

Female Leadership Dilemmas in Primary Schools: A Case Study of 18 Primary Schools in Kambuzuma, Warren Park and Kuwadzana Areas of Harare Province in Zimbabwe

By

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Abstract

This case study qualitatively examined dilemmas that female school leaders in 18 predominantly female headed primary schools in Kambuzuma, Warren Park and Kuwadzana areas of Harare Province face. It used a purposive sample of 54 research participants comprising 12 female and six male heads, 14 female and four female deputy heads, and 18 female teachers-in-charge (TICs). The study found out that Zimbabwean women have been socially, politically, economically and culturally marginalised for a very long time. Female school leaders in spite of their high educational qualifications they raise children and manage homes. They also lacked the support of other fellow female subordinates. The study found out that social and cultural factors intervene to form a barrier to women advancement. The study concluded that female leaders were not as successful as male leaders in schools when it comes to the issues possession of charisma, expertise and staff motivational techniques. The study recommended that education systems should prove that they are gender sensitive by using a quota system throughout their recruitment and promotion policies. Finally, further studies on a much wider and larger scale should be held using quantitative and mixed research approaches in the capabilities between male and female school leaders who hold some educational qualifications and who are given equal opportunities.

1. Introduction

In the wake of gender equity and equality, women now appear to compete for leadership positions with men on an even ground in Zimbabwe (The Herald, 3 April 2005). Echoing similar sentiments, Zimbabwe's first female Vice President was quoted in The Herald, dated 3 April 2005 indicating that debates regarding marginalisation of women have been topical because women were assumed to have been marginalised socially, politically, economically, culturally, religiously and professionally for quite a very long time.

The population of women in Zimbabwe is more than that of men as they comprise 52% of the entire population. Until the 1950s, very few women were sent to school beyond Grade 7 level. Parents in those days preferred to spend money on the boy child than on girls (Mulcaly and Sevilla, 2003). Culturally, girls were given menial roles of tending fields and children which roles did not require high educational qualifications. However, with the passage of time, the attitudes of parents towards the education of girls have changed. Generally Zimbabwean parents now treat their children equally affording them the same opportunities for acquiring higher educational qualifications for accessing management jobs (Ingersoll, 2001). As a result, Zimbabwe has had many women with higher educational and professional qualifications but occupying less challenging jobs in terms of management and decision making in organisations, both private and public.

Many organisations are headed by men (Simmons, 1996). The glaring gender disparity in terms of appointment of females into positions of leadership was the main motivator of the current study. Although this problem is widespread in the economy, this study focuses on female leadership in primary schools in Harare, Zimbabwe. Amongst other concerns, the study sought to confirm or refute the general claim in the literature that few organisations are headed by female leaders usually face a lot of challenges (Darling-Hammond and Sykes, 1999).

The disadvantaged position of women in relation to men in the workplaces is related to low educational attainment and skills in many developing countries (Winn, 2001). This inequality in access to education and training and stereotyping of gender roles fosters occupational segregation between men and women. Enrolment in primary and secondary schools for women increased in Zimbabwe but still, they lag behind in tertiary education and critical skills acquisition (Zvobgo, 2000). Furthermore, enrolment at university and vocational training centres which are preparatory paths for progress to leadership positions have not been in favour of women (Zvobgo, 2000). This has seen women being unfairly represented at higher levels of management because the majority of women are perceived to lack enough education to enable them to take up leadership positions in many organisations. That means it is not a matter of failure on their part but a consequence of structural challenges that have a strong positive flavour of “a man only” perspective. Within many organisations, women are under represented in jobs of authority and decision making responsibilities.

Women are tasked with the care of the children, responsibility for the economy and ultimately to ensure the success of their husbands (Davidson and Burker, 2000). Indeed, the Mirror dated 7 December 2004 concurs with Lahtinew and Wilson (1994) who revealed in their research that cultural norms in Japanese companies impeded entry of women into managerial positions. Whatever education and skills women receive were viewed as a waste of time. They were merely expected to help raise children and manage homes. In the same vein, the degree to which hindrance of women to managerial positions, relegates them to home duties and denies them access to critical skills, education and training applies to primary schools in Kambuzuma, Warren Park and Kuwadzana areas in Harare, remains an empirical question. The study therefore sought to establish the dilemmas that female leaders face in the selected primary schools in Harare.

2. Literature Review

Issues surrounding dilemmas that female leaders face in running their organisations are currently debated in Zimbabwe. However, these debates are often fruitless because there does not seem to be shared understanding of the underlying causes for these dilemmas. Three theories explain the phenomenon of gender disparity when it comes to employment and promotion. These theories are the Functionalist theory, Conflict theory and glass ceiling, glass borders and glass wall theory. The same theories form a sound framework for understanding societal attitudes towards female leaders, traditional stereotyping, and loneliness of female leaders in society and at their workplaces.

Functionalist Theory

The functionalist theory argues that “Men fill instrumental roles in society, whereas, women fill expressive roles and presume that this arrangement works to the benefit of the society, (Russell, 1997). The theory stresses that people’s socialisation into prescribed roles is a major force that causes gender inequality. It recognises and accepts that there are gender disparities caused by specialisation that people receive from infancy right up to the time they choose their careers. Functionalism further purports that women are better off if they stay at home performing a socialising role than going to work. For instance, girls are socialised into cooking, cleaning the house, doing laundry, fetching firewood and water and caring for the younger members of the family and this is usually culture bound. In the end, girls are prepared to be good wives and mothers and not managers. On the other hand, men should go for work and take care of their families. For example, boys are socialised into masculine activities such as

providing food for the family, taking care of the dogs, slaughtering animals in the home and making final decisions. These activities influence children's choices, attitudes, beliefs and aspirations for the roles they will play in society. Therefore, functionalists do not treat women and men as equals in society and in organisations. In view of the preceding observations, the researchers were motivated to explore the degree to which functionalist theory applied to leadership dilemmas faced by female school heads and their deputies and teachers-in-charge (TICs) in the primary schools under study.

Conflict Theory

The theory of conflict exists in society due to the different biological make up of men and women. The theory explains that women are disadvantaged by inequalities between themselves and men. To avoid conflict, societies have resorted to division of labour. Most societies observe some gender division of labour within the home, with women taking primary responsibility for caring for the family, whereas, men tend to be associated with the work outside the home (Spotlight on Zimbabwe, 1994). The division of labour according to gender explains the inequalities that exist in the judiciary system, Zimbabwe Republic Police and the education system. Therefore, both functionalist and conflict theories believe that education performs an important function of bestowing status in women (Management News, 2000). The conflict theory did not particularise the dilemmas as that female school heads face in the three primary schools in Kuwadzana, Warren Park and Kambuzuma in Harare, Zimbabwe. This study was intended to establish such dilemmas and then suggest solutions.

Glass Ceiling, Glass Borders and Glass Walls Theory

Various studies have suggested that women leaders have chosen to make policies to overcome the glass ceiling of corporate life. This involves a meandering path/way from corporate to founding a business of their own, then later moving in to head a larger and more traditional corporation. The dilemma is that of building their own corporation as a way to try to circumvent the constraints that they face in organisations that they lead (Cole, 2000; Robbins, 2003).

Because of the cultural perceptions of the role of women in leadership functions, it is sometimes hard to value women in leadership positions. Davidson and Burke (2000:16) argue that women who perform well in their roles of management find it difficult to negotiate moves in commercial functions. Women in these positions of leadership negotiate moves in commercial or entrepreneurial functions. Women in those positions of leadership in organisations are quick to leave the positions to run their own businesses. It is noted that:

- Their contributions are not valued.
- They are not taken seriously.
- They have feelings of isolation because small numbers of women occupy top positions in organisations (Davidson and Burke, 2000).

According to Simmons (1996:70);

Women are seen as marginal to the world of affairs rather than central to them. The inevitable consequence of not being conditioned to put them first but to see their primary role as that of caring for others is that women do not see themselves as suitable leaders in a situation.

The following clichés underscore the concerns of the above citation. For example, “women are power behind the throne”!. “The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world!” or “Behind every good man is a good woman”. The extent to which female leaders can overcome leadership dilemmas at their workplaces with particular reference to the studied primary schools will be investigated in this present study.

After work, women are expected to go straight to take care of the family while male leaders go out to socialise with other male leaders. Therefore, female leaders face a constraint of not being able to socialise and conclude business deals. Female leaders are unable to fulfil that because of the internalised sexism. Culturally, the male species are considered more intelligent than women leaders in the organisations. The beliefs are so strong that women themselves tend to underestimate themselves even if they are in a leadership position, women are generally at a disadvantage because they are socialised not to be assertive, aggressive or to seek power or control (Davidson and Burke, 2000).

Winn (2000) posits that in the company where female leaders work, the glass ceiling is firmly in place. Winn says, "With a few exceptions, we have not moved beyond tokenism in the number of women in top leadership positions or serving the boards of communication companies. Men still hold the majority of top management positions. The observations made on the gender imbalance seem to exist in the business world, indicating that business barriers still exist for women. Prior to Winn's observations, Powell (1988) found out that in the American organisations, the proportion of women who hold top management positions continues to be no more than 2% according to most surveys. While the above findings managed to locate varied barriers that female leaders face in their organisations, they have however, did not manage to point out how they apply to female school heads of the primary schools under study. Hence, the need to carry out this study using local primary school settings.

Traditional Stereotyping

The traditional role of women is one of the barriers that hinder progress in their advancement (Sekaran and Leong, 1988). The researchers note that stereotyping starts from years of life when boys and girls are socialised differently. They also report that teachers too play a role in gender socialisation. Teachers traditionally pay more attention towards males who as a result, develop better self-esteem than their counterparts. Career choices made by women reflect traditional stereotyping. Girls tend to choose jobs within limited groups in clerical, nursing and retail, while boys' choices are within wider groups. Similarly, Davidson and Burke (2000) note that women are at a disadvantage because they are generally socialised not to be assertive, aggressive or seek power or control. This stereotyping was observed from a non-African and non-Zimbabwean perspective. It was therefore worth to conduct this study using three primary school heads in Kambuzuma, Warren Park and Kuwadzana areas of Harare to find out the dilemmas they face.

Loneliness

Above and beyond the dilemma stereotyping, Sekaran and Leong (1988:17) confirm that in terms of loneliness, "the higher the woman climbs, the lonelier she gets, because there is less support available". The woman manager may be the only woman in a room full of males and has no female counterparts. These are some of the constraints why women leave their managerial positions in corporate to business ownership. These findings were silent on how loneliness of female school leaders compare with loneliness in Kambuzuma, Warren Park and Kuwadzana areas in Harare primary schools.

Women versus Men Leadership

The stereotype of management which needs to be verified is that better managers are masculine. Supportive of that view, Powell (1988:48) states that "men tend to be more influential and women are more easily influenced in most settings". He said that this is caused by the status that men hold in organisations because they have longer managerial experience. On the same note, Henning and Jardin (1970) quoted in Powell (1988:151) observe "men are cleverer and more definite in setting goals than women". This is a desirable quality in management. Women managers are assumed not to possess the desirable quality in management. They are viewed as not clever and definite in goal setting and are easily influenced by things around them. These are some of the dilemmas that women might face in organisations while they hold top influential positions. What remained to be explored by this study was the extent to which such dilemmas are faced by Kambuzuma, Warren Park and Kuwadzana area primary school heads.

Marriage

A married female manager does not have enough time to socialise after work because there are other obligations that may be waiting for her at home. This is the other traditional conception which is central to women's roles that affect their attitudes towards work plans. It may be the root of many discriminatory attitudes and practices in the work places (Russell, 1997; Women in Leadership and Governance Institute, undated). Professional women have to make difficult decisions of choosing between marriage and career. A married male manager gives full attention to his job while the female one tends to concentrate on the family at the expense of her career (Chapman and Mulkeen, 2003, Davidson and Burke, 2000). The current study intended to go beyond highlighting lack of socialisation and giving full attention to the family by female school leaders in organisations by zeroing in on primary female school leaders' experiences in Kambuzuma, Warren Park and Kuwadzana areas in Harare.

3. Research Methodology

The study was largely qualitative. Qualitative research is empirical research where data are not in the form of numbers but words (Punch, 2004). In this study, qualitative research was therefore a comprehensive of phenomena using a prolonged first-hand presence at feelings and opinions regarding dilemmas they face in running primary schools in Kambuzuma, Warren Park and Kuwadzana areas of Harare, Zimbabwe. It also enabled us to do in-depth of the dilemmas that female leaders face in the areas under study (Patton, 2003). The study employed a case study as research design. A case study is a form of descriptive research in which a single case is studied in depth to reach greater understanding about similar cases. (Thomas and Nelson, 2001; Silverman, 2006). In carrying out this study, we tried to understand in great depth, a single phenomenon of dilemmas that female school heads face in the areas under study. We subscribe to the view that Gill and Johns (2002:157) advanced by pointing out that, "in theory building, the case study research may perhaps be most appropriate when little is known about a topic ...". The greatest benefit of using the case study approach in your study was that the phenomenon you were investigating was intrinsically bound to the context. As Yin put it, "... the major rationale for using this case study design] is when your investigation must cover both a particular phenomenon and the context within which the phenomenon is occurring". Above all, these school leaders could be approached for carrying out interviews with them or administering questionnaires to them (Sidhu, 2001).

Population and Sample

The study's population comprised of 18 school heads, 18 deputy school heads and 18 teachers-in-charge (TICs) of primary schools in Kambuzuma, Warren Park and Kuwadzana areas of Harare, Zimbabwe. These participants fitted in very well with Kitchin and Tate's (2000) view that population is the totality of all elements under investigation.

The study's sample was conveniently stratified sampled in order to come up with twelve female school heads and six male heads, fourteen female deputy heads and four male deputy heads and eighteen female TICs. Fifteen copies of open-ended questionnaire were physically distributed to the 18 conveniently sampled schools. They were meant to collect data from 12 female school heads and six male heads, 14 female deputy heads and four male deputy heads and 18 female teachers-in-charge (TICs). The three strata by leader level represented the school leaders in the studied schools. They suited this study their schools were the only ones that were mostly run by female leaders in the studied areas. Furthermore, they contained the desirable research characteristics for this study namely, gender, age, educational qualifications and experience (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Bell, 2000) After a period of three weeks, all questionnaires were filled in and returned while at the same time, interviews followed up questionnaire data. The following figure and six tables help to describe the present study's sample.

Figure 1: The spread of research participants by leadership level (N=54)

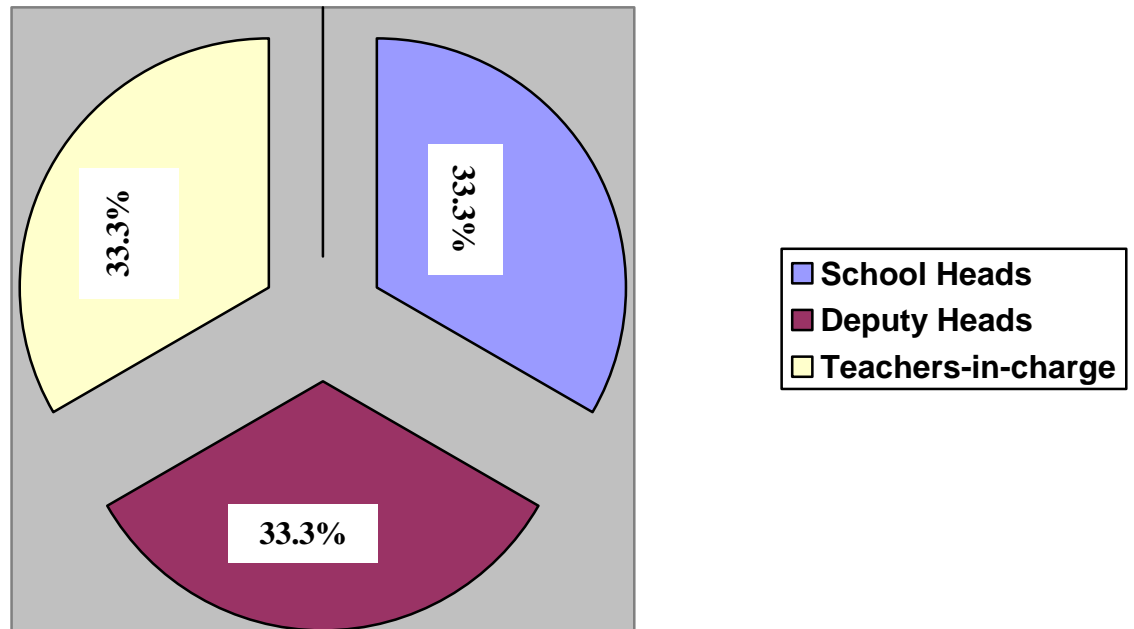


Figure 1 shows an equal spread of the research participants by their leadership level at their work place. One third (33.3%) of the research participants were school heads while deputy heads and teachers-in-charge constituted the other two thirds (66.7%).

Table 1: The spread of research participants by gender (N = 54)

Gender	School Head	Deputy Head	Teacher-in-charge	Total	Percentage %
Female	12	14	18	44	81
Male	6	4	0	10	19
Total	18	18	18	54	100

Table 1 shows the composition of research participants by gender. Eighty-one percent (44/54) of the research participants were females that are, 12 school heads, 14 deputy heads and 18 Teachers-in-Charge. Nineteen percent (10/54) of the research participants were male deputy heads.

Table 2: Age of the research respondents (N = 54)

Age Range	School Head	Deputy Head	Teacher-in-charge	Total	Percentage %
31–40 years	4	6	7	17	31
41–50 years	11	11	9	31	57
51+ years	3	1	2	6	12
Total	18	18	18	54	100

Table 2 shows the majority (31/54) that is 57% of the research participants (11 school heads, 11 deputy heads and nine TICs) who are aged between 41 – 50 years. Thirty-one percent (17/54) of the research participants (four school heads, six deputy heads and seven TICs) were aged between 31 and 40. Only 12% (6/54) of the research participants (three heads, one deputy head and six TICs) were aged over 50.

Table 3: Research participants by highest professional qualification (N = 54)

Leadership Level	Qualification	Number
School Head	Certificate in Education	1
	Diploma in Education	0
	B.Ed (Educational Management)	15
	M.Ed (Educational Management)	2
Deputy Head	Certificate in Education	0
	Diploma in Education	1
	B.Ed (Educational Management)	13
	M.Ed (Educational Management)	4
Teacher-in-Charge	Certificate in Education	4
	Diploma in Education	9
	B.Ed (Educational Management)	5
	M.Ed (Educational Management)	0
Total		54

Table 3 indicates the spread of the research participants by highest qualification. Most school heads were degreed with 15/18 of them holding an undergraduate degree while 2/18 of the heads holding a Master of Education Degree in Educational Management. Only one school head was a holder of a Certificate in Education. Most deputy heads were also degreed with 13/18 of them holding a Bachelor of Education Degree in Educational Management, while 4/18 of them were holding a post graduate degree. Only one deputy head was a holder of a Diploma in Education. The same Table shows 5/18 of the TICs being holders of a Bachelor of Education Degree in Educational Management, 9/18 of them holding a Diploma in Education qualification and 4/18 TICs holding a Certificate in Education qualification.

Table 4: The spread of research participants by highest academic qualifications (N = 54)

Qualification	Non-Teaching Post Graduate Degree	Non-Teaching Under Graduate Degree	'A' Level	'0' Level	Total
School Heads	0	0	5	13	18
Deputy Heads	0	0	4	14	18
TIC	0	0	1	17	18
Total	0	0	10	44	54

Table 4 portrays the spread of research participants by highest academic qualification. No research participants were holders of non-teaching degrees. Perhaps this was because they were school leaders of primary schools. However, cumulatively, (10/54) that is, 19% of the research participants were holders of an Advanced level ('A' level) qualification while the rest (44/54) 81% of the research participants were holders of Ordinary level '0' level qualification.

Table 5: Distribution of research participants by experience (N = 54)

Experience	School Head	Deputy Head	Teacher-in-charge	Total
0 – 5 years	4	6	3	13
6 – 10 years	6	6	6	18
11 – 15 years	8	6	9	23
Total	18	18	18	54

Table 5 shows (4/18) school heads with less than six years of experience, (6/18) school heads whose experience was between 6 – 10 years and (8/18) school heads who had experience of between 11 and 15 years. Also (6/18) deputy heads had an experience of less than 6 years, (6/18) deputy heads had an experience between 6 and 10 years and the other (6/18) deputy heads had an experience between 11 and 15 years. Only (3/18) TICs had experience of less than 5 years. One third (6/18) of the TICs had an experience of 6 – 10 years, while the majority (9/18) of the TICs had an experience of 11 – 15 years.

Table 6: Research participants' school staff size by gender (N=18 primary schools, N=856 teachers)

School	Female Teachers	Male Teachers	Total
A	52	7	59
B	49	7	56
C	58	4	62
D	60	5	65
E	55	8	63
F	34	12	46
G	29	14	43
H	30	11	41
I	35	10	45
J	34	8	42
K	36	10	46
L	32	12	44
M	29	15	44
N	31	8	39
O	28	9	37
P	36	7	43
Q	34	7	41
R	35	5	40
Total	697	159	856

Table 6 shows that the five school heads had a combined staff complement of 856 teachers. Six hundred and ninety-seven of them were female teachers while 159 were males.

Instrument

The case study used multiple sources of data namely, the open-ended questionnaires and unstructured interview. All the 15 research participants responded to the open-ended questionnaire. They were asked the same questions in an interview in order to fill in the data from the questionnaire (Willig, 2001). The two instruments contained these questions based on demographic data and actual results. Demographic data sought respondents' age, gender, qualification and experience, as well as their leadership position. The questions in the open-ended questionnaire and the interview guide were drawn from the following ideas:

- dilemmas faced female school leaders,
- magnitude of dilemma, and
- ways of overcoming dilemmas.

The interview guide and open-ended questionnaire were generated using the above statements. Data were collected during a period of five weeks between 23 August 2009 and 30 September 2009. All the questionnaires were completed and collected on 30 September 2009. Interviews were also completed on the same day.

Data were captured, analysed and interpreted throughout the course of this study since this was a qualitative study (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Cresswell, 2003; Silverman, 2006). Presentation and

analysis of data and discussion procedures were done according to logical themes that emerged from the data that was generated by the participants (Punch, 2004; Pearce, 2005). We checked for completeness of the data before we presented, analysed and discussed them. We came up with 10 themes that would enable us to present, analyse, describe and interpret data. We coded dilemmas using numbers 1 to 10 to help us notice commonalities, patterns, structures and differences among data (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

4. Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

Data were gathered through questionnaires and interviews. Interviews followed up the questionnaires using the same open-ended questions. These data are presented using tables analysed and interpreted below.

Table 7: Themes that emerged from the qualitative interpretations that were given by the research participants in the questionnaires and interviews regarding dilemmas faced by female school leaders (N = 54)

No.	Theme	Number
1	Being judged on double standards.	54
2	Feeling misunderstood.	54
3	Stereotyping	54
4	Marriage issue	54
5	Lack of support by other female colleagues	53
6	Negative societal attitudes	52
7	Low moral and commitment among teachers	51
8	Verbal abuse	48
9	Insubordination	36
10	Ability to hold bold decisions	31

In Table 7, the generated data show that all (54/54) research participants felt that female school leaders were being judged on double standards. One of the participants pointed out that many female school heads feel that similar behaviour is judged differently according to whether it is displayed by a man or a woman. For instance, if a woman shows anger, she is likely to be seen as hysterical while a man behaving similarly would just be letting off steam. Another participant noted that female school heads find it hard to accept instructions and authority from other women and men who work for or with women are laughed at by their wives and friends. These findings seem to reveal that female school leaders need to exercise virtues of trust, fairness, firmness, frankness and diligence whenever they would be dealing with their subordinates. This might help them to avoid being labelled as biased.

All research participants in Table 7 also indicate that female school leaders face another dilemma of feeling misunderstood by their colleagues and other people. To underscore this point, one participant had this to say:

Some female school heads thought that men at work had false impressions of them as people and did not really understand what they were like and what motivated them.

On the same note, another participant pointed out that:

Some of the misconceptions more commonly suggested were that working women must have unsatisfactory marriages, neglect their children, cannot be worthy the money they are paid and are unlikely to take the job serious.

These remarks tend to point out that female school leaders were rather not highly regarded at their workplaces. They were not getting the recognition they deserve for the critical work they do, that is, running schools in the same way their male counterparts do if not some times better.

Related to the dilemma of being misunderstood, all the 44 female and 10 male participants identified stereotyping as another dilemma. It was viewed as one of the greatest let downs to female advancement, progress and success. Indeed, one participant noted that according to cultural beliefs, for example, men are more intelligent than women. This finding appears to be consistent with Davidson and Burke (2000) who explained that cultural beliefs are so strong that women tend to underestimate themselves. It appears from these results that female school leaders might be lacking power and influence to lead their schools to success.

The fourth dilemma that female school heads face as perceived by all participants was the marriage issue. While marriage is highly valued in most African societies, it may cease to do so when female leaders get promoted at one's workplace. One participant was content that:

In the wake of current economic hardships, I contemplate quitting the job in order to fulfil family obligations. I also face the dilemma of having a role conflict between running a home/raising children and performing at work, not having enough time to run the home and work performance, not being a good wife/mother, not having to take work home with them.

The preceding participant's concerns are echoed by Davidson and Burke (2000) who argue that a married male manager gives full attention to his job while the female compatriot concentrates on the family at the expense of her career. In view of the above position, the current researchers albeit a small sample of 54 research participants felt that in theory female school leaders' failure to strike a balance between marriage and work might comprise their dual role. If they are not careful, they might put both their roles on the rock. In practice, it is not all female leaders who face this problem because some of them are promoted to leadership positions on merit. They deserve to be where they are and compete equally well with their male counterparts, and sometimes they are better school leaders than male heads.

Lack of support for the female school leaders by their female subordinates was another teething dilemma they face. This dilemma was likely to be more pronounced in large urban schools which have more female teachers than their male counterparts. This implies that the female school head may not be the only woman in a room full of males and has female counterparts. In that regard, she should not be found to be feeling lonely when in fact, she leads more female teachers than male ones. One male participant and one female participant concurred that:

In their rural communities, it was a taboo to elect women into leadership positions and indeed no woman had a leadership position. Women find it hard to support female leaders.

These observations seem to confirm what Sekaran and Leong (1988:17) found out when they remarked, "The higher the woman climbs, the lonelier she gets, because there is less support available". The current researchers despite their small sample would feel that women should not be their greatest enemies by pulling down their female counterparts in leadership positions. In fact, they should be found to be the greatest supporters of their colleagues who are in power if ever schools under study are to be run effectively and efficiently.

Negative societal attitudes in Table 7 constitute the sixth dilemma that 52 research participants advance as one of the challenges at their work places. The society's attitude towards women progress acts as a

barrier. The common view is that women are unlikely to display the commitment necessary for a career. Four participants explained that women are unreliable in high level jobs and better suited to lower paid jobs often performed on temporary basis. This observation was unfortunate because it was made by the nine male participants in the study who also happened to be understudies of four female headed schools of the studied 18 primary school heads. The concerned participants appeared to have attitudinal problems towards female leadership. In the interests of this study, women leaders should not be deprived of the opportunity to exercise the leadership capacity because of socio-economic and cultural factors, as well as their ideas about their position in society.

This generated data in Table 7 also exhibit that (51/54) research participants viewed low morale and commitment among teachers as one other dilemma that female school leaders face in running their schools. Schools understudy seem to fail to realise their goals because of low teacher morale and commitment. When teachers' morale and commitment are low, it follows that they are demotivated and dissatisfied (Ingersoll, 2001). To go round this dilemma, female school leaders under study might need to explore possible ways to motivate their staff if ever they are to be committed and to satisfy their work with use of incentives, participative planning and decision-making and might yield positive results in that regard.

Forty eight research participants agreed that female school leaders under study faced a dilemma of verbal abuse. Women in managerial positions are in no way immune to verbal abuse. One participant lamented that:

Verbal abuse is indeed, a common extreme form of behaviour that goes between female school heads and some colleagues and members of the society, especially those from a political front.

The above observation implies that female school leaders could be targets of verbal abuse as a result of an unappreciative society and colleagues. Teachers and members of society therefore need to be informed that a leader is a leader irrespective of gender. What matters most in a leader are educational qualifications, work performance and ability to relate to colleagues and society at large.

Last but not least, insubordination was perceived as another dilemma that female school leaders experience in Kuwadzana, Kambuzuma and Warren Park schools of Harare in Zimbabwe. Ten research participants noted the presence of this dilemma. To demonstrate the existence of this dilemma, one participant had this to say:

Teachers pretend to be attentive when female leaders are selling ideas, objectives, plans, projects, programmes and policies to them. They do so to please their leaders when in actual fact they do not translate into action when they left are on their own. They have a growing tendency of ignoring what their heads propose.

Implied in this observation is the fact that teachers, regardless of gender, appear to undermine their female leaders. It is so unfortunate that a lot of such insubordination goes unpunished. All things being equal, insubordinate teachers need to face the wrath of the law. In view of this finding, present researchers contest it on the grounds that in practice is not peculiar to female leaders only. It is not a leadership dilemma for female school heads alone. Male school heads are bound to face this dilemma as well.

The final dilemma that the studied female school leaders face is inability to make bold decisions. Nine research participants were in agreement with the preceding dilemma. Three participants concurred that

Female leaders lack confidence to make bold decision. They prefer making consultations to independent decisions. Failure to make bold decisions may be viewed as a gross weakness on their part. They therefore need to stand firm and be resolute in whatever decisions they make. In this study, it was found out that female school leaders were unable to make bold and brave decisions regarding charging, suspending and firing teachers, as well as suspending and excluding problem pupils. By their nature, female leaders were found to possess a motherly forgiving heart which is sometimes taken for a weakness. This observation is compatible with Davidson and Burke (2000) who found out that female leaders are hesitant in making bold decisions. Female leaders in the schools under study need to awaken from their slumbers if ever they are to be able to make bold decisions.

5. Summary

Zimbabwean women have been socially, politically, economically and culturally marginalised for a very long time, whatever education and skills they possess, they raise children and manage homes. Although women have high professional qualifications, they do not hold marginal positions. The authors made the study to establish the dilemmas that female teachers as head teachers experience in spite of high educational qualifications they hold. The data was collected from purposively sampled 18 school heads, 18 deputy heads and 18 teachers-in-charge of primary schools of three different areas of Zimbabwe through questionnaire and interviews.

It was found out that social and cultural factors intervene to form a barrier to women advancement. They are also facing lack of support from their female subordinates. This is one of the reasons that tend to show that female leaders are not as successful as male leaders in schools.

The study also found out that some subordinates doubted the ability of female leaders to effectively and efficiently run schools. Female leaders were found to possess lukewarm charisma and expertise to enable them to be effective and efficient school leaders. This could be one other reason that female leaders are not as highly regarded as male leaders in schools.

The study further established that female leaders sometimes generate demotivating and dissatisfying work environments in their schools. They sometimes have a tendency of falling hard on their female teachers and suppressing male teachers whom they perceive as a threat to their leadership practices and styles. This again, might be one the reasons why female leaders could be viewed as less effective than their male counterparts in schools.

6. Recommendations

In the light of the forgone summary and conclusions, the researchers make the following recommendations.

- Education systems should be gender sensitive by using a quota system throughout their recruitment and promotion policies. These should be documented in the Public Service Commission's journals, mission statement and newsletters.
- The Public Service Commission should promote women by virtue of their high educational qualifications, maturity, experience and right aptitude for the job and accord them with opportunities to exercise authority and power in their duties as their male counterparts do.
- Women in leadership positions should be made to feel free to exercise authority and get support from other females.

Female Leadership Dilemmas in Primary Schools: A Case Study of 18 Primary Schools

- Female school leaders need to work very hard and prove their worth to occupy those posts so that male bosses will change their “unspoken” corporate cultures of discrimination against female school leaders.
- The government should encourage deserving female candidates to apply for leadership positions so that females are equitably represented in schools.
- Verbal abuse of female school leaders by any one should invoke punishment or prosecution.
- Gender issues and disparities should be addressed among children at an early age. Gender issues should be incorporated in all curricular at all levels of education.
- The government and other stakeholders must educate and encourage parents to treat boys and girls equally.
- Last but not least, female school leaders should try to create a conducive and an enabling environment for their subordinates by involving subordinates in planning and decision making so as to reduce low morale and commitment, and levels of demotivation and dissatisfaction among teachers.
- Further studies need to be conducted at a much wider and larger scale at either provincial or national level using quantitative and mixed research approaches to compare capabilities of male and female school leaders who hold similar educational qualifications and who are given equal opportunities.

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