MENTORING AS STRATEGY TO IMPROVE FEMALE ACCESS TO SECONDARY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN BOTSWANA

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Abstract

There is continuous under representation of women in secondary school leadership in Botswana despite various efforts to empower them. The study focuses on whether mentoring can be used as a strategy to assist female teachers to ascend to leadership positions because there are more female teachers than males teachers, yet there are more male head teachers. The methodology used was qualitative where the primary data was collected through interviewing members of school management teams and representatives from the then Ministry of Education and Skills Development. Secondary data was based on analysis of documentary sources. Participants were purposively selected from ten secondary schools. The findings reveal that informal mentoring is prevalent amongst school managers, that mentoring could be a good strategy that can assist female teachers to ascend to leadership positions. In conclusion the employer needs to develop a mentoring programme that has to be first piloted, while all school management teams should be persuaded to be proactive and encourage mentoring relationships among their staff members.

Key words: mentoring, protégé, strategy, empower, female, leadership.

Introduction

Research from both developed and developing countries suggests that under-representation of women in leadership and management positions across the spectra of occupation still remains a universal challenge despite various efforts by various countries to create gender equity in public organizations. Kutsenko (2017) states that women are still largely under-represented on corporate boards, despite continued efforts to improve boardroom gender diversity. This is indicated in the publication which explored efforts of more than 60 countries in promoting boardroom gender diversity. The results reveal that women hold just 15 percent of board seats worldwide. In addition, Kutsenko (2017) concludes that these numbers show only modest progress from the 2015 edition of Women in the Boardroom. The differences are substantiated by Patel and Buiting (2013) that from the European Union (2013) women in 2012 constituted 13.7 % of Boards seats across the globe. These were distribute as follows; USA had 15.7%, Canada had 10%, India had less than 5%, Middle- East and North Africa had 3.2% while Australia had 38.4%. On the overall women represent only 20%of all Commonwealth ministries (Patel & Buiting, 2013).

In educational management in particular, Panigrahi (2013) argues that senior administrative positions in educational institutions has traditionally been viewed as a male domain and concludes that women teachers seem concentrated in the lower levels of the school hierarchy.

In Botswana, despite the fact that the country has celebrated its 50th anniversary of independence in September 2016 and that it is signatory to some global statutes that advocate for gender equality, there is a problem of women under -representation in both political and educational leadership. Serumola's (2007) study found out that according to the Teaching Service Management (TSM) 2005 DATABASE, out of 208 secondary school head teachers there were only 61 female head teachers. This accounted only for 29%. Earlier, Pheko's (2002) document analysis of a gender gap in educational management in secondary schools in Botswana had also revealed that women accounted for only 25% of all secondary school head teachers. Between Serumola's (2007) and Pheko's (2002) there is a small growth of 4% between the two periods. Furthermore, the TSM 2009 Infinium Botswana showed that there were 13, 630 teachers (7 167 females and 6 463 males). Out of 247 secondary school head teachers 168 were males while only 79 were females (Dioka, 2009). The 2013 Botswana secondary school "teachers' establishment was 15 471" (Statics Botswana, 2013, p.15). There are 249 secondary schools and head teachers' distribution is; 85 females and 162 males. These numbers still show gender inequality as male teachers are more at leadership positions by 65% while their female colleagues constitutes 35%.   The growth is from 31% in 2009 to 35% in 2016.

To address such disparities the Botswana government has gender equity policies which began around 1999 that emphasize the empowerment and elimination of discrimination of women to positions of authority. Despite these there is slow progress in women ascending to position of authority in secondary schools in Botswana. The major problem is that there seems to be no study which has focused on a strategy that can improve women status in school leadership.

Theoretical framework

This research was conducted within a feminist theoretical framework. Feminism values women's worth as human beings and recognizes the need for social change for women to realize their true potentials. Dudu, Gonye, Mareva and Sibanda (2008) posit that Feminist theory has many variants such as: liberal, radical, socialist, cultural, feminism, womanist and Marxism feminism. This study was

more inclined towards liberal feminism which as Dudu et al. (2008) state is a theory of gender inequality which stems from a patriarchal and sexist patterning of the division of labour. The study is largely informed by feminist theory as it seeks to address and challenge sexist tendencies in the promotion of women to the highest leadership position in secondary schools in Botswana and seek for a strategy that can be used to address the problem.

Literature reviewed

There is evidence that leadership is central to organizational effectiveness and achieving desired goals because leadership is a social interactive process. It is through the significance of effective leadership and management in successful schools that leadership is linked to better students' outcomes. This view makes leadership to be globally recognized as a critical factor in improving students' results. Therefore, in the interaction process of leadership, one person irrespective of gender is able to induce others to think and behave in a desired way (Owens, 2014). These ideals are also seen to be relevant in school settings and it is assumed that this role can be performed by both qualified male and female head teachers. But there are barriers that prevent the latter to progress.

Barriers

There are barriers that limit women to be promoted to highest position in school leadership. One of those is glass ceiling. Panigrahi (2013) concurs with Ryan & Haslam (2005) that glass ceiling is an obstacle facing managers who wish to move from middle management towards senior management. Haris, Ballenger, Townes, Carr & Alford (2004, p.96) further explain that a glass ceiling is "an invisible, seemingly impenetrable barrier that blocks women from progressing to higher levels of management."

Around the early year 2000 in Botswana, the major concern about school leaders and school effectiveness was that most school leaders were not trained on management and therefore lacked requisite skills to manage schools (Pheko, 2005). The same view was expressed by Bush (2003) who argues that in UK, continuous policy changes and societal demands now require a different type of leadership for schools to that of the past.

It was from these studies that governments including the Botswana government embarked on training head teachers on educational management. One prominent programme that was established by the University of Botswana around 2000 (University of Botswana, 2017) to meet such a demand was called Bachelor of Educational Management. Due to the continuous demands for skilled school leaders the University has currently (2017) established Bachelor of Leadership and Management degree programme to improve leadership skills required for leading and managing schools in Botswana. The first programme was targeted at primary school head teachers because Pansiri (2008) states that this group was weak in teacher management and had poor interpersonal skills. At that time secondary schools head teachers were sent abroad and to the University of Botswana to read for Master of Education in management. Despite these efforts and that the number of female secondary school teachers is slightly more than that of their male colleagues the numbers at headship level show that there are more male head teachers than their female colleagues. Some studies indicate that there are strategies such as mentoring that can be employed to change the situation.

Mentoring

Mentoring as a concept is defined by Garvey, Stokes & Meggrison (2008) as a process whereby there is one – to – one interaction of people helping each other or other individuals to learn and develop skills which are appropriate for the task. This may be a short or long-term perspective which focuses on the person's career and his/her development. This can be part of pre-service, preparation, induction and ongoing in-service education of school administrators. Studies further show that mentoring can be effective in giving mentees skills required for the job. Furthermore, Hobson (2003) agrees that all major studies of formal mentoring programmes for new head teachers especially in UK and USA have concluded that mentoring was effective.

This view is further substantiated by Ballenger, Professor& Stephen (2010) who perceive mentoring as an invaluable resource for the recruitment and preparation for women to ascend to leadership positions. In addition, there is evidence that women with high credentials may find it difficult to rise up to upper positions without being encouraged by powerful individuals. Yedidia & Bickel (2014) posit that ascending to leadership authority is limited due to inadequate mentors for women. Supporting this, is Trinidad & Normore (2005) who point out that in general, opportunities for mentoring in education, whether cross-gender or same gender is limited.

While the subject of mentoring has been viewed by other scholars as contentious (Morley, 2013), mentoring is well perceived as a winning formula for women's career. According to Friday, Friday & Green (2004) mentoring can result in both short and long personal relationships. Other scholars found out that prospects for advancement in academic institutions by women can also be enhanced by effective mentoring whereby several mentors who have diverse skills are used (Ballenger et al., 2010; Yedidia & Bickel, 2014). Diversity of skills is critical because women have different needs and they confront unique challenges. It is on this background, therefore, that diverse mentorship has been observed to be active in addressing female psychosocial, career development and some activities in helping them to advance to leadership positions. Such research concludes that ascension to leadership is not accidental but can be achieved consistently through mentorship as an organized strategy. These views suggest that mentoring is critical consequently any organization which needs to improve gender equality it should have a strategy to use.

Strategy

Strategy is a process whereby the focus is on choosing to perform activities differently from competitors. Smith & Conway (2018) argue that an organization should choose a strategy that will ensure that it has one ideal competitive position in the industry or can use benchmarking activities in achieving best practice. Such an organization should create advantages on key success factors, critical resources, core competencies that are flexible and rapid to respond to all competitive and market changes.

All these attributes can be used in the educational sector to improve, delivery, students' pass rate and promotion in Botswana's context. Changing the current climate in the education leadership in Botswana require looking for advantages to develop core competencies required. From the educational background we think strategy is the best alternative which an individual or group can select in making a decision on how best to achieve better outcomes where all teachers are given an opportunity to lead. It could also be the best option to improve an individual or group's knowledge and skills to perform one's role efficiently and effectively. In this study we perceive strategy as the best alternative that can

be used to give female teachers an opportunity to improve and acquired relevant knowledge including skills required for school leadership. The context below explains the current situation female teachers encounter in Botswana in their quest to access leadership positions.

Context

Before 2016, there was one Ministry of Education and Skills Development that dealt with the entire education sector. This was divided into two ministries towards the end of 2016. The first is the Ministry of Basic Education that deals with early childhood development, primary education and secondary education. The second Ministry deals with vocational and tertiary education. Appointment to school leadership that falls within the ambit of the Basic Education is done after the vacancies are advertised. The study conducted by Pheko (2005, p.94) indicates that "all participants know the required criteria for appointment to headship to be a diploma or degree with 3 years of deputy headship experience". The questions are, if all teachers with these qualifications and experiences are eligible why then are there few female head teachers at secondary schools in Botswana and how could the later be assisted?

The problem

The Botswana government has gender equity policies which began around 1999 that emphasize the empowerment and elimination of discrimination of women to positions of authority. Despite these there is slow progress in women ascending to position of authority in secondary schools in Botswana. This is evident in Education where there are 15 471 teachers from which 7 169 are males while 8 304 are females. Although there are more female than males teacher's statistics indicate that there are 162 male head teachers compared to 85 female head teachers (Statistics Botswana, 2013). The difference is 67 more males. The major problem is that there seems to be no study which has focused on a strategy that can improve women status in school leadership. The question is what can be done?

Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenology study was to find out whether mentoring can help to increase significantly the number of female teachers to positions of school leadership in order to address the problem of gender inequality at secondary school level in Botswana as stated above. The results may change the stereotypes and attitudes that hinder females to become school leaders.

Research questions

The questions below were used in order to find out from participants if mentoring can be used as a strategy to assist female teachers to apply and qualify for school leadership in Botswana. These were; how prevalent is mentoring in schools? Which type of mentoring is common among school managers in secondary schools in the Southern district? To what extent do respondents understand the functions and behaviors they are supposed to do in mentoring? What do school managers and the Ministry officials perceive to be benefits of mentoring to mentors, mentees and the entire education system? Can mentoring be used as a strategy to assist female teachers to advance to school headship?

Methodology

Our study came out as a result of our interest in understanding why women seem to be fewer at the post of secondary school leadership yet there are more female than male teachers. We employed

the qualitative method because we wanted to know "about peoples' experiences in their natural settings, using … interviews … and report findings in words rather than in statistics" (Chilisa, 2005, p.142). The study was based on two methods. The first was a semi-structured interview designed for school management teams and Ministry officials. This was piloted before data collection. The participants were asked to talk about the circumstances that prevented female teachers to become school leaders and whether mentoring can be used to change the situation. The second was document analysis from Botswana government policy documents and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development (2015) in relation to the improvement of gender equality. The two methods of data collection ensure internal consistency and reliability of data collected.

We chose secondary schools in the Southern District for our convenience as all of us are near the location. There are 41 secondary schools in the Southern Region, which is comprised of the 4 geographical areas (Jwaneng, Kanye, Lobatse and Moshupa). We then chose ten (10) secondary schools in this Region. We also engaged two (2) officials from the then Ministry of Education In context, could mentoring be a strategy that can enhance opportunities for female secondary school teachers to advance in large numbers or not?

From the ten (10) secondary schools which participated, all members of the School Management Teams (SMTs) participated and this consisted of 10 head teachers, 10 deputy head teachers, 10 Heads of Department, 18 senior teachers grade 1, and two (2) Ministry's officials. The total number of participants was 50. In order to balance gender amongst participants we purposively selected an equal number of male and female members of SMTs who have experience in mentoring to participate in the study and they formed group A which had 20 members (10) female and 10 male SMTs). Group B was those who had no experience of mentoring and they were 28 (16 females and 12 male SMTs). The other 2 participants were from the Ministry and were purposively selected because they are responsible for in-service training for all teachers.

Data Collection

Semi- structured questions were administered to participants through a face- to-face interview. The interview responses were transcribed and voice-recorded. Thereafter, the researchers took time to listen to responses and compared those to what was transcribed in order to arrange similar statements together. We adopted Miles and Huberman's (1994) analysis model which is based on the following three components; data reduction by listening to tapes and comparing them to notes which we took, then discarding what we deemed not to be repeated many times. Then we displayed our data by colour coding statements which were repeated to those which had similar meanings. Thirdly, we then verified our analysis and drew conclusions. In addition, we analyzed SADC Gender and Development Protocol (2015) including gender policies established and approved by the government of Botswana to gauge if there was evidence at both international and national levels to achieve gender parity and if such information corroborated with data from the interviews.

This process is consistent with Fraenkel and Wallen's (2006) view on emerging themes. The themes were then integrated into narrative descriptions of mentoring aspects of the study as discussed below.

Findings and discussions

Findings below are divided into four themes that were developed from the interview data and secondary sources as: status of mentoring in secondary schools, the importance of mentoring, mentoring as a strategy and introducing mentoring in secondary schools.

Status of mentoring in secondary schools

It is evident from the findings that majority of participants are aware of both international and national policies on gender equality. There is allusion to reasons why female teachers are not school leaders such as women are culturally not afforded position of leadership and they lacked confidence. These views contradicted the feminist theory. However, the focus is on status of mentoring.

The results show that informal mentoring is prevalent amongst some teachers and some head teachers while formal mentoring is almost none-existent. This finding is based on the participants' view regarding the prevalence of mentoring in schools. A small number of the SMTs had mentors whom they had chosen and who in turn agreed to mentor their junior staff members. Majority of participants did not have mentors. For instance one deputy head teacher said "*there is no programme for a one- to- one mentoring available in this school*". This view supports Smith & Conway's (2018) who note that historically and traditionally mentoring relationship has been an informal process. These findings are also consistent with many studies of mentoring that acknowledge that there is informal mentoring in almost all countries because formal mentoring is a relatively new phenomenon (Ehrich, Hansford and Tennet, 2004).

In addition to informal mentoring, findings indicate that most schools had developed short orientation exercises for their new teachers. These are organized by staff development committees especially for staff members who are new to those schools through transfers or are fresh graduates. Furthermore, the findings show that those who have acted as informal mentors were older than those they mentored or they were mentoring. This is consistent with Hobson (2003) who contends that the mentor is ordinarily several years older. The explanation is premised on the view that a person of greater experience and seniority in the world is the one who could craft a way from which a young man or woman could use in entering a new terrain in the work environment. Mentoring seems to draw and validates that experience leads to wisdom and mentors are usually wise men and women.

It is also evident from the findings that same gender mentorship is prevalent while few of the participants had cross gender mentors. Furthermore, there is a general trend that same gender seemed to develop friendship easily than the opposite sex and some resulted in mentoring, while mentoring occurs across the gender differences. This finding is not consistent with Playko's (1995) argument that people often assume that "only women can mentor women" because there were few mentees who were mentored by opposite sex (males). This means that assumptions that women can easily mentor others are often wrong because women might prefer to work with men as protégés or mentors. In addition, findings also show that the relationship between a mentor and mentee is that the former is usually a supervisor.

Interestingly majority of the mentors and mentees' relationship was internal, that is within the same school except a few whose mentors ranged from a lecturer at the University of Botswana,

banker, lawyer, and accountant. The period of mentorship relationship ranges from short periods to some years such as six (6) months to 15 years. These results show that mentorship lasts for a long time. This finding is consistent with Friday et al. (2004) who state that after the mentor has helped the mentee he/she could either leave or develop a lasting relationship with the mentee. From our findings, most of the relationships have turned into friendship but this contradicts Ballenger et al. (2010) who state that informal relationship last between three to six years. This is also evident from this study that the informal mentorship that exist was triggered by the mentor's outstanding performance and positive attitude towards work, common interests that existed between the mentee and the mentor. It could also emanates from the support for each other, or the need to help, and supervisor-supervisee relationship among other factors, for example one female senior teacher said that:

> When I joined the school, I heard that the lady (school head) was very strict and does not take kindly to poor performance. So I decided to work very hard to avoid any confrontation with her. She unknowingly appreciated my hard work and was impressed. We became very close and our mentorship relationship gradually developed.

The importance of mentoring

Most participants concur that mentoring is important because it provides for both career and psychological functions which benefit the mentees, mentors and the entire education system. Furthermore, there is evidence that show that mentoring as a strategy could give mentees an opportunity to acquire skills that are not taught in the classroom such as inside information on performing certain tasks, exposure to management and leadership tasks within the schools which are not privy to those who are not in school management. It is also clear that participants who were mentees see it as vital because it provides them with career function issues such as; sponsorship, coaching, visibility protection, exposure and challenging work assignments. This resonates with Hobson's (2003) argument that career functions are necessary and hence mentees need mentors to satisfy or meet such demands. One senior teacher had this to say about the functions of his mentor:

> I learnt a lot from this man. He taught me the expectation of teaching. He recommended me for posts of responsibilities and for further studies (to study computers). He taught me how to speak in the public and gave me challenging responsibilities such as item/speech writing. I was motivated.

Clearly the school managers' mentors provide their mentees with psychological functions especially counseling, role modeling, encouragement, friendship and feedback on performance. It is interesting to note that a mentor had this to say "*I learnt leadership skills such as how to communicate and how to relate to others effectively through mentoring one of my junior staff members*". These corroborate with Hobson's (2003) who has also found that learning new skills is one of the key benefits of mentoring. From the findings, mentors also indicate that as a result of mentoring they have a sense that their knowledge in terms of managing and relating to others was growing. It was also their perception that their self-confidence, self-esteem and assertiveness including those of their mentees is greatly improving.

Another dimension to the benefits of mentoring from the findings is that as the morale and confidence of teachers improve, these tend to have a positive impact on the way mentored teachers view their teaching. The total impact of this relationship is reflected by improved students' academic results. One of the mentors said "*mentoring leads to improved students' performance and better teachers' attitudes*".

These also show that mentoring is beneficial because it helps with staff retention, it supplements what colleges of education could not teach issues such as; improving relationships and conflict resolution which lead to teachers becoming mature in their approach to teaching. Hobson (2003) has also found out that mentoring could help with employee retention, better students' academic results and learning of various skills in school and in the education sector.

Mentoring as a strategy

There is an overwhelming agreement that mentoring can be used as a strategy to advance females to the position of head teachers in secondary schools. This is linked to the finding that though females may be qualified for the position of a head teacher, some of them lack confidence about their ability to lead. One of the male mentor said:

> *Yes mentoring is a strategy that could be used to assist women to ascend to the leadership position in schools. In the first place, women do not believe in their abilities. Mentoring could cement their confidence. Through this women could be made aware that they are capable of occupying the highest leadership position in secondary schools. On the other hand men can be made aware that they should not suppress women.*

It is also clear that mentoring can be effective if it is consistently used. The reason is that if the mentor had a cordial relationship that was futuristic then both mentor and mentee would be proud of their current and future achievements. There is also an emphasis on the importance of mentoring of female teachers as it would expose them to different colleagues with different gender orientations. This is consistent with Feminist theory that women are important and have potential to do many things hence their exposure would provide them with an opportunity to understand that there would be some females who are school leaders and that the former would recognize that they too have similar capacity and abilities like male school leaders to lead their schools efficiently and effectively. Secondly, female teachers who would be mentored by male head teachers would have access to assess and observe that some male head teachers work exceptionally well with their female deputy head teachers. Such an environment is expected to cultivate an understanding to females and dispel their lack of self-confidence and myths on established gender stereotypes from certain cultures. Yedidia & Bickel (2014) are also of the view that mentoring might assist women educators to have access to different areas where decision are taken including having an insight to both people in power and information. The results culminate on showing that all these might improve female teachers' understanding on processes, procedures and requisite skills for applying and self-presentation at interviews for leadership positions.

Introducing mentoring in secondary schools

There is concurrence that mentoring could be a good strategy that could change the female landscape representation in secondary school leadership. There is further evidence that mentoring exist informally amongst teachers and it is this scenario that all participants state that it would be beneficial if mentoring could be formally established in all schools. This result resonate with Hobson (2003) who argues that all major studies of formal mentoring programmes for new head teachers especially in UK and USA have concluded that mentoring was effective as it benefit both mentees and mentors. Furthermore, there is an indication that the introduction of mentoring might benefit mentees as they might feel that they are welcomed in their respective schools because they will acquire knowledge on procedures and practices that are relevant for their positions. The new dimension of the findings is the

one where participants state that if mentoring is formally introduced mentees might own decisions that would be made in their schools. One female head teachers said "*if mentoring is formally introduced in schools, new teachers and those transferred may easily adapt to their new environment. In addition they may actively participate in decision making and their implementation thereof*".

All the results clearly advocate for the formal introduction of mentoring in schools. This is centered on evidence that mentoring would benefit the school as all teachers might have strong relationship amongst themselves, peers, their respective schools and schools around them. Such a bond might create a strong teaching internal relationship which might extend to those others who have external mentoring relationships.

Conclusion

There is clear evidence that mentoring could be used as a strategy that can assist all teachers to establish a good relationship in their schools. Furthermore, the major findings indicate that mentoring can be used as a strategy that could assist female teachers to develop some skills such as self-confidence, ability to lead and manage including the ability to present to others. The fact that the findings indicate that informal mentoring is taking place behind the scenes, suggests that it could be formally used as a good strategy to assist female teachers to meet the requisite skills for school leadership. The advocacy is for formal establishment of a mentoring programme to create a conducive environment. This is premised on the findings from the majority of participants who think and are convinced that mentoring is a good strategy that might help some of the mentees to establish themselves in teaching and in cultivating individual confidence for positions of authority.

The emphasis is that female teachers might be able to ascend to school leadership position because they might develop self- confidence, become assertive, could easily get advices from mentors and their presence at headship position might change the stereotypes and mind set about females as school leaders. These results should be taken as an eye-opener and a clear indication that there is a serious need for using mentoring as an intervention for female secondary school teachers in Botswana to ascend to the position of leadership.

However, this does not suggest that formal mentoring could be a panacea for proportional representation of women in educational leadership to be achieved. The suggestion is that other measures such as deliberate decisions to have 50 to 40 of the applicants being reserved for female teachers to become secondary school head teachers could be explored.

Recommendations

The critical recommendation that emanates from the findings shows that mentoring could be a better strategy in assisting female teachers to ascend to positions of secondary school leadership. Therefore, the Ministry of Basic Education might consider developing a mentoring programme for teachers in secondary schools in Botswana. The Ministry could in the interim request all head teachers to develop internal school mentoring programmes where mentors and mentees could agree on who to mentor and who desires to be mentored by who. Such an arrangement would dictate that the Ministry should adequately train head teachers to take the role in managing staff development issues. In addition, this arrangement may improve self-confidence amongst female teachers to apply for position of school leadership while the Ministry would still be developing a mentoring programme for secondary school teachers.

Acknowledgement

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