Full Length Research Paper

An analysis of the extent to which staff division of labour in Zimbabwean primary schools reflects gender sensitivity: The case of Masvingo Urban

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Abstract

This study was conducted to determine the extent to which primary schools mainstream gender in their activities. The study was motivated by the increase in demand for gender equality and equity in all spheres of life championed by different groups which include feminist groups, governmental and non-governmental organisations. The focus on gender equality the world over has seen gender ranked 3rd among the eight United Nations Millennium Development goals. It is against this background that the researcher embarked on this study with a view to establish if gender advocacy impacted positively on societal institutions like schools. The researcher adopted a descriptive survey research design. A sample of three (3) primary schools was purposively sampled from a population of twelve (12) urban primary schools. Six (6) school administrators (school heads and deputies) were purposively selected two (2) from each school to participate in the study. Semi-structured interviews, document analysis and observation were employed to collect data. The major question for the study was: to what extent do primary schools mainstream gender? It emerged that primary schools are gendered institutions as the study revealed that the composition of school leadership in sampled schools was skewed in favour of men. Male teachers dominated teaching of junior grades (5-7) while female teachers dominated infant classes. It also emerged that females dominated in jobs like secretarial while caretakers (grounds personnel) were predominantly males. From the findings of the study the researcher recommended that the Ministry of Education in conjunction with the public Service Commission should adopt a gender perspective in recruiting staff particularly administrators; the Ministry of Education should also ensure that each school has a school-based gender policy and that the Government and other stakeholders should carryout countrywide gender advocacy campaigns to eliminate gender stereotypes that discriminate women.

Key words: Division of labour, Gender, Gender sensitivity, gender mainstreaming, primary school, organisation.

Introduction and background

Gender imbalance between men and women in society has received attention in recent years. Feminists demand for gender mainstreaming gained momentum after the declaration of the United Nations Decade of women (1976 -1985) which encourages governments to address gender inequality (Geisler, 1995). Since then gender advocacy has permeated every corner of the world. The impact of gender advocacy on the status of women has been perceived differently with some scholars like Sydie (2011) conceding that women have been accorded equal status with men in all spheres of life. Sydie (2011) further opines that traditional ideas about masculinity and femininity have shifted due to the extensive media coverage of gender issues. In the same vein Cqrai (in Giddens, 2007) talk of feminization, a tendency towards assuming female characteristics and roles. He further argues that changes in norms and relationships between sexes have been significantly altered in recent years due to gender advocacy. Thus, Sydie (2011) maintains that men's social roles are changing, becoming increasingly involved in roles and activities traditionally perceived as feminine. From the point of view of scholars like Sydie (2011) sexual

division of labour in society should be blurred due to gender sensitivity. Against this background the question is: what is the situation in the sampled primary schools with regard to sexual division of labour?

Contrary to the view that modern society accords men and women equal status, some scholars maintain that modern society is patriarchal (Crawford, 2006). The subordination of women to men and the problems women face in patriarchal society have been aptly captured by Geisler (1995) who said "a woman's sole right is to have no rights; she has no real power, only a pseudo power". This observation implies that man can make some concessions with regard to the feminist call for gender equality but are not prepared to be equal with women.

In Zimbabwe several policies were put in place to close the gender gap between men and woman in different spheres of life. Some of the notable policies include the Public Service Circular no 11 (1991) which encourages identification of women who could be promoted to headship, Public Service Circular no 22 (1995) and no 1 (1997) which encourage women teachers to apply for school management positions and the National Gender Policy of 2004 (Chabaya *et al*, 2009). Zimbabwe is also a signatory to a number of international and regional policies that encourage member states to address gender inequality such as the Millennium Development Goals, the SADC protocol on gender and Politics (Chinyoka, 2013; ZWLA, 2010). Against a plethora of the aforementioned gender policies the situation of women in Zimbabwe and the world at large is expected to be good.

Several studies conducted in Zimbabwe and the world over have shown that women are still underrepresented in areas traditionally viewed as the male province. Mugari and Masocha's (2015) study on gender equity in sport leadership revealed that 99% of presidents of National Sports Associations were men. Similarly a study by Massengale (2009) indicated that women were poorly represented in sport leadership. From the two studies it can be extrapolated that sport is viewed as masculine sport hence underrepresentation of women despite interventions adopted to address gender inequality in society. Several studies have revealed the dearth of women in leadership positions (Chabaya *et al*, 2009; Zinyemba, 2013; Gundhlanga, 2012; Gobena, 2014; Kiprop and Jeruto, 2014). Various reasons have been proffered to be contributing to this scenario which include cultural barrier also called 'Glass ceiling', (Zinyemba 2013, Mugari & Masocha 2014). Kumra and Vinnicombe (2011) defined 'glass ceiling' as an invisible and artificial barrier that prevents women and minorities from moving up in the management hierarchy. In the same vein Hafstede (1980) opines that cultural issues affect women's participation in leadership positions. Similarly Grawford (2006) argues that gender inequality in society is precipitated by legitimizing myths, which refers to attitudes, values and beliefs that serve to justify hierarchical social inequalities. Legitimizing myths promote the perception that woman are fundamentally different from men and regarded as incompetent, helpless and over emotional hence need to be controlled, (Grawford, 2006). From the foregoing literature it can be drawn that cultural factors promote gender inequalities in leadership positions. Thus, Schmuck (1980) refers to this view or model, social perspective. The model assumes that the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions is due to different socialization patterns exposed to men and woman. Men are normally socialized to persevere and seek professional success while women are socialized to nurture and support others as they assume domestic chores such as mother and caretaker (Gobena 2014:22). In the same vein Agenda 65 (2005:6) also noted that women's access to leadership positions is hindered by the socialization process and gender stereotypes. Because of gender socialization and the patriarchal structure of society, Hearn and Morgen (2004) observed that all organisations possess a distinctive genderic structure where men occupy the most powerful organizational and occupational positions. They key question driving this study is: what is the situation in urban primary schools with regard to staff division of labour in the context of gender mainstreaming?

Theoretical framework

This study is anchored in the feminist theories namely liberal and radical feminism. Radical feminism emphasises that women are oppressed by men in all spheres of life (Giddens & Sutton 2013; Gwirayi, 2010). They argue that control of women by men is the first and most fundamental form of oppression (Grawford, 2006). Thus, they maintain that women as a group are oppressed not by their biology but by social culture. The solution to women oppression, according to radical feminists hinges on the ability of women to organise themselves and challenge male domination and the patriarchal society and its institutions (Schaefer, 2010; Sydie, 2011). Another branch of feminism relevant to this study is the liberal or reformist theory. Although liberal feminists do not view men as oppressors of women and beneficiaries of gender inequality in society, they acknowledge that there is gender inequality which harms both men and women (Haralambos & Holborn 2010; Grawford, 2006). To liberal feminists the state or government is a neutral empire which should come up with intervention strategies to address gender inequality in society, such as reforms in law, education, politics as well as change in customs and values (Gwirayi, 2010; Giddens & Sutton, 2013). The issue of equal opportunities between men and women is of paramount importance to feminists. Thus the gender issue which has been accorded priority on international agenda could be credited to the efforts of feminists. This research therefore seeks to establish the impact of gender advocacy in society in general and in schools in particular.

Methodology

Research design

The research design adopted in this study is the descriptive survey. According to Leedy (1993) a survey

design is the best method for measurement of attitudes, perceptions and orientations in population. Merriam (2002) opines that a descriptive survey allows researchers to use both quantitative and qualitative data in order to find facts about a population or phenomena being studied. The researcher used both quantitative and qualitative data to explore gender sensitivity in the sampled schools.

Population and Sample

The study was conducted in Zimbabwe in Masvingo district. Masvingo district covers Masvingo urban and the surrounding rural areas. The study focused on schools in the urban part of the district. There are twelve (12) primary schools in Masvingo urban. The schools are in three categories, council schools which constitute the majority, government and church schools. A sample of three (3) schools was purposively sampled. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that all the three categories of schools were catered for. School administrators (school heads and deputies) of each of the three (3) sampled schools were purposively selected to constitute the sample for the study. They were six (6) in total. All the six (6) school administrators sampled had more than five years' experience in the post that the researcher assumed could be reliable sources of information.

Data collection instruments

Structured interviews, document analysis and observation were employed in this study. De Vos *et al* (2011:248) assert that an interview is a "conversation with a purpose." They added that it allows the researcher and participants to explore an issue. In this research interviews conducted with school administrators gave the researcher an opportunity to probe issues relating to how schools embrace gender in their activities. Data collected through interviews was corroborated with data from document analysis and observation. De Vos *et al* (2011:374) opine that document analysis involves the study of existing documents to understand their content or to illustrate deeper meaning revealed by their style and coverage. In this study that researcher analysed the organograms of the sampled schools as well as staff deployment within each school to gauge the extent to which the schools mainstream gender.

Results

Table 1: staff division of labour in sampled schools

Designation	Gender				Total	
	M	%	F	%	n	%
Administration (Heads and deputies)	4	67	2	33	6	(100)
Teachers in Junior Classes (6-7)	6	60	4	40	10	100
Infant Teachers (Gr 1-3)	2	8	25	92	27	100
Secretaries	0	0	4	100	4	100
Care takers	7	78	2	22	9	100

Findings and Discussion

The research revealed that the school administration in the sampled schools was skewed against women. There were six (6)) school heads and deputies comprising 4(67%) males and 2 (33%) females. The results show that women are underrepresented in school leadership positions. This finding resonates with findings of previous studies which indicated underrepresentation of women in management positions (Chabaya *et al*, 2009; Zinyemba, 2013; Mugari & Masocha 2014; Gudhlanga, 2012; Gobena, 2014). When the researcher interrogated participants on the gender bias of the school leadership, majority of the participants indicated that society still holds stereotypical views on women leadership. They pointed out that women were viewed as fundamentally different from men and regarded as incompetent. The participants' views on female leadership confirm Grawford (2006) observation that women are disadvantaged by gender stereotypes held by society. The gender stereotype or what Grawford (2006) calls legitimizing myths serve to justify gender inequality in society. Women participants

suggested that a lot needs to be done to ensure that the genderic structure of school administration is corrected.

The study also revealed a gender imbalance in the allocation of teachers to infant and junior classes. In emerged that female teachers were concentrated in the infant section (Grades 1 to 3) while male teachers dominated the junior section particularly grades 6 and 7. There were ten (10) classes of grades 6 and 7 in the three (3) schools. The ten (10) teachers for these comprised 6 (60%) males and 4 (40%) females. On the other hand the study revealed a high feminization of staff in the infant section. There were twenty seven (27) infant classes in the three (3) sampled schools. Out of these classes twenty five (25) were taught by female teachers while only two (2) classes were taught by male teachers. The results indicate that there is masculinization and feminization of grades or levels in primary schools where junior classes are viewed as more challenging hence taught by male teachers while infant classes are viewed as closely related to child rearing activities in the private sphere hence are handled by female teachers. This finding is in contradiction to the feminization thesis advanced by some scholars like Cqrai (in Giddens & Sutton, 2013). The

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feminization thesis holds that more and more women are leaving the private sphere to engage in paid work in the public sphere (Giddens & Sutton, 2013). Another feature of feminization according to Cqrai (2007) is that men are becoming increasingly involved in activities traditionally perceived as feminine. Feminization with respect of men taking up roles traditionally viewed as the female domain seems to be a mirage since the results of this study indicated a clear division of labour based on gender. Another notable finding of this study is the existence of sexual division of labour among the non-teaching staff such as secretaries and caretakers. There were four (4) secretaries in the sampled schools. All the 4 (100%) were females. When the researcher interrogated school heads on the dominance of females in secretarial positions they expressed that males shun the job as society views it as feminine. There were also nine (9) caretakers in the three (3) schools, comprising 7 (78%) males and 2 (22%) females. From the results it can be drawn that in the context of Zimbabwe caretaking is a masculine job. This finding affirms Hearn and Morgan's (2004) observation that organisations are gendered institutions and collectivities. In such institutions men occupy most powerful organizational and occupational positions.

It also emerged from the study that all the sampled schools were operating without a school- based gender policy. Interviews conducted with school administrators revealed that all the three schools had no school-based gender policy. When asked about the National Gender Policy, 1 (33%) of school heads confessed having seen and read the document at a workshop while 2 (67%) professed ignorance of the document. The operation of schools without a gender policy could be a contributing factor to the persistence of sexual division of labour in sampled schools, a sexual division of labour which militates against attainment of gender equality.

Conclusion

The study explored the way primary schools operate with a view to establish if they adopt a gender perspective. The study established that despite interventions to address gender inequalities such as gender advocacy, primary schools are to a larger extent gendered institutions as has been shown by the administration structure of the schools which was found to be masculine. Feminization of infant teaching and secretarial job as well as masculinization of caretaking indicates that schools are not gender neutral institutions. The study also concluded that gender mainstreaming in the sampled schools was hampered by lack of school-based gender policy.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

1. The Ministry of education should adopt a gender perspective in recruiting school heads and deputies

2. Schools should draw a school-based gender policy from the National Gender Policy to guide their operations.
3. Government and other stakeholders should conduct gender awareness campaigns to dispel legitimizing myths which reproduce and perpetuate gender inequality in society.

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