

WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP ROLES IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Joy Chinelo Anyafulu-Udeh (Mrs.)

Abstract

Largely speaking, women have been subjected to the background of social change not necessarily because of biologically established inferiority but because of social prejudices. In The Nigerian society, emphasis on gender roles differentiation is prominent. At times, this practice is carried to a disturbing level, where women are barred from playing certain roles for reasons of their sex and not for lack of skills to execute the tasks. But the fact still remains, (that no other aspect of our public sector has witnessed the emergence of women more than our Educational Institutions, This paper examines the problems encountered by women in their roles as leaders of our Educational Institutions and recommends ways of enhancing their performance in (his regard).

Introduction

The leadership question is very significant in our educational institutions. According to Ikediugwu (1999) the leadership style a principal adopts can promote or hinder discipline in his school. Ilaplin (1966) stressed the importance of the principal's position when he stated that the principal is among other things "one who delineates clearly the relationships between himself and members of the group and establishes well defined patterns or organisation, channels of communication and ways of getting jobs done and whose behaviour at the same time reflects friendship, mutual love, respect and warmth in relationship between himself and members of (he group)". Accordingly, the role of the leaders in the school set-up is critical. Leadership has a direct function or relationship with discipline as well as the attainment of the school's goals and objectives.

In a very recent study by Oppong and Abu (1987), it has been pointed out that there is segregation along gender lines. The authors pointed out that the maternal roles of women are placed above all other roles. Again, Ford (1970) stated that "to be a woman is to be a mother, whatever else she may do in the way of routine activities, and however else she may participate in social life, her primary function is to reproduce".

These comments, if correctly made are worrisome in that (they are militating factors to the proper exercise of leadership roles by women in our Educational Institutions. Against this background, one should also consider that in virtually all societies, distinctions are often made between males and females. Women have been subjected to a psychological situation where they perceive themselves as non-powerful and even non-human.

The critical question that arises is thus, can the Nigerian women effectively assume leadership positions in our educational institutions? The answer to this question either in the positive or negative sense is more relevant today, when one realises that the discussion on discipline and other related matters in schools are assuming wider and more complex dimensions. As Ikediugwu (1999) would put it "the persistency of indiscipline behaviour among Nigerian youths have incited public outcry and attracted several comments from concerned individuals".

It is in this context that this work should be appreciated. In the preceding subheadings there is an analysis of the concept of leadership: the problems confronting women in leadership of our Educational Institutions; the prospects for the future; recommendations and conclusion.

The Nature Of Leadership

The leadership question is critical to the attainment of the goals and objectives of any organisation. It influences the social, academic and psychological environment prevailing in the organisation. Thus, leadership has been variously defined as;

1. The process of influencing group towards goal achievement, (Slogdill, 1950).
2. The fulfillment of functions necessary for the attainment of group goals. (C'artwright and Zanders, 1968).
3. The ability and readiness to inspire, guide, direct and manage other, (**Carter, 1959**). Synthesizing all these various definitions Ikediugwu (1999) states that "it involves the dynamic and inter-personal process of planning, organising, controlling, directing and coordination as one integrates the organizational or institutional demands and the needs of the members in *a way that will be productive and individually fulfilling*". There are different types of leadership namely, family leadership, social leadership, political leadership, and religious leadership among others. Perhaps of greater significance is the type of leadership style which a leader adopts to achieve organizational goals.

In this respect there are various classifications viz automatic leadership style, democratic leadership style, laissez-faire leadership style, manipulative leadership style, consideration and initialing structure leadership

style etc.

It must however be stated that given the turbulent environment in which most educational institutions now find themselves calls for more effective and efficient leadership. The type of leadership to be exercised at any given situation depends on many factors including the nature of the environment and the organizational goals. No one type of leadership style is preferable to the other but much depends on the environment and the overriding need to achieve the organisation's goals.

This has nothing to do with the gender. Greenfield and Bean (1980) affirmed that leadership has no gender, which implies that management position is open to both men and women. This statement is far from being accepted as correct in the Nigerian context. In spite of women's adequate qualifications, some jobs are not necessarily open to them because our society has some norms which are male oriented. The normative male superiority is reflected in appointments to key management positions in our educational institutions. When finally a woman assumes the management position she faces a lot of problems.

Leadership Problems Confronting Women In Our Educational Institutions

The fact however, remains that women are kept at the background of social change not necessarily because of biologically established inferiority but because of social prejudices. To quote Lai Olurode (1990) "stereotyping may run counter to our development efforts especially when women after acquiring a rare skill are nevertheless barred from performing tasks which require the acquisition of that skill*¹. Most institutions still express reluctance in appointing women into executive positions. Gross and Trask, (1976) think that no matter how highly qualified a female cannot be as good as a man holding the same kind of job. Gardner (1945) observed that there is the general belief that women made poor supervisors, that they are too emotional and take things personally, that they cannot command the loyalty and respect of their subordinates. Ndu (1991) noted that even when women are qualified for managerial positions they are pushed aside as a result of some stereotypes which assume that:-

Women are unable to meet certain work demanding for emotional toughness and stability. Women are timid about accepting leadership positions. Women do not want to be managers because it would involve an extra work level which would interfere with family obligations. Women responsibilities at home are seen as more important.

The point being made is that where a male and female have access to similar jobs, they are confronted by different sets of obstacles. This is for no other reason than for sex. This state of affairs cannot easily be changed because of stereotype and prejudice. To quote Lai Olurode (1990) "our theoretical position therefore is that stereotypes and hence prejudices about the female sex are sustained because they serve specific functions in the maintenance of the status quo. This even I continues after some or all of the presumed facts upon which they rest have been proved to be false". This issue of stereotype and prejudice are relevant to the concept of leadership and the twin consideration of the role of subordinates in leadership. In the view of Ikediugwu (1999). "The subordinate in every organisation have got many roles to play in order that the goals and objectives of the organisation could be achieved". These goals the writer broadly classified as co-operation, submission and obedience. As a result of cultural bias, prejudice and stereotype women leaders in our educational institutions have problems of commanding obedience, co-operation and submission from their male subordinates. When women get to management positions in educational institutions.

they must contend with problems posed by men who find it difficult to work under women. This unfortunate position is highlighted by Herbert who testified for the National Women's party on behalf of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1976. He said.

The difficulties I had working under a women largely
stemmed from my own feeling concerning her status
....

There is a greater reluctance on the part of subordinate male to carry out instructions given by a female leader than that of their male counterparts. In reaction to this situation most female leaders adopt what may be described as autocratic leadership style. Ikediugwu (1999) stated in autocratic leadership style the behaviour of the leader is characterized by a decided preference for a centralized decision-making power in the leader and a reluctance to share position, power and or authority with others". It is a common thing to hear some female managers of our Educational Institutions being called such name as "Thatcher" and or "Iron Lady" or "Jezebel". This situation often affects employees' moral and creates tension in the work environment.

Both the Bible and the Quran assign superior position to men in society. It was written about women in the book of Genesis for example, that "thy desire shall be to thy husband and he shall rule over thee". Similar references are contained in the Holy Quran.

Women are continually being chased by these historical limitations. This explains the widespread

belief that makes it possible for women and their roles to be glossed over, under analysed, or make to be absent. The result is that:

what women do is perceived as household work and what they talk about is called gossip, while men's work is viewed as the economic base of society and their information is seen as important social communication (Reiner, 1975).

The femininity of a women envelops her role as a leader in several situations and circumstances. For example, her male counterpart is described as "Dr. Okafor", the woman is described as Dr. (Mrs.) Okafor".

The title of "MRS" or "MISS" is important as act of identifying her to the society an even more important to the¹ woman herself A professional without the title of "'MRS" immediately 'closing rank' is like food without salt.

The role of biological factors was emphasised in the work of Gross and Trask (1976) whose main proposition was that women's child rearing activities underline their social inequality lo men. Some studies have used these female physiological limitations as constituting impediments towards women's advancement in top jobs, married or single are less mobile than men. Because of cultural restrictions and impediments women leaders are less aggressive in the pursuit of organisational goals, which involves also risk-taking. A male principal is more likely to leave his home and visit the school dormitories by 12 mid-night to monitor discipline than his female counterpart.

It is argued in certain quarters that male subordinates are easier to manage by female leaders than female subordinates who present more problems. Women are their worst enemies. Some of the hardship or problems encountered by women in educational management stem from their fellow women's negative attitude towards them. In Dubord's (1979) opinion, women are held back by their passivity, naivety and misunderstandings. "There is too much willingness among the ladies to stand aside, criticise and gossip rather than work hard.

In conclusion, there is no doubt thai certain barriers connected with stereotypes and prejudices exist which act as impediments to the effective discharge of women's roles as leaders. Women leaders can reduce these obstacles by cultivating new relationships, legitimize the authority of her office and gradually break down the resistance of her subordinate male staff.

Prospects For The Future

The recognition of the significance of the place and roles of women in the society is a current social preoccupation. Whether in politics, economics, education or generally in current affairs, the place and the importance of women folk is deliberately being highlighted by both women

themselves and a considerable number of males. This movement has both national and global coverage. For example, every March 8 is annually declared International Women's Day by the United Nations. Recently, women converged in Beijing China, from all over the world to highlight the problems of women throughout the world. At the home front, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria recognizes and provides for equality of both men and women before the law whether educated or not. The trend in Nigeria today seems to be speeding fast towards a woman having a job outside her home and complementing it with house keeping. As noted earlier in this work that the Nigerian educational scene has witnessed a significant increase in the participation of women in management.

Consequently, many women will be expected to be leaders as Deans of Faculties and Heads of Departments, Rectors of Colleges of Education, Librarians and Vice-Chancellors. With the Get-Rich-Fast syndrome pervading the Nigerian society, it has been observed that more men now avoid careers in education. Consequently, the mantle to top management positions and leadership in education will fall more equally on the shoulders of women.

Recommendations

First of all, there is need for a change in our socialization process. The emphasis at all levels of our educational system should be equality of the sexes in all spheres of life. Women in leadership positions must learn to be more mobile, aggressive in the pursuit of institutional goals, confident, tolerant, democratic, independent and most importantly be able to face the challenges posed by stigma.

Broadly speaking, women must be part of the active electorate in any political arrangement. Women must be organized into politically relevant interest and pressure groups potent enough to make an impact both within and outside our educational institutions. Women should seek elective political offices as a prerequisite to the enhancement of their participation in the decision-making process. Participation in local politics like the activities of NASU etc, should not be left for men alone.

There is the need to provide more and better organized child-care centres and facilities for the children of the working class women.

All women organizations, like the National Council of Nigerian Women (NCNW), Women in Nigeria (WIN) and the NLC women's wing should draw up and pursue programmes which make women to be conscious of and relevant to their tasks.

Conclusion

Are women really inferior beings? The answer can scarcely be in the affirmative. The present day subordinate role of women in Nigerian society is not natural but historical. However, in spite of all set-backs, women have played and will continue to play critical roles in society especially in both formal and informal educational setup. "Educate a woman" they say "and you educate a nation".

References

Cartwright, S. and Zander A. (1953): *Croup Dynamics: Research and Theory*. Evanston: Row Peterson.

Dubord, R. R. (1979); *Identity Crisis: Humanizing our Sports Programmes*. *Arena Review* The Institute for Sports and Social Analysis 3. 2, 33.37.

Gardner, H. B. (1945): *Human Relations in Industry*. Chicago: Rich and I). Irwin Inc.

Greenfield and Dean (1980). *Power and Opportunity in the Principality*. New York: Macmillan

Gross, N. And Trask A. E. (1976): *The Sex Factor and the Management of Schools*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Haplin, A. W. (1966): *Theory and Research in Administration*. New York: Macmillan.

Ikediegwu. N. I*. N. (1999); *Basic Theories and Concepts in Educational Administration*. Knugu: Ok fie.

Ikediugwu, N.P.N. (1999): *School Discipline. A Guide for Administrators*. Knugu: Ok He.

Ndu, A.N. (1991): Women in Educational Management and Special Services: The Challenges of the 21st Century. A paper presented at International Conference on Women Education and African Development Towards the 21st Century at the University of Nigeria Nsukka 8th - 12th October.

Olurode, K. (1990): *Women and Social Change in Nigeria*. Unity Publishing and Research Co. Ilet.

Slogdill, R.M. (1950): *A Handbook of Leadership: A Survey of Theory and Research*. New York: Free Press.