

ASSESSING THE LEADERSHIP STYLES OF MALE AND FEMALE ACADEMICS IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS: DOES GENDER MATTER?

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ABSTRACT: *This study assessed the leadership styles of male and female heads of departments in a Nigerian State university. This was done to ascertain whether differences exist in the way both sexes lead and whether the way women lead account for their under representation in leadership positions. Data from both primary and secondary sources were utilized for this study. The primary data was derived through the administration of the Multifactor leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) on 90 randomly selected academic staff in subordinate positions from 7 purposively selected faculties in Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Nigeria. The retrieved data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics in the form of percentages, means, Cronbach alpha and Mann Whitney U test. It was found that both the male and female heads of departments utilized more of the transformational (males $\bar{x}=4.35$; females $\bar{x}=4.50$), democratic (males $\bar{x}=4.15$; females $\bar{x}=4.13$), transactional (males $\bar{x}=3.76$; females $\bar{x}=3.59$) and laissez-fair (males $\bar{x}=3.29$; females $\bar{x}=3.06$) leadership styles, as evident in their high mean scores. There was no significant difference ($P>0.05$) in the leadership styles of both sexes. Women were found to lead in ways that are effective and the styles they adopted did not account for their under representation. The study concluded that the university should develop strategies for increasing the number of women in leadership positions since they were found to lead in ways that are effective; and investigate the factors that account for their under representation.*

KEYWORDS: Leadership Styles, Leadership Positions, Male And Female Academics, University.

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is considered to be the solution to most organizational problems and a basic need in the university system (Daft and Marcic, 2006). Due to the changing global environment, universities currently face more challenges than ever before, so they need leaders who can motivate staff and ensure the sector remains relevant in a competitive global context. Such leaders must have the requisite skills and knowledge of what leadership entails as well as an understanding of the various leadership styles required in tackling the evolving challenges. Leadership opportunities must therefore be accessible and inclusive such that both men and women are fully represented. Unfortunately very few women occupy leadership positions in universities. Men dominate and gender disparities are obvious, (Morley, 2013). Previous research (Moran, 1992) has shown that lack of women in top positions is due to the differences in their leadership styles and that the continuous dominance of men in decision making positions limit women's voice and ability to influence policy at all levels. It should be

realised that having women as leaders in universities is critical because they provide diverse perspectives in resolving most of the challenges confronting universities and they also significantly influence the institution's knowledge and scope of research as well as meaningfully contribute to decisions and policies that affect the lives of women in academia (Howe-Walsh and Turnbull, 2016). Also, research (Powell, Butterfield and Parent, 2002; Schein, 2001) has shown the tendency of women to exceed men on the components of leadership styles that relate positively to effectiveness.

Gender issues have been one focal point of research in higher education. Also, gender differences and leadership styles have become one of the most studied research topics in recent times, but not much has been done on leadership styles from a gender perspective in Nigerian universities. There is the assumption that lack of women in top positions in universities is due to the difference in their leadership styles, but there is little agreement about how women really lead. It is against this backdrop that this study assessed and provided insight into the leadership styles of male and female academics occupying leadership positions in a Nigerian state university. This was done to determine whether the dearth of women in leadership positions is explained by their leadership styles and also whether women adopt styles that relate positively to effectiveness.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

Males dominate leadership positions in universities and gender disparities are obvious. It is difficult for women to break into the traditionally male domain of leadership in universities and there is little agreement about how women actually lead. In the United Kingdom for example, only 20% of women in academia occupy the positions of Vice-Chancellor and principal officers (Morley, 2013). Just 1% of women in higher education institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa are headed by women. In India, 20% of Deans and 23% of Departmental Heads are women. In Anglo-phone Sub-Saharan Africa, women hold 18% of Dean's position in the universities (Morley, 2014; Williams, 2014). In Nigeria, the disparity is also glaring, for instance, as at 2016, in Ahmadu Bello University, there were just 6 females out of the 77 Heads of Departments, and all the 12 Deans were males. Also, the positions of Directors of Institutes, Bursar, Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor were occupied by men. In 2015, at the Obafemi Awolowo University, there were just 11 females out of the 85 Heads of Departments and just 1 female Dean out of 14 of them. In the same vein in 2016, there were 3 females out of the 14 Deans, showing a slight increase, while there were just 9 females out of the 90 Heads of Departments; showing a decrease. The leadership situation in these Nigerian universities is not different from that of other universities in Nigeria; they represent the realities of gender disparity in leadership positions in all the Nigerian universities (Okunola, Uzoka, Adetoro, and Sule, 2017).

Women are unable to ascend the leadership ladder because the academic environment of the university is generally masculinised with strong boys' network in operation and they constantly struggle to find the time to work towards network enhancements as well as the time to nurture professional friendships that help advance them on the job; women are therefore unable to permeate the male domain. Also, women are saddled with several conflicting roles to juggle in the family and at the workplace (Williams, 2014). The male-normative model of leadership where leadership behaviours are aligned with masculine traits,

as well as the institutionalised patriarchy act as impediments that create difficult climate for women to take up leadership positions, own power and advance within the university system (Whaley and Krane, 2012). It is interesting to note that not all detractors are men; some can be women who act as road blockers, gate keepers and queen bees in their lack of support and inequitable treatment of other women (Cummins, 2012). These various challenges and barriers amongst many others have contributed in having few females in leadership positions in the universities. The few of them who occupy leadership positions therefore experience tokenism, attitudinal prejudice, discrimination, harassment, structural barriers and lack of mentors and role models (Vecchio, 2002).

Having women as leaders in universities is critical. This is because they are agents of change that can make contributions to decisions and policies that affect women and a strong force that strengthens gender balance (Schwartz and Rubel, 2005). Ritt (2004) affirmed that women are more likely than their male counterparts to advocate for changes that promote the interests of women and increase their participation in leadership roles. Debates about the leadership styles of women and men gained momentum in the 1990's because of new research that attempted to identify the styles that are attuned to contemporary conditions. Such early researchers included Eagly (2013) who found that differences existed in the leadership styles of men and women in organizations; and that female leaders were seen to adopt a more democratic and participative style than their male counterparts. Further research revealed that effective leadership is congruent with the ways that women lead (Book, 2000; Helgesen, 1990 and Rosner, 1995). In furtherance of this, Rosener (1995) labelled women's leadership as interactive, involving collaboration and empowerment of employees, while men's leadership was characterised by command and control involving the assertion of authority and accumulation of power. In the same vein, Eagly and Johnson (1990) found that women more than men in university business programs manifested interpersonally oriented and democratic leadership styles and men more than women manifested relatively task oriented and autocratic styles. They noted that the possible interpretation of the autocratic-democratic sex difference is the greater social skills of women than men which may facilitate collaborative and democratic leadership behaviour (Vecchio, 2002). Studies by Antonakis, Avolio and Sivasubramaniam(2003) revealed that compared to male leaders, females were more transformational and engaged in more of the contingent reward behaviours which included exchanging rewards for followers, nurturing good relationships and inspiring and motivating followers. In the same vein, Ogbogu (2018) found that women led in ways that are effective and they manifested a combination of transformational, transactional and democratic leadership styles which are consistent with their gender roles and which inspire followers' commitment and creativity. She also found that male leaders more likely than female leaders manifested aspects of transactional leadership style which focused on followers' mistakes and failures to meet standards. The females manifested the aspects of transactional leadership style that focused on positive reward based incentives. The tendency of women to exceed men in components of leadership style that relate positively to effectiveness attest to women's abilities. Gender role is thus an important personality trait that influences leadership style. Despite those findings, evidences (Powell, Butterfield and Parent 2002, Schein, 2001) exists that reveal greater preference for male than female bosses. Riggio(2008) however, noted that neither of the gender is better in employing a leadership style, rather effectiveness is conditional to various internal and external environments. He also remarked that there is no best style of leadership; rather effectiveness depends on the interaction of leader behaviour and situation.

It has however been observed that women face socially prompted stereotypes as well as contend with a variety of challenges that undermine their credibility as leaders and which also hinder their capacity to feature prominently in leadership positions in universities. There is need for a change from focusing on women's under representation to emphasizing strategies that can help them advance to leadership positions so that their voices can be heard in academia. This can be achieved by mentoring and sponsoring upcoming female leaders. Men also need to be engaged as the key drivers of the change. Also, top leadership of the university should champion diversity across the university by providing funds for leadership training programs for women (Ahern and Dittman, 2012). Since literature provides evidence that women more than men adopt the transformational, democratic and aspects of transactional leadership style that focus on positive reward based incentives, they prove to be benevolent, compassionate and act on behalf of the public good. This leads to positive social outcomes and organizational effectiveness (Krishna and Park, 2005; Matsa and Miller, 2012). Consistent with this trend of leadership styles, the number of women in leadership positions in academia needs to increase through concerted efforts of universities in initiating workable strategies to achieve this.

There are various leadership theories that provide explanation for the leadership styles adopted by leaders and why leaders act the way they do. They also explain why some succeed and others don't. Leadership theories have evolved over the years since the 1800s starting with the great man theory which was faulty because it was premised on the fact that only few people can be considered for leadership positions. However, most of the theories have come to accommodate new contexts and understanding as the society and organizations change (Naylor, 1999). Transformational leadership theory is one of the most researched and referenced. The theory emphasises how leaders connect with followers in such a way that raises their level of motivation and morality. It affirms the need of transformational leaders to be committed to a collective good (Blum and Smith, 1988). Northouse (2016) emphasised the contributions of the components of transformational leadership style to its effectiveness. These are: the idealized influence, the inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and the individualized concern. These components make followers want to follow the vision transformational leaders establish because they communicate effectively and encourage them. Also, the components make transformational leaders innovative and show care for individuals and the common good.

The adaptive leadership is one of the recent leadership theories that postulates that a leader is someone who mobilizes people to take up tough challenges and has the capacity to influence them to do so. Adaptive leaders earn results through their influence (Bass and Bass, 2008). Leaders who are adaptive seek collaborative approaches to solving challenging issues. They are focused and create a safe emotional space for addressing tough challenges. When an adaptive leader gives the work back to the people, he engages their strengths and competences. This gives rise to the strength-based leadership theory.

The strength-based leadership theory focuses on identifying and leveraging one's strength and that of others in achieving results. Dubrin (2007) affirms that understanding one's strength and those of others can help the leader improve team cohesion and productivity. Leaders should therefore recognize the strength of others and create opportunities for them to work in their area of strength.

Bass and Bass (2008) submitted that the servant leadership theory explores the need for leaders to place the needs of others over their own self interests and ensure that they serve. This theory advocates that power should shift from the leader to those who are being led. Northouse (2016) posited that the behaviour a servant leader must activate to be successful include: listening, empathizing, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization and building community.

Contingency theory postulates that there is no single way of leading and that every leadership style should be based on certain situations. Hence, Naylor (1999) noted that leaders need to combine the use of various leadership theories and identify those that are effective and work for them in order for them to succeed.

This paper is anchored on feminist theories because they provide a framework and the basis for comprehending gender inequalities and the systemic way in which women are discriminated against, underrepresented in leadership positions and subordinated because of their sex. These set of theories also help understand the differences and similarities in the leadership styles between the genders. They provide a basis for understanding why women in leadership positions are seen as less leaders and driven into silence or submission. Feminist theories demonstrate how sexism continues to work against women and examine women's roles, experiences and interests.

Leadership has become a powerful discourse that borders on masculinity; hence Smith (1978) saw this as andocentric, which is the elevation of the masculine to the level of the universal and the ideal. It is honouring men and the male principle above women and the female. This perception creates a belief in male superiority and a value system in which female values, experiences and behaviours are viewed as inferior. This is evident in the Nigerian university system, where few women occupy leadership positions and own power. It is therefore vital to deconstruct, interrogate and approach leadership from a feminist point of view (Blackmore, 2010).

Feminist theories are many and include those of the liberalists, radicalists, socialists, Marxists and postmodernists. The liberal theory for instance, advocates that women and men are similar and that women would be able to achieve as much as men do if they have the same opportunity as men do to acquire skills and competences. They noted the obvious gender inequality in positions of power and advocate for the creation of structures that would not reproduce patriarchal model but denounce discrimination of women in leadership positions (Greer and Green, 2003). The radical feminist theory postulates that men and women are different and each gender has an effective but distinct way of thinking and rationalizing (Johnsen and McMahon, 2005). They affirm that these differences should be celebrated as they could have positive effect and influence the leadership style adopted by women. They emphasise that certain styles of leadership are more readily adopted by women than others (O'Connor, 2010). Hence recent studies (Mensi-Klarbach, 2014; Sandberg, 2013) indicated a tendency for women to be rated as slightly more transformational and authentic than men. The poststructuralist feminist theorists are concerned about how masculinity and femininity are constructed and their effects on social order (Ahl, 2006).

All of the feminist theories have a common theme that emphasise the need to change the marginalization and subjugation of women and enable them enjoy full citizenship rights. They advocate for the transformation of institutions and structures such that women do not

have to conform to accepted male norms before being accepted into leadership positions and that men do not have to necessarily be the ones that can lead effectively. In this context Mama (2011) saw feminism as premised on freeing women from centuries of oppression, exploitation and marginalization since construction of leadership remain masculine, heroic and normative in orientation.

This work argues that since leadership in university has been built on male experience and designed to favour men, there is the need to reinstate the experience of women and change the patriarchal structures of universities such that women would be able to ascend to leadership positions. Hence in the 1970s and 1980s feminist theorists started to deconstruct organizational and leadership life. Researchers started to argue for a shift from individual women and their experiences in organizations to the structures in which they are located including challenging the maintenance of masculinities (Burton, 1987). Feminist theorists have helped to understand that leadership is not great deeds by great men but a relational discursive and intersubjective phenomenon between people. Leadership is not simply the way someone does a job or activity, but rather a series of ways of talking and understanding that is prefigured by relations of power and knowledge. They have found that women display the capacity to do well and put in efforts in building relationships and in empowering others. There was considerable diversity in the way women went about their job of leading with a common interest of transforming outcomes and to serve the common good (Kark, 2004). This paper therefore further argues that women would be able to lead successfully and would do it better due to their special relational skills, desire to help followers and their intuitive mode of thinking and caring if given the privilege.

METHOD

This study was carried out in Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, a Nigerian state university, to assess the leadership styles of males and females in academic leadership positions and to determine whether there are differences in the leadership styles adopted by both sexes. It also investigated whether the leadership styles of females accounted for their under representation in leadership positions. Primary data was derived through the administration of the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) on 102 randomly selected academic staff in subordinate positions, from 7 purposively selected Faculties. The questionnaire adopted the likert-scale format in providing the scale of 1-5 for the respondents to assess the leadership styles utilized by their heads of departments. The subordinates who had worked under their heads of departments for at least two years were randomly selected in order to eliminate biases and also because of their experiences and knowledge about their heads of departments. They were therefore in a position to provide information about their leadership styles. The retrieved questionnaires were 90 and they were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The Cronbach alpha was used in testing the reliability of the measurements of leadership styles and the Mann Whitney U test was employed to test whether there were significant differences in the mean of each leadership style of the male and female heads of departments. Percentages were used in reporting the results of the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**Table I: Distribution of reliability coefficients**

Leadership styles	Number of items	Cronbach Alpha coefficients
Transformational	5	85%
Transactional	3	73%
Laissez-faire	2	24%
Autocratic	2	75%
Democratic	3	60%

Table I presents the results of the reliability test carried out to confirm the internal consistency of the variables used for the study. The data shows that the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the leadership styles were as follows: transformational (85%), transactional (73%), Laissez-faire (24%), autocratic (75%) and democratic (60%). All reliability coefficient values show that there is internal consistency in the leadership styles used by the leaders, except that of laissez-faire leadership style. This is because laissez-faire leadership style has the lowest Cronbach's alpha value of 24% reflecting poor reliability of the data.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	67	74.4
Females	23	25.6
Total	90	100
Age		
20-34	12	13.3
35-44	29	32.2
45-54	39	43.3
55yrs and above	10	11.1
Total	90	100
Marital status		
Single	12	13.3
Married	76	84.4
Divorced	1	1.1
Widowed	1	1.1
Total	90	100
Religion		
Christianity	65	72.2
Islam	25	27.8
Total	90	100
Sex of HOD		
Male	56	62.2
Female	34	37.8
Total	90	100

Table 2 shows the results of the demographic data of the respondents. The result shows that 74.4% of the respondents are males and 25.6% are females, which is an indication that females are underrepresented as academic staff in the university and gender disparities exist. Data on the age of the respondents reveal that majority (43.3%) of the respondents are between 45-54 years. This implies that they are middle aged and in their productive work life. Those between 35-44 years are 32.2%, while 13.3% are between 20-34 years. It should be noted that staff in these age groups are sometimes still on training and pursuing postgraduate degrees within their respective departments. Those that are above 55 years are few (11.1%). The result on the marital status shows that majority (84.4%) are married, while very few (13.3%) are single. An insignificant number (1.1%) are widows and divorcees respectively. The Christians among the respondents are higher (72.2%) than their Muslim counterparts (27.8%). This may be attributed to the fact that the university used for the study is located in the predominately Christian region of Nigeria. The positions of the respondents' heads of departments were predominately occupied by males (62.2%). This is an indication that gender disparity exists in leadership positions in the university.

Table 3: Differences in the leadership styles of heads of departments by sex

Leadership styles	Mean(SD)	Mann Whitney U test	p-value
Transformational			
Male	4.35(0.76)	-0.999	0.318
Female	4.50(0.50)		
Transactional			
Male	3.76(0.09)	0.813	0.416
Female	3.59(1.04)		
Laissez-faire			
Male	3.29(0.99)	1.061	0.288
Female	3.06(1.01)		
Autocratic			
Male	2.82(4.15)	1.252	0.211
Female	2.49(1.35)		
Democratic			
Male	4.15(0.84)	0.287	0.774
Female	4.13(0.80)		

Table 3 shows the differences in the leadership styles of the male and female heads of departments as perceived by their subordinates. The results show that the transformational leadership style is mostly utilized by both the male ($\bar{x}=4.35$) and female ($\bar{x}=4.50$) heads of departments as evident in the very high mean scores. The second most adopted style by both sexes is the democratic leadership style (males $\bar{x}=4.15$; females $\bar{x}=4.13$). This was followed by the transactional (males $\bar{x}=3.36$; females $\bar{x}=3.59$) and the laissez-faire (males $\bar{x}=3.29$;

females $\bar{x}=3.06$) leadership styles. The least utilized style by both sexes is the autocratic leadership style (males $\bar{x}=2.82$; females $\bar{x}=2.49$) as evident in their low mean values. This finding is in accord with that of Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2007) who reported that the transformational leadership style was popularly utilized by leaders because of the theme of “individual consideration” which makes leaders focus on the mentoring and development of their subordinates, thereby paying attention to their individual needs. They also noted that female leaders demonstrated more of transformational and democratic leadership styles. This is perhaps why women are more relation oriented and men more task oriented in their leadership behaviour. In the same vein, Martindale (2011) found that women manifested a combination of transformational, transactional and democratic leadership styles which are consistent with their gender roles and which inspire followers’ commitment and creativity.

The results on Table 3 however show that the difference in the utilization of the various leadership styles between both sexes are not significant as evident in the results of the Mann Whitney U test conducted whose P-values are all greater than 0.05 ($p>0.05$). This implies that both sexes are seen to use these leadership styles to approximately the same extent, hence no significant statistical differences are recorded. The underlying reason influencing these findings may be the spill over and huge number of the male heads of departments and their dominance in leadership positions. This paper therefore argues that the university is a patriarchal and masculinised organization with men dominant in leadership positions. The few women occupying headship positions may sometimes suffer from prejudicial evaluation of their competence as leaders. However, just like their male counterparts, they have been found to predominantly use the transformational, democratic, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles. Since women have been found to lead in ways that are effective, this study therefore infer that their leadership style is not responsible for their underrepresentation in leadership positions as previously assumed, rather other factors may be.

Implications to research and practice

Since this study focused on the leadership styles of males and females in leadership positions in a state university, it has implications for recognizing and understanding better, the leadership styles and peculiarities from a gender perspective. It reveals the realities of leadership and an understanding of leadership styles that are necessary for equipping both men and women to be more effective as leaders not only in the university but in other public institutions.

CONCLUSION

Leadership is critical in enhancing the performance of universities and leadership style plays a vital role in determining a leader’s effectiveness and capacity to motivate those under him in achieving set goals. Men dominate leadership positions in universities despite a sizeable member of women in academia. Although there is the assumption that women’s underrepresentation in leadership positions is explained by their leading with styles that are different from that of their male counterparts; but this study has confirmed that women lead in ways that are as effective as those of their male counterparts even though gender gap exists. It was found that both the male and female heads of departments utilized more of the transformational, democratic, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles and the difference in their leadership styles were found not to be statistically significant.

Future research

This study found that women lead in ways that are effective and their leadership styles do not account for their under representation, therefore future research should advocate for the initiation of effective strategies by universities for advancing more women into leadership positions; and also investigate the core factors that account for their under representation so that remedies can be proffered.

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