

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIAN WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT: *Women in Africa generally and in Nigeria particularly, appear to be on the move in the new millennium. There is credible indication that Nigerian women have increased opportunities at work. This has resulted to the actual increase in the number of women in the academe particularly in management positions. Despite these evidences there are indications that women are not as effective as they should be. This is probably due to issues and challenges that define the process of advancement and effectiveness for women. The purpose of this study is to identify the challenges faced by these women in managerial positions of public universities and strategies for ensuring increased management effectiveness in the 21st century academe. Two research questions were formulated for the study. A 15 item questionnaire titled Women in Education Management Questionnaire (WEMQ) supplemented with oral interview sessions provided the data for the study. The study involved 180 randomly selected women of high caliber in academic and non-academics of two universities in southeast Nigeria. The data collected were analysed using percentage (mean) and standard deviation. The instrument was face validated by 2 experts from the sampled universities. The reliability coefficient of the instrument was established by using Cronbach Alpha and the reliability of 0.85 was established. The findings of the study showed that major challenges of women in educational management include long working hours, dealing with different natures of sub-ordinates and lack of authorization. Based on these findings, recommendations were also proffered to decision makers in order to alleviate those challenges such as the limitation of female long working hours by decentralization and better distribution of work load. Training programs in management and communication skills would help women in education, manage and communicate with other staff better. Authorization should be given to female managers to exercise their abilities in decisions making for their units and departments.*

KEYWORDS: Issues, Challenges, Women in Education, Management and 21st Century.

INTRODUCTION

Many countries of the world, through international conventions and commitments, have recognized education as instrument for promoting fundamental human rights. The proclamation of the right to education in the universal declaration of human rights in 1948 was the beginning of a broad effort by the United Nations to promote social, economic, cultural and political rights among nations. In Africa generally, and Nigeria in particular, access to basic education according to Ogbuagu (2009) is inhibited by gender issues and socio-cultural beliefs and practices, among other factors. Education is a human right instrument upon which the foundation of freedom, democracy, good governance and sustainable human and national development hinge on. Education affects how well individuals, communities and nation fare.

Although, the national policy on education and the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria emphasizes equal access to education by both sexes in Nigeria, yet evidence of

gender imbalance in access to education and its management abounds as women suffer discriminatory practices in the field of education. This, no doubt, has taken its toll on national development in the 21st Century. Although, there are still fewer women than men in the academe, there is credible indications that Nigerian women have increased the opportunities for work. This has resulted in the actual increase in the number of women in the academe particularly in management positions. This improvement can be attributed to the emergence of efforts, arising from pressure groups such as NGO's and individuals, that seeks to address the socio-cultural, economic and educational concerns of women aimed at increasing awareness of the need to improve the status and performance of women. Emphasis has been on giving qualified and competent women the opportunity to occupy management positions. Management as used in this paper, refers to activities and operation carried out by women in the academe at the strategic, control and operational levels of decision making. The paper therefore discusses the issues and challenges faced by women in management that hinder their effective participation in the 21st Century academe in south-east, Nigeria.

Locating the Problem

Women over the world are not represented in leadership positions like their male counterparts. For example, in 2004 only 7% of the universities were managed by women world-wide (Zinyemba, 2013). Women face the challenges of balancing work and life, and at work women managers face challenges related to gender prejudices. Women are seen as soft and weak and less committed for work than men. Weyer (2007) provided the theoretical explanation for the persistence of the *glass ceiling* keeping women from assuming leadership positions. Two theories were discussed, social role theory and Expectation States theory. Both theories belong to the structural/cultural models describing differences between the genders. However, both theories propose that gender differences will result in evaluation bias against women.

Both theories are based on the concept that men and women are allocated different roles in society due to their gender. According to the social role theory, women and men leaders behave somewhat differently because gender roles exert some influence on leadership roles in terms of the expectations they and others hold. A number of studies examined the challenges women face in their work. Zinyemba (2013) examined the challenges women face in the hospitality and financial services sectors in Zimbabwe where women have traditionally been found in supportive low level positions. The research identified a number of challenges which relates to gender role expectations as wife and parenting. Gartzia (2012) in Zinyemba (2013) established the same findings which concluded that motherhood impacted significantly on career opportunities for women. That the younger the age of children the great the relative disadvantage in career progression. A study conducted by Stanton Chase International (2009) in Serbia asked 300 women administrators about their career challenges. The study found that the majority of women in managerial positions hold a University degree and are in the most productive time of their life (30 – 45 years of age). The study also found that the basic limiting factor for developing a career is the decision to start a family. A large number of women think that they are less competitive than men of the same profession and level of education. Gender and age biases are readily present in the society and this is also a hindering factor for career development. Traditionally, the vast majority of top leadership positions in both the USA and throughout the world have been held by males rather than females, even though there is an increasing number of women who enter the workforce and increasing number of managerial awareness.

Discourse on Women

A woman is an adult female person. Women are very important in national development, and the role of whom at home also cannot be over-emphasized. In recent years, women have put aside gender inequality, marginalization and inferiority complex. They carry a dual burden that they must pursue both their academic interest while meeting the traditional obligations. A woman academic is concerned with child bearing, cooking and other house hold chores and their supervision. The performance measure of women in academics can either be qualitative or quantitative. Specifically, the Nigerian woman has the peculiar problem of having to cope with the role of the token women for example, a woman seen but not heard, lack of role models to learn from, feelings of isolation, strains of coping with male prejudice and overt or covert discrimination from senior colleagues. Pereira (2002) noted that although the university system tends to be spoken of in gender neutral terms, the effects of their working are far from gender neutral. The Federal Ministry of Education (2006) noted that female participation among the academic staff of all tertiary institutions is still low. For instance in 2001/2002 session, the total number of Nigerian university teachers was 20,124 out of this number 3,174 constituting 15.7% were females while 17,040 (84.3%) are males. Factors responsible for the low participation of women in top rank lectureship positions are connected with the struggle to keep the home and functions maximally on their jobs at the same time. But there is a flicker of light at the end of the tunnel.

In this 20th century, there seem to be a remarkable improvement on the states of women in management across the world. It is imperative to note, however that in Nigeria, there are women who have distinguished themselves in academics, politics, administration and even in religious organization in recent times though there is no doubt that these women may have encountered some problems. Therefore, these pioneer efforts should not be allowed to die because this is a pointer to the fact that women are willing and ready to move up on the progress ladder. According to the 2012 Gender in Nigeria report, data suggest that Nigerians ranks 118 out of 134 countries in the gender equality index. The past 20 years have witnessed insufficient improvement. A number of cultural barriers still exist in the Nigerian society which seriously impedes women's development as citizens and professionals.

Challenges of Women in Management

At present, the forces which combine to hamper sustainable development of education in Nigeria could be viewed broadly to include denial of equal access and participation to functional education, early marriage, confinement to solitary living, subjugation by culture to accept choices forced on women, discrimination and harassment at work, political disenfranchisement from elective positions and political appointment and exposure to cruel mourning rites upon the death of their husband (Oniye, 2000). These cultural barriers and environmental manipulation create inferiority complex in many Nigerian women.

According to Agbakwuru (2002) education equips one with marketable skills thereby lifting the possessor up from the poverty arena. Moreover, a number of writers, researchers and advocates of the women's leadership summarized the challenges facing women's leading roles in the educational organisations as follows:

- **Organizational Challenges:** Factors related to the administrative organization that may hinder the academic leadership to achieve the objectives of the institution, (Abu Khdair, 2012).

- **Under-Empowerment Challenges:** Factors that limit the ability of the academic leadership to affect, take the right decisions, and elicit the change required to realize success and distinction in performing her leadership role (Abu- Khdair, 2012).
- **Cultural Challenges:** A number of prevailing cultural concepts and beliefs concerning the view of women as leaders, whether in the eyes of her male colleagues, subordinates or female colleagues as well (Abu- Khadiar, 2012).
- **Self-Challenges:** Which includes personal factors and characteristics that have negative effects on practicing her leadership role successfully (Al- Shihabi, 2008).
- **Physical and Technical Challenges:** Including the other obstructions related to the physical work environment, and technical supplies that limit the ability of the women leader to achieve the objectives assigned to her (Al-Minqash, 2007). The study of Burns and Martins (2010) found that women's leadership at schools is facing the challenges of poor confidence and respect as compared to that of the men's leadership. However, the most important challenges that female managers in public universities, ranked by importance according to interviewees are as follows:
 1. Work pressure with long working hours.
 2. Dealing with the human element, different natures of employees and lack of communication skills.
 3. Lack of authorization to implement what female managers think as important for their departments or faculties. Absence of administrative and financial powers.
 4. Higher management do not appreciate workers, there is no appreciation for employees time or family circumstances.
 5. Higher management do not fully know of university regulations, ordinances and continuous change of university forms
 6. Interference of higher management in the work of lower level managers.
 7. Conflicting decisions. Conflicting demands at the same time and lack of coordination between decision makers in high management levels.
 8. Lack of available facilities especially for teaching staff.
 9. Lack of motivation for subordinates
 10. Balancing work and family, Bureaucracy and Combining teaching with managerial work at the same time.

Purpose of the Study

The study is aimed at identifying the issues and challenges facing the 21st century south eastern Nigerian women in educational management, to create awareness and discuss possible solutions. It is hoped that the result of the study would help to illustrate the predominance of several factors prohibiting females' advancement within the educational industry. It is prospected that the study findings will not only be of academic concern, but will also be beneficial for industry leaders and policy makers.

Research Questions:

The study was guided by two research questions.

- What are the challenges facing women academic and non-academic staff in educational management?

- Does women in educational management actually witness any serious challenges in the course of practice?

METHODOLOGY

The researcher developed a questionnaire titled ‘Women in Educational Management Questionnaire’ (WEMQ) comprising Parts A and B. Part A sought information on the personal data of the respondents while Part B elicited information on the challenges women face in educational management in the 21st century. The items were structures on a four point likert scale Highly Unsatisfied (HUS) Satisfied, (S) Unsatisfied (US) Highly Satisfied (HS). To ensure instrument validity, two experts each from the Department of Educational Management as well as the Measurement and Evaluation Departments of Abia State University and Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike respectively were consulted. There experts’ comments were used to modify the final copy of the questionnaire used for the study. To ensure reliability of the instrument, the instrument was administered on 20 academics and non-academic staff of the two universities. Cronbach Alpha Computed for the respondent’s mean rating showed a co-efficient value of 0.85 for internal consistency of the instrument. The researcher used a direct interview technique in the administration of the instrument to the research subjects. All the copies of the research instrument issued were retrieved in the end. The researcher questions were answered using mean, standard deviation and mean ranking.

RESULTS

Table 1: Mean Scores of Responses to the Challenges Facing Women in Academic and Non-Academic in Educational Management in the Universities.

S/N	Items	Highly Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsatisfied	Highly Unsatisfied	N	Total	\bar{x}	S.D	Rank	Decision
1	Satisfied with your role as manager at work	110	50	20	-	180	630	3.50	0.66	1 st	Satisfied
2	Satisfied with your role as wife and mother at home	45	115	15	5	180	560	3.11	0.68	5 th	
3	With the decision to start a family irrespective of its, limiting factor towards the development of a career.	98	64	16	2	180	618	3.43	0.70	3 rd	
4	With the level of challenges at home	4	13	63	100	180	281	1.56	0.72	9 th	
5.	Have a servant at home	58	112	10	-	180	583	3.27	0.56	4 th	
6	Satisfied with the level of career and obligations in your private life	45	115	15	5	180	560	3.11	0.66	5 th	

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7	With the efficient level in decision making participation and authorization	3	10	70	97	180	279	1.55	0.68	8 th
8	Reward equally with men on similar positions especially in issues on Remuneration, awareness & Honorarium	110	50	20	-	180	800	3.50	0.66	1 st
9.	Continuous change of university form and lecturing staff, interference of higher management in the work of lower level managers.	8	12	100	60	180	328	1.82	0.72	7 th

Grand Mean**2.76**

The data on the table revealed that respondents accepted items 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8 with respective mean scores of 3.50, 3.11, 3.43, 3.27, 3.11 and 3.50 with standard deviations of 0.66, 0.68, 0.70, 0.56, 0.66, 0.66 respectively while the respondents rejected items 4, 7, and 9 with respective mean scores of 1.56, 1.55 and 1.82 with standard deviation of 0.72, 0.68, and 0.74 respectively. The items 1 and 8 are ranked highest indicating that the respondent mostly satisfied with their roles as manager of work and the respondents mostly accept that reward should be equally with men on similar positions especially on issues of remuneration, allowances and honorarium while item 7 ranked least, as indicated by low responses to efficient level in decision making participation and authorization.

Table 2: Mean Scores of the Responses on If Women In Educational Management Actually Witness Serious Challenges in The Course of Administration in their Different Universities.

S/N	Items	Highly Satisfied	Satisfied	Unsatisfied	Highly Unsatisfied	N	Total	\bar{x}	S.D	Rank	Decision
10	With the long working hours and arrangement of school programmes	4	13	6	100	180	281	1.56	0.72	4 th	Rejected
11	Access to available resources, facilities or level of improvisation	-	4	117	59	180	305	1.69	0.51	3 rd	Rejected
12	Involvement in educational programmers such as conference and workshops by the institutions	15	26	85	54	180	362	2.01	0.88	1 st	Rejected.
13	With the motivational level especially with health, welfare, maturity level, and in subordinate	8	12	100	60	180	328	1.82	0.74	2 nd	Rejected

14	The level of marginalization on appointment bases	4	13	63	100	180	281	1.56	0.72	4 th	Rejected
15	Delegating authority and responsibility to keep teaching and senior non- teaching staff and dealing with different nature of subordinate	3	10	70	97	180	279	1.55	0.68	6 th	Rejected

Grand mean**1.69**

The data on table 2, show that respondents rejected all items with mean scores of 1.56, 1.69, 2.01, 1.82, 1.56, and 1.55. With respective standard deviations of 0.72, 1.69, 2.01, 1.82, 1.56, and 1.55. The item 12 ranked 1st indicating that respondent rejected most in involvement in equatorial programmes such as conference and workshops by the institutions while item is which ranked 6th indicated that respondents least rejected delegating authority and responsibility to beg teaching and senior- non teaching staff and dealing nature of subordinate

Discussion of Findings

The focus of this study is to recognize the challenges faced by women in managerial positions of the education sector with a view to create awareness and discuss possible solutions in hope that the result would help alleviate these challenges. The findings revealed that women in educational management are highly unsatisfied with the level of challenges at work and the efficiency level in decision making, participation and authorization. The findings revealed that these women are mostly satisfied with their roles as manager at work and accept that their reward and allowance should be equal with that of their male counterparts. This view is supported by Olasumbo (2007) who states that, it continues to deprive Nigerians of the high-level expertise necessary to accelerate the nation's socio-economic progress. The findings concur with that of Hawaniwi (2004) which stated an imminent threat has now receded, that the management of higher education require the development of appropriate planning and policy analysis cum capacities and strategies to secure appropriately streamlined management.

According to the respondents to research question two, the women agree that the highest areas of challenges to their administrative/effectiveness are the level of marginalization in appointment bases, the long working hours and arrangement of school programmes which affects their nature, The confirmed delegation of authority and responsibilities to key teaching and non-teaching staff as well as dealing with different nature of subordinate, a constraint to their administrative effectiveness in their various institutions, as human beings differs in their perceptions and approaches. This view is supported by Nelson and Campbell (1993), who opined that effectiveness is a function of the interaction between the administrators and their subordinates.

In line with findings of Pillay et al (2009), this study indicates that most sources of challenge, including workload, management issues, personnel conflict have been identified consistently by university administrators for many years. Perhaps this should not be surprising, as they relate to the main generic characteristics of administrative practice.

CONCLUSION

This paper aimed at recognizing the challenges that women in managerial positions of Nigeria's southeast educational institutions face, to bring awareness and discuss possible solutions that would help alleviate identified challenges. The study found that women in educational management in Abia State University, Uturu, Nigeria face a lot of challenges. But the most important challenges are long working hours, dealing with subordinates of various natures and lack of authorization. Balancing work and family obligations is not the major challenge due to dependency on servants at home. Other challenges they face are continuous change of university forms and teaching staff, interference by higher management, conflicting decisions, and demands at the same time and lack of coordination between decision makers at management levels, lack of available faculties especially for teaching staff, lack of motivation for subordinates, bureaucracy and simultaneously combining teaching with managerial work.

RECOMMENDATION

From the foregoing, it is recommended that:

In order to alleviate such challenges such as the limitation posed by long working hours, decision makers should employ decentralization and better contributions of work load method. Training programmes in management and communication skills would help female managers to better manage and communicate with subordinates. Bureaucracy and conflicting decisions should also be eased by better distribution of tasks and coordination between high level managers irrespective of the differences.

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APPENDIX

CHAPTER QUESTION

1. Women are very important in National development of any nation. Discuss.
2. The performance measure of women in academics can either be qualitative or quantitative. Analyse
3. What are the measures of increasing female participation in leadership in the tertiary institution?
4. There seem to be a remarkable improvement on the states of women in management across the world. True or False?
5. Outline the challenges facing women in leading roles in the educational organisation in Nigeria.