

Part 4

Higher Education & Teacher Education and Training

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Leadership Roles, Women and Higher Education: Lessons from the University of Buea, Cameroon

Abstract

There is no dearth of literature on the numerous challenges that women face in securing leadership roles in government, non-government and other societal and community organisations. Over the past five decades or so, researchers and concerned others have been reporting on the lack of women in leadership roles. This paper explores leadership roles of women in higher education (HE), with a special focus on the University of Buea, Cameroon. The paper is based on research work carried out in 2016 and was framed by the gender and development (GAD) model; but it is also supported by on-going research investigation, carried out for the purpose of future publications. This means that by and large, the paper makes use of literature review methodological approach to build the discussion. It makes clear that although on a global scale women's enrolment in HE exceeds that of men, this does not translate into women senior leadership positions in HE. It acknowledges what HE means in the Cameroonian context, and looks at the socio-cultural and structural factors that influence women's representation in HE positions in the University of Buea. The paper concludes that the paradigm shift in the global concepts of development has not shown a satisfactory level of decrease in the challenges that women face in relation to attaining senior leadership roles in HE institutions.

Keywords: development, higher education, leadership, University of Buea, gender and development

Introduction

The theme *Women in Leadership Roles* has been a passionate topic of discussion, as evidenced by numerous literature accounts. Globally, over the past five decades or so, researchers, educators, societal institutions, government and non-government organisations have been giving much attention to the lack of women in leadership roles in higher education (HE) (Waheeda & Nishan, 2018; Goryunova, Scribner & Madsen, 2017; Kezar, 2014; Ely, Ibarra & Kolb, 2011; Anderson & Williams, 2001). The seriousness of the situation has been flagged up as a 'systemic' issue, especially when recent decades have witnessed a paradigm shift in the global concepts of development (Morley & Crossouard, 2014; Morley, 2013). The scope of this paper does not allow a full discussion of all the elements and factors that are linked to women and leadership roles in HE. This paper therefore

takes a brief look at some of the factors that are associated with the observed low representation of women in leadership positions in the University of Buea (UB). It draws attention to the fact that although on a global scale women's enrolment in HE exceeds that of men, this does not translate into women senior leadership positions in HE. It also reveals how HE is conceptualised in the Cameroonian context and identifies some socio-cultural and structural factors that influence women's representation in HE positions in UB. To aid understanding, the paper will briefly explain the contextual factors that frame the issues. The paper concludes that the paradigm shift in the global concepts of development has not shown a satisfactory level of decrease in the challenges that women face in relation to attaining senior leadership roles in HE institutions.

Methodology

The findings from research work carried out in 2016 form the foundation content for this paper. Other supportive content materials are the preliminary results of a related on-going research investigation and the gender and development (GAD) model. Data for the paper was therefore collected by using the literature review method. When effectively done, this method can be quite useful in establishing the basis for knowledge enhancement and theory development (Snyder, 2019; Webster & Watson, 2002). Also, by incorporating views from various research findings, "a literature review can address research questions with a power that no single study has" (Snyder, 2019, p. 333). Such practicality does demonstrate that the literature review as a method bears much relevance.

Framing the issues

The purpose of this section is to provide some background information that frames the issues under discussion. It intends to place the main discussion points in context with a view to facilitating understanding. It offers conceptualisations for development, HE enrolment, leadership and UB.

Development

Development is one of those terms that does not carry a strict definition, but can be interpreted in various contexts. Generally, development has to do with change and processes of change in different situations. More often than not, it is used in a positive sense. Bellù (2011) relates that when used in a societal or socio-economic context, development is usually linked to improvement, "either in the general situation of the system, or in some of its constituent elements". Improvement often calls for some kind of action, for example, policy formulation and development. This clearly demonstrates that development in its fullest sense has numerous and varied dimensions. Some of these aspects may be even contradictory (Todaro & Smith, 2003; Galor & Moav, 2000).

In the context of this paper, it is important to note that development does not dwell solely in the realm of socio-economic activities. It should be interpreted and understood in settings that are beyond incomes, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), inflation, export, import and economic growth, to include the changing patterns of poverty, quality education, good health and wellbeing and gender equality (United

Nations (UN), 2019; Abwa & Fonchingong, 2004). Four of the many dimensions of development are identified by Bellù (2011) as economic, human, sustainable and territorial development. If these dimensions are central to improvements and the progress made in a given society, it is imperative that both men and women have leadership roles. For example, with regard to human development Bellù puts the focus on “the improvement of the various dimensions affecting the well-being of individuals and their relationships with the society”. Lack of empowerment, entitlements, capabilities, health and education are some of the elements that can negatively affect one’s well-being.

HE enrolment

Generally, universities are the places where one pursues HE, which is sometimes referred to as third level or tertiary education. How HE is perceived varies in countries across the world. In Cameroon and most countries of the Commonwealth, where upper secondary education, otherwise known as advanced level exists, HE represents education at post advanced level (Njeuma et al., 1999; Nath, 2014).

Globally, women are outnumbering men in HE institutions (HEIs). The trend shows that for the ratio of men to women, there is a consistent annual increase in many countries across the globe (Bilton, 2018). A report from Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), a UK-based organization, showed that women are 36% more likely to apply to university than their male counterparts (Martin, 2015). A similar situation exists in some countries in Asia, North America, South America and the Caribbean (Bilton, 2018; Martin, 2015). By contrast, as reported by Kigotho (2018), “women are also still largely under-represented in higher education, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa”. Kigotho makes reference to this United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) report: “Contrary to positive expansion trends in Africa, the gross enrolment ratio for women in Sub-Saharan Africa is 4.8%, compared to 7.3% for men”.

The recent reorientation towards gender equity legislation, policy initiatives, changes in socio-economic gender relations and the aspiration and expansion of higher education opportunities have contributed to the surge in the number of women participating in HE (Morley, 2013; Longman & Madsen, 2014). Encouragingly, UNESCO (2010) indicates a surge in enrolment of women in HE around the world – from 10.8 to 77.4 million. However, this unprecedented expansion of HE opportunities to women, have not yet translated into proportional representation of the number of women in decision-making positions in HE. This is the position even in countries with diverse policies and legislation for gender equality such as Sweden and Australia among others (Morley, 2013; Longman & Madsen, 2014).

Leadership

Leadership is a complex concept with numerous strands and as many conceptualisations. Therefore, in the interest of scope and context, the paper takes a peek at why *total leadership* in HEIs is crucial for securing the desired quality for institutional success; and more importantly, for ensuring that student progress and achievement is sustained. *Transformational leadership* has been demonstrated to be

a dynamic leadership style for those in leadership roles in schools and academic institutions (Miller, 2013; Shotte, 2013). There is also the shared leadership model, which is a collaborative endeavor, emphasises the need for all professionals to contribute to total leadership (Bush, 2020; Leithwood et al., 2006).

The structure of academia at UB has shown that changes in leadership and leadership styles have been made in the wake of the establishing of the Department of Women and Gender Studies. This is a demonstration of *heroic or transformational leadership* for it portrays a commitment to achieving the goal of creating and increasing leadership roles for women. Clearly, total leadership is crucial to realising overall success in HEIs. The paper asserts that overall success is not possible without meaningful leadership contributions from women in important leadership roles.

The University of Buea

The University of Buea is a 27-year old institution, located in the South West Region of Cameroon. Although it was modeled within the English-speaking tradition, UB has not forsaken the wider bilingual and multicultural context of Cameroon. This inclusivity is shown in the diversity of UB's over 12,000 student population, who hail from the English-speaking part of Cameroon as well as other provinces of the country. UB aims to create a top-class teaching-learning and research environment that provide students with opportunities for attaining the quality education that will allow them to strive for excellence. This same environment allows UB to make appropriate responses to market forces. The University fosters community collaboration, promotes human values, encourages tolerance, inspires creativity and supports critical analysis and independent thinking.

The paper looks at the socio-cultural and structural factors that influence women's representation in higher leadership positions at UB. Of the eight (8) public universities in Cameroon, UB is the only one that had a female Vice Chancellor (VC) at its inception in 1993. The paper contends that having a female VC from the onset, is an important structural factor that could have boosted women's confidence and influenced them to seek ways to attain high positions at UB. It also asserts that a socio-cultural factor is linked to UB being one of the two English-speaking public universities in Cameroon that has a Department of Women and Gender Studies. This might have served to stimulate a gender-conscious environment, as well as to motivate the woman to press for leadership roles at UB (Endeley & Ngaling, 2007; University of Buea, 2002).

Gender and development (GAD)

The GAD framework, which began with the United Nations (UN) 1945 Charter and the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights, is an on-going structure. The GAD approach is also linked to social feminism that emerged in the 1980s as a critique of the women in development (WID) which focused on women integration in development as a lens through which women subordination in the society could be understood (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005). GAD focuses on the social relations of power between men and women in the society and not relations characterised by biological differences (Moser, 1993; Tasli, 2007). In this paper, focusing on the number of women in leadership positions in HE vis-à-vis men, necessitates the

examining the unequal power structures and relations characterised by the socio-cultural, economic and political dynamics in the society. Analysing women's representation in leadership roles in HE, should not impede the holistic understanding of women's subordination in this context. Approximately forty years ago, it was noted that gender relations often take the form of male dominance and female subordination (Whitehead, 1979). Decades later, researchers have explored "some of the ramifications of the phenomenon of women's subordination to men in Africa and to highlight its educational implications with reference to development in Africa" (Uchem & Ngwa, 2014).

GAD basically centers on gender mainstreaming that could take the form of integration or agenda setting (transformation), which emphasises the active involvement of both men and women as active agents and veritable partners in development (Moser, 1993; Kabeer, 1999). Consequently, in exploring the relationship between gender and development, feminists, academics, researchers and policy makers have employed the GAD framework to interrogate and challenge the socio-economic and political *status quo* that produce unequal gender and power relations and social injustices that discriminate against women in all spectrum of the economy, including women's leadership in HE (UNESCO, 2002; Morley, 2013; Onsongo, 2004). The different components of GAD include the concepts of gender division of labour, practical gender needs, strategic gender interest, empowerment and gender mainstreaming.

Gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming (GM) is central to GAD framework in eliminating existing gender bias against women. GM is a strategy that calls for men and women experiences to form an integral part of designing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs at international, national and local levels (Tiessen, 2007). In this case, firstly it is important to examine how higher education systems are design with men in mind, as a result, polices need to be retooled to incorporate women experiences and their general femaleness to gain equal representation in leadership positions in the universities. This could be done by destabilising existing cultures, strategies and practices, in order to establish a new order with women in mind. This retooling should enhance women's representation at levels of education across male-dominated disciplines in the universities.

The GAD approach suggests the need for women themselves (sisterhood) to collectively interrogate and challenge unfair structures from grass-roots level (down-up approach) that impede their progression to high positions in HE (UNESCO, 2002; Nkomo & Ngambi, 2009). In this light, GAD views women as agents of change and not passive beneficiaries of development efforts (Tasli, 2007). Despite its attempt to provide a holistic understanding of women subordination, the GAD framework faces some criticism.

Conclusion

The paper reviewed the literature on leadership and women in leadership roles. Development, HE enrolment, leadership and UB are the main concepts that provide

the framework for the discussion. Other themes that support the discussion are gender development and gender main streaming. Both themes highlight the operations of GAD in challenging the social and political forces that are responsible for producing and sustaining injustices and discrimination against women, including debarring women from leadership roles in HE.

The paper acknowledges that the theoretical shifts in global concepts of development have not worked favourably in terms of lessening the challenges that confront women face in relation to attaining senior leadership roles in HE institutions. Obviously, there is a need for identifying some possible strategies that may have some positive effect on the increase in women's representation and effective participation in leadership positions in UB. The authors intend to address these strategies in a follow-up paper.

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