

Factors Affecting Participation of Women in Administration of Technical Vocational Education and Training Institutions: Experiences from Central Uganda

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Abstract

This paper is based on research that was conducted to examine the factors affecting participation of women in administration of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions in Central Uganda. The authors employed a cross-sectional survey design and used both quantitative and qualitative approaches for data collection and analysis. The study population comprised of principals, deputy principals, heads of department, student leaders in TVET institutions and TVET Officers at the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES). The study sample was selected using stratified and purposive sampling techniques. The findings indicated that the key factors affecting participation of women in administration of TVET institutions were; personal factors, lack of higher qualifications, biological factors and structural factors. The authors recommend that special efforts and intervention strategies be made by MoES to enable more women access key decision making positions in TVET institutions.

Keywords: Women, Technical Vocational Education and Training, Administration, Central Uganda

INTRODUCTION

Various scholars have in the recent years generated substantial data on female participation in educational administration (Nzomo, 1995; Jutta, 2000; Wanda, 2005; Mjelde, 2006; Oplatka, 2006; Shakeshaft, 2006; Osumbah, 2010; UNESCO, 2010). Much of the documentations have however, not focused on the factors influencing participation of women in administration of Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions, more so in Uganda. Overall, the consensus in the literature gives the impression that there is no single factor which can be used to adequately explain the absence of women in administrative positions, especially in TVET institutions.

Available literature further shows that down through the years from around 1840 to 1972, the field of administration has been dominated by men (Skrla, 2000; Perry, 2004). Today, a few women hold positions in the global workforce ranging from political positions to Chief Executive Officers in business institutions (UNDP, 2008). Despite their success in these positions, other documents indicate that women still have a difficult time securing administrative positions (UNESCO, 2002; UNESCO, 2010).

Globally, despite their increased education and work experience, women are not accessing senior positions in the public or private sectors in the numbers expected (UNESCO, 2011). In 2002, global statistics showed that men outnumbered women by about five to one (5:1) at middle management level and twenty to one (20:1) at senior management level (UNESCO, 2002). This is more evident when it comes to high-level decision-making positions, especially at government and state levels (DAW, 2005). In Uganda, efforts have been made to bring women to an equal footing with men in terms of access to education (World Bank, 2006). What remains unclear is whether this has enhanced their participation in administrative positions, especially in TVET institutions.

Concerns of expanding female participation in TVET have been expressed by policy makers (UNESCO, 2010; FOWODE, 2010). This followed the report of the Second International Congress on VET (1999) which expressed concern about the under representation of women in TVET institutions. In view of this, Oplatka (2006) noted that even in developed countries where gender equality has been formally achieved, women still participate in the lowest paying occupations in TVET institutions. Some scholars have argued that women live in social systems where socialization processes plays an influential role to push them in an inferior and a subordinate position in society (DAW, 2005; UNESCO, 2011). This socialization process associates girls with the immediate environment inside the home and boys with the wider environment outside the home. This tends to negatively impact on both women and men's attitude towards having women in administrative positions. This is reinforced by Feminist scholars who argue that although men and women have equal opportunity for individual development, the differences in the realization of this potential result from externally imposed constraints as well as social institutions and values (Nzomo, 1995; Osumbah, 2010).

In the context of this study, women's participation in administration was operationalized as those women occupying positions of decision making at both strategic and middle level management, such as principal, deputy principal and heads of Department in TVET institutions. The Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE, 2010), argues that although women form the biggest population in Uganda, the numbers in leadership positions today do not match the demographic gender representation. This study was therefore, premised on the assumption that there are few women in administrative positions in TVET institutions. Based on this assumption, the researchers set out to establish what was pertaining in TVET institutions in Uganda and to understand the possible factors affecting the participation of women in administration.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Kampala District, located in the Central Region of Uganda. The researchers chose this study area because most TVET institutions are concentrated in the Central Region. The study adopted a cross sectional survey design employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The design was considered appropriate because of the characteristics of the respondents and data sets which examined various people's attitudes, beliefs, opinions, practices and perceptions (Odiya, 2009). The study population comprised of 155 participants from 10 TVET institutions (6 Technical and 4 Vocational) and the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Sports (MoESTS). These were in the following categories: 10 principals, 19 deputy principals, 60 heads of department, 60 student leaders and six (6) TVET officers. Using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table for sample size determination, a sample of 139 respondents was selected to participate in the study. The target population was proportionately stratified and the respondents purposively selected from each stratum. The main data sources were primary, collected using self-administered questionnaires and face to face interviews. Of the 133 questionnaires distributed to principals, deputy principals, heads of department and student leaders in TVET institutions, 120 (90%) valid questionnaires were returned. Primary data were complemented with relevant secondary data sourced from journals, text books, published and unpublished articles. Descriptive statistics in form of item mean scores, and standard deviations were used to analyze the data obtained from the survey. On the other hand, qualitative data were classified into simple content categories, themes and sub-themes, closely examined and compared for similarities and differences. Expressions that directly related to the constructs under study were picked and used in the discussion to provide first hand feeling of the respondents.

FINDINGS

The survey results in Table 1 indicate that both male and female academic staff employed in the sampled TVET institutions had attained a comparable level of education.

Table 1: Gender and Educational Level of the Participants

		Level of Education						
			Certificate	Ordinary Diploma	First Degree	Postgraduate Diploma	Masters	Total
Gender	Male	Count	13	25	22	2	5	67
		Row	19.4%	37.3%	32.8%	3%	7.5%	100%
		Column	86.7%	51%	52.4%	50%	50%	55.8
Female	Female	Count	2	24	20	2	5	53
		Row	3.8%	45.3%	37.7%	3.8%	9.4%	100%
		Column	13.3%	49%	47.6%	50%	50%	44.2%
Total	Total	Count	15	49	42	4	10	120
		Row	12.5%	40.8%	35%	3.3%	8.3%	100%

Source: Field data

What emerges from the above results is that an almost equal number of academic staff in the sampled TVET institutions had obtained Ordinary Diploma, First Degree, Postgraduate Diploma and Masters Degree. This therefore, implied that both men and women had an equal chance of being selected to become administrators in TVET institutions.

Indeed, the second data set in Table 2 shows that at the level of principal, there was an equal representation (50% each) of males and females. There were however, great disparities in the numbers of males and females at the positions of deputy principal and heads of department.

Table 2: Gender and Positions held by the Respondents

		Position of the Respondents					
			Principal	Deputy Principal	Heads of Departments	Student Leaders	Total
Gender	Male	Count	5	15	28	19	67
		Row	7.5%	22.3%	41.7%	3%	100%
		Column	50%	78.9%	66.7%	50%	55.8
Female	Female	Count	5	4	14	30	53
		Row	9.4%	7.5%	26.4%	56.6%	100%
		Column	50%	21.1%	33.3%	61.3%	44.2%
Total	Total	Count	10	19	42	49	120
		Row	8.3%	16.7%	34.2%	40.8%	100%

Source: Field data

The results in Table 2 indicate that in the 10 sampled TVET institutions, there were 19 positions at deputy principal level. However, 15 (78.9%) of these positions were taken up by males and only 4 (21.1%) were occupied by females. Similarly, of the 42 positions of heads of department, 28 (66.7%) were filled by males and only 14 (33.3%) were filled by females.

It is important to note that of the 10 sampled TVET institutions, 6 were technical and the other 4 were largely vocational in nature. Further analysis revealed that four of the five female principals were heading institutions that were more vocational in nature and those typically associated with women, namely, Public Health Nurses College, Mulago School of Nursing and Midwifery, Health Tutors College and Young Women Christian Association (YWCA). Only one female was principal of a technical institute, thus bringing to the fore issues of gender and stereotyping of subjects and vocations (see Table 3).

Table 3: Gender and Type of TVET Institutions

Type of Institution	Number of Male Principals	Number of Female Principals
Technical	5	1
Vocational		4

Source: Field data

The low representation of women in middle level administrative positions was associated with a number of factors as presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Factors Affecting Participation of Women in Administration

Item	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Women have low interest in administrative roles like decision making, planning and resource control	1	5	2.23	1.488
The belief that men make better administrators than women hinders women’s participation in leadership positions	1	5	4.22	.832
The traditional roles of women as housekeepers render them inefficient administrators because of failure to balance housework with the job	1	5	4.13	1.142
Lack of confidence in their abilities has undermined the participation of women in administrative positions	1	5	4.14	1.154

The low representation of women in educational administration is as a result of discrimination	1	5	2.10	1.428
Traditional beliefs of women being inferior to men largely explains why few women participate in administrative positions	1	5	4.38	.918
In African societies, it is believed that women are technically incompetent and so cannot be administrators of TVET institutions	1	5	4.03	1.365

Source: Field Data

As depicted in Table 4, the outstanding factors affecting participation of women in administration of TVET institutions could be classified as socio-cultural and structural factors.

To complement the quantitative results, qualitative data obtained from six respondents; four TVET Officials (TVETO's) and two Principals (PPs) revealed similar factors perceived as affecting participation of women in administration of TVET institutions (refer to Table 5).

Table 5: Factors influencing female participation in Administration

Factors mentioned by respondents	Percentage
Socio-cultural factors such as traditional cultural beliefs, perception that women are inferior to men and thus cannot make good administrators	90
Biological roles of women as mothers and housekeepers	85
Structural factors i.e. sabotage from men. As a male dominated society, men tend to deliberately override women	60
Discrimination of women at the workplace	40

When asked to elaborate on how cultural beliefs have stifled women's representation in administration. One of the participants said:

“The traditional negative attitude right from our cultures hinder women from aspiring for certain jobs. In fact, this can be further attributed to the lack of confidence among the women themselves. If you believe you can be an administrator, then you can” (TVET, 03).

On the aspect of sabotage, the key respondents elaborated thus:

There is always a clique of men in most organizations who are ever there to challenge women's views. They often try so much to show women that they are nothing. For instance, there are some men who can tell you right in your face that they cannot respect the views of a woman however educated one is. In fact, if you are not so keen, it is difficult to know that indeed women are sabotaged by their male counterparts to assume administrative positions. This is what some people refer to as the so called "glass ceiling" (TVET, 01; TVET, 03; PP, 01 & PP, 02).

Further elaborating on the discrimination of women, one of the respondents working in a private TVET institution recounted her experience:

For instance this institution has two branches; one headed by a male and the other by a female. It is just of recent that it came to my knowledge that there were discrepancies in the salaries that are offered. In this case the female principal is paid less compared to the male, yet we all have the same qualifications. I do not know whether the same experiences could be true with other private institutions. At least for government institutions there is always a standard pay for all administrators (PP, 2).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that the under-representation of women in administrative positions emanates from various, albeit inter-related factors. Responses from the survey and secondary voices from other literature sources seem to portray that despite widely different circumstances, socio-cultural factors and family responsibilities continue to hamper women's participation in most administrative activities. This is supported by Livingstone (2004) who argued that domestic duties that women are still expected to do for their family's take significantly more time and energy than those that most men are expected to do. Livingstone asserts that in most families, women are still responsible for the majority of child-care and homemaking. He adds that women's responsibilities for family life – whether current or anticipated – slow their progress because of both external expectations and internal accommodations.

The position of women as reflected in this study further supports views of scholars like Wanda (2005) who argue that the position of women academics in Africa and the Great Lakes Region in particular reflects a global trend whereby women continue to be under represented in higher status and rewarding positions. According to Wanda, women tend to be concentrated in lower grades or less secure posts such as teaching and research assistants, hardly holding any positions in administration. Correspondingly from Zimbabwe's experience, in 2003 there were barely any women

in the top administrative structures of the country's ten Polytechnic institutions (Chipunza, 2003). It should however, be noted that there tends to be few women in administration in TVET institutions, especially those that are typically of technical nature due to lack of qualifications. In addition most programmes in technical institutions are science-based, yet few ladies take on such courses. It may not therefore, be surprising that there are hardly any females in administrative positions in such institutions.

The findings also revealed that another factor that may be hindering women from participating in administration is the individual factor. The qualitative data seemed to tie up well with some studies (Achola & Aseka, 2001) which suggest that some women are not assertive enough, while others do not want power, lack self confidence and rarely apply for administrative jobs. This implies that in addition to external factors, the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions may be attributed to lack of initiative from women themselves as supported by Marianne (1997). Other individual barriers which have been highlighted by other scholars like Cubillo (1999) include; the tendency among women to avoid criticism and/ or receiving negative feedback; fear of failure, which often translates into reluctance to voice their opinions, undertake excess responsibilities; fear of conflict and loneliness; and self-doubting, among others. As argued by the Socio-Cognitive theory, people's belief in their capabilities (perceived personal efficacy) influences the choices people make, their aspirations, how much effort they mobilize in a given endeavor, how long they persevere in the face of difficulties and setbacks and their resilience to adversity (Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

From the qualitative data, what seems to emerge from the responses is that private institutions do not necessarily use the same standards that apply to government institutions. This may explain why there are gender disparities in their practices. Given these findings, one may therefore, conclude that female workers in private institutions are more likely to face gender discrimination than their counterparts in government institutions where there are set standards and guidelines. This is a discrepancy which in most cases goes unabated by the regulatory body, the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES).

Generally, the findings of this study places the cultural milieu which children are taught as they grow up as the foundation of gender differences in perceptions and attitude formation towards work and career. This makes human differentiation on the basis of gender a fundamental phenomenon that should be focused on in all aspects of people's daily lives (Assie-Lumumba, 2001).

CONCLUSION

This paper has complemented available literature on women's low participation in administration, which remains an area of concern, especially in the TVET sub-sector. Based on the findings of this study, it is important for the Ministry of Education and Sports (MoES) to review existing policies so as to have competent qualified women

take up administrative positions. This is because unlike other sectors, assuming an administrative position in TVET institutions necessitates having a technical background, yet administration is more of decision making. It is also important that all TVET institutions operate under the same standards and guidelines, regardless of whether they are government or private institutions.

WAY FORWARD

This paper focused on understanding why few women participate in administration of TVET institutions using case studies from Central Uganda. Based on the research findings, there is need for future researchers to focus their studies in other regions so as to bring out a holistic view about women participation in TVET administration in Uganda. Finally, since the researchers undertook a cross-sectional study which does not allow analysis of trends pertaining to how women have been participating in administration of TVET institutions overtime, a longitudinal study on a similar subject would be recommended.

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