

Exploring Female Students' Quest for Leadership and their Experiential Realities in the University of Education, Winneba

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Abstract

The study explored female students' quest for leadership and experiential leadership realities in higher educational institutions in Ghana. In Ghana, female enrolment in higher educational institutions has increased due to population increases and campaign for girl-child education. However, despite the opportunities and access to higher education, female students' quest for leadership positions in their educational institutions is often thwarted and largely insignificant compared to their male counterparts. However, there is evidence in Ghana that national leadership, especially in politics, is usually linked to leadership at tertiary institutions, especially, in the universities. Using female students' leadership in governance at the University of Education (UEW) as a study focus, and employing the liberal feminist theory, we hypothesised that female students' desire for leadership positions in higher education would not differ significantly from reality due to some systemic cultural challenges. The study revealed that certain leadership positions are preserved of males, and females who vie for such positions generally encounter some cultural setbacks. The study concludes that female students are motivated to take leadership positions due to their desire to lead and serve the people, but society uses gender to set limit for women when they vie for leadership positions. The study recommends that teachers and parents should encourage both males and females to take up equal leadership roles early in life to arouse in them the drive for future leadership positions.

Keywords: Female-leadership; societal-constraints; leadership-positions: University-of-Education-Winneba; Ghana

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Introduction

Globally, education is seen as a means of empowering people and higher education facilitates development and progress of countries (Bloom et al., 2006). Higher education is a means of empowerment for the achievement of national goals of equality, equity and transformation (Council on Higher Education, 2016). Consequently, various governments invest heavily in higher education to ensure human capital accumulation for individual development, social cohesion and economic growth (O' Dubhslaiñe, 2006). Higher education has undergone radical shift from institutions of theology and philosophy through research institutions, institutions that reproduce higher administrative classes, to institutions that democratize knowledge and skills for economic development and for competition (Council on Higher Education, 2016).

Current debates on higher education focus on private rights and public good. In the context of public good, the impetus is to increase students' enrolment to satisfy fairness and social redress for healthy democracy, economic and social development (Council on Higher Education, 2016). This has necessitated higher education worldwide to move from an elite form to mass participation form of education with broader access, greater diversity and broader spread of institutions social mission (Krcal et al., 2014). Females like their male counterparts, therefore, should access higher education with ease despite the academic culture and patriarchal nature of such institutions, especially, in Africa (Adisa et al., 2019).

In Ghana, female enrolment in higher educational institutions has increased, especially, in the public universities due to population increases and campaign for girl-child education (Amagnya, 2020). Increase in enrolment has also been the result of deliberate policy by universities to

achieve gender parity in male-female admissions. Female entrance into higher educational institutions carries with it some expectations. It is one of the efforts to bridge gender parity gaps, increase aspiration, capacities, develop skills and competencies of women for leadership in various sectors including education. Female students in higher educational institutions are aspiring to have careers and become leaders to engage in professional development (Allan & Hallen, 2007).

Despite these opportunities offered to female students in higher educational institutions, their participation in leadership positions, seems not to be significant. Generally, the few positions females normally occupy seem to produce and reproduce them as vulnerable outsiders and suppliant to these institutions (Allan & Hallen, 2007). Thus, the leadership positions they vie for are mostly extension of their reproductive roles such as treasures and women representatives. Reports by women's commission indicate that women remain underrepresented in important areas of universities leadership positions (Allan & Hallen, 2007).

In Ghana, females constitute 50.7 % of the population according to the 2021 Census figures (Ghana Statistical Service, 2014). However, few females participate in leadership despite their capabilities and potentials. Females are not visible in governance in higher educational institutions in Ghana. Some scholars believe educational setting promotes masculinised leadership patterns (Madden, 2007). Besides, cultural orientations of Ghanaians in general do not support female leadership and decision making is seen as prerogative of men. Leadership is perceived as male dominated arena and females interested in it encounter some challenges emanating from cultural beliefs, practices, socialization process, role conflict and lack of resources (Attom, 2012, 2013) Arguably, some people believe females are disinterested in

leadership and society is indifferent about women's participation in leadership (Attom, 2012, 2013). Most people understand leadership culture of organizations such as higher educational institutions as masculinised context. Consequently, female students in higher educational institutions interested in occupying leadership positions battle with some realities while those in leadership positions are confronted with some challenges. This study, therefore, explores female students' quest for leadership and experiential leadership challenging realities in higher educational institutions in Ghana, focusing on female students in the University of Education, Winneba.

Statement and Contextualisation of Research Question

In Ghana, the formal educational system currently comprises of a two- year early childhood, nine- years basic, three- years of secondary and four- years of higher education. As shown in the literature earlier, women's access to higher education for some time now seems to be increasing due to population increase and support from girl child education campaign, yet their representation in leadership at that level is not encouraging.

Most political leaders at the national level started as leaders at the higher educational institutions. If Ghana as a nation wants to ensure women's active participation in national political leadership, then, there is the need to focus on females' involvement in leadership positions at the higher educational level. It brings to light the current state of female student leaders' participation in governance in higher education, which invariably seems to link to present disparities between men and women's participation in political leadership. This reveals core areas that necessitate motivation and opportunities for females, challenges they face in order to

influence policy on female leadership and empowerment especially at high educational institution level.

In Ghana, Ohene (2010) undertook research at the University of Cape Coast, to find out the level of female participation in university leadership. The study looked at the various forms of cultural and institutional barriers that hinder women from participating in leadership activities. It was found that very few women were Heads of Departments and Deputy Registrars. It looked at the various forms of cultural and institutional barriers that hinder women from participating in leadership activities. A study by Attom (2010) revealed that women in educational leadership face challenges emanating from organizational culture, discriminatory practices and negative attitudes of some subordinates and superiors. Kiamba (2008) interviewed women leaders in South Africa to establish their professional needs. She also identified socio-cultural barriers that hinder women's leadership aspirations. The socio-cultural barriers negatively affect women's access to leadership positions in the country and beyond. Discourses on women's access to leadership produce dominant image of them as those seeking permission to enter a previously male dominated arena (Kassa, 2015; Allan & Hallen, 2007).

Odhiambo (2011) also examined the gendered nature of leadership in universities in Kenya. She concluded that although there are no policies that directly prevent most of the women to become leaders, there is still a disparity in the numbers in favour of men. Kiamba (2008) and Mfikwe and Pelser (2017) recommended that there is the need to support more women to increase their representation in South African leadership. A similar recommendation was also made by Mfikwe and Pelser (2017). Madden (2007) and Odhiambo (2011) argued that there should be holistic

measures at the national and local levels to encourage more women to increase their quest to be leaders and perform creditably in such positions.

Previous studies have largely focused on experiences of female staff in leadership and administrative positions in higher institutions and consequently made recommendations on how to improve on women's representation in leadership. The following research questions shall guide the work; what factors motivate/demotivate female students in the University of Education, Winneba to opt for leadership positions? What challenges confront female students in the University of Education, Winneba in their quest to occupy leadership positions? What support systems are available in the University of Education, Winneba to encourage and empower female students' participation in leadership?

Liberal Feminism Theory and Women Quest for Leadership

This study is located within the liberal feminist theory. Liberal feminism is concerned with democracy and claims that individuals have the right to vote and to be voted for. It focuses on women's ability to maintain their equality through their actions and choices. However, there is unequal power relations between men and women, and men are mostly at an advantageous position because of certain factors including socio-cultural dictate. Liberal feminists are of the view that society holds the false belief that by their nature, women are less intellectually and physically capable than men and tends to discriminate against women. Schumaker et al., (2000) assert that liberal feminist theory holds the view that women should be provided with the same rights that men already have. They believe that although women and men are equal, certain restrictions have been placed on women. Such restrictions are inherent in customary laws and are

justified by patriarchy. According to Tong (1989), female subordination is rooted in a set of customary and legal constraints that prevent them from succeeding in public activities.

Historically and as, it is today, education and training of future leaders is seen as the core mandate of higher educational institutions (Dugan, 2006). Education equips beneficiaries with behavioural traits of persistence, punctuality and ability (O'Dubhslaiġe, 2006) to enable them adjust to take advantage of various opportunities available. Leadership is one of the opportunities lives afford to people. Leaders are expected to possess qualities that enable them to stand out against all odds to bring about positive change and development. Contrary to this, according to Amey and Twombly (1993), leadership is a process of creating, empowering, facilitating, collaborating and educating but not necessarily personality traits. To them, leadership had to be learned and education can be a means of preparing leaders. Education is expected to empower and improve the status of women in higher education, yet, there are few females who are visible in such leadership positions. According to Burkinshaw (2015), women representation in power positions is associated with social justice, equality, equity and parity, enhancing quality leadership and social inclusion.

Literature on institutional leadership projects two models namely, agentic leadership behaviour and communal behaviour (Eagle et al., 2001). Agentic leadership behaviour focuses on task, problems, assertive speech, influence and self-centredness whilst communal behaviours emphasise relationship and interpersonal problems, tentative speech, supporting others, taking direction from others and not seeking attention (Eagle et al., 2001). The former seems to be the convention for leadership because males dominate in leadership positions. Carli and Eagly (1999) reviewed many studies on leadership behaviour and revealed that men are more task

oriented whilst women exhibit more positive social behaviour. There is an assumption that effective leadership is a factor of status and power, which is manifested through autocratic behaviour (Yoder, 2001). Consequently, women leaders may be misunderstood, marginalized or trivialised when they adopt strategies different from conventional views of leadership (Madden, 2007).

Based on this theoretical perspective, the study examines institutional and cultural restrictions placed on women that affect their quest for leadership and the performance of leadership roles of female student leaders in the University of Education, Winneba.

Research Method

The researchers adopted the concurrent mixed method approach to this study. With this approach, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected at the same time. The target population for the study comprised all female students in the University of Education, Winneba. The target population however, consisted of all female students in the faculty of Social Sciences Education as well as those in leadership positions in the University of Education, Winneba. The researchers employed purposive and stratified sampling techniques to select the sample population. Purposive sampling technique was used to identify and select five female student leaders in the University. This was done with the help of the SRC womens' commission at the time of the research. Stratified sampling techniques was used to select 50 female students, each from Geography and Social Studies Education departments, offering Gender and Development for the study. Thus, the entire student population in the faculty of Social Sciences Education was divided into sub-groups made up of different departments in the faculty. The simple random

technique was used to select two departments (Geography and Social Studies Education), for the study.

A questionnaire and an interview guide were used for the data collection. The questionnaire consisted of items on four-point Likert scale, with the following response choice: strongly disagree, disagree, agree strongly agree and neutral. In addition, the interview guide was used to collect data from the five female student leaders in various positions to deliberate on what motivated them to be leaders, their challenges, and institutional support systems available for them in University of Education, Winneba. The retrieved questionnaires were serially numbered, edited and coded accordingly. Descriptive statistics tools such as percentages, mean and standard deviation were used to analyse quantitative data collected. Data that were collected during interview sessions were transcribed and analysed using thematic procedures resulting from the objectives. To ensure anonymity, pseudonyms were given to female student leaders interviewed.

Results and Discussions

Background information of participants

A total of 100 pre-service female teachers, who were studying Gender and Development course in the Faculty of Social Science Education, specifically from the Departments of Social Studies and Geography Education, and five female student leaders of the University in the 2017/2018 academic year participated in the study. The analysis of the demographic characteristics of the respondents shows that their ages ranged from 18 to 34 years. However, majority of the participants were between the ages of 19 – 24 years ($n = 75, 72.5\%$). The findings further showed that majority of the female students were not married ($n = 91, 88.3\%$) and had no

child/children ($n = 94, 91.3\%$). Therefore, it may imply that family burden and pressure, which might result in increased stress, might be minimal. Besides, they were expected to get adequate time to be involved in student leadership roles if they wished to do so.

Factors affecting female students Quest for leadership positions in the University of Education, Winneba

The determination of the factors motivating female students to opt for leadership positions was based on mean values and their interpretations: 1.0 – 1.4 (strongly disagree); 1.5 – 2.4 (disagree); 2.5 – 3.4 (agree); and 3.5 – 4.0 (strongly agree).

Table 1: Findings on factors motivating/demotivating female students to opt for leadership positions

Leadership Motivation/Demotivation Factors	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
I do not have the confidence to contest in election in my institution as a female.	1.9	0.9
I fear of ruining my academic performance due to greater responsibilities associated with most positions.	2.4	0.9
My affiliation to student political group encourages me to take up a leadership position in my institution.	2.6	0.9
My religious belief does not allow me to hold a leadership position.	1.7	1
The degree of financial resources is a deterrent to my desire for a leadership position in my institution.	2.6	1
I do not see many females performing leadership roles in my institution.	2.4	1
I believe opting for leadership position in my institution will prepare me for higher leadership roles in the future.	3.5	0.4
I believe opting for leadership position will help me meet and network with staff in management positions in my institution.	3.3	0.7
One of the primary reasons for being in leadership position was to enhance social networks among other people in leadership position.	3.2	0.8
I have always been involved and loved leadership positions.	2.9	0.8
I want to learn how to be a better leader and be able to organize people in a productive way.	3.3	0.8
When I am established in my career, I would like to be in management position.	3.3	0.8

The results reveal that several factors influence the decisions of the students to take up or not take up leadership roles. The findings show that the students disagreed that they do not have the confidence to contest in elections in the institution as females ($M = 1.9, SD = 0.9$). It also became known that religious beliefs do not serve as a demotivating factor to the students ($M = 1.7, SD = 1.0$). Accordingly, the students believed that their quest for leadership positions in the institution will prepare them for higher leadership roles in the future ($M = 3.5, SD = 0.4$). In the same regard, the female students were of the view that leadership positions will help them meet and network with management and staff in their institution ($M = 3.3, SD = 0.7$). The participants further indicated that they have always been motivated to be involved in leadership positions ($M = 2.9, SD = 0.8$). It was again found that they love to learn how to be better leaders and be able to organise people in productive ways was one of the motivating factors ($M = 3.3, SD = 0.8$). However, it was further revealed that the degree of financial resource requirement was a deterrent to their desire for leadership positions ($M = 2.6, SD = 1.0$).

Female student leaders interviewed indicated that their interests in leadership started when they were in basic and secondary schools. Some of them held various positions such as assistant school prefects, librarians and office girls. These were some of the views expressed by female student leaders interviewed.

Grace, Women's Commissioner, aged 27 shared her experience and said. I remember when I was in class one; I was able to control my friends. My friends followed my instructions. Therefore, I would say my leadership started quite early. Very early, because early childhood events that happened showed that I had those traits in me.

Rose, Vice President of a subject association, aged 25, had this to say: My interest in leadership began when I was in Primary 6. I decided to contest for the girls'

prefect and I won, so, I was the girls' prefect in class 6. I also became a prefect in Junior High School.

Mercy, Treasurer, aged 23, stated: *My interest in leadership first began in Junior High School. I was an Assistant School Prefect in JSS and the librarian in Senior High School. I enjoyed performing those roles.*

Dora, Treasurer, aged 22, said: *My interest in leadership started in JHS 1. I was a Section Leader.*

The Participants also indicated that they had personal interests to be leaders in the University even though other people also encouraged them. Below are excerpts from the interviews with the leaders:

Grace stated:

My motivation to be a leader started from the challenges I encountered. For me, I think being faced with challenges, motivated me because I am very strong. Nature got people to think that I am fit for portfolios. Therefore, they would say that "go for this position because I know you can do it". I think my motivation is my ability to face challenges. That will be the first factor then, the people I interacted or worked with also motivated me. They have a way of bringing out the best in me. Therefore, these are the two main motivators for me.

Mercy had this to say:

I enjoy interacting with people and the fact that I will be the one to stand in front and talk to them was one of the main motivating factors. Also, my cousin in level 400 encouraged me when I came to level 100. At that time, she told me to go for Course Representative.

Jane, Women Commissioner, aged 22, stated: *I have the passion to serve and render services to humanity. First, it is my interest to serve people always. The second factor was my gender as a female. I saw that most of the females were not participating in the leadership of the University, so I wanted to be a role model to those who are coming for them to appreciate that females can also be in leadership.*

Challenges faced by female students in leadership positions in UEW

This section presents some challenges that female students aspiring to hold leadership positions and those in leadership positions may encounter. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 2.

Socio-Cultural Norms

Table 2: Results on Challenges Affecting Female Students Leaders.

Challenges	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
My family members do not support my participation in leadership in higher education institution.	1.7	0.9
My peers do not support my participation in leadership in higher education institution.	1.6	0.8
I have difficulty in meeting the financial commitment associated with aspiring for leadership positions	2.7	0.9
I have difficulty in meeting the financial commitment associated with being in leadership position	2.6	1
My contributions and ideas are not taken seriously as compared to male student leaders in this institution.	2.2	0.9
I believe I am not ready to occupy some student leadership positions	2.6	0.9
My institution has some institutional structures that do not support female leadership in higher education	1.7	0.8
I am of the view that men are supposed to hold some student leadership positions and not females due to how difficult it is to manage students' behaviour	2.5	1
I do not have the confidence in performing my leadership duties in my institution.	1.7	0.8

Results as presented in Table 2 reveal that, the most challenging factor facing the female students (either aspirant or in leadership) was finance. It was evident from our findings that most of the participants had perception that they were not ready to occupy some leadership positions ($M = 2.6$, $SD = 0.9$). In addition, the results indicated that majority of the participants understood that men are supposed to occupy some leadership positions and not females due to the difficulty in

managing students' behaviour ($M = 2.5$, $SD = 0.8$). Female student leaders interviewed recounted how gender and socio-cultural norms, role conflict, financial constraints and political influence pose major challenges to them. These were highlighted by the participants during the interview sessions.

Sharing her experience, Mercy stated that: *When I came to level 100, I contested for the welfare officer position but I lost mainly because most people have the perception that the welfare position is mainly for males. They think females cannot do it better than males because it involves a lot of organisation and many carrying things here and there. Therefore, I asked people's opinions why I did not make it and these were some questions and comments they made. They asked, why would a female want to become a welfare officer? Can a female carry items around? Even the name of the position sounds masculine.*

Dora stated: *Yes, my gender sometimes affects the way some people interact with me. Some people look down upon me because I am a female. When my suggestions are not respected and the males use cunning ways to get things done, it decreases my interest in contributing during meetings.*

This finding affirms Ponterotto (2016) and Eagly and Carli (2007) view that cultures that exclude or alienate women can possibly be based on masculine activities that are less appealing to women and a work environment that might strike women as 'cut-throat' and 'macho work'. This can also be seen from the perspective of liberal feminist's theory argument that society holds the false belief that by their nature women are less intellectually and physically capable than men and tends to discriminate against women. It is in the same vein that Dora described how gender and socio- cultural norms have affected her throughout her life and have been proven obstacles to her leadership progression:

Personally, my gender does not affect my position but society's view on my gender does affect me. Society has carved out the positions we should occupy. Certain positions or portfolios such as President, Secretary, and P.R.O. are for men while females are expected to be treasurers. Therefore, as I mentioned earlier, the male part of me comes alive when I am super- passionate about a task. I have had issues

with males when they underrate my capabilities and say, "this is something for males, you can't do this". I also tell them in those instances that "Oh don't see me as a female, see me as someone who is working". Therefore, I have had those clashes most of the time. At certain places when I say this, they are like "don't talk, let the males talk". Therefore, yes, society has influenced gender and positions and I am not an exception.

The opinion shared by the participant clearly shows how dissatisfied she is about society carving out gender roles for females to the extent that even if one is a female student leader in an institution there are certain tasks that she is presumed not to perform. This goes contrary to liberal feminism theory, which focuses on women's ability to maintain their equality through their actions and choices. In the case of Dora, she did her best to maintain her equality against all odds. In view of the challenge that female leaders sometimes face, Grosz (2013) and Carrol (2003) observe that some women candidates have a particularly difficult time because some voters still perceive women as less politically powerful than men. Undoubtedly, this challenge affects female students' access to leadership positions in UEW.

In contrast, Grace indicated that she declined to go for a higher position in her association when she had the opportunity. She stated:

At a point, my Boss encouraged me and said I should go for President. I should not go for Women Commissioner (WOCOM). I said no, let me go for the Women Commissioner and he said I know you can take the association to a different height, but I just did not go... Well, I did not go for that position. I love challenges but I went for WOCOM because of the path I am towing. You know, I said I am passionate about women and children so had to walk that path regardless of my capabilities.

Mercy also said: *I chose to be a treasurer because I was not interested in any other position.*

On the part of Jane, she was scared and shy, that was why she did not contest for the presidency.

She indicated that her confidence level was low for that. The submission from Grace, Dora and Jane indicates why some female student leaders normally aspire positions in various associations on campus, despite opened opportunities for all aspirants to contest for the flagship positions. This finding is in congruence with that of Celikten (2005) who asserts that the reason why women do not get into the higher echelons of leadership may be related to pressures inherent in the job situation. It further reinforces the perception that the ideal leader should most often be a man who does not have or attend to other pressing commitments outside his work. Rose noted that the pressure that comes from home as a female student leader does not greatly affect her work as a leader even though she sometimes thinks about that.

Rose stated: *Sometimes, there is pressure from home. They say you are a female get married, you are in school, you are getting old. They say so many things. However, it does not affect the performance of my roles as student leader but, sometimes, I do think about it.*

From the views of the participants interviewed, it can be deduced that gender and culture play a significant role in determining not only female students' access to leadership positions but also the leadership roles they perform. From a gender-based backdrop, Coleman (2011) states that leadership is a much-gendered concept. In a wide variety of cultural contexts, leadership continues to be identified with the male. Even though women occupy positions of leadership and responsibility, there is a tendency to assume that the rightful leader is a male. This assertion is also supported by Edwards and Aboagye's study in 2015 which intimated that the road to school leadership positions is becoming more competitive and professional demanding among genders hence the path to school leadership is evolving and becoming more complex as cultures become more and more pluralistic and gender sensitive.

However, in appraising the impact of gender and socio-cultural norms on female student leaders, the participants involved in the study had a negative view about gender norms and female leadership in the sense that their willingness and freedom to lead were constrained due to their gender and culturally perceived roles appropriate for them. These views are in line with the feminist theory assertion that although women and men are equal, certain restrictions have been placed on women. Such restrictions are inherent in customary laws and are justified by patriarchy (Schumaker et al., 2000).

Role Conflict

The study also brought to light how some of the participants found it arduous in combining their academic work with the leadership roles they were performing. To some of the participants, multi-tasking with their studies and the leadership roles sometimes makes their academic lives suffer. This challenge was further aggravated by the involvement of the participants in other functions outside their associations. Below are excerpts from the interviews on the issue of multi-tasking and how they manage it when it occurs.

Mercy noted the *last time, we had a quiz and at the same time, I had to go to the bank for some money as a treasurer to organise a programme. My friends were learning (discussing the notes), yet I had to leave, when I came back, they were about to enter the examination room. Well, I was found wanting and that quiz I performed poorly and it affected my grades.*

Rose: *Some of the challenges are that you will be in the class learning and you have to leave and attend a meeting. I go for other association meetings and sometimes it conflicts with my studies...The leadership meetings and maybe religious meetings may clash so I have to choose one. Sometimes, we will be organising programme and we will be having a lecture at that same time so I have to forgo the lecture and go for the programme.*

Financial Constraints

Economic factors are paramount to female students' access to leadership positions. In addition to the challenges faced by female student leaders in UEW, they also brought to the fore financial challenges. Whereas one of the participants faced this challenge during the campaign or prior to her election, another participant also faced a similar hurdle immediately after assuming office. These were some of the views expressed by the participants interviewed on financial constraints.

Grace: Finance is a challenge of a sort Apart from the fact that you need money for campaign, some people expect you to give them money before they will assist you. I have always held this belief that if you are helping someone just help, it shouldn't be because of money, yet, there are places that you go and then you are expected to lubricate palms with money and I don't do that. Therefore, it has also been a challenge. I lost certain things because I did not lubricate peoples' palms.

Jane: Some selected executives went for seminars organised by the SRC and they paid. I did not go because of lack of finance. We were supposed to pay GHS80.00 per person and the money we had in our coffers then was not enough to pay for more than three people. I had to sacrifice and could not take part in the leadership seminar.

It could be deduced from these statements that these female leaders were not financially independent and needed money for leadership related programmes. Constraints as identified by Odame (2010) in a similar study include low-income levels, lack of confidence and patriarchy on the part of women. According to Onyango et al. (2011), this is due to the traditionally believed myths in some cultures that economically, women should not own any wealth in the community starting in the family set up.

Political Party Interference at Local Elections

The participants indicated that student leadership at certain levels have party political connotations and that if you are not affiliated to a national political party, especially, the two main ones we have in the country; National Democratic Party (NDC) and New Patriotic Party

(NPP), you might not be able to overcome the pressure to contest. This poses a bid challenge to female student leaders as most of them use campus politics as a stepping stone before they come to national limelight. Some of the participants indicated that they are not interested in party politics due to the insults and the stress women aspirants go through.

Grace shared her experience and said, *You know there are a few women who are poised about what they do. Therefore, the first challenge is political affiliation. Having been on the national platform for my association, I met other students on a bigger platform and jokingly said I want to go for the National President. I was amazed at where calls came from for me to step down because they thought I was a threat. Even when I joked that I wanted to go for the National President, I was told I need a strong political affiliation. I was told I have to be a registered member of a political party.*

Mercy noted: *I used to have interest in political issues but right not anymore. This is due to the stress and the insults they rain on females who are aspiring to be political leaders. These are factors that have deterred me.*

These findings give clear indication to the fact that if party politics interferes with female student leadership in higher education, some female students will not participate in campus politics and this will worsen the gender imbalance. According to a UNDP Report (1995) cited in Ngaaso and Attom (2011), there is a strong correlation across Africa between women's access to power and decision-making and their lower status. At the national levels, representation of women in decision-making shows gender imbalance with men dominating the country's members of parliament, cabinets and national executives of political parties.

Institutional support mechanisms to students' participation in leadership

Results presented in Table 3 aimed at exploring institutional support mechanisms available in the study area to encourage and empower female students' participation in leadership. A mean score greater or equal to (\geq) 2.5 indicates that the students agreed that the suggested institutional mechanism for supporting female students' participation in leadership position is available in the

study area and a mean score, less than (<) 2.5 suggests that the students disagreed to the existence of that institutional mechanism.

Table 3: Analysis on Institutional Support Mechanisms available to female students'

Institutional Support	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
My institution has a quota system for female students aspiring to be leaders.	2.4	1.1
My institution has mentorship programme for female students aspiring to be leaders.	2.5	1.1
My institution organizes workshop and training programmes for females and males aspiring to be student leaders.	2.5	0.9
Female students are free to contest any student leadership position in my institution.	3.2	0.9
The views and vision of female leaders are supported by school authorities and the student body.	2.8	0.9
My institution has mentorship programme for female student leaders.	2.5	0.9
My institution provides programmes designed to enhance the development of leadership abilities and the personal growth of female students.	2.7	0.9

An examination of the results presented in Table 3 revealed that most of the institutional mechanisms for supporting female students' participation in leadership positions were available in the study area. For example, the analysis indicates that mentorship programmes existed to aid female students aspiring to be leaders in the study area ($M = 2.5$, $SD = 1.1$). It was also revealed that the University of Education, Winneba, organises workshops and training programmes for females aspiring to be student leaders ($M = 2.5$, $SD = 0.9$). Again, the analysis shows that female students are free to contest any student leadership position in the institution ($M = 3.2$, $SD = 0.9$). The participants further indicated that views and visions of female leaders are supported by school authorities and the student body ($M = 2.8$, $SD = 0.9$). The findings also revealed that the institution understudy has a mentorship programme for female student leaders ($M = 2.5$, $SD = 0.9$). Finally, the respondents agreed that the institution understudy provides programmes

designed to enhance the development of leadership abilities and the personal growth of female students ($M = 2.7, SD = 0.9$).

Female leaders interviewed explained that the University of Education, Winneba has some institutional support mechanisms such as organising seminars for student leaders every year, financial support for SRC executives and provide mentorship programmes for female student leaders. These were some of the views expressed by the participants.

Mercy stated:

The University organises general orientation for students who have taken up leadership roles at the beginning of every academic year. The Vice Chancellor, Registrar, Dean of Student Affairs and the SRC executives participate in the seminar. One benefit I enjoy as a student leader is that I get opportunity to interact with people in other higher positions in the University. Another privilege is that I do not pay for the field trips organised by the association. It is free for the leaders.

Grace:

UEW has some policies and financial support for female students, at least I know of the gender scholarship scheme that they have. Again, I would say the University and the campus associations do not deny people from applying or nominating people for positions on the basis of gender. I think that is also a support system for people to come out willingly because, in some institutions, you can be handpicked but for UEW, you voluntarily come out or someone nominates you. There are other support systems I know of: when you are an executive member, you are entitled to some benefits, monthly allowance, which is a peanut. It is just GHS200.00 for a whole month, but I think they also help us with part payment of the accommodation. You know the title alone is a plus and it is one of the support systems.

The above quotes and findings generally show that the University provides equal avenues for both male and female students to participate in the selection of leaders for students' associations.

The onus therefore rests on the female students to compete fairly with their male counterparts for leadership positions. So as discussed in the literature by Gooden and O'Doherty (2015), the University of Education, Winneba should put measures in place to foster proactiveness among female students in competing for leadership positions in the university.

Conclusions

The study explored female students' quest for leadership and their experiential realities at the University of Education, Winneba. This study is located within the liberal feminist theory. Which argues that individuals have the right to vote and to be voted for. However, the authors hypothesized that there are certain factors which discourage women from entering into any form of context with their male counterparts. Hence, the study looked at the motivating factors, which encourage female students to be part of the campus politics. It went on to look at challenges' female students face to be part of campus politics and the institutional support for female student leaders. Female students in the University of Education, Winneba offering Gender and Development course and those in leadership positions at the University were the focus of the study. Combination of factors such as socio-cultural norms, roles conflict, financial constraints and political interference are some of the challenges confronting female student leaders in the University of Education, Winneba. The study revealed that societal perceptions about female subordination militate against females' access to certain leadership positions such as President, Welfare Officer, and Secretary and restrict them from contesting for such positions in various institutions. It was found from the research that the University of Education, Winneba, offers institutional support in the form of seminar, accommodation subsidy and stipends to some of the student leaders in SRC positions.

These general conclusions from the study indicate that, though females in higher educational institutions are not physically excluded from certain positions, there are socio-cultural and economic invisible hands that deter them from participating fully in competing for all leadership positions. What prevails in Winneba is not different from the other higher educational

institutions in Ghana. It is, therefore, not surprising that few women end up taking national political appointment in the country.

Females have many ideas and have the capacity to perform leadership roles like their male counterparts. The study therefore makes policy recommendations such as teachers and parents should encourage females to take up leadership roles early in life to arouse in all students, the leadership drive for future leadership positions. Female students should be assertive and determined to contest for positions of their choice. Females aspiring to be leaders should plan and save money towards their leadership ambitions so that they can have financial backing for the cost involved. Institutional support in the form of mentorship, workshops and seminars should be extended to all females interested in campus leadership. Female students in the University of Education, Winneba should take advantage of the available institutional support mechanisms to promote their leadership aspirations.

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