

The effect of gender, level of education and age on socio-cultural perceptions of women in leadership positions: Case study of Kadoma urban district secondary schools in Zimbabwe

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/sajest.v3i1.39806>

Runyowa L^{1*}, Chigarira T.S.¹, Antonio A.³, Chabva P.S.⁴, Mabhungu I.², Keche E.¹, Musekiwa A.¹, Bomani M.¹, Maunga M.M.¹, Mudzura M.², Katsuro P.¹

¹Department of Business Studies, Faculty of Commerce, Bindura University of Science Education, P. Bag 1020, Bindura, Zimbabwe.

²Department Of Accountancy, Faculty of Commerce, Bindura University of Science Education, P. Bag 1020, Bindura, Zimbabwe.

³Jameson High School, P.O. Box 560, Kadoma, Zimbabwe.

⁴Chabva Surgeries, P. O. Box, Kadoma, Zimbabwe.

*Corresponding author: lrunyowa@buse.ac.zw

Abstract

The study sought to find out whether gender, level of education and age have any effect on socio-cultural perceptions of women in leadership positions. Twelve school heads, 100 teachers and 100 school development association members from 15 Kadoma urban district secondary schools were used as research subjects. A five point Likert scale questionnaire with eight perception variables was administered. The study found that male respondents had negative perceptions of women in leadership while female respondents had positive perceptions. On level of education, the study revealed that the respondents with lower education had negative perceptions of women in leadership and that those with higher education had positive perceptions. The results also showed that younger people have positive perceptions of women in leadership positions. The study concluded that gender, level of education and age do have an effect on socio-cultural perceptions of women in leadership positions.

Key Words: Age, Education, Gender, Leadership, Socio-cultural perceptions.

Introduction

According to Maracek (2001), power operates as a social structure made up of numerous practices that maintain a cultural system of dominance. The social structure transcends the wishes and behaviour of any particular individual and has a tendency to shape decisions, interactions and social relations. As a result, responses to women and men in leadership roles are conditioned by social structure traditionally dominated by men (Lips, 2009). Men and women differ in their access to positions of authority and their perceptions of men and women who occupy leadership positions (Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001).

The lesser participation of women in leadership positions especially at upper levels is well documented (Bass, 1990; Swainson, 1995; Dorsey, 1996; Rojahn, 1996). Hall (1984) confirms that there are difficulties for some men in adjusting to work with women or adapting to most of their leadership styles. Studies have shown that females have more explicit positive attitudes with regard to women in authority than men (Rudman and Kilianski 2000, Wang et al, 2003). Women who have the opportunity for more exposure to female leaders are likely to accept and understand female leaders (Dasgupta and Asgari, 2003).

According to Schein (2001), both men and women tend to perceive managers as having male characteristics that are similar to masculine traits, hence women exhibiting feminine traits are perceived as being less "managerial". Furthermore Greyveinstein (1990) contends that women who succeed and rise to senior management positions often have to adopt masculine behaviour and risk being accused of violating gender norms. One of the most common reasons for the under representation of women in school administration is the negative perception of women's leadership (Tyree, 1995; Van Deventer and Van Der Westhuizen 2000). Helgesen (1990) asserts that women must deal with these negative views of female administrators held by peers, parents and employees of both sexes.

There are primarily two views with regard to the role of gender in leadership (Coleman, 1996). The first view is that gender has an impact on the ability of a person to lead. Rosener as cited by Bass (1990) argues that men and women tend to move towards opposite styles of leadership. Rosener, as cited by Bass (1990), comments that men are inclined towards the control and command styles while women tend to move towards transformational styles which rely on interpersonal skills. Cooper, as cited by Bass (1990), suggests that men tend to be task-oriented, are mechanistic and lack interpersonal skills to motivate subordinates. According to Bass cited by Pierce and Newstrom (2000), women are more charismatic and good at team-building. Money and Ehrhardt as cited by Pierce and Newstrom (2000) argue that men tend to lean towards the masculine mode of leadership which emphasizes hierarchy, high control for the leader, is unemotional and generally focuses on analytic problem-solving. Despite the entrenched differences above, Gordon (1994) maintains that there is no reliable evidence to show that these differences exist. Bass (1990) further observes that available literature fails to explicitly distinguish between supervision styles of female and male leaders.

It is in view of the ongoing discussion that this study aimed to ascertain perceptions of women in leadership held by the community.

Major attributes of the community such as age, education and gender were used to establish community perceptions along those divides. The study wished to show how acceptable women in leadership are according to each of the aforementioned community attributes.

Materials and Methods

Study site

The study was conducted in Kadoma Urban District, Mashonaland West Province of Zimbabwe which has fifteen secondary schools and twenty six primary schools. The study focused on secondary schools only.

Sampling methodology

The case study research design was adopted due to financial limitations. A sample of 212 respondents was chosen for the study. This was made up of 12 head teachers, 100 teachers, 100 school development association (SDA) members. From a population of 15 secondary schools in the district, all 6 female-headed schools and 6 male-headed schools (which were randomly selected from the 9 male-headed schools) were purposely included in the sample in order to maintain gender balance. Names of the 9 male-headed schools were written on small pieces of paper which were put in a basket. Three papers were randomly picked from the basket and the remaining schools were considered for the sample. From a population of 500 teachers from the 12 secondary schools, a sample of 100 teachers was selected. The 100 teachers represented about 20% of the total teacher population, which is more than the 10% (for a representative sample) recommended by Best and Khan (2003). A proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to select teachers from each school. The teachers were divided into male and female strata at each school and 10% of the teachers were chosen from each stratum.

Strata were coded and then the required number of teachers was selected using a random number table. Stratified random sampling was used in selecting 100 SDA members from a population of 165 members in the 15 schools.

Questionnaires for all the 11 SDA members in a school were hand delivered to school heads who then administered them to SDA members. After the questionnaires were collected from all the 15 schools, the questionnaires were separated according to male and female respondents. The questionnaires from each group were coded and random sampling was used to select 50 questionnaires.

Data collection instruments

A five point Likert scale questionnaire with eight perception variables on women in leadership was designed. The same questionnaire was administered to teachers, school heads and SDA members after a pilot test had been carried out on a sample drawn from secondary schools in Chegutu District. The pilot test was carried out in order to test for the validity and reliability of the instrument.

Data entry and analysis

Data collected using questionnaires were processed and analyzed using the Excel spreadsheet. The data were presented in tables according to gender, age and professional qualifications and then scores were established in order to rank the respondents' perceptions. The data on perceptions of respondents were analyzed based on scores. A plus one (+1) was assigned to each respondent who either strongly agreed or agreed and a minus one (-1) to each respondent who either strongly disagreed or disagreed. Respondents who were neutral were assigned 0. All the positive and negative responses for each perception were added together to come up with the perception's score.

The perceptions scores were then ranked in absolute numbers in order to establish the strongest perceptions held by the respondents.

Results

Table 1a below shows results according to gender.

Table 1a: Results of perception variables of respondents according to gender

| | Male (n=106) | | | | | Female (n=106) | | | | |
|-----------|--------------|----|----|----|-----|----------------|----|----|----|-----|
| | SA% | A% | N% | D% | SD% | SA% | A% | N% | D% | SD% |
| Q1 | 34 | 16 | 8 | 7 | 35 | 38 | 22 | 14 | 10 | 16 |
| Q2 | 9 | 16 | 21 | 37 | 17 | 8 | 20 | 31 | 30 | 11 |
| Q3 | 27 | 15 | 18 | 21 | 19 | 25 | 26 | 9 | 23 | 16 |
| Q4 | 23 | 21 | 15 | 20 | 22 | 42 | 23 | 13 | 13 | 8 |
| Q5 | 38 | 23 | 9 | 16 | 14 | 39 | 20 | 12 | 18 | 11 |
| Q6 | 27 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 16 | 31 | 23 | 21 | 17 | 8 |
| Q7 | 26 | 20 | 14 | 21 | 19 | 22 | 17 | 18 | 26 | 17 |
| Q8 | 3 | 8 | 16 | 49 | 25 | 10 | 15 | 15 | 30 | 29 |

KEY: PERCEPTION VARIABLES ON WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

- Q1: Women can be better leaders than men
- Q2: Women leaders are more respected by the community than men
- Q3: Women's leadership is not compromised by domestic responsibilities
- Q4: Women should be given leadership positions
- Q5: Women can also be trained to be better leaders
- Q6: Success of a school has nothing to do with gender
- Q7: Women are more rational when in leadership position
- Q8: Unmarried women head teachers are more respectable than unmarried men head teachers

KEY: RESPONSES TO PERCEPTION VARIABLES

- (1)SA-Strongly agree; A – Agree; N – Neutral; D –Disagree; SD – Strongly disagree
- (2) SCORES: (+1)- each respondent who either strongly agreed or agreed
 (-1) – each respondent who either strongly disagreed or disagreed.

Table 1b: Ranking of perceptions of respondents according to their scores

| Rank | MALE | | FEMALE | |
|------|------------|-------|------------|-------|
| | Perception | Score | Perception | Score |
| 1 | Q8 | -63 | Q4 | 44 |
| 2 | Q5 | 31 | Q8; Q1 | 34 |
| 3 | Q2 | -29 | Q5 | 30 |
| 4 | Q6 | 9 | Q6 | 29 |
| 5 | Q1 | 8 | Q2 | -13 |
| 6 | Q7 | 6 | Q3 | 12 |
| 7 | Q3;Q4 | 2 | Q7 | -4 |
| 8 | | | | |

The strongest perceptions among men were that unmarried female head teachers are not more respectable than unmarried male head teachers, and that women can be trained to be better leaders. Among female respondents, the strongest perceptions were that women should be given leadership positions and women can be better leaders than men.

However, like their male counterparts, unmarried female head teachers are not more respected than unmarried male head teachers.

Table 2a: Results of perceptions of respondents by academic qualifications

| Responses | Below O'level (n=39) | | | | | O'level -Diploma (n=102) | | | | | Degreed (n=71) | | | | |
|-----------|-------------------------|----|----|----|-----|-----------------------------|----|----|----|-----|-------------------|----|----|----|-----|
| | SA% | A% | N% | D% | SD% | SA% | A% | N% | D% | SD% | SA% | A% | N% | D% | SD% |
| 1 | 10 | 8 | 3 | 30 | 49 | 55 | 11 | 10 | 8 | 16 | 21 | 29 | 11 | 8 | 31 |
| 2 | 5 | 44 | 12 | 31 | 8 | 5 | 14 | 23 | 40 | 18 | 14 | 17 | 32 | 27 | 10 |
| 3 | 5 | 5 | 3 | 56 | 31 | 20 | 27 | 19 | 18 | 16 | 39 | 18 | 7 | 17 | 19 |
| 4 | 5 | 18 | 8 | 38 | 31 | 40 | 20 | 12 | 15 | 13 | 24 | 28 | 20 | 4 | 24 |
| 5 | 3 | 23 | 15 | 49 | 10 | 37 | 25 | 11 | 16 | 11 | 63 | 14 | 6 | 8 | 9 |
| 6 | 6 | 28 | 15 | 41 | 10 | 32 | 25 | 5 | 25 | 13 | 41 | 32 | 8 | 10 | 9 |
| 7 | 11 | 21 | 18 | 38 | 12 | 31 | 19 | 10 | 28 | 12 | 31 | 24 | 17 | 14 | 14 |
| 8 | 8 | 21 | 10 | 46 | 15 | 6 | 7 | 26 | 32 | 29 | 8 | 13 | 25 | 44 | 10 |

The results on perceptions in Table 2a were ranked in Table 2b according to scores.

Table 2b: Ranking of perceptions of respondents by academic qualifications

| Rank | Below 'O' Level | | O' Level to Diploma | | Degreed | |
|------|-----------------|-------|---------------------|-------|------------|-------|
| | Perception | Score | Perception | Score | Perception | Score |
| 1 | Q3 | -77 | Q8 | -48 | Q5 | 60 |
| 2 | Q1 | -61 | Q1 | 42 | Q6 | 54 |
| 3 | Q4 | -46 | Q2 | -39 | Q8 | 33 |
| 4 | Q5 | -33 | Q5 | 35 | Q7 | 27 |
| 5 | Q8 | -32 | Q4 | 32 | Q4 | 24 |
| 6 | Q7 | -18 | Q3 | 13 | Q1&Q3 | 21 |
| 7 | Q6 | -17 | Q6 | -7 | Q2 | 6 |
| 8 | Q2 | 10 | Q7 | 4 | | |

When the respondents were classified according to academic qualifications as shown in table 2b, those without 'O' levels strongest perceptions were that women's leadership is compromised by domestic responsibilities, women cannot be better leaders than men and women should not be given leadership positions. Respondents with 'O' levels to diplomas strongly perceived that women head teachers are more respectable than male head teachers and also held the perception that women can be better leaders than men.

Those respondents with degrees had strong perceptions that women can also be trained to be better leaders and that the success of a school has nothing to do with gender and also that unmarried women head teachers are more respected than their unmarried male counterparts. Generally, respondents with qualifications lower than 'O' levels had negative perceptions of women in leadership while those within the 'O' level to diploma stratum had mixed perceptions with a positive inclination. However, the degreed respondents had positive perceptions of women in leadership.

Table 3a: Results of perceptions of respondents by age (N=212)

| Responses | Below 35yrs (n=65) | | | | | 35yrs-50yrs (n=113) | | | | | Above 50yrs (n=34) | | | | |
|-----------|-----------------------|--------|--------|--------|---------|------------------------|--------|--------|--------|---------|-----------------------|--------|--------|--------|---------|
| | sa % | a % | n % | d % | sd % | sa % | a % | n % | d % | Sd % | sa % | d % | n % | d % | sd % |
| 1 | 58 | 18 | 11 | 5 | 8 | 15 | 29 | 6 | 16 | 34 | 15 | 9 | 9 | 12 | 55 |
| 2 | 5 | 11 | 28 | 48 | 8 | 9 | 27 | 28 | 25 | 11 | 24 | 15 | 11 | 26 | 24 |
| 3 | 25 | 32 | 23 | 9 | 11 | 18 | 19 | 9 | 41 | 20 | 15 | 12 | 5 | 21 | 32 |
| 4 | 55 | 22 | 6 | 9 | 8 | 18 | 28 | 12 | 22 | 18 | 32 | 21 | 20 | 12 | 15 |
| 5 | 40 | 37 | 5 | 6 | 12 | 36 | 22 | 7 | 26 | 9 | 37 | 18 | 21 | 15 | 9 |
| 6 | 30 | 22 | 13 | 27 | 8 | 21 | 29 | 14 | 21 | 14 | 9 | 24 | 9 | 32 | 26 |
| 7 | 28 | 32 | 8 | 23 | 9 | 20 | 16 | 11 | 39 | 14 | 26 | 6 | 12 | 32 | 24 |
| 8 | 5 | 12 | 26 | 37 | 20 | 7 | 8 | 14 | 44 | 27 | 6 | 12 | 24 | 38 | 20 |

Table 3b: Ranking of perceptions according to respondents ages

| Rank | Below 35 years | | 35 -50 years | | 50+ years | |
|------|----------------|-------|--------------|-------|------------|-------|
| | Perception | Score | Perception | Score | Perception | Score |
| 1 | Q1 | 63 | Q8 | -56 | Q1 | -43 |
| 2 | Q4 | 60 | Q5 | 23 | Q8 | -40 |
| 3 | Q5 | 59 | Q3&Q7 | -17 | Q3 | -35 |
| 4 | Q2&Q8 | -40 | Q6 | 15 | Q5 | 31 |
| 5 | Q3 | 37 | Q1 | -6 | Q4 | -26 |
| 6 | Q7 | 28 | Q4 | 4 | Q6 | -25 |
| 7 | Q6 | 17 | Q2 | 0 | Q7 | -24 |
| 8 | | | | | Q2 | -11 |

The results from the rank order table showed that participants below 35 years had strong perceptions that women can be better leaders, should be given leadership positions and can be trained to be better leaders. For those in the age group 35 to 51 years the strongest perceptions were that; unmarried female head teachers are not more respectable than unmarried male head teachers, their leadership is compromised by domestic responsibilities and that they are not more rational when in leadership positions.

However, they tend to agree with those aged below 35 years that women can be trained to become better leaders. Finally, those aged above 51 years had strong perceptions that women can be better leaders than men, unmarried female head teachers are not more respectable than their male counterparts and that women's leadership is compromised by domestic responsibilities.

However, they are also in agreement with other age groups that women can be trained to be better leaders. Generally those below 35 years had positive perceptions of women in leadership, those in the age group 35 years to 50 years had mixed perceptions and those above 51 years had negative perceptions.

Discussion

The study findings showed that male respondents, degreed respondents and all age group respondents supported the notion that women can be trained to become better leaders. Cundiff and Komarraju (2008) confirm the findings by asserting that training can increase positive attitudes and acceptance of women in leadership positions. This view is further supported by Shojaie (2003) who holds the notion that training and socialization make men and women acquire leadership traits. Swin and Sann (1996) also observed that respondents above 45 years are of the opinion that women leaders are quick learners.

Female respondents had the perception that women should be given leadership positions. Similar findings have been reported in earlier studies by Rudman and Kilianski (2000), and Wang et al (2003) who concur that females have more explicit positive attitudes with regard to women in authority than men. This is also in line with studies by Eagly et al (2003) and Kellerman and Rhode (2004) who found that respondents above 50 years were of the opinion that women leaders tend to excel in effectiveness because they have to position themselves in a male dominated field, and to do so, they work extremely hard to show their winning achievements. It has also been found that women can be better leaders than men according to 'O' level and diploma holder respondents and to a lesser extent by degreed respondents.

On the contrary, Tsoka and Mathipa (2000) asserted that education, instead of liberating, can condition the mind to perceive issues in a particular way which may be oppressive and degrading to one's dignity.

Furthermore, according to respondents without 'O' levels and those above 35 years, women's leadership is compromised by domestic responsibilities. This view is supported by Warsame (2000) and De La Rey (2005) who argue that women's career paths are often interrupted by domestic responsibilities.

According to the findings, generally those below 35 years had positive perceptions of women in leadership, those in the age group 35 years to 50 years had mixed perceptions and those above 51 years had negative perceptions. These findings are supported by Swin and Sann (1996) who concluded that women leaders are as effective as men but often try harder to prove it. Manning (2002) also supported this by observing that respondents above 50 years believe that men have a natural tendency for leadership and are much better at many of these leadership skills.

Conclusion

The research findings clearly show that there is a very strong influence of socio-cultural stereotype perceptions of women in leadership positions. The study established that the younger respondents, female respondents and the educated are more amenable to female leadership as opposed to older, male and less educated respondents.

Acknowledgement

The researchers would like to acknowledge the invaluable support they got from District Education Officers, School Heads, SDA members and teachers in Kadoma Urban District Secondary schools of Mashonaland Province, Zimbabwe.

REFERENCES

- Bass, B. M. 1990. *Concept of Leadership: A Handbook of leadership*. New York: Free Press.
- Best, J.W. and Khan, J.V. 2003 *Research in education*. Longman, USA.
- Bless, G. and Higson-Smith, C. 1995. *Fundamentals of Social Research Methods. An African Perspective*. Free Press: Cape Town.
- Browne, G. S. 1977. *Contemporary Education: A Comparative Study of National Systems*. New York: Harcourt.
- Coleman, M. 1996. Barriers to Career Progress to Women: The Perception of Female Head Teachers in *Journal of Educational Research*, 38 (3): 317-331.
- Cundiff, N.L. and Komarraju, M. 2008. Gender differences in ethnocultural empathy and attitudes towards men and women in authority. *Journal of leadership and organizational studies*, 15(1):5-15.
- Dasgupta, N. and Asgari, S. 2003. Seeing is believing: Exposure to counter stereotypic women leaders and its effect on the malleability of automatic gender stereotyping. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57:675-88.
- De La Rey, C. 2005. Gender, women and leadership. *Agenda*, 65:4-11.
- Dorsey, B. J. 1996. *Gender Inequalities in Education in Southern Africa: An analysis of intervention strategies*. UNESCO: Harare.
- Eagly, A.H., Johannesen-Schmidt, M.C. and Engen, M.L. (2003) Transformational, Transactional and Laissez-faire Leadership Styles: A Meta-analysis comparing women and men: *Psychological Bulletin* 129(4) 569-591.
- Eagly, A. H. and Johannesen-Schmidt, M.C. 2001. The leadership styles of women and men. *Journal of Social Issues* 57:781-97.
- Gaidzanwa, R. 1991. *Bourgeoisie theories of gender and feminism in southern countries* SAPES: Harare.
- Gordon R 1994. Education Policy and Gender in Zimbabwe- in *The Journal Gender And Education*. 2(2):131-139.
- Gordon, R. 1995. *Causes of Girls Academic Underachievement: The influence of teachers' attitude and expectations* Occasional Paper. Harare.
- Greyvenstein, L. A. 1990. The Untapped Human Resources: An Overview. *South African Journal of Education*. 12: 270-276.
- Hall, B. 1984. *Breaking the Monopoly of Knowledge Research Methods, Participation and Development*. Toronto: Paragon.
- Helgesen, S. 1990. *The female advantages: women's ways of leading*. New York, Doubleday.
- Higson-Smith, C. 1995. *Social Science Research Methods: An African Perspective*, JUTA Publishers: Cape Town.
- Kellerman, B. and Rhode, D.L. (2004) *Viable Options: Rethinking Women and Leadership*. *Compass* 2(1).
- Lips, H. 2009. *Women and Leadership: Delicate Balancing Act*. <http://www.womensmedia.com/lead/88-women-and-leadership-delicate-balancing>.
- Manning, T.T. (2002) Gender, managerial level, transformational leadership and work satisfaction. *Women in Management Review* 17(5).
- Maracek, J. 2001. *The Men's Bibliography: A comprehensive bibliography of writing on men, masculinities, gender and sexualities*, Michael Flood, 19th Ed. Canberra.

- Pierce, J.C. and Newstrom, J. 2000. Leadership Process. Boston: Irwin, McGraw-Hill.
- Rojahn, K. 1996. The Social Identities of Female Leaders in Different Cultural Context. *Journal of Feminism and Psychology* 7 (2): 183-207.
- Rudman, L.A. and Kilianski, S.E. 2000. Implicit and explicit attitudes toward female authority. *Personal and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 26(11):1315-28.
- Schein, V.E. 2001. A global look at psychological barrier to women's progress in management. *Journal of Social Issues* 57:675-88.
- Shojaie, Z. 2003 Muslim women: Politics, leadership and civil society
<http://www.aiwfonline.co.uk/downloads/dr%20zahra%shojaie.pdf>
- Swainson, N.1995. Redressing Gender Inequalities in Education: A review of Constraints and Priorities in Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Unpublished work for EDA Research Centre. Harare.
- Swin, J.K. and Sann, L.J. (1996) He's skilled, she's lucky: Are attributions for other's successes and failures gender biased? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 22(5).
- Tsoka, E.M. and Mathipa, E.R. 2001 Possible barriers to the advancement of women to leadership positions in the education profession. *South African Journal of Education* Vol. 21 No. 4
- Tyree, C.L.1995. Women in education: Are we perpetuating societal attitudes by moving toward an androgynous leadership style. The Texas Council of Women School Executives. Irby and Brown. Texas.
- Van Deventer, S. and Van Der Westhuizen, P. E. 2000. The many faces of feminism. A paper presented at the Centre for Women Studies. UNISA.
- Wang, Y. Davidson, M.M. Yakushko, O.F. Savoy, H.B., Tan, J.A. and Bleier, J.K. 2003. The scale of ethnocultural empathy: Development, validation and reliability. *Journal of Counselling Psychology*, 50:221-34
- Warsame, A.M. 2000 Assessment of potential women leaders in Somaliland.
<http://www.iprt.org/Amina%20Mohamed%20Warsame.htm>