

Counsellors' Role in Exploring Gender Gap in Leadership Administration among Principals in Ohafia Education Zone of Abia State

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Abstract

The study investigated counsellors' role in exploring gender gap in leadership administration among principals in Ohafia Education zone of Abia State. The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population comprised all the 45 principals in public secondary schools in Ohafia education zone of Abia State. All the 45 principals were sampled using purposive sampling technique. Two research questions guided the study. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled: Counsellors' Role in Exploring Gender Gap in Leadership Administration among Principals Questionnaire (CREGLAPQ). The instrument was validated by three experts, two from Guidance and Counselling and one from Measurement and Evaluation all from Faculty of Education. The reliability index of 0.83 was obtained using Cronbach Alpha, and considered adequate for the study. The instrument was administered by the researchers with the help of two research assistants. Mean and standard deviation were used for the research questions. The findings revealed that both male and female administrators possess important leadership qualities to be administrators in schools. It was recommended among others that government should make sure that schools are provided with counselling centres or clinics to cater for the needs of school leaders and administrators.

Keywords: counsellors, gender, principal, leadership, administration

Introduction

Education is basic to a person's ability to maximize any opportunity that may arise from development. It has always been a central mechanism for transmitting knowledge, skills and values for national development. There is increasing consensus that education is an important, essential aspect of basic human development (UNICEF, 2013). No wonder Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) sees education as an instrument per excellence for effecting the national growth and development.

Ndom-Uchendu and Ogbuokiri (2018) stated that education remains a potent and salient factor that enhances the chances of individual to contribute maximally to nation building. Based on this, government at all levels show concern in making education a top priority and ensure every person achieves it through effective policies that will enhance educational growth of the citizenry. Unfortunately, there have been some discrepancies between males and females in access to schooling. Some of the women who have gained equal education alongside their male counterparts found themselves in a good leadership position.

Leadership is as old as human organization in most societies, whether traditional or modern. The growth and effectiveness of any organization depends on the leadership, because no organization survives as an entity without leadership. Therefore, leadership is essential in any organization due to its far-reaching effect on the accomplishment of organizational objectives. The extent to which a leader succeeds in achieving organizational objectives largely depends on his/her skills and the ability to use such skills. According to Oraegbunam (2004), leadership is the ability to initiate action, motivate and direct others towards the fulfillment of a common goal. Okunamiri and Ndom-Uchendu (2011) noted that leadership involves a process of directing and coordinating the efforts and activities of students, teachers and non-tutorial staff towards the attainment of the educational goals and objectives of which schools are established. This implies that without leadership, there is no followership.

Therefore, the behaviour of a leader is acceptable to the subordinates only if they continue to see the leader as a source of personal opportunities to improve performance and satisfaction (Ogbuokiri, 2020). In the same vein, Osuagwu and Ogbonna (2017) stated that administration is concerned with several varieties of tasks. It initiates and directs activities, controls and monitors the functioning of the different organs of the system. An administrator therefore, is the chief executive of an organization. It can also be described as a "boss" or a "leader;" hence, leadership administrative positions could be occupied by either a man or a woman provided he/she is educated. This is because education equips one to function efficiently as a leader.

Leadership, by nature, is not ascribed to any gender, but its success depends on innate abilities, training, exposure and practice. Unfortunately, Nigeria's case is different because gender plays a very important role when it comes to the position of a leader. Gender refers to the socially constructed relations between men and women. According to Ogbuokiri (2022), it is a social and/or cultural construct, characteristics, behaviours and roles which any society ascribes to females and males. Koleosa (2017) stated that gender roles and associated stereotypes describe differences between men and women and prescribe how they should behave in social and occupational settings.

Traditionally, customs have limited educational opportunities for women whose role in the society was mainly confined to domestic work, early marriage and procreation. This makes them to rely on men for their livelihood; because the society sees them as a weak sex. No wonder Ogbonnaya (2005) stated that although there are cultural differences between males and females in their performance of certain tasks, some tasks are naturally gender based. This is applicable in schools where science and other science related subjects were projected for masculine while social courses like home economics, nursing and clothing and textile were projected for feminine (Dimson, 2017). For example, in Nigeria, Duru (2017) noted that women are ascribed to be submissive while men are said to be assertive. She further explained that these societal and culturally-ascribed roles gradually mature to permanent stereotype both in families and schools. Men see themselves as indispensable, important, strong and superior while women are identified as child bearers, housewives and cooks. According to United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (2005), a division of World Bank, men dominate all the spheres of life in Nigeria. Ogbuokiri (2020) opined that women's unequal representation in leadership positions poses multiple concerns.

A study conducted in (2002) by Stetler found out that the presence of females in corporate leadership positions in the United States is approximately 40% but with only 0.05% of those in top managerial positions. In another development, Dimson (2017) stated that women form a minority of university teachers in Nigeria. They are only fourteen percent (14%). Their numbers differ in various fields of Engineering, Science and Technology, but are found more in Education and Humanities. Evidence shows that women are marginalized virtually in all spheres of public life. According to 2006 Nigerian Population Census figure (FRN, 2009), women constitute 49% of the nation's total population but there has been a gross gender gap between the men and women in Nigeria especially in political representation, economic management and leadership.

In the secondary school level of education, women principals have all it takes to be in leadership or administrative positions. Through education, they have acquired the requisite skills and expertise and knowledge which qualify them to be at the helm of affairs in leadership; yet they are being marginalized. In the same vein, Hoyt (2010) noted that people often associate masculine traits such as aggressiveness to effective leadership. Mckinnon (2009) stated that adult male role is defined by such traits as dominance, achievement, autonomy and aggressiveness whereas traits like emotionalism, passivity, timidity and self-abasement defined the female's role. According to Suranga et al. (2017), a lot of research has been done to identify men and women's different leadership characters and qualities in the context of leadership. It was shown that men's leadership is characterized by being aggressive and analytical, task oriented, competitiveness, making assertive decisions, directive and confidence, while women adopt to leadership that is more democratic and less autocratic than men.

Research conducted by Aibangbe (2020) discovered that female administrators are more supportive, approachable, sensitive, understanding, nurturing, organized, creative, and receptive than male principals. These attributes emerged when a female leader did not feel the pressure to act and behave like a male leader. Chukwu et al. (2020) were of the view that women have a better charisma as far as the job of leadership is concern. In line with this, Emenalo and Okeke (2017) noted that every woman from beginning was made a qualified and capable manager for the man and his society. Hence, there are notable women in the society who made significant impacts in managing the affairs of government in different dimensions, such women like Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, late Prof. Dora Akunyili, Prof. Grace Alele-Williams, among others. There are a good number of women in leadership positions working both in government and public offices. Some of them are doctors, principals and pilots. The desire of every nation is to fight gender gap and negative stereotypes till gender equality and equity are achieved. Therefore, these efforts should not be ignored, because this is a pointer to the fact that women are willing and ready to move up. Other critics refuted their idea and came up with the assertion that man have leadership proficiency in them naturally and therefore should be considered a better gender for leadership than woman in the organization. No wonder, Lafreniere and Longman (2008) noted that men continue to possess a majority of high-level leadership positions almost in all sectors of public life including secondary education sectors.

Nwachukwu (2016) disagreed with their conjecture, but opined that everyone is capable of becoming a leader; both men and women can lead provided they are qualified and have acquired a sound leadership and administrative experience in terms of teaching learning

process. This implies that leadership role cannot be attached to a particular gender type, but considered as task any gender can maintain from time to time as situation requires. Despite women's demonstrated leadership abilities, the perception on leadership in the society is still predominately a masculine construct (Chin, 2011; Visser, 2011). Based on this, there is need to encourage women in taking occupation or career without any prejudice. This calls for creating counselling strategies for better management of gender inequality in the society.

Counselling is a process by which counsellor helps client to overcome their problems and live a happy life. In other words, if the individual is well counselled, he will be encouraged to live a healthy life. Researchers have advocated that counselling should be introduced very early in child's education, from pre-primary to university level. Alutu (2019) asserted that without academic counselling in schools, the whole purpose of education would not be achieved. Hence, he suggested the following counselling strategies which counsellors should employ in minimizing the gender gap in leadership administration. According to him, the use of Rationale Emotive therapy (RET) should be employed to help in assisting children who are not giving equal treatment in terms of their gender roles or females who have no confidence in themselves. This will help such individuals to think reasonably, address real issues and avoid all sorts of irrationalities in manners and approaches. He noted that counsellors should guide the girl child early enough both from primary, secondary and tertiary levels on the need to appreciate who they are and be determined to compete with the male child irrespective of their gender. Counsellors should enlighten parents through PTA meeting and town hall meetings on the need to provide equal opportunities to both genders.

Furthermore, he suggests that Transactional Analysis Techniques should be used by the counsellors which aimed at helping individuals no matter the gender to review and evaluate old decisions and make new more appropriate choices. These strategies and more should be employed by the counsellors, according to him, to minimize the gender gap in leadership administration.

It is on this premise that the researchers explored the gender gap in leadership administration among principals in Ohafia Education Zone of Abia state.

Research questions

To guide the study, the following research questions were posed:

1. What are the leadership qualities (characteristics) among the principals in Ohafia Education Zone of Abia State?
2. What are the counselling strategies in minimizing gender gap in leadership administration?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised all the 45 principals in public secondary schools in Ohafia Education zone of Abia State (Abia State Secondary Education Management Board Umuahia). All the 45 principals were purposively sampled in public secondary schools in Ohafia education zone of Abia State because of its manageable size. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled "Exploring the Gender-gap in Leadership Administration among Principals Questionnaire"

(EGLAPQ). The questionnaire has two sections, A and B. Section A was used to elicit information on the bio-data of the respondents, while sections B has two clusters with 12 items. The first cluster was used to elicit information on the leadership qualities among principals in Ohafia education zone of Abia State. The second cluster was used to elicit information on the counselling strategies in minimizing gender-gap in leadership administration. Table 1 has 7 items while table 2 has 6 items which were structured along a four point Likert scale of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD), which weighed 4, 3, 2, and 1 point respectively. Thus, to score any response a mean score of 2.50 or more is considered positive while any mean score below 2.50 is considered negative.

Copies of the questionnaire were given to three experts for validation; one from Measurement and Evaluation and the other two from Guidance and Counselling, all from the Department of Psychological Foundations, Faculty of Education, Abia State University, Uturu. The reliability of the instrument was 0.83 established using Cronbach Alpha. The instrument was administrated by the researchers with the help of two research assistants. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions.

Presentation of results

Research question one: What are the leadership qualities (characteristics) among the principals in Ohafia Education Zone of Abia State?

Table 1: Leadership qualities among principals in Ohafia Education Zone of Abia State

S/N	Leadership qualities	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	St.D
1.	Female administrators' leadership provides emotional support	10	21	12	02	2.87	.815
2.	Female administrators give room for creativity and are approachable in their leadership	11	26	07	01	3.04	.706
3.	Male administrators give room for timidity in leadership	01	08	26	10	2.00	.707
4.	Female administrators give room for nurturing and understanding for one another	04	23	17	01	2.67	.674
5.	Male administrators are more aggressive and analytical in their leadership	03	11	20	11	2.13	.869
6.	Male administrators give room for dominance and assertiveness in decision making	18	12	13	2	3.02	.941
7.	Male administrators give room for group interaction	14	21	10	00	3.09	.733
	Overall mean					2.68	

Table 1 shows the leadership qualities inherent among principals in Ohafia Education zone. Items 1 and 2 show the mean score of 2.87 and 3.04 respectively that female administrators' leadership provides emotional support and also that female administrators give room for creativity and are approachable in their leadership. Items 3 and 4 show mean scores of 2.00 and 2.67 respectively which indicate that male administrators do not give room for timidity in leadership and also that female administrators give room for nurturing and understanding for one another. Items 5, 6 and 7 with mean scores of 2.13, 3.02 and 3.09 reveal that male administrators are not more aggressive and analytical in their leadership, give room for dominance, assertive in decision making and also, they give room for group interaction. From the grand mean score of 2.68, it can be deduced that both genders (male and female) in administrative position possess good leadership qualities.

Research question two: What are the counselling strategies in minimizing gender gap in leadership administration?

Table 2: Counselling Strategies in minimizing gender gap in leadership administration

S/N	Counselling Strategies	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	St.D
1.	Enlightening parents through PTA meeting will help on the need to provide equal opportunities to both genders	13	22	10	00	3.07	.720
2.	The use of RET will help to provide equal opportunities to both gender	18	21	05	01	3.24	.743
3.	Behaviour modification techniques will help to restructure the cognitive and emotional behaviour of both gender	11	12	13	09	2.56	1.078
4.	Transactional analysis techniques will help both genders in reshaping their destinies	11	25	07	02	3.00	.769
5.	Early start of counselling programme on the girl child will help her on the need to appreciate who she is and be able to compete with the male child	14	22	05	04	3.02	.892
6.	The use of public campaign and awareness will help to provide equal opportunities to both genders	20	20	05	00	3.33	.674
	Average					3.03	

Table 2 shows the counselling strategies in minimizing gender gap in leadership administration among administrators in Ohafia Education zone. Items 1 and 2 with mean scores of 3.07 and 3.24 reveal that enlightening parents through PTA meeting will help on the need to provide equal opportunities to both gender and use of RET will help to provide equal opportunities to both genders. Items 3 and 4 with mean scores of 2.56 and 3.00 reveal that behaviour modification techniques will help to restructure the cognitive and emotional behaviour of both genders and that transactional analysis techniques will help both genders in reshaping their destinies. Finally, items 5 and 6 reveal that early start of counselling

programme on the girl child will help her on the need to appreciate who she is and be able to compete with the male child, and that use of public campaign and awareness will help to provide equal opportunities to both genders, with mean scores of 3.02 and 3.33. Hence, considering the grand mean of 3.03 and the criterion bench mark of 2.50. It can be deduced that all the outlined strategies are suitable to tackle gender gap in leadership administration in Ohafia Education zone.

Discussion of the findings

The result of the findings on the leadership qualities (characteristics) among the principals in Ohafia Education Zone of Abia State indicated that both male and female administrators in schools in the area of study possess important leadership qualities. The finding from the study is in disagreement with that of Suranga et al. (2017) whose study identified that men and women usually possess different leadership characters and qualities in the context of leadership. School leadership usually should not be concerned with gender roles since both genders are expected to create a positive learning environment, carry out their instructional leadership roles. The study also is not in agreement with research conducted by Aibangbe (2020) who discovered that female administrators are more supportive, approachable, sensitive, understanding, nurturing, organized, creative, and receptive than male principals; these attributes emerged when a female leader did not feel the pressure to act and behave like a male leader. The finding from the present study is an indication that both male and female administrators are able to possess important leadership qualities to be administrators in schools.

The result of the findings on the counselling strategies in minimizing gender gap in leadership administration indicated that all the mentioned strategies were suitable to minimized gender gap in leadership. This is an indication that several strategies can be used to minimize gender gap that may exist in administration of schools. The finding from the study is in agreement with Jacxk (2015) who found that guidance and counselling is a service designed to help the individual in making a worthwhile decision.

Conclusion

The study concludes that administrative leadership should and is equally carried out by both male and female administrators. It concludes that administrative leadership qualities are possessed by both male and female administrators in secondary schools in Ohafia Education zone. It also concludes that there are several counselling strategies to tackle gender gap in administration. Such counselling strategies include use of RET will help to provide equal opportunities to both genders; behaviour modification techniques will help to restructure the cognitive and emotional behaviour of both genders, among others.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations made in the course of the study:

1. Stakeholders in education should ensure that administrators are provided good working environment to enable them carry out their administrative activities effectively.
2. The government should make sure that schools are provided with counselling theatres and clinics to cater for the counselling needs of school leaders and administrators.

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