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Women Academicians' Career Growth and Leadership Position in Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania

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Abstract:

Increasing gender access and equity to higher education in developing countries is important, but retention of the few women who persist, especially beyond the junior ranks and occupy leadership position is even more criticalin order to achieve this, creation of a more women-friendly professional environment in Tanzanian public universities is inevitable. This study is on Women Academicians' Career Growth and Leadership Position in Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania. It employed qualitative inquiry to address the research objectives. The study interviewed ten women holding different high leadership positions in Tanzania public universities. Secondary data sources such as Gender Policy documents, other policies and guidelines on promotion criteria for Tanzania public universities and government reports on gender issues complemented the study. The data were analysed using content analysis. The findings indicate the main factors that lead women to take up leadership positions are such as to get information, involvement in decision making, to have required academic qualification, interest in leadership and eligibility criteria. It was also found out that Very demanding leadership responsibilities, organizational culture which is not supportive to women and gender policies which are not implemented as required by universities impede women academicians' career growth. It is recommended that the administrators at institutions of higher learning should create a more women-friendly professional growth environment. It is recommended further that women in senior academic positions should take their roles to influence gender policies that will create positive environments for women career and leadership growth. This can be achieved through trainings, workshops, mentoring and short courses.

Keywords: Gender and leadership, leadership in higher education, women career growth, academic leadership, women leadership. constructive role, women political social position

1. Introduction

Career growth is the lifelong process of managing learning, work, leisure, and transitions in order to move toward a personally determined and evolving preferred future. Historically, it has been the woman's responsibility to raise a family and manage households; these are roles which consume time and energy (Leatherwood and Williams, 2008). Increasing gender access and equity to higher education in developing countries is important, but retention of the few women who persist, especially beyond the junior ranks and occupy leadership position is even more critical. For women to attain the leadership position, they often need support from others as they progress on the pathway. Sometimes, families may be able or unable to give the assistance and support needed by woman to pursue her career (Leatherwood and Williams, 2008). Study done by Marks & Houston, (2002) revealed that 83% of female respondents agreed that commitment to family responsibilities impedes women's career progress. Career advancement is one of the areas where women are grossly disadvantaged and have created unfriendly environment. A woman might miss or postpone training opportunity because of problems associated with reproductive roles. This is blamed on her instead of availing her opportunity immediately after the problem is resolved. But she has to queue or look for alternatives (Nawe, 2002). The better way is to decide how women academician can be supported in case of any role interrupting her while on process to career advancement.

Leadership is about creating vision, harnessing, focusing, liberating, empowering and aligning the organization's intellectual capital to achieve its goal (Hopkins and Jackson 2003). It is also ability of individual to influence others and get win of followers through different leadership styles. It is argued that leadership styles of men differ from those of women. Studies indicate that male and female leaders are equally effective although leadership styles between them differ. International Federation of University Women (IFUW 2013) indicated that Women's different leadership styles (participatory, democratic, sensitive, nurturing and delegation) are valuable complement to men's styles. Leadership is essentially influence and women who desire to be high profile leaders must criticize men's leadership: nepotism, ugly politics, over-ambition and going to any length to become leaders. Due to the facts that being in leadership position is very demanding and is like performing multiple roles, it is likely to create difficulties in balancing responsibilities, hence, it can make the women career growth to be slower than expected.

Organizational structures, culture and the whole system have contribution in leadership and women career growth. A study conducted by (Luba, 1997) indicates that the effects of organizational norms, structures, and systems for many of the issues related to gender gap in leadership are a result of systems and not individuals. Globally gender imbalance in leadership position is observed. For instance, in the conference organized by British Council which was named: "Conference for International Higher Education Leaders in Dubai" this was very obvious as presented by Jack (2013). She presents further that the conference witnessed a serious lack of women vice-chancellors across the world. She maintains, for example, there was no female vice-chancellor at any of Hong Kong's eight universities, while there were only two women vice-chancellors at Japan's 86 public universities. Only 14 per cent of the UK's vice-chancellors were women, while the figure stood at 18 per cent for Australia, three per cent for India and seven per cent in Turkey (Jack, 2013).

In Tanzania, Managers of public universities have been struggling to implement gender policies (UDSM, 2006) through different strategies that can help to eliminate gender gaps in every level of the universities. Some of the public universities have tried to initiate gender mainstreaming strategies at all levels of management. These initiatives have helped to increase more women in the universities as well as in academic arena. However, in leadership, still gaps exist. At the Ministry level, the Ministry of Education Science and Technology (MOEST) has had various policies to ensure gender mainstreaming in higher education in Tanzania. These include The Women and Gender Development Policy (WGDP, 2000 Under review). The WGDP was developed to provide guidelines to ensure, together with other areas of operations that the institutions, including universities, observe gender balance in leadership. At the National level, the Tanzania National Constitution (Articles 12 and 13) guarantees equality between men and women and support their full participation in social, economic and political arena (URT, 1977). Unfortunately, these policies and guidelines have not been able to yield much especially in the university leadership. This may be attributed to unsatisfactory implementation strategies employed by actors.

This paper is a result of qualitative study about Women Academicians' Career Growth and Leadership Position in Higher Learning Institutions in Tanzania. The researcher noticed that there was slow growth in one's career especially women who are in leadership positions in public universities. It was also noted clearly that there is positive relationship between one's career growth and acquisition of leadership positions in higher learning institutions. The researcher was interested to find out whether women grow in their career at the same pace as men. If not what are the factors that contribute or hinder them to grow at the same level.

In Africa, and Tanzania in particular, gender imbalance in leadership position is obvious especially in Higher Learning Institutions whereby, there are clearly defined qualification and specific ranks for top positions to be acquired. For instance, to be appointed to the top ranks one must be a professor. Statistics shows that women who are in leadership positions at all levels at the various universities are approximately 25% at University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM) Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere (MJKN) campus, 28% at Mkwawa University College of Education (MUCE), 34.8% at Dar es salaam University College of Education (DUCE) and 25% at the Open University of Tanzania (OUT). Most of these women occupy lower rank positions compared to men because there are few women who are professors as required by the guidelines. Most of top ranks positions (Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Directors and Principals) are male dominated with very few exceptional. In addition, women career growth particularly for those in leadership positions is slow. Given the clear absence of women in academic positions across many African universities, particularly at top ranks and since not much has been done to uncover the situation in public universities in Tanzania there is a sincere need to provide an understanding of factors that influence the upward mobility of women academics in leadership and find out strategies women have to employ to persist in academic contexts and grow career-wise.

This qualitative study examines the women academician experiences on how leadership positions, socio-cultural factors, and organizational culture impact their professional career growth in selected public universities in Tanzania. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

- i. Examine the factors that determine women's decisions to take leadership positions in higher learning institutions;
- ii. Explore factors that affects their career advancement, while in leadership position;
- iii. Investigate strategies they use to overcome various obstacles related to socio-cultural factors, and organizational culture, and;
- iv. Suggest possible interventions to be taken in order to have more women leaders in top positions at the same time grow professionally.

1.1. Theoretical Framework and Study Design

This qualitative study was informed by Barriteau's (2003) work on feminist scholarship in the Caribbean, which provides a theoretical and analytical framework to analyze complexity of gender issues in the society. Feminism is defined by its focus on changes in women's social status, and is, therefore, about power and changing gingered power relations (Mbilinyi, 2003). The experiences from that framework helped to study experiences of female academician in developing countries particularly in Tanzania. Because the study is about leadership and career growth, female leadership style theory and career growth and development were used to complement the theory. As a result, the eclectic kind of theoretical model was used. This eclectic theoretical model helped in explaining how leadership positions, socio-cultural factors, and organizational culture impact the women professional career growth.

2. Methods

This study employed qualitative inquiry to address the research objectives. The study interviewed ten women holding different academic positions in the selected public university. These where purposively selected according to the leadership positions they hold. Secondary data sources such as Gender policy documents, policies and guidelines on promotion criteria, and Government reports on gender issues complemented the study. The study's qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis, which refers to any

qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative materials and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings (Patton, 2002). The process allowed important themes and categories to emerge from the data across sources. The analysis was particularly constructive to identify commonalities and differences across women leaders from institutions included in this study.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Determinant of Women's' Decision to Take up Leadership Positions

The researcher wanted to know whether there were motives behind women aspiration for leadership positions. The interview with women academician in leadership position indicated different views on the question. Two of them indicated to have aspiration and others did not see a need because there are set guidelines. Those who had aspirations mentioned inadequate information, low involvement and representation of women in different decision making organs as factors inspired them as one said;

➤ I don't get information that I need. Sometimes when you are not able to get information you cannot influence decision making and you find yourself lagging behind. It is like the involvement is low. Yes, we normally asked to contribute to some policies and guidelines but if the head is not smart very few people can contribute and you find yourself not involved. Another thing is having few women academicians especially in science. Sometimes very important issue related to women is ignored only because there are no women representation in that very decision. This motivated me to start thinking of how I can be involved to the maximum.

Another respondent indicated that one can only be inspired if one has all required qualifications and experience in leadership. She maintains:

> The aspiration comes when you feel yourself having required academic rank, your experience in leadership; your personal responsibilities allow you to spare time for leadership, interest in leadership and eligibility according to prior set criteria. Then, you think of being involved although is not always true that your aspirations can work due to the set criteria.

Others indicated that they had no any aspiration for leadership. Most of them said that there is no individual will in taking a certain leadership position in the organization as one respondent presented;

> The determinant criteria are the same to both men and women because the system for being given a particular leadership position depends on the recommendations of the search team and the management's final decision. I am not aware of a situation in which a woman has been given a chance to agree or disagree to take up a position instead once one is selected then she takes up the position.

Another respondent added that;

In most cases in higher learning institutions like ours, women do not decide for themselves to take leadership positions, rather, they are either appointed or elected by their institutions to take up positions in their institutions.

This information indicates that always people can be inspired due to the situation they are facing but because leadership positions in higher learning institutions depend on merits and strict prior set guidelines it is difficult to know whether it is someone's aspirations or is just qualification to the eligibility criteria.

3.2. Factors Affecting Women Leaders in Career Growth

The study also aimed at determining the factors that affect women leaders in their career growth. Three important factors were identified that were leadership position, socio-cultural and organizational factors as presented below.

3.2.1. Leadership Positions and Women Career Growth

On understanding how being in leadership position affects the women career growth, the findings from interview revealed that leadership is both an opportunity and a challenge in career growth. They reported that the leadership positions have been the great opportunity for them to be active and understand various issues which they wouldn't have known if they were not in leadership as one said. "...Being in leadership position there is motivation of doing many things in order to fit in that position and deliver as required...", another one said "being in leadership position has given me an opportunity to network with other stakeholders and widen my knowledge and experience". Another one added... "It helps in networking, gives change to effect positive changes in my organization and enables me practice what I have studied."

About seventy five percent of respondents indicated to feel overwhelmed with management that made them fail to accomplish other tasks related to their career growth. IFUW (2013) observed that gender imbalances at home also affect career development. While men typically have free time to socialize after work, to network, meet with mentors and pick up tips, women usually have to pick up the children, deliver the dry cleaning, cook dinner and clean the house. Given reproductive roles that women have in their daily practice it becomes very challenging for them to balance the two. This is explained by the following respondents;

- ➤ Being academician is difficult by itself if you wish to accomplish all the chores at home and at work place. You need to write papers to compete with men who always have enough time to write compared to women. If again you choose to be in leadership position is like you are adding more burden to yourself....So, I don't know how others are managing.
- You need to look for more time to balance the two but sometimes the time is not enough to accomplish both at equal standard. Therefore, sometimes it holds most of us back given the family responsibilities we are supposed to perform. You need to publish so that you can move from one rank to the other which will lead you to promotion and leadership positions. But you also need to take up your social responsibilities sometimes it becomes very difficult especially when you have little babies at home

- The post makes me very busy with management issues and I can hardly get any chance to concentrate in my publication and doing research and consultations.
- > There are too many responsibilities both at work and home, tight schedules that eat up most of the time that one would otherwise use to concentrate in academic issues. Additionally, lack of resources especially finances for smooth running of activities at office makes leadership even more demanding it should be.

This statement indicates the struggle women have to balance little time they have to accomplish family roles and fit in leadership positions. Marcus, (2010) asserts that university policy that encourages women to be successful; workplaces that reward for encouraging and advancing women; education systems that educate women to the highest standards, are needed to help create an environment in which women are prepared and encouraged to rise to leadership. It is high time for the organization to understand and support women in leadership position to be able to remain in leadership without affecting their career growth.

3.2.2. The Impact of Socio-Cultural (Family) on Career Growth

The researcher wanted to find out how cultural factors especially family have affected women academicians in their career growth while in leadership positions. The findings from interview indicated that some respondents felt to be supported at family level due to the family context. One respondent presented; "I do not see directly the social factors especially family affecting my career growth... The other one said; "I feel supported may be because my husband is also an academician, then, I think there is no any obstacle at family level." While some respondents felt to be supported others indicated that the multiple role women perform affects seriously their career growth. Kirai and Kobia (2012)argue that because women's work and family demands are simultaneous, these demands have a significant impact on women's careers. Achieving professional status may be more difficult for women than for men. This is also revealed by following statement from the respondents;

- Socio-cultural factors sometimes make women feel not capable or lose confidence due to challenges they face in their society. Multiple roles of women can lead to poor career growth.
- As usual in our customs a woman is a person to take care of children and ensure that everything is ok at home. Sometimes when we are not part of home responsibilities many questions can be raised even by our own kids. One day my son asked me, "Mammy, every day I eat food cooked by maid, I want you to cook for us I want to eat the food from your cooking". This was like a challenge to me. So, I felt so bad. Although we understand each other but still my responsibilities as a mother still need my attention and this make me feel having no enough time for my career.
- > Yes, it affects a lot given a lot of responsibilities at work place when you are at home you must also fulfill your objectives. So, different from men women have no chance to develop their career while at home. Until they finish house chores they are tired and the day is over.

This implies that naturally the socio-cultural issues will continue affecting the women in their career growth as it is seen as something imbedded in society life. The study conducted in Kenya by Kirai and Kobia(2012) revealed that cultural barriers are among the most difficult to remove, as they are often subtly enforced by both men and women. It is interesting to note that some women according to the findings continue to perceive the priority of a woman to be a family, irrespective of managerial aspiration or position they hold.

3.2.3. Organizational Factors and Career Growth

The results from interview indicated that organizational culture and promotion criteria affected women career growth.

Organizational culture. Culture means the way we leave. The culture of academics is still very much dictated by male hegemony (Oti, 2014). On inquiring on how culture affects women career growth the respondents indicated to observe stereotype where by the women are seen to lack confidence and traditional belief by men on their performance. Eagly and Carli, (2007) argue that when people make judgments on women leaders through the use of gender stereotypes, they can develop a tendency towards resistance to women leaders. This resistance is gender symbolism which suggests that leadership roles are masculine, because they are associated with male characteristics. One respondent said;

> The culture in a certain organization can affect one's career. When a woman holds a certain position, men do not believe that a woman can deliver as required. In contrary, when a leadership position is hold by a male no one question about that. This kind of culture can lead to women losing their confidence and when someone is not co-operating she feels that is just because of the negative perception they have that women are not capable of leading.

Others see the appropriate culture to be one that has elements of mentoring, nurturing and caring and the one which prioritize the professional development of the academicians. This is revealed by the following statements;

- > The good culture is one which has elements of nurturing, caring mentoring and guiding. This one is not observed in most of our organization. What is clear is power struggle and selfishness on even academic matters. In this kind of situation, it becomes very difficult to get someone to show you the way. No good role model to be emulated.
- For me, if the organization does not put professional growth for staff as a priority then it hinders my growth as there is no financial support for the activities I should be doing to advance in my career.

The supportive culture is prerequisite to have proper career growth for women academicians. The culture that fails to put forth the priorities of its staff and creates the supportive environment for women becomes a barrier to their growth. This is because the life of women academicians is also shaped and greatly influenced by culture and their experiences at home.

Others had different responses on the same question as one said;

My organization has a culture of working as a team through faculties and units. This makes it easy for me to have people around me to share my daily career and academic issues as well as render a needed help in reducing workload. Working as a team is very helpful for me as it reduces workload and gets time for other activities.

These findings imply that it is imperative to have supportive work environments especially from colleagues whom we work together with every day. This is also in line with findings by Harris et al., (2007) that significant among the factors influencing women's career are workplace and collegial supports, which have been identified as important factors in job satisfaction. Thus, creation of environment whereby faculties will work together and share is inevitable for women career growth and job satisfaction.

Promotion criteria and career growth. The findings from the interview revealed that the promotion criteria were the same in both men and women with no any consideration for women given the different role they play. One respondent said'

- > The criteria for promotion at the university are equal to both male and female academicians. But the two people have different role to perform especially reproductive role. Although being given different criteria will increase discrimination but in reality, women have more roles than men. So, the management of the university needs to think again about the criteria for promotion
- > The promotion is done accordingly following the academic qualification and policies on staff development and promotion guideline.
- > Yes, they stipulate exactly what one has to do to get promoted whether on leadership position or normal promotion. We get promoted based on our academic performance.
- > The promotion bases on publications one has done and the fact that a person has served for a period of three years on the current rank. Then for managerial posts, most of them are done through search committees. I thus find no problem in that area.

These statements imply that all universities have the well laid down procedures in promoting its academic staff. Unfortunately, it is perceived that being all academicians create a state of being equal in all aspect. But this is not true because in reality men and women perform different roles. Therefore, management of the universities has to rethink how they will set criteria that will consider women academician in their career growth. Nawe (2002) in her study observed that a woman might miss or postpone training opportunity because of problems associated with reproductive roles. This is blamed on her instead of availing her opportunity immediately after the problem is resolved. But she has to queue or look for alternatives. One respondent said; *I had to postpone my intention to go for postdoctoral to take care of my children*. This is not experienced by men and when the women encounter this situation men are moving forward. Thus, women promotion is delayed when compared to their counterpart.

3.3. Overcoming Challenge Related to Socio-Cultural, and Organizational Culture

- Socio-cultural challenges. On the socio-culture challenges especially family, most of the respondents revealed that it can be solved by creating awareness to men so that they can understand the experience women are passing through when struggling to engage at work place and at the same time to deliver at home. One respondent said;
- I think to overcome cultural barriers is a process. As it started it will also be reduced gradually. We need to make men aware of the obstacles faced by women so that they can also play their role to help women to do away with those obstacles. For instance, in engaging men in my college we used "walk a mile strategies with high hills" this activity required men to put on ladies' shoes and walk a certain distance. They observed some difficulties. But this was to tell them the truth about women experience. They have to help women in those shores especially when they are supposed to deliver the same kind of services and materials. We need to help each other but is only by sharing the daily experience with your loved ones is when you can be assisted.

This is like the men engagement is necessary in order to share the experience and see how they can change their mind to be more supportive to women.

- Organizational culture challenges. The findings indicated that lack of mentoring, networking opportunities, lack of transparency in roles and expectations, unavailability of relevant platforms to up skill their expertise are among obstacles they are facing. Women leaders perceived the access to role models and mentors as a barrier to the higher ranks. This is witnessed by the following statement.
- > We are sometimes not progressing because of inadequate mentoring, guidance, networking and nurturing services from those women in leadership positions whereby role modeling is not felt by women at lower management levels.
- The women who have been able to climb higher ladder are not ready to nurture young women not only in leadership but also in academic matters. Sometimes others become barrier even than men. They are not ready to create other great women
- ➤ I think...it is true that number of women in top leadership is an obstacle to career growth we are few...very few and the women who are in need of mentorship are many, I also need to fulfill my leadership responsibility it is not an easy task. I think something is to be done we need more women in leadership positions

These statements indicate the serious lack of role models to be emulated by women academician as individualism and selfishness is rampant among those who have climbed higher ladder in both career growth and in leadership. It is clear that there is positive relationship between career growth and appointment in higher rank. It is imperative for women in leadership positions to see themselves as agents for change and as rallying points for their fellow women instead of rivals. Women need to be prepared to support

each other, particularly their counterparts in leadership positions IFUW, (2013). If women will continue lagging behind in their career growth is not easy to be appointed a leader in higher ranks.

The findings revealed that sincere commitment to responsibilities is one of the strategy women use to overcome the challenges. Similarly, majority showed that procedures used to get leaders are clear and they are there due to their qualification and merits. Lahti, (2013), observes that most important factor that has advanced women careers is their own determination and commitment. As more and more women serve in leadership roles on campuses, female role models will become easier to find as one said;

➤ I am happy because women who are in leadership positions have maintained their commitment to work and whatever they do it is recognize hence slowly they are accepted by the community that they can manage their positions. The management always observes the qualifications and merits of those to be in leadership positions.

This indicates that after reaching higher levels, women are needed to be more than willing to provide guidance and mentorship because they understand how long the pathway to the position they hold can be for other women who aspire to leadership

3.4. Interventions for More Women Leaders in Top Positions

Most of respondent mentioned about creation of conducive environment, proper implementation of policies, awareness rising, reconsider promotion criteria and to have individual initiative as intervention that can help in getting more women at higher ranks.

Create conducive environment for women whereby the women academicians who are in leadership position can have a programmes for mentoring, nurturing and guiding the young leaders and help them to get networks. This will help them to grow. They must also be role models where others can emulate and get success.

Implementation of policies related to gender must be revised and strengthened in order to bring benefits to both sides. Gender mainstreaming should be implemented to all level and especially management level where more awareness is needed. This is because all policies are influenced at management level. Every action should be taken with gender lenses.

Gender awareness creation is inevitable since it is only way we can change peoples' mindset about gender relations. Initiate seminars, trainings, workshops which are intentionally participatory. This will help men to give chance to women to do their responsibilities and at the same time to work hard in their career growth.

Review promotion criteria to provide opportunity to women academicians who are in leadership position and others especially when they have struggled to get the chance themselves. Sometimes policies which are used are rigid not allowing flexibility given the situation. Sometimes when opportunities come to the college the slots for women should be clearly stipulated. They also need to get some training on leadership and how to grow in leadership without affecting their career growth

Take individual initiative to begin seriously mobilizing themselves for positive participation in the structural decision-making processes of the institutions to which they belong. This will be like alarming point that we are ready to be included in managing higher learning organization.

Create awareness to men so that they can participate on women issues. This is together with creating network with men academician and get mentorship from them. This will only be possible if they will be engaged and they understand and accept that women experience more challenges than they do.

4. Conclusion

This study intended to show how leadership position, cultural factors and organizational factor affect the women academicians' career growth while in leadership position in selected public universities in Tanzania. The findings indicated that the factors which make women to take up leadership position are having required academic qualification, experience in leadership, personal responsibilities, interest in leadership and eligibility according to prior set criteria. Other factors mentioned involve lack of information, low involvement in decision making and to represent other women in decision making organs. Moreover, the factors mentioned to affect women in their career growth are includes too demanding leadership responsibilities, organizational culture which is not supportive to women and gender policies which are not implemented as required by universities. There were also obstacles related to lack of mentorship and role modeling together with inadequate resources for research and training.

It is recommended that the administrators at institutions of higher learning should create a more women-friendly professional growth environment. Additionally, women in senior academic positions who have the opportunity to influence gender policies that will create positive environments should take their roles. Since there are very few women in higher ranks, women academicians should be empowered through different series of training, workshops and short courses to make them able to deliver at required level. It will also help them to grow and qualify to take up higher leadership positions.

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