

Organizational Barriers and Coping Strategies Influencing Female Mobility in Management of Secondary Schools in Meru, Machakos and Isiolo Counties, Kenya

Guantai Hellen Kiende

Abstract

The issue of women under-representation in management positions in all sectors including education has aroused scholarly interest globally in recent times. Statistics from the Teachers Service Commission of Kenya (2010) revealed that only 1,178 (24.5%) of the 4,800 public secondary schools in Kenya were headed by female principals. This is way below the minimum of 30% allowed by the Constitution of Kenya (2010). The purpose of this study was to identify and examine the organizational barriers and coping strategies that influenced female mobility to principalship in Meru, Machakos and Isiolo counties. The key objectives of the study were: to identify the organizational barriers faced by secondary school female principals in Meru, Machakos and Isiolo counties, to identify the coping strategies that they employed to overcome the barriers and to establish the mechanisms embraced by female principals to remain successful in their careers. The study also tested the null hypothesis that: there was no significant difference between public and private secondary schools in terms of recruitment practices as an organizational barrier faced by female principals. The study is significant in that it may inform the Ministry of Education and Teachers Service Commission on how to institute gender policies in secondary education management so as to conform to the Bill of Rights as stipulated in the Constitution of Kenya promulgated in 2010. The study employed descriptive survey design which embraced both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The study was carried out in Meru, Machakos and Isiolo counties. The target population for study was, (825) persons comprising (248) female principals, (260) male principals, 263 female deputy principals, 22, DEOs and 22 .Quality Assurance and Standard Officers. A sample size of (417) respondents was used for the study. Stratified random sampling was used to select the schools according to the following strata: girls' public secondary schools, girl's private secondary schools, and public and private mixed secondary schools. Data was collected using questionnaires and interview schedules. Content validity was determined by seeking expert judgment from specialist in educational management. Cronbach technique was used to ascertain reliability of the instruments. Qualitative data was analysed thematically while Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The major finding of this study was that organizational practices, culture, lack of mentoring, tokenism and "old boys" networks that locked out female counterparts were confirmed as the main organizational barriers that secondary school female principals encountered as they ascended to principalship in the three counties. Further the study established that additional training and female principals remaining focused in their work were among the coping strategies that were embraced to overcome the barriers encountered. The study recommends the need to embrace gender mainstreaming within organizations which will counter organizational cultures that are characterized by male dominance and discrimination hence increasing women visibility in top level positions.

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