

Focusing on Change in Educational Leadership: The Need for Female Leaders in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

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Abstract The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria guaranteed social, economic and political rights to all citizens irrespective of sex, age, religion, cultural background among others. But it was observed that women are under-represented in leadership positions in the tertiary education sector of the nation, even though they constitute the majority of the teaching workforce. They seem to possess unique qualities that enhance their leadership potentials, as they bring into leadership communication, intermediary and interpersonal skills that many men do not possess. This paper argues that educational leadership in Nigeria need to be re-focused. It presents research findings using Personality assessment questions, demographic analysis and interview on the personality qualities and motivational factors of leaders in the tertiary institutions in Anambra State of Nigeria. Literature were reviewed on leadership, educational leadership, changes and rational for change in formal organization and female leadership. It concludes that there are no distinctive variance in male and female leadership roles. But that female leaders are more assertive, persuasive, emphatic, flexible and are willing to take risks etc. That application of more sustainable leadership styles would lead to change in educational leadership in Nigeria.

Keywords: *focus, change, leadership, educational leadership, female leaders, tertiary institutions*

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1. Introduction

Leadership should no longer be identified with masculinity. The perception that men unquestionably dominate in the domain of management and administration as well as other social institutions has been challenged. The issue of equality of sexes in the domain of management has been neglected particularly in Nigeria. It has been observed that women are under-represented in leadership positions in the education sector especially in Nigerian tertiary institutions, even though they constitute the majority of the teaching workforce. Besides, additional leadership characteristics that has been observed in women managers is that they tend to be more democratic, and focus more on relationships than men do [16,22,34,39]. Further research has substantiated the fact that women are more transformational in leadership than men [20,29,35,38]. Rosener ([38]:18) also maintained that women's leadership style has been described as interactive leadership, entailing characteristics such as encouraging participation, sharing power and information, enhancing self-worth, altering self-interests, relating power to interpersonal skills, and believing that people perform better when they feel good.

School administration and its association to gender is a significant topic in leadership and has been investigated from several researchers [19,25,26,33,39]. It has also been argued that gender may not be a determinant of the leadership and management style [17,21,23]. On the same note, no significant dissimilarities were found among men and women leaders when it come to their competencies [36,42] and their effectiveness [40].

This paper focuses on change in educational leadership. It pinpoints on the need for female leaders in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

1.1. Purpose of Study

The research focuses on change in educational leadership and emphasizes the need for female leaders in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Specifically, the research addresses the following research aims:

1. Use of motivation and persuasive strategies.
2. Possession and use of interpersonal skills.
3. Inclusive team building leadership style of problem solving and decision making.
4. Tendency to ignore rules and take risks.

1.2. Literature Review

Relevant literatures that are related to the study were reviewed under the following headings:

Leadership:- The definitions of leadership are many and varied as there are different human beings. It is the process of directing the behavior of others towards the accomplishment of some objectives. Cole [1] defined leadership as a function of the relationship between the leader, the follower and the task- situational characteristics. To Onifade [2], it is a position or ability to lead a group of people in an organization for the attainment of an objective. It is the initiation of new structures or procedures for accomplishing an organizational goals or objectives. Some definitions depict leadership as the ability to know oneself, have a well-communicated vision and build trust amongst subordinates [15], while others simply portray leadership as the ability to influence others so as to achieve certain goals [30,31,37,43].

Leadership also according to Kouzes and Posner [3] as cited in Nwankwo and Ibe ([5]:284) is the process of social influence in which one person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task. Continuing, Nwankwo and Ibe [5] maintained that leadership is a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent. That this definition is similar to Northouse's ([4]:3) who viewed leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Leaders carry out this process by applying their leadership knowledge and skills. This is called **process leadership**. But there are traits that can influence leaders actions in an organization. This is also called **trait leadership** [6]. These two leadership types are shown in the chart below:

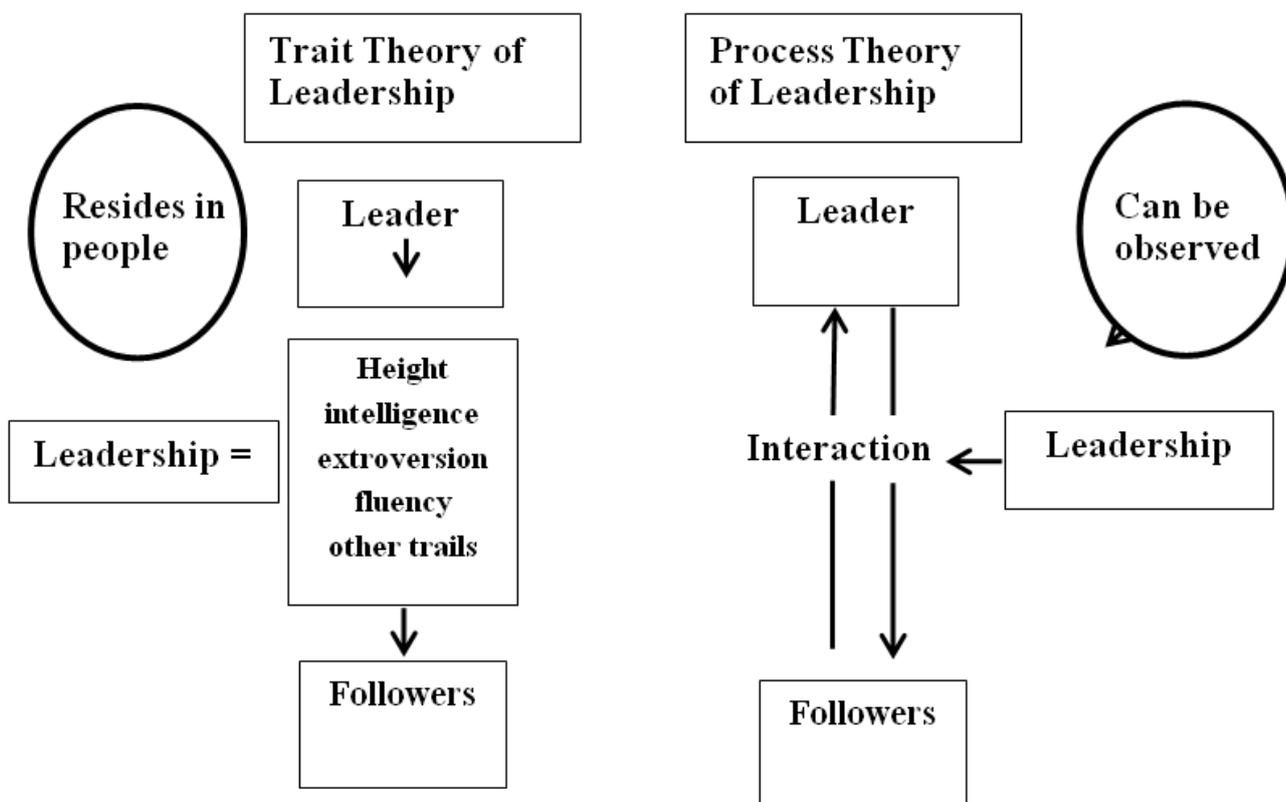


Figure 1. Leadership Chart [4] adopted from Nwankwo & Ibe ([5]:285)

While leadership is learned, the skills and knowledge possessed by the leader can be influenced by his or her attributes or traits such as values, ethics, beliefs and character. Knowledge and skills according to them, contribute directly to the process of leadership, while the other attributes give the leader certain characteristic that make him or her unique. All of the above ideas may be deemed to be relevant to our research, as educational leadership with emphasis on gender issues is examined here.

1.3. Educational Leadership

Although several definitions of leadership have being given, there is need to explore the educational leadership as an essential component and determinant of school effectiveness and improvement [18]. In educational context, various dimensions shape the leadership process.

These include: structural leadership (through rationality, efficiency, structure and policies), human leadership (through facilitation and empowerment), political leadership (through negotiation, networking etc) and educational leadership (through diffusion of educational knowledge [32].

Through numerous studies undertaken with the aim of investigating the traits of successful educational leaders, it was observed that the quality of the leader is a key determinant of staff motivation and the quality of teaching and students performance. According to Knight & Trowler [28], an ideal educational, leader is the one who possesses wisdom. Other important key factors that constitute effective educational leadership include moral vision, charisma, personal and professional values, intellectual stimulation, person-centered interpersonal practices and high performance expectations [7]. Fullan [24] also added that the ability to handle and maintain change is an

additional key enhancing factor for a successful educational leader. Educational leaders are also driven by values such as care and respect, excellence and social justice, and react to three types of contexts: the school community context, the policy context and the personal context [32].

1.4. Change and Rationale for Change in Formal Organization

Change is an inevitable phenomenon to every organization that tends to stand the test of time. It helps an organization to accomplish its mission and vision as well as goals more effectively by replacing some practices with better ones. Adepoju [8] maintained that the pertinent feature of any organization is change. Change is the process through which new programmes or practices and approaches are injected into the operations of a system to replace old or ineffective ones. It is the replacement of old practices with something new. It is a practical 'progression' that deviates from an existing order [9]. They continued that as a result of the increasing complexities in organizations, change has been advocated to be incorporated into every organization.

Change is a requisite for educational improvement. It is a necessary ingredient through which things can be turned around in a formal organizations like the school system that aims at meeting the challenges of a modern and globalized world. Change is allowed to take place in formal organization. Some of the reasons according to Adepoju [10] why organizations are involved in change programme include the need to improve on the standard, need for achievement and desire for creativity. Since change is found to be inevitable, its application is relevant and expedient to improve on standard. Besides, a leader in an organization should allow a positive change to take place as this will make the staff to be more creative by introducing new ideas which may lead to the realization of organization goals and staff individual goals.

1.5. Female Leadership

Leadership and management are considered to be male domain and there seems to be a widespread negative perception of women as leaders owing to their emotional and sensitive indecisive nature [41]. But it has been discovered as an additional leadership characteristic that women tend to be more democratic and focus more on relationships than men do [16,22,34,39]. Women seem to possess unique qualities that enhance their leadership potential. Supporting this, Swam [11] noted that women leaders are more assertive and persuasive, have stronger need to get things done and are more willing to take risks than male leaders. Women leaders were also found to be more emphatic and flexible as well as stronger in interpersonal skills than their male counterparts [12]. These qualities combine to create a leadership style that is inclusive, open, consensus building, collaborative and collegial. It is clear that women are reshaping the landscape of business. They are naturally wired to think, act and innovate like immigrants. They also have the ability to see what others don't, do what other won't and keep pushing their ideas and ideals which prudence says quit. These attributes mean that women are better than men at earning serendipity.

On women leadership, Llopis [13] outlined four skills that give women a sustainable advantage over men as: women are opportunity experts, women are networking professionals, women seek to be relationship specialists and women are natural givers. Furthermore, women leaders are always ready to live with an entrepreneurial spirit and activate their ability to connect the dots of resources and relationships to create and sustain momentum [13]. Women wired to naturally promote the spirit of giving and lead to leave a legacy. Montiel [14] also observed that women through the years have had to face multiple challenges; making them the world's greatest multi-taskers – This is why they succeed in leadership position.

2. Methodology

The methodology used in this study consists of two parts. The first part is made up of secondary research that incorporates a literature review of leadership theories, educational leadership, female leadership as well as rational for change in formal organization. The second part consists of qualitative primary research undertaken to address research questions.

2.1. Research Method

Three research instruments were employed in order to ascertain the need for female leaders in tertiary institutions. The first was a demographic analysis which is a technique used to develop an understanding of the age, sex, marital status and composition of the respondents and how it changes overtime. The second was a personality assessment questionnaire which is used to access personal behavior preferences in relation to how to relate to others, approach to problems and how to deal with feelings and emotions. The third was an in-depth interview which is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with the respondents to explore their views on the specific issues that are central to our study.

The interview was designed around the themes of the purpose of study that were revealed in the literature. These themes can also be considered as the research questions for this study.

1. How do leaders use motivational and persuasive strategies to achieve organizational goals?
2. What key elements and approaches constitute effective interpersonal skills and how do you use them?
3. To what extent do you apply inclusive team building leadership style of problem solving and decision making.
4. When overly bound by regulations and rules, what do you do to achieve optimal results?

In the interview, the respondents were asked sets of questions concerning the above research questions and roles as leaders. All the respondents were provided with opportunities to talk openly and reflect on their experiences as leaders in tertiary institutions.

2.2. Sample of the Study

A sample of sixty (60) female leaders chosen from five (5) government owned tertiary institutions in Anambra

State of Nigeria. Age breakouts of the female leaders included: 30-39 years (24%) 40-49 years (49%) and 50+ years (27%). The majority (69%) of the women are married, 50% lived with domestic partner and 26% were single. On education level, majority are post graduates (Ph.D and M.Ed/M.Sc). For comparison purposes, the female leaders in this study were matched to a representative sample of male leaders drawn from private owned tertiary institution in the state, representing similar job titles.

2.3. Validation of the Instrument

The instruments were subjected to face validation. Purpose of the study, research questions and the initial draft of interview items were submitted to two experts in Educational Management & Policy and Measurement & Evaluation at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and Federal College of Education, Technical, Asaba in Nigeria respectively. The experts made some modifications and useful corrections which were reflected in the final draft of the questionnaire items.

2.4. Reliability of the Instruments

The reliability of the instruments was tested using the responses of 10 leaders in tertiary institutions in Enugu State of Nigeria in order to determine the internal consistency of the instruments used for the study. Data collected were analyzed using Cronbach Co-efficient Alpha. Reliability Co-efficient value of 0.81 was obtained and considered high enough and suitable for use in the study.

3. Findings

Finding 1: Female Leaders are more Persuasive than their Male Counterparts

The female leaders scored significantly higher than male leaders in ego-drive (persuasive motivation), assertiveness, and willingness to risk, empathy, urgency, flexibility and sociability. The strong people skills possessed by female leaders enable them to read situations accurately and take information from all sides. This willingness to see all sides of a situation enhances their persuasive ability. They can zero in on someone's objections or concerns, weigh them effectively and incorporate them into the grander scheme of things when appropriate. These female leaders are able to bring others around to their point of view or alter their own point of view depending upon the circumstances and information they uncover. They can do this because they genuinely understand and care about where others are coming from. This allows them to come at a subject from their audiences' perspective, so that the people they are leading feel more understood, supported and valued.

The male leaders studied, on the other hand have a tendency to start from their own point of view. But because they are not as flexible or willing to interact with others, they tend to force their perspective and convince through the strength of their position rather than actually persuading. The male leaders therefore, run the risk of not necessarily convincing people to agree with them so much as pushing for their point of view.

Finding 2: Female Leaders use Interpersonal Skills Effectively With females, it's all about confidence and helping them believe that they can do whatever they want to do. And they don't have to change themselves in order to be successful. The female leaders were in the mid-range on ego-strength (resilience), which was lower, though not significantly than male leaders. But they possess stronger interpersonal skills (empathy, flexibility and sociability) and are more assertive than their male counterparts. This combination of traits enables the females in this study to express a unique approach towards dealing with disappointment, rejection or situations that don't work out their way. They will feel the sting of being set back. They may even dwell on it, and tend to be a little self-critical. But then they will muster their assertiveness, shake off any negative feelings, learn what they need to carry on and a voice in the back of their heads will say, 'I'll show you'.

Finding 3: Female Leaders have an Inclusive Team Building Leadership Style of Problem Solving and Decision Making.

It was observed that females do have a more inclusive way of leading. While the male leaders demonstrate fine levels of empathy, flexibility, sociability and urgency (a need to get things done immediately), the female leaders scored significantly higher in these areas. Leaders of both genders shared well above average levels of abstract reasoning and idea orientation. Interestingly, the female leaders were lower than their male gender counter parts in thoroughness

The female leaders studied were more interested in hearing all points of view, than making the best possible decision. The final decision did not necessarily have to be their initial point of view. They were able to read situations accurately and take in information from all sides then make the most informed decision possible.

The difference in leadership styles between men and women starts with listening. Not just listening to form your answer, but really listening, learning, reflecting, then implementing a plan that incorporates the best of every ones ideas. The inclusive style of leadership is based on open lines of communication because 'to learn, one needs to keep asking'. 'It's all about asking questions'. Because female leaders are more willing to share information, they will also take decisions through with many more people than their male counter parts. This inclusive style of leadership, incorporating facts and perspectives from as many sources as possible, positions female leaders ideally for the future, as the information age continues to evolve.

Finding 4: Female Leaders are More Likely to Ignore Rules and Take Risks.

Female leaders scored significantly lower than male leaders in external structure (adhering to established procedures) and cautiousness. They were also significantly higher in their levels of urgency and risk taking. And they have very high scores in abstract reasoning. The female leaders are more likely to push back when they are overly bound by regulations and rules, engage in more risk and come up with innovative solutions. They tend to have greater need to get things done than male leaders and are less likely to hesitate or focus on the small details. Female leaders are venturesome, less interested in what has been than in what can be. They will run the risk of occasionally being wrong in order to

get things done. And with their fine abstract reasoning skills, they will learn from any mistakes and carry on.

4. Conclusion

This study provides evidences that female leaders bring distinct personality and motivational strength to leadership. They have an open, consensus building and collegial approach to leading. They also share a strong profile and are assertive, persuasive, empathic willing to take risks, outgoing, flexible and have a need to get things done. These personality qualities combined to create a leadership profile that is much more conducive to today's diverse workplace, where information is shared freely, collaboration is vital and teamwork distinguishes the best leadership. The leadership skills that come naturally to female are now absolutely necessary for the education system (tertiary level in particular) to thrive. It is certainly the reverse of how it was (male leadership)

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