

## **Original Research Article**

### ***CAN GENDER AFFECT PRINCIPALSHIP? LESSONS FROM RESEARCH IN THE NORTH WEST REGION OF CAMEROON***

#### **ABSTRACT**

Over the years, despite the fact that women constitute two-third of the teaching corps in Cameroon, there has existed gender bias in the appointment of secondary school principals. Today, there is awareness amongst politicians, women scholars and pressure groups alike, that the trend of anomie has to be reversed. The objective of this paper was to determine if gender affects appointment into principalship; to examine if a significant difference exists in the management of personnel based on leaders' gender; to ascertain the performance of schools based on gender of the leader; and to see if significant differences exist in supervision of instructions between male and female principals. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. A sample of 252 respondents from twelve secondary schools in Bamenda Metropolis was chosen using the stratified, purposive and convenient sampling techniques. The chi-square( $\chi^2$ ) goodness-of-fit test was used to verify the four (04) hypotheses at a 0.05 alpha level. Findings revealed that gender affected the appointment of principals; male principals manage personnel better than female principals; schools managed by male principals performed better in official examinations than schools managed by female principals and male principals performed better in supervision of instruction activities.

**Key Words:** Gender, administration, principalship, leadership, research, Cameroon.

## 1. Problem And Setting

In 1988, precisely in Beijing, women **delegated** all over the world met to discuss their rights on gender particularly on gender equality and to define their leadership roles. The concept of leadership has been a perennial topic of concern and investigation in many fields. The leadership of the principal is a key factor in the success of any program in the school(Lipham&Hoeh, 1974)<sup>[9][11]</sup>. Knowledge about leadership therefore, is a prime factor if an individual is to fulfill effectively the principalship role. Principalship is simply the head of a post-primary institution. It can be a secondary school or college.

According to Lipham and Hoeh (1974)<sup>[9]</sup>, at least two productive alternative stances may be taken to perform effectively in the principalship. The first and most current **view we have is** termed ‘the foundation of principalship’. It draws heavily on recent theories, constructs and models from the basic applied social, behavioural and administrative sciences to describe and deliberate the antecedents, correlates or predictors of the behaviour of the principal and those with whom he works. The second and most typical views termed the ‘functions of the principalship’ which focuses on the tasks, jobs and activities that occupy the bulk of the principals time and analysis them according to the major competencies that must be demonstrated by an effective school principal.

The task of the principal can be grouped into five categories, instructional program, staff personnel, student personnel, financial and physical resources, and school community relationships (Lipham and Hoeh, 1974<sup>[9]</sup>; Ndu et al, 1997<sup>[14]</sup>; Ogunu, 2001<sup>[17]</sup>; Mgbodile, 2004<sup>[12]</sup>; Nwankwo, 1982<sup>[16]</sup>; Tamajong&Fonkeng, 2003<sup>[21]</sup> and Olagboye, 2004<sup>[19]</sup>).Ogunu (2001)<sup>[17]</sup> summarizes the definition of leadership as a dynamic process in a group

50 whereby one individual influences the other to contribute voluntarily to the  
51 achievement of group tasks in a given situation.

52 Having seen **that** to be an effective leader depends on a mastery of the  
53 theories and functions of the leader, it becomes worthwhile to assess the role of  
54 gender in this practice **(if there is any)**. The trait or “Great Man” theory of  
55 leadership has failed to gain universal acceptance because of its failure to  
56 consider the foundational and functional roles of school administrators. The  
57 main focus of an educational administrator is **to take** leadership in ensuring that  
58 each student develops the qualities needed in order to preserve and strengthen  
59 his way of living (Kartz, 1960)<sup>[8]</sup>.

60 In Cameroon, the Handbook for Heads of Secondary Schools (1995)<sup>[13]</sup>  
61 stipulated certain guidelines on the role of principals of which included  
62 management, leadership, spirit of dialogue, creation of links, team spirit, good  
63 relationships, educational planning and decision making. Okorie  
64 (1998)<sup>[18]</sup> summarizes the functions of principals into being a visionary, being  
65 able to promote and protect values, being able to empower teachers, providing  
66 instructional leadership and managing school climate. Similar **recaps were made**  
67 by Tamajong&Fonkeng(2003)<sup>[21]</sup> and Mbua (2003)<sup>[11]</sup>.

68 Unfortunately, gender gap remains an impediment to potential  
69 institutional improvements (Chliwnaik, 1997)<sup>[3]</sup>. Even though effective  
70 leadership is more behaviorally derived than gender based, gender remains an  
71 obstacle to women seeking and obtaining leadership positions (Getskow, 1996)  
72 <sup>[26]</sup>. Schmuck (1986)<sup>[20]</sup> identified three sets of concepts that have been used to  
73 understand women’s representation in senior posts such as principals: the  
74 socialization of women; organizational constraints on women promotion and  
75 theories relating to gender-based careers, especially in developing countries.

76 Women in leadership confront barriers that men do not realize to exist.  
 77 Some myths suggest that women cannot discipline older students, particularly  
 78 males; females are too emotional; **physically too weak**; and males resist  
 79 working with females (Whitaker & Lane, 1990)<sup>[22]</sup>. The scarcity of women in the  
 80 role of secondary school principals is a **worldwide phenomenon**. While women  
 81 make up **atleast** two-third of secondary school teachers, they are in the minority  
 82 in secondary school administration.

83 Nchindo (1997)<sup>[28]</sup> **notes that** there is a gender bias in the appointment of  
 84 heads schools. A survey of female principals in Cameroonian secondary schools  
 85 shows that only one-fifth of the women are appointed principals. It seems the  
 86 age long stereotypes **sex** role identity still remains in full as far as appointments  
 87 are concerned. There is empirical evidence to **atleast** the fact that very few  
 88 females are appointed principals in Cameroon and world over (Njila, 2006)<sup>[15]</sup>.  
 89 This **sluggish** growth rate in the number of female secondary school principals  
 90 and the concern expressed by gender equality activist, particularly by women,  
 91 about the nonchalant attitude towards the appointment of female principals  
 92 necessitated an investigation.

93 It is based upon this backdrop that this study has a problem to answer the  
 94 question of whether or not there is gender bias in the appointment of principals  
 95 in Cameroon.

## 96 **2. Objectives of the study**

97 The research intended to:

- 98 1. Determine if appointment of principals is affected by gender.
- 99 2. Examine the difference in management of personnel between male and  
 100 female principals.
- 101 3. Ascertain the performances in official examinations of schools managed  
 102 by male and female principals.

4. Examine the difference in supervision of instruction between male and female principals

### 3. Hypotheses

The following hypotheses stated at a 0.05 level of significance guided the study:

**Ho<sub>1</sub>:** Appointments into the post of secondary school principal is not significantly dependent on gender.

**Ho<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant difference in management of personnel between male and female principals

**Ho<sub>3</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between gender of secondary school Principal and students' performance in official examinations

**Ho<sub>4</sub>:** There is no significant difference in supervision of instruction between male and female principals.

### 4. Research Model

The study is tailored around the management by objectives (MBO) model and Feminist Theory.

#### 4.1. Management by Objectives (MBO)

MBO, also known as **management by results (MBR)**, is a planning technique of achieving results through a process by which superiors and their subordinates participate jointly in setting objectives; in determining the activities that should be performed in order to realize the objectives; in setting the target dates for the realization of the set objectives; and in establishing the procedure for the evaluation of the performance of the worker with respect to the set objectives. The philosophy behind MBO is that the ability of an organization to achieve its goals is influenced by the degree to which the workers within the organization

are motivated. An educational institution, like any other institution is out to achieve some objectives which are dove-tail into the national objectives. Management by objectives (MBO) is a process of defining objectives within the school milieu so that management (Principals) and employees (teachers) agree to the objectives and understand what they need to do in the school in order to achieve the objectives (Tamajong&Fonkeng, 2009)<sup>[21]</sup>.

#### 4.2. Feminist Theory

There are several views and theories of feminism. Our study is anchored on Legal theory, Communication theory and Feminist Theory of Design.

*Feminist Legal Theory:* Feminist legal theory is based on the feminist view that law's treatment of women in relation to men has not been equal or fair. The goals of feminist legal theory, as defined by leading theorist Claire Dalton, consist of understanding and exploring the female experience, figuring out if law and institutions oppose females, and figuring out what changes can be committed to (Felman, S. 1993)<sup>[5]</sup>. This is to be accomplished through studying the connections between educational policies (as well as appointment policies) and gender.

*Communication Theory:* This view of communication promoted a “deficiency model” asserting that characteristics of speech associated with women were negative and that men “set the standard for competent interpersonal communication”. Feminist communication theorists are concerned with methods used by those in power to prohibit women from achieving a voice in political discourse and consequently being driven from the public sphere (Griffin, 2009)<sup>[7]</sup>. The theory also encompasses access to the public sphere, whose voices are heard in that sphere, and the ways in which the field of communication studies has limited what is regarded as essential to public discourse. This was instigated by women such as Christine de Pizan in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and Mary Wollstonecraft

in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The theory was historically dominated by the middle-class white women from Western Europe and Northern America, which aimed at understanding differences and gender inequality and fixates on gender, politics and sexuality. The theory focuses on providing women rights. They are liberal feminists and radical feminists all advocating workplace rights including equal pay and equal opportunities for careers. They have opposed domestic violence, sexual harassment and sexual assault (Griffin, 2009)<sup>[7]</sup>. They maintain that women are oppressed in organizations including the school set up. Thus, women should be given equal opportunities to hold the positions of principalship as male counterparts.

*Feminist Theory of Design:* According to this feminist theory, Men and women will construct different types of structures about the self, and, consequently, their thought processes may diverge in content and form. This division depends on the self-concept, which is an "important regulator of thoughts, feelings and actions" that "governs one's perception of reality. This implies that female principals have some ingenuity in them which may enable them inject new ideas into the educational system.

## 5. Methodology

The study was carried out in Bamenda metropolis of the North West Region with the highest number of secondary schools in the Region. It adopted the descriptive survey design. The instrument used for data collection was a 39-items questionnaire. The population consisted of all secondary school principals and teachers found within the Bamenda Metropolis distributed among government, mission and lay private schools. The purposive sampling technique was used to select twelve (12) secondary schools stratified into seven (07) public, three (03) Mission and two (02) private schools. All the twelve (12) principals were chosen for the study. Equally, 20 teachers were selected

conveniently from each of the secondary schools. This gave a total sample size of 252 respondents. This instrument was validated by an expert in measurement and evaluation. A test-re-test on a sample of 20 respondents gave a correlation value of 0.99 indicating that the questionnaire was reliable. The Chi-Square ( $\chi^2$ ) goodness of fit test was used to verify the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance (alpha level). SPSS version 20.0 was used in computing the data.

**Decision rule:** When the  $\chi^2$  calculated is greater than the  $\chi^2$  critical value, we retain the alternative hypothesis ( $H_a$ ) and reject the null ( $H_o$ ).

## 6. Findings

**Hypothesis One ( $H_{o1}$ ):** Appointments into the post of secondary school principal is not significantly dependent on gender.

**Table 1: 6 x 4 Contingency Table of Gender influence on appointment of secondary school principals**

| Categories   | Observed frequency (O) | Expected frequency (E) | $O - E$  | $(O - E)^2$   | $\frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$ |
|--------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------|---------------|-----------------------|
| SA           | 87.1                   | 63                     | 24.1     | 580.8         | 9.2                   |
| A            | 26.9                   | 63                     | -13.6    | 1303.2        | 20.7                  |
| D            | 49.8                   | 63                     | -13.2    | 174.2         | 2.8                   |
| SD           | 88.2                   | 63                     | 25.2     | 635.0         | 10.1                  |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>252</b>             | <b>252</b>             | <b>0</b> | <b>2693.2</b> | <b>42.8</b>           |

Degree of freedom (df) = 3

$\chi^2$  calculated = 42.8

Level of significance = 0.05 =

Critical  $\chi^2$  value = 7.82

Contingency coefficient (C.C) = 0.6

**Decision:** We retain the alternative ( $H_{a1}$ ) hypothesis and reject the null ( $H_{o1}$ ), meaning that the appointment into the posts of principalship significantly depends on gender. The contingency coefficient of 0.6 indicates a strong

positive relationship. That is, the appointment is greatly dependent on gender (by about 100%).

**Hypothesis Two (Ho<sub>2</sub>):** There is no significant difference in management of personnel between male and female principals

**Table 2: 6 x 4 Contingency Table of Gender effects on secondary school personnel management**

| Categories   | Observed frequency (O) | Expected frequency (E) | $O - E$  | $(O - E)^2$   | $\frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$ |
|--------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------|---------------|-----------------------|
| SA           | 91.7                   | 63                     | 28.7     | 823.7         | 13.1                  |
| A            | 35.1                   | 63                     | -27.9    | 778.4         | 12.4                  |
| D            | 44.1                   | 63                     | -18.9    | 357.2         | 5.7                   |
| SD           | 81.1                   | 63                     | 18.1     | 327.6         | 52                    |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>252</b>             | <b>252</b>             | <b>0</b> | <b>2286.9</b> | <b>36.4</b>           |

Degree of freedom (df) = 3  $X^2$  calculated = 36.4

Level of significance = 0.05 = Critical  $x^2$  value = 7.82

Contingency coefficient (C.C) = 0.4

**Decision:** According to the decision rule, we retain the alternative (Ha<sub>2</sub>) hypothesis and reject the null (Ho<sub>2</sub>) since the calculated  $X^2$  is far above the Critical  $x^2$  value (7.82), meaning that a significant difference exists in the personnel management styles of male and female principals. Again, a contingency coefficient of 0.6 indicates a strong positive relationship. That is, management of personnel is greatly dependent on gender (by about 100%). We conclude that the significant difference existing between gender and school personnel management is very high.

**Hypothesis Three (Ho<sub>3</sub>):** There is no significant relationship between gender of secondary school Principals and students' performance in official examinations.

**Table 3: 6 x 4 Contingency Table of Gender effects on performance in official examinations**

| Categories   | Observed frequency (O) | Expected frequency (E) | $O - E$  | $(O - E)^2$   | $\frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$ |
|--------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------|---------------|-----------------------|
| SA           | 92.8                   | 63                     | 29.8     | 888.1         | 14.1                  |
| A            | 70.9                   | 63                     | -7.9     | 62.4          | 0.9                   |
| D            | 49.5                   | 63                     | -13.5    | 182.3         | 2.9                   |
| SD           | 38.8                   | 63                     | -24.2    | 585.6         | 9.3                   |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>252</b>             | <b>252</b>             | <b>0</b> | <b>1718.4</b> | <b>27.3</b>           |

Degree of freedom (df) = 3  $X^2$  calculated = 27.3

Level of significance = 0.05 = Critical  $x^2$  value = 7.82

Contingency coefficient (C.C) = 0.1

**Decision:** We retain the alternative ( $H_{a3}$ ) hypothesis and reject the null ( $H_{o3}$ ) since the calculated  $X^2$  (27.3) is far above the Critical  $x^2$  value (7.82). Thus, there is a significant relationship between gender of principal and students performance in official examinations. The C.C value of 0.1 is low indicating a weak positive relationship between the gender of principal and students' academic performance.

**Hypothesis Four ( $H_{o4}$ ):** There is no significant difference in supervision of instruction between male and female principals.

**Table 4: 6 x 4 Contingency Table of Gender effects on supervision of instruction.**

| Categories   | Observed frequency (O) | Expected frequency (E) | $O - E$  | $(O - E)^2$   | $\frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$ |
|--------------|------------------------|------------------------|----------|---------------|-----------------------|
| SA           | 65.3                   | 63                     | 2.3      | 5.3           | 0.1                   |
| A            | 37.3                   | 63                     | -25.7    | 660.5         | 10.5                  |
| D            | 59                     | 63                     | -4       | 16            | 0.3                   |
| SD           | 90.4                   | 63                     | 27.4     | 750.8         | 11.9                  |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>252</b>             | <b>252</b>             | <b>0</b> | <b>1432.6</b> | <b>22.8</b>           |

Degree of freedom (df) = 3

$X^2$  calculated = 22.8

Level of significance = 0.05 =

Critical  $x^2$  value = 7.82

Contingency coefficient (C.C) = 0.3

**Decision:** We retain the alternative ( $H_{a4}$ ) hypothesis and reject the null ( $H_{o4}$ ) since the calculated  $X^2$  (22.8) is far above the Critical  $x^2$  value (7.82). Thus, there is a significant relationship between gender of principal and supervision of instruction. The C.C value of 0.3 is low, indicating a weak positive relationship between the gender of principal and supervision of instruction. Thus, students managed by male principals perform better in official exams than those managed by female principals.

## 7. Discussion

Findings based on hypothesis one revealed that appointment into the post of secondary school principal is significantly dependent on gender. The million dollar question is 'why is there this disparity when women have the same skills, experience, competence and qualification as their male counterparts'? Aspects like women instability, non-authoritative voice, opposition, lack of self-esteem and domestic responsibilities were identified. These findings are in congruent with the legal feminist theory which reveals that law's treatment of women in relation to men has not been equal or fair. Aiseberg and Harrington (1988) had earlier noted that women lack confidence in their management skills.

Secondly, findings based on hypothesis two ( $H_{o2}$ ) revealed that gender seriously affected personnel management strategies. Male principals were found to manage personnel better than their female counterparts. This again, ties with the Feminist communication theory which stipulates that men and women will construct different types of structures about the self, and, consequently, their thought processes may diverge in content and form. It is equally in congruent

with the findings of Schmuck (1986)<sup>[20]</sup> and; Cornner (1992)<sup>[4]</sup>. However, Mbua (2003)<sup>[1]</sup> did not show any effect of gender on personnel management of schools so far as each understood the functional values and theories beneath.

Hypothesis three (Ho<sub>3</sub>) wanted to know whether gender of principals affected students' performance in official examinations. Findings revealed that schools managed by male principals performed better than those managed by female counterparts. This is in line with Marshall (2009)<sup>[28]</sup> who had earlier stressed the fact that women are always occupied with domestic affairs. Mbua (2003)<sup>[11]</sup> had noted that selection, orientation, placement and counseling of students constitute an important function of school principals not depending on gender.

Finally, findings from hypothesis four (Ho<sub>4</sub>) revealed that male principals supervised instruction better than female principals. Supervision of instruction is very important for teacher effectiveness (Glickman, 1985)<sup>[6]</sup>. Again, this is in line with the Feminist communication theory which says that men and women will construct different types of structures about the self, and, consequently, their thought processes may diverge in content and form. Thus, effective supervision, according to (Olagboye, 2004)<sup>[19]</sup> necessitates good working relationship between supervisor and supervisee

## 8. Conclusion and Recommendations

Having probed into the meaning of leadership, school administration and principalship, one can see that they all mean the same thing. However, it has been noticed that women, despite their very high population amongst teachers are always left behind in principalship appointment, which depends on a very large extent, of foundational social science, administrative theories and functional values. In conclusion, even though empirical findings revealed that male principals perform better than female principals in personnel management,

supervision of instruction and that students managed by male principals may perform better in official examinations. These perceptions of teachers may be stereotype. It is important to note that one most important function of educational leaders or administrators or principals is that of financial management where women have been found to be reliable, trustworthy and excellent.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the following recommendations are made:

1. The government and other educational stakeholders should appoint principals based on qualification, hard work, experience, capability and moral rectitude. Again, gender equality should be ensured and women above child bearing age should be given this responsibility.
2. In-service training should be given to female teachers to ensure gender balance in administration. Equally, tertiary education should be opened to all sexes to ensure representation especially at post graduate levels. Professional school counseling should also be intensified to encourage female teachers to take positions of leadership.
3. The self-defeatist attitude of women should be discouraged in staff meetings. Equally, female principals should work in collegiality with their male counterparts and be ready to adopt participatory decision-making approaches. This would develop potentials and build team spirit.
4. Teachers should be advised to give equal support and cooperation to their principals irrespective of gender, feminist ideology and stereotype attitudes.

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