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Influence of Organisational Work Environment on Women's Leadership Progression in Mixed Senior Schools in Mt. Elgon Sub-County, Kenya

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Abstract

This study examined the influence of the organisational work environment on women's leadership progression in mixed senior schools in Mt. Elgon Sub-County, Kenya. The underrepresentation of women in educational leadership remains a major challenge in achieving gender equity in secondary schools in Kenya. The study was anchored on the Role Congruity Theory and complemented by Social Cognitive Theory. A descriptive survey research design was adopted using a census sampling technique involving all 71 respondents, comprising 57 female teachers, 13 school principals, and one official from the Teachers Service Commission. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires and interview schedules. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 29 through descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis, while qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings revealed that the organisational work environment had a statistically significant influence on women's leadership progression ($\beta = 0.342$, $p = 0.002$). Key challenges identified included gender bias, inadequate institutional support, limited professional recognition, and lack of mentorship opportunities. These factors negatively affected women's leadership aspirations and career advancement. Conversely, inclusive and supportive school environments enhanced women's opportunities for leadership progression. The study concludes that the organisational work environment is a critical determinant of women's advancement into leadership positions in mixed senior schools. The study recommends that the Ministry of Education, the Teachers Service Commission, and school administrators strengthen gender-responsive policies, mentorship programs, and equitable promotion practices to enhance women's representation in educational leadership.

Key words: Educational leadership, gender equity, leadership progression, organisational work environment, women's leadership.



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INTRODUCTION

Globally, women continue to face significant barriers in accessing leadership positions despite notable progress in educational attainment and workforce participation. In educational institutions, leadership remains disproportionately dominated by men, particularly in senior administrative positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Although women constitute a considerable percentage of the teaching workforce, their representation in school leadership remains relatively low. This imbalance raises concerns regarding gender equity, inclusivity, and effective utilisation of human resources within educational institutions.

In Kenya, efforts to promote gender equality in leadership are supported by constitutional provisions, affirmative action policies, and international commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5 on gender equality (United Nations, 2015). Despite these initiatives, women teachers in mixed senior schools continue to experience institutional and socio-cultural barriers that limit their advancement into leadership positions. Challenges such as workplace discrimination, limited mentorship opportunities, patriarchal organisational cultures, work-family conflict, and lack of professional recognition persist in many educational institutions (Onsongo, 2005).

The organisational work environment plays a significant role in shaping career progression and leadership opportunities. A supportive work environment characterised by fairness, mentorship, collaboration, recognition, and professional development opportunities can enhance women's leadership aspirations and advancement (Bandura, 1986). Conversely, hostile or gender-biased work environments discourage women from pursuing leadership positions and negatively affect their confidence and career growth.

In Mt. Elgon Sub-County, concerns have been raised regarding the low representation of women in leadership positions in mixed senior schools despite the presence of qualified female teachers. Women teachers in the region possess the academic qualifications and professional competencies necessary for school leadership; however, their representation in leadership positions in mixed senior schools remains disproportionately low compared to their male counterparts (Lumadede, 2019). Few women occupy administrative positions such as principals, deputy principals, heads of departments, and

senior teachers. Existing studies have largely focused on cultural and societal barriers while giving limited attention to the influence of organisational work environments on women's leadership progression. Consequently, there is insufficient empirical evidence on how workplace conditions, institutional support, professional relationships, and organisational culture influence women's advancement into educational leadership positions in mixed senior schools in Mt. Elgon Sub-County.

This study therefore sought to fill this knowledge gap by assessing the influence of the organisational work environment on women's leadership progression in mixed senior schools in Mt. Elgon Sub-County, Kenya. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following question: What is the influence of the organisational work environment on the ascendancy of women to leadership positions in mixed senior schools in Mt. Elgon Sub-County, Kenya?

Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored on the Role Congruity Theory developed by Eagly and Karau (2002). The theory explains that prejudice arises when there is incongruity between societal expectations of women and leadership roles traditionally associated with men. According to Eagly and Karau (2002), women aspiring to leadership often encounter resistance because leadership traits are socially perceived as masculine.

The study was further complemented by Social Cognitive Theory proposed by Bandura (1986). The theory emphasises the role of environmental influences, observational learning, and self-efficacy in shaping behaviour and career aspirations. Supportive organisational environments can enhance women's confidence and motivation to pursue leadership positions (Bandura, 1986).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies conducted globally indicate that workplace environments significantly influence women's career advancement. According to Eagly and Carli (2007), women often encounter invisible organisational barriers commonly referred to as the "glass ceiling," which limits their upward mobility into leadership positions.

In Africa, educational institutions continue to exhibit gender disparities in leadership due to institutionalised

patriarchal practices and limited support systems for women leaders. Onsongo (2005) observed that women educators in Kenya experience challenges such as exclusion from decision-making processes, inadequate mentorship, and gender stereotyping.

Research by Lumadede (2019) found that organisational culture and workplace support significantly influence women's participation in educational leadership in Kenyan secondary schools. Similarly, Ndiso et al. (2025) established that mentorship opportunities and supportive administrative practices positively influence women's career advancement in education.

Further, Morley (2013) argues that organisational structures and institutional cultures often reproduce gender inequalities that disadvantage women leaders. In educational settings, gendered expectations continue to shape leadership selection and promotion processes, thereby limiting women's progression into senior administrative positions.

Despite existing studies, limited research has focused specifically on mixed senior schools in Mt. Elgon Sub-County, thereby necessitating this study.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive survey research design, considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect data from respondents regarding perceptions, attitudes, and experiences related to organisational work environments and women's leadership progression (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The target population consisted of 71 respondents, comprising 57 female teachers, 13 school principals, and one official from the Teachers Service Commission in Mt. Elgon Sub-County. Given that this population was manageable, a census sampling technique was adopted, allowing all respondents to participate in the study.

Data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to teachers and interview schedules administered to principals and the TSC official. The instruments captured information on workplace experiences, leadership opportunities, mentorship, institutional support, and gender-related challenges. To ensure content validity, the instruments were subjected to expert review, while reliability was established through pilot testing using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, with a

coefficient above 0.70 considered acceptable (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2012).

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 29 to generate frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and multiple regression results, while qualitative data obtained from interviews were analysed thematically and presented narratively.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study established that the organisational work environment significantly influenced women's leadership progression in mixed senior schools ($\beta = 0.342$, $p = 0.002$). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

The findings revealed that many women teachers experienced gender discrimination in promotion processes and leadership appointments. Respondents indicated that leadership roles were often perceived as masculine, discouraging women from aspiring to administrative positions. Female teachers also reported inadequate mentorship and limited opportunities for professional growth. These findings are consistent with the observations of Eagly and Karau (2002), who argued that societal expectations and stereotypes negatively affect women's leadership advancement.

Additionally, respondents identified lack of institutional support, negative organisational culture, work overload, and insufficient recognition of women's contributions as barriers to leadership advancement. Some participants noted that women leaders faced resistance from colleagues and communities due to cultural perceptions regarding gender roles. Similar findings were reported by Onsongo (2005), who found that women educators in Kenya often experience exclusion and institutional discrimination.

However, schools that embraced collaborative leadership, professional development programs, mentorship initiatives, and gender-inclusive policies demonstrated higher levels of women's participation in leadership roles. These findings support the assertions of Social Cognitive Theory that supportive environments enhance self-efficacy and leadership aspirations (Bandura, 1986).

The findings are also in agreement with Ndiso et al. (2025), who established that workplace support

positively influences women's career progression in educational institutions.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The study concludes that the organisational work environment significantly influences women's leadership progression in mixed senior schools in Mt. Elgon Sub-County. Workplace factors such as gender bias, limited mentorship opportunities, inadequate institutional support, and discriminatory organisational cultures hinder women's advancement into leadership positions. Conversely, supportive and inclusive organisational environments enhance women's confidence, motivation, and leadership participation. Addressing these organisational barriers is essential in promoting gender equity and inclusive leadership within educational institutions.

Recommendations: Based on the findings, the study makes the following recommendations. First, the Ministry of Education and the Teachers Service Commission should strengthen gender-responsive policies to promote equitable representation of women in school leadership. This entails reviewing recruitment, promotion, and appointment criteria to ensure they do not disadvantage female teachers, and setting clear affirmative action targets to hold institutions accountable for progress toward gender parity in administrative positions.

Second, school administrators should establish mentorship and leadership development programs targeting female teachers. Pairing aspiring women

leaders with experienced administrators for guidance and practical insight would help build the confidence, networks, and skills needed to pursue and succeed in leadership roles.

Third, educational institutions should create inclusive organisational cultures that eliminate gender discrimination and promote professional recognition for women.

This calls for challenging stereotypes and biased attitudes, fostering fair and transparent decision-making, and ensuring that female teachers' contributions are acknowledged and rewarded on par with their male counterparts.

Fourth, capacity-building workshops and leadership training programs should be organised to equip women educators with competencies such as decision-making, conflict resolution, strategic planning, and financial management, providing practical tools for taking on and excelling in administrative roles.

Finally, further studies should examine additional factors influencing women's leadership progression in other educational contexts. Since this study focused on the organisational work environment in mixed senior schools within Mt. Elgon Sub-County, future research could explore socio-cultural dynamics, policy implementation gaps, or psychological factors, and extend the scope to other regions and levels of education for a more comprehensive understanding of the barriers to women's leadership advancement.

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