NIGERIA

WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION MANAGEMENT: THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT

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Introduction

Education for women has not been easy in any region of the world. The accesses are so narrow that it would seem that they are almost impassable. Women bear the brunt of educational discrimination in the face of parental poverty. Equal opportunities for both male ande male

siblings, since they are the ones to retain and propagate the family name. By this practice, females' access to education is delayed in favour of their male siblings and sometimes it is completely ignored. World population figures as recorded by UNESCO in 1988 indicated that 63 per cent of illiterate persons were female. This further highlights the degree of discrimination against women's education.

This unfortunate practice ensured that females remained many paces behind their male counterparts in terms of education and all the opportunities that go with it. Where parents had means, women were encouraged to pursue only professional courses such as nursing, teaching, catering and the like, which place them a little above the kitchen level, or at best, at the middle management level before retirement age.

By the middle of the first decade of the 20th century, a sense of awareness swept through a handful of women who felt there was the need for enlightened women to re-examine their goals and aspirations so that the need to move them to high management positions could be pursued. There is no avoiding the fact that the fastest and surest way to hold managerial positions in all walks of life, including higher institutions of learning, is through the attainment of a high level of education. The higher the level of education, the better the chances of reaching top management positions. Compared to men, only a very small percentage of women have acquired the level of education that is necessary for the attainment of management positions in higher education institutions and other areas of human endeavour. Even then, these few who are armed with the requirements needed to move into managerial positions do not find it easy because of sexual identity. As expected, the male, who has come to see himself as the superior being, intellectually, mentally and physically, was not ready to hand over his "birthright" to this new breed of women on a platter of gold. They therefore set out to place

obstacles to ensure that as far as possible, women were not allowed into the elite club of top level management. Most females, faced with uneducated parents, poor career guidance, early marriages and child-bearing, ignorance, poverty, sex discrimination among other things do not get the right education to prepare them for management careers. The few who, despite the above obstacles, do get the right kind of education to prepare them for a career in management have a whole new range of obstacles to overcome on their way to the top.

A Survey of the University of Benin and Nigeria

Universities, the apex of educational institutions, are able to provide skilled and professional personnel for the civil service, private sector organizations and business concerns. Thus they contribute in no small measure to the economic growth and political re-shaping of nations. High level manpower in most countries is often initially developed in the universities.

However university education has always favoured men. The number of women who hold academic and administrative positions in universities are fewer than their male counterparts. This has therefore resulted in the small number of women who eventually occupy policy-making positions in the universities. The trend has recently become of great concern to many women who are agitating that women should be given the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to development and to be part of policy-making bodies.

A programme to examine the problem of small numbers of women in policy-making positions and top executive posts was initiated at a meeting in Toronto in 1985 by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) to address the various factors contributing to the problem. As a follow-up, the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) held local workshops in Bombay, India, in 1986 and 1988, for the training of potential women leaders in the skills of university management. Eastern and Southern African Universities were represented at the meeting. The need to get some ideas of specific conditions in the West African region has resulted in this survey which is focused on the University of Benin, Nigeria.

All the female academic and administrative senior members of staff of the University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria formed the subject of the investigation. Questionnaires were drawn-up and the information volunteered by these women highlighted the constraints to female education in Nigeria, problems women face in acquiring professional and academic posts, the type of skills women need to be good administrators, problems of women holding administrative posts and the training women need to be appointed to administrative positions.

Gender distribution among academic and administrative personnel in the University of Benin is shown in Table 1.

Table I

Staff Statistics of the University of Benin (1992)

Posts	Sex		
	Males	Females	Total
Academic	553	94	647
Non-Academic	428	153	581
TOTAL	981	247	1,228

Statistics show that there are 1,228 Senior Staff members in the university. Further analysis of the academic staff strength shows that all the 59 Full Professors are males. 35 Associate Professors include 31 males and 4 females. However, the Vice-Chancellor is a female.

247 female senior staff (both academic and non-academic) were interviewed and **217** completed the forms which were analysed. The various answers given by the women are presented in Tables II to XI.

Table II

Factors having negative effects on women's access to education in Nigeria

	217 Responses	Agreement
1.	Preference given to education for males	191
2.	Early/Child/Forced marriages (for religious, cultural and economic reasons)	160
3.	Sex-Stereotyping in responsibilities and careers	132
4.	Belief that women do not perpetuate the family name	86
5.	Poverty	76
6.	Lack of proper education of parents	46
7.	Early/Unwanted Pregnancy	26
8.	Child Labour	12
9	Sexual harassment	12

Table III

Factors which exclude women from high professional and academic achievement

	217 Responses	Agreement
1.	Child bearing/rearing	139
2.	Discrimination by male counterparts (sex discrimination)	134
3.	Innate and psychological habits of taking second place (negative self-image of females)	122
4.	Societal/Domestic responsibilities	114
5.	Lack of understanding from husbands	23
6.	Economic reasons	23
7.	Sexual harassment	12
8.	Societal pressures on single women which distract from professional pursuits	4

Table IV

What being a woman means in the area of managerial achievement k

		Agreement
		133
	It means a woman has to face the problems of insubordination from men	**124**
	It means a woman has to be more committed to the job	**75**
	It means nothing since women are naturally managers	**35**
	It means excellence, uprightness, honesty and competence	**34**
	It means firmness	**34**
	It means more responsibilities and extra challenges	**32**
	It means a woman needs the goodwill of her husband and family for any managerial achievement	**22**
	Managerial achievement means progress for a woman	**7**

Table V

Coping with femininity and career achievement

	217 Responses	Agreement
1.	Proper planning/organisation	136
2.	Skill/tact/a good sense of judgement	130
3.	Assistance from domestic help	28
4.	Having a small family	58
5.	Competence	48
6.	Assistance/co-operation from husbands	48
7.	Effective time-management	28
8.	Honesty	22
9.	Prayers	2

Most of the women (188 out of 217) admitted that coping with femininity and career achievement was a difficult task for a woman. It was therefore important for a woman to set her priorities right. Most of the. women felt that femininity should not be sacrificed for career achievement and vice versa.

Table VI

The different skills women can develop in order to be recognized for administrative posts

	217 Responses	Agreement
1.	Organizational skills	141
2.	Hard work/competence	132
3.	Firmness/consistency	117
4.	Self-confidence	92
5.	Reliability/Uprightness/Honesty	91
6.	Good personal relationships	73
7.	Leadership skills	68
8.	Self-discipline	49
9.	Objectivity	16
10.	Accommodation/endurance	15
11.	Commitment	12

Table VII

The different types of skills women need to have on the job

	217 Responses	Agreement
1.	Training (ongoing training through conferences, workshops, seminars and managerial courses)	192
2.	Computer skills	82
3.	Adaptation and learning on the job	72
4.	Firmness	46
5.	Hard work	46
6.	Tolerance	34
7.	Lobbying power	52

Table VIII

Women's needs in order to achieve rank in their professions

	217 Responses	Agreement
1.	Higher education	178
2.	Hardwork	176
3.	Self-determination	96
4.	Discipline/confidence	70
5.	Encouragement/promotion when due	69
6.	Self-projection (needs to publicize all her achievements)	58
7.	Firmness	44
8.	Good public relations	44
9.	Stable homes/family support	232

Table IX

Needs of women aspiring to leadership roles

	217 Responses	Agreement
1.	Intellligence/Knowledge/Excellence	150
2.	High level of competence	142
3.	Confidence	84
4.	Accommodation (tolerance, endurance, patience, fairness)	76
5.	Imitation of male behaviour	76
6.	Exposure to leadership roles	62
7.	Moral stability/stable homes	58
8.	Good human relationships	55
9.	Honesty	34
10.	Ability to lobby	

Table X

Reasons for identifying key women for key positions

	217 Responses	Agreement
1.	Academic/Professional achievements	164
2.	Hard-work/Competence	154
3.	Intelligence	**130**
4.	Good human relationships	94
5.	Experience (age and maturity)	72
6.	Personality/Appearance	58
7.	Comportment	40
8.	Honesty	26
9.	Accommodation (Patience/tolerance)	22

Table XI

Assistance needed from other women

	217 Responses	Agreement
1.	By organizing fora to inform women about positions that they can hold in society (Conferences, Seminars, Workshops, other organizations)	162
2.	Identifying and interacting with women groups	148
3.	Identifying and seeking assistance from women experts and women who have been successful	78
4.	Consultation with role models	44
5.	Mutual support among women	26

The survey showed that there are many factors which have negative effects on women's access to education in Nigeria.

It emerged that most of the women who have access to education are prevented from high professional and academic achievement because of problems of child bearing and rearing, discrimination by male counterparts and their own negative self-image. Few of those interviewed mentioned sexual harassment as a factor. Nonetheless, this issue has to be addressed by the management of every institution.

On the issue of skills needed to attain managerial posts and cope with femininity as well as career achievement, most of the women said that it was important to acquire good academic qualifications and work harder on request. Ongoing training and interaction with role models also enhance the status and position of women.

Competence and task achievement as the basis for establishing relationships with men at work, whether these be bosses and subordinates, are also vital. The establishment of good relationships and rapport among fellow women and our male counterparts should help pave the way for easier advancement.

Some Lessons for Women Managers in Higher Education

It therefore follows that, at every stage, the woman is faced with specific problems which she must tackle with all vigour if she hopes to make it to the top. Her career needs are much more cumbersome than those of her male counterparts. A male armed with good education, skills and experience is right on his way to the top. But a woman, in addition to the career needs listed above, must build up her

self-confidence and mental alertness, demonstrating a willingness to confront problems. The process of managing the roles and responsibilities of wife, mother and career woman is both daunting and demanding.

However harsh it sounds, the woman who enters a management career and decides to have children, is faced with a task that is almost unmanageable if she does not secure the understanding and support of her husband. The women who could not place their allegiance in two places has to abandon their careers and some, their homes, so that they could have a fulfilled life of their choice.

The technical, administrative skills and competence of the career woman must necessarily outweigh that of the man because, as a woman, she needs to demonstrate not just a higher degree of competence than the average man but she also needs to maintain very good inter-personal relationships in order to win and keep the respect of her peers and subordinates. This she could do effectively by socializing as often as possible and by being active in women's groups. By this means, she could acquire new knowledge, skills and experiences that will either up-date or enhance old ones.

Being fully prepared for a management position, a woman realizes that, at this level, the job is really that of co-ordination and leadership of other people and this requires the ability to trust, depend on and delegate power to others - in particular to one's peers and subordinates. It means being able to motivate them by creating an atmosphere that is open enough for them to work and develop. Beyond this, a woman needs to be available to subordinates in a way that allows them to feel free to come for help, advice and support. She coordinates the work of her peers and subordinates in the various departments and sees to it that whatever is done is related as effectively as possible to the objectives laid down by the governing authorities. It is primarily for this much broader task that she is held accountable. Because she did not get this position easily, she must be firm, upright competent, responsible, hardworking, with good interpersonal skills. Equally, she must be assertive yet sympathetic and motherly; morally stable, confident and yet objective, disciplined and dedicated. The male manager does not necessarily need to arm himself with all of these attributes. However, for a woman, her managerial and leadership role is not easily acceptable to the community.

The experience she acquires while at the supervisory level broadens her skills, knowledge and competence that prepare her for the broader and less precise role of decision-making. It is known that learning on the job through experiential involvement develops a woman's social skills and this makes her become a better and accepted leader, as she is able to assert influence, negotiate better and gain more confidence. Also, some positive or even negative experiences develop the woman's cognitive skills such as the ability to identify problems, analyse them and take appropriate decisions.

At every stage or level, the woman must realize that, as a woman, she has to work twice as hard as her male counterparts and face stiffer opposition and criticism. There is this stereotyped assumption held by men, that under pressure,

when criticized, or censured, women get emotional and lose control. A woman occupying a managerial position should therefore be very conscious of this assumption and make sure that her emotions are constantly held in check, so that, in any situation, she should be very relaxed and allow her sense of judgement, initiative, perseverance, determination, integrity and foresight to rule and direct her. These qualities are more bestowed on women by nature than men but if they are not properly developed, nurtured and applied, their possession will not be evident. She should express hostility tactfully and never be shattered by defeat if it arises, for defeat is one of the new experiences expected at management levels. It helps her to understand the necessity at times to make unfavourable decisions, especially if it is for the greater good of the institution.

Decision-making is one area of management which easily arouses criticism because of its wide-ranging impact. This is why problem identification, problem analysis and the techniques of problem-solving need to be studied and up-dated on a daily basis. The special quality which distinguishes a competent woman manager in higher education institutions from the rest is the willingness to solve problems as they occur and the ability to anticipate where they may occur in the future. A complex aspect of management in general, this becomes much more complex in institutions of higher learning because the student body is at its post-formative stage. Therefore a careful study of the tradition of the institution is most helpful. Decision-making and implementation drive all management functions in institutions of higher learning. The manager, who has passed through the rank and file of the management levels, must have acquired enough experience, knowledge and competence to be logically equipped well for the top. But, for a woman, it is not that easy because the gender problem must be overcome. The ability to socialize and regular attendance at seminars, conferences and workshops can help tighten-up loose ends. The woman manager should solicit the support, help and advice of other women as this can be very helpful in times of crises. Membership of collective women's social groups can be a critical source of information and guidance as well as support for a woman who is managing an establishment that is predominantly made up of male peers and subordinates who are ready, at any time, to challenge her right to be there.

Conclusions

In this paper I have tried in this paper to highlight the needs and difficulties of the career woman who, despite numerous constraints, was able to make it to the top. But this paper would not be complete without bringing in some personal experiences which, in themselves, have served as references for the production of this paper. The acquisition of skills and movement to the top was not an easy process. Yet, with hardwork and the desire to succeed, I was able to overcome the various problems. Also, the skills and level of competence required for the top were not obtained without effort. Establishing a working relationship with my peers and subordinates was even harder. Although male colleagues recognized that highly qualified women exist, they were not ready to give the expected support, help and advice when needed.

The determination to succeed in an exclusive male preserve was the key factor. Moreover, I was competing with them in a system they understood better and in which they were far more comfortable and much more familiar. At this level, the challenges of supervision, decision and policy-making as well as of leadership depend greatly on the ability to trust and to delegate power to others. In my experience, this called for a very careful study and assessment of behavioural processes of peers and subordinates. Trusting and delegating power to the wrong people would invariably lead to the failure of the system. The work of planning the day-to-day management of the institution needed to be handled by an excellent team, which had to be carefully and personally selected. Planning covered a wide range of decisions, including the clarification and identification of specific procedures to be used in the daily running of affairs. This is why the team in charge of this function has to be properly assessed. Also, there was the job of issuing instructions, motivation and establishing normal personal relationships with peers and subordinates. Some managers do not have the ability to delegate actual responsibility to subordinates. This was where I encountered my initial difficulties as a Vice-Chancellor. But, with my early training and experience acquired over the years in dealing with human resources, I was able to assess, choose and delegate authority to my team of administrators and academics.

There are various management styles. The style that works for one person might not necessarily work for another. Thus, finding the management style that worked for me was another uphill task. After trying out a number of methods, I was able to select the most effective and result-oriented. I am happy to say that this has worked very satisfactorily for me during the past seven years.