



Capacity Building: Exploring Its Nature in Promoting Better Performance of Higher Education Female Leaders

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Authors' contributions

This work was done in collaboration of all authors. Author FN designed, wrote the protocol, made literature searches, collected data and analyzed it. Authors JK and RB supervised the work and edited the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

To state that, 'yes I can', is to suggest that one is confident, capable, equipped, and up to the task. Success is to the one who embraces a task when fully equipped with knowledge, skills, values and other basic requirements. This study explored the nature of capacity building provided to female leaders in Ugandan universities. The study was based on Advocacy world view and drew on interpretive methods specifically the multiple case study design. Stratification was used to select universities. The study participants who are the females occupying senior and middle leadership positions were purposively chosen within each stratum until data saturation. The study found that networking, ability development, and education contribute to better performance of female leaders. The study concluded that despite networking, ability development, and education being the claimed nature of capacity building, there are apparent loopholes that need attention such as absence of structured networking programmes, the ad hoc nature of ability development, and the existing programmes taking a short time and not focussing on prospective leaders. The study recommended that universities need to create more workplace facilities, structured networking and leadership training programmes which may result into improved work performance of female leaders.

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1. INTRODUCTION

There is a paucity of women occupying leadership positions in universities worldwide and Uganda is not an exception. Whereas the senior leaders comprised of Vice Chancellors and Deputy Vice Chancellors, the middle leaders encompassed of Deputy Principals and faculty Deans in this study. According to Bryman [1], leadership is the process of influencing and motivating others towards the accomplishment of goals. Mohammedbhai [2] defines Higher Education (HE) as post-secondary education encompassing universities and other tertiary institutions. Some scholars define a female as pertaining to, or characteristics of a woman [3]. Female leaders were therefore purposively selected in this study to focus on their performance in HE leadership particularly in the Ugandan setting. The assumption was that focusing on the nature of capacity building in their leadership may contribute to females' better performance in leadership positions in Higher Education institutions. Research has focused extensively on fewer female representation in senior and middle leadership positions [4,5,6]. There are also few females occupying positions of Vice Chancellors, Deans, and Heads of Departments in African universities [7-10]. It is further evident that there are few females occupying leadership positions in Ugandan universities and those eligible still remain few [11,12]. However, little attention has been paid on the nature of capacity building that is rendered to those few females to succeed in their leadership roles in HE. The assumption is that the nature of capacity building to the effective performance of those in leadership may contribute to better performance of females in leadership positions in universities in Uganda. This study therefore, accessed voices of HE female senior and middle leaders in order to explore the nature of capacity building in their leadership.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Orzolek [13], capacity building refers to taking steps or building skills and knowledge to meet goals, missions, objectives, or realizing a vision. Specific to this study, capacity building comprises of networking [14], ability development [15], and education [16] as factors that contribute to females' better performance in leadership positions in Higher

Education institutions. We are interested in capacity building for better performance of females occupying leadership positions in HE.

Coleman [17] articulates on networking that women only networks are instrumental in achieving outcomes pertinent to its members. In addition, networking brings together individuals with diverse viewpoints and perspectives both within and outside of the organization. They share their leadership journeys which enables them to learn from each other's experiences. Interacting with women of similar experiences encourages female leaders to reflect on their goals and strengths and this enables them to realize their potential [14,15].

In the African context, there is consent among researchers that networking helps female leaders to achieve their professional success and improve their work performance in countries such as Ghana, Kenya, and Uganda [18-20]. Women connecting with other women, encourages more females to aspire to and apply for leadership positions. Universities therefore need to encourage and support the participation of their staff in national, regional and international conferences and other fora that enhance knowledge and sharing on gender issues [21,22].

Developing leaders is another critical success factor for women in leadership positions in Higher Education. Apparently, scholars concluded that women-only leadership trainings are beneficial to women [23,24]. Such trainings are essential for women to develop a stronger sense of self and the beneficial relationships that are important to leadership effectiveness [25, 26]. Leadership development programmes also help female leaders to learn from each other by engaging in discussion and reflecting on their experiences, learn new skills that enrich their professional and personal lives, as well as enhancing their self-efficacy and self-confidence in their judgments, decisions, strengths, and ideas [14,15,27].

In the Sub-Saharan African context available evidence [28,18,29] shows that leadership trainings equip women with knowledge, skills, and capacity to fully participate in decision-making and access to power. Such trainings have also helped women to develop personal mission statements, build confidence and enthusiasm, as well as empowering them to vie

for leadership and promotion. However, further evidence suggests that there is need for skills training and capacity building for women if they are to play their roles effectively [21,30].

Nonetheless, education builds self-efficacy in women leaders with high educational levels and this greatly contributes to their better performance in their leadership positions [16, 31]. This trend is also evident in female leaders in countries such as Kenya and Uganda whereby researchers emphasize that formal qualifications are essential for women in leadership positions [32,33]. Education also enables women's sense of accomplishment as university leaders in Zimbabwe, Ghana, Madagascar, and Nigeria [34]. It is therefore clearly evident that education is very critical for women's better performance in leadership positions in all contexts.

This literature indicates considerable attention put on capacity building among female leaders. However, mainly the literature on Ugandan context appears to be prescriptive of the need and how capacity should be strengthened in women leaders. This study goes further to actually access the women leaders in HE and explore the actual nature of capacity building provided to them. Their voices and experiences indicate where it has been successfully done and how it has translated into better leadership. They may also reflect loopholes that need closing.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: LIBERAL FEMINISM THEORY

This study was guided by the Liberal Feminism Theory which is rooted in the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), and Harriet Taylor Mill (1807-1858). This theory postulates that all human beings are rational and free [35-39], they share fundamental rights [36,39], and all individuals are equal [40,36,37,39]. The theory interrogates the phenomena on sexual equality. In this study, we explored the nature of capacity building in form of networking, ability development, and education provided to female leaders in universities in Uganda. It was anticipated that women should be given opportunities to access networking, ability development, and education in order to succeed in the leadership positions which they occupy. The tenets of Liberal Feminism namely: rationality, freedom, and equality are reflected in networking, ability development, and education.

4. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

There is wide complaint in the Ugandan context that the performance of some women in Higher Education leadership positions does not satisfy the expectations of society. This could be due to a number of personal, social, economic, cultural, political, and historical factors. However, this study centers on the assumption that there could be institutional factors that contribute to the nature of performance. We have therefore decided to explore the nature of institutional networking, ability development, and education as capacity building provided to women in leadership positions in universities in Uganda. The purpose of this study therefore is to explore the nature of capacity building provided by the institutions to enhance their performance.

5. METHODOLOGY

We employed a multiple case study design which allowed us to analyse data within and across settings as well as to understand unique and critical cases. Subscribing to the Advocacy world view and drawing on interpretive methods, we stratified the Ugandan universities and purposively selected the participants who were the females occupying senior and middle leadership positions within each stratum. These sampling techniques therefore helped in providing relevant information and ensuring equal representation of the population and sample within each stratum [41,42,43]. Whereas the senior leaders comprised of Vice Chancellors and Deputy Vice Chancellors, the middle leaders included Deputy Principals and faculty Deans. Ugandan universities were also categorised as public i.e. those that are State owned (Kabale University, Busitema University, Kyambogo University, and Makerere University), private religious-affiliated i.e. those that are founded and owned by religious groups (Bishop Stuart University, Uganda Martyrs University, Ndejje University, and Islamic University In Uganda), and private-for-profit i.e. those that are owned by individuals or groups (Kampala International University, Nkumba University, and St. Lawrence University). The senior leaders are mainly in managing the entire university whereas the middle leaders manage faculty level. The sample selection for the participants at the time of the field study is further elaborated as in the Table 1.

Providing the names of participants as pseudonyms, four senior leaders (PUSL1, PUSL2, PRUSL1, and PPUSL1) were selected

from all the categories of universities and nine middle leaders (PUML1, PUML2, PUML3, PRUML1, PRUML2, PRUML3, PPUML1, PPUML2, and PPUML3). These female leaders were selected based on their level of leadership position, category of their university, and willingness to participate in the study. Data was collected using face-to-face interviews captured using audio recorder at their consent, and document checks mainly Institutional Policy Guidelines. The use of interviews enabled us to access the women voices on the nature of capacity building they receive while executing their leadership duties in HE. Document checks also helped to provide information which was necessary during triangulation with the participants' responses. The advocacy paradigm required us to access women stories about their performance in positions of leadership in Higher Education. Reflecting upon these stories, we identified elements of capacity building upon which we further probed through focussed interviews. The responses on these elements were merged along the lines of networking, ability development, and education.

6. FINDINGS

The study findings were aligned according to the indicators of capacity building highlighted in the literature. These are networking, ability development, and education. Equipping them with a leader may indicate better performance in leadership.

6.1 Networking

There was unanimous consensus from all the interviewees that networking is critical for women to succeed in leadership in universities in Uganda. Through networking, the female leaders collaborated with other professionals in their fields, acquired new skills, benefitted in collaborative research, staff capacity building, student and staff exchanges, co-supervision of

PhDs, development and running of PhD programmes, facilitation of external examiners, accessed lecturers and scholars, shared policies, benchmarked, and shared their facilities which then motivated them to perform better in their leadership roles. The participants working with public universities further emphasized that their active engagements with academic and Non-Governmental Organizations at regional and international levels has resulted into their improved work performance. Particularly, a senior leader PUSL2 confirmed that:

We have had research collaborations, students and staff exchanges with several academic institutions and community based entities. We have benefited in research and staff capacity building. As a young university, we need young scientists say in research and this adds to our pool of publications which is a good thing for us.

Relatedly, interviewee PRUSL1 working with a private religious-affiliated university spoke about the importance of networking with national and regional universities. She said that:

We have collaborations and MOUs with other universities. We do research, access lecturers, external supervisors, external examiners, money for funding, capacity building, staff exchange, get scholars, share policies, benchmark, use their laboratories and this exposes our students and adds value to my institution.

In the same way, the participants from private-for-profit universities noted how they cannot work independent of other institutions. PPUML3 shared that:

Yes, I network with many universities in this country. For example, if I get lecturers who have taught in other institutions and I have gaps, I create opportunities for them so that we get what we do not have and change. Different people

Table 1. Sample selection of female senior and middle leaders in universities in Uganda

Category of university	Senior leaders		Middle leaders			Total number
	Vice chancellors	Deputy vice chancellors	Principal	Deputy principals	Deans	
Public universities	2	-	-	2	1	5
Private religious-affiliated	1	-	-	-	3	4
Private-for-profit	-	1	-	-	3	4
Total	3	1	-	2	7	13

have different ways of teaching and then because myself I also network by teaching elsewhere and so I also want to do it for my faculty.

A similar scenario exists among middle leaders in universities in Uganda. In agreement, PUML3 said about networking for her institution that:

My college has benefitted from regional partnerships. A lot of money has been paid to my staff and as a result the college has managed to buy projectors, chairs, painting the offices, and motivating its staff.

In sum, endogenous and exogenous networks provide great opportunities to female leaders to acquire new skills, become more exposed, and get what they do not have which results into their improved performance in teaching, research and community engagement in Ugandan universities.

6.2 Ability Development

All participants highlighted that participating in ability development is a critical success factor in the leadership positions that they occupy. They emphasized that ability development created awareness about self-development, helped them to think further and to grow which enabled them to perform better in their leadership responsibilities. In the same line, participant PUSL1 spoke about person ability building. She opined that:

Person ability building; this is how we grow. You train, you go for short courses, and they help you to think further. If you are in a university and you are not growing then you might as well leave. There are many gaps in institutions and so you can see this need for that ability through seminars which creates awareness about self-development.

Ability development was further suggested by another senior leader PPUSL1 who said that:

I have attended several leadership trainings nationally and regionally. Leaders share their experiences and so I have learnt different things. These trainings have also motivated me to go an extra mile in my work.

Middle leaders in Ugandan universities also share similar thinking about ability transformation. For instance, PUML1 argued that:

I have attended several workshops in which I get a chance to interact with other leaders and so we discuss issues. We share challenging issues in the Dean's office and then get advice from colleagues on how best to handle such issues.

In the same vein, PRUML2 argued that attending leadership workshops positively impacted on her performance. She revealed that:

Yes, I have benefitted a lot from these leadership workshops. I have acquired new skills including; performance appraisals, success and equality, staff success, and success management. Because of these workshops, I cannot appraise my staff in this faculty as an individual and it has to be a committee. We sit and appraise using the different tools and parameters and this is indeed satisfactory.

In a nutshell, the female senior and middle leaders agree that leadership programmes enabled them to learn new skills, share experiences, get reminded of their duties, and to enhance their leadership abilities. This motivates them and later translates into better performance in their leadership positions in universities in Uganda.

6.3 Education

All senior leaders concurred with the middle leaders that education produces new knowledge, skills, competences and values that enable women to perform their leadership roles better in Ugandan universities. A senior leader PUSL1 working in a public university reported that:

My expertise in management, gender and Higher Education is really very useful to my work. While my Masters in Higher Education reinforces my practical work, my expertise in gender makes me think about equity issues. For instance, I do not have very many women in middle and senior leadership positions in my university. But, when there is a vacancy, I think in terms of equity and equality because I am aware of this kind of inequality.

Relatedly, another senior leader from a private religious-affiliated university highlighted how education enables her to make innovations in her university. PRUSL1 argued that:

Doing medical ethnomopocology and ethnomedicine gave me a basis to start a

unit which produces medicines in this university. Then, without these qualifications I would not have been identified for this position because the university needed a scientist.

This was similarly shared by middle leaders. For instance, participant PUM1 confirmed that:

My education enabled me to come in the academia. It is because of my masters in sociology that I was able to teach in a university setting. This helps me to study people and how to relate with others.

Nevertheless, PPUM3 employed in a private-for-profit university acknowledged the good education qualification she earned which made her an expert in her knowledge field. Her performance in leadership was attributed to this expertise when she revealed that:

Yes, my expertise helps me a lot. For example, when we are going to increase fees for school practice, we make sure that we meet the people who are to be affected by the policy and explain to them why the increase. So, when we give our students the circular to take to their parents, they are already informed and can explain to them.

In sum, education has imparted new knowledge, skills, competences and values to female senior and middle leaders which in turn has built capacity hence resulting into their improved work performance in Ugandan universities.

7. DISCUSSION

The study findings established factors related to networking, ability development, and education as critical to women's better performance in leadership positions.

7.1 Networking

The findings revealed that it is important to have national, regional, and international collaborations for female leaders. Networking provides women with opportunities for benchmarking and adopting the best practices from the already existing developed or emerging Higher Education systems. These collaborations also enable these women to perform better in their leadership positions because they use the opportunity availed by networking. Endogenous and exogenous networks help female leaders learn from each other's experiences, reflect on

their goals and strengths hence resulting into their improved work performance (Baltodano, et al., 2012; Bonebright, et al., 2012). According to the study findings, the networking aspect was viewed in form of sharing academic physical resources, having young scientists trained in high level in research, staff exchanges, and joint supervision with other universities both locally and internationally. This enables staff to acquire new skills, become more exposed, and share facilities such as laboratories and equipment. In addition, senior leaders focus on the entire institution because of their strategic role and therefore emphasize the need for institutionalized collaborative arrangements bearing in mind the profiles and niches of their institutions.

Moreover, all the middle leaders in this study attributed their better work performance to networking with academic institutions. This resonates with scholars who suggest that networking helps female middle leaders to achieve their professional success and improve their work performance (Mabokela & Mlambo, 2014; Mulyampiti, 2015; Odhiambo, 2011). Collaborations are enacted through staff exchanges and joint supervision which enables them to benchmark and embrace better practices in their institutions. As middle leaders, they focus on academic-related activities because they are responsible for promoting the academic excellence in their faculties and schools in their respective universities in the Ugandan context.

7.2 Ability Development

All the female senior leaders also viewed ability development as a factor that enables them to perform better in their leadership positions. They agreed that leadership development programmes enable them to learn new skills, share experiences, and build their leadership abilities which makes them perform better in their roles. Such programmes also help them to learn from each other by engaging in discussion and reflecting on their experiences as well as enhancing their self-efficacy and self-confidence in leadership (Baltodano, et al., 2012; Bonebright, et al., 2012; Harris & Leberman, 2012). Women-only leadership trainings are beneficial to women (Debebe, 2011, O'Neil, et al., 2015). Much as these leadership development programmes are essential to female leaders, very few women have gotten the opportunity to participate basing on the fact that they are very few women occupying senior leadership positions in Ugandan universities.

In the same vein, trainings equip women with knowledge, skills, and capacity to fully participate in decision making and access to power, help women to develop personal mission statements, build confidence and enthusiasm, as well as empowering them to vie for leadership and promotion (Kele & Pietersen, 2015; Mabokela & Mlambo, 2014; Ohemeng & Adusah-Karikari, 2015). The study findings indicated that ability development enable female middle leaders in their performance.

7.3 Education

Women also attribute their better performance in their leadership positions to their education. Education provides opportunities for making innovations, thinking about equity issues, and producing results. Education also enables female leaders to perform better in their leadership roles because they use the opportunity availed by education to perform better in their work. Senior leaders just like middle leaders confirmed that their education greatly contributes to their success in leadership positions in Ugandan universities. This echoes the suggestion by scholars that education builds self-efficacy in women leaders with high educational levels [16,31]. It could also be argued that education enables women's sense of accomplishment as expressed by university leaders [34]. Despite this evidence, however, women remain few in both senior and middle leadership positions and this could be because there are far fewer women at Masters and Doctoral levels perhaps because of other obligations such as parenting that they may have to first contend with, among other competing factors. Yet, one's seniority in any Higher Education leadership position goes hand in hand with one's level of education. For one to be a middle or a senior leader in most university settings, one ought to be with a doctorate and at senior lectureship or professorial ranks respectively. Precisely, as scholars contend, formal qualifications are essential for women in leadership positions [32,33].

8. CONCLUSION

In view of the discussion, we conclude that even if endogenous and exogenous networks are important to women's performance in leadership, structured networking programmes have not been developed in Ugandan universities. Formal networks for women already occupying leadership positions and those aspiring for them help to improve their performance in leadership.

In addition, much as national, regional, and international ability development programmes are in place, they are ad hoc in nature, take a short period of time and they do not focus on those females aspiring for leadership. Finally, education equips new knowledge and skills which contributes into better work performance of female leaders. With such loopholes in networking, ability development, and education, women therefore may not succeed in their leadership roles in Ugandan universities.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Regarding networking, we recommend that universities should develop structured networking programmes for the incumbent and aspiring female leaders. Perhaps, this may enable more women to work towards better performance in their leadership duties.

In addition, universities should continuously and sustainably organize refresher courses, workshops, and women-only leadership trainings for a reasonable duration for both the incumbent and aspiring female leaders. Such programmes may then help the female leaders to acquire new skills that enhance their professional and personal lives. Universities should also endeavour to see that women staff are aware of such leadership opportunities.

The Ugandan Government should also support the establishment of more workplace facilities such as childcare crèches and day-care centres within universities to enable more women to participate in on-campus activities like trainings or workshops. Such strategies may then enable women to perform better in their leadership roles in Ugandan universities.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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