

CAREER POSITIONING PEDESTAL: WOMEN SCALING THE LEADERSHIP LADDER IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS, KENYA

Evelyn Kipkosgei

¹Evelyn.kipk@gmail.com

¹University Toronto, Canada

Abstract: Globally, perceptions of leadership competence are influenced by many contextual inputs which include gender, race, and other social identities. Gender imbalance among senior university academics is an acknowledged problem in many countries, including Kenya. This paper gives an analysis of career positioning as a strategy those women academics use to attain senior leadership positions in institutions of higher education in Kenya. The research is anchored in feminist theories. A qualitative research method was adopted for data collection. Purposive and snowballing sampling techniques were employed. The research targeted 32 public universities that had 107 women in leadership ranks of principals, research centers' directors, deans, and heads of departments, deputy vice chancellors, and vice chancellors. The sample size was 18 women from 11 of the 32 public universities. Primary data was collected at in-depth interviews using interview guides whereas secondary data was obtained by analyzing relevant documents. Data from in-depth interviews was analyzed by thematic analysis while secondary data was analysed by document analysis. Results indicated that women success in leadership positions at higher education institutions in Kenya is attributable to individual paradigm shifts that made them position themselves for the leadership positions. It was then concluded that women in this study are where they are purely on merit since they possessed the ambition, drive, and patience to succeed against all odds. Going by their small numbers in managerial positions, there seems to be other underlying factors over and above qualifications that affect women career mobility. The study recommends an urgent and deliberate effort to address structural and socio-cultural hurdles constricting the upward mobility of women.

Keywords: Career positioning, Feminism Theory, Leadership, Springboard, Higher Education, Qualitative Research.

1. INTRODUCTION

The higher a woman goes on the academic ladder, the fewer female colleagues she finds and the problem of finding mentors and supervisors becomes more acute the higher she advances (Arini, 2016). Yet on the challenges that women face in ascending to leadership positions, Onsongo (2015) posits that in institutions of higher learning as in other sectors, victim blaming is apparent as women are often accused of lack of interest, lack of commitment, lack of stamina, and an inclination to pursue other interests like raising families, and so they are thereby responsible for their own slow career growth. However others have described the low visibility of women in management positions as the outcome of identity and power relations between men and women (Arini, 2016). Scholars have continued to become aware of the existence of prejudice towards women that is driven by perceptions of role incongruity between the female gender roles and leadership roles presenting women as incapable of leadership responsibilities (Karau, 2018). In light of the assertions in empirical and extant literature, it becomes imperative to have a situational analysis of the women in leadership positions in

institutions of higher learning in Kenya. However there is no scholarly work to understand the pathways to and the pressures faced by senior leaders and what needs to be done to open doors and create support for these leaders. Thus, empirical evidence about women in higher education is scant.

From the pre-colonial, through the colonial, to the independent eras, although Kenya has always been at the forefront ratifying gender neutral international conventions and protocols, the expected benefits are not yet noticeable due to apparent reluctance to translate them into action. These protocols touch on human rights, equality, social justice for all, fair remuneration, labour standards, recognition of women as equal partners in national development, and the Maputo Protocol (2003) on gender equality in Africa, spearheaded by the United Nations through bodies like the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2008) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO (20017)..

In trying to understand the unfair advantage men have over women when it comes to leadership, researchers like Odhiambo (2011) and Nzomo (2015) have continued to investigate the persistent gender discrimination even where abilities and qualifications are not in question. This scholars point out interesting observations on the instances of leadership and management acting capacity openings that need to be filled, where the coincidence of a male taking up acting capacity overlooking female deputy vice chancellors is a clear signal of widespread discriminatory practices in the education system which favors men in an acting capacity, therefore sidelining more senior and capable women in the ranks.

The question as to why very few women occupy positions of leadership when they have been found to be as effective as men in possession of leadership roles remains to be answered. Onsumbah (2011) posed the question more clearly, “What is keeping women out of management in this female dominated career?” According to Morley (1999), men have been found to develop different strategies to maintain their dominance in educational leadership which include sidelining and overlooking women when awarding scholarships and making patriarchal assumptions in dictating women’s career paths in universities.

I situate my work within African feminist theoretical framework because it is central to the fight against oppression of women in Africa and has granted women a platform to voice their concerns. The plank of African feminism postulates that, in many parts of Africa, women strive to bear and rear children in addition to having economic and political roles (Mikell, 2017). This theory underpinned this study because African feminist perspective problematizes the blatant discrimination against women in all cadres, particularly in leadership levels across higher education institutions.

A feminist approach problematizes the gendered relations in universities which research has pointed to inequalities in the distribution of resources and opportunities (Delamont, 2013). By using a feminist perspective, I sought to highlight ways in which a few women have been able to wade through challenges to achieve phenomenal success at individual and collective level across universities in Kenya.

Statement of the Problem

The lack of diversity at the senior-most levels of higher education institutions limits the success of individuals, institutions, and the sector as a whole (Hart, 2016). Many compelling arguments about the benefits of higher numbers of women in senior leadership roles have been presented (Wambura, 2017). It is clear that advancing women in leadership roles is not something to be done solely to benefit women; it is in the best interest of institutions as well as society overall. The purpose of this research is to conduct situational analysis of women leadership in higher education positions in Kenya by looking at strategies adopted by women leadership in higher education positions in Kenya.

According to Ngambi (2019), natural feminine attributes such as empathy, compromise, and intuition (which should confer women a leadership advantage over men) have not helped increase representation of African women in leadership. Actually, women continue to fall behind their male colleagues in progressing towards leadership roles. Airini (2017) argue that although a few women do advance to leadership roles in universities, gender imbalance among senior university academics is an acknowledged problem in many countries.

Morley (2014) presents a statistical snapshot of women vice-chancellors across the globe which shows that among the selected countries and regions, Hong Kong performs the worst having not one female as a vice-chancellor, followed by: Kuwait (2%), Japan (2.3%), India (3%), and Turkey (7%). Statistics from the European Union are equally disheartening

and report only 13% of vice-chancellor positions are held by women while the United Kingdom reports that 14% of their vice-chancellors are women.

A study by Nkomo and Ngambi (2018) indicated that in Kenya there were only four (4) women in positions of vice-chancellors out of thirty-two (32) total positions across public universities, which is a paltry 12.5%, far short of the constitutionally required 30% minimum representation. Further, a study on the gender composition of Moi University by Makori et al. (2016) showed that only 1% of the women occupy the senior management positions. Moreover, Moi University's 2005-2015 Strategic Plan showed that out of 173 senior administrative positions, only 20% are women and only a paltry 10% of the women form the academic staff. In Kenya, while the general outlook is promising in terms of the number of women earning advanced degrees, few women reach the senior-most leadership levels. Thus this study set to determine the strategies adopted by the few women to attain leadership in higher education institutions in Kenya.

Theoretical Framework

This research was discussed through African feminist theory and leadership theories. In its operation, African feminism postulates the existence of a patriarchy as an oppressive force against women; hence this sits well with this investigation of the experiences of successful women in public institutions of higher learning. The African feminism strand is applicable to this study because it is about women organizing to reclaim space and power while in collaboration and negotiation with men.

African feminism has been greatly shaped by African women's resistance to Western hegemony and its legacy within the African culture (Mikell, 2015) and does not seek to disrupt, deconstruct, or eliminate patriarchy, unlike the radical Western feminism. Kenyan women's movements emerged in reaction to the low status that Kenyan women occupy in all sectors of the economy (Sifuna, 2017). In the education and labour force, for example, gender discrimination has marginalized women from mainstream development (Bunyi, 2016). African feminists seek ways of solving some of the problems affecting the continent such as; drought, crop failure, refugee situations, human rights abuses, and traditional cultural practices and beliefs that are harmful to women. They advocate for abolition of oppressive traditions such as child marriage, widowhood taboos (wife inheritance), and retention of traditional structures that are supportive of women's multiple roles (Mikell, 2015).

The second postulate of the African feminism theory is that feminist perspective examines gender as a basis of analysis in the quest to understand how gender influences relations between men and women (Bensimon and Marshall, 2015). Third, when a feminist lens is used to interrogate women's and men's social and professional roles, it uncovers unequal access to opportunity, power, and self-determination. Fourth, feminist thought contributes to the salience of gender as a social construct and proposes productive approaches that challenge and disrupt the status quo. Finally, a feminist thought foregrounds the knowledge that women have been positioned historically in many societies as lesser and subordinate to men.

Through this lens I examine and articulate the real issues that affect Kenyan women in leadership in higher education institutions and how they work to enhance their visibility in highly gendered spaces. My experience with gendered and patriarchal structures in the workplace gives me the impetus to investigate how power is exercised in professional settings. I witnessed open gender biases that negatively impacted my career progression. African feminist thought will be valuable in shaping strategies that will be useful for women to decolonize their mind and fight for space up the management ladder.

Anecdotal evidence and previous studies show that Kenyan universities are still highly gendered, with men dominating higher positions while women populate the lower ranks regardless of possessing similar or better credentials. A feminist perspective thus problematizes these gendered relations in universities while examining how women could claim their space and retain dignity.

On the other hand, leadership theories help define women's leadership based on their styles, taking into account any unique attributes which contribute to their effectiveness for success. I chose a feminist inspired leadership perspective because it disrupts existing power relations between men and women in society. These power relations structure all areas of life, the family, education and welfare, the worlds of work and politics, culture and leisure. They determine who does what and for whom, what we are, and what we might become (Weedon, 1991). The contribution of women to the exercise

of leadership dates back to precolonial societies when their role was central to certain aspects of indigenous culture. Indigenous leadership acknowledges that marginalized and colonized communities have long upheld their own conceptions of leadership. The indigenous conception of leadership is spiritually informed and spiritually based. It is about developing ethical and social responsibility towards all humans (and non-human) sharing the earth (Dei, 2015). Such leadership works with consensus decision making and upholds the integrity of the group. Indigenous leadership style fuses well with African feminism.

Women power networks play a significant role in fighting gender stereotype in a continent where discrimination of women is disguised as socio-cultural way of being. African feminism was born out of the work of African feminist champions as explained by Amina Mama:

We have had to fight for our own meanings to be kept alive... sometimes the term has been appropriated by anti-democratic interest. African regimes have tried to do funny things with gender politics and misrepresent feminism, and our societies have not always been clear about the meaning of 'feminism' and its perennial presence in all our societies. Feminism remains a positive, movement-based term... It signals refusal of oppression and commitment to struggling for women's liberation from all forms of oppression; psychological, emotional, socio-economic and political. (Mama, 1996, p. 10).

Often assumptions were made about African women resistance, especially in early Western feminist writing that implied a lack of organized forms of addressing issues affecting women in low income countries as told to us by Mama (2006). In Kenya, like in many African countries, men and women hold the view that feminism is a foreign, Western ideology, and therefore has no relevance to Kenyan culture and life style, hence "a number of Kenyans, male and female are repelled by western

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The absence of women in decision-making positions stems from a variety of factors. According to Neidhart and Carlin (2013), barriers to women's leadership have been categorized as stemming from socialization and stereotyping, including individual and organizational barriers. Women have also historically lagged behind men in education (UNESCO, 2000). Ernest (2019) adds that a "glass ceiling" is widely responsible for the under-representation of women in leadership positions.

Grove and Montgomery (2015), point to women's individual barriers as the cause of their own under-representation. They argue that women are not assertive enough, do not want power, lack self-confidence, are unwilling to play the game or work the system, don't apply for jobs, or that even when in a job, they don't apply for line positions

However, research by Neidhart & Carlin (2013) suggested that some women in management carefully assess career decisions in light of their own values and beliefs. For these women the barrier was not lack of confidence, but rather an informed choice based on knowledge of what is important to them personally and the extent to which they are authentic. Women are generally other-directed and, unlike men, are more concerned about how they are perceived by others in their group.

Other individual barriers, according to Cubillo (2019), include: the tendency among women to avoid situations where they risk facing criticism or receiving negative feedback; fear of failure, and hence a reluctance to voice their opinions; excess responsibilities and fear of conflict and loneliness; self-doubting; and a different (feminine) style of management.

A literature search indicates that studies have largely focused on factors responsible for women's underrepresentation and suggested remedies in response to calls to interest groups for awareness campaigns against blatant discrimination towards women. It is neither acceptable nor profitable to have a large pool of expertise and skills lying wasted when they could be fulfilling personal and national developmental agenda. In addition, Nzomo (2015) challenges women to self-organize in support of feminism, an act of resistance, against patriarchal beliefs which are reinforced by education, religion, and culture.

In the Kenya situation, according to Nzomo (2015) women have endured a long, circuitous, tortuous journey to management and leadership roles. Realizing that individualism could not yield dividends, they have learned to self-organize and collectively bargain for space and leadership across political, economic, cultural, and educational

institutions. Underrepresentation of women academics in university leadership is not unique to Kenya as highlighted in the literature review, although their experiences bear some uniqueness collectively and individually. The findings are varied but conclusions are similar. Onsongo (2015) records those women in higher education careers in Kenya experience subtle discrimination, unfriendly work environments, resistance to women leadership, sexual harassment, and unfavourable institutional practices. At the same time, Bunyi (2018) attributes gender disparity to low attention and discussion in a country which considers it a luxury for a woman to study at a university, let alone to work or lead in. Other findings were gender socialization and lack of role models to mirror their struggles and assurances for success. A study by Kamau (2010) on experiences of women in political leadership named gender-based violence, family issues, name calling, finances, and the role of mass media as some of their challenges and setbacks.

The position of women in a country mirrors the general attitude towards them in society. Since time immemorial, women have demonstrated leadership through women-only groups that brought them together to address social, economic, cultural, and economic matters neglected by community patriarchs. Even though Kenyan women had certain powers in pre-colonial times, Kenyan traditional culture was predominantly patrilineal and patriarchal (Odinga, 1967). The colonial administration emphasized male dominance by transferring men's supervisory rights over land to individual legal ownership (Elkins, 2005), which resulted in being denied access to land, something that was new and foreign (Lovett, 1989). Oyèwùmí (2013) points out retrogressive cultural and traditional practices such as son preference ideology, lack of belief in the importance of educating girls, forced marriages, female genital mutilation, bride price collection, widowhood rites, and disinheritance of girls and women as some of the ills that impede the quest for women's leadership in Kenya.

Oyèwùmí (2013) further notes that poor socialization where boys are prepared for leadership and girls for domestic roles also works against women's ascendancy to leadership. The forgoing notwithstanding, today notable groups popularly known as Chama or Vyama in plural (Swahili for groups) are the social fabric of women across Kenyan communities locally and in the diaspora. These socio-economic groups cut across age, class, and religion to rally women around common objectives. Chama was the ingenuity of women to cushion their lot in the home and in community by coming together for positive reinforcement in a cooperative style. Women are in precarious situations. The term precariat was used by Butler (2009) to refer to those who are exposed to injury, violence and displacement, those who are at risk of not being qualified as a subject of recognition. Kitetu (2014) constructs Chama as a gendered concept, a traditional idea of women working together around activities that the women traditionally engaged. It is not surprising therefore that men view the Chama negatively because it signifies a power shift to women as they decide projects and priorities without consulting men. Most men make disparaging remarks about the Chama (Kitonga, 2017). There are therefore gendered challenges that face the Chama but will not take away the leadership and organizational capabilities of women demonstrated through such collaborative vehicles.

Higher education administrative positions lack female managers (Lie & Malik, 2014). There is a need to analyze this development in the Kenyan local context and this research will hopefully yield some pertinent statistics in that regard. Progress towards gender equity has been very slow and uneven across the globe (Airini, 2018). In Kenya there is an ironic reality of women siding with men; as soon as they get into the dominant space they become consumed by masculinity, and the fight for gender equality takes a back seat as masculinity beckons. This is notwithstanding their getting to positions that are meant to represent women or through feminist or affirmative action influence. The researcher is keen on relating the trend of female underrepresentation to the situation in Kenya's higher education institutions.

This study adds to earlier research on experiences of the Kenyan women academics as they struggle to develop their careers amidst a multiplicity of role conflicts and negative traditional culture which defines them as social deviants or outsider insiders (Onsongo, 2017). Just as in the past, the academy is fraught with patriarchy and the accompanying sexual harassments and discriminative practices in the system. The question of women's access to education and representation in academic leadership in Kenya has received attention in recent years (Bunyi 2018). Even with structural and invisible barriers to their survival and growth in academia, women in the Kenyan academy have risen through the ranks and are heading universities with stellar performance. I therefore seek to build on the earlier research on this development by documenting the factors that have propelled the few top women managers to head public universities.

Based on literature, scholars have used numerous terms to describe these twists and turns as the barriers related to women's development. In the reviews of literature, two terms were prominent: "glass ceiling" and "labyrinth." The glass ceiling seems to be a widespread phenomenon that explains why women, despite their qualifications and abilities, cannot

progress to the top administrative positions of higher education administration worldwide (Beck, 2019) to explain the circuitous paths that women have to navigate in order to achieve top positions in societies. They argued that many women are able to break the ceiling and make it to top-level positions. Although the paths exist, the barriers have become invisible and more difficult to detect; thus, they named the path to achievement a labyrinth. The researcher would like to bring to the fore these hidden complications that stand in the way of women's determination as well as the devised strategies for upward mobility in the academia in Kenya.

Finally, the glass ceiling is one of the many barriers that can thwart qualified women's rise to the top management of organizations. These barriers are artificial and invisible, providing a view to the top, but also providing a ceiling on how far up a woman can go. When a glass ceiling exists, men occupy a disproportionately high percentage of the higher ranks in a career field, while women tend to be overrepresented in the lower ranks (Sincoff, et al., 2006). Therefore, the "glass ceiling" is the major reason for women's underrepresentation in leadership positions (Ernest, 2003). The glass ceiling is therefore an effect of individual, organizational and socialization barriers and exists in its strongest forms denying women opportunities to gain access into top management.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a qualitative research method for data collection. It was based on descriptive research approach. Qualitative research method focuses on obtaining data through open-ended and conversational communication. It involves in-depth interviews of "what" people think and "why" they think so.

The qualitative research method is specifically designed to uncover a target audience's behaviour and its connection to the phenomena under investigation. I have used qualitative research tools to centre women's voices. The results were descriptive of the women's lived experiences and allowed the researcher to identify the meanings that people placed on the events, processes, and structures of their lives.

The qualitative study adopts a descriptive research method using interview guides at in-depth personal interviews. Researchers have noted the flexibility of data collection methods such as personal interviews and the opportunity to engage respondents in projective techniques (Raburu, 2015). Participant interviews help to enhance interaction with respondents and to provide the space for secondary questions based on ensuing comments and perceptions, which will yield descriptive results.

The research was conducted in Kenya, a young democracy situated on the east coast of Africa. The Kenyan higher education leadership has been characterized by gender inequality. Kenya has a total of 32 public universities. Due to logistical, time, and financial constraints, I managed to interview 18 women selected from 11 universities located across Kenya.

The research targeted 107 women in leadership ranks of principals, research centers' directors, deans, and heads of departments, as well as deputy vice-chancellors and vice-chancellors across the 32 public universities.

Purposive supported by snowballing sampling techniques were chosen as the most effective technique for this study whose target population was small. One participant purposively chosen would share the questionnaire with two of her colleagues who would in turn extend to more who gladly participated in this study. This snowballing effect yielded a total of 18 participants from 11 universities out of the 32 public universities. Women in positions of leadership as defined in this study are covered by the sample of 18 that include deans, chairs, directors, and deputy vice chancellors, vice chancellors as well as a chancellor.

The bulk of the data was collected directly from participants during the in-depth interviews accompanied by personal notes and emailed questionnaires. Document reviews and other secondary sources like online databases and clips provided additional information that supplemented that which was collected at interview.

Formal participant interviews were held at mutually-agreed upon locations and times. Some participants opted to fill in the questionnaire and mailed their responses directly to the researcher, an option that was available to all participants. According to Coate (2017), interviewing is a qualitative tool that allows the researcher and the participant some freedom to negotiate their own meanings and further allowing the researcher to explore in-depth interesting issues through conversations. With prior consent of a participant, interviews were audio recorded for accuracy and speed.

I reviewed documents to provide background information and to bolster field data that was received on email. Using document review as a secondary data source I was able to obtain insights and additional information pertinent to this study. Document analysis is an invaluable part of most schemes of triangulation, the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon. The purpose of triangulating is to provide a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility (Bowen, 2017).

The data obtained were subjected to cleaning to identify relevance and consistency in the collected data. Data management was then undertaken by various steps. As a first step of analysis I prepared data obtained from notes and transcribed material from tape recordings which, in addition to my observational notes, constituted the whole data set for analysis. Themes began to emerge early in the initial exploring, reading, and reduction stages that grouped data into meaning units that were assigned codes. Data reduction was a critical step to producing concise reports in line with advice of Huberman and Miles (2018) who stated that data analysis involves such processes as data reduction, display, conclusion drawing, and verification. Collected data was transcribed and tabulated based on emerging themes. Descriptive-interpretive analytical methods help understand the data and its meaning, that is the symbolic content of qualitative data while taking into account the non-verbal expressions noted during face-to-face interviews, except in the instances of the emailed answers, which denied the opportunity of personal interaction and the value that comes with it. The body language and other nonverbal expressions helped in checking the validity of the answers of the respondents.

4. RESULTS

The study first sought to obtain demographic information of the respondents in terms of pseudo names, institution, position, work experience, and career specialization. The findings are as captured in Table 1.

Table 1: Respondents' Profiles

Participant	Institution	Position	Years in Service	Career Field/Specialty
Charity	Tana	DVC	14	Agricultural economics
Molly	Tana	Director	24	Art and design
Emmy	Tana	Director	19	Music
Sarah	Tana	Director	20	Education
Anna	Kerio	VC	31	Home economics
Lisa	Sondu	VC	37	Home economics
Grace	Dawa	Senior Lecturer	26	Biotechnology
Rebecca	Athi	VC	21	Organic chemistry
Christina	Mara	Director	27	Linguistics
Alice	Suguta	VC	33	Biochemistry
Maria	Kerio	Dean	27	Linguistics
Faith	Nyando	Chancellor	40	History
Jessica	Yala	Chair	27	Analytical Chemistry
Isabella	Tsavo	Deputy Principal	17	Business management
Monica	Dawa	Chair	27	Horticulture
Lisa	Athi	DVC	29	Soil conservation
Sandra	Suam	VC	20	Food and nutrition
Patricia	Tsavo	DVC	28	Horticulture

Career Positioning Vision

All participants in this study pointed out that from the outset one must have a vision of where they want to be and work towards achieving it by doing first things first. A leadership position is not achieved through linear growth. It requires an organic, personal, and preference-driven approach entailing positioning and repositioning.

It is telling that at the time of this study, five women had managed to rise to the helm of leadership which is the vice-chancellor position of power and decision making in the 32 Kenyan public universities. Two of the women vice-chancellors participated in this study, sharing their experiences in in-depth one-on-one interviews that lasted approximately one hour each. Their achievements are phenomenal considering the deeply-rooted patriarchal culture in Kenyan society. There is a slightly better representation of women in the second tier of deputy vice chancellors and a marginally higher at the directors, principals of colleges, and department chairs levels. The government has made some

progress in the past 10 years, although overall visibility of women in the academy is still a long way from the constitutionally-mandated gender rule of no more than two thirds of one gender in any positions across the public service.

This study found that women academics have had to devise ways to position themselves early with a proper vision for leadership. Participants in this study advised women to seek the requisite credentials and begin to persistently fight for space early. Citing her experience participant Christina was categorical:

Prepare yourself for leadership in masculine domain, break away from stereotypes of the traditional, subtle, compassionate women; embrace culture and understand its significance but know your rights and responsibilities.

Further, she urges women academics to acquire the right skill set to:

Build self-confidence, demonstrate your knowhow and self-mastery; Develop leadership identity at a personal level early enough...

She goes on to explain:

People are not looking for a woman; they are looking for a leader so seek leadership without drawing unnecessary attention to your gender.

The foregoing statement is powerful and is a reminder that leadership is not domiciled within any gender, so playing the gender card will not necessarily get one a promotion but could be tantamount to blackmail. Career positioning blended with affirmative action propels women to leadership because a strong momentum has to be built for a sustainable and gender-sensitive leadership required for the University of the Future (Morley, 2011). Molly, who participated in this research via email, sums it up by giving women the impetus required to navigate through the turbulent and sometimes murky waters of getting to the top in a patriarchal society. I reproduce part of her response below:

Express desire and demonstrate ability to lead... fight for space... demand gender balance, voice your concern for inequality. Call discrimination by its name; it lowers women's dignity; sensitize men to respect women and to encourage women to apply for elective posts as they arise... Do not give up, fail interviews until you pass – the right and best one for you is to champion for gender equality.

It also emerged that as one looks forward to the next level, they must prepare others to take over their current positions to avoid any potential vacuum obstructing their way up. Failure to plan for succession signals weakness and a lack of confidence to move forward. Emmy emphasized succession planning, stating that one is deemed ready take on new challenges when they train others to replace them. Emmy and I did not get an opportunity for a face-to-face but her response was insightful. She argued that the win-win approach involves succession planning to benefit others and will enhance career growth prospects:

Take charge/control at meetings while recognizing other people's abilities. Encourage people to be courageous and ignore stereotypes and societal expectations. Develop people to succeed you as you go up... Succession planning is a pointer to your personal confidence and readiness for greater challenge.

There will always be obstacles which aspiring women must learn to ignore as they charge towards the goal. Women must be well aware of the challenges. People will try to focus on the anatomy before the belt as celebrated Kenyan leader Wangari Maathai once told us, but we must challenge them to focus above the neck. In this study Rebecca relates her experience of rejection from peers and advises:

Throw caution through the window and go for what you want... Ignore negative voices and rejection.

Positioning for illustrious careers in the academy can start as early as elementary school, as in the case of Jessica who came to the realization early enough that life in the village was too cruel and so decided to work towards building a career that would take her to urban locations. It is never too early to plan. Get a goal early and hold on to prayer for your desires to be granted. Jessica knew early and she shares:

Living in the rural area comes with harsh realities of trekking long distance to get to school and running back in the evening to help at the farm and with household chores.... I was motivated by my dislike for rural life. I wanted a better life that people in urban cities appeared to have.

Whatever the motivation or driver, the earlier the gear of career positioning is engaged the higher the possibility of breaking into the male domain of power and decision making, a domain that continues to be elusive to women. The good news is that the political class in Kenya is keen to project an image of a modern democracy by regional standards and therefore is expected to respect the constitutional provisions for equality of rights and access to opportunities for all citizens regardless of gender. Women must be ready to take up positions as they open up in respect of equal representation in key positions although it has been correctly argued that representation alone cannot be the only goal for gender equality (Nnaemeka, 2015).

Women academics were unanimous that ambition and tenacity propelled them to success. It is the strong desire for change from struggle and to escape poverty that drives academic excellence early in life.

The simple narrative that women have no interest in leadership or are afraid of additional responsibilities or that they better homemakers ought to be debunked by coming come out to demonstrate otherwise. Women aspiring to lead must demonstrate courage, express desire to lead, fight hard for space, and persistently voice their concerns against inequality. Woman academic Charity rallies women to be visible as they champion feminist ideals. She articulated her thoughts in the following quote:

Express desire and demonstrate ability to lead... fight for space... demand gender balance, voice your concern for inequality.

The study found that although women are well aware of the discrimination towards them and its impact on their self-worth, they are careful not to call out their male colleagues, fearing it could be counterproductive. It was evident that women walk on eggshells unsure of what works. Charity declared that she is not fearful of anyone and calls on fellow women to call discrimination by its name because it lowers women's dignity so respect for women must be demanded. The myth about women's disinterest in positions of more responsibility is discredited with persistence for promotion, as Charity encourages:

I encourage women to apply for elective posts as they arise... Do not give up –fail interviews until you pass – the right and best one for you are coming.... Fight for yourself and others. Be a feminist champion covertly and overtly. It is ok be a women champion for gender equality.

It is incumbent on all ambitious women to take ownership of their own survival or growth when faced with turbulence. A path laced with patriarchy is often tricky. Similar sentiments were aired by Grace who advises women to fight on adding that sometimes it may be necessary to developing close relationships with men for mentorship, coaching and for insight on internal dynamics of the system:

Women are interested in competing for positions as evidenced by applications from women on opportune positions. They should go a step further to socialize with men because they are mostly in supervisory position.

And:

Don't pay attention to character assassination and assumptions of immoral behavior when they are always seen with supervisors. The world may not understand what it takes to get advice and guidance from male supervisors and may mistake contacts with supervisor for emotional/physical relationship/engagements. At all times seek advice from the sincere.

With regard to ambition, participants talked of the importance of showing interest so that people become aware of your desires. Interest can be exhibited by participating actively in group assignments, volunteering, and by expressing it honestly with decision makers. Rebecca intimated that excess caution or fear could be counterproductive as one would appear weak or disinterested, hence the advice:

Stand up to be counted among those with a long term view of the institution. It may go against our socialization to be modest but I tell you... offering yourself and listing your capability will in no way appear boastful.

African societies are mostly conservative and would frown at those who discuss their achievements, capabilities, dreams, goals, or strengths openly. Women are victims of a hostile culture so they are advised to shed attitudes that no longer work.

Rebecca's views on toughness show that women have come a long way in confronting norms. I argue women tailor leadership styles to respond to prevailing circumstances and self-represent in ways that diffuse patriarchal backlash.

Christina's reflection on how she got to where she is today is instructive. She advocates for an early positioning saying:

Prepare yourself for leadership in masculine domain... break away from stereotypes of the traditional, subtle, compassionate women... embrace culture and understand its significance but know your rights and responsibilities. Your self-confidence must come through; demonstrate your knowhow and self-mastery... Develop leadership (self-mastery and leadership identity) at a personal level early enough.

Christina rallies women to claim their space and proactively seek positions of leadership. Literature is replete with expressions that "Leadership is taken, not given," so women ought to take that literally and not wait for that opportunity to arrive on a silver platter. People are not invited to advance, it takes personal initiative to be seen and heard because as Christina stressed it is not about gender but about capabilities. She felt that it the skillset a person possesses that determines selection to leadership as expressed:

Leadership is all about capability and interest. The weak will be discouraged by gender violence which is attitudinal in most cases. I know that people are looking for the right people to occupy leadership positions. Be that person. Don't draw unnecessary attention to your gender.

Christina's perspective was supported by Faith, a trailblazer in many fronts who advises women to be firm and focused on their goals:

Be different and authentic and devise a unique Leadership style which could be counterproductive but in the end some love and more hate. I withstood so much but in the end am proud of my achievement gender manipulation with a firm demeanor and my passions for results. Find a passion in championing women's even if you appear selective.

In conclusion, the study found that successful women positioned themselves for leadership early by adopting a holistic approach encompassing multiple pathways discussed in the sections that follow. At the time of this study, five women were in the top leadership position of vice chancellor with the men occupying the rest of 27 positions in Kenyan public universities. Two of the women vice chancellors shared their experiences with the researcher in their offices during interviews that lasted approximately one hour in each case. Their achievements are phenomenal considering the very well-veiled but deeply-rooted patriarchal culture in Kenya.

Out of the 18 participants, key soft skills required for success emerged as presented in the Figure 1. The number of respondents in support of each attribute was tallied and a percentage computed as in the bar chart below:

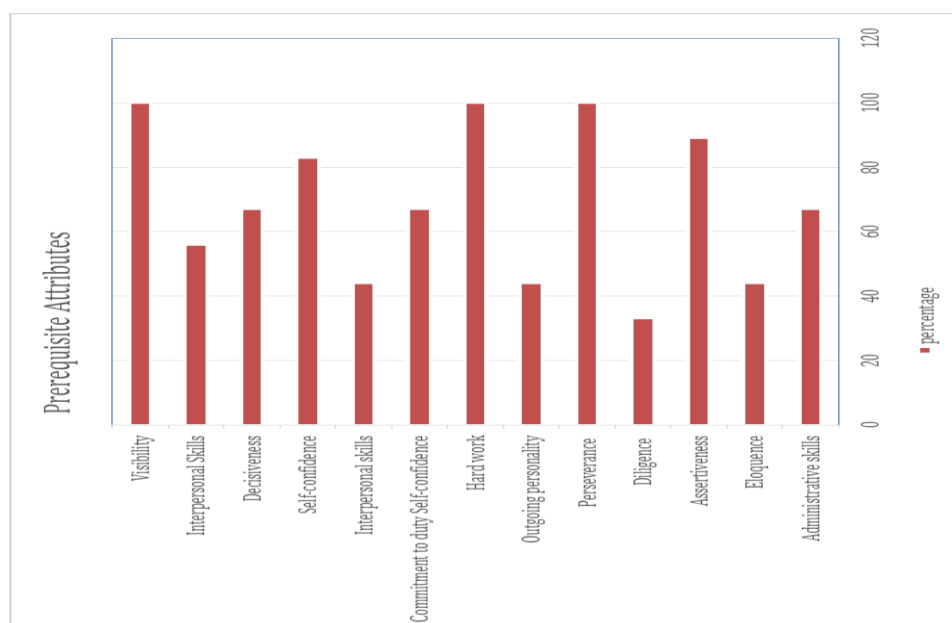


Figure 1: Prerequisite Skills for Career Positioning

It is clear that administrative skills were a soft skill that 12 participants (70%) considered as being instrumental in elevating women to achieve positive results in their line of duty. University management comes with a lot of challenges and therefore requires that women are well equipped with managerial skills that will give them a competitive edge.

Participants attributed success to hard work (100%), most of them saying that the extra effort, sacrifice, and long working hours (even weekends) contributed to their success. All the 18 participants narrated how much effort they put in to get to the top.

Diligence, meaning being careful and conscientious in one's work was backed by 6 of the participants, translating to 30%. Giving all the attention that a job requires is the key to success. Lack of concentration and any form of carelessness will definitely bring down standards and that is what must be avoided at all costs.

Perseverance, which can be defined as continuing in a course of action in spite of difficulties, made all the difference between losers and winners. The 18 participants (100%) said that the road is narrow and winding with many hurdles, but they had to soldier on.

This finding is in agreement with the literature review where women managers require more attributes than men in order to ascend to senior management. Gachukia (2001), quoting Grace Alele Williams, outlines these attributes: professional qualification, having qualities of firmness, competence, responsibility, hardworking, good interpersonal skills, assertiveness, confidence, moral stability, objectivity, discipline, and dedication.

Self-mastery enables one to unleash their full potential which then yields confidence that is in turn a critical asset for navigating the system. To navigate the system, one has to have impeccable skills.

Participant Jessica declares that the need to escape from the chains of cultural gender role demarcation should be a strong enough motivation to ensure a successful formula to get through the labyrinth to a lifelong comfort. She shared her eventful journey and the challenges faced growing up:

Find an exit point to escape cultural chains. Have the courage to be different because in reality it is quite a challenge balancing traditional expectations of a woman and your individual long-term goals. It is draining to execute both and to please everyone. A few very tough women excel in both.

Rural life is defined by repetitive daily chores and scarcity or total lack of basic needs like sanitary towels for women. It is the grim reality of the countryside drove Jessica to seek a higher calling that would get her out of that environment. Most respondents agree that the social costs of success are numerous and ought to be confronted holistically. However, when holistic approaches presented new challenges, women opted for incremental steps with clear goals in mind. Whereas boys and men are invisible around the home, girls had to undertake repetitive household chores and farming activities to provide food and affection to their other siblings. Women must ask themselves what they must do to be like the men and escape societal role expectations as enumerated by Tamale & Oloka-Onyango (2000). This is all because men are stereotyped positively with maleness seen as a resource, or form of career capital, and femaleness as a form of negative equity.

Participant Charity believes that women excel with the right attitude: "Be bold, strong, unassuming until you seem like a threat to cultural beliefs. Do not conform but rather copy and implement the dominant male /patriarchal tactics.... Find male role models."

This participant introduces a new strategy of looking out and copying the ways of men, how they succeed, and to adapt if necessary.

Charity goes on to urge women to be feminists in academia. This will allow women to reap from both ends, i.e. femininity and masculinity. Feminists in academia would facilitate gender balance and check gender inequality that is reproduced in the academia, as Leonard (2001) points at the academy as a place that actively constitutes gender. She rallies women to participate in collective and collaborative initiatives address gender inequalities:

Each and every woman should convert into a feminist. Don't shy from identifying with women's causes. Advocate even if you are reluctant to be associated with the activist tag. The situation now is that some women do not see themselves as activists but partake of the spoils of unrelenting fighters for feminist causes.

This observation from a younger professor is in sharp contrast to the response of senior and more experienced participants, which shows that feminism is getting appreciated at the academy. The older generation struggled hard to be where they are without collective action and it is no wonder that they cannot pinpoint the value of feminism as they find it problematic to make a distinction between feminists in academic leadership and women in academic leadership when asked. The older academics are more inclined to individual efforts and hard work than the collective activism and or feminism. It is apparent that few women explore feminism as a collective chip to dismantle patriarchy but instead choose to be lone rangers even if it results in long journeys to the top. Women have learned to be lone ranger strugglers even as they fight against patriarchal resistance that actively reproduces gender disparity within the walls of higher education institutions. In the above examples the younger feminist has scaled heights faster than the older academic by employing a blend of approaches.

In reference to leadership Nzomo (1995) calls on women to close ranks and self-organize across class, political, and socio-economic divides to stand up against marginalization. The call is more relevant today when all attempts to implement legislative proposals aimed at better female representation have met strong resistance. Sadly, even when it takes court orders to create more space for women, patriarchal resistance fights back strongly to sabotage leadership. Meanwhile women extend extremely cordial relationships with the men, even as the women remain in what has been described by scholars like Ryan & Haslam (2005) to be unpopular, precarious positions.

Women must not allow the feminist agenda to be infiltrated anti-feminist agents. Instead they should strive to merge for common good to erase the artificial distinctions between being woman and being feminist. Women in academic leadership should also double as feminists in leadership to utilize their positions of privilege to bargain at the negotiating table for more inclusivity (Madden, 2004). Women academicians have defied cultural norms and expectations in most communities in Kenya and are highly-regarded role models. When these role models champion feminist causes, it will have a huge impact. They are already immune to stereotypes and stigma.

Madden's conclusions on apparent disinterest in feminism among women in the positions of leadership in education is supported by the findings of this study. It is apparent from this study that participants were not emphatic about feminist struggles. Women academics constantly alluded to their personal initiatives and strategies. It is troubling to see women leaders who can neither recall nor acknowledge feminisms as a movement to dismantle patriarchy. This therefore calls for an examination on how sister-hood slipped.

It is apparent that those that do not see an advantage in the numbers (feminist movement) may find themselves in an unintended default approach such as a gaze at the men and move towards maleness to compete. Society has successfully positioned maleness as admirable. It has been hypothesised that leadership is defined according to normative masculinity (Binns and Kerfoot, 2011). Maleness is seen as a resource whereas femaleness is often perceived as irreconcilable with intellectual and managerial authority to the extent that in the concept of social cognition when we think "leader," we think "male" (Sinclair, 2001). I argue that women view maleness as access to opportunity, and performing maleness more rewarding than collective approaches spearheaded by fellow women.

At some point women become individualistic elites disconnected from the collective packs to pursue own survival. Such women would not consider their successes as a success of womenfolk but as personal achievement based on individual goals and their on hard work. When women describe themselves as working extra hard and doing what it takes to succeed, it can be concluded that women are ready to lose themselves in pursuit of individual goals and interests. Feminism(s) is collective, an ideology that permeates class and station in life. Amina mama (2005) tells us that every family has multiple levels of class such that the privileged women in a household are still connected to the marginalized in the same family. It is however observed that successful women have little patience to nurture their colleagues in lower ranks and even lesser time for collaborative ventures for affirmative action.

Participant Charity goes further to recommend that women should fight by all means to gain access to leadership positions, including staff union positions. A campaign for leadership slots is often accompanied by violence meted on competitors. Women require protection provided by male security to insulate them when things get out of control. This further dispels the notion that women are not keen to compete only waiting to be handed out positions as the weaker gender. Charity argues that all things being equal, women are sure to outperform men and suggests "Provide women with

security as they perform their managerial duties. In a male-dominated masculine society, women need to feel secure as they climb up the leadership ladder.”

Leadership is a choice, it is not a rank. Leaders make choices and take risks for the sake of everybody else. Security protection is a masculine tool used to intimidate and harass opponents. Women gaze at the heavy presence of mean-faced bodyguards of elite men, and sense danger thus opting out or losing interest. Since gender is performative, women have learned to shed feminine traits such as affection, tolerance, and dialogue, and wear masculine no-nonsense traits of assertiveness, meanness, and even violence. To have bodyguards is a status symbol that elicits fear while providing a false sense of self-importance, a mark of class and status. Bodyguards during campaigns for office and promotion signify masculinity and readiness for violence. Interestingly, strong women utilizing male tactics gain the admiration and respect from fellow women. The following comment by Sarah sums up: “You are what you want to be and can be what you determine to be. Women have excelled in different leadership roles including in the traditional pre-colonial times. It is much easier now. Fight on.”

Feminist researchers in Africa have argued that there is a salient tendency within institutions to place responsibility for the persistent gender imbalance to forces outside their institutions (Mama, 2006; Odhiambo, 2014; Omwami, 2011). Patriarchy fights back fiercely therefore victim blaming is not uncommon. In a firm tone participant Rebecca goes on to state:

Don't be afraid of men's reactions to your aspirations... make your choices and fiercely defend them... Ignore harsh judgments and verdicts by men... Women should draw strength from fellow women who must support.... Women must be able to get away with what men would usually get away with ... (no double standards). Break away from stereotypes ... disregard them... be fearless, ignore voices and propel your agenda.

Harsh judgements by men emanate from stereotypes such as the gender role incongruity theory (Bunyi, 2018). Patriarchy continues to sustain itself by a role congruity theory that prejudices women depicting them as less likely to be successful at leadership and less favorable as leaders when compared with men. This narrative refuses to go away even in modern times when women leadership has been tested and applauded.

If women in leadership positions in the academy embraced feminism, remained true to their cause without worrying about political correctness, the narrative would change and the role incongruity theory will be demolished. Consequently the theory of female leadership advantage by Eagly and Carli (2003) will be reinforced and the “glass ceiling,” a barrier of prejudice and discrimination that excludes women from higher level leadership positions will be eventually shattered.

It is my argument that women have utilized a mix of conventional and unconventional strategies to ascend and survive positions of power and decision making. This is hinted to by the rallying call on women to employ all weapons and tactics at their disposal. Do what it takes, act like them, be mean, hire, fire, confront or pray, and stand your ground unrelentingly. Break up unsupportive teams and seek allies at high places. Once in high positions, women blend with men so well that they embrace each other's trait and ignore the values that make them different.

Female stereotypes emanate from within and outside the institutions as narrated by a participant in Raburu's study (2010). She points to disrespect, frustration and sabotage by male colleagues who make sarcastic remarks at departmental meetings. Despite her seniority they subtly disrespect her position, labelling her a timewaster with such comments as “let's see what the girl has to say today” (Raburu, 2010). Similarly participant Patricia observed that stereotypes are complex and cut across family, friends and close allies. She says:

Those conservative communities frown at women who are excelling and there is this attitude that women in academics are stubborn and difficult, with little touch with common citizens. This should not trigger setbacks. Your due respect comes later without doubt.

Molly reminds women of barriers along the path to success. She advises women to expect the worst from both men and women. Gossip is an effective weapon for surrender. She offers the following tips:

Women need shock absorbers to withstand harsh comments from both men and women. Women are advised to take the high road to crack the glass ceiling whose level is getting lower and lower. To achieve this they must work hard to come

to the attention of the chief executives regardless of theories peddled. Being in the face of the decision and policy makers is a metaphor for networking, working late, visibility at events, volunteer or anything to get noticed. Take the high road.

The above advice points to my observation on the existence of an escalator effect. An escalator would be any force that works in support of one's aspirations by a push to a higher ground for clearer visibility. It could be a pat or any form of rooting for the other. Once visible, the woman's desirable leadership qualities are noticed thus giving an edge over the invisible. People must know you exist in the first place. Feminists have been stigmatized and used as a label to deride women in order to surrender their quest for leadership in institutions in general. To survive, women quickly transform into "acceptable" beings as soon as they enter male-dominated spaces, they suddenly assume new personalities, vote alongside men with the hope of gaining acceptance and "respect." They assume maleness to disguise as male figures in women's suits. This transformation therefore defeats the purpose of women fighting hard only to turn against their hard-fought course and quietly become part of the male problem they faced on their way up.

Whereas networking and ally building has been used successfully by the women in this study, it was the advice of one participant for women to pay special attention and efforts at individual levels through personal commitment to attain leadership. It emerges that collective initiatives like feminism are relegated to be secondary, an option used to increase chances and not the key to propelling women to leadership in higher education. Patricia places the onus on womenfolk as responsible for their own success by urging them:

Persistence, focus, and sheer hard work. I have had to reach out to cross-cutting issues like gender to expand my sphere of influence and consultancies... Widen your sphere of influence and tell people in positions of leadership and decision making what you can offer to the institution... lead by example and work in the league of winners.

Christina, a senior professor with impressive credentials on gender and children education, advises women aspiring to leadership to shun mediocrity: "Demonstrate your know-how and have self-mastery... don't sabotage yourself by being less than professional in the way you do your work. Learn more effective ways and understand appropriate strategies of gender empowerment..."

Women are called upon to pursue excellence because they are judged differently from men. Further, the women respondents outlined specific traits that catapulted them to prominence as discussed below. The majority of respondents described their personal styles, preferences, strengths and zeal with expressions like; self-driven, confident, restrained in meetings, discipline, prudent, work long hours, have poise, determination, patience, will power to win, keep the faith, composed when faced with difficulties, ignore negativity, set goals and exceed expectations, sacrifice, delay marriage, have the courage to take men as role models, self-express be visible in meetings, be a hard worker, a fighter, innovative and creative, hands on, stabilizer, unifier, hard worker, fighter, and creative, cutting edge management style, driven by personal initiative, volunteerism within and outside university, worked late hours, long hours and participated in multiple committees, vigor, personal energy and collaboration with external agencies, use of personal resources, recognize and promote gender initiatives, and hold vigorous campaigns.

For Monica leadership and personality traits give her the confidence:

I am results-oriented, dedicated, results driven, must go the extra mile to succeed, consult to management decision making by consensus, firm, tolerant, passionate otherwise you won't go far. You must be in control. You must be disciplined. You must set targets, as what gets measured gets done. I work hard. I really put in time; I like being innovative and creative, efficient, discipline, team player, honesty, honesty and a firm style.

Self-mastery and navigation skills were a key trait that makes the difference. Self-mastery is being a master of your own self by fully understanding who you really are. Self-mastery enables one to unleash their full potential unleashing confidence, which in turn is an impetus for navigating the system.

Part of positioning involves women in the academy doubling up as feminist in the academy as earlier argued by Morley (2013). Feminists in the academy would take deliberate steps to create space for women within and even outside their ranks for a stronger impact in the society because they are highly regarded. 12 participants felt the need to increase advocacy comprising of 67% of the participants. I anticipated that feminism advocacy would receive a 100% backing. It however turned out to have 67% support, meaning that women academics are not inclined to collective approaches to gender issues and choose instead to look inward towards the self. They chose their paths and took ownership of the risks,

efforts, and rewards. The observation from a younger professor is in sharp contrast to the older professor who declared that it is quite difficult to tell the difference between feminists in academic leadership and women in academic leadership when asked if there was a distinction. The older academics are more inclined to individual efforts and hard work than collective activism and/or feminism. It is apparent that few women explore the route of feminism as a collective means to dismantle patriarchy, choosing instead to be lone rangers even if it results in long journeys to the top. Women are so used to struggling and they are comfortable struggling to find space. Charity a feminist advocates for collective activism to enhance their profile and transform into feminists in the academy.

Nzomo (1995) called on women to self-organize across class, political and socio-economic divides to stand up against marginalization. The advice is more relevant today in the struggle for the legislation of the two-thirds gender rule that has failed to garner support in the legislative assembly that is male dominated. Morley (2013) argues that for a distinction between women in academic leadership and feminists in academic leadership. All women are encouraged to merge for common good and close the divide between women and feminists. Women in academic leadership should also be feminists in academic leadership to utilize their positions of privilege to bargain at the negotiating table for more inclusivity.

Women are reluctant to identify as feminists in fear of backlash for societal and cultural expectations. Feminists have been stigmatized and disrespected by both men and women. Women who are ignorant of the ideals of feminism are encouraged by masculinist forces to isolate those that are championing gender equality. It is clear that feminist movements are easy targets and used as a label to divide women, leading to stigmatization of their course. This has resulted in the quick conversion of successful women so that as soon as they enter male-dominated spaces, they quickly assume new personalities voting and siding with agenda for acceptance and respect. They assume maleness to become male figures in women's suits. That was evident from the respondents who formed 33% of non-feminist ideology.

Women recommend a focus on individual success and personal commitment to attain leadership. It confirms that most women do not necessarily believe in teamwork or collective initiatives like feminism. It emerged that collective action is just one little option used to increase chances and not the key to propelling women to leadership in higher education.

In our society women encounter constant resistance from men, mostly due to the male stereotypes. 12 women participants equivalent to 83% felt that these stereotypes must be fought to correct the attitudes men have against women. Sandra urges women to emulate trailblazers:

Be like Olive Mugenda. She fought off haters and detractors hell bent on denying her a second term in office as VC. She put up a strong fight through a judicial process and won. A similar fight was waged against one other female VC and she successfully fought it off through the courts... they are top role models for us in the academy on how to survive the male dominance.

She demonstrated that the fight is not for the faint hearted, some fights can get murky but that should not deter women to forge a head. Rebecca encourages women to ignore overbearing negative voices: "Step out and step up! Do not be afraid of men's reactions to your aspirations. Break away from the yoke of being seen as a weakling... disregard negatives... Be fearless, ignore destructive voices, and propel your agenda."

Stereotype is a harmful vice that distorts identity by over-generalizing characteristics in order to discourage women from conforming to negative stereotypes thus resulting in fear and anxiety. Through teaching, advocacy and research scholars can expand the conversation and confront stereotype because they themselves are role models who have experienced similar negativity and emerged successful.

Respondent Jessica further challenges women:

Break all the rules, cross socially constructed lines, determine to excel beyond expectations and play near the male goal posts. Nothing comes on a platter unless you want the old flower girl roles. I am not saying it is easy.

One has to sacrifice for a better future. The respondent had a choice of succumbing to societal pressures in the short run to blow up her future. She had a goal and kept the eyes on the prize; she had to demonstrate resilience and was never derailed by the myriad environmental challenges that came her way. Persistence, focus and hard work were at 100% meaning all the respondents acknowledge that these attributes are ingredients for success.

Demonstrating know-how and self-mastery was at 44%, which means that expertise alone cannot propel a woman to the top echelon. Knowing what you are expected to do and doing it with high precision and command is what women need to get to the driver's seat in management in academia. One requires other traits in combination to help break the glass ceiling.

Success factors are multifaceted in nature and a combination of traits will help women to navigate and climb the management ladder. To bring out all the strength women poses was a trait that was mentioned by 10 women translating to 56% of the respondents. They reckon that women are not any different from their male counterparts and have unique qualities that can be summoned to put them at the helm.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of the study was to understand how the women managers made it to the top of university management in spite of the gendered nature of leadership in higher education institutions in Kenya. Amidst barriers and challenges only a small number of women make it to positions of leadership in higher education institutions in Kenya. The disparity of women in top management in the workforce has been a major debate in both management and gender studies. Faced by many hurdles of a socio-cultural, organizational, and individual nature, a handful of women have held VC, DVC, Deans, HOD and other senior administrative positions with remarkable success.

A women-centred analytical approach and feminist methodology was used in this study. According to Blackmore (2002), a feminist critical perspective treats leadership as a conceptual lens through which to problematize the nature, purpose, and capacities of the educational systems and organizations to reform and indeed rethink their practices in more socially just ways. Feminist methodology requires the researcher to think differently about the process of doing research, and gives the researcher the power of naming those aspects of women's lives that are not always named in general social science research.

Women academics have to fight from within their institutions for space, promotion, and recognition despite being more assiduous and productive than their male colleagues. Their incremental success in the fight for leadership within their ranks has worked to disrupt the trend of hiring externally while overlooking homegrown talent. It is no longer appropriate to appoint women as compromise candidates to ameliorate powerful male candidates, as revealed by (Onsongo, 2004).

Citing Eagly & Karau (2002) and Koenig et al. (2011), Longman et al. (2018) reason that, "the cognitive association of leadership and maleness challenges women's advancement, whether that association is held subconsciously or overtly" (p. 4). Stainback et al. (2016) offer other reasonings such as hegemonic gender beliefs about the relative abilities and skills of women and men which result in lowered expectations for women and devalue women's performance; as there is a tendency for the disadvantaged to adopt the perspective of those in power, it's possible that women devalue their own abilities; and because women have to fight stereotypes to advance into leadership positions they might not risk openly fighting gender equality.

REFERENCES

- [1] Airini, R. (2016). Influencing Factors of Female Underrepresentation as School Principals in Indonesia.
- [2] Beck, A. J. (2018). *Through the Looking-Glass Ceiling: The advancement of women administrators and women faculty in an institution of higher education*.
- [3] Bensimon, E. & Marshall, C. (2003). Like it or not: feminist critical policy analysis matters. *Journal of Higher Education* 74 (3), 337- 349. Retrieved from <http://myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/docview/62227770?accountid=14771>
- [4] Bowen, G. A. (2017). Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9 (2), 27-40. doi: 10.3316/qrj0902027
- [5] Bunyi, G. W. (2018). Gender Disparities and Higher Education in Kenya: Nature, Extent and Way Forward. *The African Symposium* 4, (1), 43-61. Retrieved from <http://www.ncsu.edu/aern/TAS4.1/TAS4.1.pdf>
- [6] Coate, K. (2016). Feminist knowledge and the ivory tower: A case study. *Gender and Education*, 11(2), 141-159. doi: 10.1080/09540259920663

- [7] Cubillo, L., & Brown, M. (2019). Women into educational leadership and management: International differences. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 41(3), 278-291. Retrieved from <http://www.emeraldinsight.com/0957-8234.htm>
- [8] Delamont, S. (2013). *Feminist Sociology*. London: Sage.
- [9] Karau, S. J. (2002). Role Congruity Theory of Prejudice Toward Female Leaders. *Psychological Review*, 109(3), 573-598. doi:10.1037//0033-295x.109.3.573
- [10] Gowe, R., & Montgomery, P. (2015). Women and the leadership paradigm: Bridging the gender gap. *National Forum of Education Administration and Supervision Journal*, 1(E). Retrieved from <http://www.nationalforum.com/pdf>
- [11] Huberman, A. M., & Miles, M. B. (2018). *Data management and analysis methods*. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 428-444). Thousand Oaks, CA, US: Sage Publications, Inc.
- [12] International Labour Organization. (2008, June 10). *ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization 8*. Adopted by International Labour Conference, 9th session in Geneva.
- [13] Kamau, N. (2010). *Women and political leadership in Kenya*. Berlin: Heinrich BollStiftung. Retrieved January, 3, 2011.
- [14] Kitetu, (2014) Organisational networks of Kenyan female migrants in England: The humble chama now operating at higher international levels, - London: United Kingdom.
- [15] Kitonga, N. (2017). Postcolonial construction of self: Two immigrant secondary science teachers from Nigeria and Kenya explore the role of cultural and indigenous beliefs in their teaching.
- [16] Makori, R., Onyango, M., Attyang, J., M., Bantu, E. & Onderi, P. (2016). Organizational cultural factors hindering women ascending to top management positions in public universities in Kenya: A case of Moi University. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7, (11), 79-84.
- [17] Mikell, G. (2015). *African feminism: The politics of survival in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- [18] Morley, L (2019) *Organizing feminisms. The micropolitics of the academy*. London: Macmillan Press.
- [19] Morley, L. (2014). Lost leaders: Women in the global academy. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 33:1, 114-128, DOI: 10.1080/07294360.2013.864611
- [20] Neidhart, H., & Carlin, P. (2015). *Pathways, incentives and barriers for women aspiring principalship in Australia Catholic Schools*. Paper presented at New Zealand Association for Research in Education Conference, Auckland. Retrieved from <http://209.85.229.132>
- [21] Nkomo, S. & Ngambi, H. (2018). African women in leadership: Current knowledge and a framework for future studies. *International Journal of African Renaissance Studies*, 4(1), 49-68. doi:10.1080/18186870903102014
- [22] Nnaemeka, O. (2015). *Mapping African feminism*. In A. Cornwall, (Ed.) *Readings in Gender in Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- [23] Nzomo, M. (2015). Women and Political Governance in Africa: A Feminist Perspective. Pathways to African Feminism and Development, *Journal of African Women's Studies Centre*, 1(1).
- [24] Odhiambo, G. (2011) Higher education quality in Kenya: A critical reflection of key challenges. *Quality in Higher Education*, 17 (3), 299-315. Retrieved from <https://doi:10.1080/13538322.2011.614472>
- [25] Odinga, A. O. (1969). *Not yet uhuru: The autobiography of Oginga Odinga*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- [26] Onsongo, J. (2015). The growth of private universities in Kenya: Implications for gender equity in higher education. *Journal of Higher Education in Africa*, 5(2-3), 111-133.

- [27] Onsumbah B. A (2011). Representation of women in top educational management and leadership positions in Kenya. *Advancing Women in Leadership*, 31, 57-68. Available at http://advancingwomen.com/awl/awl_wordpress/ISSN 1093-7099.
- [28] Oyěwùmí, O. (2013). *African women and feminism: Reflecting on the politics of sisterhood*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.
- [29] Raburu, P. (2015). Motivation of Women Academics and Balancing Family & Career. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*, 5(1), 359. Retrieved from <http://www.mcser.org/journal/index.php/jesr/article/view/5630>
- [30] Rosette, A. S., Zhou Koval, C. Ma, A., & Livingston, R. (2016). Race matters for women leaders: Intersectional effects on agentic deficiencies and penalties. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 27, 429-445.
- [31] Sifuna D. N. (2017). The governance of Kenyan public universities. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 3:2, 175-212, DOI: 10.1080/13596749800200030
- [32] UNESCO. (2017). *Higher education in the 21 century, vision and action*. Report of the World Conference on Education. UNESCO, Paris 5 - 9 <http://ifuw.org/cfhgred98-is.html>.
- [33] Wambura Ngunjiri, F. (2017). Lessons in spiritual leadership from Kenyan women. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 48(6), 755-768.
- [34] Weedon, C. (2017). *Feminist practice and poststructuralist theory*. Oxford: Blackwell.