
AN OVERVIEW OF WOMEN AS SCHOOL LEADERS IN NON-PUBLIC EDUCATION

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Abstract: Democratic development in Albania opened up new prospects for private education, education that is most associated with the country's economic prospects. The initiative of female teachers to be part of the role of private school leader brought a new trend in Albania the field of education and business. The hierarchy in education developed as a result of masculine hegemony, with administrative abilities being associated with males, and teaching associated with females (Elmore, 2000). An elaborate system of administrative positions that has expanded with the growth of districts and schools was developed in order to adequately supervise the predominantly female and, therefore, relatively weak, profession of teaching (Elmore, 2000). According to Leithwood (1994), education is numerically dominated by women but managers in education are predominantly male although even there is some evidence of women readiness to take up leadership positions in education. Research suggests that men continue to implicitly perceive positive leadership characteristics as being associated with stereotypically masculine behaviours, thus implicitly favouring men in the selection of leaders (Hill et al., 2016). The widespread acceptance of the bureaucratic-managerial model of leadership has been detrimental to education, placing too much emphasis on the decision-making ability of a few people and stunting the growth of leadership among front-line personnel. Leadership, not management, is needed to solve complex problems that do not have simple answers (Fullan 2001). This study aimed to present the problems faced by women entrepreneurs in leading private pre university educational institutions. Six women leaders of private schools were part of the study by analyzing their perceptions of their experiences, professional developments, difficulties, professional self efficacy, commitment and challenges in the process of organization, management and operation of private education institutions based on semi-structured interviews and focus group session conducted with them. The purpose of qualitative content analysis was to identify the major categories and patterns among the subcategories. This study confirms previous research in the areas of gender discrimination during the career paths of school female leaders. Women who aspire to leadership position in private pre university educational institutions must be willing based on integrity they build over time in their job performance at every level of administration. Findings suggest that the critical role of advocating women leadership challenges in education. Educational leadership programs should encourage and prepare females in assisting them in climbing the educational leadership career ladder.

Keywords: school leadership, non public education, women, challenges

1. INTRODUCTION

Democratic developments in Albania opened up new prospects for private enterprise which one of them was the expansion of non-public education. Developments of non-public education in Albania after 90s brought to the Ministry of Education and Science (nowadays known as Ministry of Education Sports and Youth) the demand for the restoration of non-public education, presenting first requirements for creation of this new alternative in education. In the absence of legislation to regulate relations between education governing bodies and private entities, (religious communities, associations, foundations, individuals and legal entities), it is operated on agreement between the two parties. The first legal regulation became law on 21.06.1995, “On pre university education system”. While on the Albanian Constitution is written: “Pupils and students can be educated in private schools of all levels, which are created and operate under the law”. The responsible bodies for private pre university educational institutions are the Council of Ministers, Ministry of Education Sports and Youth, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs and institutions under the ministries, where we can mention local educational units (Departments of Regional Education, Education Offices and Employment Centres). Ministry of Education Sports and Youth is represented locally by local educational offices, which are established by the Council of Ministers. Local educational units are educational departments, at the regional level, and education offices at the district level, which are responsible for the operation of educational institutions within its jurisdiction.

The initiative of female teachers to be part of the role of private school manager brought a new trend in Albania the field of education and business. The hierarchy in education developed as a result of masculine hegemony, with administrative abilities being associated with males, and teaching associated with females (Elmore, 2000). An elaborate system of administrative positions that has expanded with the growth of districts and schools was developed in order to adequately supervise the predominantly female and, therefore, relatively weak, profession of

teaching (Elmore, 2000). According to Leithwood (1994), education is numerically dominated by women but managers in education are predominantly male although even there is some evidence of women readiness to take up leadership positions in education. Research suggests that men continue to implicitly perceive positive leadership characteristics as being associated with stereotypically masculine behaviours, thus implicitly favouring men in the selection of leaders (Hill et al., 2016). The widespread acceptance of the bureaucratic-managerial model of leadership has been detrimental to education, placing too much emphasis on the decision-making ability of a few people and stunting the growth of leadership among front-line personnel. Leadership, not management, is needed to solve complex problems that do not have simple answers (Fullan 2001).

2. METHODOLOGY

This study aims to present the problems faced by women entrepreneurs not only socially, but also economically in their bold venture. The sample of principals was purposive having been determined by their gender, experience in their current position. Through a procedure that combines data obtained from the database of the Regional Education Directorate of Shkodra 6 women leaders of private schools of Shkodra, were part of the study by analyzing their perceptions of their experiences, professional developments, difficulties, professional self efficacy, commitment and challenges in the process of organization, management and operation of private education institutions based on semi-structured interviews and focus group session conducted with them. The study was designed in two phases; in *the first phase* it was used the technique of a narrative oral history approach in order to gather personal reflections of events from one or several individuals. The interview protocol included semi structured, open-ended questions. This is an interpretive research methodology based firmly on the basis that human beings come to understand and give meaning to their lives through story (Andrews, Squire, & Tambokou, 2008). In *the second phase* it was used the technique of focus group. According to Matthews and Ross (2010), "Essentially, the focus group is a method for collecting qualitative data, which is an adaptation of the interview technique". The moderator also has a very important role in focus groups. Gibbs (1997) argues that the role of the moderator becomes critical, especially in terms of providing clear explanations for the purpose of the group, the assistance given to the participants to feel relaxed and facilitating interaction among group members. One of the focus group's advantages in this study is that it enabled us to collect information that directly reflects the participants' own experience with the issue taken in the study. The focus group gives people the opportunity to explore and challenge the experiences and opinions of others by making personal reflections. Guide questions sought to encourage participants to give their point of view regarding the research objectives and research set by researchers in this study. The drafting of the focus group guide was built up with open and semi-structured questions aimed at getting information from participants on their perception of contemporary teaching with the one previously developed. The process of data collection continued until "data saturation" was achieved.

3. FINDINGS

The purpose of qualitative content analysis was to identify the major categories and patterns among the subcategories. The analysis element was a whole phrase taken from the focus group transcripts. Qualitative researchers believe that the social world has many dimensions, hence explanations are based on the interpretations of the researcher (Leedy and Ormrod, 2014; De Vaus, 2014). The topics and sub-topics relevant to the research questions were identified and represented by the quotations that were selected for presented in the Findings section. The data has been coded and organized after some interpretive steps to ensure that no sense of theirs is lost (Jacelon and O'Dell 2005). It is given for each subcategory corresponding to the meaning of its coding. Coding and sub-categories are constantly checked, and compared to data collected to verify the common understanding and topics reflected in the interviews (Bowen 2008). The subclass and category designation was not formed by the numeric frequency of the units of finding, but more in the meanings ascribed and the links of meanings found by transcription. The major categories and patterns among the subcategories were;

- a) *Time to develop leadership styles.* According to our respondents the first barrier they have encountered during their journey as private school manager was related to develop the appropriate leadership style. Even they readiness to take up leadership positions in education was based on their passion to bring a new concept of women in leadership it took years to develop their leadership style until these styles are understood and accepted by the staff.
- b) *Leader stereotypes.* Women have entered into educational leadership; they have experienced limited access to productive mentoring relationships (Gardiner et al. (2000). The lack of encouragement to pursue leadership positions, coupled with the gender stereotypes in educational leadership. According to Leithwood (1994), education is numerically dominated by women but managers in education are predominantly male although even there is some evidence of women readiness to take up leadership positions in education.

c) *Confidence and ability*. The consequences of being accepted or not for their initiative and their own leadership style brought lack of confidence. Our respondents declared they had emotional struggles in their beginnings. These emotional struggles were related to their confidence of dealing with unfamiliarity with a new territory (non public sector) and their new position (leaders). Cubillo (1999) found in her study that women's lack of confidence was more to do with unfamiliarity with the territory than a lack of faith in their abilities. During the focus group discussion it was evidenced that the faith in their ability to succeed in their entrepreneurship was one an important component in struggling the insecurities of dealing with unfamiliarity of their role.

d) *Balancing work-family*. Family responsibilities are barriers for women in administrative positions (Home, 1998). The demanding nature of the leadership role brought overload and conflict from their role in the family. According to Keith and Schafer (1980) the demanding nature of women's family roles makes them more likely to experience conflict, overload and negative consequences from family roles than men. Even though struggling with work life balance, respondents declared that their family was the potential key support in continuing with their leadership role. Many women benefit from supportive relational connections regarding their leadership development (Brue & Brue, 2018; Mullet et al., 2017). On the other hand professional support was the most negative influencing factor in developing barriers in their leadership career.

e) *Professional support*. All respondents declared that the main obstacle for their career advancement came from not being support from their male and female colleagues. According to Home (1998) women in leadership position have lack of support from colleagues, administrators or mentors, as one of major external barriers for women who seek leadership positions.

4. CONCLUSION

Democratic development in Albania opened up new prospects for private education, education that is most associated with the country's economic prospects. This study aimed to present the problems faced by women entrepreneurs in managing private pre university educational institutions. Also, the findings from this study are addressed to women aspiring to leadership roles in education especially in private one. The widespread acceptance of the bureaucratic-managerial model of leadership has been detrimental to education, placing too much emphasis on the decision-making ability of a few people and stunting the growth of leadership among front-line personnel. Findings suggest that the critical role of advocating women leadership challenges in education. Educational leadership programs should encourage and prepare females in assisting them in climbing the educational leadership career ladder. This study confirms previous research in the areas of gender discrimination during the career paths of school female leaders. Women who aspire to leadership position in private pre university educational institutions must be willing based on integrity they build over time in their job performance at every level of administration.

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