

The Contribution of Women Academic Library Directors to Higher Education in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Women constitute the bulk of the labour force in library and information science practice a methods approach both the global and local level. Despite this phenomenon, directorship for all types and sizes of libraries in most parts of the world is male dominated. "The sex structuring of organizations prevails throughout library, higher education, and corporate administration" (Irvine 1985:236). The issue of under-representation of women in leadership positions is attributed to a number of factors including, gender role stereotypes, gender segregation, biased recruitment and promotion systems amongst a host of other factors. However, there is a variation to this trend in Zimbabwe's university libraries, where the majority of directors are women. There are 15 universities in the country and only four out of fifteen university library directors are men. This paper looks at the contribution of women academic library directors to their institutions, focusing on their achievements as women managers in Zimbabwe. A review of literature will contextualise and compare their experiences with women in similar positions in some parts of the world within the framework of the Theory of Attribution.

Keywords

Library directors, women directors, leadership, gender, Zimbabwe University Libraries Consortium (ZULC)

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Academic libraries are often referred to as the nerve centre of the university (Udoumoh & Okoro, 2007). This characterisation depicts the critical and tripartite role they play in supporting the teaching, learning and research needs of the university. The extent to which libraries succeed in playing this role is largely dependent on several factors, paramount of which are the leadership skills and environmental consciousness of the library director. Additionally, for women, gender is a factor in determining how successfully they manage their libraries. The female dominance of the library profession is well documented. In 2010 (DPE Fact Sheet, 2011) women accounted for 82.8% of all librarians. Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that librarianship was one of the earliest professions to be open to women (Moran,

Leonard & Zellers, 2009:215). Despite the glut of women in the profession, there is a dearth of the same at directorship level in most types and sizes of libraries globally. The exceptions to this rule are Zimbabwean universities where 80% of library directors are women. The aim of this paper is to highlight the achievements of women academic library directors in Zimbabwe. The paper will start by discussing the theory of attribution in relation to the progression of women to top management positions in higher education institutions, particularly academic libraries and how they are perceived by their male counterparts. This will be followed by a review of literature on gender and its effect on women in librarianship in general and academic libraries in particular. Finally the situation of women academic library directors in

Zimbabwe will be assessed in the context of the Theory of Attribution.

1.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a review of the literature, to contextualise the situation of female library directors in Zimbabwe within a global perspective, and an experiential approach. The experiential approach allows for a naturalistic or even an 'artistic' approach to gathering information (Carson and Coviello, 1996 cited in Grant et al, 2001:67). The researchers used their experiences as library practitioners and lecturers.

1.3 THE THEORY OF ATTRIBUTION

The theory of Attribution revolves around the human desire to understand the world around us. It was first proposed by Heider (1958) followed by Jones and Davis (1965), Kelley (1967) and Weiner (1974, 1986). Heider explored how people make judgements of each other during interaction and make sense of the other's behavior. Attributions are defined as "the internal (thinking) and external (talking) process of interpreting and understanding what is behind our own and others' behaviors" (Manusov and Spitzberg (2008:38) thereby attributing one or more causes to that behavior. Internal attribution refers to the assumption that a person is behaving in a certain way because of something about the person (personal attributions) for example, attitude, character or personality. A female director can assume that she is being excluded from leading projects due to the CEO's low opinion of women. External attribution refers to the assumption that a person is behaving in a certain way because of something about the situation he or she is in (situational attributions). One can assume that the director is being harsh because his child is sick. Therefore, people's perceptions are driven by emotional and motivational factors and

they end up blaming others and avoiding personal reproach. When a person fails he/she becomes defensive and attributes it to other negative causes like bad luck. On the contrary, success can be attributed to fortune or 'who you know'. According to Shaver (cited in Griffin, 1991), attribution is a three step process through which people perceive others as causal agents involving (1) perception of the action, (2) judgement of intention – intentional or unintentional action (3) attribution of disposition (mental states i.e. traits, attitudes or abilities).

Attribution theory helps explain how some important biases may arise in the performance evaluation process and how they may be responsible for producing serious and unrecognised inequities (Gedeon & Rubin, 1991:19). Differential evaluation based on gender is responsible for low representation of women in top management in academic libraries. Several researchers (Murgai 1991; Nkerekwem 1996; Gedeon & Rubin 1991) applied the theory of attribution toward perceptions on women's performance in the workplace. They all agreed that the performance of women academic librarians was viewed through a different lens from men's.

Nieva and Gutek (1980 cited in Nkerekwem 1996) observed two forms of performance evaluation bias, whereby (i) an individual's performance is evaluated negatively than it actually warrants, and (ii) differential evaluation where a woman's good performance is attributed to good luck or extraordinary effort and not their abilities and talents.

1.4 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Librarianship is a female dominated profession with women constituting over 80% of the workforce (Davis & Hall, 2007; Davis 2009 and Karr 1983:343). The prevalence of women has been attributed to the fact that it was one of the first professions to be open to women (Moran,

Leonard and Zellers, 2009:215). The dominance of women in the profession has resulted in a myriad of gender based challenges such as the low status of the profession (Mujanja and Kiplang'at 2003) the subdued presence of women in senior management positions and glaring inequities in the salaries of men and women.

Many observers have noted that "men hold a disproportionate number of administrative positions, that they tend to receive higher compensation than women in the field and that subfields of the profession with a higher concentration of male workers tend to be higher paid" (Gordon 2005:11). This observation propelled many studies on gender issues in librarianship to concentrate on academic libraries; the sector of the profession that has traditionally employed the lowest percentage of women. (Moran et al. 2009 citing Davis & Hall 2007)

Moran et al. (2009) summarised findings of studies (Schiller 1974; Martel 1995; Fisher 1997; Hatcher 1997; Hildenbrand 1997; Kirkland 1997; Deyrup 2004; Zenon & Bahr 2005; Davis & Hall 2007, and ARL 2008), which concur that, despite the dominance of women in academic libraries and the enactment of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) legislation and its application to institutions of higher education and academic libraries in particular in 1972, there was a puzzling persistence of inequity in terms of salaries earned by men and women in similar positions. There was also underrepresentation of women at director level in big and prestigious academic and research libraries. Mech and Fisher's (1985) research exposed a concentration of women directors in small to medium-sized college libraries. However, there was an increase in the number of women directors in academic and research libraries (ARL) from 2 out of 111 in 1972 to 69 (56%) in 2007 (Kyrillidou et al. 2008:13) and the rise in women's salaries from 87% of men's salaries in 1980 to 95% of men's salaries in 2007. These sentiments were supported by Deyrup (2004:249) who was convinced that "the issue of women's

advancement to parity in the academic library field had reached a satisfactory conclusion."

The relegation of women to operatives in a profession in which they outnumber men has also been observed in other parts of the world. In Australia, library staff are regarded as administrative staff in universities (Wallace & Marchant, 2011:569). Although 60% of university libraries were headed by women (Gammon-Leary & Parker 2001), they faced extensive but unfounded bias about the value of their work (Mayer & Tikka, 2008 cited by Wallace & Marchant, 2011:274).

A study in this area was commissioned by the 66th IFLA Conference (2000) and it was carried out by Pat Gammon-Leary and Sandra Parker (2001). Although the study was not restricted to academic libraries it reinforced the notion that traditionally in many cultures, librarianship has been seen as a female-dominated profession and yet the senior positions are predominantly held by men (Gammon-Leary & Parker 2001:4). A snapshot survey conducted by the researchers found this to be true in Western Europe, Asia, Middle East and Africa. The only exceptions were Botswana and Zimbabwe. The University of Botswana had a female director and 2 female deputy directors whilst the Botswana National Library Service had a female director and deputy director. In Zimbabwe, 6 out of 7 university libraries were headed by women. The survey also found that women earned less than men, men's rise to positions of authority was much quicker and that the profession had a low status compared to equivalent professions.

1.4.1 Rationale for women's challenges

The slow ascendancy of women to directorship level has been attributed to a number of factors. These include educational qualifications, role models, mentoring, publications, participation in professional activities (Irvine, 1995), family commitments, and developmental and cultural issues (Mujanja & Kiplang'at 2003). Zenon & Bahr (2005) cited in

Moran (2009:218) found that motherhood was not a significant factor in preventing women in attaining directorships whilst Kirkland (1997) concluded that mentoring was an important factor in cultivating future women library directors. Irvine (1995:253) found that educational qualifications and publications were important traits for attaining administrative positions in higher education and that men possessed these more than women. These findings were supported by Gammon-Leary and Parker (2000), whose survey revealed that a PhD was a most desirable qualification for an academic library director. Mujanja & Kiplang'at (2003) observed that, "apart from contending with the problems facing women worldwide, the Kenya female librarians have to contend with the difficulties of a developing country and an African culture."

It is indisputable that for women to be eligible for the top administrative positions in academic libraries, they need to exhibit a high level of performance and leadership skills. Evaluation of these traits is often skewed in favour of men. Singh & Garland (2013:138) made the observation that,

Although little evidence can be adduced about women's inability to perform on the job, real inequities exist in many areas that affect their performance and the opportunities for their advancement in higher education.

These sentiments were echoed by Irvine (1995:14) in her observation that women had not been allowed the luxury of attempting these functions except by the duress of affirmative action.

1.4.2 Women academic library directors in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe enjoys the unique and enviable position of having the most women academic library directors the world over. What makes the Zimbabwean situation unique? The researchers did not come across any literature pertaining to women academic library directors in Zimbabwe.

However, inferences on their dominance can be drawn from the history of the UZ Library. Made (2002) observed that at independence the UZ employed graduates in Arts and Social Sciences with a professional library qualification obtained usually from the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada. These experienced professionals, most of whom were women, started taking positions of responsibility in the newly established universities, where they in turn nurtured other potential library directors. A case in point is that of Africa University and National University of Science and Technology.

In the absence of any studies to verify the gender balance in this fairly young profession, Made (2000), it is difficult to determine any inequities in the distribution of directorships of academic libraries. It can be assumed that the requisite qualifications of education and experience played a crucial role in the attainment of directorships by both genders. The Theory of Attribution could not be applied as the pool of professionals of both sexes was very shallow.

It can be presumed that women librarians were able to take advantage of their education and experience to rise to leadership positions. The enabling environment created by enactment of the Legal Age of Majority (No.15 of 1982), the Equal Employment Opportunities (Labour Act Chapter 28 2002) and the Affirmative Action Acts, the establishment of the Ministry of Women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development and Zimbabwe's ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women(1991) and the SADC Protocol on Gender (2009) enhanced their chances and boosted their confidence. Once in position, their managerial skills and abilities enabled them to make an impact on higher education in Zimbabwe. Empowering legislation ensured they enjoyed the same salaries and benefits as men in similar positions.

However sustainability of this situation is subject to speculation. With the exception

of two libraries, these women directors are deputised by men who are much younger. The men are attaining higher degrees at a faster rate than women. A closer examination of the enrolment and/or output of the Department of Library and Information Science at NUST, the only university which trains librarians in Zimbabwe, is indicative of a gender balance at the undergraduate level over a ten year period. However at the graduate level, the enrolment figures are skewed in favour of men, by a margin of 15%. The tables below illustrate this point.

Table1 NUST LIS Undergraduate Output 2004-2014

Year	Female	Male	Total
2004	9	15	24
2005	19	14	33
2006	19	24	43
2007	17	21	38
2008	20	28	48
2009	14	18	32
2010	26	21	51
2011	21	8	31
2012	19	12	31
2013	14	10	24
Grand Total	178	175	353

Table 2: NUST LIS Masters Degrees Enrolment 2004-2013

Year	Female	Male	Total
2004	9	9	18
2005	15	6	21
2007	6	24	20
2008	4	10	14
2010	4	5	9
2011	4	6	10
2012	5	7	12
2013	8	11	19
Grand Total	64	87	151

It can be argued that in a few years' time, the academic library scenario in Zimbabwe would have normalised. In other words, there would be significant

numbers of library professionals of both sexes to give credence to the Theory of Attribution. The majority of women directors would have retired and been replaced by men who, just like their predecessors would have excellent qualifications and experience. Women would be trailing men in terms of higher qualifications such as Masters and PhDs.

1.4.3 Achievements of female academic library directors in Zimbabwe

The single most notable achievement of academic library directors in Zimbabwe was the formation of the Zimbabwe University Libraries Consortium (ZULC) in 2002. The ZULC's vision is to be "a leading consortium in empowering teaching, learning and research in Southern Africa, and its mission is to provide leadership in access to knowledge, information and resource sharing through collaboration, capacity building, advocacy and networking in support of national development. (ZULC:2002)." ZULC's prowess lies in its resource sharing and capacity building activities where it has partnered with the International Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) and the Electronic Information for Libraries Network (eIFL.net) for the provision of electronic resources to member libraries at discounted rates and for the facilitation of training in the use of those resources.

ZULC was able to negotiate with the United Nations Education and Scientific Organisation (UNESCO) at the height of the economic recession, for the use of UNESCO coupons as legal tender for the purchase of electronic journals, thus sustaining the e- journals' supply to the academic community in Zimbabwe. The rotational hosting of the ZULC Council of Directors Meetings amongst member libraries affords members to benefit from objective assessment of their libraries and activities by other directors, thus creating room for continuous improvement.

Individual directors have leveraged the collective power of the Consortium, to provide much needed services in their

own institutions. For instance most libraries have automated their systems, established institutional repositories and are running successful information literacy programmes for their clientele. More and more libraries are utilising social media and mobile technologies to provide cutting edge services in line with global trends.

1.5 Successes of ZULC women directors

Below is a snapshot of some of the strengths and successes of selected ZULC member libraries that are/were managed by women.

1.5.1 Bindura University of Science Education Library

- Spearheaded compilation of ZULC Standards
- Voted the best managed department in 2011 and 2013
- The Deputy Librarian was voted the best worker of the year - 2013
- Strong Outreach Programme

1.5.2 Chinhoyi University of Technology (CUT) Library

- Introduced the Mandarin Integrated Library Management System. Six other institutions are now using the system.
- Strong Outreach Programme in which books sourced from donors were distributed to schools in Mashonaland West Province
- Established HIV/AIDS Information Resource Centres at Rural District Councils and Tertiary Institutions in the Province with funds from PEPFAR
- Produced a Library Charter
- Established an Information and Documentation Centre focusing on agricultural information provision.
- Country coordinator for open access for eIFL.net and contributed to UNESCO's Global Open Access Portal.

1.5.3 National University of Science and Technology

- Mentored two academic library directors

- International networking – the Director is a Board member, Country Coordinator and Intellectual Property Coordinator of eIFL.net
- Capacity building in IT.
- Sourcing Donations

1.5.4 University of Zimbabwe (UZ) Library

- Best library in terms of resources and infrastructure
- Mentoring
 - A former female director co – authored and edited a book entitled, "A celebration of teamwork and collaboration: building a digital library at the University of Zimbabwe."
 - Eight (8) former and current academic library directors in Zimbabwe are former employees of the UZ Library.
- Proposal writing and attracting donor funds
- Holding capacity building workshops for ZULC members
- Establishing a computer laboratory for female students
- Country coordinator for INASP

1.6 Conclusion

Although men are prevalent in occupying top posts in academic libraries in most parts of the world, women in Zimbabwe have dominated the higher echelons of academic librarianship for the past two and a half decades due to their education, experience and affirmative action. Academic librarianship has largely been immune to the Theory of Attribution. Women have demonstrated that they can perform as well as men. However, the prognosis is for the scales to tip in favour of men within the next decade. Authorities responsible for hiring academic library directors should be aware of the Theory of Attribution and apply it in the performance evaluation and hiring process to ensure equitable distribution of directorships between the genders. Women should intensify their efforts to acquire higher

qualifications in order to compete fairly with men.

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