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**Gender Pedagogy: Developing Champion Educational Leaders in
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Gender Pedagogy: Developing Champion Educational Leaders in East Africa



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Abstract

Purpose: This study explored the landscape of educational leadership development in East Africa. It investigated its ability to equip leaders with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to promote gender-responsive and inclusive practices.

Methodology: Employing a mixed-methods approach, this study collected data through surveys, interviews, and document analysis across Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. The participants included educational leaders, local government authorities, and other stakeholders. Quantitative and qualitative data analyses were performed.

Findings: The findings are as follows: Effective sensitization meetings foster shared understanding and ownership of gender-responsive initiatives, and teacher colleges can play a vital role by offering targeted training. Some knowledge gaps exist, necessitating targeted training of educational leaders and Local Government Administrators on gender responsiveness and inclusion.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy, and Practice: The study recommends establishing multi-stakeholder collaboration and dialogue platforms and designing context-specific sensitization meetings tailored to local communities and leaders. Furthermore, strengthening college support through targeted training and programs focused on gender-responsive leadership and pedagogy is necessary. Additionally, investment in training to address knowledge gaps and equip leaders with the necessary skills and tools to facilitate collaborative action research and knowledge sharing for continuous learning and improvement. By implementing these recommendations, East Africa can cultivate a generation of educational leaders who champion gender equality and inclusivity, creating more equitable and transformative learning environments.

Keywords: *Educational Leadership, Gender Responsiveness, Inclusion, Stakeholder Engagement, Gender Sensitization*

1 Introduction

In recent years, educational discourse and policy agenda across East Africa have increasingly prioritised the pursuit of gender equality and inclusivity (UNESCO, 2016). This shift acknowledges the fundamental role of education in fostering social progress and economic development (World Bank, 2018). Consequently, governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and educational institutions have intensified their efforts to address gender disparities in education and cultivate inclusive learning environments within the region.

Central to this endeavour lies the crucial role of educational leadership. Leaders capable of championing gender-responsive practices and fostering inclusive teaching and learning environments are recognised as essential catalysts for achieving positive change (UNICEF, 2019). However, questions remain regarding the effectiveness of these efforts in developing leadership capacities for learners.

This study explored the landscape of educational leadership development in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania, specifically focusing on its ability to equip leaders with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to promote gender-responsive and inclusive practices. By examining the experiences and perceptions of educational leaders and stakeholders, the study aimed to

- To investigate the current state of support offered by educational leadership institutions to head teachers in enhancing their educational leadership and knowledge of gender responsiveness and inclusion.
- Assess the understanding and application of gender-responsive principles among educational leaders and local government authorities (LGAs) within the context of teaching and learning practices.
- Identify gaps and challenges in developing gender-responsive leadership and propose recommendations for strengthening existing support structures and initiatives.

The study aimed to contribute to ongoing dialogue and efforts to foster gender equality and inclusivity in education across East Africa. By exploring stakeholder dynamics, support mechanisms, and understanding levels, it was expected that insights would be gained into the opportunities and challenges inherent in promoting gender-responsive educational leadership. Such insights are crucial for developing effective policies, programmes, and practices aimed at creating equitable and inclusive learning environments.

The study was conducted through the Foundations for Learning (F4L) project implemented by a private university in East Africa which is working to transform teacher education systems in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania by improving learning outcomes in teacher education. This project focuses on equipping and empowering college tutors and educational leaders with pedagogical and leadership practices that will ultimately strengthen educational systems and the delivery of teaching and learning in schools.

Effective leadership in education greatly influences the effectiveness and quality (Huguet, 2017) of education. Literature shows that teacher effectiveness, better student results, and general school improvement are all related to successful educational leadership (Leithwood et al., 2020). In addition to promoting scholastic success, educational leaders play a crucial role in developing inclusive learning environments that accommodate learners' varied requirements (Day et al., 2011). For this reason, enhancing educational performance and fostering social progress depends on supporting the development of educational leaders, among other factors.

1.1 Gender-Responsive Leadership as a Catalyst for Change

Due to the realisation that education is essential for promoting social progress and economic development, the fight for gender equality and inclusion in education has gained traction in East Africa (UNESCO, 2016; World Bank, 2018). Notwithstanding this recognition, gender differences in educational attainment, involvement, and access continue throughout the region (UNICEF 2019). Women and girls still face a variety of obstacles, such as entrenched socio-cultural 'norms' that result in difficult learning settings that reinforce inequality, cultural standards, and financial limitations.

In response to these issues, academics and decision-makers have realised the importance of educational leadership in employing gender-responsive strategies and solutions (Achimota, 2020; Brock & Inui, 2004). Strong catalysts for change within educational institutions might be leaders with the knowledge, abilities, and attitudes required to promote gender equality (UNICEF 2019). These leaders apply and facilitate gender-responsive teaching and learning strategies that benefit all students, support inclusive policies, and establish fair learning environments (UNESCO 2017).

The significance of cultivating educational leaders has recently received increasing attention. According to Fullan (2014), educational leaders are crucial for promoting innovation and changes in education. They have the foresight, expertise, and abilities required to lead change initiatives and successfully negotiate challenging educational environments. Additionally, educational leaders mentor and serve as role models for educators, encouraging them to pursue excellence in their work (Harris, 2013). In short, the main role of the education system is to foster a culture of innovation and continuous improvement by investing in educators' leadership development, which will ultimately benefit students and communities.

The development of educational leaders' benefits society as well as educational systems in numerous ways. Educational leaders play a crucial role in advancing diversity and gender equality (Chapman et al., 2019). In addition, leaders who have adopted gender-responsive initiatives take the lead in addressing gender gaps in education and fostering a welcoming environment in which all students, regardless of gender, feel respected and empowered. Furthermore, educational leaders assist teachers' professional development and advancement, while cultivating a cooperative and encouraging school climate (Day et al., 2011). Educational systems may increase teacher

effectiveness, improve student results, and support equal access to education by developing a cadre of capable and visionary leaders.

1.2 Contribution of Developing Champion Leaders

The development of educational leaders greatly aids in the improvement of educational systems. Leithwood et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of educational leaders in fostering organizational performance and spearheading initiatives for school development. Clear goal setting, encouraging stakeholder engagement, and implementing research-backed strategies that benefit children are all the skills of influential educational leaders. Furthermore, educational leaders are essential in developing an inclusive and equitable school culture to guarantee that all students have access to top-level education and support services (UNESCO, 2016). Education systems can increase their ability to handle difficult problems and make long-lasting gains in the academic performance and well-being of their students by investing in the leadership development of educators.

Several strands of research have provided valuable insights into the different aspects of gender-responsive educational leadership development in East Africa.

Research indicates that it is critical to include various stakeholders such as head teachers, parents, community leaders, and civil society organizations in the development and execution of gender-responsive initiatives (Akyeampong & Lussier, 2011; Brock & Moloji, 2002). According to Mulinge (2017), effective teamwork can guarantee sustainability of initiatives, satisfy contextual demands, and improve ownership.

Research has demonstrated that initiatives aimed at educating various stakeholder groups, such as educators and local leaders, about gender stereotypes and promoting their understanding can positively change attitudes and behaviours (Akbar & Pitt, 2019; Brock & Moloji, 2002). Nevertheless, different elements, such as design, execution tactics, and follow-up procedures, can have varying effects on the efficacy of sensitisation campaigns (UNESCO, 2019).

Research indicates that educational leaders require specialised training programmes that provide them with the skills and knowledge required to advance gender equality in their institutions of higher learning. This is leadership development and capacity building (Achimota, 2020; Brock & Inui, 2004). Such programmes should cover matters concerning leadership for social change, inclusive education, policy advocacy, and gender analysis (UNESCO, 2017). Studies have also noted that limited funding, restricted access to training opportunities, and poor programme alignment with regional contexts must be addressed (Akyeampong & Lussier, 2011; Brock & Moloji, 2002).

To date, research indicates that many educational leaders do not thoroughly grasp gender-responsive principles or how to use them in real-world teaching and learning environments (Gerrard, 2016; Mundy, 2014). To promote gender-responsive practices in schools, it is imperative

that training programmes be tailored to individual situations, address knowledge gaps, and offer useful tools and techniques (Achimota, 2020; UNESCO, 2017).

2 Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods, to comprehensively explore the dynamics of gender-responsive educational leadership in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. The research methodology encompassed data collection, participant selection, and analytical techniques, as outlined below.

2.1 Data Collection Methods

A structured survey instrument was administered to educational leaders (heads of schools and local government authorities - LGAs). The survey instrument was administered to 27 educational leaders (13 female, 14 male) in Kenya. In Tanzania, the tool was administered to 13 (1 female, 12 male) educational leaders, whereas in Uganda, the survey instrument was administered to 41 (14 female, 27 male) educational leaders. The survey included closed-ended questions to gather quantitative data on participants' demographics, understanding of gender responsiveness, perceptions of support mechanisms, and engagement in sensitisation meetings.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of survey participants from three partner institutions in Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five (two female, three male) educational leaders and LGAs in Kenya, three (one female, two male) educational leaders and LGAs in Tanzania, and eight (three females and five males) in Uganda. The tool was administered to investigate course participants' experiences and recommendations regarding gender-responsive educational leadership. The interviews provided rich qualitative data, allowing for a nuanced exploration of key themes and insights.

Relevant documents, reports, and policy briefs related to gender-responsive education and educational leadership initiatives were reviewed to contextualize findings and triangulated data collected through surveys and interviews.

2.2 Participants

The participant sample comprised diverse stakeholders involved in education and gender equality initiatives across East Africa. They included:

- a. Educational leaders: Headteachers, school administrators, curriculum developers, and teacher trainers.
- b. Local Government Authorities (LGAs): Representatives from ministries of education, district education offices, and local education boards.
- c. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs): NGOs and advocacy groups working in education and gender equality.

- d. Community Leaders: Religious leaders, community elders, and representatives from marginalised groups.
- e. Other stakeholders: Parents, health professionals, political leaders, and representatives from Persons with Disabilities (PWDs).

The participants were purposively selected to ensure representation from various geographic regions, educational sectors, and stakeholder groups, thereby capturing diverse perspectives and experiences.

2.3 Analysis Techniques

Survey responses were analysed using statistical software to generate descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations. This quantitative analysis provided insights into the prevalence of certain attitudes, behaviours, and perceptions among participants.

Interview transcripts and qualitative data from open-ended survey questions were thematically analyzed using a coding framework derived from key research questions and emergent themes. Through iterative coding and thematic analysis, patterns, similarities, and differences in participants' narratives were identified, interpreted, and synthesized into overarching findings.

By ensuring the convergence of evidence from multiple perspectives, triangulation enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings.

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review boards and informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Measures were taken to ensure confidentiality, anonymity, and respect for the participants' rights throughout the research process.

3 FINDINGS

The study's findings and discussion have been reported and presented to explain the development of leaders of learning using gender pedagogical strategies.

3.1 Effectiveness of Sensitization Meetings in Engaging Local Leaders

The majority of respondents (90%) acknowledged sensitization meetings as an effective platform for engaging local leaders in gender issues within educational programmes. Uganda had the highest agreement percentage (48.1%). The reasons cited for the effectiveness of sensitization meetings included empowering local leaders to monitor issues within their jurisdictions, leveraging their influence as community representatives to promote sensitisation, facilitating informed decision-making and policy formulation, and enhancing awareness, appreciation, and ownership of projects. A male educational leader in Uganda noted,

"Sensitization is important because, as a community, we look up to the leader. So, if the leader is ready to be with me and lift me high, then I can achieve something," (Individual Interviews, Ug, August 2022)

The study indicated that educational leaders are a mouthpiece for the community because they are closer to the ground for more sensitisation. It helps them to learn, monitor planned activities, and render advice to the parents to act according to policies to evaluate the activities and implementation and come up with strategies to correct areas of weakness. Local leaders can follow up and monitor all issues within their boundaries when they are well informed, including at schools. The table below explains the involvement of educational leaders in sensitization meetings:

Table 1: The percentage of LGAs and educational leaders agree that sensitisation meetings are critical in creating a harmonious collaborative environment.

Geographic location	Frequency	Percent
Kenya	21	25.9%
Tanzania	13	16.0%
Uganda	39	48.1%
Total	73	90%

90% of the total LGAs and educational leaders agreed that sensitization meetings are real platforms for engaging leaders in the community. Furthermore, respondents mentioned the following reasons:

- It helps to share information, views, and challenges; increase ownership; and build a positive attitude towards them.
- It will help them to design their policy and strategies.
- It helps create awareness, appreciation, and importance of the projects, identify gaps, and create teamwork.
- It will enhance ownership of the project because it involves older stakeholders with children, so they become ambassadors of Early Childhood Development.
- Sensitization is important because as a community, they look up to the leader. So, if the leader is ready to be with them and lift them high, they can achieve something.

These responses highlight the need to enhance strategies for the sensitisation of local leaders and to empower them as a medium for the successful facilitation of interventions.

3.2 Support Provided by Teachers Training Colleges to Enhance Educational Leadership

During the interviews, 49.3% of respondents affirmed that colleges support head teachers at practicum schools to enhance educational leadership and knowledge of new processes, tools, and

teaching methods. This support included general monitoring and supervision, training on induction manual writing and management skills, leadership development initiatives, performance improvement plans, and capacity building through pedagogical training and support supervision. However, 37% of the respondents indicated that colleges did not offer such support, citing reasons such as perceived self-sufficiency among head teachers or a lack of alignment between academic and leadership issues. This is the case in Kenya, where the respondents highlighted the lack of support received from the student trainee on leadership matters. Student trainees were found to be busy in class and teaching.

In Tanzania, respondents from the school in Nachingwea District explained how, through students' training, they were able to acquire knowledge and skills in school management. The Headteacher noted that student trainees would make a great contribution during the weekly meetings, which helped them understand how to manage meetings by giving everyone a chance to speak and give their opinions. One respondent explained:

“...it’s a privilege having the student trainee who came for teaching practice; staff members are enjoying how we recently handled the meetings by inviting everyone and getting their opinions and feedback,” (Individual Interview, July 2022)

This shows how the preparation of an effective teacher at the college could transform schools when they are placed for teaching practice. In the college in question, student teachers have been trained on leadership and management issues that they can handle during teaching.

When asked how the student trainee had been prepared at the college, the student trainee explained that apart from being taught educational leadership and management, they had been practising leadership through different leadership positions, such as presidents, vice presidents, secretaries, and cabinets. They transfer the knowledge they acquire from the leadership at the college during teaching practice.

“I have a vast of experience being a cabinet secretary of the environment, attending the meetings which would impact the school management by working together with the head of the school” (Individual Interview, July 2022)

When asked how they integrate gender issues, they said that the college itself has set up opportunities for sharing power between females and males: if the president is male, the vice president should be female, and vice versa. The formulation of the cabinet must allow for equal division of positions between men and women. This was also supported by the student trainee in Uganda on how the division of positions among males and females at the college is being made.

3.3 Understanding Gender Responsiveness and Inclusion in Teaching and Learning Practices

The study found that 13 out of 44 educational leaders and LGAs (40%) articulated gender responsiveness and inclusion concepts in the context of teaching and learning. Among the 28 respondents who provided detailed explanations, 13 (46%) had received training from the university. Their understanding focused on tailoring teaching and learning strategies to diverse gender needs, ensuring equality in education for all genders, addressing cultural biases in educational practices, and advocating for gender fairness in assessment and teaching methodologies. A female educational leader from Kenya noted

“My impression towards gender responsiveness in the context of teaching and learning is to change how we teach students and the examples we make for them during lesson. For example, some teachers frame their questions badly if they are about professional jobs, for example, a pilot is normally male. However, when it comes to matters of kitchen cooking, you find a female name; if a male is cooking, it is an accident.”

Colleges integrating gender issues into their teaching classes have affected student trainees who excel in schools when they undergo teaching practice. With the knowledge they gain, they practice well in their classroom lessons, which becomes an effective way of teaching and learning. By having gender knowledge and skills, the student trainee would make a significant contribution to the leadership in the schools in which they would be placed for teaching. Tutors from Uganda mentioned this:

“It is exciting to observe the student trainee in the teaching practice schools and find them adhering to gender principles learned during their college training.” (Individual Interview, July 2022)

This shows that the tutors can transfer their knowledge on gender responsiveness to their students. Consequently, the trainee can support the educational leader on gender-related issues when they are placed in school, thereby contributing to improved education. Headteachers also explained that the trainees also worked closely with the school committee, which is a critical arm for supporting school and educational development. It was observed that the gender knowledge acquired was used to influence the community on the committee members' selection and the message to be spread to the community about schooling.

3.4 Resource Support

Most respondents explained how the University supported them in managing their schools. E School leaders have been able to integrate gender responsiveness into the school curricula. This is a result of participating in courses that focused on gender issues in education, which enhanced their understanding of, and skills to tackle gender issues within the school context. For example, a respondent in Tanzania noted.

“The courses were integrated with gender issues, which was the first encounter in understanding and reflecting on gender issues in our community” (Individual Interview, November 2022)

The aforementioned knowledge and skills were largely obtained through the action research projects that the school leaders were required to undertake while attending the leadership and management classes. The project required that school leaders were expected to conduct the study in their schools in collaboration with their staff, thereby illustrating how the school community could work together to resolve gender issues in the school.

In addition, the school leaders worked with the project teacher colleges in the development and use of the makerspace, a resource centre, for the teachers’ lessons. The school leaders thought the hub contributed to improving teaching in the schools.

Discussion and recommendations

The study showed that it is important to establish robust mechanisms for ongoing collaboration and dialogue among diverse educational stakeholders to ensure continuous advancement in gender-responsive leadership development. This collaborative approach should actively engage voices from various backgrounds to drive inclusive and equitable educational practices. Studies highlight the value of collaborative leadership, in which leaders develop and carry out gender-responsive projects in conjunction with a variety of stakeholders, such as head teachers, parents, community leaders, and civil society organisations (Akyeampong & Lussier, 2011; Brock & Moloji, 2002; Mundy, 2014). This concerted effort addresses the unique needs and objectives of many communities. This collaborative approach also promotes communal ownership and guarantees the contextual appropriateness of interventions (Mulinge, 2017). Studies show that to ensure that the voices of the perpetual marginalized groups (i.e., women and girls, ethnic minorities, and disabled students) are heard and that their needs are met in the pursuit of gender equality and inclusivity, these groups must be actively involved in leadership development initiatives and decision-making processes (Brock & Inui, 2004; UNESCO, 2019).

Further, the study illustrates the value of designing and implementing tailored sensitization meetings that are customized to address the specific needs and contexts of local communities and leaders. These meetings should focus on raising awareness and building understanding around gender responsiveness within their unique cultural and social environments. Sensitization meetings are strong instruments that can be used to promote ownership of gender-responsive projects, engage local leaders, and build a shared understanding about positive gender responsiveness and inclusion. Indeed, it has been demonstrated that sensitization initiatives that encourage critical thinking and transformative conversation about gender stereotypes and prejudices among various stakeholders can result in favourable changes in behaviours and attitudes

(Akbar & Pitt, 2019; Brock & Moloji, 2002). These initiatives challenge discriminatory practices, foster safe spaces for candid conversations, and promote group action toward change.

In addition, the study showed the importance of prioritising the allocation of resources and capacity-building within educational institutions to offer targeted training and support programmes that emphasize gender-responsive leadership and pedagogy. This includes ensuring that colleges are equipped to provide specialized programmes that foster inclusive and equitable educational environments. Kwatubana (2021) emphasizes the importance of adopting gender equity measures in educational leadership, stating that the mere presence of women in leadership positions is insufficient without accompanying support and training. The author contends that comprehensive training and development programs are critical for eliminating structural constraints faced by women leaders, allowing them to fully engage and flourish in educational management. Thus, by providing institutions with the appropriate resources and gender-responsive frameworks, educational systems may improve fairness and inclusivity at all levels.

Moreover, there is need to develop and deliver specialised training programmes aimed at closing knowledge gaps and equipping educational leaders and Local Government Authorities (LGAs) with the skills and tools necessary to promote gender-responsive teaching and learning practices. These programmes should be specifically designed to address the challenges and opportunities within their local contexts. Colleges can be vital in providing head teachers with gender-responsive knowledge and leadership abilities by offering specialised mentoring, training, and resources. Studies suggest that focused leadership development initiatives are required to provide educational leaders with the know-how and abilities to advance gender parity in their institutions (Achimota, 2020; Brock & Inui, 2004). Gender analysis, inclusive teaching, policy advocacy, and leadership for social change are among the subjects these programs ought to include (UNESCO, 2017). Facilitating mentorship and coaching opportunities can enhance leaders' ability to apply acquired knowledge to their circumstances and overcome implementation obstacles (Akyeampong & Lussier, 2011; Brock & Moloji, 2002). Mentors can provide direction, constructive criticism, and support to boldly enable leaders to adopt gender-responsive procedures.

Finally, it is beneficial to facilitate collaborative action research and knowledge-sharing initiatives to promote continuous learning and improvement in gender-responsive leadership development practices. Naidoo and Perumal (2014) stress that for educational stakeholders to comprehend and effectively handle gender issues, there must be a constant state of learning and reflection. Their study emphasizes how important it is to look at women's leadership experiences to create a climate that is supportive of gender parity. Reflective practices and a critical grasp of power dynamics are necessary for creating an educational system that is more egalitarian (Freeman, 2019). To improve gender equity and inclusion in education, it is therefore essential, required, and advised that educational stakeholders foster a culture of continual reflection, adaptation, and innovation.

Furthermore, it is imperative to apply particular tactics that encourage gender-responsive leadership in addition to cultivating a culture of ongoing reflection, adaptation, and innovation. This entails establishing mentorship programmes specifically designed to help women and other marginalized groups develop their leadership abilities as well as offering opportunities for focused professional development that centre on enhancing competencies in gender equity and inclusivity (Chao et al., 2022). In addition, creating forums for candid communication and cooperation among interested parties in education can help to promote the sharing of best practices and lessons discovered (Mullen and Klimaitis, 2021). Educational institutions can more successfully promote gender equity and a more diverse leadership landscape by incorporating these tactics (SWE, 2024).

Conclusion

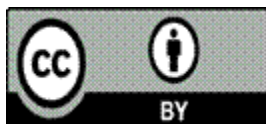
This study explored the landscape of educational leadership development in East Africa, focusing on its capacity to equip leaders with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to promote gender-responsive and inclusive practices. By examining the experiences and perspectives of diverse stakeholders, this study yielded valuable insights into the strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities of strengthening gender-responsive leadership development in the region. Some key findings noted a significant knowledge gap among educational leaders regarding gender-responsive principles, with only 40% being able to articulate these concepts effectively. Research indicates that many educational leaders do not fully comprehend gender-responsive principles or how to use them in real-world teaching and learning environments. This emphasizes the necessity of training programmes tailored to individual situations, addressing knowledge gaps, and offering useful tools and tactics to support the implementation of gender-responsive practices in educational settings. Further, sensitisation meetings have proven effective in engaging local leaders, fostering shared understanding, and promoting gender-responsive initiatives. Thus, addressing the knowledge gaps in this study, it is essential to improve the understanding of gender responsiveness and inclusion by providing educational leaders and LGAs with specialized training and professional development opportunities. Nonetheless, as the research suggests, there is a need for more targeted training programs that incorporate action research to inspire leaders to critically assess their methods and work together to create practical plans for advancing gender equality in their institutions. Finally, it is believed that by implementing these recommendations, the efforts undertaken thus far will significantly advance ongoing efforts to cultivate educational leaders who champion gender equality and inclusivity, ultimately creating more equitable and transformative learning environments.

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