“Principals’ involvement in the career development of female teachers: a case study in South Africa”

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Principals' involvement in the career development of female teachers: a case study in South Africa

Abstract

Career planning is an important aspect of Human Resource Development and Management. This research is centered on the question as to whether school principals in South Africa fulfill their management role with respect to the career development of female teachers. The results indicate that principals rated their involvement in the career development of female educators relatively high, whereas female educators do not experience the principals to be supportive in terms of the identification of career weaknesses and strengths, the availability of career development programs and opportunities or support in terms of discussions and planning on career development. Principals nevertheless are of the opinion that adequate career development programs for female teachers are lacking at their schools and that they themselves do not adequately accommodate the fact that career paths for women differ from those of men. It is recommended that Departments of Education should place more emphasis on the professional development of school principals in order for them to be able to focus on the career development of female teachers at their schools. It should focus on all aspects of female educators' career development.

Keywords: female teachers, career development, career ladders, management, principal and gender.
JEL Classification: I2.

Introduction and problem statement

Females form the majority of staff in South African schools but tend to be underrepresented on management levels (FSDoE, 2007), which mirrors a global phenomenon. Career development, a co-responsibility of the individual involved and his/her employer, forms part of staff development, and hence should be facilitated by the principal (Prinsloo, 2008) on the basis of a career development program determined by the career needs of the educator in question.

The employer ideally addresses the career development of employees at three levels, the macro-level (that of the National Department of Basic Education i.e. DBE), the meso-level (Provincial departments of Basic Education) and the micro-level (the particular school). As in most countries, South African female teachers have through the years experienced all kinds of discriminatory practices (Wolpe et al., 1997) notwithstanding Government playing a major role in minimizing such practices through equity legislation, affirmative action and the abolishment of discriminatory labor rules and regulations. Government's commitment to ensure gender parity by establishing the Gender Equity Task Team (GETT) furthermore culminated in processes, structures and the development of an operational policy framework for the implementation of gender equity (DoE, 2004b). Training manuals for women to be able to move into management and leadership positions (DoE, 2004a; 2004b) were developed in the process. The Human Science and Resource Council also published a document with the same objective in mind, *Gender Equity in South Africa* (Chisholm & September, 2005). Gender parity was also a focus area at a COMEDAF (Conference of Ministers of Education of the African Union) meeting (DoE, 2007). On provincial level, the Free State Department of Education (FSDoE) has put procedures in place for short-listing of staff based on representativity in terms of gender and race (FSDoE, 2008).

Instruments for the IQMS (Integrated Quality Management System) were developed and introduced to schools (ELRC, 2004). These documents focused on job descriptions for a specific post level and provided guidance for the professional development of teachers (FSDoE, 2003). The problem is that without an honest intention from the principal and SDT (School Development Team) to provide career development to female teachers, it only remains more documents to be completed. Many female teachers do not have the skills to develop a personal growth plan (PGP). Teachers' personal growth plans are important to furthermore enable school management to ensure reconciliation of individual career needs with those of the school in order to form a partnership (the so-called psychological contract). The various roles of principals have so far been researched (University of California, 2008), but the extent of principals' involvement in the career development of female teachers has thus far been largely overlooked by researchers. Principals seem not to be sufficiently involved with regard to promoting career development of female teachers, because of time constraints to provide general guidance and review PGP's. The question therefore remains: To what extent are principals involved in the career development of female teachers in primary schools?

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The rest of the article is structured as follows: Section 1 sets the purpose of the research, Section 2 outlines the conceptual-theoretical framework, on which the empirical work was based. Section 3 gives a brief report is given of the empirical investigation, and the findings flowing from it are depicted in Section 4. This is followed by a discussion of the findings in view of the conceptual-theoretical framework. The final section concludes the paper with a number of recommendations.

1. Purpose of the research

The purpose of this article was firstly, to determine how principals rated their own involvement in the career development of female teachers in primary schools, and secondly, to determine how the female teachers in question perceived the involvement of their principals in their own career development.

2. Conceptual-theoretical framework

Over time, the perceptions of people changed about what a career entails; the emphasis shifted from the objective to the subjective dimension of career choice, with more emphasis on how people feel about their careers and their own perceptions of career success (Breland et al., 2007). According to Human Capital Theory (HCT), emphasis is placed on the inherent value of human beings. Female teachers, the largest source of Human Capital (HC) in education, can therefore not be valued only as "teaching potential" but must be seen as human beings, intrinsically valuable assets to the school (institution) as well as to other stakeholders. In this research, therefore, the emphasis was on the relationship between HC and Human Resource Management (HRM) in an effort to capacitate and empower female teachers, not to enslave them. Career development should be seen as an important aspect of Human Resource Development (HRD) and HRM and Social Capital (SC) as the outcome thereof (DoE, 2009, pp. 7-11). SC refers to the complementary relationship between the availability of resources, institutional ties and social networks based on shared norms and trust (Sanginga et al., 2007). By improving educators' professional skills and content knowledge, specific skills are gained and the people involved become more valuable to their institutions. In view of this, the DBE contrives to develop HC through continuous professional teacher development (CPTD) (Moham-med, 2012).

Career development, underpinned by sound career planning, is a lifelong process entailing the refining and mastering of skills and competencies. The latter implies interaction between a human and his/her environment, which is embedded in economical, historical, cultural and community factors (Fourie, 2012). In education context, the primary site for career development of staff is the school (DoE, 2003). Within schools, HC-strategies should therefore be focused on the management of existing HC, for example to build new competencies and to take on new challenges (WCDoE, 2006). Researchers discovered that female teachers have been experiencing career barriers and displaying career development needs (Domenico and Jones, 2006). A principal has multiple roles with respect to addressing the career development needs of the educators under their leadership. Career development within the boundaries set by realities and work life experience inter alia draws on the different roles of the principal, for example to act as mentor/coach and as a role model for the female teacher; to steer her career development through proper delegation, motivation and communication. This can only occur when an inclusive management/leadership approach, for example, a needs-satisfying career development approach, is followed by the principal (Calitz and Botha, 1990). Intrinsic barriers such as fear of success and the Cinderella syndrome, which are typical results of a low self-image/self-esteem, should be countered in the process (Monau, 1995). Female teachers, intrinsically motivated by the respect and performance of their learners (Kieft, 2005), should ideally be regarded as leaders-in training (UFS, 2008).

Certain factors hamper the career development of female teachers, despite their own efforts and those of their colleagues and principles. Such factors include the lack of equal opportunities, the ability to overcome extrinsic barriers such as a lack of knowledge pertaining to opportunities (networking), gender stereotyping and cultural beliefs (Fourie, 1997). Role conflict arising from different life roles and time constraints (Özkanli and White, 2008) can also result in different career patterns for men and women (Nel and Venter, 2008). The harvesting of SC and HC is therefore advantageous to both the employer and the employee, including female teachers. Networking is of the utmost importance to the latter as they should not expect to be treated differently from their male colleagues. They have to be just as well qualified, have the same skills and knowledge, and should be capable and competent to the same extent. The career development of female teachers and the role of the principal seem to converge in a number of key issues with respect to female teachers' perceptions and perspectives on their career, career planning and movement. These include the nature of the psychological contract between the female teacher and her principal; the (intrinsic and extrinsic) career barriers the female teacher has to overcome, including glass ceilings, tokenism, and ways of managing the career path of female teachers that have become stuck on a certain post level (Fourie, 1997, p. 38; Van Dijk, 2004, p. 774).

An empirical investigation based on the above conceptual-theoretical framework was launched into the different perceptions concerning principals' involvement in the career development of female educators. The subsequent section reports on this project.

3. Empirical investigation

3.1. Research design and methodology. A quantitative and post-positivistic research approach was followed (Creswell, 2012). It took the form of a survey, one of the methods suitable in quantitative research for collecting data from respondents regarding their views, judgments and experiences (Ibert et al., 2007).

3.2. Study population and sampling. The study population consisted of principals and female teachers on post levels 1 and 2 at primary schools with 300 or more learners in the Free State Province. The sample group consisted of the principals and the female educators (post levels 1 and 2) at 50 primary schools, randomly selected by means of stratified systemic cluster sampling from all 5 school districts in the Free State Province, 10 schools per district. Forty of the fifty (i.e. 80%) sampled schools responded to the questionnaires whilst 40 principals and 336 female educators responded. Responses were received from all five school districts; the results can therefore be viewed as representative of the school population in the Free State Province.

3.3. Data collection. A structured questionnaire developed on the basis of the conceptual-theoretical study was developed and administered (Maree and Pietersen, 2007). The questionnaire consisted of two sections: section A to gather biographical information regarding the respondents, and section B to interrogate different aspects of career development. This section consisted of 68 items, divided into 10 sub-categories. The Likert scale used to describe each statement allowed the respondents to choose from the following options: *(1) Not at all (2) to a lesser extent (3) to an average extent (4) to a large extent.*

Separate questionnaires were developed for principals and female teachers for addressing the issue. The items were respectively formulated in such a way that the female teacher and principal respondents could respond in accordance with their own perceptions regarding the issue in question.

3.4. Pilot test. A *pilot test* was conducted in four primary schools to evaluate the questionnaire in terms of the clarity of items, its length and the duration to complete it. Forty female educators and four principals, not part of the study population from which the sample was drawn, participated in the pilot test. The respondents' recommendations were taken into account during the final editing of the questionnaires.

3.5. Validity and reliability of the questionnaire. The objective of the pilot test was to enhance the validity and the efficacy of the rating scale and to assess the completeness of the questionnaire. The construct validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by means of confirmatory factor analysis whilst Cronbach Alpha coefficients were calculated to determine the degree of internal consistency. The degree of reliability indicated by the latter (values of 0.8 and higher) was high.

3.6. Ethical aspects. Permission to execute this research project was granted by the Ethics Committee of the institution under which auspices it was done. Written approval was obtained from the Free State Department of Basic Education (FSDBE) to conduct the research and to do the pilot testing in schools. A cover letter outlining the purpose and importance of the research accompanied the questionnaire to schools. In it, assurance was given that the research was directed only by the set research aims and that the privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of respondents were guaranteed. The letter also indicated that participation was voluntary, that respondents would not be harmed in any way and could withdraw at any time. It also stated that a participant's completion of the questionnaire would be regarded as based on informed decision-making.

3.7. Data analysis. The data were firstly subjected to the use of descriptive statistics. To determine the differences between teachers and principles' responses, we have used hierarchical linear modeling to adjust for and model the non-independence of data (Hancock and Mueller, 2010). In order to determine the practical significance of the differences in the means of teachers and principals, standardized differences in means were calculated as effect sizes (d-values) (Cohen, 1988; Ellis and Steyn, 2003), where d-values of 0.5 and larger are considered to be an indication of differences that are important in practice.

4. Results

Sixty-seven percent (67%) of the female educators (n = 336) were older than 41 years, 39% only had a teachers' diploma, 29% had a degree, and only 17% possessed a degree plus a postgraduate teachers' diploma. The majority of them (79%) were on post level 1, 53% had 16 or more years' experience, but fewer than 20% of them had been promoted to higher post levels. The majority of them were married (60%), African (76%) and taught in a school with 10 or more female educators (95%).

The majority of the principals (78%) were 41 years or older, on post level 4 (70%), male (83%) and African (80%). The majority of them (70%) had 10 years or more experience as principals, and were managing a school with more than 10 female educators on the staff (95%).

A factor analysis brought ten constructs to the surface (refer Table 1). Their Cronbach Alpha coefficient values ranged from 0.80 to 0.95. The average mean scores on each construct for teachers and principals were also determined. A high mean score indicated an involvement from an average to a large extent and a low mean score indicated an involvement to a lesser extent or not at all.

Table 1. Mean scores of teachers and principals on constructs

Construct	Average means female educators	Standard deviation	Average means principals	Standard deviation	Mean square error (MSE)	*p*-value	Effect size (*d*-value)
Networking	3.14	0.61	3.36	0.48	0.27	0.022	0.39*
Communication	2.99	0.64	3.36	0.42	0.26	0.000	0.72**
Delegating	2.91	0.69	3.33	0.51	0.34	0.000	0.71**
Recruitment of staff	2.89	0.64	3.32	0.44	0.29	0.000	0.78**
Mentoring	2.82	0.68	3.20	0.38	0.31	0.000	0.64**
Role conflict	2.81	0.68	2.88	0.51	0.33	0.530	0.10
Self-concept	2.77	0.74	3.11	0.35	0.38	0.002	0.52**
Career development	2.69	0.68	2.98	0.34	0.30	0.005	0.47*

Note: *d*-value: 0.2 small effect;* 0.5 medium effect**; 0.8 large effect***.

Group averages of the female educators' responses on the constructs indicated that in only one construct, networking, the average mean was higher than 3 (3.14), For the other constructs it ranged from 2.69 for career development to 2.99 for communication. Group averages of the principals' responses on the constructs indicated that six of the construct mean scores were higher than 3; only 2 (2.88 and 2.98) were below 3. According to these averages, the principals seemed to rate themselves higher on all constructs than their rating according to the female teachers. Practically significant differences of medium effect between the responses of the principals and the female teachers were also obtained for the constructs *Communication* (d = 0.72), *Delegating* (d = 0.71), *Mentoring* (d = = 0.64), *Recruitment* (d = 0.78) and *Self-concept* (d = = 0.52) which implies that principles indeed think that they are more involved in these aspects of female educators' career development than perceived by female educators. For the constructs *networking* and *career development* the effect was statistically significant with an approximating medium effect whilst for role-conflict, no statistical or practical differences between the responses of the teachers and the principals were obtained. Next, we analyze items in the career development construct with low averages in order to determine where recommendations for career development will be viable.

Table 2 indicates 6 items in constructs connected with career development in which the female educators perceived their principals to have been less involved. The female educators did not experience the principals to be supportive in terms of the identification of career weaknesses and strengths, the availability of career development programs and opportunities or support in terms of discussions and planning on career development.

Table 2. Items in which female educators rated principals not being involved to an average or large extent

Item no.	Abbreviated description of item	Construct	Mean	Standard deviation
25	Identification of career weaknesses and strengths	Career development	2.16	0.94
3	Implementation of a career development programme for female educators	Career development	2.45	0.99
67	A career development interview between the principal and female educator	Career development	2.53	0.84
24	Availability to attend professional career development opportunities	Career development	2.54	0.97
17	Availability of mentors and coaches to assist female educators	Career development	2.55	1.01
66	Assistance on how to adapt career development strategies	Career development	2.60	0.86

Items in which principals rated their involvement to have been to a lesser extent are indicated in Table 3.

Table 3. Items in which principals claimed less involvement

Item no.	Abbreviated description of item	Construct	Mean	Standard deviation
3	Career development program for female educators in place at school	Career development	2.33	0.73
56	Accommodate the fact that career paths of women are different from those of men	Mentoring	2.67	0.92
34	Understanding what motivates female educators to take consistent career development actions	Self-concept	2.74	0.72
5	Necessity to review career development strategy of the school to accommodate changing career development needs	Career development	2.78	0.69
66	Involvement to assist female educators to adapt career development strategies during different career- and life cycles	Career development	2.79	0.65

Table 3 shows that principals thought that there were inadequate career development programs in place at their schools and that they themselves did not adequately accommodate the fact that career paths for women differed from those of men. This might be concomitant to the fact that they also admitted that they did not fully understand what motivated female educators to take consistent career development actions; they therefore failed to assist female educators to follow certain appropriate career development strategies during different career and life cycles.

5. Discussion

According to the principals' self-assessment, they rated their involvement in the occupational development of female teachers much higher than perceived by the female educators involved in the study. It implies that these school principals felt more comfortable with their support to female teachers in terms of professional development, than female teachers experienced in terms of their principal's support. However, both female educators and principals indicated weaknesses in terms of programs for a career ladder of female educators. Principals admitted that they did not have adequate strategies in place to accommodate the changing needs of female teachers. The fact that they indicated that they did not fully understand what motivated female educators to take consistent development actions as well as the fact that they did not accommodate the fact that career paths of women are different from those of men, also explain why teachers experienced principals to not be supportive in terms of their own development.

Female educators' responses to principals' failure to identify their career weaknesses and strengths and to assist them to adapt to career development strategies chimed with the principals' responses regarding their inability to understand female educators' professional development needs. Female educators experienced a need for mentors and coaches to assist them with their planning of a career ladder in terms of discussions and support to identify their career weaknesses and strengths. They also have a need for discussing their career development with their principals.

The fact that school principals agreed that no adequate career development program for female educators are in place at their schools, explains the reason why female teachers in this research did not receive sufficient guidance and mentoring in terms of their professional development. This research further indicated that school principals in the study population are not fully competent to support female teachers in their career development because they do not always understand what motivates female educators and therefore do not accommodate the fact that career paths of women are different from those of men.

Recommendations

It is recommended that professional development of school principals should include formal training in career development with a strong focus on the needs of female teachers. They should understand what motivates female teachers and be able to develop a program for their school, taking into account all aspects of female educators' career development. It should replace the current approach of principles in which certain aspects of their career ladder are addressed in isolation and as needed. Career development strategies should furthermore be tailor-made for a specific school, and specifically for the female educators at a school. Further research could be undertaken regarding the career development training programs on the basis of which the career needs of female educators can be addressed.

Conclusion

Different aspects influence the career development of female educators and the role principal's play should not be underestimated. Certain realities within education, including certain legal parameters, set the boundaries of career development. Because principals in general rated themselves, according to this project, to be more involved in the professional career of female educators than perceived by female educators, they tend not to support female educators' career development as could be expected. According to results (cf. Table 1) the principals seemed to rate themselves higher on all the constructs than their rating according to the female teachers. The principal as mentor and coach who regards female educators as leaders-in-training should play a major role in their career planning and development by means of various management actions. These actions must at least include a tailor-made management strategy for the career development of female teachers based on a career plan.

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