VISIBILITY OF WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN GHANA: A CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether women employees are visible in their organizations in Ghana. The study was carried out among female non-teaching staff (senior members) of the University of Cape Coast. The study made use of purposive sampling to select the twenty-six (26) out of a population of one hundred and three (103) non-teaching staff. Data were collected using a self administered questionnaire and analyzed using quantitative techniques. The results indicated that the visibility of women in the University was very high.

Key words: visibility, female non-teaching staff, university of cape coast, Ghana,

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The last half century has brought about an increase in the number of women in all levels of education all over the world. Nevertheless, in spite of their highest levels of education, women’s qualifications are not translated into options and corresponding occupational opportunities for the positions of status and authority within the university (Brooks, 1977). Dybe (1989) states that “in the majority of Social Sciences, women were invisible, because their contributions were not recognized or were “absent” or were not taken seriously”. This absence or “invisibility’ of women must jointly be considered with their ‘visibility’ as passive beings (Ardener, 1989).

The barriers to the promotion of women in universities are well known. For example, at the universities, men publish more than women that have to do perhaps with university structure aspects (Brooks, 1997) or with the fact that women do not offer sufficient time for their professional development, as their responsibilities are divided between household and work. Other authors talk about a “glass ceiling” which the women have to face (David & Woodword, 1998).

One major concern of career research has been on the underrepresentation of women in managerial positions. In this connection, various researchers have focused on factors which lead to the progression of women managers (Kirchmeyer, 1998, Maxifield, 2005 and Garavan, O’Brien & O’Hanlon, 2006). Some of the factors which have been suggested as leading to women’s career advancements include mentoring, training and development, career planning, individual characteristics, and hard work (Ismail & Arokiasamy, 2007, Burke, Burgess & Fallon, 2006) among others.

In Africa and Ghana in particular, researchers have mainly focused on the barriers faced by women in higher education. This article takes the research agenda on women’s career development further by focusing in particular on the visibility of women in public universities in Ghana, case study of University of Cape Coast.

1.2 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The study sought to assess the visibility of women in higher education in Ghana with specific reference to the University of Cape Coast.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the extent to which female non-teaching staff (senior members) in the University of Cape Coast are visible?

2.1 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In reviewing the literature, it would be difficult to search for the universal definition of ‘visibility’. Thus, ‘visibility’ is not an easy concept to understand and can mean a variety of things to different people.
The term ‘visibility’ involves ‘putting yourself into the limelight’ or ‘allowing oneself to be seen’ and it involves risk (Driscoll & Goldberg, 1993). According to Vinnicombe and Singh (2003), an individual’s visibility may lead to his or her public approval and success. In an organisation, an employee’s visibility is important because the evaluation of effective performance can be very subjective. It is therefore important that one’s supervisor and those in power in organizations are made aware of one’s contribution (Robbins & Coutler, 1999). According to Snape, Redman, and Baner (1994) women may lose out in terms of promotion because senior managers do not know them well or do not have an accurate view of their ambitions and may therefore underrate their job performance. Lemons and Parzinger (2001) indicate that because supervisors were unlikely to attribute the performance of women to them, women were as less promotable to men. To Robbins (2001), the attribution theory states that when individuals observe behaviour, they attempt to determine whether it is internally or externally caused. Internally caused behaviours are those that are believed to be under the control of the individual. Externally caused behaviour is seen as resulting from outside causes. The argument here is that because women are not visible to supervisors, even their performance is not likely to be attributed to them and therefore they are likely not to be recommended for promotion. This issue may be critical where employees’ recommendation for promotion depends on the supervisor. To be able to wield power and influence, a woman must be known to be an individual who deserves to be there because of personal professional power.

Several authors (Alder & Izareli, 1992; Morrison, White & Velsor, 1992; Driscoll & Goldberg, 1993; Vinnicombe & Bank, 2003) state that visibility is increased by being involved in challenging assignments, participation in social events, and Professional events and networks.

2.1 Challenging Assignments

Challenging assignments involve adding to an employee’s responsibility and this gives the employee a sense of recognition as he or she stands out (Aswathappa, 2005). According to Armstrong and Murlins (2004), recognition is necessary in career advancement. Recognition could be achieved by accepting challenging assignments which stretch and compliment one’s knowledge and then learn as much as one could. Dessler (2008) notes that challenging assignments provide employees with opportunities for achievements and also motivation.

Lee (2002) finds that ability to take challenging assignments helped computer professionals to fulfill growth needs. Cox and Copper (1998) states that women who had succeeded in their careers had been challenged early in their career and that gave them opportunity to prove their abilities. Also, studies done by Metcalfe (1989) showed that women who had advanced in their careers rated challenging assignments as important for career advancement. Dessler (2008) views challenging assignments as developmental opportunities. He states that women had great difficulty in getting geographic mobility opportunities and they needed to be proactive to get such assignments.

Undertaking challenging assignments entails ability and willingness to assume a heavy workload and putting in long face hours (Dessler, 2008), because this demonstrates commitment to the organization and career (Snape et al., 1994) due to the increased responsibilities. Research done by Vinnicombe and Colwil, (1997) indicates that successful women attributed their career to hard work which led to good performance. pine (2002) and Zhong (2006) recommend that women must stand out through hard work and being good at what they do. In contributing to heavy work load, Lee (2002) posits that apart from assuming long and flexible working hours by extending the environment to working outside of normal hours, heavy work load also entails having a preoccupation with work related issues like undertaking geographical assignments. This could be an indication of commitment to the job and organization.

2.1.2 Participation in Social and Professional Events

In order to increase visibility, women need to participate in social events. This includes being seen at social functions, being effective in professional associations and developing powerful allies who speak well of you (Robbins & Coutler, 1999). Attendance at social gatherings increases one’s visibility (Robbins & DeCenzo, 2007). According to Aswathappa, (2005) one’s presence at social functions and events provide social interaction and a source of information about career opportunities. To enhance career advancements opportunity, one needs to join a support group to be able to listen to others and develop empathy and other key interpersonal relationships (Zajas, 1995).
Vinnicombe and Colwill, (1997) indicate that associations can make women more visible in society and encourage them to contribute and develop. The two authors add that women’s associations may provide a network for women to offer support for their efforts in the workplace and bring together women who have similar professional qualifications to share information about their occupations and career guidance. According to Walsh and Borkowski (2006) professional networks provide instrumental benefits to their members such as information exchange, access to resources and professional opportunities. In addition, Dessler (2008) observes that a study on minority working women in the United States showed that 40 percent of the women attributed their lack of career advancement to lack of networking with influential colleagues. Hansen (2006) asserts that it is important for one to focus on people with power and influence in the organization in order to benefit from their clout. She observes, however, that women tended to focus on people at lower than themselves.

2.1.3 Networking

Networking is said to be a significant issue for a successful career. It is described as a pattern of the ability to create relations with various people. It is the process of developing connections and also to maintain and establish these relationships. It could be viewed in many different ways. Both as a set of links that connect and interact different agents with each other or as a set of agents that adopt a similar behavior to achieve different economic purposes (Cohendet, Llerena, Stahn & Umbhauer, 1996). According to Murphy in Davidson and Cooper (1993), a network is a group which encourages employees to help each other in their respective job and is a source of information and advice. Kandola (2004) points out that the purpose served by networks was that of fulfilling to be seen to be doing something and adds that informal networks might hinder or improve an employee’s chances of promotion. However, several authors have stated that networks are important for increasing visibility and career advancement (Vinnicombe & Singh, 2003; Aycan, 2004; Maxfield, 2005; Ogden et al., 2006). According to Ackah and Heaton (2003), men used networks to obtain promotions. Aycan (2004) states that women who had made it to top management in Turkey had access to networks.

Networking is related to the social learning theory. The social learning theory poits that people learn from observing others. The theory contributes to adult learning by highlighting the importance of social context and explicating the process of modeling mentoring (Arokiasmy, 2007). To this end, one may argue that networks provide women with context where they can learn by observing role models and being mentored.

Zhong (2006) states that women need to set up their networks and participate in men’s networks as well. Maxfield (2005) contends that women find networking challenging and thus they lack the important tool of networking. According to Ackah and Heaton (2003), women were excluded from the network through which they could make themselves known and learn about promotion processes. Studies conducted in Tanzanian showed that women who do not network remain vulnerable and liable to being rendered invisible and never remembered when promotions were being discussed (Alder & Izraeli, 1994).

According to Maxifield (2005), there exist two types of networking: internal and external networking. Internal networking refers to networking within an organization. Maxifield (2005), stated that internal networking is deemed to be a characteristic or behavior thought to be important to progress in an organization. Thus, if you struggle to network internally, you may be seen as unable to represent the organization effectively on an external basis. External networking is the ability to network with others outside the organization. The ability to network was perceived as a business skill that is important for building relations with clients, and as a method by which one’s visibility to senior management demonstrated, and this may enhanced career progression.

Networking with clients enables an employee to learn about the clients’ views about the products or services offered by the organization. Employees who net work with clients look good to management because they help to strengthen the employer’s stability (Spiegel, 2008). The author adds that such employees may receive increased earnings.

According to Ackah and Heaton (2003), a network of friends, colleagues, and clients can be valuable means to career advancement because it can prove beneficial in getting things done.
Lin (2002) discusses four different reasons why engagement in social networks can be of importance for an individual. Firstly, a network enhances the flow of information. An individual intervened in a network with social ties in strategic locations can gain information about opportunities and choices that otherwise would not have been available to the person. Secondly, the social ties that an individual possesses may influence the decision makers in an organization. If people on strategic positions “put in a word” for an individual, the probability that decision makers take this into consideration are very likely. Thirdly, the importance of networks is that the social ties the individual possesses may function as a re-assurance for an organization of his or her social credentials. Finally, the network can improve the reinforcement if the individual. Being recognized as an individual as well as a member of a group, not only provides emotional strength for the individual but also publicly acknowledge the person’s entitlement to resources.

2.1.4 Female Networks

Over the past twenty years, an increasing number of female networks, both internal and external have emerged. Female networks usually offer instrumental information, job opportunities, mentors and meetings with business contacts (Davidson & Burke, 2000). He mentions three board categories of female networks which are:

1. Professional and occupational networks. These are often formal and they bring together women with similar business and professional qualifications. The purpose is to share information about the industry or profession and to provide career guidance.

2. In-company networks. These can be either formal or informal and bring together women that work with the same organization. Some of these are only open to women at a certain level in the organization, while others include all women in that particular organization.

3. The Training Group. This is a kind of support group that offer guidance for its members. This type of network can be formal or informal depending on what type of support it offers. The distinction between the more instrumental network ties and those developed for social support is that instrumental ties result from the performance of a particular work role. Social support is the exchange between expressive ties and has a more informal structure. Nevertheless, they can be just as important for motivation, career development and information exchange. In fact, research indicates that informal networks that offer material, emotional and informational support are usually more vital for women than formal networks.

The issue of building a network of mutual friends who can be called upon to assist in career matters can help an employee to find the best career opportunities and get in a better financial situation. For many employees, their work group is a source of social interaction where they can also share their frustrations and feelings of satisfaction. Aswathappa (2005) states that employees who communicate with fellow employees may get information about career choices. Peer network is one interpersonal determinant which involves supportive relationship at work and as such supports advancement (Nikandrou, Panyotopoulou & Apospori, 2006).

3.1 METHODOLOGY

The objective of the study was to find out whether female non-teaching staff (senior Members) is visible in the University of Cape Coast. The study therefore involved female non-teaching staff of UCC.

A descriptive survey approach was used for the study. The population was the female non-teaching staff of UCC and the total number of the female non-teaching staff was thirty-three (33) including the researcher. This was out of the total population of one hundred and fifth-five (155) non-teaching staff. Thus, to cater for all the women, purposive sampling technique was applied.

A questionnaire was used to collect the data. Respondents had to give their opinions in relation to visibility. ‘Visibility’ was measured using five items ranging from hard work to having a network of influential colleagues. The measures used likert type of questions with responses ranging from 1 as strongly disagrees to 5 as strongly agree. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics specifically frequencies percentages, means and standard deviations.
4.1 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study are presented and discussed under this section.

The demographic respondents revealed 10 (38.5%) were between the ages of 40-49 years, 8(30.8%) of them fell with the ages of 50-60 years. Another 7(26.9%) were also in the ages of 30-39 years and only 1 representing 3.8% of the respondents was in the age range of 20-29 years.

In terms of status 12(46.2%) of the respondents were Assistant Registrars, 5(19.2%) of the respondents were Deputy Registrars, in the status of Senior Assistant Registrar and Accountants were both 3(11.5%). There was one respondent each in all the other categories (Assistant Accountants, Senior Medical Officer and Assistant Librarian) representing 3.8%.

Twelve of the respondents representing 46.2% had worked for 10 years and above, 7(26.9%) had worked for 6-10 years and 5(19.2%) had worked for 1-3 years whereas 2(7.7%) had worked for 3-6 years.

Research Question

What is the extent to which female non-teaching staff (senior members) in the University of Cape Coast are visible?

To find out whether female non-teaching staff are visible or not, respondents were given a five point Likert scale questionnaire to respond to. The scoring was based on the five point Likert scale of measurement of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Not certain (N), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The options of the items were weighted in the Likert format with SA = 5, A = 4, N = 3, D = 2 and SD = 1.

A maximum score a respondent could obtain was 35 and a minimum score of 7. The weights were equated to a maximum of 5 and a minimum of 1 to reflect the averages, using the number of items as a denominator. To interpret the score a person obtains on the questionnaire, score bands were used as shown below. The greater the score the more a person is visible. Thus for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>38.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>30.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assist Registrar</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>46.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Srn. Assist Registrar</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Registrar</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountant</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist Accountant</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Srn Medical Officer</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist Librarian</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of working</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-3yrs</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6yrs</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-10yrs</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10yrs and Above</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>46.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not at all visible we have 0 – 0.9
Not visible we have 1.9 – 1.9
Somehow visible we have 2.9 – 2.9
Visible we have 3.0 – 3.9
Very visible we have 4.0 – 5.0
Table 2: Visibility of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am able to undertake a heavy workload</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>.857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am always willing to work for long hours</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td>.703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to undertake official assignments outside my workplace (station)</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>.951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like participating in social events</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>.838</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am involved in professional associations</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>.710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a network of influential friends</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>.774</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a network of influential colleagues</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>1.129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean of Means</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>4.2473</td>
<td>.47045</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the answering Research, Table 2 revealed that the mean of means of the respondents was 4.2 which fell within the score band of 4.0 – 5.0 which is interpreted as very visible. A closer look at the individual items revealed that the respondents were very visible except on one item “I have a network of influential colleagues” which was (M=3.92, SD=1.129). The respondents showed visibility on that item.

The finding of the current study is supported by Vinnicombe and Singh, 2003; Aycan, 2004; Maxfield, 2005; Ogden et al., 2006 who were of the opinion that women higher positions were equally visible as their male counterparts.

Vinnicombe and Colwil, (1997) on their part join compliments to the finding of the current study. They revealed that even though women in top positions indicated their visibility, they were not as visible as their male counterparts. Out of the 35 women interviewed for their study, 32 of them indicated that they were very visible in their organizations.

The finding of Ackah and Heaton (2003), is in opposition to the finding of the current study. They found out that women were excluded from the network through which they could make themselves known and learn about promotion processes.

The finding of Alder and Izraeli, (1994) is in contradiction to the finding of the current study. Their studies conducted in Tanzania showed that women who do not network remain vulnerable and liable to being rendered invisible and never remembered when promotions were being discussed.

The researcher on her part was not surprise of the finding of the current study. This is because the policies, regulations and status of university do not put any barriers to restrict women from becoming visible. The university gives equal access to both sexes. What probably takes away the attention of women is family pressure. This is confirmed by the study of Asante (2010) which posits that child bearing and late pursuance of education were the two debilitating factors which constraints women from being luminous in their organizations.

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

It was revealed from the study that female non-teaching staffs (senior members) of the university of Cape Coast were very visible in the university. It is therefore concluded that women in higher education in Ghana are very visible.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

It was also recommended that women in high education should endeavour to strive for higher heights as they can rock shoulders with their male counterparts and even do better. It was also suggested that the study be replicated with female teaching staff (senior members) as the current study was conducted with female non-teaching staff.
6.1 REFERENCES

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