

# A Rethinking of the Organizational Cultural Practices and Mentorship as Barriers of Female Teachers Ascending to Principalship in Kenya

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## Abstract

The focus of this study was to examine the organizational cultural practices and mentorship as barriers that female school principals encounter in Kenya as they ascend to principalship. The study objectives were: To establish the influence of organizational cultural practices on upward mobility of secondary school female teachers, and to ascertain the influence of mentorship on female upward mobility to management positions. The target population for this study was 825 (N) persons, from which a sample size 376(n) respondents comprising of; 76 female principals, 78 male principals, 178 deputy female principals, 22 sub-county education officers, and 22 Quality Assurance and Standards Officers were picked and used in the study. The study used questionnaires and interview guides to collect requisite data and both descriptive and inferential statistics were used in data analysis. The study established that: Organizational cultural practices played a critical role in locking female teachers out of management positions and absence of mentors in school organizations was found to be detrimental to women empowerment. The study recommends that school organizations should: embrace gender mainstreaming which will counter biased organizational cultures, put mechanisms in place to ensure that mentoring is anchored within their frameworks.

**Keywords:** Organizational cultural practices, Principalship, Mentorship

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background to the Study

Historical trends around the world have shown that women have been under-represented at all educational levels globally. For instance, Ouston (1992) found that less than half of the primary schools in England and Wales had female principals, while in secondary schools one in six schools had a female principal. This concurs with a study done in Turkey in 2005 which established that women account for the majority in the teaching profession and yet are under-represented at headship level (Maundu and Warren 2008). The International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) (2012) underscore the prevalence of increased feminization of the teaching profession at the lower levels of education, while the senior management and leadership positions in education are taken by men. Coombe, (1993) revealed that women occupied marginalized positions in leadership in most organizations. Jones and George (2004), further show that although there are more women in management than a decade ago, there is a dismal number in top and even middle management positions in most organizations. Neidhat and Carlin (2003), affirm that women have been under-represented in management due to organizational barriers stemming from socializing and stereotyping. They further underscore the current organizational reality being heavily structured against career oriented women making women's upward mobility within institutions internationally unattainable (Ernest, 2003, Neidhat et al, 2003).

According to Tlaiss (2010), the hurdles that women in management positions globally encounter can be so formidable that women sometimes discard the efforts to make it to the top in large organizations. This is manifested by a minimal percentage representation of women in management positions and their fundamental absence from most of the senior jobs, Tlaiss: 2010:48). ILO (2004) further attributes this under-representation to amalgamation of social attitudes and gender inequalities in education and training as being determinants to occupation segregation that makes men and women to be streamlined into different jobs. The ILO report further highlights that it is not enough that men and women have different jobs, but there is also a disparity in the extent to which they are represented in the hierarchies of the positions within jobs universally. Even in the occupations dominated by women, it is important to note that the more skilled and better paid positions are occupied by men (I.L.O, 2004:64). A similar idea is expressed by Coleman, (2003) who reiterates that regardless of women being the majority, few of them find their way up in management positions. It is in the light of this state of affairs that the study sought to investigate the organizational barriers that hindered female teachers from accessing principalship in secondary schools as well as establish the coping strategies that they used to overcome the barriers in the selected counties.

## 1.2 Literature Review

### 1.2.1 Organizational Culture

Organizational culture entails issues like cultural stereotyping, male dominance, societal expectations, and sequence of behavior, attitudes, values and norms which acts as either key facilitators or barriers to work life policies (Davidson and Burke, 2004). According to Bennet (1997) an organizational culture comprises its members shared perceptions of issues customary ways of doing things, modes of behaviour and attitudes towards work. Bennet (1997, further affirms that positive aspects of organizational culture are that: it gives employees a sense of corporate identity; assisting in generating commitment to the attainment of organizational goals, provides employees with a frame of reference through which to evaluate issues by influencing individual perspectives and perceptions and stabilises interpersonal organizations within the firm. Bennet further notes that some organizational cultures could also be highly rigid, encourages bureaucracy and inflexibility. Organizational culture depends highly on whether the philosophy and the core values of a given organization entrenches the principle of gender main streaming. This is because most organizational cultures are characterized by patriarchal systems and masculinity which disadvantages the female gender (Davidson and Burke, 2004).

Most of the managerial literature on culture refers to its inclusive properties. It refers to the indefinable part of an organization, which gives it its cohesiveness (Tlaiss, 2010). Cultures represent systems of meaning and signification which may act as a defence against the unknown and a means of providing stability, for example, the role of rituals in people's lives (Bennet, 1997). People form great attachment to their cultures, which explains why there is always a lot of resistance to culture change (Kabaji, 2007). It is interesting to note that cultures prohibits as well as embraces the cultural stereotype of leaders which is seen as a barrier hindering women from rising to positions of higher management levels (Onsongo, 2002). This stereotyping portrays women as less capable leaders and as having lesser ability than males when it comes to leadership potential. Moreover, it has been observed that women on top leadership often report that their male colleagues sometimes feels uncomfortable or even threatened by their presence and this discomfort emanates from the failure of men to reconcile their traditional values about sex roles they were brought up with and their experience of working with women as peers (Oakley, 2007).

Stereotypes may stop women's leadership development and organizations need capable leaders for the advancement of their organizations but when it comes to women as leaders then gender stereotypes make these organizations to underestimate the capabilities of the females who are able to do as well as their male counterparts, (Anker, 1997, Acker, 1994). Kamau (2004) further agree that female leaders are often faced with societal demands and traditions that males do not encounter like household chores, marriage, children and negative attitudes and these hinder their upward progression in their careers.

### 1.2.2 Mentorship

Organizational mentoring plays a critical role in the advancement of managers as Mentors are considered essential for career advancement as they participate in career advancement of protégés through sponsorship, coaching, role modelling and counselling, (Burke and McKeen, (2004). Mentoring programmes in many organizations are never geared towards women empowerment but instead they perpetuate a male dominated status quo and consequently many organizations have given lip service to the idea of mentorship, Kimani, (2014). Role model view points of organizations are indeed dictated by male status quo and never by qualifications as established by a study launched in (2009) with support of American express which found out that women either underestimate the role the sponsors play in career mobility or fail to cultivate it all together. The study further explained the reasons for this attitude to vary from women's perception that getting forward through connections is in appropriate, to reluctance by both women and senior men to establish a sponsorship relationship because it can be misconstrued as sexual interests.

Mentoring involves transfer of experience and expertise from experienced individuals in an organization to the less experienced. It is often used as a kind of "fast-track" support scheme where one (relatively) senior manager oversees the activity and performance of a junior colleague who is earmarked for rapid progression (Riegle, 2006). The mentoring relationship has been earmarked in the practitioner and management literature as a fundamental element that supports career success and advancement (Tharanou, 2005). Indeed the use of mentor to back present and future leaders is a powerful tool that may be used to foster more effective school practices (Cullen and Luna, 1995, Pavash and Playko, 1999, Whitaker and Lane, 1990). This concurs with Kimani (2014) who notes that mentors have great insights that would save an organization money and time that would otherwise be wasted reinventing the wheel. It is therefore, explicit that lack of female mentors within the education system especially in the management leadership position is a barrier affecting women's upward mobility in the educational leadership organizational structure as emphasises Catalyst, (2001) that lack of influential mentors for women in management affected their upward mobility.

Mentors play a key role to the success of female managers because they help in the improvement of the managers' sense of identity and professional confidence, reduce discrimination, help them get access to information that is available to men, give them decision-making power in organizations and facilitate their

managerial advancement(Ragins,2000,Allen,et al,2000). This agrees with Kimani (2014) whose work retaliates that mentors assist employees to identify the unique skills that they can ride on to scale up the career ladder in addition to giving the mentees ideas on what areas to improve on. However, a number of studies have also highlighted the difficulties that female managers face in getting mentors mainly because of women's token status and potential discomfort with cross-gender mentors. (Burke and Karambaya, 2004; Cleveland et al., 2000) In general, absence of mentors has a negative impact on women's career advancement and success because they hardly get role models to emulate.

## 2. Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the organizational cultural practices and mentorship as barriers of female teachers to ascending to principalship. To realize this objective, the study was guided by the following research objectives;

- a) Establish the influence of organizational cultural practices on upward mobility of secondary school female teachers.
- b) Ascertain the influence of mentorship on female upward mobility to management positions.

## 3. Research Design and Methodology

This study used descriptive survey design which combined qualitative and quantitative approaches in data collection and analysis. The target population for this study was 825 (N) persons comprising; (248) female principals, (260) male principals, 263 female deputy principals, 22, DEOs and 22 Quality Assurance and Standard Officers. Through purposive sampling, a sample of 376(n) respondents; (76 female principals, 78 male principals, 178 deputy female principals, 22 sub-county education officers, and 22 Quality Assurance and Standards Officers) were identified and used in the study. The study used questionnaires and interview guide as primary data collection tools and descriptive and inferential statistics were used in data analysis using SPSS version 21 software.

## 4. Research Findings and Discussion

The study sought to establish how biased organizational cultural practices influenced upward mobility of female teachers. To achieve this, the respondents' were required to rate several biased organizational cultural practices which had the potential to influence upward mobility of female teachers. The responses were indicated on a 5 point likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Not Sure Disagree, and Strongly Disagree). This is shown in Table 1

**Table 1: Principals' opinions on Organizational cultural practices**

Aspect of Organizational culture	N	Mean	SA		A		NS		D		SD	
			n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Cultural norms where the women's place is supposed to be at home caring for the family	135	2.4	46	34.1	39	28.9	13	9.6	22	16.3	15	11.1
Male dominance in organizations where female headship is sidelined	135	2.2	46	34.1	43	31.9	26	19.3	14	10.4	6	4.4
Oppressive traditional beliefs where women's aspiration and competencies are ignored	135	2.3	49	36.3	37	27.4	14	10.4	24	17.8	11	8.1
Societal prejudices against the female gender	126	2.5	36	28.6	45	35.7	13	10.3	14	11.1	18	14.3

SA-Strongly Agree

SD-Strongly disagree

A-Agree

NS-Not sure

D-Disagree

Table 1, show principals' opinions on biased organizational cultural practices that influenced upward mobility of female teachers. It is explicit from the table that male dominance in organizations where female headship was sidelined was rated highest with 89 (65.0%) of the principals, who both strongly agreed and agreed, positively highlighting that it was indeed an obstacle that hindered upward mobility of female teachers.

The study also sought to establish the opinions of deputy principals on organizational cultural practices. This is shown in Table 2

**Table 2: Deputy Principal's rating of Organizational Cultural Practices**

Aspect of Organizational culture	n	Mean	SA		A		NS		D		SD	
			n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Cultural norms where the women's place is supposed to be at home caring for the family	160	2.2	74	46.8	40	25.3	9	5.7	16	10.1	19	12.0
Male dominance in organizations where female headship is sidelined	156	2	65	41.7	53	34.0	13	8.3	15	9.6	10	6.4
Oppressive traditional beliefs where women's aspiration and competencies are ignored	159	2	74	46.8	47	29.7	12	7.6	15	9.5	10	6.3
Societal prejudices against the female gender	160	2	64	40.8	52	33.1	18	11.5	12	7.6	11	7.0
Organizational rituals and practices that discriminate against the female gender	163	2.4	45	27.8	61	37.7	25	15.4	13	8.0	18	11.1
Sexist practices that portray female gender as a sex objects	162	2.4	54	33.8	44	27.5	18	11.3	26	16.3	18	11.3

**SA-Strongly agree**  
**A-Agree**

**NS-Not sure**  
**D-Disagree**

**SD-Strongly disagree**

Table 2, indicates that the means for all the organizational cultural practices that hindered female principals from rising to managerial positions was less than three (3.0) for deputy principals. This means that the deputy principals positively felt that these organizational cultural practices affected female teachers' upward mobility in management positions. This was on the basis that: any mean less than 3.0 indicates that the respondents agreed positively, 3.0 neutral and any mean above three indicates that the respondents disagreed that the practices hindered upward mobility. The aspect of organizational culture included, cultural norms where the women's place is expected to be in the kitchen caring for the family, male dominance in organizations where female leadership is sidelined, oppressive traditional beliefs where women's aspirations and competences are ignored and societal prejudices against the female gender.

Table 2 also shows that a majority, 121(76.5%) of the deputy principals who either strongly agreed or agreed, affirmed that oppressive traditional beliefs where the women's aspirations and competences are ignored played a critical role in locking female teachers out of management positions. On the aspect of cultural norms where the women's place was expected to be in the kitchen, 114(72.1%) of the deputy principals either agreed or strongly agreed with the fact it was indeed a barrier which hindered female teachers upward mobility. This agrees with the opinions of a vast majority of DEOs who alluded to the fact that some biased organizational cultural practices really oppress the female teachers and it disadvantages those aspiring for positions. A similar sentiment was expressed by one DQASO who observed that some cultures look down upon the women and he said, "Men are sometimes not happy when a female teacher is promoted because the norm is where men are leading and women are led."

The findings of this study on organizational cultural practices as a barrier to female teachers accessing principalship agrees with Onsongo's, (2002) study, which observed that there were oppressive cultural practices which undermined women as leaders. Similarly, a female District Education Officer interviewed confirmed that some school cultures viewed female principals with apprehension and adopted a wait and see attitude to see whether they would succeed. Further Thornton, (2008) argues that male cultures tend to dominate in organizations and notes that the processes of gender exclusions were common within the organizations which perfectly concurred with the findings of this study. Similarly, Bennets (1997) notes that organizational cultures could be resistant to change encouraging bureaucracy and inflexibility and hence the notion that the most suitable place for the woman was in the kitchen as many of the respondents observed. Organizational culture depends highly on whether the philosophy and core values of a given organization entrenches gender mainstreaming because most organizational cultures are characterized by patriarchal systems and masculinity which disadvantages the female gender (Bennett, 1997). This is reflected in the respondents opinions where they either agreed or strongly agreed that there was presence of male dominance within organizations where female

headship was sidelined. The DQASOs alluded to the same as most of them concurred that male dominance is still prevalent in the school organization and female teachers are being overshadowed regardless of their numbers. The oppressive traditional beliefs where women’s aspirations and competencies are ignored and social prejudices against the female gender are some of the aspects of organizational culture which Reece (2009) argues that they affect the journey for women advancement to positions of management.

The study also sought to establish how organizational cultural practices influenced female teachers’ upward mobility between public and private schools. To realize this, the study tested the following null hypothesis:

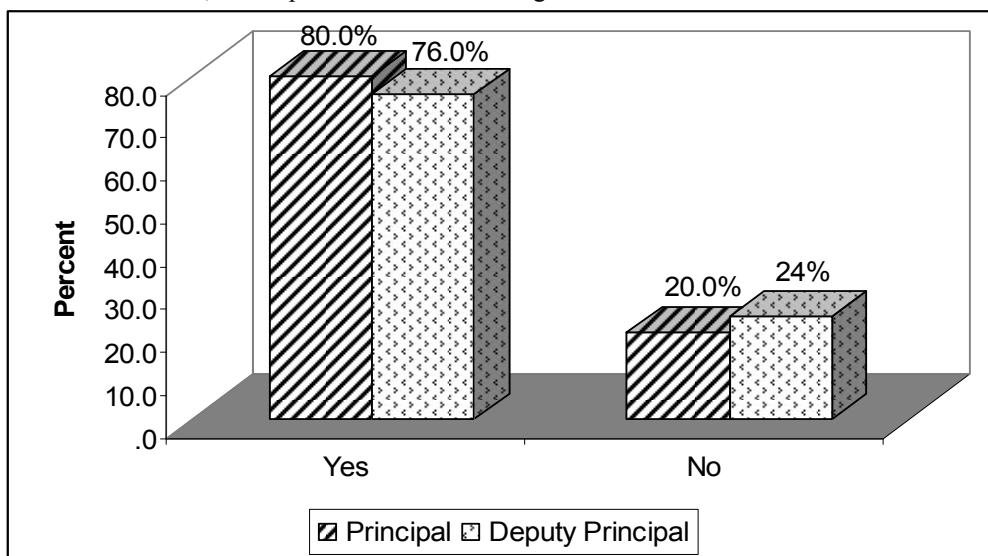
There is no significant difference between female principals of public and private secondary schools in terms of organizational cultural practices as an organizational barrier that female teachers encounter as they ascend to principalship. The hypothesis was tested using Independent Samples Test whose results are indicated in Table 3.

**Table 3: Independent Samples Test on Organizational Cultural Practices by School Category**

	t-test for Equality of Means		
	t	df	P-value
Cultural norms where the women's place is supposed to be at home caring for the family	-0.392	129	0.696
Male dominance in organizations where female headship is sidelined	-1.240	129	0.217
Oppressive traditional beliefs where women's inspirational and competencies are ignored	-1.065	129	0.289
Social prejudices against the female gender	-1.788	120	0.076

Table 3, shows that principals from both private and public schools strongly felt that the biased organizational cultural practices hindered female teachers from both categories of school from attaining principalship. This is indicated by the fact that P-values of 0.696, 0.217, 0.289, and 0.076 were all greater than the level of significance of 0.05 in all the four respective biased organizational cultural practices by school category. Thus the researcher fails to reject the null hypothesis and affirms that there is no statistical basis to claim that there was a difference between female principals of public and private secondary schools in terms of organizational cultural practices as barrier that hindered the upward mobility of female teachers. This means that organizational cultural practices affected upward mobility of female teachers equally in both public and private schools. There was however a divergent perspective from the DEOs and QUASOs who felt that upward mobility in private schools was dependent on the proprietors of schools where most of them preferred men to lead their schools. This is contrary to the public schools where the policy is clear on who heads a particular school.

On the issue of mentoring, the study sought principals and deputy principals’ information on the various aspects of mentoring and then established how they affected upward mobility of female teachers. On whether the respondents had mentors, the responses are shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Presence of Mentors**

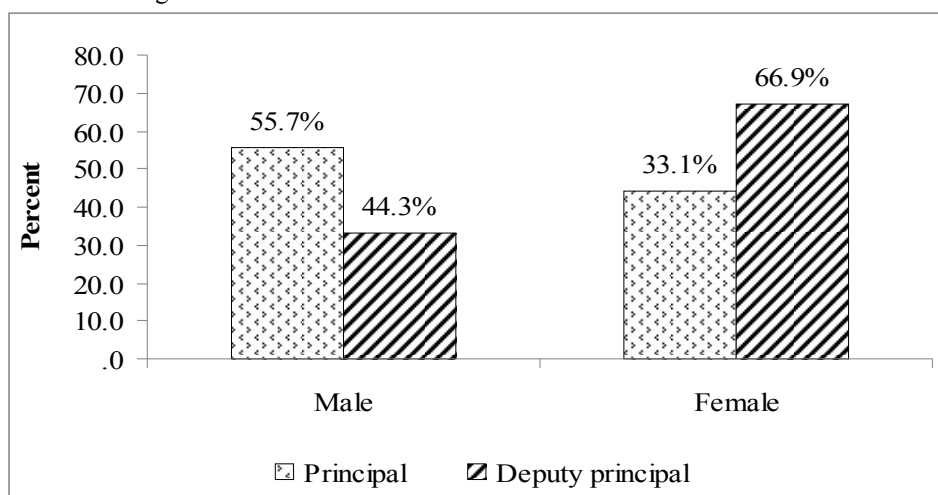
From Figure 1 it is clear that a majority, 108(80.0%) of the principals and 130(75.4%) deputy principals, reported that they had a mentor whom they looked upon for guidance in relation to their professional growth. The literature review has pointed out that organizational mentoring is critical in the advancement of managers as mentors are considered useful for career advancement through sponsoring, coaching, role modelling and



counselling (Burke and Mc Keen, 2004). The principals and the deputy principals appreciated the value of mentors and that was why they had them. The findings on presence of mentors by the deputy principals contradicts Scandular's study, (1999) which reported that women have great difficulties in getting mentors than men and that was based on the assumption that there was a scarcity of female mentors at the highest levels of organizations due to the glass-ceiling effect. The District Education Officers differed with the principals and deputy principals' views on presence of mentors by observing that it was difficult for female teachers to get mentors because of the complications involved. One of them said:

Women cannot get mentors because they are their own enemies and are busy competing with each other and in the instances where a woman has a male mentor others start gossiping around insinuating an affair and this makes many of them uncomfortable.

The study also sought to establish the gender of the mentor for both principals and deputy principals. The results are illustrated in Figure 2.

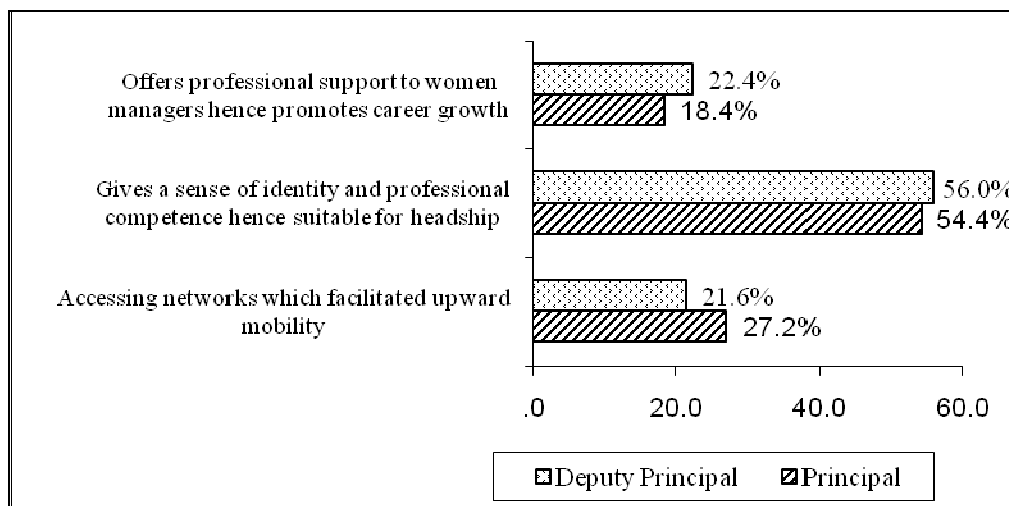


**Figure 2: Gender of the Mentor**

A majority, 54(55.7%) of the principals said that they had a mentor who was male whereas the rest 43(44.3%) said that their mentors were female. This agrees with an observation by several DEOS who noted that ladies preferred men as mentors and one of them said, "Ladies do well when they are with men as mentors". The fact that most principals preferred male mentors differed with deputy principals where a vast majority, 83(66.9%) affirmed that their mentors were females while only 41(33.1%) said their mentors were males.

The findings on choice of mentor where the male is the most preferred gender is explained by Kattara, (2005) who points out that given men's control in organizations they are more likely to be mentors. Similar sentiments were shared by Al-Jamal (2006) who notes that finding a mentor for a woman was difficult given that there are not enough women in senior management positions to provide support. This was also consistent with Akafor, (2004) work in Nigeria that observed that female mentors were rare in organizations and this scenario explained the problems that women encountered in organizations which made them hate other women(Ghosh, 2003).

The study sought to establish from principals and deputy principals the role of mentoring in supporting their upward mobility in their organizations and the results are illustrated in Figure 3.

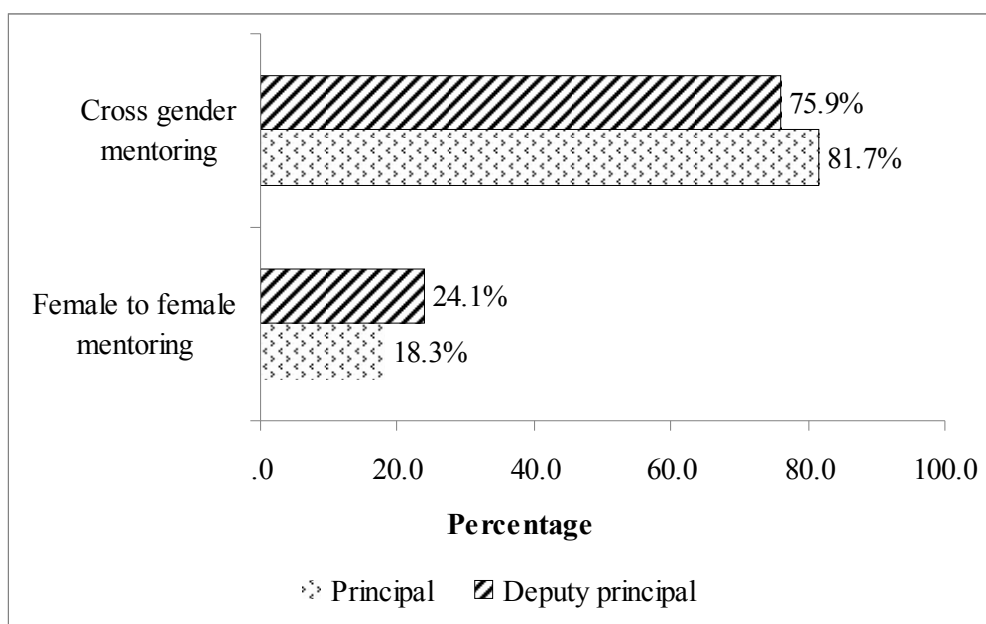


**Figure 3: Role of Mentoring**

As indicated in Figure 3, 27(21.6%) of the principals reported that their mentors helped them to access networks which assisted them in their upward mobility while 28(27.2) of the deputy principals also concurred that the same support from mentors enabled them to access networks like gaining access to information about promotion and getting to know when vacancies are advertised. Fifty six, 56(54.4%) of the principals said that their mentors gave them a sense of identity and professional competence hence making them suitable for headship, while 70(56.0) of the deputy principals alluded to the same. Further, 19(18.4%)of principals said that their mentors offered professional support to women managers hence promoting their career growth and similarly,28,(22.4) of the deputy principals agreed to the same.

The findings on the role of mentoring confirms the vital role that mentoring plays in supporting females to rise to higher management positions as pointed out by Riegle (2006 ) whose work notes that mentoring transfers experiences and expertise from experienced individuals in an organization to the less experienced. This also concurs with a study conducted in USA, which found out that employees with mentors were found to have access to important people and enjoyed more career satisfactions (Godshalk and Sosik, 2000). Mentoring was also considered important to the success of female managers because mentors assist in the development of the manager's sense of identity and professional confidence, reduce discrimination and help them to access information that is available to them to facilitate their managerial advancement (Ragins, 2001). A study conducted by Atieno, (2001) observed that working women teachers have lacked mentors and this aggravates the issue of under-representation meaning that mentoring plays a critical role in supporting female leadership and absence of the same would be viewed as a barrier. This study found out that mentoring should be encouraged in organizations but (Burke and Mc Keen, 2004) observes that mentoring programmes in many organizations are never geared towards women empowerment but instead they perpetuate a male dominated status quo.

The study sought to establish the most preferred type of mentoring for female teachers. The results are illustrated in Figure 4.



**Figure 4: Type of Mentoring Preferred by Female Teachers**

As indicated in Figure 4, majority, 103 (81.7%) of the principals, indicated that cross gender mentoring was most effective in supporting female teachers to ascend to headship positions in secondary schools. This view was shared by a majority, 103 (75.2%) of the deputy principals who shared the same notion with the principals. Only 23 (18.3%) principals and 34 (24.8%) deputy principals felt that female to female mentoring was a preferred type of mentoring. A similar sentiment was expressed by District Quality Assurance and Standard Officers as most of them from all the counties agreed that cross gender mentoring was the most preferred type of mentoring by female teachers who accused fellow women teachers of being jealous of each other and were afraid of sharing the limelight with others.

The finding of this study on choice of mentors contradicts a study by Burke and Karambaya, (2004) and Cleaveland, Stockdale and Murphy (2000) that highlighted the difficulties that female managers face in getting mentors because of women’s token status and potential discomfort with cross-gender mentors. The findings however agree with the views expressed by a majority of the District Education Officers who said that women are their own enemies and hence preferred cross gender mentoring. The findings also contradict the notion held by Ghosh (2003) that women sometimes refuse to submit themselves to cross gender mentoring relationships because they prefer women as mentors. Ghosh, (2003) also asserts that women who have gone through similar experiences could identify better with their problems and sorrows but they were doubtful that male mentors would not misunderstand their problems to be their weaknesses and take advantage of them and hence preferred mentors of the same gender with them.

When principals and deputy principals were asked to justify why they preferred female to female mentoring, several reasons were given to explain the preferences. First, support for each other was cited because they understood each other better if they were of the same sex. Secondly, it was clear that female to female mentoring was less suspicious compared to male to female mentoring. Thirdly, respondents reiterated the fact that females had common interests and hence were best suited to mentor each other. The respondents similarly expressed that females to females had similar experiences and so they were best placed to mentor and learn from each other. Lastly, when compared with cross gender mentoring, female to female mentoring was more acceptable and therefore many female teachers preferred it.

Further the respondents were asked to justify the choice of cross gender mentoring and most of the respondents preferred cross gender mentoring because it was explicit that different genders have a diversity of ideas and therefore were likely to support each other. This means that the respondents were in agreement that ideas were best shared when the two genders were involved. Cross gender mentoring was preferred so as to avoid favouritism. There was a general consensus among respondents that men were more willing to assist female teachers. Contrastingly, some of the respondents stated that women were their own enemies and are therefore not willing to support other females who are interested in management positions for fear of competition.

This agrees with Scandalar, (1999) who suggests that women at higher ranks were unwilling to mentor because they do not want to share the limelight with others and they also feared competition from other women. The cross gender mentoring was also preferred because very few women were in leadership positions. This concurs with Okurame’s (2006) findings which described cross gender mentoring as having a more beneficial



mentoring relationship compared with female-female mentoring.

The study also sought respondents opinion on how mentoring affected their upward mobility. To realize this, principals and deputy principals were required to respond to several aspects of mentoring. The means of both principals and deputy principals are illustrated in the Table 4.

**Table 4: Principals' and Deputy Principals' Opinions on Mentoring Processes**

Mentoring Process	Principal		Deputy	
	n	Mean	n	Mean
Absence of mentors to motivate female teachers wishing to become heads	136	2.2	173	2.1
Dominance by male principals as mentors hence female teachers feel victimized	135	2.2	173	2.0
Presence of female principals who are unwilling to mentor female teachers fearing competition	136	2.1	173	2.1

Table 4 shows that presence of female principals who are unwilling to mentor female teachers fearing competition contributed significantly to lack of mentors who could support female teacher's upward progression. This is indicated by a mean of 2.1. Table 4 also shows that absence of mentors to motivate female teachers wishing to become heads negatively affected their upward mobility as indicated by a mean of 2.1, for deputy principals. These findings confirms a study done by Ragins,(1994) that revealed that women at higher ranks were unwilling to mentor because they did not want to share the limelight with others and they were also afraid of being out competed.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

### 5.1. Conclusions

This study makes the following conclusions based on the research findings;

- Organizational cultural practices played a critical role in locking female teachers out of management positions.
- Absence of mentors in school organizations has been detrimental to women empowerment and therefore discourages female teachers from accessing principalship.

### 5.2 Recommendations

In the light of the study conclusions, the study makes the following recommendations;

- School organizations should embrace gender mainstreaming which will counter biased organizational cultures that are characterized by discriminative systems and masculinity which disadvantages the female gender.
- School organizations should put mechanisms in place to ensure that mentoring is anchored within their frameworks.

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