Towards closing the gender gap in education management: A gender analysis of educational management policies in South Africa

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abstract
As one of the strategies for the advancement of women, a call was made to governments at the Nairobi Conference in 1985 to establish national women’s policies to abolish all obstacles women face. South Africa has made significant policy steps towards the achievement of gender equality, but 12 years after its democracy, and 21 years after the call for the advancement of women, women are still under-represented at the senior management levels in education. Using Van Eck and Volman’s (1996) ‘management route model’ as an analytical framework, this article presents an analysis of selected policies addressing gender equality in education management. The purpose is to understand how policy impacts on the different career phases which women go through to understand the perceived lack of representation in education management. The analysed policies emphasise the elimination of all forms of discrimination, including gender, to ensure equal benefit of the law. However, the model reveals a lack of balance in the way policy addresses issues of gender in education management. These policies do not address the concrete experiences of inequality and thereby underplay the complexity of challenges influencing women’s career path into educational management positions.

keywords
gender equity, educational management, policy symbolism

Introduction
To mark the end of a decade declared by the United Nations for the advancement of women, in 1985, the Third International Conference on Women was held in Nairobi, Kenya. At this conference, a call was made to governments to, amongst others; (i) eliminate all forms of discrimination against women; (ii) ensure equal rights before the law; (iii) promote women to positions of power at every level within all political and legislative bodies in order to achieve parity with men and (iv) provide equal employment opportunities. As a member country of the United Nations, South Africa participated in these international conventions long before it became a democracy, and while international conventions do not necessarily form part of the national law, ratification is an important step because it signifies the commitment of government towards specified principles. The South African apartheid
regime was characterised mainly by racial discrimination, which clouded attempts to bring about gender equity. Since its inception in 1994, it has therefore been the goal of the South African democratic government to address gender and other forms of inequalities. This process of transformation was effected through legislation and generic policies in the different governmental departments, including education.

It has been 21 years since the Nairobi Conference was held and 12 years since South Africa achieved a democratic majority rule. While there has been a great deal of success in terms of women’s participation in the government sector, with a significant number (more than 40 percent) of the ministers in the national government being women, the same cannot be said about the participation of women in management positions in the education sector. Men continue to be at the centre of management, and this centrality is marked by both their numerical dominance and the masculine culture of leadership and management that is associated with particular views of management (Blackmore, 1999; Whitehead, 2001; Chisholm, 2001). Yet, women constitute the majority in the teaching profession. While women make up 65 percent of the teaching force, only 26 percent of school principals in the country are women (National Department of Education (NDOE), 2004).

There have been a number of interventions put into place to improve women’s participation in management but these interventions have not reached the desired effect. Perhaps one explanation...
for the failure of these interventions and the continuing absence of women in positions of management is the fact that they have mostly been informed by theories of socialisation and sex-role stereotypes (Blackmore, 1999). Many gender and management theorists have concluded that strategies informed by such socialisation theories have thus far not been completely successful in increasing the potential pool of women participants because they tend to leave structures and cultures in organisations (schools) as well as in the system as a whole intact. A second explanation is that gender equity interventions in the South African context have been underpinned by liberal feminist theories with their emphasis on women’s individual rights and equal opportunities provided by laws and clearly articulated policies. Liberal feminist approaches have also been criticised on their assumption that the removal of barriers to women’s full potential will result in equal distribution of genders across various divisions of labour. The purpose of this paper is therefore to analyse various educational management policy interventions that have been adopted in the South African education system in order to understand their failure to address the under-representation of women in management positions.

**Gender influences access to positions of school management as a result of discrimination**

The focus of the South African government has been on the reconstruction and development of the country into a non-discriminative society through the law that guarantees formal equality in many different ways. In addition to legal steps taken, national policies have been initiated, and some independent structures that operate through all sectors and at levels of government enforcing provisions from national policies have been established. This paper focuses particularly on policy that was developed in part as a response to the Nairobi Conference and other international declarations, and to address gender inequality at national level as a starting point for transformation. In particular, I analyse selected legislation and white papers put into place between 1994 and 1998 (the most policy-active period in the post-1994 period in South Africa). Two interrelated frameworks inform my analysis in the writing: First, the ‘management route model’ (Van Eck and Volman, 1996) and the policy functions framework adapted from De Clercq (1997) are used to understand the ways in which women rise (or do not rise) through the management ranks in the education system. Second, Smulyan’s (2000) work, in which she argues that gender influences access to positions of school management as a result of discrimination, lack of access to information and skill expectation, is utilised to examine the ways in which the selected policies ensure gender equity at different levels of the management route.

Education is seen as a primary tool for transformation and in particular as a means to escape the limitations of poverty and exclusion by challenging gender oppression and enhancing development opportunities of women (NDOE, 2001). School management, and particularly principalship, are very important leadership positions within the South African schooling system, which should be provided with fair and open access to all potential sources of quality candidates including women and men. In this paper, gender equality is perceived as equal chances and opportunities given to women and men, while gender equity denotes fair and just distribution of these opportunities.

**The management route model**

The management route model adopted from Van Eck and Volman (1996) distinguishes three phases that influence the career path to management positions, and phases in which women encounter
more obstacles than men. The first phase is the anticipation phase, which prepares women for the management function. It focuses on the development of the knowledge and skills needed for a management position. Training, acquisition of qualifications, participation in informal networks and support from sponsors are important in this phase because they enable teachers to acquire a higher profile that is essential for promotion into top management positions. Evidence of this can be seen in various university courses aimed at such training, which are often over-subscribed, with both men and women teachers registering for them (see NDOE, 2004a).

The second phase is the acquisition phase, which focuses on access into management positions. Job application skills acquired through training, informal networks and support from sponsors, are also important in this phase to help women get appointed to management posts. Assessment of candidates and clarity of selection criteria, backed up by national policy and regulations advancing women's chances to be appointed in management positions play a crucial role at this phase. Unfortunately, organisational and social factors tend to impact negatively on women's access at this stage. To illustrate, because management is generally viewed as a male domain, women tend to be denied the necessary support (e.g. informal networks and mentors) to succeed in their application for promotion (see Van Eck and Volman, 1996; Meyerson and Fletcher, 1999; Ely and Meyerson, 2000; Van Deventer and van der Westhuizen, 2000).

Van Eck and Volman (1996) identify the third phase as the performance phase, where the actual management function is performed. In this phase, informal networks and support structures are very useful in influencing the performance of management duties. Because women are under-represented in these positions, such networks and support systems are lacking, further leading to less women successfully accessing them and to poor performance of management tasks among the few who are in these positions.

This model questions the policy provisions in terms of these three different phases and suggests that nowhere in the policy route do women receive the necessary support and opportunity if they are to be successfully incorporated into management positions as envisaged in the various policies. I return to this later in the paper.

Policy functions framework

Complementing the management route model is a framework suggesting how policies provide a structure for the development of gender equality through three different functions. De Clercq (1997) suggests that policies must be analysed in different ways, depending on their nature and scope. She outlines three functions or levels of operation for policies. These functions or levels include firstly, the symbolic level where policy points towards the vision of the ideal future that policy makers are working towards but remains rhetorical about these ideals. Secondly, the regulative level refers to where policy introduces regulations, rules and laws that should be enforced to assist with achieving the desired vision. Thirdly, the procedural level refers to guidelines and explanations regarding who should take action in terms of the vision or desired goal and through which mechanisms. While this framework was useful in establishing the extent to which the analysed policies could be implemented and whether they could reach the desired goals, the management route model enabled the dissection of the policy content to understand the policy effect in combating the gender crisis in education management.
Ensuring gender equity in the context of policy

The context for the development of policy is set by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. All legal frameworks and policy initiatives take their cue from the Constitution, which recognises challenges of equity faced by the South African government and addresses them by guaranteeing equal treatment of everyone before the law. Using the above frameworks, this section reviews some of the main legal documents that were meant to address all forms of social justice, including gender equality in the South African education system after the demise of apartheid. In terms of the management route model, although the policies themselves were meant to address discrimination on all grounds, the selected initiatives are analysed with a specific focus on gender discrimination in education management and its redress. The documents analysed in this section were chosen because of their emphasis on equity in education and training, as well as on equity in employment and in the work place.

Education and training are primary tools for bringing about development and empowerment


Education and training are primary tools for bringing about development and empowerment of the people, and they therefore form the basis for the achievement of other transformation goals. The South African White Paper on Education and Training of 1995 (WPET) (NDOE, 1995) addresses inequalities quite broadly in terms of ensuring equal access to educational institutions and to all subjects. Sections 10, 11 and 12 of the policy address the reduction of educational historical inequalities through affirmative action measures on learners’ access into schools and choice of certain curricula. Of particular relevance to this paper, paragraphs 63 to 69 propose the affirmation of women in employment positions. Specifically, section 66 (4) proposes:

...affirmative action strategies for increasing the representation of women in professional leadership and management positions, and for increasing the influence and authority of women teachers. (NDOE, 1998d)

This is the one section that delineates a specific area in which gender differences occur with regard to the issue of women in leadership and management positions. Other sections on gender propose the establishment of the Gender Equity Task Team (GETT) whose mandate is to address gender equity issues in education. The WPET emphasises equal access to education and training for all, in which potential educational managers, including women, are trained in preparation for management positions. The policy also emphasises gender equity, which is aimed at ensuring that women access positions of leadership in education. The proposition of affirmative action strategies for increasing the representation of women in professional leadership and management positions ensures that more women will be given the opportunity to participate in management positions.

As the above illustrates, the WPET came in recognition of the poor representation of women in leadership and management positions in education, particularly among the ranks of school principals, and put into place a policy aimed at addressing inequalities through education and training, which is meant to prepare the previously disadvantaged for positions of leadership. However, the one shortfall of the WPET is the lack of procedures for monitoring the implementation of its principles. To illustrate, if men and women have equal access to training, as implied by the policy, then more women educators should have a
chance of improving their qualification in preparation for the management function. Research that examines the extent to which training needs of women for this task are being met is yet to be conducted. It is worth pointing out that in its emphasis of education and training, the policy assumes that with training and education women will automatically achieve equal representation in positions of power. Whether the trained women are actually selected into these positions and whether the strategies for monitoring progress towards equity are in place, is not catered for in the policy. That most selection committees are made up of men who are likely to favour male candidates, or even by women who have been socialised to believe that men make better leaders, is also not addressed.

The white paper therefore addresses equity through education and training (which would be useful at the personal level of preparation for women aspirants of education management) only at a symbolic level. Recognising the limitations of this and other policies in addressing the imbalances of the apartheid regime, the South African government also developed and instituted the White Paper on Affirmative Action in the Public Service in 1998.


The policy of affirmative action is meant to ensure that suitably qualified people from designated groups (African, women, disabled, etc.) have equal employment opportunities and are equally represented in all occupational categories and levels in the workforce. This is important for the acquisition phase. The White Paper on Affirmative Action in the Public Service (hereafter WPAA) states its goal clearly as:

...to speed up the creation of a representative and equitable public service and to build an environment that supports and enables those who have been historically disadvantaged by unfair discrimination...

It specifically identifies and defines women as a previously disadvantaged group, which needs to benefit directly from particular strategies aimed at correcting their disadvantaged status. It acknowledges that women have been disadvantaged by being relegated to doing low-level work and being given mostly the non-decision-making positions in the hierarchy of occupations and the predominance of males at
the management levels even where women have sufficient (and sometimes better) qualifications and experience. It therefore calls for the eradication of the disadvantages caused by discriminatory practices that will enable women, black people and people with disabilities to benefit on a fair basis from the opportunities offered by an equitable public service. The policy also calls for the creation of conditions in the workplace that ensure that women are able to overcome the barriers that block progression up the employment hierarchy and suggests the creation of an environment that affirms them.

**Getting more women into management positions is only an initial step in the process of bringing about gender equity**

In relation to the management route model (Van Eck and Volman, 1996), through its affirmation of women at the employment level, the WPAA is aimed at ensuring that women, in particular, successfully reach the acquisition phase and gain access to management positions. Smyth (1989) states that affirmative action policies have gone a long way towards removing structural impediments to the progression of women in leadership positions but argues for the necessity to go a step further beyond arguing for better representation of women in management positions. He questions the very concept of management, how it is perceived and the selection practices under the auspices of affirmative action. In scrutinising these aspects, the aim would not only be to argue for more numbers of women in the positions of authority, but also to question the practices that inform the selection and recruitment of candidates. According to Wolpe et al (1997:195) in the GETT report, getting more women into management positions is only an initial step in the process of bringing about gender equity in management, as this ‘…does not deal with any of the qualitative issues’. To its credit, the WPAA does not only enforce, superficially, the advancement of bigger numbers in women’s positions of authority but also makes reference to paying particular attention to the employment practices, thereby acknowledging the presence of sexist attitudes prevailing in the employment of women in positions of power. Yet, it fails to address mechanisms of dealing with them. As a result, affirmative action has become one of the key strategies to redress historical imbalances (Wolpe et al, 1997), but the ways in which it is implemented may ultimately be disempowering for women if certain preliminary steps that ignore the fact that women do not compete at an equal level with men are not in place. These include equality of access to education, as well as to the various networks and structures that ensure access to employment opportunities. Thus, once more, as is the case with the WPET, the acquisition phase is addressed, but symbolically.

Moving beyond the two generic policies discussed above, the Employment Equity Act (1998) (NDOE, 1998a) was further adopted to address issues of gender equity in the workplace. But, has the Employment Equity Act of 1998 as a legally binding policy framework succeeded in addressing this gap? The section below explores.

**Employment Equity Act (1998)**

Like the policies discussed in the preceding section, while the Employment Equity Act (EEA) (NDOE, 1998a) generally prohibits unfair discrimination in the workplace and in any employment policy or practice on all grounds, particularly race, gender and disability, in this paper, I focus specifically on its emphasis on gender equity. In an attempt to ensure equitable representation of people from designated groups, the Act calls for ‘annual equity plans’ negotiated between employers and employees. These plans are to outline steps to minimise discrimination and enhance representation, and a ‘series of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms’ to ensure progress. It also calls for the ‘analysis of employment policies,
practices and procedures’ in order to identify employment (and progression) barriers, which adversely affect people from designated groups. The EEA also requires employers to stop discriminating against women in the provision of training and to refrain from other forms of structural discrimination. The EEA considers education and training as part of the broader package of mechanisms to reduce gender inequality.

However, while the EEA promotes the general advancement of women, it does not ensure that they have both the skills and experience required for male-dominated positions, as well as opportunity to fill these jobs. Education and training are important at the personal level in preparation for higher positions, but they alone do not guarantee equal opportunity with regard to access to historically male-dominated jobs. The politics of the broader framework, in which training is embedded, play a crucial role in determining access to positions of power (Samson, 1999). It is crucial to question who provides the training, as well as what the content and methodology of training courses is and the extent and ways in which these avoid the perpetuation of the male view of management.

Thus, although the EEA views training as a tool for transformation of gender inequality in the workplace, and training is considered important at the personal level for the preparation of the management function, it does not ensure that women have the opportunity to enter these previously male-dominated positions. Like the WPET, the EEA assumes that, with the right
training, women will automatically acquire positions to which they have been traditionally denied access, regardless of the type of training they receive and the factors that impact on their access to actual management positions.

The Act requires all employers with 50 or more employees to implement affirmative action measures or equity plans in consultation with unions and employees. According to the Employment of Educators Act (NDOE, 1998c) the Department of Education is recognised as the legal employer of all educators in public schools and therefore falls within the category of employers compelled to comply with the Act’s regulations. However, this leaves a gap, as the same Employment of Educators Act and the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 recognise public schools through their governing body as the employer of persons in the service of a particular school. Educators from schools which may have fewer than 50 educators are clearly not to enjoy this benefit from their organisations. The reality of the South African school context is that there are many (mostly rural) schools with less than 50 employees where the voice of traditional leadership against the employment of women in school principalship is still dominant (Moorosi, 2006).

The Act does not include guidelines for redressing gender discrimination and/or discrimination in general

The EEA appears to represent an advance for women, but it does not acknowledge the differences amongst women as a target group and assumes that women are a homogeneous group (Samson, 1999). Samson further notes that the EEA has a number of critical weaknesses, which are most likely to prevent it from having a positive impact on the eradication of gender inequality. These weaknesses are related to its definition of the target groups and the provisions for non-compliance as has been seen. The Act also fails to recognise that all target groups are made of men and women. Black and white women have had different levels of education, training and job opportunities in the past. There is thus a possibility of advancing women who are already privileged (Samson, 1999) and leaving the poorest of the poor even poorer. These limitations affect the very target of the EEA, which relates to the eradication of gender discrimination in the workplace. The EEA, in this regard, ignores race and social class differences of women.

Other policy initiatives include the Skills Development Act (SDA) (NDOE, 1998b), which also puts particular emphasis on education and training and was meant to guide the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), which, in turn, was proposed to improve workers’ wages and reduce the wage gap, create career paths for workers and, most importantly, remove discriminatory practices built on gender bias by ensuring fair access to training.

The SDA also targets the development of skills essential for promotion and, thus, enhancing representation at all levels including management where, traditionally, women have been denied access. Unfortunately, the SDA seems to be completely gender blind. For example, one of its objectives is to ‘improve employment prospects of those previously disadvantaged by unfair discrimination, and to redress those disadvantages through education and training’. However, the Act does not include guidelines for redressing gender discrimination and/or discrimination in general and does not specify or define the categories of people who were previously disadvantaged. It does not specify who should take action to redress gender discrimination and makes very little reference to gender. An interesting observation made by Samson (1999) is that the EEA and the SDA both emanated from the Department of Labour and were negotiated over the same period of time. However, the SDA does not promote equity for
women and does not make any reference to gender at all, while the promotion of gender equity seems to be the central value in the EEA. Thus, the SDA makes omissions that limit it from addressing any of the phases women go through in their education career, yet, it was meant to address the development of skills essential for promotion.

The equal opportunity approach to gender equity

It is evident that the South African government’s commitment to a non-sexist society is enshrined in a number of legal policy documents – an observation also made by Chisholm and Unterhalter (1999) and Chisholm and Napo (1999). However, for Chisholm and Napo, gender equity in education has been mainstreamed at a discursive level in all policy documents, including the GETT report. Similarly, for women in management, policy shifted only symbolically, by mandating employers to allow them to access management posts, what Van Eck and Volman (1996), in their management route model, refer to as the acquisition phase, but failing to effectively monitor implementation and compliance with this requirement. The preparation phase is also addressed symbolically through an emphasis on education and training but with no intervention strategies to ensure that women will get education and training that will prepare them for management positions. Although the EEA and WPAA focus on eradicating gender discrimination in the workplace, the performance phase received no policy attention at all. Affirmative action laws have nothing to do with performance and accordingly nothing to do with retention. Thus, the law design is very weak in the performance phase where women continue to experience resistance.

Formal equality before the law is guaranteed, but it does not appear to be sufficient on its own to eliminate gender discrimination

Although the liberal feminist-informed approaches to equal rights and equal opportunities in South African education have not been effective in eradicating gender inequality in the management of schools, thus far. Although it has had a significant number of successes in increasing the number of women in management positions, liberal feminism has been a less-favoured approach due to its assumption that a critical mass would produce cultural change (Blackmore, 1999). To support this, many policies put into place have emphasised education and training as means towards achieving equity without outlining exact intervention measures to be followed. Blackmore (1999) as well as Ely and Meyerson (2000) argue that these approaches are premised upon sex-role socialisation theory and, as a result, they seek to facilitate individual women’s taking of leadership roles in schools to create a more equitable gender representation. The successes of such policies, including the affirmative action policy, is not underestimated in any way, but even though they appear to provide, to some extent, role models for girls in education and other women leaders, these policies ignore the very impediments towards women’s attainment of educational qualifications (anticipation) and access (acquisition) into institutional management.

Formal equality before the law is guaranteed, but it does not appear to be sufficient on its own to eliminate gender discrimination

All policies serve a symbolic function of a non-discriminative society, but not all of them outline procedures of how to reach this ideal picture. For example, it is illegal to discriminate against women on the basis of their sex, and this is sufficiently expressed in the analysed policies. Symbolic and regulative functions are clear in these policies even though some are more detailed than others with regards to enforcing gender equity principles. It is at the procedural level where actions to be taken with regards to
closing the gender gap are not clearly outlined. This is not to trivialise the role played by symbolism and regulation in policy-making, because it suggests that government recognises gender inequality as a problem, commits to addressing it, but does not necessarily go into detail when outlining processes that could change attitudes within the workplace to fight obstacles against the participation of women. In addition, there have been some significant changes in getting more women participants in fields that were historically male dominated. Symbolism in policy can therefore not be discounted, as Chisholm and Napo (1999) and Jansen (2002) rightly argue, as a useful initial strategy to overcoming the gender disparity problem. However, there is a need to move beyond political symbolism and more towards implementation to realise goals set for the emancipation of women in preparation for promotion in the workplace.

There have been some significant changes in getting more women participants in fields that were historically male dominated

Given the historical imbalances South Africa inherited from the apartheid past and the need to respond to the international call on gender reform, including the one that came from the Nairobi Conference 21 years ago, gender equity policies were needed as a starting point for transformation. While the preparation and acquisition phases have been addressed (WPET, WPAA and EEA), albeit symbolically, the performance phase has been completely ignored at the policy level. Thus, the pattern of gender equity policies is marked by symbolic policy statements, voluntary implementation (as there appear to be no quotas), voluntary delegation of responsibilities with limited resources and insufficient monitoring mechanisms. It is therefore difficult to impose penalties for not increasing the numbers or changing attitudes. South African gender equity policy is premised on an unequal playing field determined by the history of colonialism and racial discrimination that determined women’s social status. Black women were consequently denied equal opportunities to that of their male counterparts and their white female counterparts. In an attempt to rectify the situation, some of these interventions run the risk of advancing women who have already proven themselves or women who are already privileged by class. This is because of their insufficient challenge of the fundamental sources of power and social interactions between men and women that reinforced these inequalities. Liberal feminist approaches ignore these inequalities amongst women themselves and assume an equal playing field, thereby perpetuating class differences amongst women of the same race and ethnicity groups. As Blackmore (1999) observes, the interpretation and reception of gender equity policies is influenced by the shifting social, political and economic agendas. There is therefore a need to highlight the recognition of difference of women’s background in order to acknowledge race and class differentials. There is also a need for more ‘constructive’ gender policies (Stromquist, 1999) that promote new behaviours, knowledge and attitudes regarding women and men in society.

In summary, formal equality (such that envisaged in the policies discussed in this paper) often ignores the more concrete experiences of inequality and may exclude the sectors of the population that have been discriminated against in terms of access, skills and training and work experience (Smulyan, 2000). To illustrate, even when women enter management positions, because of the structural and social environment that marginalises them, it would be difficult for them to challenge discrimination. As observed by Chisholm (2001), this in turn, may lead to their quick entry into and equally quick departure from management positions due to lack of support in performing management functions.
In addition, formal equality expressed in South African gender equity policies ignores the roots of inequity by assuming that expressing the ideal of equal rights and equal treatment would automatically put more women in positions of power, which in turn would automatically get rid of gender-discriminative practices in organisations. As Meyerson and Fletcher (1999) put it, the realities that drive organisational practices are still predicated on traits stereotypically associated with men, and 'those realities drive organisational life, and organisational practices mirror societal norms' (1999:129). Thus, intervention should not only be about setting policies but should be viewed as a starting point for women's emancipation as a historically disadvantaged group. Clearly articulated gender policies with clear guidelines for implementation, resourcing and monitoring of progress could enable women proper preparation, access and effective performance in management positions, particularly in a profession where they constitute the majority.

Conclusion
This paper has illustrated South Africa's commitment to ensuring gender equity in education by adopting relevant policies since 1994. However, using the management route model, as well as the policy functions framework as tools for analysis, the discussion has revealed the limitations of the policy approach to gender transformation in education management. Because of its silence around issues of social and structural factors that exclude women from positions of power in education, this approach tends to only address issues of access, but fail to ensure effective participation and retention of women in such management positions.

This interrogation of gender equity content in policy documents challenges the claim to redress gender inequity which policy makers and legislators assume and opens up more research questions in terms of who policy makers are and what their agendas are. The analysis helps to expose the political character of official accounts of policy and challenges the presumably neutral stance adopted by bureaucrats in understanding the lack of achievement of the Nairobi conference goals with regards to gender in education management.

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