School Constituents' Ratings of The Performance Dimensions of Male and Female High-Performing Principals

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Abstract
The purpose of the current study was to analyse both the general school constituents' and male and females school constituents' ratings of the performance of male and female high-performing principals in the Jamaican public schools. With a sample of 2384 respondents representing school constituents from 125 schools, the returns were 1523 (64%). The data were collected using a 69-item Likert scale and analysed using Principals Component Analysis (PCA) and t-test. The results of the analysis revealed four dimensions of leadership performance: philosophy and abilities, leadership and management, student support systems, and community support and relationships. The findings showed that there were significant differences in how the general school constituents rated high-performing principals on three of the four dimensions of performance. There were no differences in male respondents' ratings of male and female principals; however, there were significant differences in the ratings of female respondents of the four dimensions.

Key Words: High-Performing Principals, Performance, Leadership, Gender and Relationship

Introduction

The issue of male and female leadership performance and which of the two is more effective has resulted in three views being articulated by researchers and practitioners in the field of leadership. There are those who see females as more effective than males while others support the reverse; that is, some see male leaders as more effective than female leaders (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014). The third view is that there is no difference between male and female leaders in their leadership success and effectiveness (Bass & Bass, 2008). As Costellow (2011) said "the leadership capability of the individual should outshine any notion that when all other factors are equal, one gender is better suited to be a principal" (p. 125).

Notwithstanding the mixed views on who is more effective, there is increasing evidence that females demonstrate some skills which are more in keeping with their personalities and general approach to leadership (Northhouse, 2013; Pew Research Centre, 2008).

The genesis of this study commenced when Hutton (2011) conducted a survey to determine how school constituents rated high-performing principals who were selected by regional directors and senior education officers based on a number of performance cation officers was confirmed by school constituents who rated these principals above

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criteria. The rating of high-performing principals by regional directors and senior edu-
four on a rating scale of between one and five, with five being the highest. The school
constituents included vice principals, senior teachers, classroom teachers, and depart-
ment heads. It is of interest to note that the majority of school principals in the public
education system in Jamaica are females (Hutton, 2013). But as Gates, Ringel, Santi-
banez, Chung and Ross (2003) indicated in their review of literature related to gender
and school leadership, males continue to be in the majority as principals in many
school system and this trend will continue for some time to come.

The study on high-performing principals revealed nine categories of effective per-
formance. However, further analysis of the data using the Principals Component Anal-
ysis (PCA) identified four dimensions of effective performance by high-performing
principals. The dimensions include personal philosophy and abilities, leadership and
management, student support systems, and community support and relationships. The
purpose of the current study was to determine if there were any significant differences
in how school constituents rated the performance of male and female high-performing
principals based on the four dimensions of performance.

Background of the Jamaican School System

Jamaica has 25,000 teachers employed in the public school system in 999 schools
located in six geographical regions. There are three types of schools operating in the
school system. At the secondary level, there are the upgraded high schools which
were established in 1960s but are now classified as high schools (Miller, 1999). These
mainly cater to the weaker students from the primary level schools. Similarly, at the
secondary level, there are the traditional high schools, some of which were established
over 250 years ago (Whyte, 1977). They tend to cater to the best students from the
primary level schools. The third category is the primary level, consisting of all age,
primary and junior high schools which have been grouped together because they serve
the same age range of students, but with some differences in the curricula.

The sample which consisted of classroom teachers, senior teachers, vice prin-
cipals, PTA presidents, and board chairpersons represent the respondents from the
125 schools included in the current study. Like many other developing countries,
the public school system is beset by a number of problems, which include limited
resources to support the education process, poor academic performance, overcrowded
and sometimes under-populated schools, poor student attendance, dilapidated plant,
and lack of equipment for teaching and learning in order to be successful and effec-
tive (Vision-2030, 2009; Task Force on Educational Reform 2005; Leo-Rhynie, 1993).
Overcrowding, for example, could be as a result of schools being located in densely
populated areas. The reverse situation, where schools are under-populated, could result
from dwindling communities or from parents having removed their children because
of the poor academic performance and or disciplinary problem of the school.

Review of Related Literature

Even though there are mixed reviews on the effectiveness of male and female leaders in organizations, there are a number of factors which may provide a clear disposition to favour female leaders outperforming male leaders in certain spheres of leadership. These factors include how leaders were socialized in their upbringing, biases that were instilled by society, cultural orientation and their genetic classification (Sikdar & Mitra, 2008; O'Brien, 2008; Rosser, 2003; Eagly, Karau & Mikhijani, 1995). Regarding the genetic factor, research on the human brain has revealed that females have 11% more neurons than men in the area of the brain responsible for language and hearing. This allows women generally to be "better at expressing emotions and remembering details of emotional events and communicating them (and) they use language to talk about feelings and develop consensus more efficiently than men do" (O'Brien, 2008, p. 4). In the case of males, their brains do not have the same number of connections and this heightens their ability to concentrate more effectively. In addition, Fisher (2013) (making reference to the results from brain research) emphasized the differences between the brain structures of males and females. In the case of the males, their brains are more compartmentalized so they have a greater affinity for functioning with greater independence. For the females, there are more connectors between both hemispheres of the brain so they are better able to integrate information more rapidly, and take into consideration and assess a larger number of variables when making decisions. In fact, "women tend to generalize, to synthesize, to take a broader, more holistic, more contextual perspective of any issue" (Fisher, 2013, p. 134). Morrison et al. (2011) added that societal traditions tend to have an impact on whether men or women demonstrate this creative ability based on beliefs regarding the power of genes. They also emphasized that males and females perceive elements of adeptness differently as it relates to leadership skills. These elements, which include evaluating their ability to organize and a passion for change, are used to measure their personal qualities as leaders.

It must be pointed out that when males and females are examined based on their leadership behaviour in organizations, the results have been mixed. Vernett (2012), for example, said that the literature is mixed on the effectiveness of male and female leadership, as some studies found differences in gender rating of principal leadership behaviours, while others have not. In a study of the leadership qualities of male and female principals, Ijaiya (1998) showed that male principals were weak at disciplining female teachers while female principals were characterized as "too strict and unapproachable" (p. 11). According to Bass and Bass (2008) "some studies show that groups and organizations do better with female leaders; some studies show that groups and organizations do better with male leaders; and still others find no difference due to the sex of the leader" (p. 925). Despite the conflicting positions on the issue, Kent et al. (2010) confirmed that, based on the relationship between the ratings of leadership

and performance as related to the factor of gender, the literature has presented a view of gender differences in leadership style or leadership behaviour from the perception of teachers. Kent et al. (2010) also noted, though, that while some of the literature has shown differences in leadership styles, most current studies have found that irrespective of leadership style, men and women achieve relatively the same results.

But even though there are strong views regarding the mixed positions on the effectiveness of male and female leadership, increasingly there are studies which show that females lead "in a more democratic, or participative, manner than men" (Northhouse, 2013, p. 351). Bass and Bass (2008) reported on a number of studies which showed that female leaders seemed to be more transformational in their leadership style while men are more transactional and laissez-faire. But the differences were not limited to leadership behaviour. A study conducted by Brailsford (2001) showed that there were differences between male and female leaders with regard to work behaviour but not in the areas of instructional leadership and teacher empowerment. As concluded by Miller (2013), "a glance at rates of participation of women in the teaching profession and school leadership roles in Jamaica suggests the struggle for opportunity and access may not be as problematic" (p. 186). This position is supported by the fact the majority of leaders at the different levels of leadership in the school system (including at the level of the principal) are females. Yukl (2013), making reference to an argument from the proponents of the 'female advantage' theory, concluded that consensus building is a more pressing concern for women than men and so they are more willing to share power with their subordinates rather than assert their authority. This was further elaborated when Yukl identified socialization as a factor which explained the particular strength of females over males. Citing Cockburn (1991), Yukl explained that childhood experiences impact heavily on the difference in the abilities of females and males. This is demonstrated by the interaction between parents and children as well as socialization practices that speak to sex roles that are culturally underpinned. According to Yukl (2013), Cockburn concluded that certain sex roles are stereotypical and so they affect belief systems and actions between the genders. Yukl added that women are also more concerned with inclusiveness and interpersonal relations, both of which facilitate their natural desire to share power rather than assert it as their male counterparts do. The fact that over 75 per cent of the principals identified as high performing were females (Hutton, 2013) suggests that it is prudent to examine the factors influencing this phenomenon and the female characteristics which may be bringing value to the role of the principal in the Jamaican school system. Summarizing the difference between female and male, Grove and Montgomery (2011) reviewed the work of a number of authors and identified some of the areas which distinguish between them.

1. In the area of instructional leadership female administrators focus on supervisory management practices with specific attention paid to differences among

students, teaching methodology and teaching objectives.

2.   With regard to preparedness for the job, females have more experience and spend more actual time working both as teachers and principals and give greater attention to matters related to the curriculum and teaching.

3.   Females tend to focus on instructional leadership while males focus more on matters related to how the school is organized.

4.   Males display leadership which is commanding in nature while females take a more facilitative and supportive approach.

5.   Female leaders nurture and foster the building and maintenance of relationships with all constituents while males emphasise matters related to task completion and reward and punishment.

6.   Males tend to use the formal process of making decisions including the decision of the majority while females emphasise consensus building and need to have a process that is facilitating.

7.   Females are more flexible in how time is spent, demonstrate a more visible profile and engage with teachers on a regular basis.

8.   Males tend to utilize a more top-down style to leadership while females are more interested in empowering individuals.

It would seem that the mixed view regarding the effectiveness of male and female leaders will continue to be voiced in the literature. The effective performance of leaders based on gender is influenced by factors such as genes, revealed in the difference in brain structure and function, socialization, and societal bias among others. Increasingly, there is no doubt that female leaders are being credited with effective leadership based on the strengths they exhibit in specific performance areas. Wilen-Duagenti, Vien and Molina-Ray (2013) identified a number of skills and attributes women need to acquire in order to improve their effectiveness as leaders. These include 'education and lifelong learning', a 'tech savvy' approach, 'people and project management skills', and 'confidence, assertiveness and risk taking' (p. 174–175). But these skills and attributes could also be recommended as vital for male leaders to function effectively in the 21st century.

Research Questions

1.   Are there any significant differences in the ratings of the performance of male and female high-performing principals by the general school constituents?

2.   Are there any significant differences in the ratings of the performance of male and female high-performing principals by the male and female school constituents?

3.   What are the implications of the ratings of male and female constituents of the performance of high-performing principals for policy and practice in the

Jamaican school system?

Method
Sample and Respondents
Respondents numbering 2384 from the 125 schools used in the study were select-ed based on quota sampling. The returns, which excluded principals (5), were obtained from 1523 school constituents who completed the instrument. This represented 64 per cent of the sample. By gender, the female respondents were 76.5 per cent of the sample compared to males (23.5 per cent). Most of the respondents were employed at primary and related schools (39.3 per cent), while the rest of the sample was represented by upgraded high schools (35.3 per cent) and traditional high schools (25.5 per cent). Over half of the respondents were classified as classroom teachers (51.9 per cent), 19.2 per cent were classified as senior teachers, 8.7 per cent were classified as heads of department and 8.5 per cent were grade coordinators. The remaining constituents who responded were vice principals (6.1 per cent), board chairmen (2.7 per cent), PTA presidents (2.7 per cent) and education officers (0.3 per cent).

Measures
A questionnaire was used to elicit information on the principals' leadership per-formance. The instrument consisted of a demographics section which captured sex, age, position, education level, and number of years working with the principal and the school. The other section of the instrument consisted of 69 Likert scale items that consisted of nine categories or sub-scales of high-performing principals' leadership performance. Each item in each scale was rated between 1–5, with 1 denoting strongly agree and 5 strongly disagree.

Validity
The instrument was developed based on the results of interviews conducted among 20 high-performing principals and six regional officers, each having responsibility for a region and the schools assigned to them. The analysis of the data identified nine areas or subscales which were consistently emphasized by the principals and regional directors during these interviews as central to the performance of the high-performing principals. These categories include the following: Personal philosophy and beliefs; Personal strengths, qualities and abilities; General leadership and management; Aca-demic development and achievement; Support for students' development and achieve-ment; Staff development and relationship; Community development and relationship; Relationship with Formal Structure; and Plant and facilities and manage

Efforts were made to establish content validity before the instrument was adminis-tered. This was accomplished by asking two colleagues of school leadership to review the instrument to order to identify inconsistencies while ensuring content relevance

and appropriateness. These are colleagues who have studied and published articles in the area of school leadership, and they were also faculty members of the educational administration unit. In addition, I also asked three principals who were identified as high-performing principals and had over 90 years of experience among them as school leaders to review the instrument. The feedback provided by all five persons were assessed and those which were deemed necessary to enhance the validity of the instrument were incorporated. In order to satisfy the psychometric feature of the instrument, I have commented on the nature of categories or areas of performance by high-performing principals and provided examples of the questions asked of the respondents.

Personal philosophy and beliefs sub-scale

This category consisted of seven items which identified the principals' personal beliefs and what they believe schools should do in order for students and schools to perform effectively. The principals actively promote these beliefs and seek to get schools constituents to adhere to them. Samples of these items included: 'Believes that the learner should at all times be the central focus of the school's initiatives and activities', and 'Promotes the belief that formal schooling provides the majority of students with the opportunity to achieve a rounded and broad-based education'.

Personal strengths, qualities and abilities sub-scale

This category consisted of eleven items related the personal qualities or innate tendencies which high-performing principals constantly emphasized as factors which made a difference in their performance. These personal qualities are expected to be emulated by school constituents including teachers and students alike. The teachers in particular usually responded by seeking to match these personal qualities which are constantly displayed by high-performing principals. Samples of items included: 'Demonstrates strong interpersonal skills when dealing with teachers, students and other members of the school community', and 'Exhibits a high level of self-confidence in his/her ideas and the possibility of successfully pursuing them'.

General leadership and management sub-scale

This category consisted of ten items related to the leadership approach of high-performing principals. Based on the information provided during the interviews, high-performing principals usually display a distinctive situational approach to leadership, but this happens within a transformational leadership framework. These principals constantly seek to find new ways to improve students and school performance, and they take every opportunity to involve the staff in the decision-making process and usually apply a differentiated approach to leadership. Samples of these items included: 'Articulates and implements a shared vision of where the school should go, what it should be doing and how it should get there', and 'Involves the staff and other

stakeholders in making important decisions regarding the direction and operation of the school'.

Support for students' development and achievement sub-scale

This category consisted of seven items which are about the efforts that high-performing principals make to facilitate students' learning. In other word, everything is done to provide the support system that is required to facilitate the main role of the school which is the personal and academic growth of each child. Samples of items included: 'Analyzes students' performance to identify performance deficiencies and to institute strategies to overcome problems identified' and 'Prescribes standards for students' general conduct and insists that they are enforced and maintained at all times'.

Academic development and achievement sub-scale

This category consisted of seven items which build on the support system already in place to facilitate learning. This area is more about opportunities provided to students so that they are better able to make choices in order to increase their academic success. In addition, the significant attention is placed on employing teaching and learning strategies which are applied to enhance the acquisition of knowledge, skill, attitudes and abilities to improve performance and increased their capacity to move into further education or to the job market. Samples of items included: 'Institutes curricula and programme options comparable to traditional high schools (sixth form, music option, etc.)' and 'Initiates promptly, relevant intervention strategies to solve specific academic and learning problems identified among students'.

Staff development and relationship sub-scale

This category consisted of eight items which target the relational aspect of the workplace. It was demonstrated in the interviews with the high-performing principals that building a strong relationship among all levels of the internal staff is essential if the school is going to progress on all fronts, including the academic outcomes of the students. If fact, it was posited in the interviews that those principals who are unable or unwilling to build meaningful relationship do not make significant progress in almost all areas of targeted achievement. Samples of items included: 'Engenders the commitment of all levels of staff to achieve the performance targets of the school' and 'Consults with teachers and other constituents to address issues and problems that may face the school'.

Community development and relationship sub-scale

This category consisted of eight items focusing on building relationships with the immediate community but also the wider community which would include government agencies, churches, alumni, civic organizations including the 4H clubs, among

others. In fact, the nature of the relationship is sometimes symbiotic; that is, community provides support to school but there are cases where the school provides support to community. Those schools which do a good job building relationships with communities are more likely to have successful schools. Samples of items included: 'Develops active involvement with the business community to garner support for the school's activities' and 'Builds and sustains a community of support for the performance and achievement of the school'.

Relationship with Formal Structure
This category consisted of five items which examine the relationship with the central ministry and regional offices. The high-performing principals take advantage of building a strong relationship with central ministry and regional authorities, but they don't wait on the central ministry to solve problems which are retarding their progress. These principals usually take the initiative to seek support both internally and externally to solve problems which are within their competence and can be accomplished. This approach at times usually lead to dispute with central ministry but in most cases the schools which take risks usually do better in their overall performance. Samples of these items included: 'Establishes strong relationship with MOE officials who can be called on for assistance when necessary' and 'Challenges MOE policies and guidelines which prevents the school from meeting its planned objectives or retard initiatives, even at the risk of been sanctioned by the MOE.'

Plant and facilities and management sub-scale
This category consisted of six items which assess the high-performing principals who give special attention to the provision of facilities to enhance learning, the maintenance of the plant and the overall presentation of the school. These principals usually make effort to plant trees and established gardens in their effort to 'green' the school. Alongside the effort to green the school, high-performing principals implement maintenance programmes to ensure the cleanliness of the school compound. Samples of items included: 'Implements new technology and equipment to facilitate teaching and learning' and 'Implements programmes which attend to the environmental needs of school (for example: tree planting, creating flower gardens, etc.'.

Reliability Results
Prior to conducting the Principal Component Analysis (PCA), the researcher checked reliability of each scale. The results of Cronbach's Alpha presented in Table 1 show that all but one of the nine sub-scales had high internal consistency. The factor, Relationship with the formal structure, was relatively low with a Cronbach's Alpha of .596 (see table 1). Consequently, this factor was eliminated because it did not meet the minimum standard required for the acceptable reliability (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009).

Table 1. Test of Reliability of the Categories of Factors Representing the Performance of High-Performing Principals

Categories of factors	Cronbach's Alpha
1. Shares personal philosophy	.869
2. Personal Strengths, Qualities and Abilities	.910
3. General Leadership and Management Skills	.914
4. Academic Development and Achievement	.800
5. Students Development and Achievement	.868
6. Staff Development and Relationship	.887
7. Community Development and Relationship	.882
8. Plant and Facilities Maintenance and Development	.737
9. Relationship with the formal structure	.596

Procedure

The questionnaires were either mailed or delivered personally by the researcher to all 125 schools identified with high-performing principals over a six-week period. The questionnaires were administered to the respondents by a designated teacher within each school who also collected and returned the instruments upon completion. Respondents were allowed to keep the instruments for a maximum of three weeks. In those cases where the administration of the questionnaire was delayed, the researcher made phone calls to the respective principals and/or designated teachers with the aim of speeding up the completion of the data collection process. The completed instruments were returned via mail by the designated teacher or collected from the school by the researcher.

Data Collection and Analysis

The data were cleaned and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (version 17). Within the context of this study, PCA was used to test the theoretical premise that leadership performance could be explained by a number of factors. Prior testing with PCA showed that four components explained a principal's leadership performance among this sample. Examples of the elements identified under each of the dimensions are as followed:

1. Personal Philosophy and Abilities
a. 'Promotes the belief that formal schooling provides the majority of students the opportunity to achieve a rounded and broad-based education'
b. 'Demonstrates a personal commitment to the school and the education of the students'
2. Leadership and Management
a. 'Demonstrates strong interpersonal skills when dealing with teachers, students

and other members of the school community'

b. 'Involves the staff and other stakeholders in making important decisions re garding the direction and operation of the school'

3. Student support

a. 'Prescribes standards for students' general conduct and insists that they are enforced and maintained at all times'

b. 'Promotes values and attitudes to guide students' behaviour both inside and outside of the school'

4. Community Support and Relationship

a. 'Maintains active personal involvement in the life of the immediate school community'

b. 'Provides academic and/or skills training programme to benefit community and parents'

Once the factors were obtained from the PCA, a t-test was performed to assess whether there were differences in the ratings of the general constituents of male and female high-performing principals. The findings indicated that the general constituents rated female principals higher on three of the four dimensions of effective leadership as opposed to male principals. Consequently, there were significant differences based on the following dimensions: personal philosophy and abilities – males (M= 81.41, SD 9.41) and females (M=79.36, SD= 12.92), t(1617)=3.628, p=.000; leadership and management– males (M=33.40, SD=6.29) and females (M=32.19, SD-7.60), t(1613)= 3.508, p= .000; and student support systems – males (M=22.47, SD=3.13) and females (M=21.92, SD 4.08), t(1607)= 3.060, p= .002. However, there were no significant differences between constituents' ratings of male and female high-performing principals based on school-community support and relationships as indicated by the following findings: males (M=31.23, SD 6.12) and females (M=30.64 SD=7.24, t(1613)= 1.774, p=.076 (see Table 2).

Table 2. An Independent Samples T-Test Showing the Ratings of the General Constituents of Male and Female High-Performing Principals

Component	Gender		t	df
	Females	Males		
Personal Philosophy and Abilities	81.41 (9.85)	79.36 (12.91)	3.628*	1617
Leadership and Management	33.40 (6.29)	32.19 (7.60)	3.508*	1613
Student Support Systems	22.47 (3.13)	21.92 (4.08)	3.060*	1607
Community Support and Relationships	31.23 (6.12)	30.64 (7.24)	1.774	1613

Note. * = p ≤.05. Standard Deviations appear in parentheses below means.

Male constituents' ratings of male and female principals showed slight differences in mean scores as indicated in Table 3 below. However, there were no significant differences in male constituents' ratings of male and female principals based on the four dimensions of effective leadership as follows: personal philosophy and abilities – males (M= 81, SD 10.2) and females (M=80.96, SD 11.39), t(376)=.117, p= .907; leadership and management – males (M=33.90, SD=6.29) and females (M=33.65, SD=3.13), t(373)= .370, p= .712 ; and students support systems – males (M=22.46, SD=3.11) and females (M=21.52, SD=3.43, t(374)= -.192, p= .848; and community support and relationship – males (M=22.46, SD=3.11) and females (M=21.52, SD 3.43), t(374)= -.897, p= .370

Table 3. Male Constituents Ratings of Male and Female High-Performing Principals Based on the Dimensions of Effective Leadership

Component	Gender		t	df
	Females	Males		
Personal Philosophy and Abilities	81.09 (10.12)	80.96 (11.39)	.117	376
Leadership and management	33.90 (6.29)	33.65 (6.59)	.370	373
Student Support Systems	22.46 (3.11)	21.52 (3.43)	-.192	374
Community Support and Relationships	31.22 (5.73)	31.82 (6.93)	-.897	374

Note. * = p ≤.05. Standard Deviations appear in parentheses below means.

Table 4 shows that female constituents' ratings of the performance of male and female principals was more favourable towards female principals on all four dimensions. There were significant differences in how female constituents rated the performance of male and female principals based on the following dimensions: personal philosophy and abilities –males (M=81.35, SD=9.85) and females (M=78.69, SD=13.55), t(1195)= 3.892, p=.000; leadership and management – males (M=33.20, SD=6.29) and females (M=31.59, SD=7.49), t(1196)= 3.935, p=.000; student support systems – males (M=22.46, SD=3.15) and females (M=21.68, SD=4.29), t(1188)= 3.590, p=.000; and community support and relationships – males(M=31.12, SD=6.21) and females (M=30.14, SD=7.35), t(1194)= 2.481, p=.013.

Table 4. Female Constituents Ratings of Male and Female High-Performing Principals Based on the Dimensions of Effective Leadership

Component	Gender		*t*	*df*
	Females	Males		
Personal Philosophy and Abilities	81.35 (9.85)	78.69 (13.55)	3.892*	1195
Leadership and Management	33.20 (6.29)	31.59 (7.94)	3.935*	1196
Student Support Systems	22.46 (3.15)	21.68 (4.29)	3.590*	1188
Community Support and Relationships	31.12 (6.21)	30.14 (7.35)	2.481*	1194

Note. * = p ≤.05. Standard Deviations appear in parentheses below means.

Discussion

The analysis of the data shows a greater support in ratings of female high-performing principals on the four dimensions of effective performance. While one could conclude that the literature was more in line with a mixed response to how male and female are rated in their leadership effectiveness, the findings are in keeping with the new trend which places female leaders in the ascendency. It should be noted that in the ratings by male constituents of male and female high-performing principals, there was no significant difference. One the other hand, female constituents rated female high-performing principals significantly higher than male high-performing principals on all four dimensions of effective performance. Based on the research questions posed, the following responses have been posited.

Research Question 1: Are there any significant differences in the ratings of the performance of male and female high-performing principals by the general school constituents?

The current study showed that there were significant differences in how the general school constituents rated female high-performing principals on three of the four dimensions of performance. These include personal philosophy and abilities, leadership and management, and student support system. For the dimension of community support and relationship, there was no difference. This finding could be as a result of a number of factors. First, it is merely confirming findings reported in the literature that

there is a difference in the leadership provided by males and females leaders and that more importantly females are more effective in a number of areas. For example, Yukl (2013), Northouse (2013), Grove (2011), and O'Brien (2008) have all acknowledged that there is a difference in male and female leadership as far as the effectiveness of organizational performance is concerned. The ability of the female leaders to apply a more democratic approach to decision making and take into consideration the needs of subordinates are just two of the qualities associated with female leaders. Yukl (2013) also identified the strengths of the female leaders to include being more inclusive in their leadership behaviour; being better able to establish interpersonal relationships; and demonstrating a greater level of willingness to share power with others in organizations.

A second possibility for the difference is the fact that the samples, from both the high-performing principals and the respondents, were predominately female, thus, raising the possibility of skewed data resulting in a bias in favour of female high-performing principals. On the other hand, the findings showed no difference in the ratings of the community support and relationships dimension. This is consistent with the literature which indicates that some studies show that there is no difference generally in the effectiveness of male and female leadership behaviours (Kent et al., 2010 & Bass & Bass, 2008)

Question 2: Are there any significant differences in the ratings of the performance of male and female high-performing principals by the male and female school constituents?

Even though female high-performing principals showed a slightly higher rating in the mean score in three of the four dimensions, the analysis showed no difference in the ratings of male principals and females by male school constituents. However, in the case of female constituents and their ratings of female high-performing principals, the study showed that they rated female high-performing principals significantly higher than male high-performing principals on all four dimensions. This finding confirmed the position of Sikdar and Mitra (2008) that gender affinity may play a role in how leaders are rated on their performance. So, while the general school respondents (males and females together) rated female high-performing principals significantly different on all but one performance dimension, community support and relationship, female constituents rated female high-performing principals significantly different from male high-performing principals on all four dimensions. One could conclude that female bias may play a role in female constituents rating female high-performing principals significantly different from male high-performing principals, but other factors must also be considered. First, both the number of respondents and the composition of high-performing principals are skewed in favour of the females, which is similar situ-

ation as discussed in question 1. This in itself could be an important factor influencing the difference in the ratings. Additionally, the factors relating socialization (Sikdar & Mitra, 2008), brain function and structure (O'Brien, 2008), and bias based on stereotyping (Eagly, Karau & Mikhijani, 1995) must be considered among the factors contributing to this significant differences.

Question 3: What are the implications of the ratings of male and female constituents of the performance of high-performing principals for policy and practice in the Jamaican school system?

One could conclude from the findings of the study that female high-performing principals are seen as more effective that male high-performing principals. This is borne out by the fact that the general school constituents rated female high-performing principals significantly different from male high-performing principals on three of the four dimensions of effective performance. Of equal importance, while there were no significant differences in the rating of male high-performing principals by male constituents, there was a significant difference in the ratings of female high-performing principals by female constituents on all four performance dimensions. These findings will have serious implications for the formulation of policies because they are suggesting that females are generally more effective leaders than males. But any attempt to deliberately seek to employ males over females would be short-sighted. In the actual running of school, the absence of male leadership or the dominance of female leadership may affect boys negatively (Miller, 1991). In addition, caution should be applied in terms of recruitment of female principals over male principals in light of the fact that bias could be an influencing factor as suggested by the skewing of the sample in both principals and respondents. Even though females seem to be in the ascendency, in terms of constituents' ratings of their performance on the four dimensions, the decision regarding employment of male or female principals cannot be based on the position that one gender is more effective than the other. Caution is advised even though female advantage in leadership is in keeping with an international trend, which seems irreversible, in both developed and developing countries. Of course, this must have implications for the performance of schools which are led by both male and female principals. It stands to reason that every effort must be made to ensure that the education system is able to take full advantage of the competencies and special skills that female leaders have to offer. At the same time, male principals must engage in professional development and systematic training to acquire the skills that will improve their performance as leaders. However, one must not lose sight of the fact that Jamaica remains a traditional society with traditional values which continue to elevate males to lead organizations, despite knowledge of the unique skills female leaders have to offer. This is in conflict with the fact that it is the females who now have the required

qualifications to assume the leadership positions in organizations, public or private.

Conclusion

Great care should be taken to resist the selection of males over females or females over males for leadership positions based solely on the perceived strengths and weaknesses in their leadership behaviour. The evidence regarding who brings the greater value to effective school performance remains inconclusive, at best, based on the general literature. However, at the same time, the ways in which leadership is seen and evaluated must now take into consideration the evidence on brain research and the performance of males and females in leadership roles. Based on the findings reported and discussed earlier, it would appear that the debate regarding the effectiveness of male and female leadership will continue for some time to come. For the general school constituents, there were differences between male and female in the performance of high-performing principals' in three dimensions and no differences for one dimension. At the same time the findings show that female leaders are rated as significantly more effective than male leaders on all four performance dimensions by female constituents while there was no difference in how male constituents rated male and female leaders in the four dimensions. No further clarity is provided by these findings so factors such as gender bias, socialization, genetics, among others, will continue to influence both the actual performance and perception of performance based on gender. What is required is for both male and female leaders to exhibit leadership that is effective and successful in both school and non-school settings. However, based on the recent trend, females seem to be in the ascendency based on the skill sets that are needed to become effective leaders. The question is, can males adopt and or adapt the approaches which make female leaders more effective than males and exhibit leadership that is similar to females or is it that males are genetically programmed to lead in a particular way? Are males comparable to females in their overall abilities, qualifications, experience, etc.? What role do social and economic factors play in the recruitment and retention of males who have the potential for becoming high-performing principals? There is clearly a need for a closer examination of both males and females who are practicing principals in the school system to determine the factors which provide advantages and disadvantages to their effectiveness in performance. Further research will be required to provide evidence-based answers to these questions, but in the meanwhile, training should be one first step to address the differences, especially, if they are related to how school leaders behave in their leadership practice.

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