Role Models as an Influential Determinant of Entrepreneurial Aspirations of Higher Education Female Students in Botswana

ABSTRACT: Increasingly, researchers regard role models as an influential determinant of student’s career choice. This study addresses the research question: To what extent are female students’ business start-up aspirations influenced by role models? Findings emanating from a survey of 76 University of Botswana female students and a focus group discussion with 10 of these women highlight the prominent role played by parents, family friends, husbands and TV talk show personalities. This investigation has important implications for government bodies, university curricula and gender-based entrepreneurial research.

Keywords: Role models, women entrepreneurship, predisposing factors

INTRODUCTION

Research has recognised the importance of role models in career development, let alone in venture creation. These studies stem from the social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) and the cognitive developmental theory (Kohlberg, 1966), that assume that children imitate adults, in particular, parents who are regarded as role models (Dryler, 1998). Shapero (1985) assert that role models influence entrepreneurial intentions. Later research, by Scott and Twomey (1988, p.7) found that students whose parents owned a small business showed the highest preference for self-employment and the lowest for large business. This paper discusses the influence of role models on entrepreneurial desirability of women students in Botswana. Gibson (2004) notes two theoretical constructs on “role model” – role identification and social learning. Role identification is where “individuals are attracted to people whom they perceive some similarity to….. and are motivated to enhance that similarity through observation and emulation” (Gibson 2004, p.136). Social learning entails that “individuals attend to models because they can be helpful in learning new tasks, skills and norms” (Gibson 2004, p.136). This research is part of a wider investigation on factors that influenced attitudes of women students to business ownership in Botswana (Rametse & Huq, 2013, 2014). Although several international studies, for example, Scott & Twomey (1988), have focused
on the influence of role models on career intentions, in particular entrepreneurship, the author is not aware of any study that address the influence of role models on women’s venture creation within the Botswana context. Thus this research addresses this gap.

Whist studies and assistance programmes in the small business sector in Africa have ignored female entrepreneurs, despite the fact that they constitute a significant and growing proportion of owners and managers of small enterprises (Mitchell, 2004), Botswana has however, begun to address women entrepreneurship through some business initiatives that have drawn particular interest from young people and women. For example, amongst others, the Local Enterprise Authority (LEA), which was established by the Botswana government in 2004, to develop and support the need of small, micro and medium sized enterprises (SMMEs), targets women, the youth and the unemployed in key sectors of manufacturing, tourism, agriculture, and any services that support these three business sectors. The World Bank (2011) confirms that as compared to other developing countries, Botswana displays a high rate of women owned and operated microenterprises, at 70 per cent. Thus, addressing the influence of women students’ entrepreneurial aspirations toward self-employment is crucial.

This research attempts to answer the question: *To what extent are female students’ business start-up aspirations influenced by role models?* The reasons for focusing on women students in Botswana are as follows. First, studies, such as Hisrich and Brush (1991) have confirmed that the woman entrepreneur is not an “average” woman and that, she has problems not encountered by her male peers (Scott, 1986, p. 37). These setbacks have resulted in women entrepreneurs to be “under-resourced, under-experienced, under-protected and under-productive” (Marcucci, 2001, p.iii). Thus, to address these problems, the influence on women students’ entrepreneurial aspirations are worth investigating, hence will contribute to existing knowledge. Secondly, students mostly comprise of the youth, which falls within the criteria for LEA entrepreneurship assistance programme. Moreover, GUESS (2008, p.1), note that a great amount of innovation power and entrepreneurial competences
is embedded within students and can later lead to successful start-ups. Finally, as discussed above, women represent a minority of entrepreneurs and policy makers must be enlightened of this situation. Thus, the predisposing, in particular, parental role models, as an influencing factor on the Botswana women students’ entrepreneurial aspirations is explored.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Earlier research on role models has focused on children and adolescents (Bandura, 1977). Gibson (2004) has identified an abundance of literature on role models that examine career choice, in particular, underrepresented groups, such as women. Gibson (2004) further proposed a framework that defines role models along cognitive and structural dimensions. The commonly used role model attribute is the positive dimension, where individuals, when asked about their role models, provide names of people they see as positive (Gibson, 2004). Moreover, Barnir, A, Watson, W. and Hutchins, H. (2011) assert that individuals look at role models and compare their own situations and experiences to those of role models. Zellweger, Sieger and Halter (2011) also found that, whilst students with family business background are pessimistic about being in control in an entrepreneurial career, they are however, optimistic about their efficacy to pursue an entrepreneurial career.

The most relevant study that also sees role models as influential factor on students’ career aspirations on entrepreneurship is by Scott and Twomey (1988). Although this study is not gender based, its contribution to the literature is significant, particularly in the identification of a strong theoretical framework on students’ career aspirations in business start-up. Scott and Twomey (1988) derived the data from the US, England and Ireland studies to assess the potential long-term supply of entrepreneurs in the region by researching the career attitudes of students in higher education (Scott & Twomey, 1988). Amongst the predisposing factors that influence students’ entrepreneurial intentions, Scott and Twomey confirmed that respondents whose parents owned a small business showed the highest preference for self-employment and the lowest for large business (Scott & Twomey 1988, p.7). This issue is supported by the social learning and the cognitive developmental literature. It is
well known that the family is one of the most influential contexts of socialization in childhood and adolescence (Dryler, 1998). The social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) and the cognitive developmental theory (Kohlberg, 1966), both assume that children imitate adults, in particular, parents who are regarded as role models (Dryler, 1998). Moreover, other researchers suggest that less educated women without managerial experience can acquire entrepreneurial skills through socialisation with a successful family member entrepreneur (Kim, Aldrich & Keister, 2003). On the contrary, Mungai and Velamuri (2009) note that recent research in social learning theory argue that “negative role models” do exist, as they can discourage the observer from undertaking the behaviour exhibited by the role model. Thus, low parental performance in self-employment may have a “negative role model” effect in their offspring’s choice of self-employment career (Mungai & Velamuri, 2009, p.339). This can also occur where the socio-cultural status of women, where they are regarded as minors, can be an impediment to women’s entrepreneurial desire (Rametse and Huq, 2014), particularly if women confide to societal attitude.

Another relevant study to this research, by Huq and Moyeen (1999), investigated future career aspirations of female graduates in Bangladesh. The results also confirmed that amongst factors that influenced the students’ aspirations of business-ownership, the media was most influential than relatives and husbands (Huq & Moyeen 1999, p14). A majority of these women (57 per cent) were influenced by their husbands and friends. However, departing from Scott and Twomey (1988) study discussed above and others (for example, Van Auken, Spehens, Fry & Silva, 2006), the influence of family entrepreneurial role models in their career aspirations was not evident, probably due to the fact that women in Bangladesh appear to aspire to start their businesses for economic returns for the family. Van Auken et al. (2006) examined differences in role model influence between the US and Mexican students. Their results showed that role models who owned businesses had a significantly greater influence on the career intensions of US respondents than role models that did not own a business. However, whether or not Mexican role models owned a business had no significant difference among Mexican students (Van Auken et al., 2006, p.334).
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The analysis of this research is predominantly based on Scott and Twomey (1988) model, which prescribes factors that influence women students’ career aspirations (see figure 1).

Notably, only the predisposing factor of parental role models is used in this paper as the other dimensions had been applied in analysis elsewhere (Rametse & Huq 2013, 2014). This framework is used as its conceptual dimensions are mostly covered by the literature (Scott & Twomey, 1998; Huq & Moyeen, 1999; Orhan & Scott 2001; and Gibson, 2004) and meet the research objectives of this study. These factors are represented by three broad variables comprising of predisposing factors, triggering factors and possessing a business idea (Scott & Twomey, 1988). Scott and Twomey (1988) explain predisposing factors as background/personality/perception factors that develop over several years or more. For this study, these include family background; in particular, small business owners within immediate or broader family as role models. Work experience and perception of business ownership are additional predisposing variables that may shape students' aspirations to become entrepreneurs.

Other broad variables, which are situational and short-term, are triggering factors. These are the reasons why the students are interested in setting up businesses. These include “the effects of looking for work, career advice received, and the prospect of unemployment” (Scott & Twomey, 1988; p.6). Another factor that may influence women students to start their businesses is possession of a business idea, which may be instigated by both predisposing and triggering factors. Thus, these factors may generate a business idea, leading on to setting up a business as an ultimate career preference. Thus possession of a business idea alone may “pull” women students into entrepreneurship. Rametse and Huq (2014) extended this model by providing additional explanations of how the socio-cultural status of women in a particular country context can significantly moderate...
the influence of the triggering and predisposing factors on women students’ entrepreneurial career aspirations, and often to the extent that, it can act as an impediment to venture creation (Rametse & Huq, 2014). In Botswana, these include access to land, inheritance and status of women as dependants (see figure 1).

METHODOLOGY

Data was collected between December, 2010 and April, 2012, in two stages, using a questionnaire survey and two focus group discussions (FGD), respectively. The first stage involved a questionnaire survey of 100 University of Botswana women students from the Faculty of Business, in December, 2010 and July, 2011, which produced 76 usable questionnaires. This sample size was regarded as suitable for a qualitative study which required the researcher’s close association with the respondents. The students completed the questionnaires during class, hence were immediately collected by the researcher upon completion. It took around forty five to sixty minutes for the students to fill out the questionnaires.

The second stage was based on two focus group discussions with ten women students from the same surveyed group, in December, 2011 and April, 2012. Robinson (1999) defines a focus group as “an in-depth, open-ended group discussion of 1-2 hours’ duration that explores a specific set of issues on a predefined and limited topic… and are convened under the guidance of a facilitator” (Robinson 1999, p.905). The focus group discussions were conducted mainly to validate the information from the survey, as to delve deeper in obtaining Botswana women students’ attitudes to business ownership. Twenty of the students who had indicated in the survey questionnaire that they were willing to participate further in the study were contacted. However, only ten students were able to attend the FGD session because most of the students had finished their studies and others had gone to their respective home towns for their semester break. The women students’ age ranged from 18 to 26. The students knew each other, hence related very well during the discussion (Kitzinger, 1994).
The participants reflected on a number of issues identified from the results of the first stage of the study, which needed further clarification, such as the influence of role models on their entrepreneurial intentions. The data had been transcribed and analysed through identification of key themes, linking issues discussed to the underlying subject matter on role models.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The Respondents’ Profile

Around 64 per cent of the students had the highest qualification of Bachelor’s degree, followed by 18 per cent who had a Diploma. Their areas of study were as follows – Accounting (42 per cent), Information Systems (21 per cent), Management (18 per cent) and Finance (9 per cent). A majority (79 per cent) were the age group of between 18 and 25 and the rest were mature age students. The FGD participants’ education profiles were as follows. Out of the ten participants, two had just completed a Bachelor of Commerce (Accounting) qualification. The rest of the students were completing their final year of Bachelor of Commerce. A majority, (48.7 per cent) were interested in a service business, followed by retail (18 per cent) and manufacturing (7.9 per cent).

A majority of the respondents (48.7 per cent) were interested in a service business, followed by retail (18 per cent) and manufacturing (7.9 per cent). However, eleven respondents did not provide an answer to this question. Generally, statistics show that a majority of women in Botswana work in the service industry. In 2007, there were a total of 6,709 service workers, of which 3,719 (55 per cent), were women (Central Statistics Office, 2007).

The results show that overall, of the respondents’ parents; their mothers were more educated than their fathers. Around 15 per cent of respondents’ fathers had no education and 3 per cent stated that their mothers had no education. Around 29 per cent and 25 per cent of respondents’ mothers and fathers had education level of standard 1-7 respectively. Around 12 per cent of respondents confirmed that their parents’ (both father and mother) education level was form 4-5. The same
proportion of respondents’ (12 per cent) parents had university education of bachelors and masters. Around 20 per cent and 11 per cent of their mothers and fathers respectively attained a diploma level of education. These figures show a high proportion of educated women than men. Thus, overall, the majority of respondents’ parents were literate.

Fifty (50) per cent of the respondents’ family members operated a business. A majority of the respondents (22 per cent) stated that these family members were men. Only nine per cent confirmed that the family members who operated a business were women, and 17 per cent stated that they were both men and women. Thus, this shows that a majority of respondents’ family members who operated a business were males.

The respondents were asked if they were involved in the business in any way. A majority of the students were not involved (around 63 per cent). This is expected as the respondents were students and probably seeking to concentrate on their school work. However, 18 per cent were involved and only seven per cent confirmed that they were paid a salary from the business. Three per cent of the respondents were paid a share of the profit from the business. Thus, these women students were rewarded for keeping their family business going as well as earning income whilst completing their studies.

**Predisposing Factor: Parental/Family Role Models**

Situations that influenced women students to start their businesses are seen as predisposing factors. This study confirms that women students’ involvement in their family members’ businesses (42 per cent) influenced them on their desire to own businesses. The finding suggests the importance of parental role models (Dryler, 1998). An earlier study by Scott and Twomey (1988) found that those students whose parents owned and operated a small business showed the highest preference for self-employment and lowest preference for large business. The results of this study also showed that 50 per cent of the respondents’ parents owned a business. The respondents from the focus group
discussion mostly related their aspirations in starting their own businesses to parental influence. One participant became emotional as she revealed:

“*My mother was a small business owner…. She passed away six years ago. She really influenced my desire to start my own business. She operated a clothing boutique and vegetable shop. She would travel to South Africa to buy her stock and unfortunately, she died in a road accident when she was travelling back home (Botswana). It was through my mum that I have a network of contacts and through these contacts; I know I will start my own business... My interaction with different entrepreneurial people motivates me to start my own business...*” (Participant A).

Another participant also revealed that:

“*My father is an author of mathematics books and he is the most influential person in my desire to start my own business as he earns revenue from his publications....*” (Participant B).

These participants’ assertion confirms Dryler (1998) argument that family is one of the most influential contexts of socialisation in childhood and adolescence. However, Participant B believed that the influence could be limited if the parents believe that the child lacks entrepreneurial capabilities. This also confirms the theory of “negative role model”(Mungai & Velamuri, 2009). Around 12 per cent of women students said involvement in their family members’ businesses did not influence them on their desire to own business. Additionally, they aspired to work for large companies. Another surveyed respondent stated that:

“*My family business had not been generating profits for almost three years and this has demotivated me to start my own business when I finish my studies.... I would rather work for a large business*”.

This participant displays the attitude that role models can also exert negative influence.
A majority of the students aspired working for the private sector (56.6 per cent), followed by working for the small/medium business (47.7 per cent), own business (44.7 per cent), government (35 per cent) and joint family business (17.1 per cent). A majority of respondents (56.1 per cent) confirmed that their parents influenced them on their most preferred employment, followed by the university (47.3 per cent), then the media (39.5 per cent) (Table 1).

Generally, in Botswana and other countries, parents have a significant influence on their children’s career choices. Moreover, a majority of women students (57.9 per cent) reported their mothers as either owning a business or having a job. Around 59.3 per cent of the students also reported their mothers’ level of education as ranging from form three to university education. Additionally, 65.8 per cent reported their fathers also either owning a business or employed, with an education level of form three to university education (39.4 per cent). This is supported by Bundura (1977) socialisation theory that children tend to imitate their parents, hence impacting on their career options. Thus, it is not surprising that a majority of women students ranked their parents on the top of the list as influential in their most preferred employment. Overall, their parents’ level of education and involvement in entrepreneurship and work influence their most preferred employment.

The participants were also asked to rank the influence they thought their parents, siblings, friends, the media, the university, work experience, relatives, spouses and others had on their desire to start their businesses. As shown on Table 2, a majority of respondents (65.8 per cent) confirmed that the media influenced them on their desire to start business, followed by the university (51.4 per cent), then their parents (47.4 per cent).
The FGD participants confirmed that the international media had a major impact on their desire for venture creation, than the local media. They cited the television movie called “The Apprentice” by Donald Trump, which shows the high level of ambition. They revealed that fashion designers are passionate about growing their businesses, and this has a major influence on them. They believe that talk show personalities, such as Oprah, portray successful business women. Moreover, visual pictures had a major influence on their venture creation desire. One participant said:

“Seeing people living in poverty on TV really motivates me so start my own business in future, mainly to change the world through involvement in social initiatives” (Participant F).

Thus the women believed that social entrepreneurship is important in Botswana society. This is confirmed by an Indian study (Vijaya and Kamalanabhan, 1998), which found that 195 potential women entrepreneurs in India were driven by providing services to the community, rather than motivated by money.

The respondents were also asked to rank the influence they thought their parents, siblings, friends, the media, the university, work experience, relatives, spouses and others had on their lack of interest in business ownership. This was on a scale 1-5, 1 representing (no influence), 2 (little influence), 3 (undecided), 4 (moderate influence) and 5 (strong influence). Not many participants responded to this question. However, the highest proportion of participants (9.5 per cent) of those who responded to moderate and strong influence together, ranked parents, followed by siblings, the media, relatives and spouse (5.2 per cent) (see Table 3).
When asked to explain how or in what way their lack of interest in business-ownership was influenced by their parents, siblings, friends, the media, the university, work experience, relatives and spouses, the participants gave the following responses:

“Some peers and friends at times think…. I just dream too big dreams that can’t happen practically and they make fun of me”.

Another respondent said, “…. They [parents] have tried to set up their business and ended up with debts such that some of them lost their houses on top of their business premises”.

Respondents who were not influenced by the above stated parties commented that they never lacked interest. One pointed out that: “... there was never any influence because I never spoke about it to anyone”. Another said, “I am so much interested that you can never imagine”.

**CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

This study has fully answered the research question: To what extent are female students’ business start-up aspirations influenced by role models? As majority of women students confirmed that their parents influenced their desire to start their businesses, this could be attributable to their parents’ level of education and involvement in their ventures. The limitation of this study was, due to the lower number of FGD participants, the findings cannot be generalised to represent the opinions of the whole women students’ population in Botswana. However, this presented a substation of the surveyed results on moderating factors for business start-up decision. The richness of the data obtained from these participants strengthened the findings of this study. Based on this study’s findings, universities, in collaboration with government bodies can formulate effective entrepreneurship curricula.
REFERENCES


Figure 1 – Main Factors Influencing Career Aspirations

(1) Predisposing Factors
- Parental role models
- Work Experience
- Hobby

(4) Socio-Cultural Factor
- Access to land
- Property inheritance
- Status of women as dependants

(2) Triggering Factor
- Seeking work
- Unemployment effect
- Career advice

(3) Possession of a business idea

Table 1: Influence on the Choice of the Most Preferred Employment

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<th>Response</th>
<th>Parents</th>
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<th>Friends</th>
<th>Media</th>
<th>University</th>
<th>Work Experience</th>
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Total 48 | 63.2 | 48 | 63.2 | 48 | 63.2 | 48 | 63.2 | 48 | 63.2 | 48 | 63.2 | 48 | 63.2 | 48 | 63.2 | 48 | 63.2 |

n denotes number of respondents and % (percentage)
1 = no influence; 2 = little influence; 3 = undecided; 4 = moderate influence; and 5 = strong influence

Table 2: Extent of Influence in Desire to Start Business

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<tr>
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Total 65 | 80.5 | 65 | 85.5 | 65 | 85.5 | 65 | 85.5 | 65 | 85.5 | 65 | 85.5 | 65 | 85.5 |

Missing 11 | 14.5 | 11 | 14.5 | 11 | 14.5 | 11 | 14.5 | 11 | 14.5 | 11 | 14.5 | 11 | 14.5 |

Overall 76 | 100 | 76 | 100 | 76 | 100 | 76 | 100 | 76 | 100 | 76 | 100 | 76 | 100 |

n denotes number of respondents and % (percentage)
1 = no influence; 2 = little influence; 3 = undecided; 4 = moderate influence; and 5 = strong influence
### Table 3: Extent of Influence on Lack of Business Ownership

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*n denotes number of respondents and % (percentage)
*1 = no influence; 2 = little influence; 3 = undecided; 4 = moderate influence; and 5 = strong influence
Increasingly, researchers regard role models as an influential determinant of student’s career choice. This study addresses the research question: To what extent are female students' business start-up aspirations influenced by role models? Findings emanating from a survey of 76 University of Botswana female students and a focus group discussion with 10 of these women highlight the prominent role played by parents, family friends, husbands and TV talk show personalities. This investigation has important implications for government bodies, university curricula and gender-based entrepreneurial research.

Role Models as an Influential Determinant of Entrepreneurial Aspirations of Higher Education Female Students in Botswana

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