

# Influence of Culture on Women's Public Speaking Skills in Rwanda

## Case Study of Rwanda Women Parliamentarians

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### Abstract

In Rwanda, the disparity between females and males can be seen in different aspects of life, including their communication skills. The Rwandan culture has been one that constrains women to perform house and babysitting tasks, which lowers their expectations to speak out in public gatherings. In fact, this cultural impact can be traced back even further, because many girls were not given opportunities to go to school; lowering their ability, confidence and acceptability to speak out in public. The objectives of this study are: to examine the influence of cultural beliefs on women's public speaking skills in Rwanda; to determine the influence of language on women's public speaking skills in Rwanda; to establish the influence of cultural taboos on women's public speaking skills in Rwanda and to analyze the influence of cultural values on women's public speaking skills in Rwanda. During this study, researcher was used census method. The respondent of this research is all women members of Rwanda parliament. In order to get all necessary information researchers was used questionnaire and interview technique as data instruments tools. On analyzing data researcher was used Statistical package for social science (SPSS). The results shows that 90.2% of respondents said that men they don't have a right to control and discipline women through physical means makes women vulnerable to violence by intimate partners and 100% of respondents shows that Rwanda culture allow women to possess their own property. Language on women's influences public speaking Skills in Rwanda. Most of time the women like to use question tag when they need to speak is public, all respondents are strongly agree and agree. 100% respondent shows that Women must be polite and respectful to the men. In order to continue influencing culture on women's public speaking, researcher is recommend to the government to Continue to implement of international conventions and declarations in the field of culture in line with other human rights instruments and in respect of gender equality and diversity and Continue Reinforcement the culture of public speaking of women in different region in Rwanda.

**Keywords:** Culture, women's and public speaking

### 1. Introduction

Women speakers have historically faced barriers to the fundamental right to free speech. In colonial America, the women who sailed here seeking the opportunity to express their religious beliefs were subjected to harsh punishment and death. They were condemned for behavior that was deemed unwomanly and society dictated their silence for generations. The religious, cultural, legal, and political sanctions remained in place until women claimed the right of free speech for themselves in the 19th Century. The political and social reformers of that era were courageous trailblazers who weathered ridicule and abuse to advocate for suffrage, abolition, and other causes Becker, Heike (1996).

The vestiges of disdain regarding women's speech are still present in society today and impact a women's ability to be viewed as competent leaders. The media culture is laden with sexist imagery and negative stereotypes. The dominance of the masculine style of speaking ensures that it is more closely associated with the traits and habits of a leader. Politically conservative women belittle the accomplishments of previous generations of progressive women. The negative environment impacts women at all levels and is most readily apparent when women seek high profile positions of authority and power.

According to the religion of Islam, women are granted the ability to gain an education and to work. However, for political and social reasons, in the Islamic world and in Arab countries in particular, women still have limited participation in leading public and private organisations (Donno and Russett, 2004). Thus, gender

does have an influence on the communication behaviour of individuals in different social settings (Merkin, 2005).

Johnson, et al. (2005), who found that women in employment were more concerned with establishing and maintaining good relationships and improving the work relationship with their leaders. However, men usually do extra work in developing and maintaining their work relationships. .

Rwanda is proud to be among those countries that have adopted national plans of action and established institutional gender machineries to follow up on the commitments of the Beijing Platform for Action. Achievements range from facilitating the inclusion and participation of women in political, social and economic spheres, to incredible socio-economic progress that includes being on track to meet most of the MDGs. As a result, Rwandan women are present in all spheres of national life and as decision-makers. An all-inclusive Constitution was passed in 2003, that transcends politics based on division and entrenched the rights of women as full partners in nation-building. Political representation of women is impressive at all levels, and particularly in Parliament, it is at 64% the highest in the world. (GMO current report, 2014).

The Government of Rwanda has made great strides in developing policies and strategies to support women's empowerment and the advancement of gender equality, and numerous mechanisms have been instituted to support their implementation. Nevertheless, according to Gender Analysis done by USAID/Rwanda in their Civic engagement Project of January 2015, Rwandan women continue to face equality challenges. Women in positions of authority tend to carry less influence than their male counterparts. Further, while two-thirds of parliamentarians in Rwanda are women (64 %), this analysis identified gender issues that pose barriers to women communication skills, as well as opportunities to empower women.

Some Rwandan women face problems when it comes to talking or expressing themselves in public, mainly because of cultural and traditional restrictions. The Rwandan culture restricts women, especially rural women, to housework and therefore women are attributed little responsibility for household property; they do not even partake into its management, which lessens their economic development.

## **2. Statement of the problem**

In Rwanda, the disparity between females and males can be seen in different aspects of life, including their communication skills. The Rwandan culture has been one that constrains women to perform house and babysitting tasks, which lowers their expectations to speak out in public gatherings. In fact, this cultural impact can be traced back even further, because many girls were not given opportunities to go to school; lowering their ability, confidence and acceptability to speak out in public (UN Department of Economics and Social Affairs, 2013).

Women and men need to participate as equals in all of our activities, and benefit fairly from the outcomes and impacts of their interventions. Today in our modern society Rwandan socio- cultural traditions are still in force and do not permit equal opportunity; they do not allow men and women to share, manage and have access to household property on an equal footing to that empowerment. (UNESCO, 2009).

The Government of Rwanda has made great improvement in developing policies and strategies to support women's empowerment and the advancement of gender equality, and numerous mechanisms have been instituted to support their implementation. A case in point is the national strategy for community development and local government development of 2013 – 2018, (MINLOG, January 2013) However according to the Gender Analysis done by USAID/Rwanda in their Civic engagement Project of January 2015, Rwandan women continue to face equality challenges in general and verbal skills in particular. A woman who attempts to stand and talk in public is banned from her family because she is considered as breaking taboos (GMO report 2014).

Additionally, women are taught to limit their roles in the public sphere and instead dwell in the private sphere. As the 2014 CHAIN project team found in its discussions with the gender offices of five partner organizations, women, even educated urban women, tend to follow cultural norms which stipulate that women should restrain themselves from fully participating in the public sphere. It is high time we carried out a study on the causes of such a situation and strive to give suggestions and put in place mechanisms for change as there are different ways to help people internalize the notion of gender equality.

## **3. Research objectives**

### **3.1 General objective**

The general objective of this study is to assess the influence of culture on women's Public speaking skills in Rwanda.

### **3.2 Specific Objectives**

- i. To examine the influence of cultural beliefs on women's public speaking skills in Rwanda.
- ii. To determine the influence of language on women's public speaking skills in Rwanda.
- iii. To establish the influence of cultural taboos on women's public speaking skills in Rwanda.
- iv. To analyse the influence of cultural values on women's public speaking skills in Rwanda.

#### 4. Research Questions

- i. What is the influence of cultural beliefs on women's public speaking skills?
- ii. What does language influence on women's Public speaking skills?
- iii. What is the effect of cultural taboos on women's public speaking skills?
- iv. What do cultural values influence on women's public speaking skills?

#### 5. Research design

The researcher used descriptive comparative strategy and consequent descriptive correlation design to determine cause and affect relationships between two variables.

#### 6. Target population

The study targeted the Rwanda Women parliamentarian as the study population. Women parliamentarians constitute of 51 women out of 80 Members of parliament.

#### 7. Sample Design

During this research, due to the fact that the target population is less than one hundred people, the researcher preferred to take the total population as the sample.

#### 8. Sampling Techniques

The study use census method, there is no detailed sampling frame since the entire population (women Parliamentarians) was drawn

#### 9. Data collection instrument

Data collection instruments for the purpose of this study researcher were used questionnaires and interview technique. This questionnaire was consisted of close ended questions since they allow for intensity and richness of individual perception in responding the asked

#### 10. Data processing and analysis

The data for this study were analyzed quantitatively using percentages, frequencies and using linear regressions. The regression model used was  $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + e$ . The results were presented using tables for ease of understanding. This allowed the researcher to interpret the findings and also generate recommendations from the findings.

Y: Women's public speaking skills

X1: Beliefs

X2: Language

X3: Taboos

X4: Values

$\beta_0$ : intercept

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3$  and  $\beta_4$ : slopes

e: is an error term

#### 11. Data Processing and analysis

The primary data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical. The researcher used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23 in coming up with the statistical analysis for the study.

#### 12. Research findings and discussion

**Table 1: Influence of Cultural Beliefs on Women's Public Speaking Skills**

| Cultural and public speaking   | Total     |     | Mean | St. Dev. |
|--|-----------|-----|------|----------|
|  | Frequency | %   |      |          |
| Men have a right to control and discipline women                               | 51        | 100 | 1.90 | 0.300    |
| In case a woman has a constructive idea she has to pass it through the husband | 51        | 100 | 2.90 | 1.676    |
| Rwanda culture are not allowed women to possess or own property                | 51        | 100 | 1.47 | 0.504    |
| A woman who attempts to stand and speak in public is banned by her family      | 51        | 100 | 2.75 | 1.197    |
| Cultural norms stipulate that women should restrain themselves                 | 51        | 100 | 2.00 | 0.000    |
| Past history influence the women's performance in communication                | 51        | 100 | 4.39 | 0.493    |

Source: Primary data, 2017

From the above table 1, the respondents revealed on the influence of Cultural Beliefs on Women's Public Speaking Skills. The results show respondents said that men they don't have a right to control and discipline women through physical means makes women vulnerable to violence by intimate partners. The respondents shows that Rwanda culture allow women to possess their own property because even the Rwanda law shows that when the couple has any property house or land everyone has a right of earning 50%. The respondents shows that past history influence the women's performance in communication in Rwanda. The previous years before genocide the women in Rwanda were not participated very well in different social and economic activity for their own development as the evidenced by mean ranging from 1.90, 2.90, 1.47, 2.75, and 2.00 to 4.39 respectively.

Gender mainstreaming' emerges in national, supranational and international processes of governance of public policy with the aim of mainstreaming considerations about gender inequality across a range of policy areas. It is closely associated with international efforts by the United Nations system to promote gender awareness and fight discrimination and violence against women and girls. Fraser, (2013). The political aims of gender mainstreaming are to free women from 'symbolic annihilation', which takes place through the silencing of women's voices and absence of women from public speaking and their repression in the private sphere. In the domain of media and culture, the purpose of gender mainstreaming has been seen as integral in bringing women on influence of Cultural Beliefs on Women's Public Speaking Skills, literacy and access to this content by women, and the qualitative change of content from patriarchal and sexist to emancipator and diverse.

**Table 2: Influence of Language on Women's Public Speaking Skills**

| Influence of Language                                    | Total     |     | Mean | St. Dev. |
|--|-----------|-----|------|----------|
|  | Frequency | %   |      |          |
| Often use question tags and investigative                | 51        | 100 | 4.82 | 0.385    |
| Women apologize more often than men                      | 51        | 100 | 4.20 | 0.448    |
| Women use both interactional questions and informational | 51        | 100 | 4.63 | 0.488    |
| Women often used disclaimers in their speech             | 51        | 100 | 4.41 | 0.606    |
| Women use directives which minimize status               | 51        | 100 | 4.47 | 0.504    |
| Women are accommodating when interrupted                 | 51        | 100 | 4.57 | 0.500    |
| Women are talkative                                      | 51        | 100 | 4.33 | 0.476    |
| Women use more of nonverbal communication                | 51        | 100 | 1.65 | 0.483    |

Source: Primary data, 2017

Language pervades social life. It is the principal vehicle for the transmission of cultural knowledge, and the primary means by which we gain access to the contents of others' minds. Language is implicated in most of the phenomena that lie at the core of social psychology: attitude change, social perception, personal identity, social interaction, intergroup bias and stereotyping, attribution, and so on. Moreover, for social psychologists, language typically is the medium by which subjects' responses are elicited, and in which they respond: in social psychological research, more often than not, language plays a role in both stimulus and response.

The above table 2 shows how language on women's influences public speaking Skills in Rwanda. Most of time the women like to use question tag when they need to speak is public. The respondent's shows that women apologize more often than men in Rwanda.

The women members of Rwanda parliament said that in general the women in general are more talkative than man. The influence of Language on Women's Public Speaking Skills shown by the evidenced by mean ranging from 4.82, 4.20, 4.63, 4.41, 4.47, 4.57, 4.33 and 1.65 respectively.

This study supports the hypothesis that a communication partner's gender is a relevant factor in the conversational context that can influence a speaker's women language. There was no indication that one gender converges toward their partner more than the other.

**Table 3: Influence of Cultural Taboos on Women's Public Speaking Skills**

| Influence of Cultural   | Frequency |     | Mean | St. Dev. |
|---|-----------|-----|------|----------|
|   | F         | %   |      |          |
| Ladies are not meant to sit and speak                                 | 51        | 100 | 1.65 | 0.483    |
| Woman cannot attar anything in the public                             | 51        | 100 | 2.14 | 0.348    |
| It is a taboo for a girl to refuse a man                              | 51        | 100 | 1.86 | 0.348    |
| It is a taboo for a woman to question a man's decision's              | 51        | 100 | 1.98 | 0.547    |
| It's a taboo for a woman to argue with a man or reject a man's order. | 51        | 100 | 4.02 | 0.547    |

Source: Primary data, 2017

Table 3 shows that ladies have right to sit and speak in public in presence of men, the respondent shows that in Rwanda all men and women are equal and have the same opportunity when they want to speak in public in front of men; this is proven by the mean 1.65.

In Rwanda the women can attar anything in the public without a man’s approval as the data shown above, where the respondents are disagree with the statement shown that “women cannot attar anything in the public gathering without a man’s approval” as the data from respondents shows that, the majority of respondents are disagree. This means that the women in Rwanda they don’t have any problem of attar anything in the public without a man’s approval proven by the mean 2.14.

In Rwanda is not a case when a girl to refuse a man or a marriage arranged by family or parents however old he is. Because in Rwanda the women have a right to choose the person whom can make her life good and happy. For a case of Rwanda is not a taboo for a girl to refuse a man or a marriage arranged by family. This proven by means 1.86, because the majority of respondents are disagrees.

According to Wardhaugh (2000), taboo is the prohibition or avoidance in any society of behavior believed to be harmful to its members in that it would cause them anxiety, embarrassment, or shame. Consequently, so far as language is concerned, certain things are not to be said for certain objects can be referred to only in certain circumstances, for example, only by certain people, or through deliberate circumlocution, i.e. euphemistically. Tabooed subjects can vary widely: sex, death, illness, excretion, bodily functions, religious matters, and the supernatural. But quite often they extend to other aspects of social life. In any language there are certain things which must be avoided of mentioning. It applies to the words with such connotations as well.

**Table 4: Influence of Cultural Values on Women’s Public Speaking Skills**

| Values of culture                                      | Total     |     | Mean | St. Dev. |
|--|-----------|-----|------|----------|
|  | Frequency | %   |      |          |
| Women meant to be polite and respectful                | 51        | 100 | 4.02 | 0.547    |
| Women are meant to be sacred                           | 51        | 100 | 4.37 | 0.488    |
| Women are meant to be hospitable and receptive         | 51        | 100 | 4.20 | 0.601    |
| Women have to respect men                              | 51        | 100 | 3.76 | 0.651    |
| Women talk with humbleness and a lot of respect to men | 51        | 100 | 4.43 | 0.500    |

**Source:** Primary data, 2017

Women are strongly represented and even overrepresented in the cultural and Public Speaking Skills, or at least in some fields of this sector. However, despite what one could think when looking at their quantities’ superiority in public cultural institutions or programmes of higher education in culture management and the arts, the creative sector is far from offering equal opportunities for women and men. Then barriers found in the creative sector for women are not different from those observed in other economic sectors.

The above table 4shows the results from the fields about the Influence of Cultural Values on Women’s Public Speaking Skills. The respondent shows that Women meant to be polite and respectful to the men, all respondents were agreed with this statement. The Rwanda culture believed that women have to respect men, elder, society and authority and a woman’s disloyalty to a man is a disloyalty to God and talk with humbleness and a lot of respect to men. All statement has proved by the mean ranging from 4.02, 4.37, 4.20, 3.76 and 4.43 respectively.

**Table 5: Relationship between culture and public speaking**

|                                |                     | Culture | Women’s public speaking skills |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|---------|--------------------------------|
| Culture                        | Pearson Correlation | 1       | .537**                         |
|                                | Sig. (2-tailed)     |         | .000                           |
|                                | N                   | 51      | 51                             |
| Women’s public speaking skills | Pearson Correlation | .537**  | 1                              |
|                                | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000    |                                |
|                                | N                   | 51      | 51                             |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Pearson correlation coefficient, (r=0.537) shows that there is positive and moderate correlation between culture and Women’s public speaking skills. This means that culture contribute to the women’s public speaking skills in Rwanda.

**Table 6: Model Summary**

| Model | R                 | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1     | .987 <sup>a</sup> | .973     | .973              | .102                       |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Cultural Beliefs, Language, Taboos and Cultural Values

According to results in above table 6 shows that, Cultural Beliefs, Language, Taboos and Cultural Values is affect Women’s Public Speaking Skills (R=0.987) with variations of all independent variables contribute 97% to Public Speaking Skills.

**Table 7: ANOVA<sup>b</sup>**

| Model |            | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F       | Sig.              |
|-------|------------|----------------|----|-------------|---------|-------------------|
| 1     | Regression | 33.798         | 1  | 33.798      | 3.244E3 | .000 <sup>a</sup> |
|       | Residual   | .927           | 89 | .010        |         |                   |
|       | Total      | 34.725         | 90 |             |         |                   |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Cultural Beliefs, Language, Taboos and Cultural Values

b. Dependent Variable: Women’s Public Speaking Skills

ANOVA results further shown that aspects of Cultural Beliefs, Language, Taboos and Cultural Values. The table above 4.11 shows the sig value (0.000) less than the level of significance (0.05). The F-statistics (F=3.244) is greater than the P-value (0.000) hence a further confirmation that aspects of Cultural Beliefs, Language, Taboos and Cultural Values is significantly influence the Women’s Public Speaking Skills. Further, the residual value (0.927) is less than the regression value (33.798) which means that aspects of Cultural Beliefs, Language, Taboos and Cultural Values influence Women’s Public Speaking Skills.

### 13 Conclusions

Female gender of the communication partner influenced two aspects of a speaker’s language (i.e., dependent clauses and interruptions), and this occurred regardless of the speaker’s gender. In light of the theories developed to explain a gender’s role in language patterns and role of the communication partner, the data indicate that language may be influenced more by the speaker’s schema of gender norms than by gender characteristics of the speaker. Cultural Beliefs, Language and Taboo have influence Public Speaking Skills in Rwanda. Women probably have a few things they refuse to talk about and still others they do not talk about culture.

Each social group is different from every other in how it behaves in their culture beliefs and mutual respect in the use of language is the basis of friendly mutual communication or public speaking. Perhaps one linguistic universal is that no social group uses language quite at random.

I set out in this work to argue that the influence of language style and gender on perceptions of leadership potential is a function of the interrelationships among gender, language style, and desirable or relevant characteristics of the type of leader sought.

### 14. Recommendations

On the basis of the research findings, the following are Recommendations which if implemented will benefit government and women to stay strongly in the area of culture belief, gender equality and **Public Speaking Skills** to remain stable.

-Continue to implement of international conventions and declarations in the field of culture in line with other human rights instruments and in respect of gender equality and diversity.

-Continue Reinforcement the culture of public speaking of women in different region in Rwanda.

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