

Comprehensive Qualitative Analysis of Women in Educational Leadership and their Impact on Organizational Effectiveness: Exploring Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

This research aimed to explore public opinions regarding women's roles in higher-level educational leadership positions in Pakistan and examine the correlation between managerial leadership styles and organizational performance. This study sheds light on the obstacles female educational leaders face in retaining their positions of authority within the Karachi Sindh province, Pakistan. Additionally, it explores the strategies they employ to navigate these challenges. The qualitative research design with case study used to collect the data from 15 female educational leaders in 07 districts of Karachi, Sindh through semi-structured interviews, field notes, and observations data, specifically from the department of school education managers who are working currently in higher-level leadership roles, in seven districts. The study findings highlight the multitude of challenges these female educational managers encounter in their professional settings, which hinder their effectiveness and efficiency in administrative roles. To address these challenges, the participating female educational leaders identified several effective strategies, including pursuing professional development courses, seeking mentorship, receiving family support, fostering collaboration, and developing a cultural understanding. Moreover, study recommends several measures to empower female educational leaders in effectively addressing these challenges, furthermore, study include the advocating for a mandatory requirement for a degree in educational management and leadership for those in educational leadership roles, this involves establishing an effective onboarding procedure for new leaders and initiating adjustments at the policy level.

Keywords: Structural Arrangements in Organizations; Women in Educational Leadership; Educational Policy Matters; Gender Bias; Coping Strategies.

1. Introduction

female underrepresentation problem in educational administrative roles is one of the many challenges facing the education sector in the territory of Pakistan. While research in the United States (e.g., Lopez, 2008) and Asian contexts (e.g., Shamsodin, Saeed & Shahla, 2012) has shown a connection between Challenges linked to managerial roles and the lack of adequate female representation in leadership positions., studies specifically addressing this issue in Pakistan are limited. This study aims to investigate the obstacles encountered by female leaders when fulfilling their administrative responsibilities in the Department of School Education Government of Sindh Education in Karachi, Pakistan. The primary focus is to assess how these challenges impact their overall efficiency and effectiveness in leadership roles. It's important to note that this research is pioneering in its approach, as it not only delves into the issues faced by female educational leaders in the Sindh province of Pakistan but also provides valuable recommendations for policymakers to address these challenges effectively. To explore the issues concerning female educational leaders, this research aims to address the subsequent inquiries:

1.Which kind of obstacles do female educational leaders encounter in their careers in Karachi, which impede their effectiveness?

- a. How does familial support or lack thereof affect female leaders?
- b. To what extent does their gender present challenges for managerial roles?
- c. How do organizational hierarchies impact female leaders?
- d. Does the absence of adequate professional support and internal networks pose challenges for female leaders?
- e. Are there additional factors contributing to challenges faced by female leaders?

2.. What diverse approaches do female leaders employ to navigate professional obstacles successfully?

2. Literature Review

Although the majority of teachers in the United States are women, as evidenced by studies like Lopez (2008), Skrla et al. (2000), and Wyland (2016), their presence in superintendency and other prominent school management roles remains notably limited. The responsibilities shouldered by women superintendents experienced substantial growth, with their representation reaching 24.1 percent by 2010, as reported by Kowalski et al. (2011). As per data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), approximately 76 percent of educators in the United States were female during the 2011-12 school year. Nonetheless, their presence in leadership positions remains insufficient. Existing research has correlated the inadequate representation of women in leadership roles with various hurdles at multiple tiers, including familial obligations and obstructions (e.g., Barmao, 2013; Coleman, 2012; Derrington & Sharratt, 2009; Miller et al., 2006; Montz & Wanat, 2008; Shamsodin et al., 2012; Niesche & Keddie, 2011; Tallerico & Blount, 2004; Uwizeyimana & Mathevula, 2018), personal impact (Xiang & Ingram, 2017), the shift to leadership positions (e.g., Coleman, 2012; Derrington & Sharratt, 2009; Miller et al., 2006; Montz & Wanat, 2008; Shamsodin et al., 2012), structural and societal elements such as recruitment and gender (e.g., Manfredi et al., 2014; Shepherd, 2017; Yadav & Lata, 2018), and workplace circumstances (e.g., Brunner, 2000; Coleman & Campbell-Stephens, 2010; Gewertz, 2006; Grogan, 2005; Grummell et al.,

2009; Hanan, 2011; Niesche & Keddie, 2011; Palladino et al., 2007; Quilantan & Menchaca-Ochoa, 2004). In brief, bias is based on gender, societal customs, corporate frameworks, structural elements, and familial influences. responsibilities all pose challenges to women's ability not only to attain leadership positions but also to retain them in education and other sectors. Figure 1 in this review illustrates that the fundamental causes of many of the obstacles confronted by women educational leaders, both in acquiring and maintaining managerial positions, are rooted in social practices, cultural norms, community attitudes toward women, and biases among board members.

3.Methodology

This philosophy led us to adopt a qualitative case-study design as the most suitable approach for studying the phenomenon in question (Creswell, 1998; Johnson & Christensen, 2000). Additionally, employing a qualitative methodology for data collection provides a valuable means to explore human perspectives within authentic, real-world contexts. The sample comprises women educational managers currently working in higher-level administrative positions from the Karachi region. A purposive sampling technique was utilized in accordance with the recommendation. Citing alternative sources, Creswell, and Plano Clark from 2011, as well as Teddlie and Yu in 2007, to carefully choose participants for the study as well as the locations for observations and interviews. We intentionally selected 15 female leaders for this purpose. The participants were divided into two distinct groups: the first group consisted of six District Education Officers (DEOs), while the second group included Town education officers (TEOs) assistant directors (ADs), and deputy district education officers (DDOs). District Education Officers (DEOs hold pivotal roles as primary educational administrators within their respective districts, exercising authority over educational decisions, especially those related to girls' education within the political district.

3.1 Data collecting

Various data collection methods were employed to enhance the reliability of the study, as recommended by Yin (1989). These methods included observations, interviews, informal conversations, and reflective memos, which were used to gather data from diverse sources. Fifteen interviews were conducted with research participants from seven districts. The interview durations ranged from a minimum of 20 minutes to a maximum of 60 minutes, depending on the preferences and comfort of the participants. The interviews were conducted in either Urdu or Sindhi languages, based on the participants' choice and ease of communication. Subsequently, the interviews were translated into English for analysis. The first author organized three separate visits with each study participant. During the initial visit, the researchers introduced themselves, explained the study's main purpose, and requested the participant's participation. They also provided the interview questionnaire. The actual interviews took place During the subsequent scheduled meeting. The third visit aimed to observe the participants while they carried out their duties in their natural routine.

4.Data analyses

To analysis, we integrated all our data sources, including field notes from observations, transcriptions of interviews, and recorded journal entries. To gain a more comprehensive

understanding of the overall data, we meticulously reviewed the interviews and other data sources multiple times. Following this initial review, we initiated the coding process to effectively manage the data. In the initial coding phase, we applied open coding techniques, as outlined by Gallicano (2013). Subsequently, a secondary coding phase was carried out to further condense and refine the data. In the second coding cycle, our aim was to establish connections among the codes and transform them into categories and subcategories. We also systematically organized all these categories in a cohesive manner to illustrate the interrelationships among different categories. This organization was presented in the form of themes, which are elaborated upon in the sections that follow.

4.1 Thematic Analysis

Theme 1-The Family's Impact as an Obstacle

When asked about the role of their families in supporting or challenging their educational leadership roles, most participants indicated that their families were indeed supportive of their professional endeavors. Nevertheless, it became evident that the question posed by the researcher held broader implications than initially realized by the educational leaders. In fact, family dynamics also encompassed cultural norms and personal and familial pressures, which influenced their professional lives in unanticipated ways. As a result, we can assert that family unquestionably exerts a significant influence on the professional lives of educational leaders. One women leader provided an illustrative instance of this scenario: ***"Here, you must adhere to long-standing cultural norms, such as the concept of eastern dresses and refraining from occupying the front seat in any vehicle."*** In Muslim society, wearing a burqa and Eastern dresses is a matter of personal choice for women, but one participant felt obligated to do so because she understood that not adhering to these cultural norms could have repercussions for her family.

The female leaders disclosed that they grapple with threats to their families while carrying out their professional duties. For instance, one of the study participants shared her experience of facing severe personal threats for refusing to comply with unreasonable demands from clerks' unions. She explained, ***"We women tend to shield our male family members from official issues,"*** emphasizing that they avoid involving their male relatives in work-related problems. However, some threats prove beyond their control. Another participant had to strike a balance between her family and professional life. She recounted an incident when her family read false allegations about her in a newspaper. They decided to seek retribution from the unions, viewing it as a challenge to their family's honor, even though the matter was purely professional in nature, pertaining to an **"official agenda."** This incident disrupted her family life. These accounts illustrate that these female leaders endeavor to shield themselves from disruptions and may take actions that they might not willingly undertake for the sake of their families. They make efforts to avoid personal and familial threats, including false accusations and allegations of bribery, which inevitably impact their personal lives and families.

Theme 2-Gender Bias as an Obstacle

These participants in the study also encountered the pervasive issue of gender bias within their professional roles. For instance, one participant recounted instances where discrimination arose as male officers often favored the most competent and diligent clerks

among female officers. She elaborated, "***Since most clerks in the education offices are men, they occasionally exert pressure on female managers and exploit inexperienced officers for personal gains.***" Another participant added that the female District Education Officer's office was situated on the third floor, making it uncomfortable for women to work in due to excessive heat. One of them shared her struggles in securing a proper workspace for herself, initially lacking an office because many rooms were occupied by male subordinates. The gender discrimination they face within their workplaces reflects a broader societal issue in Pakistan.

Theme 3. Organizational Structure as an Obstacle

The data unveiled that a significant number of female officers' encounter office-related pressures, particularly when interacting with their superiors. For instance, during one of the interviews conducted by the primary author at a District Education Officer's (DEO) office, which had been scheduled in advance, the DEO was preoccupied with addressing queries from the regional director's office. Consequently, the interview could not take place as planned on that day. On a subsequent visit, she remained unavailable for the interview once again due to ongoing responsibilities in responding to the director's inquiries. These challenges arose during her communication with both the regional administration and her office staff. Furthermore, there are instances when provincial authorities demand a substantial volume of data to be provided within a limited timeframe. Managing this task becomes exceedingly challenging, particularly considering issues like frequent electricity outages and related complications. The educational leaders consistently send information to the regional office, but they are repeatedly asked for the same data. Although the district office is responsible for handling all matters related to teacher transfers, appointments, training, leaves, and other related affairs, they often find themselves compelled to implement decisions imposed by the regional office, posing a significant challenge. One of the participants, while discussing this issue, highlighted the immense internal pressure she faces when dealing with teacher Reassignments and placements within the urban area. Certain female educators aim to secure positions in proximity to their relatives' residences, leading them to approach both educational offices and political leaders to facilitate these transfers. As an illustrative case, it was reported that an officer from the provincial secretariat visited the DEO's office and submitted a transfer application without prior permission. The officer insisted on the transfer, citing a recommendation from the minister, putting pressure on the DEO to carry out the transfer.

Theme 04 Political pressure as a challenge

The officers also encounter difficulties stemming from political leaders, forcing them into a delicate balancing act. They find themselves unable to either disregard political intervention or fully comply, as sometimes it conflicts with established regulations. One of the DEOs openly broached the subject, remarking, "***The extent of political interference is overwhelming. We seem like mere puppets under their control.***" Another women leader, too, grappled with challenges posed by teachers' unions, asserting, "Union members enjoy robust political support, and they insist that we follow their directives, whether they align with ethical principles or not. I am resolute in adhering to what is right." A majority of these officers have reported grappling with political interference while executing their responsibilities.

5. Discussion & Conclusion

In this study, participants reported a range of complex challenges that were interconnected. These challenges can be categorized into three overarching levels:

1. **Personal Level:** This encompasses challenges related to personal competence, personal threats, gender-related issues, and family concerns. It's important to note that these challenges are not necessarily distinguished by their intensity but rather by their connection to a leader's personal life. Gender and family-related challenges fall under this category.
2. **Organizational Level:** These challenges are distinct from personal matters and pertain to issues that may impact female leaders' decisions within their organizations. These challenges do not directly relate to their personal lives but can influence their professional roles.
3. **Cultural Level:** Challenges at this level have a broader and more profound impact than both organizational and personal challenges. They encompass societal norms and social barriers that significantly affect the decisions and experiences of female leaders. Recognizing the interconnected nature of these challenges, the following sections will explore each level of challenges individually and examine the relationships between them in greater depth.

6 Recommendations and Suggestions

Female leaders and managers operate within complex settings, where they are tasked with meeting official, personal, cultural, and political expectations. These environments serve as arenas where they must strive to achieve their visionary goals of effectively leading district education while adhering to cultural norms and avoiding negative consequences. Often, support strategies are crucial in realizing these aspirations. As a result, this study suggests the following tactics to empower and assist female managers in their mission to deliver high-quality education:

1. Teacher training institutes should develop degree programs tailored for aspiring educational leaders, equipping them to shoulder the responsibilities of overseeing district education systems.
2. In-service teacher training institutions, such as PITE and others, need to establish effective recruitment mechanisms for future managers. These training programs can be made more practical by harnessing the skills of current instructors and officers.
3. The secretariat should encourage former managers to closely collaborate with newly appointed managers, ensuring a seamless transition through workplace training.
4. Managers slated for transfer should be provided with ample time to familiarize themselves with the specifics of the district they are relocating to.
5. Policymakers should craft policies that guarantee job security and autonomy for district leaders. For example, depoliticizing education processes, including enrollment, transfers, and appointments, is essential.
6. Replacing bureaucracy that hinders education with democratic leadership practices should be a gradual process, as an immediate overhaul could disrupt the system. This transition necessitates expertise, an open-minded approach, sufficient resources, and time.
7. Managers' transfers should be rationalized to prevent the undue influence of politicians and bureaucracy from interfering with the process.
8. Rather than conducting recruitment on a province-wide basis, the selection of managers should be done at the district level, and this should be clearly stated in the

recruitment advertisements.

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