



RESEARCH PAPER

Women's Role in Educational Leadership: Opportunities, Barriers and Strategies for Success at Primary School

¹Eqan Waqas ²Tehreem Fatima and ³Dr Gulnaz Akbar

1. BS Student, Department of Educations, Govt. College Women University Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan
2. BS Student, Department of Educations, Govt. College Women University Sialkot, Punjab, Punjab, Pakistan
3. Lecturer, Department of Educations, Govt. College Women University Sialkot, Punjab, Punjab, Pakistan

*Corresponding Author

tehreemf022@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to explore the opportunities available for women in higher positions in educational institutions, to understand the challenges they face, and to examine the strategies they have adopted to become successful leaders. In which data was collected from four head teachers using purposive sampling, including three government head teachers and one private head teacher. The purpose of this research is to explore the challenges women face in reaching higher positions in educational institutions, such as social expectations, gender discrimination, limited decision-making authority, harassment, balancing work and household responsibilities, restrictions on doing jobs, and lower salaries compared to men. It's a qualitative research, Data was collected from head teachers through interviews using a questionnaire consisting of 14 questions. All head teachers agreed that they face challenges in maintaining discipline in schools, dealing with gender discrimination, having limited decision-making authority as female leaders, and most importantly, balancing job and household responsibilities. In addition, they also agreed that men are paid higher salaries than women, not in the government sector but in the private sector. In the government sector, men and women receive equal salaries. The study suggests that educational institutions hold additional workshops to improve teachers' pedagogical understanding and communication abilities in context with these findings. We also came to the conclusion that women's are capable of becoming successful leaders, but the system does not fully support them. The research suggests that training opportunities should be expanded, gender discrimination should be eliminated, and women should be supported so that they can effectively manage both household and job responsibilities and emerge as successful female leaders.

KEYWORDS

Women in Educational Leadership, Women Leadership, Women Empowerment

Introduction

Most of the areas, currently a lots of women represent as teachers. On the other hand, leadership functions, such as principals, supervision, and leaders of department, are still primarily organized by men in most of the areas. In society which have strong historical views, leadership hand over by men, which can lay down the women's strength and importance in the field of education. Research recommended us that with in the presentation is because of the mixture of different cause, including fix ideas in the context of ownership, male and female functions in public, hardships with stabilizing their

professional and personal life, and an absence of conventional ownership coaching for ladies at the level of basic school. According to the historical education research that was the severe problem. When ladies are not represented well in the field of education, the selection of leadership ways and opinion accessible to schools is shortest at the level of primary school. A different group of leaders different ideas and techniques, that may assist schools improved achieve need and requirements of students and other shareholders. On the conversely, if leadership is too alike, it may restrict the opportunity for new ideas of thoughts and comprehensive training. Student's assessment set up that fostering male and female equity in leadership improve the skills of decision-making, support expand recent ways, and helps extra comprehensive surrounding at the level of primary school.

Literature Review

As the establishment of private educational institutions has increased in Pakistan, the number of women entering the education sector has also increased. These women have not only emerged as teachers but are also performing their responsibilities effectively in various leadership positions. According to research conducted by Gallup Pakistan (2023), which analyzed data collected by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2021) from 2010 to 2020, the number of female teachers increased by 57.3% at the primary level, 72.8% at the middle level, and 61.2% at the high school level. The study also showed a significant change in the employment rate of women in higher education. There is still no information available about women in leadership positions in the Government of Pakistan (GoP) statistics (2017, 2021). In addition, data related to women's teaching and leadership positions at all levels in private and public educational institutions is still not available. Although women are working in leadership positions in girls' primary, elementary, and secondary schools, the number of female heads in educational institutions where both boys and girls study is very low because these positions are usually occupied by men.

Research has indicated that if we talk about South Asia, the population of women and men there is almost equal (49% women and 51% men), the participation of women in employment and education is much lower than that of men. However, there are signs of improvement and the number of women in educational institutions and employment has increased. Due to this, women have been provided with employment opportunities that were previously considered only for men. Furthermore, it is also a fact that most women still work in the informal sector and their salaries are much lower than those of men (Strachan & Adikaram, 2023). Women were generally considered suitable for teaching and medicine, but even in these fields, women do not have sufficient opportunities to reach senior or mid-level leadership positions.

According to the Human Development Report (2020), Pakistan's Gender Inequality Index (GII) is 0.538, and Pakistan ranks 135th out of 162 countries in terms of gender inequality, while Bangladesh ranks 133rd and India ranks 123rd (2019). Research shows that in the past, men were given preference over females (in education and employment), but this trend is gradually changing. Currently, the difference between the male and female population is almost equal (World Bank, 2019, 2022).

Challenges and Barriers Faced by Women in Educational Leadership

Studies have shown that women face several challenges in reaching educational leadership positions. These challenges include social, organizational, and individual barriers. Due to traditional social norms, women are often kept away from educational leadership roles because they face traditional gender bias and an additional burden of household responsibilities.

Societal and Cultural Barriers

The biggest challenge for women in educational leadership is maintaining a balance between home and work. This is because social norms and traditional gender roles usually consider only women responsible for household and family duties, which is why most of the burden is placed on women. It is expected of women to adopt a leadership style that has been in place for centuries, making it difficult for them to play an effective leadership role to their potential (Wang & Wang, 2021; and Wang, 2024).

Work-Life Balance, organizational Climate, and Policy Environments:

The literature review shows that executive roles in educational institutions is a demanding job. It usually includes working overtime, traveling from one city to another or even from one country to another for work, and taking part in social and networking activities after office hours, similar to part-time work. For women, it is difficult to maintain a balance between job responsibilities and household responsibilities. Because of this, they are often unable to achieve leadership positions successfully.

Bias in Hiring and Promotion

The third barrier is the preference for male candidates over female candidates during promotion and recruitment in educational institutions. Women in educational leadership mostly face this obstacle. Furthermore, research shows that during hiring and promotion decisions, female candidates are judged more strictly than male candidates, and their qualifications, experience, and leadership skills are examined in greater detail. In addition, most hiring committees and development boards are dominated by men, where there is a higher chance that, consciously or unconsciously, male candidates may be preferred over equally qualified female candidates. Moreover, very few women are able to become part of these decision-making boards (Ghimire, 2023).

Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is a major barrier for women in achieving higher educational leadership positions (Phillips, 2020). It is a highly sensitive form of gender-based violence that exists at all levels and can even be found in environments that are considered safe and open (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020). In particular, women leaders who manage to reach positions of authority in educational institutions face this issue.

A study conducted among female supervisors in the United States, Japan, and Sweden shows that women who usually work under male supervisors experience more incidents of sexual harassment (more than 30%) compared to those who work under female supervisors. These incidents include sexual comments, insulting language, catcalling, jokes, and inappropriate remarks. Several studies also show that more than one quarter of women who report harassment file complaints against men who hold senior positions in their organizations, and such behavior often prevents women from successfully reaching senior management positions.

Lack of Mentorship

For leadership roles and professional growth, proper guidance and mentorship are very important. However, in Pakistan, women have very limited access to such support. Due to the lack of proper mentorship, women face significant difficulties in reaching higher

positions in the education sector. Research shows that guidance is an important factor in professional growth, but women are usually given very limited access to such institutions and support systems compared to men (Madsen, Longman & Daniels, 2020). As a result, women leaders find it difficult to understand the complexities of leadership roles and miss important opportunities for development.

Gender Diversity

Gender diversity is considered a valuable asset. Due to its increasing importance, various steps are being taken to promote women's leadership (Burkinshaw & White, 2024). Many educational organizations are implementing strategies and policies that help women achieve leadership positions, such as leadership development training, networking programs, and family-friendly workplace policies (2020). These measures play an effective role in the development of both women and institutions. However, policy making and advocacy play an important role in addressing the challenges faced by female academic leaders and in expanding their opportunities.

Material and Methods

The present research is qualitative study by nature whose main objective is to examine women's higher leadership roles in primary-level educational institutions. This study employed Phenomenological design. The Phenomenological research is a qualitative approach aimed to exploring and understanding individuals' "**lived experiences**". This study also explores the challenges they face. For this study, women holding leadership positions in public and private educational institutions in Sialkot were selected. The aim of the study was to find out what barriers women face in reaching leadership positions and it identifies what strategies need to be adopted to overcome these challenges and what strategies are necessary to become a successful leader. In this study, Purposive Sampling technique was used to select participants who were directly linked to the research topic. The following criteria helped in selecting individuals who had relevant experience in educational leadership positions. A sample consist of 4 Female Principals were selected from different government and private primary schools. A semi structured interview protocol was developed for data collection. The interview protocol was consisted of 14 questions, which were designed to explore three main aspects of the research: Barriers, Opportunities, and Strategies. The data collection process was completed very carefully and respectfully. Each participant was contacted individually, and the purpose of the research was explained to them clearly and effectively. Their full consent was taken before conducting the interviews. For the analysis of the collected data, first all interview recordings were transcribed. After that, the researcher carefully read the data several times in detail to fully understand the responses. Then use thematic analysis process to interpret the data, to identify the main themes and findings related to the three main aspects of the study.

Results and Discussion

Theme 1: Challenges of School Leadership

As head teachers, they face many challenges. These include making sure that a maximum number of students are enrolled in the school, maintaining discipline, completing the syllabus on time, supervising teachers, staying aware of their activities, and motivating them to work better. They also have to manage school accounts, supervise clerical staff, take care of school security, handle office work, check teachers' attendance, solve their problems, and review their responsibilities. In addition, they face challenges

such as maintaining educational quality, using limited resources effectively, improving students' behavior, creating a positive learning environment, and maintaining good communication between parents and teachers. They also need to stay updated with new educational policies and technology for themselves and the school.

Other challenges include balancing home and professional responsibilities, traveling from one city to another for work, meeting the expectations of staff and parents, providing activity-based learning to students, lack of financial resources, and low awareness about the importance of education. Changing the traditional mindset of parents so they become open to new ideas, especially training mothers, is also a challenge.

Theme 2: Gender Bias and Social Expectations

Most participants agree that female teachers face gender bias, which negatively affects their responsibilities. However, some participants working in government institutions do not fully agree with this. In their opinion, gender bias is mostly faced by head teachers working in private schools. They believe that head teachers in government educational institutions do not face this problem because government schools mostly have female staff.

Theme 3: Limited Authority and Decision-Making Power

Most participants have acknowledged that, as women in institutions, their decision-making authority is limited. She also agrees that, as a woman, her decisions are often not accepted. In contrast, if the same decisions are made by men, they are appreciated and valued more than those made by women.

Theme 4: Opportunities for Women in Leadership

All head teachers agree that such opportunities are available in their schools that help them become successful leaders.

Theme 5: Importance of Training and Mentoring

All head teachers agree that mentoring, training, and networking help women develop skills, increase their motivation, and keep their abilities updated. These factors play an important role in preparing women for leadership. They also give women the opportunity to learn from experienced people, which improves their decision-making, confidence, and problem-solving skills. Overall, all these factors play an important role in becoming a successful leader.

Theme 6: Personal Strategies to Overcome Challenges

The participants shared different personal strategies they use to manage barriers and challenges in The participants mentioned different personal strategies to handle barriers and challenges in leadership roles. These include honesty, integrity, good management, communication skills, discipline, proper planning, teamwork, problem-solving skills, patience, and perseverance. They said that barriers do exist, but they have overcome them because of their leadership qualities.

Theme 7: Importance of Staff Support and Teamwork

All head teachers agree that they receive full support from their staff, which helps them become effective leaders. All head teachers agree that they receive full support from

their staff, which helps them become effective leaders. If there is no support from the staff, the principal faces difficulties in moving forward and cannot implement strategies and policies effectively. Their staff is very cooperative, and the main reason is that they have created an environment where everyone supports each other fully. In addition, when teachers and the school administration work together, it becomes easier to implement decisions and manage the school system effectively. Cooperation among teachers, school administrators, and parents, along with mutual trust and positive communication, not only helps reduce problems but also improves the overall performance of the school.

Theme 8: Educational Policies and Government Support

Most participants believe that educational policies and government initiatives help improve their leadership abilities. These factors are very important in helping women become successful leaders. According to them, they learn a great deal from mentorship workshops, which play an effective role in developing their leadership skills and supporting their success as leaders. These policies not only provide training and professional development opportunities for female educational leaders but also create a fair system that helps strengthen their leadership abilities. In addition, they build women's confidence and enable them to move forward and make better decisions. Government institutions follow an open merit system, through which both men and women are given equal opportunities for recruitment in their respective fields. This is considered a positive step by the government.

Theme 9: Balancing Career and Family Responsibilities

All head teachers agree that they face difficulties in balancing their professional and family responsibilities. These responsibilities include taking proper care of their children, giving them time, ensuring their education and upbringing, managing household tasks, spending quality time with their husbands, and handling the additional duties that come with being a head teacher. In addition, they also face challenges such as lack of time, mental stress, and fatigue. However, with proper planning, family cooperation, and strong support, they are able to manage these responsibilities to a large extent. Even so, balancing all these duties remains a major challenge for them.

Theme 10: Society's Objections to Working Women

Almost all head teachers say that they have not faced such opposition or objections from their families, and their families have fully supported them. However, they agree that in society there are still some people who think that women should not do jobs and that a woman's place is at home, where she looks more "appropriate." But now, as people are becoming more educated, this awareness is increasing that women should be independent.

Theme 11: Perception that Men are Better Leaders

According to all head teachers, this is just an assumption. If a female candidate is more capable than a male candidate, or vice versa, then the most suitable person for the position gets the job easily. In their view, in the present time there is no bias between men and women, and institutions consider both as equal. However, according to some head teachers, gender discrimination still exists, but they believe it is not justified. Because of this discrimination, women often have to prove their abilities again and again, which can demotivate them. On the other hand, men are more easily considered suitable for leadership positions, and sometimes preference is given to male candidates instead of

female candidates. They also agree that leadership does not depend only on gender. It also depends on skills, experience, leadership abilities, confidence, and performance.

Theme 12: Qualities of a Successful Leader

The participants said that a successful leader should have certain important qualities. A leader should have a friendly and supportive attitude toward school staff and should create a comfortable and positive environment where everyone can freely share their ideas. If staff need help, they should be fully supported, and their problems should be solved properly. In addition, qualities such as honesty, vision, patience, confidence, communication skills, and decision-making ability play an important role in making a good leader. A good leader should also have critical thinking skills. All of these qualities are necessary to become a good and successful leader. A leader should make careful decisions and stay consistent with them, because changing decisions again and again can reduce people's trust. Empathy is also very important so that a leader can understand people's situations and help them. A leader should know how to motivate and empower their team and create a positive environment among them.

Theme 13: Gender Pay Gap

All head teachers agree that in the private sector, women are paid less than men because they often ask for lower salaries than men. It is generally believed that managing household expenses is not mainly a woman's responsibility, so even if they are paid less, they accept it because they are considered only a supporting role. As a result, women are sometimes satisfied with lower salaries. However, in the public sector, salaries are based on a fixed scale, so men and women are paid equally. In private institutions, however, women are often paid less than men.

Findings

Most of the leaders told us their daily routine responsibilities was too much hectic. These routine includes managing teachers work, deciding schedule, financially calculation, rules of school and the monitoring of curriculum. They also face the parent teacher meetings. The participants were confirmed that the leadership was not limited to the studies and curriculum but also burden of higher authorities. Some participants highlighted that the higher authorities were limited their decision-making skills they were not independent to make decisions for schools without the permission of head authorities.

Most participants highlight the gender bias that give negative impact on the skills of leadership. This problem also effects the environment of school and performance of the female leaders. They explain that society was never considered that they were working on the men dominant place she told us work more than men and they have abilities to male leaders are not expected to.

All participants confirmed that the official trainings for leadership helps to impose system. This training helps to improve decision making skill, encourage leaders to perform their responsibilities well. Most of the heads told us trains included workshops online training center was effective for their leadership style.

Most of the participants identified the presence of supportive colleagues, family members, and institutional leadership as a decisive factor in their ability to perform effectively. They noted that having cooperative staff who actively participated in solving

institutional problems created a shared sense of ownership and significantly reduced the individual burden on the school leader.

Without any hesitation all participants explain that they face a lot of problems to managing school's curriculum professional domestic and the responsibilities of staff and teachers they also face the burden from high authorities. All participants are explained that the leadership was not the difficult or hectic task but the problem was male dominant society. Men never considered women as equal to them. They told us we also face society pressure to leave the position.

Some participants face student's problems because in the government sector every type of student were available, they explain that some students are emotionally hurt because their parents were working so the students become emotionally damaged due to the lack of parent's attention.

Most of the participants explained some personal characteristics that were most important for the becoming of leaders. In the interviews majority participants explained these characteristics such as good communication skills, understanding of emotions, patience, courage and honesty were considering the most important characteristics.

Discussion

The present study aimed to identify the challenges they face, to investigate the opportunities, to explore the strategies which can help them become successful leaders at the primary school level. Study findings revealed that This study shows that female leaders face many administrative challenges. The most significant challenges are gender bias and maintaining a work-life balance. If women are provided with equal opportunities to men in both the public and private sectors, along with flexible working hours and daycare facilities, these measures can help them become successful leaders at the primary school level. In addition, mentoring and training are very important for becoming a successful leader. Educational institutions and the government should provide mentoring and training opportunities for female leaders from time to time. This will help keep their skills and knowledge up to date and support them in becoming successful female leaders at the primary school level. In addition, staff support is very important for achieving your goals. A constructive and assistance staff encourage female leaders to strengthen their work outcomes and work more efficiently. This encouragement helps them grow occupationally and become more accomplished in their leadership functions. Leadership attributes also play a significant role in developing a woman a successful primary school leader. A successful leader should have strong communication skills, tolerance, sincerity, and reliability. She should also have excellent judgement abilities and know how to work effectively as part of a group. These attributes help female leaders overcome difficulties and perform their leadership functions effectively.

Conclusion

Women have the capability to become accomplished educational administrators at primary school level. However, if gender discrimination is decreased and appropriate coaching, training, and work-life balance possibilities are provided, these elements can together help women become more successful and efficient leaders.

Recommendations

- District and provincial educational administration should enhance present leadership training schemes so that all female primary school principals and upcoming leaders can receive systematic and excellent professional coaching. These schemes should be offered at adjustable times or through flexible strategies so that women can easily participate while also handling their domestic duties , as this study found that domestic duties are a significant obstacle to their professional participation.
- In addition, mentoring programs should be officially established at the district level to link newly appointed female principals with skilled senior leaders. This will provide them with continues guidance and professional assistance , as many female leaders presently do not have approach to such services .
- School administrators and education departments should review and reform organizational structures that limit the decision-making power of female school leaders. Administrative rule that need female principals to request approval for regular work professional decisions, or that channel society influence through unified channels that bypass formal leadership administration , should be identified and addressed.
- Education departments should set up clear complaints mechanisms through which women leaders can report cases of gender discrimination , power contestation, or workplace stress without fear of professional consequences.
- Education administration should analyze realistic administrative strategies intended to reduce the undue house hold responsibilities manage by women school leaders. These could include the work plans of economical and accessible day care focused connected to schools or school teams, the enforcement of flexible working contracts for leadership post where attainable , and the formulations of official duties administration guidance that establish realistic requirements for what school principals are required to complete within normal working hours.

References

- Bondestam, F., & Lundqvist, M. (2020). Sexual harassment in higher education—A systematic review. *European Journal of Higher Education*, 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21568235.2020.1729833>
- Burkinshaw & White (2024). Advancing gender parity in educational leadership: Insights from selected secondary schools in Shinyanga Municipality. *Journal of Management and Policy Issues in Education*. doi:10.58548/2024.jmpie11.5670
- Gallup Pakistan. (2023). Gallup Pakistan analysis of Pakistan Bureau of Statistics data. <https://gallup.com.pk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/social-indicators-2021-percentage-of-female-teachers-for-levels-of-education.pdf>
- Ghimire (2023). Challenges facing women in school leadership positions: At community schools in Lalitpur Nepal. *Pragyaaratna*, 5(1), 216-224. doi:10.3126/pragyaaratna.v5i1.59290
- Madsen, S. R., Longman, K. A., & Daniels, J. R. (2020). Women's leadership development in higher education: Conclusion and implications for HRD. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 22(2), 248-263.
- Phillips, S. P. (2020). When will it ever end? And how? Sexual harassment of female medical faculty. *EClinicalMedicine*, 20, 100304. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eclinm.2020.100304>
- Strachan, G., & Adikaram, A. S. (2023). Women's work in South Asia: Reflections on the past decade. *South Asian Journal of Human Resources Management*, 10(2), 244-255. doi:10.1177/23220937231198381
- UNESDOC Digital Library (2020). *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Gender Report, A new generation: 25 years of Efforts for Gender Equality in Education*. UNESDOC Digital Library.
- Wang & Wang (2021). How female students are "educated" to retreat from leadership: An example from the Chinese schooling context. *Education as Change*. doi:10.25159/1947-9417/8616
- Wang (2024). A gender role perspective on women's leadership in Chinese higher education. *International Journal of Engineering Pedagogy*. doi:10.3991/ijep.v14i3.48497
- World Bank. (2019). Women, business and the law 2019: A decade of reform. World Bank.
- World Bank. (2022). *Population, total - South Asia*. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=8S>