

The Challenges of Educational Leadership: A Feminist Perspective Lens

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Abstract

Women as leaders have been facing challenges in workplace as well as at homes. However, the focus of this research is to explore the challenges which women face in different leadership and managerial positions in public and private organizations in Gilgit-Baltistan. Employing qualitative research method, data was collected from eight (8) females who were in leadership and management positions in different public and private organizations in the context of Gilgit-Baltistan. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect the data. The analysis of the data showed that women mostly face challenges regarding their job related duties due to household responsibilities, stereotypes of the masses about their abilities to manage public administration and the lack of equal opportunities for promotions and rewards as compared to their male counterparts in the organizations. It is recommended that both public and private organizations should develop women friendly policies to provide equal opportunities so as to facilitate them in their job responsibilities.

Keywords: Leadership, Management, Challenges, Organizations, Stereotypes, Feminist Lens.

Introduction

Women have been in workplace for many years across the globe and have made great contributions in their fields. The participation of women in all spheres of life is considered essential in meeting the challenges of the century. However, the stereotypes related to women leadership roles have extensively impacted the workplace, as women role in the workplace has been considered as caregivers and nurturers and rarely seen them as leaders. The issue remained connected with the definitions of leadership with attached attributions and traits purely based on masculinity as it had remained the norm that leadership roles requires the attributes and qualities of hero-centric personality of men. Women were attributed with the characteristics of sympathy, communal, expressive, and supportive and so on, therefore, it was thought that they lack the aggressive characteristics required for the leaders to lead in different situations. It is also believed that the beliefs which were deep-rooted long ago still influence the beliefs and decisions whether women should be placed in leadership positions, especially in male dominants cultures and organizations.

In spite of the challenging work, women have made their way in the workplace, small positions in small enterprises to the highest positions of the heads of the governments in different countries. For example, in

1960 Sirimavo Bandaranaike was elected as the first prime minister of Sri Lanka. In 1988, Benazir Bhutto becomes the first prime minister of Pakistan. Similarly, Dr. Fehmida Mirza became the first female speaker of South Asia. In the modern world, there are around 70 countries, which have had the head of their government or a state, a woman for a period of at least one to five years (World Economic Forum, 2020). For instance, in 2017, Sheikh Hasina completed her 13 years as prime minister of Bangladesh while Ellen Johnson Sirleaf had her 11 years as president of Liberia. Currently, in United Nation member states, there are twenty member states having women as heads of the government or states.

One of the important areas in which women have proven their abilities, is the leadership and management as they bring and add values to the professions such as social attitudes and communication, intuition, strategic planning, respect, and so on. Such women have also proven other qualities of leadership and management, that is, innovators, exceptional thinkers, risk takers, and so on. Though women have proven their capabilities and capacities in all spheres of life, especially in leadership and management professions and positions, still, they have been facing discrimination at home as well as at societal levels. While, the focus of social research has remained on the gender inequalities in different fields of life, however, the gender inequalities, issues and challenges in organizational leadership and management has remained overlook sadly (Qadir, 2019). A few studies conducted on women participation in leadership and management shows that women participation in management related jobs have increased, however, their progress in management jobs has not taken pace in accordance with the sufficient increase in working women number. Their representation in the senior positions of management has remained negligible. In addition, the women who secured the top positions of leaders and managers in the organizations have also been discriminating. They face challenges very starting from homes as there might be family and cultural norms which may exert pressure not to opt leadership and managerial positions in male dominant organizations. Similarly, an unsupportive and inhospitable culture of an organization may also make obstacles for women in different management and leadership positions.

Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is manifold. Firstly, the current research will provide contextual knowledge about the challenges women in educational leadership face – something which has not sufficiently been explored yet. This knowledge will be an addition to the existing body knowledge on the challenges, women face in practicing leadership in both public and private organizations. Secondly, the study will have an organizational importance for both the women in leadership as well as the policy makers of the organizations as it will provide insights into the current practices and challenges of women in leadership. The knowledge could be used in study and reduce the challenges faced by women leaders in different organizations across Pakistan in general and in Gilgit-Baltistan in particular. Thirdly, the study will be a foundation for the researchers who may take similar researches in the future. Fourthly, the results of the study may provide an opportunity for the policy makers to reflect on the existing policies and practices in their organizations, especially about the gender equity and equality and may device gender friendly and gender sensitive policies so that the women in leadership positions can be facilitated as much as possible. Lastly, the study will enhance the understanding of the researchers about the role of women in leadership position and some of the major challenges they face in the organization where they work.

Research Questions

The following are the research questions.

What are the major challenges women face in leadership positions in the context of Gilgit-Baltistan?
How do the women in leadership positions overcome those challenges which they face in the leadership positions?

Literature Review

This review discusses the concept of gender and leadership with specific reference to females as leaders. Furthermore, this review unveils the major barriers women encountered at leading positions. It also explicates how we can overcome these barriers through support at the workplace.

Gender and Leadership

The primary objective of leadership is to accomplish the targets of the organizations through its followership using a diverse range of styles such as guiding, facilitating, enabling, empowering and accommodating followers (Qutoshi, & Poudel, 2014). Leader has to lead and support the people of the organization with the certain level of knowledge, skills and a positive attitude. Furthermore, to achieve the objectives, leaders use and create different leadership models, styles, strategies and techniques etc. (Northouse, 2018). In addition, research shows that female and male can equally perform regardless of gender at workplace in the leading positions when they are equipped with opportunities and relevant skills.

However, according to Global Gender Report by WEF (2016), in Norway and Iceland females in both political and non-political leading positions are serving effectively. Moreover, it has been found that women at leading positions often face gender-based discrimination (Ely, Ibarra & Kolb, 2011), even if they are equally or more qualified than their male colleagues (Williams, 2019). It is because of the perception that females are considered as less suitable for leadership positions and managerial roles. However, such trends do not have any logical or scholastic value in itself. Therefore, to successfully initiate and implement gender free leadership in the workplace depends strongly on the equal representation of male and females.

Female as Leaders

From household chores to managerial roles, in every aspect of life, female have been contributing very positively. However, it seems difficult for every working women to keep a balance between personal as well as family life and work-related life where they are serving at the leading position. Exploring perspectives of several female managers and leaders Williams (2019) concluded that the females, who are leaders, possess leadership qualities too, that is, analysis, emotional intelligence, communication skills, management skills, problem-solving strategies and interpersonal skills, and so on. Furthermore, research carried out worldwide has supported that females are better leaders with all potentials (Hryniewicz & Vianna, 2018). On the other hand, a study conducted by Eagly and Carli (2003) depicted no significant differences between the perceptions and practices of male and female leaders.

After interviewing 15 females at leading positions, Hryniewicz and Vianna (2018) concluded that females are demanded to struggle more and work harder than males to prove herself as a leader. Moreover, research (Nikolaou, 2017) suggests that females are expected to be notable leaders in the coming century as they are naturally more consistent and social than male counterparts.

Barriers to Female Leaders

Studies show that there are a number of barriers to women leaders, such as the disparity in wages, maternal responsibilities, and lack of networking, socio-cultural barriers, gender discrimination, and balance between family and work, gender specific challenges and time management issues were some of the underlying hurdles females face at the leadership position in the workplace (Nikolaou, 2017). Moreover, in the context of Brazil, Hryniewicz and Vianna (2018) found that along with several challenges, females are also under-represented at leading positions. Pillinger and Wintour (2019) found the biggest challenge for working females is to keep a balance in their private/ family life and public/ official life. Another major barrier that

influence the leadership opportunities of females is the burden of household chores (Black, Guest, Bagnol, Braaten & Laven, 2019). Furthermore, females also encounter mobility issues in the public places. Mobility and movement is commonly linked with males while females are associated with limited mobility (Cook & Butz, 2019). Female leaders' major hurdle to opportunities is the lack of acceptance by the coworkers at public administration positions (Puteh, Mohamad & Syahirah, 2018). Hence, female leaders in majority context face many challenges in workplace and females consider it a biggest challenge to overcome along with all their sociocultural limits. Therefore, to overcome certain barriers that females faced at workplace they need support.

Overcoming Barriers to Female Leaders

Literature suggests that female at leading positions are vulnerable to many challenges and issues (Hryniewicz & Vianna, 2018). Many studies show that despite difficulties number of females are able to reach at leading position for instance Statistics Canada (2012) depicted that in Canada the percentage of females on all senior management positions is 22% and, on all management, positions its 35.4%. In addition, females held 26.5% of senior management positions and 36.9% of management positions in USA (Catalyst, 2007). However, the rate of female progression is slow than their counterparts. To make substantial change in promoting women, it is imperative that females have opportunities to overcome those barriers through skill development and growth (Korn Ferry Institute, 2013). Human Resource (HR) departments must play a significant role (Singh, Ragins & Tharenou, 2009). Female are provided with opportunities to expand their knowledge and practices with emotional intelligence, mentorship, networking and leadership skills.

Moreover, for any organization it is crucial to develop a culture that supports work-life balance approach to female leaders. An institute with a supportive environment that encourages women to not feel uncomfortable when trying to balance different life roles will be considered a top employment contender in the future (Hewlett, 2002; Williams, 2019). Besides, organization needs to adopt more equitable salary packages to men and women regardless of their gender.

It is concluded that leadership positions are equally challenging and beneficial for females. Literature proved that female feel empowered and self-confident to be at a managerial position. However, literature also reveals that there are so many barriers being faced by females at such high positions. Despite having several challenges females are proved to be world's best leaders too (Williams, 2019). Finally, in any context around the world females should be provided with adequate resources, administrative support and opportunities to encourage them to be successful leaders.

Methodology

The aim of the study was to explore the challenges faced by women in leadership and management positions in different public and private organizations in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Research Design

As the study aimed at exploring the challenges faced by women in leadership and management positions in different public and private organizations in Gilgit-Baltistan, therefore, a qualitative methodology is adopted as it best suited in achieving the objectives of the study (Harrison, Birks, Franklin & Mills, 2017; Yin, 2017). A qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews can better help researchers in exploring in-depth and rich contextual experiences of the participants. The phenomena being studied using a case study approach would not possible through a quantitative research approach (Yin, 2003, 2015, 2018). Thus, in current research, the questions contained the words, like how and why, the case study was one of the appropriate methods to be employed (Yin 2003, 2018).

Participants Recruitment Strategy

The study included eight (8) women from age range of 30 to 70 years who held or recently hold any leadership or management position in a public or private organization in the context. Thus, the researchers selected eight (8) women leaders through the technique of “consecutive sampling”. A consecutive sampling is “very similar to convenience sampling except that it seeks to include all accessible subjects as part of the sample” as it was difficult to find more than eight in the context because of the non-availability of women leaders (Maheshwari, 2017, p.1). The sample size was also sufficient for the saturation of the data in the context of Gilgit-Baltistan. The criteria of inclusion were that the participants should be in top leadership or management position in any public or private organization.

A snowball sampling strategy was used to identify the potential and accessible participants (Neuman, 2014). In additions, personal contacts were also used for recruiting the participants. The first selected participants helped in finding other potential participants for the study. The participants were then contacted through phone calls and emails and requested for the participation in the study. They were sent important information about the study and consent form.

Data Collection

For the data collection, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Interview guide was prepared for interviews. The interview guide contained 10 questions with a number of probes and prompts for each question. However, on-the-spot probes and prompts differed from participant to participant because of the nature of responses of the participants. Each participant was consulted for the setting of the interviews. They were also requested for the consent to audiotape the interviews. Notes were also taken during the interviews.

Data Analysis

The data analysis started during the data collection process. The data was collected till a saturation point reached. For the meaning making from the data analysis process, a number of steps were followed. Firstly, during the data analysis process, the audiotapes of each interview and the notes were transcribed and typed in Microsoft Word. For the transcription, the audiotapes were listened several times and each and every word of the interviewees was noted down. Secondly, in cases where the words were not clear in the audiotapes, interviewees were contacted again. The typed transcripts were also shared with the participants to verify whatever was written was what they said and meant. Thirdly, the transcriptions were read several times to explore patterns and trends. Words, phrases and even sentences were explored which were meaningful in addressing the research questions. Such segments of data were recorded for further analysis. The patterns and trends were, and then labeled using different descriptive words suitable for the segments based on the nature of the patterns (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Fourthly, the categories of codes were put in a proper order and listed on the basis of the nature of the categories of the codes. Lastly, similar codes were merged together, and themes were generated based on the nature of the merged codes and keeping in view the research questions. Each theme was then described and explained briefly and evidences in the form of direct quotations from the transcriptions were taken (Qutoshi & Paudel, 2014).

Findings and Discussion

The findings of the analysis have been arranged on the basis of the themes emerged from the data. The important themes appeared from the data are, (i) household responsibilities, (ii) stereotypes about the abilities to manage public administration and (iii) lack of opportunities of rewards and promotions, (iv) lack of acceptance of women in public administration positions, and (v) issues of mobility.

Household Responsibilities

From the analysis of the interviews of the participants, the major challenge which most of the participants reported was handling the household responsibilities with their management duties. Four of the participants shared that they have extended families as the parents of their husbands and other siblings live with them, which is a challenging thing for them to fulfill all those responsibilities. Along with management responsibilities, they need to take care of the families as well. The family's responsibilities include cooking at homes, taking care of children, washing clothes, visiting markets for food items and grocery, frequently visiting relatives and neighbors with the family on different religious and local events and occasions and so on. Hryniewicz and Vianna (2018) have also explored the same issue in their study in which they found that women spent most of the time of a week in household chores. When it comes to taking care of the families, especially the children when they are sick, it becomes the sole responsibilities of the mother to take care of the children. One of the participants also shared that "when my younger daughter was ill, I had to spend three nights awaked with the daughter as she kept on weeping the whole nights". She further explained that "in the morning, I had to attend my job as managing the daily activities of the office that was one of my major responsibilities..." (Interview, October 2019). Jang and Zippay (2011) argue that some of the roles which women have chosen by themselves to perform while there are other roles which are socially forced to undertake. Similarly, such women also experience a number of different roles, conflicts among these roles may also arise and the roles varies in nature may not fit with one other. Hence, such women may also experience overload of roles. Hryniewicz and Vianna (2018) further argued that sometimes, because of the social and family pressure, women may give more importance to their roles and responsibilities of the family; the likelihood of the promotion of women in different leadership positions also gets decreased.

Stereotypes about the Abilities to Manage Public Administration

One of the important findings of the study was the perception of coworkers about the ability of women in leadership in managing the public administration and public dealing. According to the participants, most of their coworkers think that women cannot manage administrative tasks which require the lot of public dealing and taking decisions related to issues and problems faced by the public. One of the participants shared that "when I started my job as a local leader in public administration, I was not taken in the loop whenever a public issue rose". She further shared her narrative that "subordinates used to inform my male colleagues about the issues although it was my responsibility to address those issues". She went on adding that "later on, when I started getting direct information about the public issues, I managed well instead of their interference in my work..." (Interview, October 2019).

Lack of Opportunities for Promotions and Rewards

Results of analysis revealed that women in leadership positions are deprived of a number of opportunities of work as well as promotion based on gendered stereotypes. For instance, two of the participants shared that they are lagged behind from many opportunities of work, promotion and rewards based on such thinking that they would not be able to manage the activities and tasks properly. One of them shared her story of promotion and said, "I was in the first number in seniority of service for a district level position of management, however, I was not given the position only because I am a woman and based on the stereotype that it would be difficult for me to face the public on the daily basis and manage the district level activities". She further added that, "a male colleague of my office was given the opportunity" (interview October 2019). A similar story was shared by another woman that she was mostly kept limited to her office and was not given opportunities of working in the field in management tasks. She shared an interesting aspect of her story that "...the men in my office have the stereotype as they might think that they are giving respect to me, therefore, they are trying to keep me limited in my office so that I may not go into the public and indulge myself in their issues, problems and conflicts" (interview, October, 2019). She regard this

behavior of respecting women and keeping them within the boundaries of the office as a stereotype as it limits them from a number of opportunities of work and learning. She further added that she does not get any opportunity of working in the field, so she couldn't be able to perform and show her abilities. On the other hand, her male colleagues get opportunities of showing their performance in the field, create achievements and get appreciation and rewards from the higher authorities.

Stamarski and Hing (2015) categorize the lack of opportunities of work, rewards and promotion as an issue related to human resource (HR) policies of the organizations. According to them, such an issue arises when the level of employees' access to the rewards and outcomes of the organization is different across gender and other variables. This institutional level discrimination may also lead issues in pay, role assignments, evaluation of performance, training and so on.

Lack of Acceptance of Women in Public Administration Positions

During the interview of one of the women in a manager position, she shared that her relatives working in her office have remained hurdle in her work. She further shared that "there is a common belief in my society that it is not appropriate for the women to work in public administration offices with male counterparts", she continued, "as if we work in such offices, then we would have to sit with the male officials for meetings and planning different activities even in late hours and on weekends as well". She shared the prevailing reasons for the practices that, "such practices are not acceptable in my immediate community" (Interview, October 2019). She shared examples from her own office where there are a few relatives of her. Whenever they saw her in one-to-one meetings with different officials, they used to avoid her as they did not feel good to see her with male colleagues. She named this particular behavior as a conservative behavior of her relatives working in her office as it puts hurdles to her work as she used to avoid meetings and face-to-face sessions with her officials due to the unacceptable behavior of her relative officials. When she was asked about why her relatives behaved in certain ways, she shared, "the community accepts women working in teaching and medical fields only and there is a strong opposition for women to work in public administration and private organizations especially in leadership and management positions where there is male dominancy". She further explained, "there are other women in my office in different management positions, however, they do not visit the office regularly, and there is not any strictness for the attendances because of the conception that they are women so they cannot come to the office on daily basis as there is male dominancy in the office" (Interview, October 2019). From the discussion, it seems that there is lack of acceptance of the community for women to work in leadership and management positions as there is male dominancy in said positions and women working in such organizations might not feel comfortable due to the cultural norms of the community.

The findings of the study of Kossek and Buzzanell (2018) corroborates with the findings of current study. According their study, there is lack of acceptance for women to work in leadership and management positions from different cultures. There are a number of situational factors which are the part of the lack of cultural acceptance. The social and cultural pressure compels the families not to allow their women to either work in leadership and management positions in male dominant organizations or if they still work, then to avoid meetings and gatherings in such organizations as much as possible (Martin & Barnard, 2013).

Issue of Mobility

During interviews, some of the respondents were of the view that they faced mobility issues whenever they had to go public places as part of their duties. When they were asked to further explain the mobility issue, one of the respondents shared, "the mobility issue meant that I am not able to travel or visit, alone, the public places, that is, a local market for food items inspection as there is a cultural norm in my immediate community that a woman cannot visit a male dominant public place alone". She further explained, "to encounter this issue, in the beginning of my job, I used to take a male official from my office whenever I

needed to visit a local market for any kind of inspection”. She added, “later, I did not feel comfortable to request, again and again, male officials from my office to accompany me for the inspection visits, therefore, I couldn’t develop any separate visit plans for myself as it was not possible for me to disturb my male colleagues each time”. “Later on, I realized that I should not develop any separate visit plan for myself” she continued. “Instead of having a separate visit plan, I requested two male colleagues from my office to share their visit plans so that I can go inspection visits with them according to their schedules” (Interview, October 2019). Another woman manager from a public organization shared that men are more autonomous as compared to women, in terms of travelling to public places or other cities even for any personal or official visit as part of a job. She shared an example from her family that her brother, who is around ten years younger than her and less educated than her, but still, he can take a car and can travel the whole country not only for any official commitment, but also for enjoyment, without any obstacle from her family and culture. However, the same kind of practice is not possible for her only because she is a woman and the culture does not allow her to travel alone.

Similar results were found in studies conducted by Karim, Lindberg, Wamala and Emmelin (2018), and Sarwar and Imran (2019). According to the findings of studies, there are certain barriers from their families which working women have to face especially, when they have to pay official visits to public places and other cities with their male counterparts. The barriers may arise as the prevailing culture of the context may not allow women to travel with men. Similarly, the barriers also arise when women have to travel other cities as part of their duties, and they have to leave their household responsibilities to other members of the families.

Conclusion

The study was conducted to evaluate the barriers and hardships which women leadership encounters at management positions in a particular context of GB. The female leaders face several challenges based on stereotypes with regard to gender and society. These difficulties and barriers influence the female leaders by reducing their working capacity at leading positions. Some significant insights were gained from this study. Despite of having leadership status participants cannot get any opportunity of working in the field, so they couldn’t perform as per standards and show their abilities. Women may also experience the burden of roles as they are always overloaded with domestic tasks along with official tasks. The findings suggest that there is a need to create an enabling environment for women working in public and private organizations within the organizations as well as outside in the community so that they can put their energies in achieving the goals of the organizations. Such initiatives may help women to opt leadership and management positions in different organizations. Equally, they may also continue their careers in such managerial positions when they get a gender friendly environment in the organizations where they work.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for both policy and practice, based on the findings of research.

- The organizations should develop such policies in which there are equal promotions and rewards for both men and women at all levels of leadership and management positions based on the nature of their work.
- Keeping in view the responsibilities which women have to fulfil at homes, women should be given flexible work schedules so that women can adjust their household responsibilities and job duties.
- Awareness sessions for general public, including the families of the employees of the organizations, should be arranged on importance of the roles and responsibilities of women in the organizations.
- Recruitment and selection policies for the employees and managers should be redesigned so that more women could join the leadership and management positions in different organizations.

- There should be equal opportunities for women to work within organizations as well as in fieldwork so that women can use their capabilities and potentials in both contexts.
- Day care facilities should be set up within the premises of the organizations so that the women may not get disturbed due to the responsibilities of caring their children during their official work.

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