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Women Leadership Roles and the Factors Influencing these Roles: A Qualitative Perspective

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Abstract

Concept of leadership is comprised of contributing the efforts of both men and women in performing different roles in different institutes but women are considered under-represented in performing different leadership roles. Purpose of this study was to identifying the background factors that became hindrance to women in performing different types of leadership roles. So this study explores the perceptions of women leaders in performing different leadership roles in a Public Sector University. Research nature was qualitative and twelve female leaders from three campuses of a public sector university were interviewed. Telephonic interviews were conducted due to the pandemic conditions. Data was analyzed by using thematic analysis technique. Three themes as women's acuity, leadership styles/behaviors and women's leadership qualities emerged from the data that support the first research question. Whereas, five main themes generated support the second research question as factors related to organization, students and colleagues, societal and cultural factors, factors related to personality and family, and factors related to professional development. Results of the study revealed that societal and cultural factors affected a lot on women leadership roles as compared to other factors. Recommendation of this study was that these factors should be bounded by introducing new policies to strengthen the women leadership roles in institutes.

Key words: *Women Leadership, Leadership Roles, Public University Setting.*

Introduction

The leader is necessary for any types of institutes. Having a leader is the most pressing necessity of the time; regardless of the size or purpose of the organization. Without a leader, any organization is such a knot of men and machinery. There would be no law in a country if there was no leader. Society would be destroyed without a leader; it turns out to be a vicious, harsh, and dangerous place to live. The meaning of leadership is diverse as different people have different mindsets. The definition of leadership is

evolving as time goes on. For the time being, a leader is someone who affects and motivates a group of people to work towards a common goal. The ability to influence people to achieve goals and improve oneself is a key feature of leadership. Leadership is defined as a superior's capacity to influence subordinates' behavior and persuade them to take a specific course of action because leaders provide directions to others and play a prominent role in achieving institutional goals. It is evident that women leaders provide more focused on creating group work environment and tries to achieve institutional goals with full passion. Women who lead are more likely to have a holistic view of work and people, resulting in a brighter personal and professional future (Effendi, 2003).

Literature Review

Gender equality in leadership, as well as in every other aspect of life, is critical because meaningful progress cannot be made without a diversity of viewpoints. The empowerment aspect in women strengthens their position. Their competences to manipulate the executive process help them advance in their career. Their capacity to influence the decision-making process helps them advance in their career and allow them to achieve an organization's objectives (Effendi, 2003).

Warren wrote the book "Leadership and Natural-Born Leaders" in which he argues that leaders are not only born but also developed. However, there are some special talents that a leader can learn to lead in the direction of their passion. From this perspective, one thing is clear: women have no barriers to becoming leaders because most women are born with intrinsic talents that effective leaders possess (Blank, 2001).

Equal access to leadership positions is also justified by the fact that women often have different views and viewpoints as most of the time, women tend to be more socially active than men. They can make a positive difference in the future. It is critical to have more women in all fields of life, as having more women as leaders in colleges may leave a pleasant and welcoming environment due to their inherent attributes. Present them as role models for people who want to be leaders and who want to feel more connected (Sanders, Willemsen & Millar, 2009).

In comparison to other Muslim nations, Pakistani societal and cultural norms and traditions are more conservative when it comes to women's participation and involvement in authoritative managerial jobs. According to research, the country has a poor or non-existent female education ratio, as well as little possibilities for women in a society and culture that adheres to traditional standards and holds conservative views on women's leadership (Doumato, 2010). The Global Gender Gap Report was delivered by the World Economic Forum (WEF) in 2006. This report examines many factors that contribute to gender disparities. Inequality between males and females is attributed to the following four key factors, according to this report. Learning opportunities, political awareness and empowerment, cultural influence, and sanitary conditions are included in such factors (Mokhtar, 2007).

The propensity for women's leadership in Islamic countries is varying, according to Keddie in 2005, for the best of male-centered or male-dominated institutions and communities. As Keddie (2005) “Gender disparities in the Muslim world are more pronounced nowadays than they were previously (p. 54)". Feminist theory is a branch of sociology that "focuses on the collision of society on gender inequality and how those findings might lead to changes in gender roles (Bankston, 2000, p. 203)". To figure out the study of communal and edifying behaviors within the similar and different communal contexts, feminist theory has its name in such context. According to Patton (1990), the feminist perspective emphasizes the issue of gender differences and inequality. Feminists determined which gender has greater power and

involvement in a certain setting by closely studying the participation of women in many domains of the workplace and societal milieu (Bankston, 2000).

According to Rai (2010), Feminism serves as the foundation for female leadership. As a result, feminism can be described as the politics of giving and securing equal rights to women by various groups and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Deo (2006) asserted that "Western feminism has repeatedly misconstrued Muslim women's rights, resulting in their position being lowered and their rights being curtailed; thus any debate of feminism in the Arab world must also capture religious conviction into consideration (p. 106)".

According to Pharaon (2004): "All humanity has a place of tremendous dignity in Islam (p. 353)". "Conventional and spiritual academics occasionally, the thinking of Muslim jurists have been influences by all sorts of non-Islamic and pre-Islamic bodies. They ignored the context and selected specific verses from Quran Pak to justify their arguments (Pharaon, 2004, p. 354)".

Generally, it is considered that high rank positions are only made for men and not for women. Women responsibilities are linked with look after the family members. High rank leadership demands good leadership, intellectual abilities and self-confidence and these are not available in women. This social and cultural notion of society becomes the hindrance to women for leadership roles (Hoobler, 2011). Al-minqash (2007) describes a number of factors that effect on leadership positions that is institutional factors, social and cultural factors, less empowerment factors, personal factors and limited knowledge of mechanical tools. In institutional factors, different behaviors of staff members are not helpful to achieve institutional objectives. In social and cultural factors, considering women are not suitable to high positions and men are best suitable for this. In personal factors, personal knowledge, personal skills and duties are responsible for it. At the end, women sometimes are having not up-to-date information about operating of computers and other electronic tools to perform their tasks in a smooth way.

Women have leadership roles not in that range as in European countries. Exploring the factors that influence on women leadership roles will be the addition in literature and this research adds new contribution in literature in aspect of perception of women leaders about their roles and highlighting the factors responsible to become hindrance in performing leadership duties.

Research Questions of the Study

1. How do women leaders perceive their roles at the university level?
2. Which types of factors influence on women leadership roles at the university level?

Research Methodology

This study used interpretivisim paradigm of research because this paradigm of research is based on multiple realities and tries to know the phenomena by obtaining in-depth information in a subjective way (Creswell, 2007).

Qualitative research approach was employed in this study and this approach facilitates the researcher to understand the people and social issues by living in natural setting and provides in-detail information about the un-known issues. In qualitative research, researcher is involved in the research process and gets in-detail data by using multiple methods. Convenient method of sampling was used and sample of the study was comprised of twelve female leaders of three campuses of a public sector university of Lahore

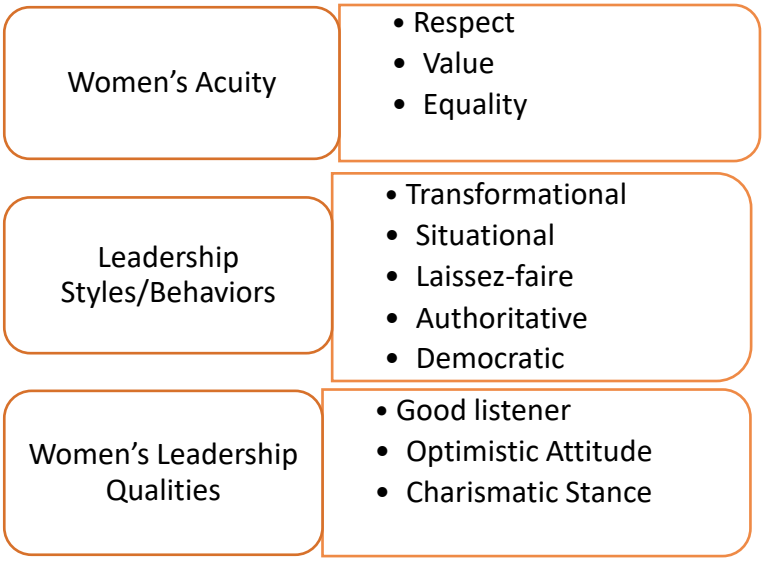
city. Semi-structured interview protocol was developed by the researcher on the basis of related literature of women leadership roles and first part of questions were related to perceptions of women about leadership roles and second part was about factors affecting the women leadership roles in university. Firstly researcher obtained the telephonic consent from the participants about the interviews and then conducted telephonic interviews of participants due to pandemic situation. Recorded interviews were transcribed by using thematic data analysis technique and findings of the study were presented as:

Data Presentation and Research Findings

This section of the study presented data under two headings. The first one was related to the perceptions of women leaders about their roles and the second part was related to the factors that influence their roles as women leaders.

Women Leaders' Perception about their Roles:

The data relating to the perceptions of women leaders about their roles were grouped under the following three main themes such as; women's acuity, leadership styles/behaviors and women's leadership qualities. Each main theme consisted of three and four sub-themes as presented in the figure. As evidence, the quotations collected from the participants' interviews were presented in the next section.



Women's Acuity

The data pointed out that all the participants had the same perceptions that they needed respect from their colleagues, being valued by others and should be equally treated as male leaders. All of the participants shared the same perceptions of society about their roles. The quotations recorded from participants who had the same perceptions were given below as evidence:

Women are so revered in Islam that there is a full Surah dedicated to them in the Quran called Surah-Al-Nisa. As a result, every woman leader needs respect from her peers. In addition, most institutes do a fantastic job of respecting women's abilities, perspectives, and capacities. (Respondent (R) 7).

In my opinion, it is impossible to reach the targeted aim without the equal participation of women as leaders in any company. Because of the range of thoughts and suggestions, participation of both males and females is required at every decision-making level. (R3).

Leadership Styles/Behaviors

From gathered data, it could be seen that a good leader can never rely on one leadership style but he/she should have diversity to choose leadership style according to the situation. Purpose of choosing different leadership styles were to obtain the institutional objectives in a successful way. Some of the recorded quotations were presented below as evidence:

You can't just keep going with one leadership style, in my opinion. In different situations, you must use different leadership styles. You have to be authoritarian at times, and democratically dependent on others, depending on the scenario. (R5)

I would prefer to lead my department by using a transformational leadership style. It will help me out to motivate and inspire my students and colleagues. If I motivate them in the right direction, then they will never disappoint me and yield an outstanding output that is more than my expectations from them. (R4)

I used to act democratically because there were only ladies in the college. They all have an equal right to speak and share their point of view. I think in the male-dominated organization, this mutual understanding is not possible because they (male colleagues) think the supervisory role is just associated with them. (R6)

The same interviewee (R6) chooses authoritative leadership behavior when she moves to the male-dominated organization and supervises both male and female staff:

When I first arrived, most of my coworkers were male; I usually deal with an authoritative leadership style because most of my staff members were senior to me. They are unconcerned about my view if I lead democratically. They were not interested in my recommendations; therefore I had no choice but to impose my views or proposals on them. (R6)

Women's Leadership Qualities

The gathered data pointed out that all the feminine traits should be used by good women leaders. The supported quotations were presented as evidence below:

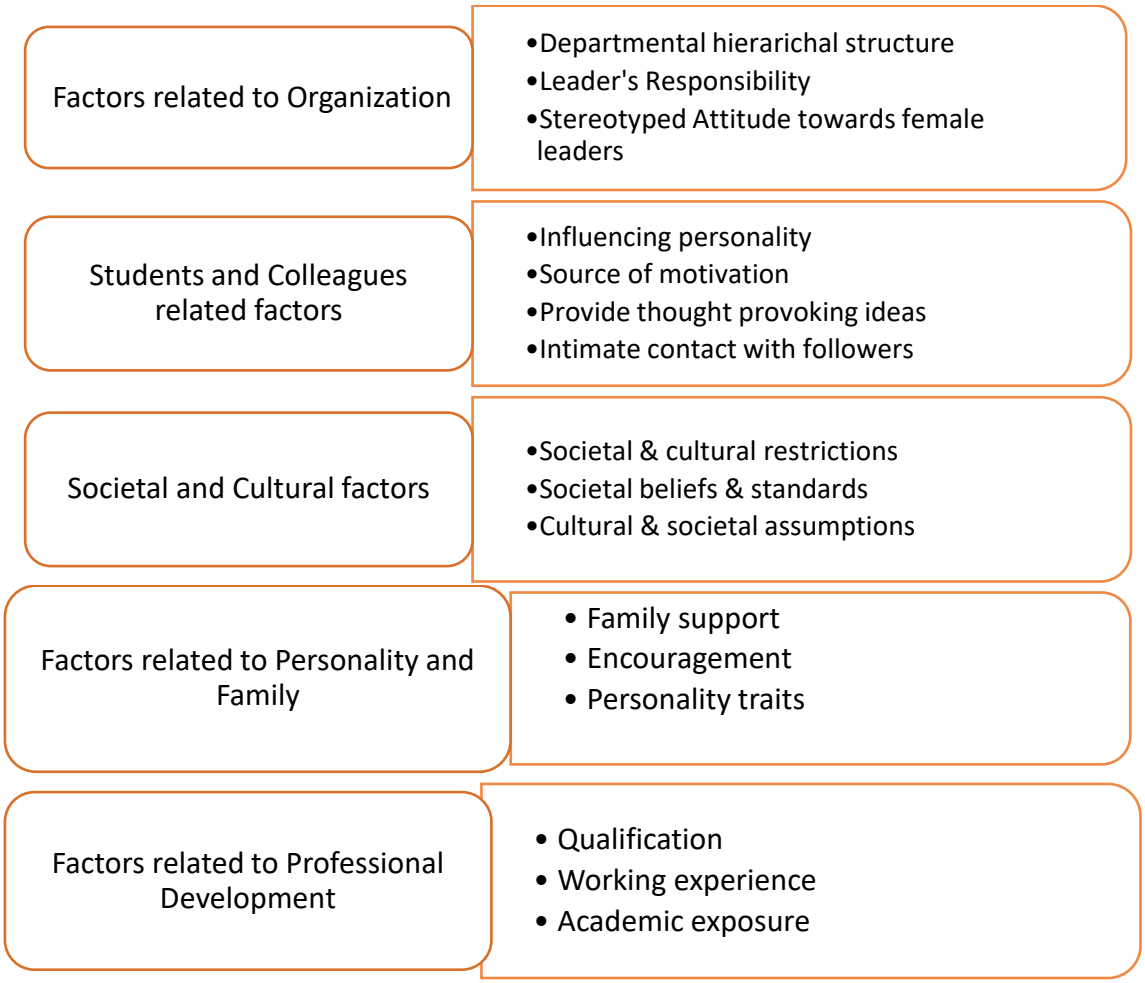
My persona is the major factor because I am influential and exceptional. (R4)

I believe that being communicative in a positive manner is vital for change to occur, and somehow that is my success story. (R2)

Every problem can be solved through communication. A key to success is to truly listen and interact with others. (R10)

Factors that Influence Women's Leadership Roles

Five main themes were generated from the data and these were about: factors related to organization, students and colleagues, societal and cultural factors, factors related to personality and family, and factors related to professional development. Sub-themes of each main factor were presented in the figure below:



Factors Related to Organization

The gathered data pointed out those organizational factors influenced the women's leadership roles in terms of responsibilities of the leader, understanding the structure of the department and gender-stereotyping factors prevailing in every male-dominated organization. The quotations recorded from the participants were presented below:

You must be aware of and monitor the success of your department, as well as the department's managerial structure, the efficiency with which you operate, and your allocated responsibilities. (R1).

It will be difficult for you to cope if you discover that there is an unfavorable perception of you in the organization, such as gender stereotyping. First and foremost, you must improve your employees' attitudes, which may be influenced by gender stereotypes. (R11).

Students and Colleagues Related Factors

The perceived data pointed out that factors related to followers influence the women's leadership roles positively if the leader motivates them. Deals everyone based on individual differences. As evidence, the quotations recorded from the participants were presented below:

Be sure of who you are, understand your self-esteem and self-concept, and then lead others. (R7)

I used to motivate my coworkers by sharing my previous experiences, the department's current position, and the department's future goals. (R9)

I supervise my co-workers by keeping individual differences in my mind. I always prioritize listening to them first and then treat them accordingly. (R8)

Societal and Cultural Factors

Data showed that society influences their role negatively. Because of cultural taboos, values and norms as well as societal assumptions of society, participants show that they faced restrictions to play their role effectively.

Our society's unambiguous standards and values are to blame for the low percentage of women in management positions. (R11)

In Pakistan, it is commonly observed that people adhere to their forefathers' male-dominated culture. (R10)

In Pakistan, culture is regarded as the most important factor in women's professional development. (R7)

Factors Related to Family and Personality

Data showed that the position of a leader is influenced by family and personality-related factors in both positive and negative ways. Recorded quotations related to this factor were presented below as evidence:

Your leadership role is influenced by your family and personality. My family encourages me to perform my best for my department since I have their support. (R1)

If your family is causing you trouble and putting pressure on you, it will harm your personality as a leader. (R4)

When it comes to being a leader, your personality is the most important aspect to consider. (R5)

Factors Related to Professional Development

Data perceived that good academic exposure, working exposure and qualification influence the women leadership roles effectively.

> *In my department, many people are older and have more experience than me, yet I am in charge because of my command of all areas. (R9)*

> *We should attend workshops that are relevant to our field and have a positive impact on our professional careers. (R6)*

> *If your academics are relevant to your field, you have progressed professionally. (R7)*

Discussion

The first question concerned women's perceptions about their roles when they were serving in leadership positions at the university level. Findings were in line with prior studies, with the majority of women leaders believed that women were undervalued at the managerial level due to the prevalent male-dominated culture. In the light of feminist beliefs, feminists want equal involvement of women in obtaining basic rights and then having access to educational possibilities as men (Palmu-Joronen, 2009). Results of the study were consistent with the study of Al-shaddi (2010) that described the weak position of women in performing leadership roles were the societal factors. Due to these factors, women had no confidence about their personal skills and abilities, and not in a position to perform their tasks confidently without the interruption of others. The findings were consistent with past research, as past studies had shown that transformative and democratic leadership styles are regarded as more successful by women. Previous research had shown that female executives prefer these two leadership styles since they require some feminine characteristics to be effective, and the new study backs this up (Eagly, Makhijani, & Klonsky, 1992). Several studies reviewed the existing literature and founded that negative factors affect women's leadership roles more than positive variables. On the negative side, the findings matched those of a study done by Al-Minqash (2007) and Abu-Khdair (2012). According to his studies, the most impacting factor in a male-dominated society was the managerial component which always prevents them from contributing at the administrative level. Fixed rules and regulations were existed in organizations and these not provide the freedom to every individual to perform their duties independently without the interruption of others. Another aspect related to organizational perspective, hierarchy was existed and all the male members had fixed their positions and not provide the opportunity to female members to perform administrative tasks. Social, family support and personal factors faced by women leaders in public sector universities becomes the hurdle to updating their knowledge. In a male dominating society, family members didn't provide support to females to balance their roles. Women had to perform their home duties as well as job responsibilities. Provision of non-cooperative attitude was responsible for hiding the intellectual abilities of women. Bloom and Erlandson (2003) suggested that training is necessary for women leaders for becoming successful leaders in life because training refreshes the knowledge of individuals and it does not become the source of enhancing the knowledge but also provides technical skills to perform their duties effectively and efficiently.

Conclusion

Results of the study indicated a lot of factors that affected on women leadership roles such as organizational factors, factors related to students and colleagues, and societal and cultural factors. Sub-

factors of organizational factors were departmental structure, responsibility of leaders, and stereotyped behavior towards female leaders. Factors related to students and colleagues were comprised of influencing personality, source of motivation, provision of thought provoking ideas, and intimate contact with followers. Sub-factors of societal and cultural factors were linked with societal and cultural restrictions, societal beliefs and standards, and cultural and social assumptions. The majority of women leaders viewed society and cultural norms as harmful, according to the study's findings. The underlying issue is society's conservatism as well as our forefathers' cultures. This research focuses on the elements that influence women's leadership, as well as the obstacles and barriers that women encounter in their roles as leaders. People continue to believe the same things about females and their role in the world; they refuse to see women as their heads or leaders for the reason that it goes against their self-esteem and egoistic personalities to have a woman control them.

In light of feminist beliefs as in theories, feminists want equal involvement of women in obtaining basic rights and then having access to educational possibilities as men (Palmu-Joronen, 2009). It demands to introduce different educational policies in this area so that women may perform their leadership roles in the different fields of life. It could also be achieved by provision of support to women in institutions and improving the thinking styles of societal members about women leadership roles.

Many studies were conducted on women leadership roles but this study was different because it identifies the factors that effect on women leadership roles and the findings of the study were helpful to introduce new leadership courses to empower the women to perform their roles in educational institutions and other organization.

Recommendations of the Study

On the basis of results of the study, recommendations of the study were:

1. Government should make changes in the curriculum by adding gender sensitizing disciplines so that attitude of societal members about women leadership roles should be converted in positive perspective.
2. Training programs should be arranged for women leaders so that they could perform their leadership roles effectively and face the challenges of professional life and societal believes.
3. This study further suggests for identifying other factors that influence on women leadership roles by using quantitative method of research and a comparative study of public and private universities should be conducted.

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