

Women's Leadership in Educational Institutions: A Qualitative Literature Review on Challenges and Strategic Opportunities

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Abstract: Women leaders in education continue to face structural and cultural barriers, such as biased recruitment and leadership stereotypes tied to masculinity. However, their collaborative, empathetic, and inclusive leadership style offers unique advantages in building responsive and innovative educational environments. This qualitative literature review explores studies, policies, and best practices related to women's leadership in educational institutions. The findings reveal that gender quotas, leadership training, and mentoring programs effectively increase women's access to strategic roles. Mentoring also boosts confidence and expands professional networks. To empower women as transformative leaders, institutions must adopt inclusive policies, support mentoring initiatives, and challenge gendered cultural norms. Strengthening women's leadership can improve institutional equity, innovation, and sustainability.

Abstrak: Pemimpin perempuan di bidang pendidikan masih menghadapi hambatan struktural dan kultural, seperti bias dalam rekrutmen serta stereotip bahwa kepemimpinan adalah sifat maskulin. Namun, gaya kepemimpinan perempuan yang kolaboratif, empatik, dan inklusif memiliki keunggulan dalam menciptakan lingkungan pendidikan yang adaptif dan inovatif. Studi pustaka ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif untuk menelaah berbagai penelitian, kebijakan, dan praktik terbaik terkait kepemimpinan perempuan. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa kuota gender, pelatihan kepemimpinan, dan program mentoring efektif meningkatkan akses perempuan ke posisi strategis. Mentoring juga memperkuat kepercayaan diri dan jaringan profesional. Untuk memberdayakan perempuan sebagai pemimpin transformatif, institusi perlu menerapkan kebijakan inklusif, mendukung program mentoring, dan menantang norma budaya yang bias gender. Penguatan kepemimpinan perempuan akan mendorong kesetaraan, inovasi, dan keberlanjutan institusi pendidikan.

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INTRODUCTION

Women's leadership in educational institutions continues to face significant structural and cultural challenges. Despite women dominating the teaching profession, they remain underrepresented in strategic leadership positions. This phenomenon reflects a gender disparity rooted in stereotypes and patriarchal structures that hinder women's access to top positions within educational hierarchies (Shafira, Maryam, & Kurniati, 2024). Furthermore, cultural norms and social expectations often place women in primary caregiving roles, creating a double burden that limits their career progression (Huda & Renggani, 2021). Such conditions necessitate structural reforms to promote gender equality in educational leadership.

Previous studies have highlighted the barriers faced by women in attaining leadership positions within educational institutions. Gaus et al. (2023) revealed that gender stereotypes and emotional expectations limit women's recognition as leaders. Awan et al. (2024) identified that female leaders in academia struggle with social expectations and impression management strategies to maintain their legitimacy. However, existing research lacks a comprehensive analysis of how women overcome these structural and cultural obstacles, as well as the strategies they employ to build professional networks and gain institutional support.

This study provides a novel approach by comprehensively analyzing the structural and cultural barriers that women face in educational leadership and exploring initiatives and policies designed to support their empowerment. By employing a desk study approach, this research integrates recent findings from diverse cultural and institutional contexts, offering a broader perspective on the dynamics of women's leadership in education.

The primary objective of this study is to identify and analyze the structural and cultural barriers that hinder women from achieving leadership positions in educational institutions. Additionally, it aims to evaluate the effectiveness of various initiatives and policies implemented to support women's empowerment and provide strategic recommendations for policymakers, educational practitioners, and researchers in creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for women as leaders in the education sector.

This study argues that achieving gender equality in educational leadership requires profound structural reforms and cultural change. This includes implementing policies that support work flexibility, developing inclusive mentoring and networking programs, and promoting awareness to challenge gender stereotypes that hinder women's access to leadership roles. As Baroudi and David (2020) noted, mentoring programs can enhance women's leadership confidence and skills, while Lu (2020) emphasized the importance of institutional support in facilitating women's participation in educational leadership.

Given the growing global awareness of the importance of gender equality and inclusion in leadership, this study is crucial in understanding the dynamics and challenges faced by women in educational leadership. The findings of this study are expected to serve as a basis for developing policies and practices that are more responsive to the needs and potential of women as leaders, while encouraging

institutional transformation that supports equality and diversity in educational leadership.

METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative approach with a library research (literature review) design, aiming to conduct an in-depth exploration of the challenges and strategic opportunities related to women's leadership in educational institutions. The qualitative paradigm is chosen because it enables the researcher to interpret complex social phenomena through conceptual and contextual analysis of existing scholarly discourse (Moleong & Surjaman, 1989; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

The core method employed is desk-based literature review, involving a systematic identification, selection, evaluation, and synthesis of peer-reviewed journal articles, policy reports, institutional publications, and credible grey literature published within the last two decades. The analytical procedure follows the integrative literature review model, which allows the development of new theoretical insights by combining findings from various studies and theoretical frameworks (Torraco, 2016). The inclusion criteria for the reviewed literature focus on: (1) empirical research and theoretical discussions on women's leadership in educational contexts; (2) gender equality policies; and (3) international best practices in educational leadership.

To ensure the rigor of the study, the data analysis involved thematic coding to identify recurring patterns related to structural barriers, gendered perceptions, leadership styles, mentorship, and institutional policies. The data collection process followed a structured protocol using academic databases such as Scopus and Google Scholar, with keywords including "women in educational leadership," "gender and leadership," "mentoring programs," and "transformational leadership in education."

The rationale for using literature review as the primary method is twofold: first, it provides access to a wide range of global perspectives and cross-contextual insights unconstrained by geographical limitations; and second, it facilitates the identification of conceptual gaps and evidence-based strategies for empowering women in educational leadership roles (Beloskar et al., 2024; Gaus et al., 2023).

This methodological approach contributes not only to theoretical discourse but also to practical recommendations for stakeholders (such as policymakers, school administrators, and academic institutions) in enhancing women's participation in strategic leadership. The study is guided by the principles of transparency, relevance, and methodological coherence, ensuring that findings are grounded in robust and verifiable evidence.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

This research reveals that structural and cultural challenges are the main barriers women face in achieving leadership positions in educational institutions. Structural barriers include bias in the recruitment process, lack of gender

affirmation policies, and a lack of institutional support that inhibits women from progressing in their careers. Meanwhile, cultural barriers stem from gender stereotypes that associate leadership with masculine traits, such as assertiveness and dominance, so women are often deemed unsuitable for leadership roles. Eagly and Karau's grand theory, role congruity theory, explains that these barriers are related to the mismatch between social gender norms and the characteristics expected of a leader (Eagly & Karau, 2020). Women who try to transcend such stereotypes often face social resistance that amplifies their challenges. On the other hand, this research also highlights the great potential that women have through their leadership styles that tend to be based on empathy, collaboration, and inclusiveness. In the context of education, this approach is highly relevant as it creates an environment that supports the involvement of all parties and increases organizational effectiveness. Therefore, it is important to implement gender affirmation policies and mentoring programs to support women in overcoming these barriers. With such measures, women are not only able to break down structural and cultural barriers but can also play a key role in creating positive change in the education sector.

Women's more collaborative, empathic, and inclusive leadership style has proven to be an important asset in improving the effectiveness of educational organizations. This confirms that women's leadership creates an inclusive work environment, where all parties feel valued and are given equal opportunities to contribute. This collaborative approach not only reduces internal conflict but also strengthens harmonious working relationships, encourages innovation, and improves overall organizational performance. With high empathic abilities, women leaders are more sensitive to the needs of educators and students, enabling them to provide relevant solutions to challenges. In the context of diversity and multiculturalism, women's leadership style helps manage cultural differences and perspectives effectively, creating a respectful and supportive work environment. In addition, this leadership style also encourages active participation in decision-making, resulting in innovations relevant to the evolving needs of the education world (Smith & Lee, 2023). Thus, this study confirms that women's leadership styles based on collaboration, empathy, and inclusiveness can bring positive changes in the dynamics of educational organizations, especially amid increasingly complex global challenges.

Women's lack of access to professional networks and mentors is one of the significant barriers to their career development in the education sector. In many cases, women do not have the same opportunities as men to engage in strategic circles of influence, which are often key to accessing relevant information, opportunities, and support. This lack of access makes it difficult for women to develop their leadership skills and limits their ability to make professional connections that support career advancement. Male-dominated environments in leadership positions often create additional barriers for women to obtain relevant guidance or mentors (Wang, Zhang & Li, 2021). This research proposes that women-only mentoring programs can be a strategic solution to address this challenge. Such programs can be designed to provide professional guidance, support the development of leadership skills, and create a platform for women to expand their networks. In addition, gender-based mentoring also allows women to

share experiences, overcome social barriers, and gain moral support in their career journey. With mentors who can provide guidance and support, women are not only able to face challenges in the work environment but are also more confident to take on strategic roles in the education sector. Therefore, the development of inclusive and gender-based mentoring programs is an important step to support women in building sustainable careers and expanding their contributions to education.

This suggests that gender affirmative policies, such as the implementation of gender quotas and women's leadership training, significantly increase the representation of women in strategic positions within educational institutions. Countries that implement gender quotas experience improved education quality through more inclusive and diverse decision-making. In addition, women's leadership training helps build competence, and confidence and expand professional networks (Klenk, et al., 2022). This research also emphasizes the importance of advocating for affirmative action policies to encourage consistent implementation across regions, ensuring that women have equal access to leadership opportunities. With this policy, educational institutions can create an environment that is more inclusive, innovative, and responsive to community needs.

This research found that women in educational leadership face structural and cultural challenges, such as gender bias in recruitment and stereotypes that associate leadership with masculine traits. However, the research also showed that women's collaborative, empathic, and inclusive leadership styles have a significant positive impact on the educational environment. Educational institutions led by women tend to be more responsive to students' needs, creating learning environments that are inclusive, innovative, and adaptive to change. In addition, gender affirmation policies. Such as gender quotas and women's leadership training, have proven effective in increasing the representation of women in strategic positions (Rahayu et al., 2023). Mentoring programs and institutional support also play an important role in helping women overcome structural barriers, expand their professional networks, and increase their confidence. By paying attention to the potential of women's leadership styles and appropriate policy support, this study concludes that women can be powerful agents of change in improving the quality and sustainability of education.

This research highlights that mentoring is one of the effective strategic solutions to address the challenges faced by women in educational leadership. This suggests that gender-based mentoring programs not only provide practical guidance but also support women's emotional and professional development in the workforce. Through mentoring, women can increase their self-confidence, expand their professional networks, and hone their leadership competencies (Bhatti & Ali, 2021). The results of this study confirm that mentoring can create a safe space for women to share experiences, learn from more experienced leaders, and gain support in overcoming structural and cultural barriers. In addition, mentoring also provides opportunities for women to be more involved in strategic decision-making processes, thereby accelerating their progress in achieving leadership positions in educational institutions.

The results of this study also show that women in educational leadership have great potential to become agents of change that promote gender equality, both at the institutional and community levels. With leadership styles based on empathy, collaboration, and inclusiveness, women can create policies that are more responsive to the diversity and needs of students from different backgrounds. Women's leadership often promotes values of equality, which can help create a more inclusive and adaptive educational environment. The research also found that women in leadership positions focus not only on achieving organizational goals but also on strengthening interpersonal relationships and building collective capacity (Ely & Padavic, 2021). With this approach, women have the potential to create a widespread positive impact, driving transformation in a more equitable and sustainable education system.

This research concludes that women have a great opportunity to increase their representation in education leadership positions through specifically designed training and advocacy programs. A key focus of this opportunity is women's capacity building through gendered leadership training, where women can learn strategic skills relevant to the challenges of education. In addition, this research emphasizes the importance of advocacy to remove cultural barriers that often restrict women from pursuing strategic positions. Advocacy is also needed to ensure that educational institutions adopt gender-affirming policies that support diversity and inclusiveness. With the support of focused programs and consistent advocacy, women can not only increase their representation in educational leadership but also play an important role in creating educational environments that are more innovative, inclusive, and responsive to the needs of the times. This research reinforces the view that women can become transformational leaders capable of bringing about positive change in education (Klenk, et al., 2022).



Figure 1. Research Findings

The findings of this study reveal that women's leadership in educational institutions continues to face complex structural and cultural barriers, such as recruitment bias, lack of gender-affirmative policies, and stereotypes that associate leadership with masculine traits. Eagly and Karau's role congruity theory explains that these obstacles arise from the mismatch between societal gender norms and the traits traditionally expected of leaders. Nevertheless, the study affirms that women's leadership styles—characterized by collaboration, empathy, and inclusiveness—have a significant positive impact on creating harmonious, innovative, and student-responsive educational environments. Limited access to professional networks and mentorship opportunities further hinders women's leadership development; however, this challenge can be addressed through gender-specific mentoring programs designed to enhance leadership skills and provide emotional support. Additionally, the implementation of gender-affirmative policies, such as leadership quotas and targeted training, has been proven effective in increasing the representation of women in strategic positions. Therefore, women possess great potential as agents of change who can drive educational transformation toward greater equity, inclusivity, and sustainability.

DISCUSSION

Women leaders in educational institutions have become an increasingly prominent issue in discussions on gender equality and the development of inclusive education. While women have made important contributions to the education sector, their representation in high-level leadership positions is still faced with a variety of social and structural hurdles. Gender-based stereotypes, systemic barriers, and limited access to professional networks are the main obstacles preventing women from reaching strategic positions in educational institutions. Despite these challenges, various programs and policies have begun to be implemented to encourage women's involvement in educational leadership. Delving into these complexities, the following discussion will examine the various elements that influence women's leadership in educational institutions as well as measures to increase their presence at the executive level.

Challenges of Women in Educational Institutions Gender Views and Perceptions of Leadership

Gender views refer to sex-related attitudes, roles and expectations that are formed and entrenched in a culture. In the context of leadership, these views significantly influence perceptions and practices across organizations, including in education. Traditional gender roles have long defined the ideal leader as strong, rational and dominant - characteristics stereotypically associated with men. In contrast, women are often categorized and assumed to be more emotional, empathetic, and lacking assertive leadership characteristics, a perception that has led to an imbalance in the recognition of women's capabilities in leadership positions. These gender stereotypes have created systemic barriers that affect women's opportunities to achieve and maintain leadership positions, despite research showing that the collaborative and empathetic leadership styles often associated with women are highly effective in modern management.

In the context of higher education and schooling, the impact of these gendered views is even more pronounced when looking at the phenomenon of "glass ceilings" or invisible boundaries that impede women's career advancement, supported by social expectations that burden women with dual responsibilities between career and family. This situation is exacerbated by the lack of female role models and mentors in leadership positions who can provide inspiration for the next generation. Addressing this gap requires a fundamental shift in the way society views women's leadership, including the recognition that leadership effectiveness is not tied to gender, but rather to individual competence, vision and leadership ability. Educational institutions need to develop policies and programs that actively support women's leadership development, such as mentoring, inclusive leadership training, and the creation of work environments that are more supportive of work-life balance, so that they can make a positive contribution to progress and innovation in education as a whole.

Social constructions in society that differentiate the roles of men and women have created a profound impact on gendered views of leadership. In a variety of cultural contexts, men have traditionally been considered more suited for authoritative positions because they are associated with assertiveness and rationality, while women are more often associated with roles that emphasize empathy and cooperation. While both characteristics are equally important in various leadership situations, the perception is that the traits associated with women are less aligned with the leadership attributes idealized in education. As a result, this contributes significantly to the gap in women's representation in strategic leadership positions. These gender stereotypes are further reinforced by deeply rooted social and cultural values, creating systemic barriers for women in accessing and maintaining their leadership positions.



Figure 2. Social construction of women's and men's roles in society.

Furthermore, perceptions of men's and women's leadership styles are strongly influenced by the gendered views that have been established in society. Male leaders are generally associated with strength and decisive decision-making

abilities, while female leaders tend to be perceived as weaker, emotional and less capable of managing conflict. These biased views create significant challenges for women in leadership positions, as they often face more critical judgment and higher demands to prove their credibility and competence. The situation becomes even more complex in educational contexts, where women are faced with double expectations: on the one hand, they are expected to exhibit stereotypical motherhood and empathy, but on the other hand, they are required to meet leadership standards that are often defined by masculine characteristics. This creates a dilemma for women leaders in managing perceptions and establishing their authority in educational settings.

Gender views have created a profound and complex impact on the perception of women as leaders in education. Women leaders often find themselves caught in a double expectation that demands they be able to combine softer roles - such as nurturing and teaching - with more masculine leadership characteristics. This situation creates a significant dilemma: when a female leader displays assertiveness and strength in her leadership, she runs the risk of being perceived as too aggressive and less feminine; conversely, when she displays gentleness and empathy, she can be seen as less assertive and less capable of making decisions. This paradoxical state of affairs results in severe internal tension for women leaders who are constantly trying to balance multiple and often conflicting social expectations.

Perceptions of women leaders' competencies are still heavily influenced by gender-biased views. Although trends show an increasing number of women occupying leadership positions in the education sector, they are still often faced with skepticism about their capabilities, especially in aspects such as conflict management and strategic decision-making. Women leaders often have to work harder to prove their superiority, even when they have demonstrated excellent managerial skills. This situation is further exacerbated by gender views that implicitly doubt women's ability to make bold and effective decisions, especially in stressful situations. As a result, women leaders not only have to manage their leadership responsibilities, but also have to constantly fight against prejudices and stereotypes that are entrenched in organizational culture.

Gender roles also influence the leadership styles and methods applied by women leaders. Female leaders tend to be more oriented towards open communication, collaboration, and empowerment of their team members. This is reflected in many studies that show that women favor team-based leadership over more authoritarian leadership styles. For example, women leaders in education often focus more on building positive and inclusive relationships, which can encourage active participation from all parties involved in the educational process. This team-based leadership, while sometimes perceived as less prominent than more transactional leadership, has proven effective in creating a more inclusive and supportive educational environment.

This research compares transformational leadership style, which is often associated with the ability to inspire and motivate others, with transactional leadership, which focuses more on managing tasks and achieving specific outcomes. This transformational leadership style is more commonly accepted and associated

with women, who tend to be more development and interpersonal relationship oriented. In contrast, the more structured and results-based transactional leadership style is more often accepted in male leadership contexts. While both have their merits, greater recognition of women's transformational leadership could pave the way for more women to take on roles in educational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

Amidst traditional views of gender roles, women's leadership roles present both opportunities and challenges. Women have great potential for leadership roles in educational institutions because they tend to adopt transformational leadership models that emphasize inspiration and collaboration (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Women generally prioritize the *ethic of care*, a crucial element in creating inclusive learning environments (McKenzie & Blenkinsop, 2006). With education policies increasingly supportive of gender equality, including leadership quota systems and special training programs for women (UNESCO, 2012), there are more avenues for women to occupy strategic positions in educational leadership.

However, on the other hand, women still face various challenges, such as gender stereotypes that consider leadership more suitable for men, as explained in the *Role Congruity* theory by (Eagly & Karau, 2002) . In addition, the double burden between domestic and professional roles, as suggested by (Hochschild, 1989), often hinders women's career development in leadership. Lack of access to professional networks and mentorship is also a major obstacle, given that these networks play an important role in supporting leadership development (Ibarra, 1993). Therefore, affirmative policies and stronger structural support are needed to ensure women have equal opportunities to lead educational institutions.



Figure 3. Statistical data on women's leadership in education

Although women can occupy leadership positions, they often face difficulties penetrating the male-dominated educational hierarchy. The presence of female leaders at the executive level of educational institutions is still limited. While women are more often placed in low-level managerial positions, they rarely reach top positions. These barriers are caused by structures that favor men in leadership roles and a lack of policies that facilitate women's empowerment in education.

1. Structural Barriers

Structural barriers refer to obstacles that arise from organizational or social systems and structures that prevent women's full participation in leadership. In the context of education, these barriers are systemic, encompassing policies, work cultures and organizational governance that indirectly discriminate against women. These barriers not only limit women's access to leadership positions, but also affect their ability to succeed in these roles.

The patriarchal structure embedded in educational institutions reinforces a gendered view that dominates men in leadership positions. In the education system, strategic decision-making is often dominated by men, while women are often placed in supporting roles, such as teaching or low-level administration. This patriarchal structure creates significant barriers for women to penetrate the power hierarchy in educational institutions. Recruitment processes in educational institutions are often non-transparent and influenced by gender views. Women are often perceived as less worthy of strategic positions than men, despite having the same or higher qualifications (Fitzsimmons, Callan & Paulsen, 2020). This view arises from the perception that women are less capable of making strategic decisions or managing conflict than men. Women are often faced with social expectations that limit their ability to maintain leadership positions, as well as systemic discrimination in the process of achieving leadership positions and decision-making. For example, the process of selecting a school principal who does not go through the stages of education and training has the potential to create new problems for women (Cakrawikara, 2021).

Public perception of women's leadership is also a significant structural barrier. Society often sees women's leadership as a deviation from social norms, which affects not only their chances of being appointed to leadership positions, but also the way they are treated once in those positions. These negative perceptions can reduce women's confidence and create a less supportive work environment.

2. Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance refers to an individual's ability to divide time and energy proportionally between work and personal life, so that both can be optimally fulfilled. This balance is important not only for productivity, but also for mental health and happiness (Greenhaus & Allen, 2021). For leaders in educational institutions, the issue of work-life balance is particularly relevant. They often face high pressures, including long work schedules, administrative responsibilities and the need to support staff and learners. These challenges require leaders to maintain a healthy balance between work and personal life. Lack of balance can increase the risk of burnout among education leaders.

Women leaders in educational institutions often face demands to balance their roles as leaders and personal or family responsibilities. Women more often experience a "double burden," i.e. a professional workload complemented by family responsibilities, leading to burnout and stress that can affect their performance in leadership (Baptiste, et al 2024). Women who lack family support tend to face higher levels of stress, reducing their effectiveness in leadership (Sandberg, 2020). This leads to women often being faced with a dilemma between career and family

responsibilities. Work-life balance can be achieved with support from educational institutions. Policies such as work flexibility, adequate family leave, and support for mental health can help women achieve a better balance. In the educational context, educational institutions that implement these policies tend to have more effective leaders and more productive staff.

3. Lack of Network Support and Mentorship

A strong professional network is key to success in leadership. Yet women in education are often constrained by a lack of access to professional networks and mentoring that can provide the necessary career support. Women in educational leadership often feel isolated and lack mentors, which can hinder their career development (Pant & Shiwakoti, 2025). Women tend to have fewer mentors who can help them navigate their careers in education, which in turn limits their chances of advancing to leadership positions (Smith & Turner, 2022). In many cases, strategic positions in educational institutions are filled through informal networks that are more often accessed by men. Female mentors who can provide guidance and support to aspiring female leaders are limited, hindering the transfer of experience and learning across generations (Elly, Ibarra & Kolb, 2021).

Leadership Opportunities For Women In Educational Institutions

1. Social Change and Government Policy

Social change refers to the transformation of social structures, patterns of relationships, values and norms in society. This change can take place quickly or gradually, influenced by various factors such as technology, economy, politics, and culture. Social change is an unavoidable phenomenon and reflects the dynamics of society in adjusting to the challenges of the times (Giddens, 2021). Government policies have a strategic role in encouraging or directing social change. Through public policy, the government can create an environment conducive to innovation, improve people's welfare, and address social inequality. For example, policies related to education and health have a direct impact on improving people's quality of life (Worldbank, 2022).

Social change and government policies play an important role in increasing women's involvement in leadership in educational institutions. Progressive social change creates a more inclusive environment, while government policies serve as tools to remove structural barriers and provide greater opportunities for women. The combination of the two can drive significant transformation in the representation of women in leadership positions. Specific leadership training and mentoring program policies for women can help address the challenges they face and prepare them for future leadership positions (Bhatti & Ali, 2021). This policy can increase the number of women in leadership positions. The PGP program was designed by the government to increase the capacity of female teachers in leadership roles. This is a form of the government's seriousness in issuing policies to encourage women's participation in educational leadership (Klenk, et al., 2022).

The success of gender affirmation policies in several countries shows the positive impact of empowering women in educational leadership. The implementation of gender quotas, women-only leadership training, and incentives for organizations that support gender equality have proven effective. In New

Zealand, a gender affirmation policy that requires 50% of senior positions to be filled by women has succeeded in creating a more inclusive and social justice-oriented education policy. Data from the New Zealand Ministry of Education shows a significant improvement in the quality of education in the last three years (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2023).

2. Promoting Gender Equality and Advocacy

Gender equality is a crucial component in creating inclusive leadership in educational institutions. Advocating for women in leadership aims to overcome structural, cultural and social barriers that limit their participation. By creating an equal environment, educational institutions can capitalize on diverse perspectives in decision-making and policy implementation. Gender equality in leadership is not only a matter of equity, but also of efficiency. Organizations with diverse leadership, including adequate representation of women, tend to be more innovative, responsive to community needs and perform better. In the context of education, women leaders can bring a unique perspective that encourages a more inclusive approach to learners and staff.

Advocacy plays a key role in promoting gender equality. Through advocacy, communities can raise awareness about the importance of women in leadership, pressure governments to adopt supportive policies, and encourage educational institutions to create more inclusive work environments (UN Women, 2022). Effective advocacy strategies involve educational campaigns, the establishment of support networks, and the provision of leadership training for women. In addition, it is important to involve men as partners in this advocacy, so that gender equality is not only seen as a women's issue, but as a shared responsibility (Heilman & Caleo, 2020).

Increased awareness of the importance of gender equality has encouraged various sectors to advocate and provide support for women in leadership roles. Educational institutions have a great responsibility in promoting gender equality. As institutions that educate future generations, they can be catalysts for social change by teaching values of inclusivity, providing leadership training for women, and modeling women's leadership at their institutional level. This encourages more institutions to adopt policies that support women in leadership positions (Alshdiefat, et al 2024). This initiative helps reduce barriers and provides a platform for women to thrive (Baker, et al 2019).

An increase in the number of women in leadership positions can contribute to a reduction in gender views and an increase in equality in educational settings. Schools led by women are more likely to implement policies that support gender equality and student empowerment (Torres & Ramirez, 2024). Gender equality in leadership in educational institutions has far-reaching positive impacts, including improved education quality, more inclusive learning environments and the overall empowerment of women. It also sets a positive example for female students, encouraging them to aspire to great heights in their careers and lives.

3. Increased Womens Involvement

Increasing women's involvement in leadership in educational institutions is a key focus in creating inclusive and equitable institutions. Women have great

potential to bring about positive change through their unique perspectives in decision-making, problem-solving and policy formation. However, the representation of women in leadership positions still faces significant challenges. The presence of women in leadership positions has a positive impact on various aspects, including increased inclusivity, more balanced decision-making, and empowerment of educational institutions. Gender diversity in leadership can improve organizational performance and encourage innovation.

Women are increasingly involved in organizations and communities, which gives them more opportunities to take on leadership positions. Many educational institutions are now implementing leadership development program policies for women. It has been shown that institutions implementing these policies report an increase in the number of women in leadership positions (Monkman, 2021). This involvement provides opportunities for experience sharing and networking (Women in Education Leadership, 2023).

4. Improving the Quality of Education

Women's leadership in educational institutions has a strategic role in improving the quality of education. With their unique ability to build inclusive and collaborative environments, women as leaders can create positive change in educational organizations. However, the representation of women in leadership positions still needs to be increased to reach their full potential in improving the quality of education. Women's leadership can bring different perspectives and innovations to decision-making, which in turn can improve the quality of education. Women's leadership often introduces new approaches to teaching and learning. Women tend to use a more inclusive and collaborative approach to leadership. This approach can increase the participation and involvement of all members of the organization (Hernifiona, 2023). This approach also tends to make women leaders more responsive to the needs of students in educational institutions (Johnson, 2024).

Women's leadership can foster innovation in curriculum development and teaching methodologies. Female leaders often have a collaborative and empathic approach that can create learning that is more interactive, relevant and appropriate to students' needs (Northhouse, 2021). Female leaders are also often more sensitive to the well-being of teachers and staff. They tend to create work environments that are supportive and oriented towards work-life balance. This increases the motivation and productivity of educators, which in turn has a positive impact on the quality of education.

Women's leadership can contribute to building an inclusive learning environment for all students. This approach includes special attention to the needs of students from different backgrounds, including female students, students with special needs, and minority groups. This encourages all students to feel valued and supported in their learning process. Women's leadership in educational institutions also contributes to increased accountability and transparency in the management of institutions. This research shows that women often have a more ethical approach to management, which supports the implementation of equitable and results-oriented education policies.

5. Mentoring and Network Development

Mentoring and network development are important strategies for increasing women's involvement in leadership in educational institutions. Through mentoring, women get the guidance needed to overcome career barriers, while professional networks provide access to opportunities and support that can strengthen their position as leaders. Mentoring helps women develop leadership skills, build confidence and gain insight into effective decision-making strategies. Mentors, who are typically experienced leaders, serve as guides who provide emotional support, practical knowledge, and inspiration for women to face challenges in their leadership careers.

Women-only mentoring and professional network development programs are growing, providing support for women to overcome barriers and increase their confidence (Mareque, et al 2022). Technological developments have also opened new doors for women to engage in leadership. With digital platforms, women can network and share knowledge more widely. The use of technology can help women overcome geographical and social barriers to leadership (Mackey & Petrucka, 2021). The knowledge gained through these connections allows women to be better prepared for the responsibilities of leadership, both at the local and national level.

Mentoring also contributes to women's increased self-confidence. By getting support from mentors, women feel more confident to make strategic decisions, lead teams, and manage educational institutions effectively. This is important in overcoming gender stereotypes that often undermine women's ability to lead. Professional networks provide opportunities for women to collaborate, exchange experiences and access career opportunities. They also help women broaden their horizons on best practices in leadership and create useful connections to support the development of educational institutions.

Networking helps women gain access to career opportunities they may not have known about otherwise. By participating in professional forums, conferences and discussion groups, women can increase their visibility among other education leaders. Through mentoring and networking, women can build collective support to address shared challenges. These relationships create solidarity among women leaders, allowing them to support each other in the face of institutional and cultural barriers. Mentoring not only supports individuals, but can also be used as a tool for social transformation. By mentoring young women who aspire to be leaders, mentors create a stronger and more inclusive generation of women leaders in the future.

CONCLUSION

Women's leadership in educational institutions has emerged as a crucial and multidimensional discourse among scholars, education practitioners, and policymakers. Over the past few decades, there has been a growing awareness of the need to enhance women's representation in educational leadership across all levels—primary, secondary, and tertiary. While notable progress has been made, particularly in terms of policy inclusion and awareness campaigns, women continue

to face significant obstacles that hinder their advancement into strategic leadership roles.

These challenges are rooted in deep-seated gender stereotypes and societal perceptions that frame leadership through a predominantly masculine lens. Structural barriers, including biased recruitment systems, insufficient institutional support, and the absence of gender-affirmative policies, further exacerbate the difficulties women encounter. Additionally, the dual burden of professional and domestic responsibilities and limited access to professional mentoring networks contribute to the sense of hesitation and uncertainty often experienced by women leaders in the education sector.

However, this study also identifies clear pathways of opportunity that can be harnessed to empower women in educational leadership. Social transformation, inclusive policy reforms, advocacy for gender equality, and the establishment of targeted mentorship and capacity-building programs have demonstrated effectiveness in strengthening women's leadership trajectories. Furthermore, the inherently collaborative, empathic, and inclusive leadership style that many women bring has been shown to enhance organizational effectiveness, foster innovation, and create more responsive educational environments.

Therefore, empowering women in leadership roles should not only be viewed as a matter of equity but also as a strategic imperative for educational quality and institutional transformation. Stakeholders must actively promote systemic reforms, support mentorship initiatives, and challenge gendered perceptions of leadership. By leveraging both structural opportunities and the unique strengths of women leaders, educational institutions can become more inclusive, dynamic, and better equipped to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

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