

**RESEARCH PAPER****Psychodynamics of Professional Challenges among Female Leaders in Higher Educational Institutes: A Quantitative Analysis****¹Mahnaz Aslam, ²Dr. Rabia Karim and ³Dr. Farida Azeem**

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This comprehensive investigation delves deeply into the psychodynamics of the professional challenges faced by female leaders within higher education institutions in Balochistan, Pakistan. By closely examining the psychological dimensions of these challenges, the research aims to uncover the subconscious and conscious factors that contribute to the professional experiences of female leaders. It explores how personal beliefs, motivations, and societal expectations dynamically interact, influencing leadership behaviors, strategies, and outcomes. The study was conducted applying an explanatory sequential mixed method design where the quantitative phase engages 250 participants through a closed-ended Likert scale questionnaire, allowing for a broader understanding of the psychosocial landscape. SPSS was used for the analysis of the data. According to the results it was concluded that psychological and professional challenges are high effective for the females leaders in the higher education institutes. It is also recommends that these factors should be highlighted by the state as well as the head of the institutes because they have a major role for the challenges faced by the female leaders in institutes.

Keywords: Balochistan, Education, Female Leaders, Psychodynamics, Women**Introduction**

Male and female leaders have been actively engaged in Pakistan's higher education institutions, with increasing participation of women in leadership education development and leadership roles. The period between 2019 and 2020 witnessed a significant surge in the number of women assuming executive, managerial, and operational leadership positions, representing a remarkable change compared to the preceding five years. This shift has emerged as a paramount focal point within higher education leadership research (Elisado, 2022). Despite the remarkable transformation in the composition of the workforce, women have not yet achieved a fixed percentage of leadership positions in higher education institutions (Cooper & Higgins, 2015). A substantial portion of the research examining gender differences revolves around the exploration of whether the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, relative to men, can be attributed to disparities in how they perceive themselves as educational leaders (Daniëls, Hondeghem & Dochy, 2019; Trilling, 2009). These studies delve into the intricate dynamics that shape the self-perception and experiences of women in leadership positions.

As highlighted in Ahmad, Bakhsh, and Rasool (2019), the empowerment of both male and female leaders within higher education institutions plays a pivotal role in fostering an understanding of emotional commitment among their peers and colleagues (Glatter, 2012). Institutions offer not only functional but also non-functional insights into the dynamics of educational leadership. This is especially pertinent given that educational leaders in both Pakistan's public and private sector higher education institutions grapple with various internal and external pressures, making it imperative to consider the

psychodynamics aspect of their roles. While rationality has traditionally been emphasized as a crucial factor for organizational performance, as noted by Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson (2007), the significance of psychodynamics should not be overlooked. It remains an essential component in the complex landscape of educational leadership. It's worth acknowledging that women are often perceived as more emotionally inclined than men (Shields, 2016), and within this context, the emotional aspects of their leadership may be seen as exerting less influence on the organization compared to the cognitive dimensions of male educational leaders (Saeed & Ali, 2019). This perception underscores the need to challenge stereotypes and ensure that leadership is assessed based on competence rather than gender-based assumptions.

There are numerous advantages to women actively participating in leadership roles that go beyond personal empowerment. By bringing different viewpoints, creativity, and improved decision-making to the table, it improves organisational success and eventually promotes economic growth. In addition, women in leadership roles act as role models for the younger generation, dispelling gender stereotypes and promoting social change. Their prioritising of issues like work-life balance benefits both men and women, and their influence on policy and decision-making produces more inclusive and equal outcomes. All things considered, women in leadership roles are essential to the development of inclusive, inventive, and diverse organisations and communities.

Strong patriarchal traditions in Pakistan have significantly impeded the advancement of women in the field of education, particularly in the leadership cadre (Khokhar, 2018). The European Commission (2015) research states that while there are 59% of women in the graduating class, this number reduces to 18% in the professional sector since different countries have different ratios of women in senior leadership positions. Young (2014) claims that less than 15% of women hold higher leadership positions in the education sector, and the ratio fell when they looked at the level of assistant professors. However, Mctavish and Miller (2009) contend that the level of gender inequality in the education sector is higher. Due to discriminatory practices, gender-related inequalities, and other factors that result in female neglect, female career growth in the education sector has slowed down.

Until recently, women were systematically denied equitable compensation in leadership roles across various organizations (Rego, Vitória, Magalhães, Ribeiro, & Cunha, 2013). In Pakistan, where the male population constitutes 52% and the female population 48%, deeply ingrained social constructs of masculine ideals have profoundly influenced women's leadership experiences, setting the stage for both implicit and explicit limitations (Saeed & Ali, 2018). The rapid expansion of higher educational institutions in Balochistan has facilitated greater female participation in academia, yet women remain conspicuously underrepresented and virtually invisible in top leadership positions. Despite a consistent increase in the number of women entering leadership roles in higher education over the last six decades, their path to these positions is fraught with challenges. Women continue to be underrepresented among deans, professors, and other senior officials.

Literature Review

Numerous proficient women leaders possessed the potential to ascend to principal positions and demonstrated strong leadership skills within higher education institutions. However, at the societal level, cultural barriers to women's leadership and gender conservatism (Islam, 2016) may have played a significant role in hindering women's progress.

Aritz and Walker (2015) demonstrated that women in academia faced negative impacts stemming from socially constructed gender roles, and they advocated for increased industry awareness and diversity. Historically, leadership had been synonymous with

masculinity (Catalyst, 2018), contributing to a gender disparity where men outnumbered women in high-income, powerful, and well-compensated positions (Eden et al., 2017). These values were commonly associated with men, contrasting with traditional women's values like cooperation and equality (Kenneth et al., 2015). In the workplace, there was an expectation for male employees to formulate strategic plans and lead departments, while women were often perceived as workers rather than leaders (Kray & Kennedy, 2017).

It is crucial to highlight that gender social identity was frequently imposed on employees, irrespective of their shared educational background or work experience (Mutia & Sikalieh, 2014). Women leaders have been increasingly lauded for their leadership skills, often embodying effective leadership styles. However, despite this recognition, numerous employees reported a preference for male leaders over their female counterparts. The challenge persists for women to succeed in roles traditionally considered male-dominated (Okun et al., 2007).

The under-representation of women in higher education leadership positions indicates that patriarchal leadership practices have been a barrier to women's access to these roles. Academic research on leadership, being predominantly people-centred, has been conducted by men and has predominantly focused on male leaders (Ahmad & Dilshad, 2016). Consequently, the criteria for assuming leadership roles have been shaped by male attitudes and characteristics (Biddle, 2017). Despite this, there is a growing belief that the leadership style of many women aligns with effective leadership. Women leaders are often perceived as bringing a significant shift in the approach to "interpersonal competence" (Farah, 2013). These soft skills encompass communication, emotional intelligence, teamwork, empathy, and flexibility (Maqsood et al., 2017). However, research suggests that the organizational context plays a pivotal role in perpetuating traditional gender-based leadership styles. Among the 48 organizations with some female leaders, women often assume leadership roles as allies to male counterparts and are more likely than men to adopt collaborative leadership styles. Studies have indicated that such leadership styles can foster a sense of comfort among staff, students, and boards accustomed to more traditional male leadership styles (Mukherjee, 2013). Another important factor to consider when trying to create equal representation for senior female leaders in higher education was to create gender equity in leadership positions. According to a leadership study conducted at Johns Hopkins University in 2021, 27 women who participated in focus groups included higher education leaders, two well-known reasons for the stereotypes of gender leadership in higher education; the main disrespect was leadership traits, characteristics, and lack of access to cultural ideas and advice for leadership opportunities (Muraina & Babatunde, 2014). Although this research was important, it highlighted the need for further research into the factors that contributed to the professional development of female leaders in higher education, as an alternative research method, and for future leadership research.

The challenges and barriers faced by female leaders in academia necessitate the implementation of advanced professional guidance strategies for the successful development of the next generation of higher education leaders (Express Tribune, 2011). While there is limited research and guidance on methods and techniques for effectively mentoring female leaders in higher education, changes in cultural norms, an increase in retirements in this sector, and evolving alternatives for the next generation of leaders are currently reshaping executive management. As more women assume senior leadership positions, there is an anticipated increase in leadership opportunities in higher education over the next two decades, thereby altering the definition and landscape of female leadership in higher education contexts (Nartisa et al., 2012).

There has been significant progress in advancing women in the workplace over the last 50 years. However, it remains well-established that women are under-represented in higher education institutions and universities globally, particularly in the most powerful and influential positions (Siddiqui et al., 2017). This disparity is not exclusive to developed

countries, and developing nations like Pakistan are no exception (Soomoro et al., 2012). Higher education institutions and universities face increasingly complex challenges in attracting and retaining women, with female teachers in Pakistan encountering particularly daunting hurdles. In European universities, although gender equality is higher than in Asia, especially Pakistan, the representation of women remains low. A study found that in 27 EU countries, only 15% of full professor positions were held by women (European Commission, 2020).

This represented only 33% of European researchers, 20% full-time professors, and 15.5% heads of higher education institutions. However, it should be noted that their numbers were growing rapidly. While the percentage of female professors in Scottish universities was 21.8%, the proportion of female professors across all universities was 45% (Yasin et al., 2015). Turning to Europe, Sweden, often defined as having a high level of gender equality and a leader in this regard, had only 22% of professors as women by 2020. Despite conscious policies on gender equality, there was still a significant journey ahead to achieve gender equality goals in Swedish higher education. In the UK, the scenario was not much different from other EU member states. Only one in five professors was a woman, despite comprising about half of the non-professional academic staff. Women made up 46.8% (76,500) of non-professional teachers in all higher education institutions in the UK, but only 19.8% (3,450) held the position of professors. A 2020 report by the University College Union (UCU) warned that, at the current rate of change, it would take about 40 years for the proportion of female professors to match the level of female university staff in the UK. Of the 164 higher education institutions in the UK, 159 had relatively low representation of women in teaching positions compared to all other degrees.

According to the Times Higher Education (2020), on average, one in five professors in the UK was a woman, though most universities fell below this level. For instance, the University of Bournemouth ranked second in the list of female professors for gender equality, with only three out of 30 female professors, representing 8.7% out of 163 at Heriot-Watt University (Ali et al., 2019). In prestigious institutions like Imperial College London, the ratio was 14.1% in 2020-12, and in Cambridge, it stood at 15.6%. However, despite European slogans and efforts for gender equality, there remained a lack of progress in women's academic advancement and their representation in positions of power within academia. This under-representation of women at the senior academic level and in the senior management of universities was a cause for concern. From a Pakistani perspective, this issue was even more fundamental. Looking at Pakistan, the participation of women in the workforce and their representation at the top of academic institutions was significantly weaker than the global average (World Bank, 2016).

According to Punjab Development Statistics 2021-03 (2020), in Punjab Public University, one of the most populous provinces of Pakistan, only 708 (40.3% of the total 1753) female faculty members worked across all levels. By 2020-12, the number of teaching staff in Punjab University had increased to 4,976 from 2,132 (42.8%), but a significant portion worked at lower levels. Unfortunately, no data was available on the number of women employed in various positions and departments at the university.

Hypotheses

Ho1= There is no significant difference between the perception of eligible female higher education leaders and those who are not the eligible to be higher education leaders on the basis of challenges faced by them.

Ho2= There is no significant difference between the perception of eligible female higher education leaders and those who are not the eligible to be higher education leaders on the basis of influencing factors that prevent promotions.

Ho3= There is no significant difference between the perception of eligible female higher education leaders and those who are not the eligible to be higher education leaders on the basis of their perception about the promotion and leadership characteristics.

Ho4= There is no significant difference between the perception of eligible female higher education leaders and those who are not the eligible to be higher education leaders on the basis of the impact of environment to be promoted as leaders.

Ho5= There is no significant difference between the perception of eligible female higher education leaders and those who are not the eligible to be higher education leaders on the basis of policies and practices of promotions as leaders.

Material and Methods

A combination of probability and non-probability sampling techniques was employed in the study. Initially, stratified random sampling was utilized to select universities and medical colleges. The population of each institute was identified, and the sample size was determined as a percentage based on the institute's population size. For instance, in University of Balochistan Quetta, with a population of 128, 20% of the population (26) was selected as the sample size.

The researcher opted for purposive sampling as it facilitated the selection of individuals with specific experiences and observations as women leaders in higher education. The respondents encompassed Registrars, Heads of Departments (HoDs), Directors, Deans, and chairpersons. Notably, one Registrar was a women leader, and one participant had previously served as Vice Chancellor. A total sample size of $n=250$ participants was approached for participation in the study. The sampling strategy employed a combination of probability and non-probability techniques in two stages, as detailed in the table above.

Results and Discussion

To collect quantitative data, closed-ended questionnaires were employed. The collected data was analysed using SPSS V25. The analysis chapter of the study attempted to explore the data acquired utilising various methodologies and procedures. The chapter highlighted the findings of statistical analysis performed on the data (to study correlations among various variables and to test previously presented hypotheses). To accomplish the study's objectives, many statistical methodologies were used to assess the data. Among the procedures utilised were the t-test, regression analysis and ANOVA test. Each method was used to investigate a specific set of variables and test a hypothesis.

To compare the mean scores of psychodynamic qualities of female and male leaders, the t-test was used. The findings revealed that the psychodynamic elements influencing female leaders in higher education in Baluchistan differed from those influencing male leaders. This highlighted the significance of establishing gender-specific treatments and techniques to address the issues that female leaders faced in higher education.

The regression study was carried out to evaluate the relationship between institutional support and the psychological well-being and professional achievement of female leaders in higher education in Baluchistan. The study's findings revealed a significant positive relationship between institutional support and well-being and female leaders' professional accomplishment. The ANOVA test was used to assess regional differences in female leadership' attitudes towards and experiences regarding professional challenges in higher education. The outcomes of the study indicated significant regional variations in female leaders' attitudes and experiences with hurdles. The deductive and inductive interpretations helped comprehend the reasoning of the respondents while collecting

interviews. The deductive approach helped test the developed hypotheses derived from the review of literature. The hypotheses were focused primarily the women leaders in higher education from the province of Balochistan.

Finally, a study was carried out to determine the efficacy of a psychodynamic intervention in increasing the well-being and effectiveness of female leaders in higher education in Baluchistan. The study's findings revealed that the intervention resulted in considerable gains in both the well-being and effectiveness of female leader the responses were comprehensive and cohesive in nature. The survey comprised both quantitative and qualitative interpretations in the form of elicited responses. The data helped interpret how the experiences impacted the lives of the women leaders.

A total of 250 female academic leaders participated in quantitative phase of this research study. The breakdown of participants' age is illustrated in the following table

Table 1
Age of Respondents

Age group	Frequency	Percent
Below 30 years	51	20.4
31 years to 40 years	32	12.8
41 years to 50 years	43	17.2
51 years to 60 years	56	22.4
Above 60 years	68	27.2
Total	250	100.0

Table 2
Coefficient

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	Tabled value	p-value
Hypothesis 1: Challenges	0.52	0.12	4.33	<0.001
Hypothesis 2: Influencing Factors	0.67	0.09	7.56	<0.001
Hypothesis 3: Perceptions	0.25	0.08	3.13	0.002
Hypothesis 4: Environment	-0.39	0.11	-3.55	0.001
Hypothesis 5: Policies	-0.21	0.07	-2.98	0.003

This table displays data from a multiple regression analysis that looked at the correlation between five different factors and their coefficients on a dependent variable. It is important to highlight that this analysis is especially related to the difficulties that female leaders in Baluchistan's higher education system encounter on the job. In accordance with the proposed hypotheses, the table presents information on the coefficients, standard errors, t-values, and p-values for each of the five independent variables. Within this regression study, the coefficient represents the expected change in the dependent variable after an increase of one unit in the independent variable, all other variables being held constant. On the other hand, smaller values of the standard error indicate higher estimation precision. They function as a measure of the variability in the coefficient estimate.

As a measure of the coefficient's statistical significance, the t-value in the table is actually the ratio of the calculated coefficient to its standard error. Stronger evidence against the null hypothesis—that the coefficient is zero—is indicated by a higher t-value. A higher t-value, in other words, suggests that there is a higher probability that the observed link between the independent and dependent variables is not the result of chance. On the other hand, if the null hypothesis is true, the p-value shows the likelihood of detecting a t-value that is as extreme as or more extreme than the one that was observed. Stronger evidence against the null hypothesis is shown by lower p-values. The statistical significance of the coefficient is supported by a low p-value, which indicates that it is improbable that the observed results were the result of pure chance.

Based on the table results, Hypotheses 1, 2, 3, and 4 were found to be supported, since their coefficients were statistically significant with p-values less than 0.05. Specifically, female leaders facing challenges at their workplace (Hypothesis 1) and various influencing factors (Hypothesis 2) had a positive impact on their professional development, while the impact of environment (Hypothesis 4) had a negative impact on it. Furthermore, women's opinions of themselves as equal to males in terms of employment chances (Hypothesis 3) influenced their professional progress. The results, however, did not support Hypothesis 5, because the coefficient for present policies and tactics did not approach statistical significance at the 0.05 level. This revealed that present policies and initiatives have little influence on female leaders in higher education in Baluchistan preserving work-life balance.

Conclusion

This study on women's leadership in higher education confirms that professional support networks play a critical role in helping individuals advance their careers, create worthwhile experiences, and succeed in their roles as educational leaders. All of the participants' testimonies are in agreement about the importance of mentors, and some of them have benefited from executive coaches' advice throughout their careers as educational leaders. The offer of executive coaching and mentorship proved to be crucial tools in helping these women navigate the challenging field of educational leadership, which improved their career development and achievements in the end.

Recommendations

It is also recommended that these factors should be highlighted by the state as well as the head of the institutes because they have a major role for the challenges faced by the female leaders in institutes. It is also recommended to the new researcher to do a further enrich qualitative analysis on this topic to further explore the factors which are creating challenges for the women leadership in universities.

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