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## Developing myself as an Educational Leader: Does Gender Reserve any Space?

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### Abstract

*Despite the growing association of teaching field, women's presence is still notably low in senior educational leadership positions due to the gender-explicit work on leadership position is not still well established. The contribution of broadly shared factors; gender power relations, role stereotyping and role socialization, that constructed and enacted with cultures and society are also crucial. So this article discuss about socio cultural and gender influence in educational leadership with empirical lessons. Obviously, every school system needs capable leaders to tune school with the times though the concept and meaning of leadership differ according to the national and cultural boundaries. Time and again, the personal differences in leadership positions between men and women have been concluded as some theories describe gender as an important core identity component and some views a cultural component emphasizing social role. However, the core notion advocates leadership styles and administrative contexts are gender neutral.*

**Key Words:** Educational Leadership, Gender, School leader, Culture, Women Leader

### 1. Introduction

Over the past decade, policy-makers have implemented a broad range of new policies and programs aiming to increase the capacity of school leaders (Hallinger, 2011), because the nature of today's schools is notably different than schools of past decades due to the changes in various factors including, socio economic changes, technological advances, choices of school for students and parents, increased accountability along with the increased pressure from parents, communities, and politicians (Crow, 2006). As a result the role of school leadership unavoidably becomes very challenging and demanding in sustaining school development and effectiveness in response to the various waves of educational reforms (Cheng, 2010). To accomplish the assigned task, every school system needs capable leaders to tune the school system with changing context. Without capable professionals, school systems would become supporter of conventional traditionalism and incapable to adjust the rapid changes occurring in the external environment (Goldman, 1969). Goldman (1969)

further noted that, without capable administrator, schools would find it impossible to function which shows schools are the subject of intensive debate on a number of issues including discipline maintain, learning achievement, school success etc. So it is essential to address, support and prepare assorted team of talented leaders to meet the challenges facing today's schools (Peterson, 2002 as cited in Peters, 2010), who 'keep the show moving' (Goldman, 1969, p. 13) with challenging various issues for the success of the school. Many people blame school creates problems on a shortage of discipline or pedagogical working methods, which if true, are indications of deficiencies in the school's internal culture. Some other focused on organization and resources and look for structural solutions to solve these problems. However, the stronger school management having clear and achievable goals, better planning, and more frequent evaluations are often proposed as remedies to improve the schools (Zachrisson & Johansson, 2010, p. 39). Because of these motives, today there is widely accepted belief among policymakers and practitioners that effective school leadership is necessary in order to attain the desired effects of reform policies. This can led to the initiation of new standards, roles, programs and systems for the preparation, selection, appraisal and in-service training and development of school leaders around the world (Hallinger, 2011, p. 306).

As I believe that leadership is an interactive process (Bellou, 2011), so leadership occurs within a social context. It is informed by both individual and social behavior, and thus materializes as a connection between culture and psychology (Adams, 2009, p. 222). Additionally, educational leadership can be defined and posited in multiple ways to encapsulate the concepts, practices and perceptions in diverse contexts of the society (Shah, 2010) because leadership is not rigid, but like a 'bamboo cane' adaptable to different situations and flexible and at the same time, however, consistent and by no means unpredictable (Huber, 2010, p. vi). Definitely, in school we can found several communities for instance, we can take the classroom as a democratic community, a professional community, a community of learners and a 'community of leaders (Sergiovanni, 1995), so school leader should conscious about these overlapping aspects of the school. So, educational leadership is associated with the ability to mediate between different levels, between the external and the internal environment of the school, between teachers and students (and parents), and between different groups within the school, etc. (Huber, 2010, p. vi). Consistently, the main purpose of school leadership is to empower and enable staff and students to assume responsibility for learning, acting and collaborating inside school and outside the school (Moos, 2010). Hence, school leaders are concerned with their relations to their teachers, with the culture in their school and with the trust within the field (Moos, 2003, p. 25). So, every educational leader should have multiple capabilities to collaborate with multiple stakeholders for the successful enhancement of the educational institutions. As educational leaders, if we can always remember to dance, both literally and figuratively, we will promote joy in learning and leadership (Gardiner, 2013, p. 538).

## **2. Sociological and Cultural Outlook of Leadership**

With increasing Diaspora of communities of diverse cultures, ideologies, and faiths, it becomes highly significant to understand how educational leadership is understood and

informed by different cultural and belief systems (Shah, 2010, p. 28). Since education is a normative enterprise, it reflects wider social values and aspirations to students and the wider community as well (McEwen, Carlisle, Knipe, Neil, & McClune, 2002). Moreover, schools are social institutions, fundamentally linked to the society (Moos, 2010) so definitely, the links between schools and societies go many ways. For instance, (Moos, 2010) noted society frames the tasks of schools and on the other hand schools have to report to society what they actually do (p. 103), so leadership needs to be designed in accordance with the core purpose of the community that is being led (Moos, 2010). It is also to be noted that, among the leadership literatures, the term educational leadership and school leadership are used interchangeably with varying concepts and practices across societies and cultures (Shah, 2010). Understanding culture is important for every leader because the situated cultural and belief systems, and social patterns of behavior determine the discourses shaping the concepts and practices in each context (Shah & Shah, 2012). Additionally, culture provides the context in which the socialization of individuals occurs. It is in this context where we form the norms for acceptable behavior, develop gender and non-gender related roles, and establish values for shared belief systems that can be oppressive for some segments of societies (Adams, 2009, p. 240). Hence through socialization process, individuals then adopt values and norms that carry over for the successful implementation of his/her leadership roles.

Educational leadership is a form of cultural expression and negotiation deriving its meaning from the way in which social situations are cognitively appraised (Codd, 2010). Codd (2010) further mentioned that each decision made by the leader is based upon a cognitive appraisal of the social and political context in which she or he is located. It means that almost all the leadership and administrative practices made by leader / administrator are theory-laden (Codd, 2010) and roles are socially constructed, be these domestic roles or public (Shah & Shah, 2012, p. 34). Hence, the concepts, theories and practices of educational leadership evolve in context, and informed by cultural and belief systems (Shah, 2006). There are many cross cultural differences about effective leadership and also difference in concept and meaning of leadership according to the national and cultural boundaries. The differences in socialization in the various nations of the world give rise to different conceptions of leadership because the leaders' roles and practices are deeply embedded in the social and cultural environment of the performer (Li, 2001). Consistently, Adams (2009) noted that culture provides us with norms and values; it presents us with a framework of how we are supposed to behave (p. 229). Hence, it is obvious that every individual has a number of social identities or roles that influence how we perceive ourselves through our gender, ethnicity, religion, nationality, career, family role, and so forth. These roles have a great impact on individuals because they clearly define the expectations and attribute values to behavior (Adams, 2009). explicit

In recent years, research and discussion on the gendering of leadership have been influenced by the debates on feminism, organizational culture and communication, experiences in leadership, division of labor, home-work relations, men and masculinities in leadership etc. So the position of gender free work on leadership is not still well established due the vast majority of mainstream work on leadership preserve less or no gender analysis (Husu, Hearn,

Lamsa, & Vanhala, 2010). Some theories define gender as an important core identity component and some views gender as a cultural component emphasizes its social role (Adams, 2009). However, in general, gender is often not confronted in leadership theories because of the assumption of leadership styles and administrative contexts are gender neutral (Blackmore, 1995) and also there is no formula for leadership (Li, 2001, p. 179) whether only men or women can enhance the leadership positions individually. These theoretical and ideological evidences also suggest that there is no gender influence in leadership styles; so to enhance the women's access to leadership positions, cultural change is necessary because culture is crucial to change role models for the world's power structures (Wilson, 2004). The successful transformation of women's access to leadership requires changes in how women perceive their status in society and in how societies support women's emergence to leadership (Adams, 2009, p. 223). But unfortunately, women's presence is notably low in senior educational leadership positions due to these broadly shared factors like, gender power relations, role stereotyping and role socialization etc (Shah & Shah, 2012). Shah and Shah (2012) further noted that these factors are constructed and enacted with cultures and societies. Hence, women's participation in the public and their access to senior leadership positions is defined by cultural and belief systems in a society (Shah & Shah, 2012, p. 33). Additionally, for women, the many conflicting roles can also serve as a source of discontent (Adams, 2009, p. 233). Hence it seems crucial to work towards developing complex theoretical constructs to re-conceptualize educational leadership drawing from the perspectives held by diverse cultural and faith communities with changing societal structures (Shah, 2010).

### **3. Leadership Qualities and Strategies: Differences by Gender?**

The concept of leadership has been attracting increased attention over the last four decades by both theorists and practitioners because of its major effect on organizational performance and success (Bellou, 2011), so several researcher tried to identify the best leadership styles (p. 2818). And consistently, the leadership development has suddenly and in some ways quite dramatically, become a major focus of educational systems around the world (Brundrett & Crawford, 2008, p. 1). In this context, leader should have know how to build trust by always telling the truth, listening well and demonstrating personal accountability for doing what they promised (Close, 2012, p. 130). They also needs to manage time to develop personal relationships with each partner and encouraged a supportive and open exploration of partners' individual needs and expectations (ibid). Several expert focused that educational leaders need to understand the competing political, economic, and social forces in education, and need to become more confident in resisting the dominant discourses in order to advocate especially for marginalized and powerless group in society (Hoffman, 2009). Educational leaders need to work in complex environments for better relationships between community development, educational attainment and sustainability of systems and services (Close, 2012). For instance, the main key responsibility of school leaders should be the improvement of teaching and student learning (Spillance, 2003, p. 344). Hence, to be an effective school leadership, enjoying working with children, vision for creating school and social aspects of works are also essential (Brinia, 2012). Additionally, leaders also can predict about what is happening in societal trends and prevent negative outcomes before they are realized (Gardiner, 2013).

Leaders should make an effort to transform the organization into a community (Moos, 2003, p. 31) and leadership must take care and see to it that there is no violence (ibid). Educational leadership is a contested and value-laden activity (Close, 2012, p. 138), and it is a social practice (Eacott, 2011, p. 35) so educational leaders should have a social justice approach to enhance educational opportunities for all (Gardiner, 2013). Social activism in educational leadership seems to be more natural when it is understood how education is only one part of the larger system that is challenged to ameliorate societal ills (Hoffman, 2009, p. 407). Hence, leadership quality should be understood as a process involving an individual's examination of self in the context of the past, present, and future (Widly, Clarke, & Cardno, 2009, p. 148). From the theoretical lens, the trait theory of leadership assume that the characteristics/qualities commonly associate with leadership include effective communication, task completion, responsibility, problem solving, originality, decision making, action taking, passion, vision, ethics, humor, self-awareness, confidence, courage, experience and power (Whitten, 2000) and the claim is that the effective leadership training can be enable everyone to become a leader with these traits (Rey, 2005). It means that the leadership position could enhance through personal traits, qualities and characteristics of effective leadership but there is no substantial role of gender to be an effective educational leader.

#### **4. Women and Educational Leadership**

The rising presence of women in the international workforce has enlarged the interest for engendered perspectives of leadership (Trinidad & Normore, 2005). Although gender issues in leadership have been the subject of research, there has not been an extensive and exploratory research body that would identify the underlying issues that are strictly specific to male and female educational leadership (Brinia, 2012, p. 176). There are also the progresses toward gender equity in higher education but it described as glacial and excruciatingly slow (Marchke, Laursen, McCarl Nielsen, & Rankin, 2007, p. 1). As a result, women are still underrepresented in positions of power, responsibility and leadership, despite the dramatic increase in their formal employment over the last five decades (Rey, 2005, p. 4). Ion and Folch (2009) argued that gender is a crucial aspect in organizational analysis, and that gender differences impact the values held by leaders (Guramatunhu-Mudiwa & Bolt, 2012). Guramatunhu-Mudiwa and Bolt (2012) further noted that the gender differences in leadership style were highlighted in a meta-analysis of gender and the effectiveness of leaders. On the other hand, Brinia (2012) mentioned that personal traits as well as personal circumstances and age always play important roles as barrier for leadership (Brinia, 2012). Eagly and Johnson (1990) noted, 'the strongest evidence we obtained for a sex difference in leadership style occurred on the tendency for women to adopt a more democratic or participative style and for men to adopt a more autocratic or directive style' (p. 263). Hence, there is ongoing debate on the issue about whether men and women have different leadership styles and traits.

Several scholars argued that female leaders are not different from male leaders. They believe that the women who pursue the non-traditional role of a leader reject feminine roles and characteristics and have needs and styles similar to those of male leaders. This is due to the

leaders in an organization are socialized and selected into their organizational role and that this overrides their gender role (Rey, 2005). However, some others believe that gender ratios in any industry influence leadership styles (Guramatunhu-Mudiwa & Bolt, 2012, p. 263).

A Recent study concluded that the American and Finish women perceived gender as a societal constrain, a context specific variable and they discussed gender as a matter that impedes women's access to leadership (Adams, 2009). Ray (2005) noted that women's access to leadership positions has been hindered by discrimination and stereotyping (p. 6). Williams and Best (1990) also mentioned that the key gender differences have been recognized by gender stereotypes; refers to the distinct psychological characteristics that are believed to describe men or women to a greater or lesser extent (Bellou, 2011). Similarly the factors like; personal traits, indecisive character of women and, difficult to manage home and professional work task simultaneously are the contributing factors for the under representation of women in leadership positions (Brinia, 2012).

From theoretical lens, the role congruity theory predicts female leaders suffer two types of prejudice: descriptive and prescriptive (Eagly and Karau, 2002; Johnson et al., 2008 as cited in Elsesser & Lever, 2011). Descriptive bias occurs when female leaders are stereotyped as possessing less potential for leadership than men. Prescriptive bias occurs when actual female leaders are evaluated less favorably because leadership is seen as more desirable for men than for women (Elsesser & Lever, 2011, pp. 1556-1557). Elsesser and Lever (2011) further mentioned that these both sources of bias leave women in a double bind. If they conform to their traditional gender role, women are not seen as having potential for leadership; if they adopt the agentic characteristics associated with successful leaders, then they are evaluated negatively for behaving in an unfeminine manner (pp. 1556-1557).

#### **4.1 Empirical Lessons**

Gender inequalities in educational administration attract calls for research globally (Lumby, 2013) with diversified conclusions of leadership styles and personal traits between men and women. A meta-analysis of 45 studies of transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles described the cultural stereotypic male qualities of leadership were agentic, that is: 'behavior that is independent, masterful, assertive and instrumentally competent and female behavior as communal, i.e., behavior that is friendly, unselfish, concerned with others and expressive' (Eagly, Johannesen- Schmid, & van Engen, 2003, p. 572). Moorosi (2010) noted that school principals face ongoing discrimination in their role and their lives, and lead within a gendered context in which children attempt to learn (Lumby, 2013, p. 435). Study conducted by Elsesser and Lever (2011) concluded that negative comments such as 'bitchy' or 'catty' were commonly applied to female leaders. While not directly addressing the competence of female leaders, these comments attack the personality of the female leader, indicating that some perceive these abstract female leaders as less likeable than men (p. 1573). In contrary, Taylor and Hood (2010) found female leaders received higher ratings than male leaders in emotional and social competence (Elsesser & Lever, 2011). In a study conducted by Elsesser and Lever (2011) the participants indicated female managers were more supportive, nurturing, personable, understanding, empathetic and better listeners than

men (p. 1569). The participants of Elsesser and Lever's study reported females were better managers, better organizers, and had better communication skills than male managers. They viewed female bosses as more intelligent, better decision-makers, and more hard-working than their male counterparts (Elsesser & Lever, 2011).

Contrary, a recent study concluded that, there are no substantial differences on the way parents, teachers, and pupils face men and women principals. In the same study women principals strongly believe that women are more progressive in the both ways to teach and lead (Brinia, 2012). Likewise, a study conducted about the ratings of actual managers found no gender differences in subordinate ratings of satisfaction with their manager, ratings of manager persuasiveness or ratings of manager supportiveness (Byron, 2007). Brinia (2012) concluded that women principals also believe that there are some distinct gender differences in the way men and women head teachers bring about change; women prefer to use the expertise of staff while men tend to favor the intervention of advisory staff (p. 185) though they focus on ambitiousness, confidence, communication skills, and fairness (Brinia, 2012).

Female leaders were found more transformational than male in a meta-analysis of 45 studies of transformational, transactional and laissez-faire leadership styles (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmid, & van Engen, 2003). This meta-analysis described men as command-and-control managers, decisive, aggressive, risk takers, competent, confident, self-directed and strong while women have been perceived to be indecisive, unaggressive, incompetent, not risk takers and weak (ibid). From the gendered perspectives of educational leadership, several researchers concluded the diversified results with some personal differences in leadership positions between men and women. These differences can also be explained by the social-role theory and the expected roles for individuals of each gender group, which stress different qualities and characteristics for group members. But, still other than these differences, an important similarity was also revealed that a leader that is effective and gets the job done is regarded equally important by individuals, regardless of gender (Bellou, 2011). Scholars also claim that the effective leadership training can be enable everyone to become a leader with essential traits (Rey, 2005), which can enhance effective leadership position without any gender bias. Since, the central aim of education is not passive social conformity but active and properly informed social critique (Codd, 2010, p. 119). So increasing the number and success of female leaders and scholars in academe is essential to ensuring these organizations not only reflect the diversity of the field and society, but also to develop and benefit from the talent and contributions that both men and women scholars bring to the field (Mansfield, Welton, Lee, & Young, 2010). For this the recruitment processes need to be designed to create a pool of candidates qualified with the leadership skills, traits, and behaviors valued by the employees. Personality tests would be of significant value in this case (Bellou, 2011). However, for educational leadership a meaningful change is not possible unless it is linked with beliefs of the practitioners (Siddiqui, 2011, p. 28).

## **5. Conclusion**

From the gendered examination of leadership activities showed that there is no substantial differences between men and women leader rather female leaders claim their leadership style

as more supportive, better decision maker and change oriented than their male counterparts. But women leaders' also perceived gender as a societal constrains, a context specific variable that impedes women's access to leadership positions. It seems the effective leadership depends on the internal belief of the practitioners rather than gender roles. For instance, head teachers cannot become change agents unless an inner change, at belief level, takes place (Siddiqui, 2011, p. 22). On the other hand educational leadership is associated with the ability to mediate between different levels, groups and environment. Effective school leadership is also influenced by the policies and programs of schools. In this essence, it can be concluded that being a leader is more than the knowledge of, and the skills for, leadership (Giles & Morrison, 2010, p. 64) although some personal differences in leadership positions between men and women has been observed in some setting but the concluding remarks is leadership styles and administrative contexts are gender neutral.

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