

STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESSFUL WOMEN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: A CASE STUDY OF THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN LAHORE

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ABSTRACT

Women school leaders have to be equally effective in running the school setup as compared to male school leaders. Previous researches prove that women are more zealous, systematized, kind, friendly, and sympathetic, and honest relative to the males. This study sought to explore the experiences of female school leaders and the strategies they adopt to successfully run the school setup. Qualitative research approach was used and 10 female principals were selected from public secondary schools of district Lahore, province Punjab, Pakistan. The interviews conducted with participants were transcribed and analyzed. After the data analysis, different themes emerged related to the challenges faced by female school leaders and how they managed to cope with them. These themes included interpersonal relationship building, conflict management, and mentoring. This study helps to find out the strategies required by female leaders to successfully run any school setup so it is helpful in devising training programs accordingly.

Keywords: women school leadership, leadership styles, leadership strategies

INTRODUCTION

Women's school leadership has gained significant attention globally as a research area especially from the last quarter of the twentieth century (Cliffe, Fuller & Moorosi, 2018). The accountability and responsibilities for schools have been increased in recent years and public demands that the school leaders should be more effective (Myung, Loeb & Horng, 2011). A considerable amount of work has been carried out on women's leadership experiences in the education sector with demands for greater promotion of equity, improving diversity, and promoting inclusion, but with the same perceptions and concerns continuing to surface paths forward seem less easy to implement. It is argued that before change can be made; there is a fundamental challenge and reformation needed of the prevailing paradigm of leadership (Myung, Loeb & Horng, 2011). Research into women's leadership experiences in the education sector has led to calls for greater promotion of equity, increased diversity, and inclusion, and paths seem less straightforward to execute with the same perceptions and grievances that often tend to arise around sexism and stereotyping (Fuller, 2017; Morley and Crossouard, 2016).

This research aimed at exploring the strategies adopted by women school leaders in public schools in Lahore district, Punjab. Few of the recent researches regarding effectiveness of female principals and the strategies they adopt to cope with school problems are explained next.

To make a school building functioning properly, both genders can uniquely play their role. In a study conducted by the Pew Research Center, a question was asked from 1835 males and female participants that “Which leadership trait matters the most?” To be honest, intelligent and decisive were the essential traits that should be possessed by a leader, and 8 out of 10 participants rated these qualities. According to the participants, women are more zealous, systematized, and honest relative to the males (“Women and Leadership”, 2015). Eagly and Carli (2007) found that women have mutual traits including kindness, friendliness, and sympathy. Men are more conclusive, determined, prevailing, and confident (Eagly & Carli, 2007; “Women and Leadership”, 2015). So it can be stated that both males and females have the deemed traits required for becoming successful leaders.

Schools that employ female members as heads and principal assistants get many benefits. One of the reasons is that women have more transformational leader qualities as compared to men (Bycio, Hackett & Allen, 1995). Eagly (2005) did a meta-analysis that confirmed the benefits of female employees as administrators. According to Eagly, transactional and laissez-fair traits are found in males. Hunt (1990) found that deep-rooted aspects of democracy are more common among female leaders. Foster (1989) described transformational leaders as leaders who can develop a positive relationship with all staff members of the school so that all the staff individuals feel involved in achieving the mission and goals of the school. Such schools become more successful where the transformational and instructional types of leadership qualities are practiced by the heads (Aydin, Sarier&Uysal, 2013; Gray & Lewis, 2013). Transformational leaders become successful in getting the support of their subordinates, thus they provide a more suitable environment that aids in increasing the achievements made by students. Transformation leadership qualities are significant in this regard along with the leadership of teachers (Robinson et al., 2008). Transformational leadership is more effective for organizations in today’s world, and approaches regarding women's leadership are also essential for efficient leadership.

For combating injustice, female superintendents are more effective (Hughes, 2013). It is because many female leaders can relate to the feeling of injustice based on their experience of orthodox behavior and facing other obstructions in their leadership career so they can identify injustice from the viewpoints of minority group students, parents, and other members of the school. According to the report of the Common Wealth Secretariat (Patel, 2013), females are less hierarchical, more supportive and collaborative, and more eager to enhance self-confidence in others. Authoritative positions in any institute can be made diversified by increasing the number of women leaders. The diverse perspectives can then help to think and create in different ways for having a unique problem-solving approach in an organization (Boatman, Wellins, & Neal, 2011).

Having more female leaders in school will be beneficial for female staff members of the school. Female leaders in the educational sector can be role models for achieving the set goals and they can be a source of inspiration for upcoming leaders. The

relationship of the employee with the head is a source of satisfaction for an employee (Tillman & Tillman, 2008).

Some additional benefits and strengths that are gender-specific and can be gained by female leaders in the educational realm have been confirmed by other researchers. Teachers perceive the female heads to be more dynamic and have more involvement in school classrooms (Lee, Smith, & Cioci, 1993). Male and female teachers working with female heads gave a positive response that female leaders are more participative (Lee et al., 1993). Hoyt & Simon (2011) confirmed a slight benefit. Andrews (2017) deduced that some gender specified trends can be found by testing emotional intellect; particularly females get high scores in compassion, societal responsibility, and interactive relationship. And males get a high score in self-confidence, decisiveness, and stress tolerance. A Zenger Folkma (2012) studied 16 competent leadership areas and compared men and women, he discovered that females possess more soft skills which include establishing a relationship, communicating, and emotional intellect. They also got high scores in traits such as taking initiative and driving for outcomes that are traditionally associated with males (McLaughlin, 2015).

A few studies have also been conducted to point out the successes brought by women in their organizations and to see that how many colleagues give value to them. In a study completed by Catalyst (2007) about Fortune 500 companies, companies' performance was compared with the number of onboard women working in those companies. An increment of 40-60% has been observed in return on equity, profit margin, and return on invested capital of those companies where a minimum of 3 women are serving as on-board members. McKinsey and Company (2007) also supported these outcomes by stating that there is a much higher return on equity in teams in which gender diversity exists. Wilson & Atlantar (2009) also found that chance of bankruptcy is decreased in companies where women work on board. There are not many studies that have been conducted on women leadership in secondary schools in Pakistan. This study will help to fill this gap.

Background of the study

Several studies are indicating the successful indicators for women school leaders. Krumm and Gates (2000) carried out a descriptive research study to assess the gender inequality and types of leadership between male and female heads. It was found that most of the male and female leaders had "a behavior of high-task and high relationship which was adopted by them as their styles of leadership" (p. 20). Moreover, the female school heads have adopted such leadership styles which are more suitable and are shown through their actions as compared to that of male heads. The key finding of this study was that women managers are more superior to male leaders because they get adapted to leadership more easily. Funk and Polnick (2005) described that women school leaders are effective, and inspiring leaders who act as agents of change, treating others with dignity, caring for children, providing a healthy school community, and making a difference in the lives of children. The effectiveness of female heads can be strengthened by mentoring, developing positive relations with all the clients of school, taking good care of health issues related to themselves, having optimistic thoughts, and getting a lesson from their inaccuracies. Many effective US charter schools particularly led by female heads appear to concentrate on cultivating hard-working student habits without excuses and show a deep willingness to do whatever it takes to promote a culture of academic achievement and personal accountability (Stetson, 2013). The best attributes for a successful school leader are

setting directions, improving learning and teaching programs, developing people and cultivating skills among team members, refining, aligning, and transforming the organization (Krumm and Gates,2000). Similarly, McKinney, Labat, and Labat (2015) identified that there was a connection between teaching morality and the key modeling of the path, motivating a common vision, questioning the method, empowering others to act, and stimulating the heart for mutual objectives to be a successful school leader.

The international scholarly research demonstrates an urgent need to train and equip school heads with certain skills to implement this pedagogic leadership (Hallinger& Lee, 2014), giving them trust and skills to engage them in improving teaching-learning processes and resolve any problems that may occur in teaching practices (Le Fevre& Robinson, 2015). The planning and implementation of the secondary school leadership approach in England include support for the headteacher, coaching and mentoring, professional networking with colleagues and senior leaders, and opportunities for further education and training are crucial steps in achieving leadership roles (Cliff et al., 2018).

Significance and Contribution of the Study

A theoretical approach has been used in this study for getting information about secondary schools and the role of female leaders in educational institutes. The challenges being faced by the female leaders in school will also be identified so that they could be assisted in formulating specific action plans in association with the policy-makers of governmental organizations which will help to promote the career advancement of currently working and newly emerging women as well. Thus, they could be guided about the most suitable styles of leadership along with some informal strategies that could be adopted by them by which the impacts associated with culture, economy, and education could have the least effects on the career projections of females in the secondary level educational sectors. A significant contribution made by this study will be that live experiences of Pakistani women leaders in the educational sector will be described through which some strategic plans could be devised by others working in the same field for improving and nourishing the capabilities and skills of the students in secondary level schools. Understanding the female leaders and their abilities to transport into the administrative role requires having deep insight so that an equal viewpoint of female leaders at schools could be gained and their leadership styles could be promoted to strengthen the opportunities for other females (Grogan, 2014).

Objectives of the study

Following are the main objectives of this study:

- To investigate the lived experiences of women school leaders during their routine job.
- To investigate the major strategies adopted by women leaders to successfully run the school setup.

Research questions

Following are the research questions of this study:

- What are the major challenges faced by women leaders while running the school setup?

- What are the strategies adopted by women leaders to successfully run the school setup?

Research methodology

A qualitative approach will be used for the case study in this research for exploring the strategies adopted by them for running the setup of school in a successful manner. Qualitative research is used to solve and interpret the live experiences of humans which could not be defined by the numeric data in this world of chaos and richness (Schaefer, Roller, & Lavrakas, 2015). Lewis, 2015 defined qualitative research as “the process of collecting, organizing, and systematically interpreting the documented material and it is obtained from dialogue and discussions for exploring the actual meaning of social procedures experienced naturally by humans” (p. 115).

Boundaries of the research

The boundaries defined for this particular study have been given as follows:

- It is conducted in the Lahore district of Punjab province.
- Only public schools are included, private schools are not a part of this study.
- Only female leaders are included in this study.

Data Collection Methods

For understanding the insights of female school leaders, face-to-face interviews of participants were conducted in this study (Roller, 2016). To understand the perceptions, estimates, and points of view of the individuals targeted as the sample, interview questions were made open-ended (Creswell, 2014). The questions were designed in such a way for expanding the path and knowledge of female leaders regarding the conclusion of the head teacher’s role. It was required to include a lived experience for structuring the instruments for qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). For producing the potential of follow-up questions, interviews were conducted in semi-structured form (Lewis, 2015). It was possible to focus on building rapport and observing visual prompts from the responses given by participants by researching taking their face-to-face interviews (Oltmann, 2016).

Data Analysis

Once the data was collected by me, the next step was the categorization of available information according to any specific pattern or theme in it (Saldana, 2009). For determining if any nuance or background knowledge is missing, I started listening to the audio recordings before transcription (Brooks, 2010; Matheson, 2007). Shosa (2012) suggested the following steps precede thematic analysis for having a rich and detailed analysis:

- Reading the transcripts multiple times.
- Extracting significant statements.
- Formulating meanings.
- Making categories, clusters, and themes.
- Integrating into a comprehensive description.
- Explaining vital structures of the phenomenon.
- Validating from research participants.

I believe that it was made possible to have a holistic view of the phenomenon when two methods were combined. I read and re-read the individual transcripts continually. I used a coding scheme for all the responses to help out in their analysis. The

application of this coding system allowed me to categorize the responses into specific themes.

Ethical considerations

It is necessary to protect the participants from all the possible harms that might come from their participation in this study because of human participation in this research study. The researcher is responsible for getting approval from the organizations involved in this research, obtaining consent from participants after providing complete information to them, and ensuring the confidentiality of participants' characteristics (Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). To inform the participants about all the aspects of this study, it was ensured that a recruitment email was sent to all of them. The information was presented by making a demographic questionnaire and they were given sufficient time to reflect their thoughts about it before agreeing to participate in the research. Before initiating the process of the interview, I acquired a written consent form from all of the participants. Consent forms ensured that they were participating voluntarily and their responses were anonymous. They were free to ask any further questions before giving the interview. The option of withdrawal at any point of study without giving any reason was also provided to them.

I was the only person who had the access to information provided by participants to make sure that their personal information remain confidential. They were already informed that the audio of their interviews will be recorded and after completing the doctoral dissertation successfully, those recordings were destroyed. There was no possibility of psychological harm to any of the participants during and after the interview process. To make sure that the study is trustworthy and to lessen the biases, ethical procedures were followed by the researcher during data analysis.

Results

The major aim of this study was to investigate the experiences of women school leaders while running the school setup and the strategies adopted by women leaders to overcome the challenges faced by them while running the school setup and successfully control the school setup. The researcher interviewed 10 female school principals and after transcribing the interviews, analyzed the obtained data to find out the answers to the study questions.

The major themes obtained from qualitative data analysis are explained below.

Interpersonal relationship

Many responses were recorded related to the variety of ways by which female leaders engaged with others and led their institutions i.e., by hard work and also having fun with them. Based on all the responses, it can be deduced that these female leaders know the importance that they could be approached by any of their subordinates to develop authentic interactions with them. Some of the other good characteristics which were possessed by them including kindness, friendliness, and being generous were also identified. In general, all the female respondents mentioned their passion for this job and doing their job well. Participant D said that

“I lead by all the possible ways i.e; by attending the events, caring about my colleagues, and all this is like fun for me to do.”

In this section, common experiences of respondents have been outlined along with some of those habits which are possessed by some particular individuals such as

interacting with others, communicating, listening, collaborating, working in a team, vision about different things, and focusing on the bigger picture.

In this entire research study, almost all the female schoolteachers shared the idea about the significance of developing relationships. Participant A stated that:

“You cannot achieve success if you are not good at building relationships with your colleagues. Relationships play a primary role and else of everything gets derived from the relationships.”

The importance of relationships was continuously repeated and mentioned as one of the most significant things done by the participants to achieve success. To achieve success in their jobs, developing strong relations was regarded as a part of this process. As participant C said that:

“Being a leader, relationships provide greater strengths to me.”

Participant F mentioned that,

“I have always been recognized at the leadership post based on my relationships with the colleagues. To do the tasks deeply and productively, it is important to collaborate for developing strong relationships more than any other factor. I have been reputed as a person who can forge relations in almost every kind of place or division.”

The most often discussed factor was the skill to establish connections with other people to get the job done. Participant J commented about successful relations as,

“Successful relationships are warm and trustworthy. In this way, you are sure that the communication is authentic; the things I am listening to are genuine and the things I am saying are also reliable. This factor is the shortcut to being productive. The work just gets done that way. But it’s based on giving value to human associations and believing that everyone has the capability of teaching and they can also make their contributions in any project.”

Having a strong commitment to being productive was evident in creating a way towards successful and authentic relations. Participant H said that:

“Despite being a leader, the characteristic by which I am defined greatly and that helps me a lot is that I genuinely love people as I am a relationship junkie.”

One of the positive traits of their jobs was getting different things learned from others, investing in their lives, and developing a constant relation with others.

It was also recognized that a specific amount of effort is required to keep the relationships maintained. It was highly significant to be trustworthy, confident, and following the obligations and commitments made by a leader. These efforts are important to such an extent that if a leader is shy or introverted, even then these efforts should be made by her. According to the female participants, it was noteworthy to put personal efforts into getting engaged in building the relationships.

When the process of relationship-building was being discussed, it was also identified that informal meetings including food, sweets, tea, or coffee should also be arranged. Several respondents mentioned that it is helpful to have such informal meetings for developing deeper relations with other people. Participant I explained that,

“It is cheap for me to invest in taking someone out for the lunch or buying a coffee to someone to have some time for talking with them, so that I could know them a little more and develop a relationship with them. It has greatly helped me.”

A participant told that she used to have informal meetings with people while having a cup of coffee with them for solving the problems and checking on relations with them. While giving the interview, she also confessed that she does not even like to have coffee, but she has this reputation in the campus to drink it usually, which is due to the schedule of her meetings with different people.

In this section, another skill was also highlighted which was the capability of having direct communication with others in a good manner. It had also a close association with building relationships and emphasized having the capability of sharing information and listening to others as well. Participant E stressed that:

“What is meant by on a day to day basis? It involves two things; meetings and emails. It means it is all about communicating with others. Some people have the perspective that time in meetings and sending emails mean that you are not accomplishing anything but some people do believe in doing it because the whole job constitutes of conducting meetings and sending or receiving emails as well.”

For making the communications successful, it is important to share information. Participant B expressed her views as,

“I think I might over-communicate sometimes because I just want to ensure that people could understand the information completely. So that their trust is developed that although everything is not perfect and clear, there is something new that has been brought into their considerations. Whenever I get any new information, I want to make sure to communicate it with them as early as possible and give them access to the information resources so that they might get help in making good decisions for themselves.”

More than 5 other female respondents also shared the idea of making communications more than that is required. It was deduced that over-communication was an effort to ensure that much of the information is transferred to others so that they do not perceive any concept of hoarding the information.

To be a good communicator, it is necessary to be an active listener as well. 5 of the female leaders mentioned that they feel like counselors because of being a listener and a coach to many other people. Participant G explained that

“I always try to be a listener more than a speaker and I attempt to add what is missing and speaking up the voices of those people who are not present there.”

It is critical to listen and hear the other person for making the communications successful.

5 female respondents recognized themselves as the key holder of vision and operations going on in their organizations. Participant B explained,

“Thinking about where are we heading? Where are we going to be about? and Where are we going to be together?”

For all the schools, it is important to be the responsible person for leading the bigger picture of that institute along with managing the set objectives and goals. More than half of the female participants particularly mentioned that they had been tied into a much bigger system as compared to their initial posts. The bigger picture of their job is based on working to make the students, state, and the school division educated. Participant G said that,

“I have a belief that all of us are providing the services to a mission dedicated to academic education whether you are working as a supporting staff person, secretary, or you have an administrative position.”

To make the communication good, it was also mentioned that it is necessary to have a smiling face and laugh and enjoy with other staff members to find some sort of humor in a stressful situation. It should be the priority of every leader that conversations are kept short, to the point, and conversing face-to-face.

According to this study, the participating women also mentioned the importance of engaging and collaborating with others. It is also important to have broad consultations and involve others while making the decisions, but it also has some drawbacks as well. Participant I explained that,

“I think my staff anticipates me as a collaborative leader. This factor can be a strength and can also be a weakness sometimes. Sometimes, it may take more time because I want to see the consensus. I think it is important that everybody is included in a particular program that is associated with the organizational development so that the input of all the people could be achieved.”

The leader should have the capability of deciding that when everyone should be involved and when to make the decisions independently. Many of the female leaders mentioned what they expect from their staff members while leading them in their work. Almost all of the females discussed the significance to hire the right people, trust them, and support their decisions. Participant A explained that,

“I never try to convince people to do something if they are not willing to do that. I have the commitment to find the best and right employees, and then allowing them to work on anything that is liked by them the most, and then everything happens naturally.”

It was also deduced that it is important to create a comfortable working environment that should be inclusive and new ways should be found for celebrating the achievements. Participant D explained her viewpoint as a leader that,

“People should be provided with enough of space so that they could grow, they should be inspired and a vision should be given to them. And then, at the last, they should be willing of being accountable while taking tough decisions for the organization.”

It was also seen as an essential factor that a leader should give time to others and get involved in their personal and professional lives. Another way to give value to the employees can be done by fulfilling their needs. Participant J said that,

“I have a day-to-day mandate decided according to my leadership role in which the set of tasks is mentioned so that people can get a sense of surety that they have the required work in terms of reality and morality as well. Moreover, they are provided with proper support financially to make them willing to do work.”

Many female respondents explained that it was their duty to solve the concerns related to money to make their staff members focus on their jobs.

Conflict management

The response of all the participants was clear regarding the conflict dealings. All of them had established appropriate and required steps to address all the conflicts arising in the workplace, these steps had been developed by them regardless of the factor that

they were comfortable while dealing with that conflict or not. Their responses were parallel with their description of the leadership style adopted by them. In this section, the highlighted areas include time taken for gathering information, communication, listening, establishing relationships, self-assessment, negotiations, and other strategies that should be adopted to deal with the conflicts.

A minor number of 3 females admitted that the process to deal with conflicts is not enjoyed by them. Participant B mentioned that,

“I do not like to deal with real conflicts. It is tough to deal with those conflicts because people have emotional attachments with them and they get very angry if things are going in a wrong direction.”

When she was asked that how these situations are handled by her, she said that,

“I do not have any good and effective strategy to deal with them because I would not be bothered by such conflicts if I had a good strategy to handle them.”

It was regarded as the most difficult aspect of this job by many of the female participants.

Some women-directed that they had familiarity and were ready to deal with such conflicts because they were ready to get engaged and work for handling these disputes. Participant F said that:

“I do not resist solving the conflicts. I anticipate many of the ways by which the issue can be resolved as it results in making the unit strong when you get succeeded in working through it.”

It was also mentioned that it was important to initiate the process of solving the conflict and to help to craft the conversation for moving through the procedure of solving it and was considered as a part of the jobs of these females.

In general, everyone said that it is possible to work through the conflict and it should be done. Participant J explained that,

“I do not ponder that people show up their work by saying that I want to do a worthless job or I do not want to improve my relations. But I think that many people simply do not know how to retain the relations, or do the business without having any sort of fight with anyone.”

In these interviews, the goal of most of the female respondents was to help the people to pass through the challenging times of solving the conflicts. To deal with a conflict in a successful manner, many strategies were also identified. For this purpose, the 1st step was to take time for gathering and assessing all the information related to a particular conflict. Participant A said that,

“Mostly the stupid mistakes are made by me when I do not have enough information. If all the pieces of information are not available, then I will not be able to use my guts with full potential because there are gaps. And the gaps are too large. That’s why I have to ensure that the fabric is almost fully integral. Only then it is possible to make the next move clear.”

She further stated that she would adopt the option of interviewing all the persons associated with a particular dispute so that she could get the information appropriately before making any decision. Many of the other respondents also stated that it could

also be helpful to take time for allowing the situation to be cooled down which might help people in re-grouping.

After gathering all the information, the next step was to move on to identifying and communicating with people about the persisting situation. Participant E said that,

“I am good in communication so the strategy mostly adopted by me is allowing the people to take their time so that their emotion get calmed down, then sitting together with all the people involved in that particular dispute and trying to help them in meditating, and negotiating with each other about that conflict.”

5 of the female respondents identified themselves as straightforward persons and they had been responsible for tackling difficult situations. Making the relationships to work gets difficult if the conflicts are ignored or avoided as it can give rise to further problems. Participant H said that

“I can have patience in this regard, but I will surely talk about it.”

One of the respondents highlighted the way of communicating about the conflicts. She further mentioned that

“If I will face any conflict, I will immediately try to communicate face-to-face rather than communicating via emails or sending voice mails. I will arrange a meeting on an immediate basis to have a face-to-face conversation.”

Face-to-face conversations always helped her and others to comprehend the actual situation in a better way.

Once the issue is surfaced, you should sit back and allow others to speak up about their perspectives so that they could also be heard. It was also identified as one of the critical pieces of this process. Participant C said,

“It is always the best idea to have such a conversation through which I could get to know about the nature of their concerns and also to understand the actual cause of those concerns.”

This statement was supported by many of the other participants, they said that *“they just stop to talk and start listening,”* this process allowed other people to talk about their concerns openly and the source of those problems could also be identified in this way.

A common concern of all the participants of the interview was to maintain and build the already persisting relationships during the times of solving conflicts. Participant H stated that,

“To develop relationships with other people is the best way to let them reveal something new after every interaction with them. For this purpose, they should not be pre-judged by us, and we should be there at that moment in a real sense, being honest, and allowing them to talk.”

The fact that the person involved in the conflict should be provided with dignity and respect was mentioned by the participants many times. Another significant part of dealing with the conflicts was to get yourself separated from the situation or to be self-reflective about the situation. Participant I said that,

“I have to step back for re-examining my incentives, suppositions, and perspectives.”

This fact was identified as a challenge by another participant that we named J, she said that

“It is very hard to remember that we have already developed assumptions and a lens had been created by us before the actual moment existed which is based on all these things. It is difficult to view the situation by deviating from that lens and seeing the situation from a new perspective particularly for those people with whom we had spent our time in the history.”

A female participant shared an important message that it is important to have a complete understanding of the nature of the situation and not be caught up personally in this regard.

Many of the female participants mentioned that their role was negotiation most of the time while solving a conflict. Participant G explained that,

“While dealing with a conflict to solve it, I prefer relying on the data obtained from facts. Its attempts to negotiate about the issues respectfully so that the winning situation could be mutual. But it does not work all the time because sometimes you know that they are wrong and you cannot say that directly to them. You keep negotiating based on the facts until the situation gets turned over.”

Participant E further added that

“the conversation should be monitored to keep it courteous, humble, non-emotional, and most importantly all-encompassing.”

Everyone must be given a chance to speak up and also allow those people to raise their voices who do not speak up naturally.

Some other tools which could help females in solving the conflicts were also identified. As already mentioned earlier, many of the participants arrange informal meetings by having a cup of coffee or by having food with them to resolve the conflict. Allowing people to walk towards their desired way and being aware of their problems were also considered as some of the ways that can be used for connecting with people and diffusing into the situations. Participant F said that

“I mustn't lose my control over myself. I think that the most important way by which I could manage to solve the conflicts is by staying as steady as possible.”

Having a good sense of humor was also regarded as one of the significant tools to resolve any situation effectively.

The ultimate goal of all the participating individuals was to resolve the problems. Participant C said that,

“I am fully committed to the outcome that can be achieved by working together as a team. In some situations, we may disagree with each other's perspective, it is a part of moving on, so we should be focused on those things which are required for reaching there.”

It was identified as a challenge by Participant D who said,

“As a leader, you would have to stand alone sometimes because the decision has to be taken in any case, and in that situation, you would have to do that being a leader.”

Mentoring

In this section, the main focus lies on those particular ways by which women leaders get engaged with others in normal circumstances and during a time of conflict as well. The next crucial step of leadership is to pass on these skills and teach these methods to others. If a women leader mentors other female members by telling them about the

strategies that work and which ones do not work so that they could progress. In this research study, the female leaders were asked about their successful leadership strategies and most of them responded that mentoring is the most helpful strategy to run the schools effectively. They stated that mentoring strategies are based on the fact that the relationships could be built by understanding the responsibility of actual supervision. Some of the females replied that they do not give mentoring to other staff members because their job is not related to supervision. A wide range of areas was mentioned as the activities required during mentoring and these include creating opportunities, training, inspiring, and assisting others.

Some of the other examples of such activities include upgrades, attending seminars, assigning extra duties, and joining additional committee assemblies which are required for mentorship. The other significant aspects of mentorship also include establishing relations and taking enough time for visiting with people. It is necessary to spare some time for having informal meetings with the people to give appropriate advice to them for their career paths and further opportunities. Such relationships were explained as the ways by which participants could be encouraged, supported, and given feedback to the mentoring persons. Participant B articulated,

“I always try to spare sometime for mentoring anyone available in the school. I try to have informal meetings with different persons while having lunch and also make sure to ask them about their decisions whenever you encounter them so that they could be remembered about the last conversation. I also always try celebrating the success or achievements of other people.”

Most of the responses were short and mentioned 2-3 of the above-mentioned activities. But 2 participants gave comprehend and deep view about mentorship which was compared to the others. Participant A mentioned her way of teaching the graduate students and creating opportunities such as job or committee work for those students who have the potential of doing something. She perceives that she gives knowledge to them

“Being the caretaker of this field, we continuously take the top-notch persons in this field regardless of their gender to make the field stronger and achieve those legacies which have been established by other people related to this field.”

She searches for those people who have passion and are motivated to work for the betterment of this field. She liked to involve new people who have entered into this profession. She explained that

“I participate in a bootcamp that is of two and a half days in which different topics are discussed which include political interactions on-campus, developing a budget plan, hiring the staff members, leading, managing, and how to do all these things simultaneously.”

The main focus of this step is to motivate people for taking the next step of their career and get progressed.

She also works with the successful personalities related to this profession and stays connected with the people to help them in dealing with tough problems and issues. She also regarded this activity as the whole span of her career that she assists others in exploring new opportunities for getting mentorship. She said that,

“I remember that some people have mentored me at every step of my career and to continue the cycle I should also mentor others and also make them realize that they are also responsible for mentoring their fellows.”

Participant D identified her hidden talent and said that,

“You only consider the factor of potential, but it is also possible that they are being pushed by their boss or maybe the factor of confidence is lacking in them. She also mentioned that she always insisted the people get a degree from the college and in this regard they are provided with flexible timings so that they could accomplish which has been started by them.”

Participant J said that she could prepare others for taking over.

“I feel like it is my responsibility to prepare others for the future because I will get retired one day and I am a part of this leadership post till then and I want that this place should be better at that time as compared to the present.”

She was the only female individual who recognized this position as a part of successive planning and that this position is temporary. She also expressed that she had a strong desire of advocating the female individuals belonging to unrecognized groups.

“I think that I must believe in people more than they believe in themselves so that I can motivate and guide them.”

She said that she wants to see people making progress for the field and themselves as well at the same time. Based on this analysis we can conclude that female leader must pass on the traits, strategies, styles, and ways they lead to successfully run the schools to the next generation of principals through mentoring. This will not only help the next generation to overcome the challenges they face while running the schools but it will also help the existing principals to lead the schools effectively.

Discussion

Three major strategies emerged as major themes for successfully running the schools. These are interpersonal relationships, conflict management, and mentoring. The data obtained from interviews in the present study reveals that women principals strived to maintain all the characteristics to maintain healthy relationships with their subordinates such as kindness, generosity, and friendliness. This helps them to sort out many problems regarding administrations and “teachers become helpful when they become your friends”, stated one of our participants. Relationships are a source of strength for strong leaders. One of the participants stated that *“You cannot achieve success if you are not good at building relationships with your colleagues.* The present study found that women principals sit with their colleagues, have a cup of tea with them, accompany them at several functions, and even attend meetings with them to maintain healthy relationships. Similar strategies were utilized by the women leaders to develop relationships with local community members and parents by joining their informal meetings. Relationship building helps to cope with many challenges that hinder the performance of a school leader. These results align with many studies some of which are stated above. Babcock and Laschever stated that “relationships play a more crucial role in women's lives as compared to that of men almost in all the disciplines of social and behavioral science literature studies” (2007, p. 128). Hill explained that “To ensure the continuous development and to become successful, it is essential for emerging leaders to develop relationships with others”

(2003, p. 159). In addition, “to grow and nurture a relationship network, time and attention should be devoted, it not only helps managers for obtaining stretch tasks but also aids them in managing the risk factors associated with such tasks” (Hill, 2003, p. 157).

Another skill of women leaders to overcome the hindrances is communication. Leadership is all about communication and it involves the process of sharing information through all possible means. This helps to build trustworthy relationships among staff members and school principals and the concept of hoarding of information is eliminated. Our participants stated that it is important to listen to your colleagues about their problems and issues they are facing in schools. If a person is a good listener, then he/she can be a good communicator. If a woman leader can listen to the problems of her staff, then she can communicate with them about the overall problems of the school as well. Leaders must discuss the goals and policies of the schools and they must be highlighted about the expectations of the higher authorities. For all the schools, it is important to be the responsible person for leading the bigger picture of that institute along with managing the set objectives and goals. More than half of the female participants particularly mentioned that they had been tied into a much bigger system as compared to their initial posts. The bigger picture of their job is based on working to make the students, state, and the school division educated. These results are supported by many other studies (Eagly and Carli, 2007; Hegesen, 1995; Rosener, 1990; Werhane, Posig, Gundry, Ofstein, and Powell, 2007).

The second strategy is conflict management and the participants indicated that they were very clear about their management strategies to cope with the conflict arising in the workplace. The several methods utilized by them to avoid or manage conflict are gathering information, communication, listening, establishing relationships, self-assessment, and negotiations. However, some participants stated that they do not have any feasible strategy to deal with the conflict as it is the most difficult part of the job. The participants of the present study also mentioned that it was important to initiate the process of solving the conflict and to help to craft the conversation for moving through the procedure of solving it and was considered as a part of their jobs. Furthermore, the women leaders allow face-to-face conversations between the conflicting members. They also allow them to take their time so that emotions cool down and the conflict can be resolved through communication. The data indicated that the person involved in the conflict should be treated with respect and dignity for a long-term solution.

To engage and lead others, conflict dealing cannot be avoided. Komives et al. stated that “avoiding conflicts is common among people, so conflicts are usually ignored or pretended to be not existing by people” (2007, p. 228). Babcock and Laschever mentioned that “women have a strong urge of fostering and protecting relationships and most of them have the fear of disagreement from the results after a negotiation, it means that disagreement has been made from the issues under discussion which represents a dispute among the negotiators involved in actual” (2007, pg 131). Hegeson stated that “women give value to treat the disputes by interdependency and support by considering the relationship in contextual terms and it requires communication, collaboration, and settlement” (1995, p. 247). Although conflicts can be uncomfortable to handle by women they usually focus to resolve the issue by using formerly developed relationships to investigate the persisting situation.

The last strategy adopted by women principals to successfully run the school administration is mentoring other members and junior aspiring leaders so that they may not face similar hindrances while taking the responsibility of school leader. To pass on the skills to the next generation is important. Moreover, when leaders themselves mentor the staff members and parents then they can avoid many problems. Most of the participants stated that they mentor others whenever they find the time to do so. They meet them on formal and informal meetings and ask about their problems and provide them with feasible guidance that is helpful for them in their career. The importance of mentorship in school administration is visible from several studies (Bass, 1990; Fine, 2007; Freeman, 2001; Gardiner, Enomoto and Grogan, 2000; Hill, 2003; Werhane et al., 2007). Some of the other examples of mentoring activities include upgrades, attending seminars, assigning extra duties, and joining additional committee assemblies which are required for mentorship. The other significant aspects of mentorship also include establishing relations and taking enough time for visiting with people. It is necessary to spare some time for having informal meetings with the people to give appropriate advice to them for their career paths and further opportunities.

Findings

Following are the major findings of this study:

The strategies to cope with the barriers that hinder the women leaders from successfully running the schools include interpersonal relationships, conflict management, and mentorship.

Interpersonal relationships help the leaders to keep the school environment free of minor disturbance. The leaders adopt several strategies to develop these relations such as a trustworthy relationship network, communication, formal and informal meetings, going out with the staff members, and highlighting the goals and expectations of the school management beforehand.

Conflict management is considered to be the most difficult part of the job. The several methods utilized by them to avoid or manage conflict are gathering information, communication, listening, establishing relationships, self-assessment, and negotiations. However, some participants stated that they do not have any feasible strategy to deal with the conflict.

We found out that in order to successfully run the school system, women leaders must mentor their fellow employees and junior teachers who are aspiring to become principals in the future. This helps them to pass on the experience that they have gathered after several struggling years of work. Women principals tend to mentor others whenever they find the time to do so. They even provide guidance to the junior staff members over a cup of tea, lunch, or formal and informal meetings.

Recommendations

The researcher suggests following recommendations for the researchers.

The researcher should also focus on studying women in indirect leadership roles and traditional leadership roles. This would add further to the different ways and leadership styles adopted by women while leading the schools. The researchers could get benefit by conducting a more in-depth and comprehensive study getting and revealing information about careers, leadership styles, school culture and locations,

reward policies, social support and recognition, demographic information, and mentorship.

There is a vast amount of literature available regarding women leaders in different academic positions and school leadership at the national and international levels. However, there is a little amount of literature discussing women's leadership in other administrative positions within the education department. Future researches should focus on exploring the problems of women leaders in other administrative positions. Furthermore, the studies should look into the difference between men's and women's leadership in the education department.

Different multi-perspective studies are required in Pakistan's school education department to explore the socialization experiences of female principals. This type of research would help to comprehend the differences and similarities between different leadership contexts and how women with varying years of teaching and working experience manage the barriers faced by them while leading the schools. In order to better understand this, a two-way study is necessary which should include other teachers, parents, and local community members to comprehend the skills, training, and support needed for a female principal to successfully manage the schools.

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