

The Impact of Socio-Cultural Factors on Leadership Skills of Female Students at Undergraduate Level

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Abstract

The influence of socio-cultural environment on human personality, including leadership abilities, is undeniable. Socio-cultural factors significantly impact women's leadership skills and their ability to participate in leadership roles. In this regard, this study aimed to understand the impact of socio-cultural factors on female students' leadership skills. The study was carried out in Abasyn University, Peshawar. Data was collected from a sample of 104 randomly selected, female undergraduate students, using a five-point Likert scale-based questionnaire. Data was analyzed through SPSS 24 using descriptive, inferential and correlational statistics. It was found that socio-cultural factors had a significant and positive association with leadership skills of female undergrad students. Based on the findings, the study recommended that varsities should improve women's leadership skills by hope, awareness creation program, and bringing attitudinal changes among female students at undergraduate level through training workshops and experience sharing.

Keywords: Leadership Skills, Socio-cultural factors, Women Leadership

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of gender equality and the need for more female representation in leadership positions across various sectors. While strides have been made towards achieving gender parity in education. The numerous studies have highlighted the significant disparities in leadership positions between males and females, especially in traditionally male-dominated fields. Exploring the factors that influence female students' development of leadership skills is crucial to promote their empowerment and ensure their participation in decision-making processes. The participation and performance of girls in all primaries, secondary and tertiary education levels lower than that of boys (Dawit, 2016). Some of the challenges that females face in obtaining an education are the same for males, but, in the case of females, the challenges are more difficult. Basic education for all is a human right and social development issue that is full of gender equality and women's empowerment in all societies' developing countries (Ahmad & Gul, 2023; Bukhari et al., 2023; Gul & Khilji, 2021). Shah and Shah (2012) highlighted the influential role of mentors in providing guidance, support, and opportunities for skill development for women aspiring leadership positions. In any society

individuals play some roles, and one of such is the role of a leader. Disparity in leadership positions is substantial and critical. Prominent leadership roles remain disproportionately held by men (*Ahmad et al., 2024a*; *Ahmad et al., 2024b*; *Gul et al., 2022*). The most common opinions about leaders are that they deal with everything and give directions: leaders have power the structure of professionally important skills of a future specialist in the foreground today is their ability to show leadership qualities in different directions of social and professional activities (*FarajAllah et al., 2018*).

Female students of a university refer to women who are enrolled in educational programs offered by a university. Women who succeed in gaining leadership positions must work exceptionally hard to prove their competence or succumb to the pressure of these challenges (*Glass & Cook, 2016*; *Gul et al., 2021c*; *Zhou et al., 2022*). These students pursue various academic disciplines, ranging from arts and sciences to engineering, business, and beyond. They engage in undergraduate and postgraduate studies, working towards earning degrees such as bachelors, master's, and doctoral degrees. Female university students contribute to the diverse and dynamic academic environment of the institution. They participate in classroom discussions, collaborate on group projects, conduct research, and engage in extracurricular activities. Universities strive to create an inclusive and supportive atmosphere that fosters the personal and academic growth of all students, including female students (*Gul et al., 2021a*; *Gul et al., 2021b*). It's important to note that the experiences and challenges faced by female university students can vary, and issues related to gender equality, representation, and support services may be relevant considerations in the context of their educational journey. The term "female students of university" is a broad categorization that encompasses a wide range of individuals with diverse backgrounds, aspirations, and goals within the university setting. They have been denied equal access to education, training, and gainful employment opportunities, and their involvement in policy formulation and decision-making processes have been minimal. Obviously, women play a vital role in the community by taking care of all societal activities (*Gul et al., 2023*). However, they do not enjoy the fruits of their labor and suffer from political, economic, societal, and cultural marginalization. There is a belief that women are docile, submissive, patient, and tolerant of monotonous work and violence, for which culture is used as a justification (*Hirut, 2004*).

Leadership roles in societal affairs including religion and governance are exclusively belong to males. Even the right of choice in respect to entry to conjugal union is denied to women. Society cannot be brought about without the full and unreserved participation of both woman and man in the development process, and such a balanced development should also call for the elimination of all discrimination, and the protection against all forms of violence against women. Leadership can appear in any field and is given special attention in pedagogy. Within different learning types, leadership occupies an important place as one of the important outcomes of student development that teaching methods strive to achieve (*Gul et al., 2020*; *Hishamuddin & Shukor, 2021*; *Tufail et al., 2024*; *Khan et al., 2023*; *Villera Herrera & Pinto Lucas, 2020*). Leadership can act as a significant predictor of graduates gaining a place in the labor market, as well as being a significant career-building factor (*Danels et al., 2019*). American scientists offered a methodology for developing students' leadership stated that more women we will have in leadership and management positions in the world, the more stable and dependable world will have (*Shah Bukhari et al., 2022*). Many governments realized that without the active participation of women at all levels of leadership; the goal of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved. It is supposed that to ignore females' participation in all aspects of social, political, and economic activities are a loose half of the potential of the world's population.

It is also believed that ignoring female's participation in all aspects of social, political and economic activities is a loss of half of the potential labor force of the world's population. In spite of that, a survey study conducted by UN in some countries of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe shows excessively low percentages of women's participation in various ranking positions in many professions including leadership positions. Leadership aspirations in undergraduate college students, or the extent to which educational experiences and institutional environments may influence differential development of leadership aspirations across genders. This has led researchers to call for more longitudinal research on leadership development in the college years, including direct attention to the impact of collegiate experiences on this development ([Correia-Harker & Dugan, 2020](#)).

Statement of the Problem

The current study is investigating "Factors Affecting Female Students' Leadership Skills at the Undergraduate Level" lies in its potential to contribute meaningful insights that can inform policies and practices in higher education. By addressing the specified objectives, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by female students in developing leadership skills, offering practical implications for educators, administrators, and policymakers. Firstly, investigating the current position of leadership skills among female students is crucial for establishing a baseline understanding. This information allows educational institutions to identify areas of strength and weakness, enabling targeted interventions to enhance leadership development programs specifically tailored for female students. The insights gained from this area.

Secondly, exploring socio-cultural factors affecting female students' leadership skills recognizes the influence of societal norms and cultural expectations. Understanding these dynamics is essential for creating an inclusive environment that supports and empowers female students in their leadership journey. By shedding light on these socio-cultural factors, the research aims to pave the way for educational institutions to implement strategies that break down cultural barriers and promote gender equity in leadership development. In conclusion, statement of the problem of this study lies in its potential to inform evidence-based strategies for promoting the leadership development of female students at the undergraduate level. By addressing the specified objectives, the research aims to empower educational institutions to create inclusive, supportive, and equitable environments that nurture the leadership potential of female students.

Research Objectives

The research has been conducted to investigate the following objectives.

- 1) To investigate the current level of leadership skills among female students.
- 2) To find out the socio-cultural factors affecting female student's leadership skills.

Hypotheses of the Study: The research has been conducted to formulate the following hypotheses:

H01: There is no significant difference in leadership skills among female students.

H02: Socio cultural factors have no relationship on female student's leadership skills.

Significance of Study

The findings of the study had both theoretical and practical significances for the future study on women's leadership in the area. Theoretically, the study is expected to contribute for the improvement of knowledge about factors that influence women's contribution in leadership skills.

Suggestions from the study will also display the way to policy makers' new direction in formulation and implementation of favorable action and other policies that might improve women's sharing in leadership position. In addition, the study benefits women; it helps to understand factors that affect their representation in leadership skills by suggesting recommendations. The lessons may also have practical significance provided that perceptions to policy makers concerned with gender equality in politics. It's also serving as steppingstone for the forthcoming researchers. Finally, it is imagined that the study will add new information to the existing literature on women in leadership and provide insight into issues of women at work. It was also anticipated to enable scholars and policy makers to design more liberal leadership programmers and policies aimed at ensuring equal participation of women and men in leadership skills.

Research Methodology

Design of the Study

Quantitative research design was used for the study. This study was descriptive in nature. Quantitative research design is a systematic and structured approach to collecting, analyzing, and interpreting numerical data to answer research questions and test hypotheses (Creswell, 2014). Quantitative research design is well-suited for the study as it allows for objective analysis of numerical data, facilitates generalizability, and enables statistical examination of relationships between variables. Descriptive research design treaties on describing the characteristics of a specific individual, or of a group, in the case of this study the researcher selected to describe the status of women's leadership skills in life. According to Kothari (2004) the accent of explanatory research is on studying a situation or a problem in order to describe the relationships between variables. In this case the researcher used to examine the connection between personal factors, socio-cultural and institutional factors and female students' leadership skills, in adding to see their cause-and-effect relationship on each other.

Population of the study

In research, Population refers to all the elements or individuals that are chosen as the phenomenon being studied for the research. The data is collected from the sample of the Population of the study. The target population of this study was all undergraduate female students of social sciences departments in Abasyn University Peshawar. There were 140 female students' social sciences departments.

Sample size and Sampling Technique

According to Kothari (2004) the size of sample should be best in which it accomplishes the requirement of representativeness, efficiency, flexibility and reliability. The number depends on the precision needed, the population heterogeneity, the population size, and means available. So, statistical formula should be used to determine the size of sample, most of the authors used different formulas to determine the sample size of the study. For the determination of this study, the formula set by Yaman's 1967 was carried out to determine the sample size, which is consistent when the population size is known. The sample size is 104 which are determined using formula and the sample respondents were chosen from social sciences and management sciences departments of Abasyn University, Peshawar by using Yaman's sample formula for calculations of sample sizes. The sample is composed of 104 female undergraduate students of social sciences (Archeology, Journalism and Mass communication, education, political science, Psychology, Social work and sociology) departments.

Method of Data Collection

The data collection method which has been laboring to this study was survey method, Survey method was employed for this study because it is an appropriate method for measuring respondent's opinion and attitude towards the leadership skills of women. The data collection tool that has been used to gather facts and findings from sample respondents is a questionnaire.

Research Instrument

The instrument which was used for data collection is a questionnaire. Questionnaire is a tool by which information is obtained from sample size in written form. The questionnaire was prepared for all female students of social and management sciences departments of Abasyn University, Peshawar. Questionnaire was prepared in English. The questionnaire prepared has two parts; the first part was designed to collect information about the background like sex, age, academic qualification, and work experience and service years of the respondent. The second part is major factors affecting women leadership skills indicated on five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Validity and Reliability

For validation purpose, the questionnaire was administered to 15 female professors (experts) and supervisor from the social sciences and management science department. The respondents were pleased with all items of the questionnaire. For reliability purpose, respondent's responses were tested using Cronbach alpha process. The Cronbach alpha for all the items on the questionnaire was .792. The reliability of the tool was measured by using Cronbach alpha methods with help of Statistical Package for Social Science version 18. Based on the pilot reliability coefficient (alpha) the average of the reliability results was found to be (0.792) and hence, reliable and valid. That means the instrument was found to be reliable as Statical literature recommended result of (0.67) to (0.90) is reliable (Tavokol, 2011). So, the researcher calculates the reliability and validity of the tools by using the formula.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher collected data through questionnaire and personally visited to the concerned departments. During data collection procedure, the confidentiality of the participants was assured by using the data for only research purpose and keeping their identities hide. The first and primary phase in the data collection process was to get motivation of the subjects to complete the questionnaire by self-introducing. Once the subjects were willing to complete the questionnaire and able to return the papers within a short range of time to voluntarily collect the papers collaborating with leaders from each sector. Finally, questionnaires were circulated to each respondent and all of them were appropriately filled and returned.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed data through Descriptive and Inferential statistical tools such as percentage, mean, standard deviation, frequencies and correlation. Descriptive statistics refers to the methods used to summarize and describe the main features of a dataset. (Discovering Statistics Using IBM SPSS Statistics, 2018)

Results

Questionnaire was used as a major tool for primary data collection. Among the total of 104 questionnaires distributed to the respondents fairly large, 98 (94.23%), were returned being appropriately filled by the respondents. The remaining 06 questionnaires were not included in this

analysis as they were unreturned or wrongly filled. Hence, the data analysis considered the appropriate questionnaire considering the response rate is sufficient to meet the purpose of the study.

Table: Demographic Information

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|--------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | 1st | 55 | 52.9 | 56.1 | 56.1 |
| | Third | 43 | 41.3 | 43.9 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 98 | 94.2 | 100.0 | |
| Missing | | 6 | 5.8 | | |
| | System | | | | |
| | Total | 104 | 100.0 | | |

The researcher collected data from semester 1st and semester 3rd with the frequency of semester 1st is 55, semester 3rd is 43 and the missing system value is 6 and total number is 104. The percent of semester 1st is 52.9%, semester 3rd is 41.3%, missing system is 5.8 and the total are 100.0%. Valid percent of semester 1st is 56.1%, semester 3rd is 43.9% and total are 100.0%. The cumulative percent are semester 1st is 56.1% and in the semester 3rd is 100.0% as shown in table 2.

Table 5 Descriptive Statistics of items of leadership skills

| S. No | Item Description | SDA NO % | DA NO % | UD NO % | A NO % | SA NO % |
|-------|--|----------|---------|---------|--------|---------|
| 1 | My reliance in the face of challenges positively influences my effectiveness as a leader | - | 11 | 23 | 39 | 25 |
| 2 | I actively seek opportunities for personal development to enhance my leadership skills | - | 17 | 16 | 56 | 09 |
| 3 | I believe that my ability to collaborate and work well with others is a key factor in my leadership success. | - | 15 | 27 | 35 | 21 |
| 4 | I believe that my level of self-confidence positively contributes to my effectiveness in leadership roles. | - | 09 | 20 | 38 | 31 |
| 5 | The ability to communicate effectively is a crucial factor in my leadership capabilities. | 3 | 07 | 15 | 41 | 32 |
| 6 | I am capable of adapting my leadership style to different team dynamics and situations | 6 | 10 | 13 | 49 | 20 |
| 7 | I believe that building and maintaining positive relationships is a crucial aspect of effective leadership. | 4 | 5 | 11 | 55 | 23 |
| 8 | I can confidently delegate tasks to others and trust them to accomplish the assigned responsibilities. | 1 | 10 | 27 | 35 | 25 |
| 9 | I believe that I effectively communicate my ideas and opinions to others in a group setting. | - | 07 | 17 | 43 | 31 |
| 10 | I feel confident in my ability to take on leadership roles in group projects or activities. | 3 | 06 | 16 | 39 | 34 |
| 11 | I actively seek opportunities to lead and contribute to the success of a team or organization. | 5 | 11 | 13 | 45 | 24 |
| 12 | I think I possess the skills necessary to motivate and inspire others in a collaborative setting. | 2 | 10 | 11 | 49 | 26 |
| 13 | I am comfortable making decisions, even in uncertain or challenging situations. | 1 | 4 | 15 | 53 | 25 |

SDA=Strongly Disagree, DA=Disagree, UD=Undecided, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree

As shown in table 5 item 1, 65.3%, female students were agreed with the statement that “My reliance in the face of challenges positively influences my effectiveness as a leader”

Item 2, 66.3%, female students’ were agreed with the statement that “I actively seek opportunities for personal development to enhance my leadership skills” Item 3, 57.1%, female students’ was agreed with the statement that “I believe that my ability to collaborate and work well with others is a key factor in my leadership success” Item 4, 70.4%, female students’ were agreed with the statement that “I believe that my level of self-confidence positively contribute to my effectiveness in leadership roles”. Item 5, 74.4%, female students were agreed with the statement that “The ability to communicate effectively is a crucial factor in my leadership capabilities”. Item 6, 70.4%, female students were agreed with the statement that “I am capable of adapting my leadership style to different team dynamics and situations” Item 7, 79.59%, female students’ were agreed with the statement that “I believe that building and maintaining positive relationships is a crucial aspect of effective leadership”. Item 8, 61.22%, female students were agreed with the statement that “I can confidently delegate tasks to others and trust them to accomplish the assigned responsibilities”. Item 9, 75.51%, female students were agreed with the statement that “I believe that I effectively communicate my ideas and opinions to others in a group setting”. Item 10, 74.48%, female students were agreed with the statement that “I feel confident in my ability to take on leadership roles in group projects or activities”. Item 11, 70.4%, female students were agreed with the statement that “I actively seek opportunities to lead and contribute to the success of a team or organization”. Item 12, 76.53%, female students were agreed with the statement that “I think I possess the skills necessary to motivate and inspire others in a collaborative setting”. Item 13, 79.59%, female students were agreed with the statement “that I am comfortable making decisions, even in uncertain or challenging situations”. All these items from 1 to 13 indicate that the majority of the respondents agreed to the statements given to them for response.

Socio-Culture Factors

The major best guess in the communities about female and their skill has been evidenced as determinant factor to female’s participation in leadership roles. In this section of the paper, an attempt is made to investigate whether socio-cultural factors such culture and education affects female undergraduate students’ level of participation in leadership roles and the findings were discussed here.

Table: Summary of respondent opinion on cultural factors

| S. No | Socio culture factors | N | M | SD |
|-------|--|----|------|-------|
| 1 | The community culture, females are appreciated more for their outward show and good character than for their competence and intellectual skills. | 98 | 4.06 | 0.998 |
| 2 | Cultural attitude of society does not encourage female to think on key leadership position | 98 | 3.9 | 1.112 |
| 3 | Participation of female in leadership is low because culturally female leadership is unacceptable by the society. | 98 | 4.18 | 1.039 |
| 4 | The community traditional culture does not favor female on leadership position, because they are believed to be mothers and home makers | 98 | 4.07 | 1.007 |

N= No. of Participants, M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation

Concerning item 1, on table 8, respondents were requested to rate their observation the community culture, females are appreciated more for their outward show and good character than for their competence and intellectual skills at a mean score of 4.06, The respondents rating the item as a 'major cause' for the below demonstration of women in leadership position. In respect to this, above average of the respondent approved that community culture, women's does not appreciate through their talent, this shows that the community culture does not encourage women's those have ability and skill rather than those beautifully, which have influence on women to come on leadership position.

Concerning item 2, on table 8, respondents were asked to response cultural attitude of society does not encourages women to think on key leadership position at a mean score of 3.9. In concerning to this, maximum part of the respondent approved that cultural attitude of society does not encourage women; this implies that community culture does not support women on leadership. This finding is supported by with Calvert (1996) the cultural and social assumption that women are less strong than men and therefore cannot hold managerial positions is common in many developing countries.

In relation to item 3, on table 8, respondents were invited to price participation of women in leadership is low because culturally women leadership is unacceptable by the society. As reflected on the table it had the 1st highest grand mean score of 4.18, indicating the issue as 'major cause' that could perhaps prevent women's entry into leadership positions. In regarding to this, majority of the respondent approved that involvement of women leaders is unacceptable by the social order. This finding is supported by Brown (2006) men are more often socialized to preserve and seek professional success while women are socialized to nurture and support other as they assume the traditional role of mother and caretaker of the perfect.

In relation to item 4, on table 8 and respondents asked to rate community traditional culture does not favor female on leadership position, because they are believed to be mothers and home makers had a grand mean score of 4.07, The respondents rating the item as a 'major cause' for the under representation of female in leadership. In respect to this, lion share of the respondent agreed that society does not accept as true reality female to come on leadership this mean that community cultures do not be familiar with female on leadership. In line with this data gathered through interview confirmed that the domination of men over female is yet prevailing specially in the leadership positions. In this respect, Meron (2003) finding support that cultural perceptions that say a woman is less than men embodied in our culture that affect their exposure to the leadership.

Correlation between Leadership Skills and Socio-Cultural Factor: In the analysis Pearson correlation coefficient has been used to examine the relationship between the variables (i.e. dependent and independent variable). According to (Robert, 2008), Pearson correlation coefficients varieties between -1 and +1, where 0 shows no relationship between, -1.00 shows a perfect negative relationship and +1.00 shows a perfect positive relationship. For transitional values the study uses Pallant (2010) guidelines to govern the strength of the correlation, less than 0.1 shows weak correlation, small correlation for value range between 0.1 to 0.29; moderate/medium for 0.3 to 0.49; and large value for 0.50 to 1.00).

Table: Correlations of socio-cultural factors and leadership skills

| | | Correlations | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Variables | | Socio cultural factors | Leadership skills |
| Socio cultural factors | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .276** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 |
| | N | 99 | 98 |
| Leadership skill | Pearson Correlation (r) | .276** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 98 | 98 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From the analysis of the above table, it can be noted that socio-cultural and leadership skills have a significant and positive relationship. Therefore, they have positively correlated and strong relationships with each other.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the research conducted in Peshawar regarding female students' leadership skills must be interpreted in the context of existing literature and cultural nuances. Studies by Eagly and Chin (2010) and Koenig et al. (2011) have emphasized the significant influence of sociocultural factors on leadership development, highlighting the role of cultural norms and societal expectations. These findings align with the current study's identification of sociocultural factors as influential in shaping leadership skills among female students. However, it's essential to acknowledge that cultural variations can lead to different outcomes. For instance, while Western-centric models of leadership often prioritize individual assertiveness, collectivist cultures like Pakistan may value traits such as humility and group harmony (Hofstede, 2001). Therefore, while the research in Peshawar identifies sociocultural factors as influential, it may diverge from studies conducted in other regions due to unique cultural dynamics.

In conclusion, the research conducted in Peshawar provides valuable insights into the factors influencing female students' leadership skills, highlighting the significance of sociocultural, personal, and managerial factors. The findings underscore the importance of understanding the interplay between cultural norms in shaping leadership development. Sociocultural factors emerge as key determinants of leadership skills. The study's outcomes contribute to existing literature by emphasizing the need for context-specific approaches to leadership development, acknowledging the influence of cultural shades and societal expectations. These findings hold implications for educational institutions and organizations seeking to foster leadership capabilities among female students, advocating for handmade interventions that consider the diverse cultural and organizational contexts in which leadership emerges and evolves. This research recommends universities to produce better platforms and programs that are specially designed to develop leadership skills among their student body. This could include dedicated courses, seminars, and workshops with teachers, directors, and professionals who have experience in developing and improving leadership qualities. The varsities should provide more resources and opportunities for students to learn practical leadership skills through activities such as outdoor activities, and community service. By doing so, they will be able to cultivate a pool of motivated and knowledgeable student leaders who can drive positive changes in their respective communities.

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