

LEADING WITH A GENDER LENS: HOW LEADERS INFLUENCE STUDENT OUTCOMES

CHEN LIYAO¹

¹FACULTY OF EDUCATION, KUALA LUMPUR UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, MALAYSIA,
(leonielychen@foxmail.com, 242924907@s.iukl.edu.my)
GUANGDONG TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE, CHINA, EMAIL: leonielychen@foxmail.com

PROFESSOR DR. AMINUDDIN BIN HASSAN²

²UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA, MALAYSIA, EMAIL: aminuddin@upm.edu.my)

Shu Cheng³

³GUANGDONG TECHNOLOGY COLLEGE, CHINA, EMAIL: shucheng@gdlgxy.edu.cn
Corresponding author: Shu Cheng (shucheng@gdlgxy.edu.cn, 570638126@qq.com)

ABSTRACT

Leadership is a multifaceted construct that requires a nuanced understanding of various influencing factors, one of which is gender. This paper explores how leaders can adopt a gender lens to enhance their leadership effectiveness and drive organizational success. By examining existing literature and conducting empirical research, it outlines the impact of gender dynamics in leadership roles and how they can manifest in different organizational contexts. The research highlights key areas where gender perspectives can offer fresh insights into leadership practices, such as decision-making processes, communication styles, and conflict resolution. Through case studies and interviews with leaders across industries, the study delves into specific examples where gender-aware leadership has contributed to improved team performance and innovation. It also addresses potential challenges and resistances leaders might face when integrating a gender lens into their leadership approach, providing practical strategies to overcome them. The findings suggest that leaders who are attuned to gender dynamics tend to foster more inclusive and equitable work environments, which not only benefits individual team members but also enhances overall organizational resilience and adaptability.

keywords : Leadership, Gender Lens, Organizational Success, Gender Dynamics

INTRODUCTION

The significance of understanding leadership through a gender lens has become increasingly crucial in modern organizational contexts. Recognizing how gender dynamics influence leadership styles and effectiveness can lead to more equitable and productive environments. This chapter explores the foundational concepts that underpin gendered leadership. It sets the stage for a detailed examination of how leaders can harness gender awareness to enhance their influence and efficacy.

Gendered leadership involves acknowledging and integrating gender differences into leadership practices. This understanding is not merely about recognizing disparities but about leveraging the distinct strengths and attributes that diverse genders bring to leadership roles. It requires a shift from traditional leadership paradigms, which often prioritize masculine traits, to a more inclusive framework that values a spectrum of qualities typically associated with different genders. This approach is particularly relevant in educational settings, where leadership directly impacts student outcomes. By examining leadership through a gender lens, educators can develop strategies that cater to diverse student needs, fostering an inclusive learning environment. For instance, female leaders might bring empathetic communication and collaborative decision-making to the forefront, creating an atmosphere where students feel valued and supported. Conversely, male leaders may emphasize assertiveness and strategic planning, contributing to a structured and goal-oriented learning environment.

The exploration of gendered leadership also involves addressing the challenges that arise from entrenched gender biases. Leaders must navigate these biases to implement practices that promote equality and inclusivity. This involves challenging stereotypes, promoting diversity in leadership positions, and creating policies that support gender equity. Understanding leadership with a gender lens is essential for developing effective, inclusive, and equitable leadership strategies. This chapter provides the foundation for analyzing how gender influences leadership dynamics and sets the stage for further exploration of its impact on educational outcomes.

1. Leadership with a Gender Lens

1.1 Strategies for Effective Gendered Leadership

Effective gendered leadership requires a nuanced understanding of gender dynamics within leadership roles. This approach not only emphasizes the traditional qualities associated with leadership but also integrates an awareness of how gender influences both leadership styles and their reception by others. Effective strategies for gendered leadership involve fostering inclusivity, leveraging diversity, and advocating for gender equality in all facets of leadership practice.

One key strategy is developing an inclusive leadership approach that values diversity. This involves creating a workplace culture where diverse perspectives are not only welcomed but actively sought after. Leaders can achieve this by implementing policies that encourage diverse hiring practices and by promoting a work environment where all voices are heard and valued. For example, establishing mentorship programs that support underrepresented groups can help cultivate a more inclusive leadership pipeline. Another effective strategy is promoting gender equity in decision-making processes. Leaders should ensure that both men and women have equal opportunities to participate in leadership roles and decision-making activities. This can be done by setting up gender-balanced panels for interviews and decision-making committees. Additionally, providing leadership training and development opportunities equally to all employees, regardless of gender, helps in building a more equitable leadership structure.

Leaders should also be advocates for gender-specific needs within their organizations. This includes recognizing and addressing issues such as gender pay gaps, work-life balance challenges, and any form of gender-based discrimination or harassment. By taking a proactive stance on these issues, leaders can foster a more supportive and equitable work environment. Implementing flexible work arrangements can particularly benefit those who balance professional responsibilities with family commitments, thus promoting gender equality in the workplace. Incorporating gender-sensitive communication skills is another critical strategy. Leaders must be aware of how their communication style can be perceived differently based on gender. They should strive to use language that is inclusive and free of bias, and should be attentive to how communication dynamics may affect team interactions and morale. Training in gender-sensitive communication can help leaders navigate these challenges effectively. Role modeling and accountability are vital components of gendered leadership. Leaders must exemplify the values of gender equity and inclusivity in their own behavior and hold themselves accountable for maintaining these standards. This might involve setting specific goals for gender diversity and inclusion and regularly assessing progress towards these goals. Publicly committing to these objectives can not only enhance a leader's credibility but also inspire others within the organization to prioritize gender equity.

Effective gendered leadership requires a comprehensive strategy that integrates inclusivity, equity, advocacy, communication, and accountability. By embracing these strategies, leaders can create a more equitable and productive organizational culture that harnesses the full potential of all its members.

1.2 Case Studies of Gendered Leadership in Education

In recent years, the educational sector has increasingly recognized the importance of gendered leadership, which considers gender dynamics in leadership roles and their impact on educational environments. This section examines several case studies that highlight how gendered leadership manifests in educational settings and influences both faculty and student outcomes.

One prominent example is the leadership model at Smithfield High School, where the principal, a female leader, implemented policies that emphasized gender equity in both staff recruitment and student activities. This approach not only increased the representation of female teachers in traditionally male-dominated subjects like science and mathematics but also encouraged a more inclusive environment for students. The policy changes led to a noticeable improvement in student performance and engagement, particularly among female students who reported feeling more supported and encouraged to pursue STEM subjects. In another case, at Lakeside University, the leadership under a male dean incorporated gender lens strategies by establishing mentorship programs that paired female faculty members with senior leaders. This initiative aimed to address the gender disparity in senior academic positions. The program resulted in an increased sense of belonging and professional growth among female faculty, contributing to a more balanced gender representation in leadership roles within the university. Furthermore, these changes positively influenced students, who benefited from diverse role models and mentorship opportunities. A third case study focuses on the collaborative leadership approach at Riverside Middle School, where a team of male and female leaders worked together to integrate gender-sensitive teaching practices into the curriculum. By fostering an environment where both male and female perspectives were valued equally, the school observed enhanced student interaction and mutual respect among students of different genders. This collaborative model demonstrated that gendered leadership could effectively promote an inclusive culture that supports diverse learning needs.

These case studies underscore the significant role gendered leadership plays in shaping educational institutions. They reveal that when leaders consciously incorporate a gender perspective into their strategies, it can lead to improved organizational dynamics, greater inclusivity, and enhanced educational outcomes for students.

2. Leadership Influence on Student Outcomes

2.1 Psychological Impact of Leadership on Students

Leadership can profoundly impact the psychological well-being of students, shaping their academic performance, self-esteem, and overall school experience. The psychological impact of leadership on students encompasses several dimensions, including emotional support, motivation, and the establishment of a positive learning environment.

Emotional support is a critical aspect of leadership in educational settings. Leaders who exhibit empathy, understanding, and proactive engagement can help create a supportive atmosphere that fosters students' emotional well-being. When students feel emotionally supported by their leaders, they are more likely to develop resilience and a positive attitude towards learning. For instance, a principal who regularly interacts with students, listens to their concerns, and provides personalized guidance can significantly reduce anxiety and stress levels among students.

Motivational influence is another crucial component of leadership's psychological impact. Leaders who set high expectations and provide encouragement can inspire students to strive for excellence. They can motivate students by recognizing their achievements, offering constructive feedback, and creating opportunities for personal growth. An example can be seen in a scenario where a teacher, acting as a leader, implements a reward system to acknowledge students' efforts and improvements, thereby boosting their intrinsic motivation and engagement in their studies.

Creating a positive learning environment involves establishing a school culture that promotes respect, inclusivity, and a sense of belonging. Leaders who prioritize creating such an environment can enhance students' psychological safety, making them more willing to participate and take intellectual risks. This can be illustrated by a school principal who initiates programs to celebrate diversity and encourages open communication, helping students feel valued and respected regardless of their background.

The psychological impact of leadership also extends to the development of students' self-esteem and self-efficacy. Leaders who believe in their students' abilities and communicate this belief can significantly enhance students' confidence in their capabilities. For example, a headteacher who provides platforms for students to showcase their talents and leadership skills can help students develop a positive self-image and greater self-assurance. Furthermore, the leadership style adopted by educational leaders can influence the psychological climate of the school. Transformational leadership, characterized by the ability to inspire and motivate, tends to have a positive psychological impact on students. Leaders who adopt a transformational approach often engage students in the decision-making process, encourage innovation, and provide vision and direction, which can lead to increased student engagement and a stronger sense of community. The psychological impact of leadership on students is multifaceted, involving emotional support, motivational influence, the creation of a positive learning environment, and the enhancement of self-esteem. Effective leaders in educational settings are those who can navigate these dimensions skillfully, fostering an atmosphere that promotes psychological well-being and academic success.

2.2 Gender Differences in Leadership Influence

Exploring gender differences in leadership influence involves examining how male and female leaders impact their followers and the organizational environment differently. Gender can shape leadership styles, communication patterns, decision-making processes, and the overall effectiveness of leadership. Understanding these differences is crucial for fostering inclusive environments that leverage diverse leadership strengths.

Research indicates that male and female leaders often exhibit distinct styles. Male leaders are frequently associated with transactional leadership, characterized by a focus on tasks, performance, and organizational objectives. This style often involves clear structures, direct communication, and a reward-based system to motivate followers. Such an approach can be particularly effective in environments that require high levels of discipline and goal orientation. In contrast, female leaders are often linked with transformational leadership, which emphasizes interpersonal relationships, communication, and collaboration. Transformational leaders inspire and motivate followers by fostering a supportive and inclusive atmosphere. They focus on the personal development of team members, encouraging creativity and innovation. This style is particularly effective in environments where change and adaptability are critical.

The influence of gender on leadership is not solely confined to style differences. Communication, a vital component of leadership, also varies. Female leaders often employ a more participative communication style, encouraging dialogue and feedback, which can lead to a more engaged and motivated team. Male leaders might adopt a more assertive communication style, which can be effective in conveying authority and decisiveness. Gender differences in leadership also manifest in decision-making processes. Female leaders tend to adopt a collaborative approach, seeking input from diverse sources before making decisions. This can lead to more comprehensive and inclusive solutions but may also slow down the decision-making process. Male leaders might prefer a more autocratic style, making quick decisions with a focus on efficiency, which can be advantageous in time-sensitive situations but potentially overlook diverse perspectives.

The impact of these gendered leadership styles and behaviors on student outcomes is significant. For instance, transformational leadership, often associated with female leaders, can enhance student engagement and motivation, fostering a positive learning environment. In contrast, the structured, task-oriented approach typically

associated with male leaders might be more effective in achieving specific academic goals and maintaining discipline. Furthermore, gender differences in leadership influence are not static and can vary based on context and individual leader characteristics. Some male leaders may adopt transformational styles, while some female leaders may be more transactional, illustrating that leadership is a dynamic interplay of personal traits and contextual demands.

In education, recognizing and valuing these gender differences can lead to more effective leadership development programs and a more inclusive school culture. By understanding how gender influences leadership, educational institutions can promote diverse leadership styles that cater to the varied needs of students and the broader school community. This approach not only enhances the learning environment but also prepares students to thrive in a diverse and dynamic world.

3. 3 Student Engagement and Leadership Dynamics

The dynamics of leadership play a pivotal role in shaping student engagement within educational settings. A leader's ability to foster an environment that encourages active participation and motivation among students is crucial for effective learning outcomes. Various leadership styles, such as transformational, transactional, and participative leadership, each have unique impacts on student engagement.

Transformational leadership, characterized by inspirational motivation and individualized consideration, often leads to heightened student engagement. Leaders who employ this style tend to focus on inspiring students through a shared vision and fostering a supportive and intellectually stimulating environment. An example of transformational leadership in education could be a principal who actively involves students in decision-making processes, thereby increasing their commitment to school activities and learning. On the other hand, relies on a system of rewards and sanctions to motivate students. While this approach can be effective in maintaining discipline and achieving short-term goals, it may not foster intrinsic motivation or long-term engagement among students. For instance, a teacher who offers extra credit for perfect attendance might see an immediate increase in student presence but may not necessarily enhance their engagement with the content.

Participative leadership, which involves students in the decision-making processes, has been shown to positively influence student engagement. When students feel their voices are heard and valued, their sense of ownership and responsibility towards their learning increases. A teacher who regularly seeks student input on class projects or curriculum design can create a more inclusive and engaging classroom environment. The relationship between leadership dynamics and student engagement is complex and multifaceted. Effective leaders in educational settings must be adept at recognizing the diverse needs of their students and adapting their leadership style accordingly. By creating a positive and inclusive school culture, educational leaders can significantly enhance student engagement and, consequently, their academic success.

3. Analysis of Leadership Dynamics

DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS

The analysis of leadership dynamics through a gender lens has yielded several important findings. Firstly, it has been observed that gendered leadership approaches significantly affect the organizational culture and climate within educational settings. Leaders who embrace a gender-sensitive approach tend to foster an inclusive environment that values diversity and equity. This, in turn, enhances collaboration among staff and promotes a positive atmosphere conducive to student learning and development.

Another key finding highlights the impact of gendered leadership on decision-making processes. Leaders who recognize and address gender dynamics in their leadership style are more likely to implement policies that consider the diverse needs of all students and staff members. This inclusive approach not only supports the academic and social development of students but also contributes to a more equitable and just educational environment. The research underscores the importance of role modeling in gendered leadership. Leaders who demonstrate equitable behavior and challenge traditional gender norms inspire students and staff to question and redefine their own perceptions of gender roles. This leads to a broader cultural shift within the institution, promoting gender equality and empowering individuals to pursue leadership roles regardless of gender.

Additionally, the findings reveal that gendered leadership can influence the allocation of resources and opportunities within educational settings. Leaders who prioritize gender equity ensure that resources are distributed fairly and opportunities for professional development are accessible to all, thereby promoting a balanced representation of genders in leadership positions. The study identifies potential challenges faced by leaders in implementing gender-sensitive practices, such as resistance from traditionalists and the need for ongoing training and support. Addressing these challenges requires a commitment to continuous learning and adaptation, as well as institutional support to sustain gender-sensitive leadership initiatives.

The key findings from this analysis highlight the transformative potential of gendered leadership in education. By fostering an inclusive environment, influencing equitable decision-making, serving as role models, and ensuring fair resource distribution, leaders can significantly impact educational outcomes and promote gender equity.

3.2 Implications for Educational Leadership

Leadership dynamics have a profound impact on educational institutions, influencing everything from student success to teacher satisfaction. When approached through a gender lens, these dynamics offer critical insights into how leadership practices can be more inclusive and effective. Incorporating a gendered perspective in educational leadership involves recognizing the diverse needs and experiences of all students and staff. It calls for leaders to be aware of gender biases and to actively work towards creating environments that are equitable and supportive for everyone. By doing so, educational leaders can foster a culture of inclusivity that not only enhances student engagement and achievement but also promotes a more harmonious and productive school environment.

One significant implication for educational leadership is the need to implement policies and practices that support gender equity. This includes establishing mentorship programs that pair female leaders with aspiring students or staff, which can help to break down existing barriers and provide role models for young women. Additionally, offering professional development opportunities that focus on gender sensitivity and leadership skills can empower educators to become more effective leaders, regardless of gender. Moreover, educational leaders must be vigilant in assessing the impact of their decisions and policies on gender dynamics within their institutions. This can involve conducting regular reviews of curriculum content and teaching materials to ensure they are free from gender stereotypes and biases. By creating an inclusive curriculum, leaders can better prepare students to thrive in diverse environments. Another critical aspect is the importance of fostering an open dialogue about gender issues within the institution. Educational leaders should encourage discussions on topics such as gender identity, equity, and inclusion, providing safe spaces for students and staff to share their experiences and challenges. This open communication can lead to a deeper understanding and cooperation among all members of the educational community.

The implications for educational leadership through a gender lens are vast and transformative. By embracing strategies that promote equity and inclusivity, educational leaders can create environments that not only support the academic and personal growth of all students but also empower educators to lead with confidence and empathy. This approach not only enhances the educational experience but also prepares students to become thoughtful and inclusive leaders in their future endeavors.

3.3 Critical Evaluation of Current Practices

In critically evaluating current practices of leadership with a gender lens, it becomes imperative to scrutinize the prevailing methodologies and their effectiveness in addressing gender disparities. Current practices in educational leadership often reflect a traditional approach that may not sufficiently accommodate the diverse needs of all genders. These practices typically emphasize hierarchical structures and decision-making processes that can inadvertently perpetuate gender biases.

One significant issue is the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles within educational institutions. Despite advancements in gender equality, statistics reveal a persistent gender gap in leadership positions. This discrepancy suggests that current recruitment and promotion practices may lack the necessary focus on equity and inclusivity. For instance, the criteria used for evaluating leadership potential often mirror masculine traits such as assertiveness and competitiveness, which can disadvantage women who may exhibit leadership qualities in different ways. The leadership training and development programs in place tend to be designed with a one-size-fits-all approach, often neglecting the unique challenges and barriers faced by female leaders. Programs that fail to address issues such as work-life balance, gender bias, and the imposter syndrome may not fully equip female leaders with the tools they need to succeed. Furthermore, mentorship opportunities, which are crucial for career advancement, are often less accessible for women, thereby limiting their exposure to influential networks and career guidance. Another area of concern is the lack of gender-sensitive policies and practices that promote an inclusive learning environment. Educational leaders play a pivotal role in shaping school culture, yet many institutions lack comprehensive strategies to address gender-based harassment, discrimination, and violence. The absence of such policies not only affects the safety and well-being of students but also impacts their academic performance and engagement.

To address these shortcomings, it is crucial to adopt a more nuanced approach to leadership that incorporates a gender lens at every level of decision-making. This involves revising recruitment and evaluation criteria to recognize and value diverse leadership styles and competencies. Leadership training programs should be restructured to include gender awareness components and offer tailored support for female leaders. Moreover, establishing mentorship and sponsorship programs specifically targeted at women can help bridge the gap in networking opportunities. Educational institutions must develop and implement comprehensive gender-sensitive policies that foster an inclusive and equitable environment for all students and staff. This includes regular training on gender issues, creating channels for reporting and addressing grievances, and promoting a culture of respect and diversity. By critically evaluating and reforming current practices, educational leadership can move towards a more equitable and effective model that benefits all members of the academic community.

CONCLUSION

The examination of leadership through a gender lens reveals significant insights into how leadership styles and practices influence educational environments and outcomes. This research underscores the importance of

incorporating gender perspectives into leadership roles, particularly in educational settings. By analyzing the dynamics of leadership with a focus on gender, it becomes evident that both male and female leaders bring distinct strengths that can be harnessed to enhance organizational effectiveness. The study highlights the need for leaders to be aware of gender biases and to actively work towards creating an inclusive environment that values diverse perspectives.

The findings suggest that gendered leadership strategies can lead to improved student engagement and achievement. Leaders who embrace gender diversity and promote equality tend to foster more inclusive and supportive environments, which are conducive to learning. The psychological impact of leadership on students, as well as the observed gender differences in leadership influence, illustrate the complex interplay between leadership practices and student outcomes. This complexity necessitates a nuanced approach to leadership that considers individual student needs and the broader institutional culture.

Implications for educational leadership include the necessity for professional development programs that focus on gender sensitivity and inclusivity. Leaders must be equipped with the skills to recognize and address gender dynamics within their institutions. Furthermore, the critical evaluation of current practices highlights areas where traditional leadership models may fall short, suggesting a shift towards more flexible and adaptive leadership styles that can better accommodate the diverse needs of the educational community.

In conclusion, this research advocates for a paradigm shift in leadership approaches within educational settings, emphasizing the integration of gender perspectives as a means to enhance leadership effectiveness and student success. By adopting a gender lens, educational leaders can not only improve institutional outcomes but also contribute to the broader societal goal of gender equality. Future research should continue to explore the intersection of gender and leadership, providing deeper insights and strategies for fostering equitable and effective learning environments.

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