Investigating Leadership Attributes of Women Administrators in Public Schools

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Abstract: *This study was undertaken to investigate the leadership attributes of women administrators in public schools in the Schools Division of Isabela City, Basilan, Philippines. It explored the leadership attributes of women as school leaders when moderating variables were considered. It further delved into the context of women leaders running institutions when curriculum and instruction as well as governance were put into the picture. The opportunities earned by women as school leaders were also given emphasis in the study. Employing quanti-quali sequential research design with twenty-two (22) respondents, results shows that women school administrators are flexible, perseverant, transparent, risk-taker and committed. It further shows that length of service is significantly related with leadership attributes while educational attainment and age do not imply any positive correlation. Furthermore, women school leaders view managing institutions in terms of curriculum and instruction with adherence, adaptability, and implementation while governance with flexibility, responsiveness and transparency. Exposure to public service, discovery to own strengths and weaknesses, ability to inspire others and the chance to grow better are among opportunities related by women leaders in public institutions.*

Keywords: Leadership attributes, school administrators, public schools

1. Introduction

Leadership becomes exceptional when the team follows the leader and collaborate together to make things work for all. This applies regardless who leads you in achieving the organization's targets. Undeniably, the understanding of an effective leadership is influenced by restricted gender norms which is something that school leaders and policymakers in education frequently failed to understand (Maranto, Carroll, Cheng, and Teodoro, 2018).

In several circumstances, women leaders are questioned as far as their leadership and management competencies are concerned. Reports consistently show women feeling degraded despite their significant contributions to society. However, Moyo and Perumal (2019) claimed that a concerted effort has been made to address the historical inequities by ensuring that more women are hired in educational leadership and administration positions. MacDonald (2019) stressed that women have a greater chance of holding the principal position at schools that serve the underprivileged. In fact, many of today's exemplary educational institutions are headed by women (Msila (2017). Kapur (2018) described that women in leadership positions are found to be equipped with skills and capabilities necessary to carry out in-depth analysis of varying situations and are skilled enough in maintaining harmonious relationship with other members of the organization.

Despite the fact that women leaders are empowered today and capable of managing institutions, it is inevitable that they receive setbacks. Series of research studies suggest that women leaders are compared to men leaders and go as far including cultural orientation as a barricade to effectively manage an institution, among others. A study shows comparison and found out that men and women leaders are characterized by adaptive leadership. This implies that leaders today, regardless of the gender, manifest flexibility and adaptability to rapidly changing environment albeit the high stress tolerance of men compared to women (Robinson, Shakeshaft, Grogan, and Newcomb (2017). Some studies also found that women administrators received opposition and resistance from colleagues who are doubtful of their competence to run the institution. According to Macomber (2018), for female leaders to be considered for leadership roles, they need to possess a high level of professional competence. However, in some circumstances, this competence posed a disadvantage to others and women leaders appear to be intimidating more than the male leaders do. Furthermore, female school administrators also faced pushback from their instructors, particularly older male teachers.

The circumstances aforementioned are just some of the cultural attitude people pose towards women leaders. The negative view about women as potential school heads has affected their efficiency as heads of the institutions. Additionally, due to the prevalent biases against women as leaders in the institution, it may be difficult for them to lead successfully after being promoted to positions of authority. This situation is evident even in educational institutions. For decades, men leaders have been leading the academic institutions that make it taboo for women leaders to lead, until slowly recognized. Sylvester (2019) however, conducted a study that tries to correct the misconception about women leaders. He claimed that the success of the institution lies not on who leads it but what leads it. He pertains to the principles that contribute to its efficiency. He further claimed that it is equally important to address the challenges women continue to face and ensured that all women have the equal opportunity of enjoying authorities and power. He further claimed that judgments and biased against women are clear examples of flawed human system which has long been a problem to society, and further a manifestation of a contained system where men are believed to be the best fit for leadership roles.

While the views about leadership is clear, it is important to note that there is no such thing as ideal and perfect leadership. Men or women leaders have their own shortcomings and strengths. Because of the dominance of the women leaders nowadays especially in leading prestigious institutions, women have emerged to the limelight and has been a central topic of discussion in international conferences and programs. However, despite their imperfections, women remain to be the image of love and commitment and willingness to sacrifice.

Sylvester (2019) claimed that a society would be better if there is an equal representation of women especially in leadership positions. Hence, this study is conducted to provide empirical data on women leadership attributes and to look at the perspectives on how women run an institution. After all, the best way to create potential women leaders is by exploring their path of leadership development (Sweat 2020).

2. Methodology

This research is classified as Quanti-Quali Sequential Research Design employing both quantitative and qualitative methods. It is described as quantitative in view of the fact that it involves collection of numerical data to answer the specific and measurable problems. It is also categorized as qualitative since it involves collection of data through statements from the participants. Corbin and Strauss (1990) defined qualitative research as a study that yields findings not through quantification, rather it's a study which data analysis reside on using themes, codes and categories to come up with the interpretation of data. The use of interview guide to obtain data is also observed in qualitative research.

Population and Sampling Procedures
This research was conducted in the selected Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Division of Isabela City school year 2022-2023 and whose school heads are women. The participants in this study were the twenty-two (22) women school heads of the selected schools classified as School Principals, Head Teachers I, II or III and Teachers-In-Charge. Purposive sampling method formula through total enumeration method was employed thus involving all the women school leaders in the Division.

Research Instruments
For the quantitative part, the researcher formulated a survey questionnaire to gather the demographic data of the respondents and a 5-Point Likert Scale Checklist to collect information on the attributes of women school leaders. The checklist provided insights on the attributes of women as school administrators and the questions were likewise constructed based on the topic of the study. For the qualitative part of this study, a researcher-made interview guide was utilized to gather feedbacks on the attributes of the women school administrators. The instrument was designed to allow the participants to share different opinions relevant to the leadership attributes and opportunities.

Data Analysis Procedure

Quantitative Data Analysis
The data gathered were validated by assessing whether the standards and ethical considerations of data collection were implemented. Then, tabulation and encoding of numerical data followed. Individual mean was also used to answer the question. The corresponding score of each respondent was described with an adjectival description as shown below.

Scores	Range	Adjectival Description
5	4.50-5.00	Very Evident
4	3.50-4.49	Evident
3	2.50-3.49	Moderately Evident
2	1.50-2.49	Less Evident
1	0.50-1.49	Not Evident

Qualitative Data Analysis
In the analysis of data for the qualitative phase, thematic coding was employed in this study. Thematic coding also called as thematic analysis is a type of qualitative data analysis that finds themes in text by analyzing the meaning of words and sentence structure. The analyses of qualitative data employed in this study were as follows: *Data Coding and Analysis, Data Reduction and Data Interpretation.*

3. Results and Discussion

1) What are the leadership attributes of women administrators in public schools?

Table 1.0 shows the overall result of the survey questionnaire on the leadership attributes of women school administrators. The result shows that from the set of leadership qualities listed, only five (5) qualities emerged dominant and observable among women leaders in the Isabela City Division. The qualities such as *flexible* with a score of 4.5, *perseverant* with 4.6, *transparent* with 3.82, *risk-taker* with 4.85 and *committed* with 3.82 are **Very Evident** which implies that women leaders possess these skills that make them effective and successful leaders in their respective institutions.

Table 1: Leadership Qualities of the Women School Administrators in Public Schools

Variables	Score	Description
a) Flexible	4.5	Very Evident
b) Perseverant	4.6	Very Evident
c) Transparent	3.82	Very Evident
d) Risk-taker	4.85	Very Evident
e) Committed	3.82	Very Evident

4.50-5.00 (Very Evident); 3.50-4.49 (Evident); 2.50-3.49 (Moderately Evident); 1.50-2.49 (Less Evident); 0.50-1.49 (Not Evident)

2) Is there a significant difference in the leadership attributes of women when data are classified according to
a) Length of service
b) Educational attainment
c) Age

Table 2.0 provides for the significant difference in the leadership attributes of women administrators when data are

classified according to length of service, educational attainment and age. Based on the result, the length of service obtained the p-value of 0.005 and f-value of 6.356 which is significant at alpha 0.05. This implies that respondents' length of service significantly affects their leadership attributes hence, it implies that the longer the respondents are in the service, the more they are equipped with the traits such as experience necessary for leadership and governance.

Meanwhile, the result shows that educational attainment and age with p-value of 0.626 and 0.440 and f-value of 0.587 and 0.784 respectively are not significant at alpha 0.05. Hence, both variables do not determine the respondents' leadership attributes.

Table 2: Leadership Attributes of the Women Administrators according to Length of Service, Educational Attainment and Age

Variable	F-value	p-value	Interpretation
Length of Service	6.356	0.005	Significant
Educational Attainment	0.587	0.626	Not Significant
Age	0.784	0.440	Not Significant

*N=32   *Significant at alpha=0.05*

3) What are the different leadership attributes of women administrators in terms of:
a) Managing Curriculum and instruction
b) Managing Governance?

a) On the leadership attributes of women administrators in terms Managing Curriculum and Instruction

This research was able to find out the different leadership attributes of women school leaders when managing curriculum and instruction were put into the picture. From the testimonies provided by the respondents, it appears that to be able to manage curriculum and instruction, a leader should possess adherence or the ability to follow the rules and regulations of the school. Adherence as defined in Merriam Dictionary means fidelity or commitment to work, thus to be able to accomplish the tasks successfully, one should follow what has been set by the organization. One respondent shared:

> *"For me, everything is manageable. All you have to do is comply what the division regulates, for as long as it won't go in contrary with law"(Respondent 9)*

Other respondents pointed out that adaptability to situation is also an attribute possessed by women leaders which is necessary when managing curriculum and instruction. Adaptability to situation pertains to the skill of the leaders to adapt to the environment and the circumstances that are embedded in it. A respondent emphasized that an institution adapts to curriculum updates and changes hence, to accommodate the change, respondents must embrace be willing to embrace the changes. One respondent remarked:

> *"In a working environment like ours where changes rapidly happen, it is important that we sway with the waves, no complains at all, just accept what your bosses instruct you to do, after all we are just but subordinates" (Respondent 2)*

Further, one of the attributes that respondents found necessary in managing instruction and curriculum is the ability to implement changes relevant to it. Adherence and adaptability alone are not sufficient to successfully carry out the task, rather, to be able to evaluate impacts on the changes made, one should do the implementation. Implementation is the process of translating theories to practice. It is putting concepts into actual setting and a way to gauge program effectiveness. Implementation then provides baseline data that will serve as a reference for further enhancement. One of the respondents echoed:

> *"All the changes, in whatever form it is, should be actualized. That way, we can see how things are going at the moment. From doing it, we learn and it serves as a benchmark for us to better our practice" (Respondents 10)*

a. *On the leadership attributes of women administrators in terms of managing governance*

Governance is the core of administration. For governance to properly function, a leader should possess a quality that caters the needs of the institutions. One of the attributes that has emerged to be of importance to leaders is flexibility. Similar to adaptability, a school administrator must be flexible enough to handle situations especially concerning governance. Flexibility is characterized by capability to adapt new and changing situations. Change of leadership style and strategies are the commonly observed changes in governance where flexibility is much required as evident in the words of one of the respondents:

> *"...flexibility is my strength, I think. I have learned to understand that not all things work for the same people. In my case, this is my third school, and I have seen different situations and behaviors all throughout my journey. So it's not them who will adjust, it's me, so we can have a peaceful environment" (Respondent 8)*

Meanwhile, it is also noted that managing governance requires that leaders should have prompt responsiveness. It is inevitable that school's needs for instructions never cease considering that curriculum evolves, hence to be able to maintain smooth relationship with the teachers and the students, leaders should be responsive to the situations. One of the respondents attested:

> *"One of the challenges that I have experienced as a school leader is the support that I can render, especially on finances. As a leader, it's a big No for you to say No, None or Nothing, as a leader, you should always provide even it means consuming your own pocket..." (Respondent 2)*

Finally, transparency is an attribute that has posed great significance among the school leaders. It is considered as the backbone of good governance. It connotes honesty, loyalty and efficient leadership. With transparency, members of the institution feel that they are part of the organization and that they are directly involved in decision-making and its achievements as manifested in the thought of respondent 15:

"...I never fail to show people my accomplishment, especially with money. For me, financial matter is always a sensitive issue, so if I want to maintain my good relationship with them, I keep them informed"

Although there are only few attributes mentioned by the respondents, it is never conclusive for all. Leadership constitutes different behaviors, what works for one might not be effective for others and vice-versa.

b) What are the opportunities gained by women administrators in leading schools?

Opportunities are what people gain out of something. They are the advantages, benefits and good chances people enjoy from a specific phenomenon. This research found out the different opportunities' women leaders gain from heading an public school. One of the opportunities found in this study is the exposure to public service. In the context of the Division of Isabela City, where Muslim dominates, it is a rare occasion that Muslim women get to lead. However, because of the empowerment enjoyed nowadays, where women possess the same qualifications as men, women were given the chances to show off skills in the field of administration and governance. This implies an equal opportunity for both men and women. Respondent 4 mentioned:

"As a Muslim leader, I feel empowered given that I am a woman and a Muslim. I am grateful that there is such as institution like ours that recognizes our worth and skills to lead. It gives me the opportunity to tell people that leadership has no gender…"

Other respondents during the interview discussed about discovering own strengths and weaknesses. Because of the opportunity to serve, they were able to assess what they are capable of doing and what else to improve. It urged them to value their own strengths and enhance the new skills they developed along the way. Likewise, they were able to manage their weaknesses and used this weakness as their point of development. Respondent 16 pointed out:

"I have been in this position for almost a decade, yet I feel that there are still lot of things I need to learn. I also saw my strongest and weakest sides."

While other respondents talk about discovering strengths and weaknesses, Respondent 12 related that he was given the chance to grow better. In his statement, he related:

"....I considered this as an opportunity to further my skills and grow more…"

Lastly, one of the things that have been considered as the best opportunity being school leaders is the ability to inspire others. While it is noted that not everybody gets pleased with the kind of school leaders they are, others have inspired. This is evident in the statement of one of the participants:

"As a school leader, you can be two things, it's either you inspire or you discourage and I choose the former. I have the best position anyone in our organization has. I have all the chances to lift their spirits when they feel

down and enhance their self-esteem when they are morally challenged. I always choose to inspire"(Respondent 5)

4. Conclusion

Looking at the findings of this study, it can be concluded that women leaders are capable of leading institutions. Basing from the findings, women possess different leadership attributes that have been their anchoring qualities in successfully managing public schools. The result shows that among the attributes presented in the checklist, the attributes of *flexible, perseverant, transparent, risk-taker and committed* emerged dominant among the respondents. Meanwhile, when the moderating variables were considered in the study, the result shows that length of service affects the leadership attributes of women while educational attainment and age do not significantly affect and determine their qualities. This implies that experience as an indicator of length of service matters as it tells that the longer the leader is in position, the more experience he becomes.

The leadership attributes of women in terms of managing curriculum and instruction suggest that a leader should possess *adherence, adaptability and implementation* while *flexibility, responsiveness and transparency* are necessary to successfully manage governance. *Exposure to public service, discovering strengths and weaknesses, inspiring others and the chance to grow more* are just some of the opportunities pointed out by the respondents as the opportunities they enjoyed from becoming public school leaders.

The attributes that have emerged in this research are the common qualities among the respondents. It implies that women of the same position might have used the same methods and styles in managing institutions. However, it is not enough to conclude that these qualities fit to everybody. Considering the individual differences in terms of leadership and management, one has the opportunity to enjoy his/her own style for as long as the end result positively benefits his/her constituents.

5. Recommendation

As a result of the findings and conclusions of this study, the following are hereby recommended:

1) A school leader is recommended to undergo assessment in order to understand own strengths and weaknesses. The strengths can serve as the positive attribute that he/she can use in successfully leading an institution while the weaknesses can be addressed through seminars and trainings
2) The institution can sponsor trainings that can enhance the perspectives of the women school leaders on efficiently running institutions
3) Professional development is recommended for the school leaders who lack managerial skills
4) Future researchers may work on the same study by considering a wider scope, variables and population to further validate the findings of this study.

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