

Journey of Difference: The Voice of Women Leadership in Education in the Context of Nepal

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Abstract

The study aims to explore the experiences and leadership perspectives of women leaders in Nepal. Using a qualitative method, the study collected interview data from six female principals across different schools. The collected data were further analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that women leaders adopt a relational, student-centered, and value-based leadership style focus on service, respect, and collaboration and teamwork. The findings also indicate that women leaders are often perceived as caring and approachable, which in turn strengthens communication and trust within the school community. The findings reveal that a deep passion for education, classroom experience, and a belief in education as a transformative force for social change often inspire women's pathways into educational leadership.

Keywords: Women Leadership, Education, Female Principal, Nepal, Student-centered, Value-based.

INTRODUCTION

Education in Nepal is undergoing a profound transformation shaped by the presence and influence of women leaders. Once overlooked voices of women leaders are now guiding classrooms, shaping policies, and inspiring societies. Globally, women's leadership in education promotes equality, inclusion, and sustainable progress. Women remain underrepresented in leadership positions in contexts where social, cultural, and structural barriers continue to limit their participation (Smith Hussein Kamaldeen, 2025).

Women's high-level leadership positions highlight their multiple roles, both personal and professional, that experiences indicate significant challenges and barriers need to be addressed to achieve gender equality in the sector (Prasain Indira Devi, 2025).

The research seeks to explore the lived experience, challenges, and contributions of women leaders in Nepalese educational settings. This research seeks to explore the personal and professional experiences of women in educational leadership, focusing on the challenges, motivations, and strategies that shape their leadership journeys.

This research paper focuses on how they lead and on the meaningful change their perspective brings to the education system. This study not only acknowledges their contributions but also builds an equitable and empowering educational future for Nepal.

Objectives: To explore the personal and professional experiences of women in educational leadership, with a focus on the challenges, motivations, and strategies that shape their leadership journeys.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study provides a clear vision of how women navigate challenges, motivations, and strategies that shape their personal and professional leadership journeys. This research will serve as a valuable resource for academics, and researchers in further study. The findings of the study offer meaningful insights for scholars and readers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Females are doing better in education than in other fields. Females possess more collaborative and power-sharing tendencies than men. Female leaders are more honest and intelligent than their male counterpart, an enabler of fairer treatment in an organization, one of the best means of mitigate deep-rooted stereotypes, more productive, and so on. (Khanal Nabin,2025)

According to Shrestha Rohit K et al. (2023), the women leaders are committed, devoted, dedicated, and also style is a flexible and cooperative leadership, linked with their feminine traits and features. Women's positionality in leadership is embellished with sufferings and challenges by Subedi Ramila, Shrestha Milan, 2023.)

Societal norms and traditional gender roles often place a disproportionate burden on women to manage family responsibilities, including child-rearing and household tasks. In parts of the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa, cultural norms heavily restrict women's participation in public life, including leadership in Education (Halim Alya, Biswas Debpbani, 2024)

According to Meza-Mejia et al (2023), Women face varieties of internal and external barrier in the process of their leadership, it includes traditional and cultural barriers. Lack of dedication to professional practices, work role at home, open opposition to promotion, gender wage differences, and absence of female role models to look up to. According to Thien Lei Mee et al. (2025), there are numerous challenges, including traditional women's roles, social stigma, and individual factors.

The case study by Adhikari Rishi and Adhikari Devendra (2021) highlights that when women participate, they can make schools safer, especially for girls, and also build their own skills and confidence when they take on leadership roles in schools. The study also emphasizes that when women are supported to stay involved, they become more empowered, and this leads to better leadership and management in schools.

METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a descriptive research design and applied a qualitative approach, conducting interviews with six women leaders of higher secondary schools in Nepal. The researcher interviewed the principals personally, using a set of six main questions, allowing for further clarification from the participants. The study was conducted within educational institutions in Kathmandu and Pokhara. The study utilized both purposive and convenience sampling techniques to help select participants based on their availability and location, making the research process more efficient. The questions were open-ended, and the answers were recorded with their consent. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and systematically examined to identify themes across the data. This research also reviewed relevant articles that were collected and used for this research paper. All participants served as principals of private secondary schools, each overseeing an average of one thousand students.

THEMATIC ANALYZES

Journey into Educational Leadership and a Source of Inspiration:

The participants' journey into educational leadership were driven by a great desire to be an educator, extensive classroom experience, and a firm belief that education is a transformative force. The participant stated that leadership is not exercising authority but service guided by compassion, justice, faith, and commitment to empowering others. One of the participants shared that her educational journey was inspired by the vision of great women leaders in the world who championed inclusive education and social change. The participant experienced challenges like gender-based resistance and cultural expectations. These experiences strengthened the participants, enabling them to make firm decisions, stand against prejudice, bias, and inequality, and foster fearlessness in their professional lives. The participant also shared that their journey helped to achieve moral and spiritual growth and a holistic development of confidence, responsibility, and compassion. Another participant's experience highlighted belief in faith and dedication to helping others support leaders in staying balanced and leading with modesty.

As a female educational leader, the participant stated that passion for education and commitment to shaping students' values and future is an important experience. According to her, leadership is service grounded in compassion, competence, and moral integrity rather than authority or power. Participants experienced challenges such as subtle resistance, societal expectations, and gender limitations, which were acknowledged, but ultimately reinforced resilience and dedication. In the field of education, transformative leadership is necessary. Another participant said that it is important to be a mentor and foster an environment that empowers both students and teachers in educational institutions. Women's leadership inspires, promotes equity, and inclusion. It cultivates moral and spiritual growth and drives social change through education.

Challenges

Educational leadership within the Nepali context is a representation of both significant opportunities and formidable obstacles. One participant said that she earned respect through dedication and commitment. However, it is a challenge to persist in a male-centred society where women's authority is limited and not visible in the decision-making process. Another challenge is finding the right balance between being firm and being gentle. Society often expects women leaders to be caring and flexible, but good leadership also means making tough decisions, setting limits, and firm boundaries. It can be difficult to do this without being misunderstood. The other challenges are diverse expectations from parents, staff, and society. Keeping students engaged, motivating teachers, and building a positive school culture is a challenge. Gender bias is strong, and it appears in attitude, tone, or doubts about women's ideas or authority. Only using dialogue to change perceptions is a difficult task and, hence addressing these biases require calmness, confidence, integrity, and consistent effort.

Women often advance through personal effort, experience, and perseverance rather than formal mentorship, training, or networking opportunities. For women in religious communities, communal support provides moral and spiritual guidance, but professional spaces can still feel isolating. Structured support systems remain limited in women's leadership, particularly in Nepal. Additional challenges include societal expectations, balancing multiple responsibilities, and navigating gender biases. The narrative highlights the importance of intentional mentorship, supportive policies, professional development, and inclusive networks in empowering women leaders effectively, ensuring their leadership is both recognized and sustained.

Leadership style and evolution

One participant shared that her style of leadership is relational, student-centered, and guided by core values such as service, respect, and faith. It is an evolution from task-focused management to a more holistic approach that empowers teachers, students, staff, and parents. Another shared that it is teamwork and shared responsibility of leadership. It is essential to be a good listener, as this fosters trust and nurtures strong relationships within the school community. The participant stated that this involves striking a balance between empathy and accountability, flexibility and consistency, as well as the ability to make firm decisions when necessary. The women's leadership in education is reflective, value-based, and service-oriented.

The participant stated that women provide more care and demonstrate a higher quality of approachable integrity. This facilitates open communication and mutual trust with students, parents, and staff. Women leaders believe that leadership is defined by ability, and not gender. They take on multifaceted roles of caring, guiding, inspiring, and encouraging teamwork. They believe in community involvement, proving that leadership goes beyond gender.

Management of Personal Life and Professional Life

The participant shared that maintaining School leadership responsibilities and balancing personal well-being is a challenge. Maintaining personal balance is crucial, as it enables women leaders to lead with strength, clarity, and care. Many participants pointed out the difficulty of navigating the double burden of professional demands and domestic responsibilities. They have extensive domestic responsibilities like household work, taking care of family members, maintaining family relationships, and participating in cultural and religious practices. Women's leadership is very important and requires effort to balance through clear priorities, effective time management, and efficiency in delegating responsibilities shared by participants. It requires reflection, support from families and communities, which is a necessary and important source of strength. This kind of support provides a deeper sense of purpose in leadership. It is also essential to have flexibility, prioritize self-care, and engage in proactive planning to effectively manage professional demands.

Legacy and impact on women's leadership in education.

According to the participants, women's leadership is a commitment to fostering a culture grounded in compassion, integrity, collaboration, and mutual respect. The purpose of leadership is to empower others, especially young women, to pursue leadership with confidence and authenticity. The women's leadership focuses on value-based and service-oriented leadership, which nurtures inclusive learning environments and strengthens trust among educators and students. Such leadership plays a crucial role in driving a meaningful and sustainable transformation in education.

Insights for aspiring women educational leaders

The theme highlights guidance offered to young women pursuing leadership roles in education. The participants emphasize the importance of self-belief, courage, and nurturing inner strength, all grounded in values, faith, and humility. According to the research, leadership is a service that requires empathy, integrity, and collaboration rather than authority or status. All participants emphasized the importance of mentorship, professional networks, and continuous learning in overcoming challenges and building a successful conference. Again, from the research participants, leadership is a purposeful journey where resilience, authority, and commitment to making a positive difference are essential to the field of education.

FINDINGS

- Women's leadership is strongly motivated by a passion for education and a commitment to transformation and social change.
- Women's Leadership is capable of promoting inclusive education and is focused on qualities such as care, empathy, approachability, integrity, respect, faith, and compassion
- Leadership is nurturing students and teachers, shaping values and future generations.
- Women face structural and gender-based challenges in educational leadership.
- Women leaders adopt a student-centered and relational approach to educational leadership.
- The participant's view is that leadership is empowerment of others with justice, compassion, ethical practices, and service rather than holding authority.
- There is a shared responsibility and teamwork in women's leadership.
- It is ability, competence, rather than gender.
- It is a challenge for women to balance professional and personal life responsibilities.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study suggest that the women leaders believe transformative leadership can change society and promote inclusive education in schools. According to a study done by Pant Yashodhara & Shiwakoti (2025), Female leaders often navigate systemic challenges while leveraging collaborative and transformative leadership approaches. According to the findings of Afriani et al. (2025) Female transformative leaders display distinctive characteristics, such as high empathy, participatory approach, and a focus on developing healthy interpersonal relationships in the school environment. Women leaders emphasize integrity, justice, commitment, and integrate emotional and social values in decision-making. The findings of the present study confirm women leaders to be transformative and capable of promoting social change in society.

It is a challenge for women leaders to manage both personal life and professional life within a patriarchal society. Similar findings by Subedi Basu P (2023), the female school leaders have mentioned that they are facing difficulty in managing time as they have to play a dual role of both leading a home and school. Women have to place greater importance on family responsibility than on their professional careers. Some participants had to give up their leadership positions due to their family responsibilities, Shah Saeeda and Shah Umbreen (2012). In the present study, the participants echoed the same view that it is a challenge to have both family responsibilities and a professional life.

According to the research, Halim Aliya & Biswas Debobani (2024) indicate that women face numerous obstacles like societal, organizational, and personal factors. A similar finding in this research is that gender-based, cultural, and personal factors exist. A study conducted by Dhobi Saleem (2025) found that discrimination of opportunity occurs in both personal and professional realms. The similar findings in the present study are gender-based challenges facing the women leaders in Nepal. Gender equality in academic leadership positions remains a significant challenge, and obstacles in traditional attitudes and cultural obstacles faced by women leaders are highlighted according to the study done by Correa Alicia et al. (2025).

LIMITATIONS

First, the perspective included in the study may not represent women's experiences across Nepal. The voices of women leaders are underrepresented in the remote and marginalized communities in Nepal. This study relies on a limited number of participants from

private-run educational institutions, which can restrict the generalizability of the findings. Published works of women leaders are limited in Nepal. As a result, the analysis depends heavily on qualitative accounts.

The current findings pertain specifically to Nepal, suggesting limited applicability to diverse institutional and cultural settings. Therefore, future large-scale studies are recommended to conduct these qualitative findings. The current sample's size and composition might not fully represent the entire spectrum of women's leadership. Therefore, it is recommended that more research be conducted on the same topics in Nepal.

CONCLUSION

The journey of educational leadership significantly transforms women's professional and personal lives. Despite cultural, structural, and systemic barriers, these women continue to step into leadership roles with vision, resilience, and purpose. The experiences of leaders reveal that women leaders bring not only administrative skills and talents, but also compassion, collaboration and a transformational approach to leadership. Participants described leadership as a form of service rooted in compassion, justice, faith, and a strong commitment to empowering others rather than exercising authority. Their leadership journeys have contributed not only to professional growth but also to personal, moral, and spiritual development, strengthening qualities such as confidence, responsibility, and resilience. Women leaders continue to face significant challenges, including gender bias, societal expectations, limited participation in decision-making processes, and the difficulty of balancing professional responsibilities with personal well-being. Hence, it is important to strengthen support systems and create an inclusive environment for women leaders to thrive and bring social changes and educational reforms in Nepal.

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