The Path of Leadership Experience of Muslim Women Leaders in Higher Education

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Abstract: How do Muslim women get to positions of leadership in higher education? An important path toward success for most of the contemporary Muslim women leaders in higher education was through education. The women achieved a high educational leadership level which built their self-efficacy and provided them upward mobility. This study explores the experiences of Muslim women leaders working in higher education to access and advance to aleadership position. Qualitative phenomenology case study methods were used to gather data on common characteristics of Muslim women leaders in higher education. Data were gathered from interviews with ten women working in a cross section of professional positions at two public universities in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. This study argues that Muslim women's participation in the higher education and their access to senior leadership positions is defined by recommendation from higher authority, administrative efficiency and accomplishments in their career.

Key words: Muslim women leaders, leadership, higher education, accessing of leadership, accomplishments

INTRODUCTION

Higher education is the traditional training ground for leaders and specialized manpower in society. Today, the education of a graduate shape an investment for each country. This should be returned through this person's sound contribution to the social, economic and cultural development of the nation. In this respect, men and women have anequal responsibility (Mukherjee, 1993).

Several years ago, successful leaders have been connected with stereotypical masculine assigns such as readiness to take risks, task orientation and competitiveness. Latest studies, even so, show that high level executives and female middle no longer compare successful leadership with these masculine characteristics. The experience of the female managers shows that there are no differences in leadership efficiency and ability from their experienced male counterparts. Both males and females own a high need for achievement and power and both demonstrate assertiveness, risk-taking, self-reliance and other attributes and behaviors associated with leadership. Inaddition, the moment that men and women have established themselves as leaders in organizations, women do not act or behave differently than men. (Prewitt *et al.*, 2011).

In the field of academia particularly, the situation of Muslim women as leaders is more difficult to determine as this is a matter that has seldom been discussed. Regrettably, men have become the standard against which women leadership power, potentials roles are compared to and judged by. The community has created debilitating stereotypes about women such as some employees may not want to work for a woman and women going out to work puts the family's stability and therefore, society at stake and others believe that women do not possess the same motivation as men. As a result, accepting this disfigured picture and believing these stereotypes to betrue about themselves (Walker, 2004).

Working in the leadership position can be anenjoyable and challenging career for women in higher education Steward (2009). Indicated that "satisfaction that the job provided was important for all the women interviewed. It was one of the pleasures of the job that the women talked about. Getting a sense of a job well done, that was either acknowledged by peers or by past women was frequently reported".

Despite Muslim women's accessed leadership and reached some leadership titles, they appear to dye the decision-making but they did not get the right to participate this role for several reasons. One reason is traditional outlook which prevails in the Muslim societies

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for awoman as a leader. There are other reasons like customs and social values, women remain under the leadership of the men inside the education sector. On the other hand, there is a general dearth of research, national and international and particularly a scarcity of research related to the accessing of Muslim women to aleadership position in higher education. Therefore, in an effort to advance talented Muslim women in leadership positions, this study is developed from qualitative data seeking to explore the way that Muslim women leaders in higher education accessing leadership position in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia to encourage the women leaders who are willing to assume such these position and take advantage from their experiences to develop themselves.

Gender role in leadership: It is been estimated that although there were significant examples of women leadership, the society in thecurrent world still faces the chronic issue of a low number of feminine leadership in the academic organisations (Smith, 2015). According to the 113th Congress (2013, 15), it was been estimated that only 18.3% of the total Muslim leaders are female all across the world. Higher educational leadership attributes would provide a promising statistical platform in the global scenario (Dowler *et al.*, 2014). The basic qualities of women such as being passive, timid and collaborative are often observed to be the ineffective and inappropriate for a leader. Being more aggressive, dominating and masculine are considered to the prime moto of a professional leader (Lie and Malik, 2014). According to the concept of Gail Evans, women must be accustomed to the fact that leadership is gendered (Schuh *et al.*, 2014). There is a vast leadership difference between a male and a female (Comim and Nussbaum, 2014). The women should target for developing innovative strategies in order to lead this competition against the masculine sector (Peterson, 2014). It is been observed that the women are found to be more relationship focused than the masculine sector which often tends to build up afriendship (Ferreira and Gyourko, 2014). Thus, it would be highly debatable to answer whether an aggressive and dominated character which the masculine leaders often express are an important attribute for leadership or the exact definition of leadership', is something different (Klein *et al.,* 2014).

Women leaders in Islam perspective: In aleadership position, women have access to reach thehighest leadership position in the society. Women's have potential talents and can bring up a change and achieve such an excellent position that Quran approve by introducing some historical examples such as the most manifest example of women's leadership in Islamic society refers to Bilqis Queen of Sheba, who Quran explains it precisely (Naml: 22-24). This woman was a powerful queen who ruled the country. She had a great land, a lot of facilities, armies and her politicians and captains who settle in the palace counting on their military power (Bakhtyar and Rezaei, 2012). In addition, the Prophet consulted the women. At Hudaybuyyah, he consulted his wife, Umm Salama and made an important decision depending on that cosultaion. Qur'an also stresses the need for vanguards and leadership (whether male or female) for the furtherance of the Islamic movement and the unity of the large society:

> "And hold you fast to God's bond, together and do not scatter, remember God's blessings upon you when you were enemies and He brought your hearts together so that, by his blessing you become brothers. You were upon the brink of a pit of fire and He delivered you from it, even so God makes clear to you his signs, so happily you will be guided. Let there be one nation of you, calling to good and bidding to honour and forbidding dishonour, those are the prospers. Be not as those who scattered and fell into variance..." (Al-Imran, 98:102) (Abdulraheem, 2009)

Muslim women academic leader: There were several intimidations which was accustomed by these women leaders in order to achieve the recognised glory as observed today. There were various situational and organizational factors which had a major impact on the leadership attributes. As observed previously, most of the Muslim states were under foreign rule (Harrison and Roomi, 2015). Soon after the emergence of independent factor and factor of globalization, it was found that there was a backlogging among this target group (Sabri, 2015). Although, the government of the Islamic countries provided the facilities of education in the community, the female candidates were mostly deprived of it. Taking an example of the situation in Pakistan, it can be observed that the women sector legged behind the men sector in terms of academic education by 37.23% (as recorded in 2007), in spite of confirming a respectable rate in the growth of annual Gross National Product (GNP). According to the statistical record of UNESCO Commonwealth estimated in the year 1993, it was been projected that one out of five women get influenced by middle management leadership and one out of twenty women gets involved with the higher management leadership among the various academic perspectives (Alajmi and Ahmad, 2016).

The number of academic leaders is found to be quite low as compared to the men. It is been generally observed that women were restricted to the position of Deputy Dean and was found it be restricted to encounter the Dean position (Sidani, 2015). The Deputy Vice Chancellor and the Vice Chancellor positions are also found to be male oriented from the contemporary times. According to the concept of Sheryl Bond focusing on the Academic Leadership module, the Islamic countries needs to eradicate the filters which resist the women too, attain the leadership attributes associated with an academic organization (Achour *et al.*, 2014). Estimations have been deduced in the module, according to which a university comprises of 22% women professors and 33% associated women professors which are considered to be effectively low as compared to the male candidates. The other filter is the personality which is considered associated with visibility. The women should be meritoriously visible in order to sustain the leadership position in the academic organizations. Women need to be effective enough to attend meetings, lead complex projects and produce innovative ideas for an academic organization. However, it was considered that these tasks would not be possible to be overcome systematically by these women sector. Hence, the significance of the Muslim women leaders deteriorated from the community (Jafari and Scott, 2014).

Women's access to leadership: The women leaders created successful lives for themselves by working smart and working hard (Halpern and Cheung, 2008). Brown (2005) emphasizedthat, "Academic leadership should reflect the diversity of the faculty, staff students and administration in the higher education institutions they serve". Therefore, researches and studies have done so far about women and leadership in supporting and encouraging women seeking equal access to leadership positions (Madsen, 2008). Additionally, some researchers encouraged women, who are assuming leadership positions, to build professional networks and seek mentoring (Carli and Eagly, 2012).

As in Gomez *et al.* (2001)'s study of Latina leaders, mentors and mothers figured prominently in the women's stories of how they got where they are today. Their mothers played an important role inencouraging and inspiring them in building their self-confidence and to try their best and early in life. As well as mentorsprovided networking opportunities and provided an insider's guide to what they needed to know. According to the finding by Dominici *et al.* (2008) in academia, administrative positions have a well-defined hierarchy

with progressive ranks that are fairly uniform nationwide, from division director to department chair, dean and then university leadership roles. It is generally expected that a career in academic administration progresses by moving up the rungs on this ladder sequentially. They also indicated that women leaders have developed programs or centers that address unmet important needs, have often done so without support from either universityor departmental resources with alittle encouragement and often with only tacit approval from their department deansand chairs (Dominici *et al.*, 2008).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research design: The research design we used was a qualitative phenomenology case study design. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), a qualitative approach may "create and bring psychological and emotional unity to an interpretive experience". Additionally, Patton (2002) noted that use of qualitative methods in evaluation help "illuminate the processes and outcomes... for those who must make decisions". The case study, according to Yin (2009) is an appropriate design when the phenomenon of interest is current as opposed to historical and examined in context, unlike experimental research which according to Yin "deliberately divorces a phenomenon from its context". Participant recruitment took place through a combination of purposive and snowball sampling in two public universities in Malaysia (University Putra Malaysia) and in Saudi Arabia (King Abdul-Aziz University). The data was collected byaudio-recorded, open-ended interviews in person with ten Muslim women leaders who agreed to be interviewed. After the interviews were transcribed literally, the analysis was performed using analytical methods associated with interpretation phenomenological analysis) to highlight the major themes. A number of ways in order to ensure the validity and reliability. To enhance the validity of the study verification procedures were incorporated: compilation of a reflexive journal, member checking (Harper and Thompson, 2011), peer examination and clarification of the researcher's bias (Merriam, 2009).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of respondents who took part in this research project. The finding showed that accessing leadership positions in higher education for these women leaders fell into three core themes (Fig.1).

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

No. of participants	University	Faculty	Position of leadership	Leadership experience (years)
P1	Putra Malaysia	Faculty of Human Ecology	Vice Dean	7
P2	Putra Malaysia	Faculty of Educational Studies	Vice Dean	4
P3	Putra Malaysia	Faculty of Science	Head of the department	3
P4	Putra Malaysia	Putra Business School (PBS)	Head ofthe department	8
P5	Putra Malaysia	Faculty of Educational Studies	Vice Dean	8
P6	King Abdul-Aziz	Economics and Administration	Vice Dean	7
P7	King Abdul-Aziz	Arts and Humanities	Head of the department	I
P8	King Abdul-Aziz	Arts and Humanities	Head of the department	9
P9	King Abdul-Aziz	Economics and Administration	Vice Dean	8
P10	King Abdul-Aziz	Arts and Humanities	Vice Dean	5

Fig. 1: Basic themes for accessing of Muslim women to leadership positions

Achievements and performance: Three of participants agreed on the significant role of their achievements and performance in becoming visible to leaders. P10 from Saudi Arabia described her experiences in accessing leadership positions through being the best choice and they saw that she is the person who can develop the faculty to the best stage of performances and achievements:

"They look at administration experiences. So they choose the person who can develop the sectors to stage from the best performances and achievements with the aspirations of King Abdul Aziz University"

P8 indicated that her university chooses her to assume leadership position because of her experience. As well as the university expect that she will develop her faculty. P8 described that actually her faculty achieved three global credits for her faculty and her contribution to develop her faculty, she said:

The university appointment me because of my experience and expectations of the university that I am the person who can manage the college effectively and achieve the objectives of the university effectively. Indeed, it has already been obtained some credits"

Experiences: The last core theme was experience. All ten women leaders mentioned this theme during their journey to accessing leadership positions. Participants' past work history showed a set of rich employment experiences. Women were in a variety of positions within higher education. Each participant had worked in various administrative positions before they assume academic leadership positions. P4 had 8 years experiences and has held a range of academic in administration positions as well as she has led the development of a number of educational programs in the university settings. According to P4 her access to leadership was easy because of her experience and knowledge as well as her possession of multiple languages and was the best student in her university. She had gained not one but many of leadership positions in different organizations in a short period of time. P3 described her journey in accessing leadership positions as:

"I had 8 years' experiences in administration work because of that experiences and knowledge the university choose me to this position. I have been actually working very closely on, I have been handling all corporate communication in marketing customer service. I got the job. One of the reason two reasons for me to be able to get the job easily Alhamdulillah first because I have multiple language. Secondly. I was the best student from UITM. I was the best student I got that work from my faculty, from my university, and also from the whole Malaysia. I am grateful to Allah"

CONCLUSION

The nature of leadership positions in universities, whether academic or administrative imposing the scientific fact to choose the appropriate elements for these leadership positions must be conducted in a sufficient degree of care and concern for the place-based on management expertise and their willingness to take over the role that the nature of its responsibilities. The Muslim women leaders in this study had primarily worked in higher education for their whole careers and occupied a different of administration positions within each their faculties. Therefore, this study looked at ten Muslim women leaders in higher education leadership positions and found a number of common experiences of their journey in accessing leadership position. The finding showed that Muslim women assume leadership position through a recommendation from high authority, their achievement and performance and their experiences.

Within the realms of higher education, Muslim women leaders provide critical contributions to the processes, policy and culture of these institutions. Therefore, this study recommended giving attention to women who assume the leadership position which can use their experiences to understand the key enablers of success as a senior women leader.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Three out of the ten participants highlighted the role of a recommendation in accessing leadership positions for them. P1 recommended to leadership by high authority because they see that they were people who can develop the organization and understand the process. P1 had 6 years experiences in the leadership position. She was chosen for this position by her dean because she saw that she was a suitable person for holding the position and she can understand the process. She described her visibility to be recommended as: "I was off like approach by the dean that time, she was also the one who asked me to become the head of the lab at the institute, she's recommended me to the director because I think she was looking into leadership development as part of her portfolio as the dean. She was trying to look for someone who could understand the process. In addition, I supposed the dean sees that I am a person who can work in a team because in developments of curriculum you need to get the assessment from the others heads of department".Likewise, P6 did not seek the leadership position but the choice was from the university, she explained that the reason for selected her because she was suitable for this position. She explained: "I didn't choose this position,university was chosen and appointed. They asked me if I like to be in this position or not. But I didn't seek to assume this position, maybe the Vice Dean see that I am person who is suitable for this position".

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