



The Role of Women Professionals in Top Management in the Educational Sector and Impact on Organizational Performance

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Abstract:

This study examines the representation of women in top management positions within educational institutions and evaluates how their leadership influences organizational performance. It also explores the leadership styles adopted by women, the challenges they face in attaining senior roles, and employees' perceptions of their leadership effectiveness.

Study Design/Methodology/Approach - A mixed-method approach was used, combining survey questionnaires administered to employees in educational institutions with interviews conducted with women holding top managerial roles. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were applied to assess leadership patterns, perceived effectiveness, and factors affecting women's advancement.

Findings - The findings indicate that women leaders positively influence organizational performance through collaborative and transformational leadership styles. Despite their contributions, many encounter barriers such as gender bias, limited networking opportunities, and work-life balance challenges. Employees largely view women leaders as effective, though some underlying biases persist.

Originality/Value- This study contributes to the growing discourse on gender diversity and ethical leadership by highlighting the impact of women leaders on sustainable institutional performance. It offers practical insights for policymakers and administrators seeking to strengthen gender-inclusive leadership practices in the educational sector.

Keywords: Women Leadership, Educational Institutions, Organizational Performance

1. Introduction

Gender diversity in leadership has emerged as a critical theme in contemporary organizational and educational research due to its implications for ethical governance, inclusive decision-making, and sustainable organizational performance. Although women's participation in the workforce has increased significantly over the past decades, their representation in top management positions remains disproportionately low across sectors. This imbalance is particularly visible in the educational sector, where women constitute a substantial proportion of academic and administrative personnel yet remain underrepresented in senior leadership roles such as principals, deans, vice-chancellors, and institutional heads.

Educational institutions play a pivotal role in shaping human capital, social mobility, and long-term societal sustainability. Leadership effectiveness within these institutions is closely associated with academic quality,

organizational culture, employee engagement, and institutional reputation. Prior studies suggest that leadership diversity enhances decision-making by incorporating varied perspectives and experiences, thereby strengthening organizational outcomes (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Consequently, women's inclusion in top management is increasingly viewed not only as a matter of gender equity but also as a strategic imperative for institutional effectiveness and sustainability.

The literature on women's leadership indicates that women leaders frequently adopt transformational, participative, and ethical leadership styles, which are particularly effective in knowledge-intensive and people-centered environments such as educational institutions (Northouse, 2022). Empirical evidence across different contexts demonstrates that women's leadership contributes positively to organizational performance, employee satisfaction, and ethical climate. In educational settings, collaborative and democratic leadership approaches adopted by women leaders have been shown to enhance institutional functioning and staff commitment.

Despite these demonstrated strengths, women professionals continue to encounter persistent structural and socio-cultural barriers in accessing and performing senior leadership roles. The "glass ceiling" effect remains a widely cited explanation for women's limited advancement, reflecting gender stereotypes, unequal access to leadership networks, work-life balance pressures, and rigid organizational structures (Morrison & Von Glinow, 1990). While prior studies have examined leadership challenges or performance outcomes in isolation, there remains limited integrated empirical research that simultaneously examines women's representation in top management, the challenges influencing leadership progression, and employees' perceptions of leadership effectiveness—particularly within educational institutions in emerging economies.

Addressing this gap, the present study adopts a quantitative empirical approach to examine women's representation in top management positions in educational institutions, identify the organizational and socio-cultural challenges influencing leadership progression, and evaluate the impact of women's leadership on organizational performance and employees' perceptions of leadership effectiveness.

2. Theoretical framework

The conceptual framework of this study integrates **Glass Ceiling Theory**, **Social Role Theory**, and **Transformational Leadership Theory** to explain women's leadership representation and its organizational outcomes in educational institutions. Glass Ceiling Theory explains the persistent underrepresentation of women in top management positions due to invisible organizational barriers, biased promotion practices, and limited access to leadership networks, despite women's strong educational qualifications (Osumbah, 2017; Siddique & Aurangzeb, 2024). Complementing this, Social Role Theory highlights how socio-cultural norms and gender stereotypes shape expectations regarding leadership suitability, often disadvantaging women professionals in educational leadership contexts (Nurbayani et al., 2018).

Once women attain leadership positions, Transformational Leadership Theory explains their positive influence on organizational performance and employee outcomes. Prior studies indicate that women leaders frequently adopt

participative, ethical, and transformational leadership styles that enhance institutional effectiveness, employee engagement, and trust (Yogendrarajah, 2010;

Ali & Munir, 2025). Empirical evidence further suggests that employees perceive women leaders as effective due to their supportive and communicative leadership approaches (Komariah et al., 2020; Cahyani & Sary, 2025).

Accordingly, the framework posits that organizational and socio-cultural challenges influence women's representation in top management, while women's leadership positively affects organizational performance and employees' perceptions of leadership effectiveness in educational institutions.

Despite women's substantial presence in the educational workforce, their representation in top management positions remains limited. Empirical studies in educational contexts highlight persistent organizational barriers such as patriarchal cultures, gender-biased promotion practices, and limited access to leadership development opportunities (Siddique & Aurangzeb, 2024; Osumbah, 2017). Socio-cultural expectations related to women's domestic roles further constrain leadership progression, often discouraging women from competing for senior positions (Nurbayani et al., 2018). These findings reflect the enduring relevance of the glass ceiling effect within educational institutions. Accordingly, organizational and socio-cultural challenges continue to shape women's access to senior leadership roles. Based on this evidence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Women's representation in top management positions is significantly influenced by organizational and socio-cultural challenges within educational institutions.

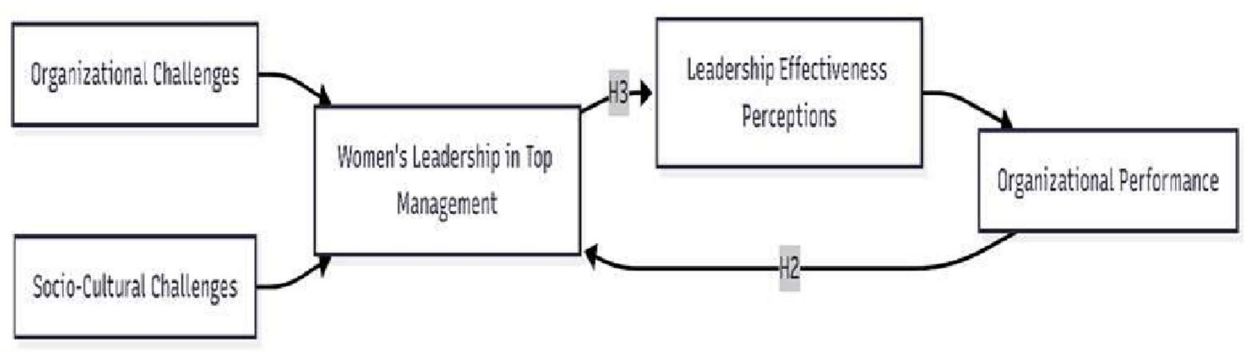
A growing body of research demonstrates that women's leadership contributes positively to organizational performance in educational institutions. Studies show that women leaders exhibit strong human, ethical, and relational skills that enhance institutional effectiveness and transparency (Yogendrarajah, 2010; Hashmi, 2010). Research in women-led educational institutions further indicates that participative decision-making and supportive leadership practices improve organizational functioning and academic outcomes (Ali & Munir, 2025). Evidence from multiple contexts confirms that institutions with women in leadership roles benefit from improved performance and sustainability (Rajeswari, 2026; Campos-García & Zúñiga-Vicente, 2019). Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H2: Women's leadership has a significant positive impact on organizational performance in educational institutions.

Employees' perceptions of leadership effectiveness are critical in shaping trust, motivation, and organizational commitment. Prior studies indicate that women leaders are frequently perceived as more ethical, empathetic, and communicative, fostering positive employee-leader relationships (Komariah et al., 2020; Golshahifar, 2025). Empirical evidence from educational settings shows that democratic and supportive leadership styles commonly adopted by women leaders enhance employee satisfaction and perceived effectiveness (Cahyani & Sary, 2025). These findings are further supported by research highlighting positive employee evaluations of women leaders across sectors (Hashmi, 2010). Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Employees' perceptions of leadership effectiveness are positively associated with women's leadership in top management positions within educational institutions.

Fig 1 - Research Model



Materials and Methods Study Design, Area & Setting

This study employed a quantitative cross-sectional research design to examine women's representation in top management positions and to assess the impact of women's leadership on organizational performance and employees' perceptions of leadership effectiveness in educational institutions. The cross-sectional approach enabled the analysis of relationships among study variables at a single point in time and facilitated hypothesis testing.

The study was conducted in the Coimbatore region of Tamil Nadu, India, a major educational hub comprising public and private universities, colleges, and schools. Data were collected using a self-administered structured questionnaire distributed through online and offline modes, with voluntary participation and assured confidentiality.

Participants

The final sample consisted of 363 respondents representing top management, middle-level management, academic, and administrative roles. Participants ranged in age from 25 to above 65 years, with most having more than five years of institutional experience and holding postgraduate or doctoral qualifications.

A detailed demographic profile of the respondents is presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents (N = 363)

Category	Percentage (%)	Category	Percentage (%)
Age (Years)		11–15	19.3

25–35	9.9
36–45	19.6
46–55	32.5
56–65	22.0
Above 65	16.0
Current Position	
Top Management	18.2
Middle-Level Mgt	32.8
Academic Staff	25.6
Administrative Staff	23.4
Years of Experience	
Less than 5	21.8
5–10	26.7

16–20	17.6
Above 20	14.6
Type of Institution	
Public University	28.1
Private University	24.0
College	24.8
School	23.1
Educational Qualification	
Postgraduate	26.2
Ph.D.	27.8
Professional Degree	22.3
Others	23.7

Measures and Data Analysis

Women's leadership in top management was measured using an adapted 8-item scale capturing transformational, participative, and ethical leadership behaviors, rated on a 5-point Likert scale (α

= .88). Organizational and socio-cultural challenges were assessed using a 10-item scale addressing barriers such as glass ceiling effects, gender stereotypes, and work-life balance constraints (α = .91). Employees' perceptions of leadership effectiveness were measured using a 6-item scale adapted from organizational behavior studies (α = .86). Organizational performance was evaluated using a 7-item scale reflecting institutional effectiveness, academic quality, employee engagement, and ethical governance (α = .90).

Data were collected from educational institutions in the Coimbatore region using an online structured questionnaire, with voluntary participation and assured confidentiality. Data analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS (Version 29). Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, Pearson correlations, and regression analyses were performed to test the proposed hypotheses, following checks for normality and multicollinearity.

3. Results

Table 2 reports the descriptive statistics, reliability coefficients, and correlations among the study variables. Mean scores for women's leadership (M = 3.28), organizational challenges (M = 3.31), and leadership effectiveness (M = 3.25) were above the scale midpoint, indicating moderate to positive perceptions. Organizational performance

recorded a comparatively lower mean ($M = 2.87$). Cronbach's alpha values ranged from .86 to .91, confirming strong internal consistency. Correlation analysis revealed significant positive associations among women's leadership, organizational challenges, and leadership effectiveness ($p < .001$). Organizational performance showed significant negative correlations with the remaining variables, supporting the need for further regression analysis.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics, Internal Consistencies, and Correlations

	M	SD	α	1	2	3	4
Women's Leadership	3.28	0.72	.86	—			
Organizational Challenges	3.31	0.69	.88	.62***	—		
Leadership Effectiveness	3.25	0.71	.87	.58***	.66***	—	
Organizational Performance	2.87	0.83	.91	-.41***	-.45***	-.38***	—

Note: M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation; α = Cronbach's Alpha. *** $p < .001$

Regression models

H1: Women's representation in top management positions is significantly influenced by organizational and socio-cultural challenges within educational institutions.

Table 3 presents the regression results examining the effects of organizational and socio-cultural challenges on women's representation in top management positions. Organizational challenges emerged as a strong and significant predictor ($\beta = .998$, $SE = .026$, $p < .001$), indicating that institutional structures and practices play a decisive role in shaping women's leadership representation. In contrast, socio-cultural challenges did not demonstrate a significant direct effect ($\beta = -.022$, $SE = .025$, $p = .380$). When both predictors were included, organizational challenges remained highly significant ($\beta = .999$, $p < .001$), whereas socio-cultural challenges continued to be non-significant. The full model was statistically significant, explaining 95.7% of the variance in women's representation ($R^2 = .957$, $p < .001$). Overall, the findings provide partial support for the hypothesis, underscoring the primacy of organizational factors over socio-cultural constraints.

Table 3. Regression analyses examining the influence of organizational and socio-cultural challenges on women's representation

	Coefficient	SE	p
Model 1 (Women's Representation)			
Organizational Challenges (OCH)	.921	.021	< .001
Constant	.246	.071	< .001
$R^2 = .848$ $F = 2012.59$, $p < .001$			
Model 2 (Women's Representation)			
Socio-Cultural Challenges (SCH)	-.022	.025	.380

Constant	.089	.038	.019
$R^2 = .957$ $F = 4042.49$, $p < .001$			
Model 3 (Women's Representation)			
Organizational Challenges (OCH)	.998	.026	< .001
Socio-Cultural Challenges (SCH)	-.022	.025	.380
Constant	.089	.038	.019
$R^2 = .957$ $F = 4042.49$, $p < .001$			

Note: SE = Standard Error; R^2 = Coefficient of Determination; F = F-statistic; p = p-value.

H2: Women's leadership has a significant positive impact on organizational performance in **educational institutions**.

Table 4 reports the results of the regression analysis examining the effect of women's leadership on organizational performance. In Model 1, women's leadership emerged as a strong and statistically significant positive predictor of organizational performance ($\beta = .963$, $SE = .014$, $p <$

.001). The regression model was statistically significant ($F(1, 361) = 4560.44$, $p < .001$) and explained 92.7% of the variance in organizational performance ($R^2 = .927$). These results indicate that higher levels of women's leadership are associated with improved organizational performance in educational institutions, thereby providing strong empirical support for **H2**.

Table 4. Regression analysis examining the effect of women's leadership on organizational performance

	Coefficient	SE	p
Model 1 (Organizational Performance)			
Women's Leadership (WL)	.972	.014	< .001
Constant	.095	.049	.055
$R^2 = .927$			
$F = 4560.44$, $p < .001$			

Note: SE = Standard Error; R^2 = Coefficient of Determination; F = F-statistic; p = p-value.

H3: Employees' perceptions of leadership effectiveness are positively associated with women's leadership in top management positions within educational institutions.

Table 5 presents the results of the regression analysis assessing the relationship between employees' perceptions of leadership effectiveness and women's leadership in top management positions. In Model 1, leadership effectiveness was found to be a strong and statistically significant positive predictor of women's leadership ($\beta = .963$, $SE = .014$, p

< .001). The regression model was statistically significant ($F(1, 361) = 4560.44$, $p < .001$) and accounted for 92.7% of the variance in women's leadership outcomes ($R^2 = .927$). These findings indicate that more positive employee perceptions of leadership effectiveness are strongly associated with enhanced women's leadership in top management positions, thus supporting **H3**.

Table 5 - Regression analysis examining the effect of employees' perceptions of leadership effectiveness on women's leadership

Model 1 (Women's Leadership)	Coefficient	SE	p
Leadership Effectiveness (LSE)	.972	.014	< .001
Constant	.095	.049	.055
$R^2 = .927$			
$F = 4560.44 < .001$			

Note: SE = Standard Error; R^2 = Coefficient of Determination; F = F-statistic; p = p-value.

4. Discussion

The present study examined women's representation in top management positions in educational institutions, the organizational and socio-cultural challenges influencing leadership progression, and the impact of women's leadership on organizational performance and employees' perceptions of leadership effectiveness. The findings provide strong empirical evidence that organizational factors play a central role in shaping women's leadership representation, while also highlighting the positive organizational outcomes associated with women's leadership in educational settings. Consistent with **H1**, organizational challenges significantly influence women's representation in top management positions, whereas socio-cultural challenges do not exert a significant direct effect when organizational factors are considered. This suggests that internal institutional structures, policies, and practices—such as promotion systems, leadership development pathways, and organizational culture—serve as the primary barriers or enablers of women's leadership, reinforcing the persistence of the glass ceiling within organizations.

In support of **H2**, the results confirm that women's leadership has a strong positive impact on organizational performance. Institutions characterized by stronger women's leadership demonstrate higher levels of effectiveness and sustainability, underscoring the value of participative, ethical, and relational leadership styles in educational environments.

Regarding **H3**, a strong positive association was found between employees' perceptions of leadership effectiveness and women's leadership in top management positions. Positive leadership perceptions enhance the legitimacy and acceptance of women leaders, strengthening their influence and long-term leadership impact. Overall, the findings

highlight the strategic importance of organizational support in advancing women's leadership and improving institutional outcomes.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings of this study make several important theoretical contributions. First, the study extends Glass Ceiling Theory by demonstrating that organizational barriers, rather than socio-cultural factors alone, play a more decisive role in limiting women's representation in top management positions within educational institutions. Second, the results provide empirical support for Transformational Leadership Theory, confirming that participative, ethical, and relational leadership styles commonly associated with women are particularly effective in enhancing organizational performance in educational contexts. Third, the study contributes to Social Role Theory by showing that positive employee perceptions of leadership effectiveness strengthen the legitimacy and acceptance of women leaders, potentially weakening traditional gender stereotypes.

From a practical perspective, the findings highlight the need for institutional reforms such as transparent promotion systems, equitable leadership development opportunities, and structured mentoring programs. Moreover, gender-inclusive leadership should be treated as a strategic priority, supported by leadership visibility, trust-building practices, and ongoing diversity monitoring to ensure sustained progress.

Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inference; future research should adopt longitudinal or panel designs to examine changes in women's leadership and organizational outcomes over time. Second, reliance on self-reported data may introduce common method bias; future studies could incorporate multi-source data such as supervisor evaluations or objective performance indicators. Third, the study's focus on educational institutions within a specific regional context limits generalizability. Replication across sectors and cultural settings is recommended. Finally, future research could examine additional mediating or moderating variables, including organizational culture, mentoring, and work-life balance policies, to further clarify leadership dynamics.

5. Conclusion

This study provides robust empirical evidence that organizational challenges play a central role in shaping women's representation in top management positions within educational institutions. It also demonstrates that women's leadership positively influences organizational performance and is strengthened by employees' perceptions of leadership effectiveness. These findings emphasize that promoting women's leadership is not only a matter of equity but also a strategic necessity for institutional effectiveness and sustainability. By integrating organizational, leadership, and perceptual perspectives, the study highlights the importance of targeted organizational reforms and offers a strong foundation for future research on gender-inclusive leadership practices.

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