Women's Leadership in Higher Education: Barriers and Opportunities in Indonesia

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Abstract

This review analyzes and describes the factors that women in Indonesia consider obstacles to achieving top leadership positions, especially at the college level, by looking at the various obstacles and opportunities women experience in other countries. This research was conducted using a qualitative design with a descriptive approach. The data analysis comprised data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results showed that women in Indonesia, especially in tertiary institutions, still face obstacles in reaching top leadership positions, even though there is a growing recognition of gender equality. Women do not report experiencing obstacles from institutions but rather from family responsibilities, a patriarchal culture, and a lack of support.

Keywords: Women's leadership; Obstacles; Opportunities

Introduction

Leadership is the ability to direct others to complete specific tasks (Terry, 2012). In some countries, women still face various obstacles in reaching top leadership positions in higher education. Drawing on several studies conducted in South Africa, Gina Wisker (1996) reports that "women are under-represented in middle and high management positions in higher education, even in the current post-feminist climate

many people claim there is no need to emphasize that equality must be continued to fight for" (p. 90).

A study in Zimbabwe revealed a lack of women in leadership positions in higher education, both locally and in many other countries (Chabaya, Rembe, & Wadesango, 2009). Marianne Coleman (2001) noted that "women in educational management are a minority in the UK, but they are also a minority in most other countries, both at comparable levels of development and those in emerging economies" (p. 175). The general statement that "women teach and men manage" (Greyvenstein & Westhuizen, p. 271) at school still applies, despite many strategies to correct gender imbalances in education management.

Such research has rarely been done in Indonesia, particularly in the province of Lampung. The purpose of this study is to analyze the various obstacles and opportunities experienced by women aspiring to top leadership positions in Indonesia, especially in higher education institutions. Surprisingly, Indonesia is included in the top ten countries that consider women as organizational leaders and as potential successors in an organization (Novita, 2018).

In education management and leadership, characteristics such as empathy, intuition, sensitivity, caring, support, compassion, patience, organization, attention to detail, and the ability to integrate people, listen to them, and motivate them through non-monetary incentives are valued (Cubillo, 1999; Funk, 2004; Growe & Montgomery, 1999). One of the fundamental reasons there are few women in leadership positions is gender inequality. While effective leadership is based on behaviour, gender remains an obstacle for women ascending to leadership positions (Getskow, 1996).

At the State Vocational High School 6 Surakarta in Indonesia, which has more male students than female students, most of the students reported thinking that women are inappropriate as leaders (Putra, 2009).

Women often experience discrimination in society. In the world of education, religious colleges or institutes of religion are rarely led by women. Although many schools at the *madrasah* level (Islamic religious-based high schools) are led by women and the boards of faith-based Islamic universities often contain a lot of women, they are usually limited to roles such as department secretary, dean, vice chairman, vice chancellor, or director of postgraduate studies and are not high-ranking officials. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education and Culture has had several women chancellors. For example, professor Asniar Ismail was the chancellor of Tanjungpura University from 2003–2007 (appointed by the Minister of National Education), and professor Dwia Aries Tina was elected as chancellor of Hasanuddin University from 2014–2018 (Mardiyati, 2014). While there are currently women occupying the position of chancellor/chairperson in tertiary institutions in Indonesia, the number is still very small, especially in Islamic-based tertiary institutions.

Hagberg Consulting Group (Hagberg & Heifez, 2000) examined more than 300 executives, directors, and CEOs and compared their managerial and leadership qualities, finding that women outperformed men in the managerial field, specifically in appointing employees, guiding and developing staff, and organizing and monitoring the work of others. Women also outperformed men in leadership, particularly in formulating and expressing vision, setting clear directions, carrying out tasks,

being an inspirational model, setting high standards of performance, and having responsibilities (Kholis, 2006).

Larry Summers (2005), former president of Harvard University, is famous for suggesting that women are under-represented at the top of science and engineering because such leadership positions require a level of commitment that they are not ready to make. In 2005, the *Sunday Telegraph* reported on a survey of the retail industry in the United Kingdom that revealed 40 percent of women reported consciously refraining from finding top jobs (Hall, 2005). Furthermore, the article stated that "women avoid top jobs because they do not want to sacrifice their family life, are less aggressive than their male counterparts, and care less about work status than men" (Ryan, Haslam, Hersby, Kulich, Atkins, & Compass, 2007, p. 267). Julie Ashby, Michelle Ryan, and Alexander Haslam (2007), however, wrote that female candidates are significantly better suited to challenging situations than men.

In Indonesia, there is ongoing discussion of discrimination and gender disparity. There is still, however, a lack of research that discusses the obstacles women face in attaining leadership positions, rendering the situation of women who have been discriminated against and held back from reaching top leadership positions in educational institutions invisible. What factors inhibit women from occupying top leadership positions? Are there opportunities for women to become the highest leaders in educational institutions in Indonesia, particularly in Islamic-based universities?

This research focuses on analyzing obstacles and opportunities women have experienced in achieving top leadership positions. It explores two research questions:

1. What is the most dominant obstacle experienced by women aspiring to top leadership positions?
2. Do women have the opportunity to achieve top leadership positions?

Research methods

This research was conducted using a qualitative design (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 2007) with a descriptive approach. This research was conducted in a natural situation and not manipulated by researchers.

Sources of data in the study were divided into two, namely into primary data sources, which provide direct data, and secondary data sources, which provide data through other people or documents (Sugiyono, 2010). Study participants were chosen through purposive sampling, the selection was done deliberately based on predetermined criteria and the research objectives (Sukardi, 2003). Data collection techniques used in this study were interviews, observation, and document study (Sugiyono, 2010).

Data collection was carried out using unstructured interviews. Unstructured interviews are free interviews where the researcher does not use interview guidelines that have been arranged systematically for the collection of data. The interview guide only outlines the issues that will be addressed (Sugiyono, 2008). Before conducting interviews, the researchers prepared an outline of the topics to be covered, including questions relating to problems experienced by women.

Data analysis can be done interactively through four stages, namely data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Miles & Huberman,

2007). The data analysis model used in this study was developed using Matthew Miles and Michael Huberman's (2007) interaction model (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Data analysis interaction model
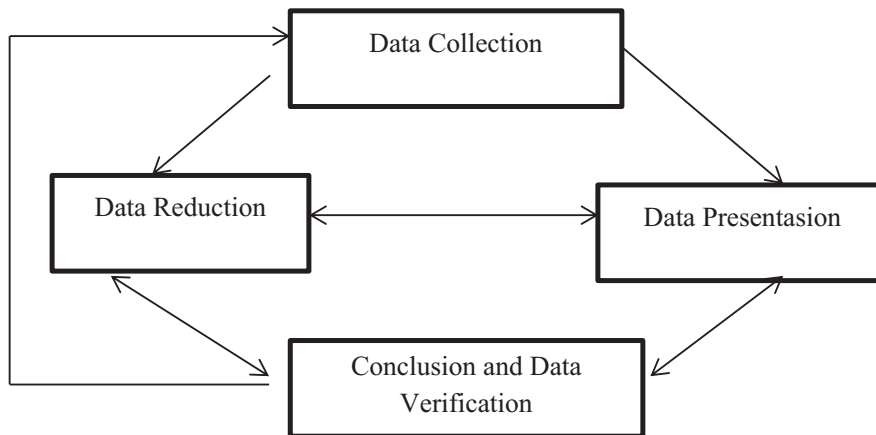
Source: Milles & Huberman

This technique is used to analyze the obstacles faced by prospective female leaders. It is also used to analyze opportunities for women to achieve top leadership positions in state universities, especially at the Raden Intan State Islamic University of Lampung in Indonesia.

Context

This qualitative research was carried out at the Raden Intan State Islamic University, a public Islamic tertiary institution in Lampung Province, Indonesia. It is a state university that has several female leaders in middle-level positions, but not in top leadership positions. It has never had a female leader at the university or postgraduate level.

Sampling procedure and research

Eight participants were chosen for this study through purposive sampling (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participants

Participant	Position
A	Head of doctoral study program in management of Islamic education
B	Postgraduate treasurer
C	Head of master study program in economic law
D	Secretary of doctoral study program of Islamic community development
E	Vice chancellor for academic and institutional development
F	Dean of the faculty of *tarbiyah* and teacher training
G	Head of the undergraduate study program management of Islamic education
H	Secretary of the madrasah ibtidaiyah teacher education undergraduate study program

Researchers conducted interviews with each participant about the obstacles women face in achieving top leadership positions in a college and whether women have the opportunity to achieve top leadership in tertiary institutions. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Result and discussion

The results are reported according to the two research questions. To answer the research questions, an observation was carried out at Raden Intan State Islamic University to see the environment and working conditions and interviews were conducted. After the interviews, a document study was carried out to support the observations and interviews.

Research Question 1: What is the dominant obstacle facing women aspiring to top leadership positions? Participants' answers to the first research question are outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Participants' answers about the obstacles they experienced

Participant	Answers
A	I personally feel that there are no obstacles. If I want, I can become the top leader. But I don't really want to. I personally see women as leaders. I am happy, proud, but I personally am not interested in becoming one of the top leaders, because for me everyone has their respective interests. … My children need a lot of time and attention, and I prefer fieldwork … to sitting behind a desk. I don't think there are any crucial or significant obstacles … for women to be leaders. The most important thing is in the woman herself, whether she is ready or not, whether she faces problems that arise, whether or not she works professionally, and whether or not she works with men professionally.
B	I have a child who is still small and needs a lot of attention, while the leader must have 24 hours to think about the institution.
C	There are many factors that prevent women from reaching the top leadership, the first is our cultural factor, [our] patriarchal culture, which means that the community considers men as more powerful leaders… . This means that with the mistrust of women about being at the top of leadership it is … still very rare for women to become a chancellor. Second, there is also competition in careers.
D	There are many obstacles for women leaders, the first is that there are many doubts from the community or a group of people that [a] woman can become a leader, the second is that due to the shortage of women, the steps to the top are not nimble and flexible like [they are for] men. There is a cynicism of gender, which means placing boxes between men and women who think that women are incapable or [who] discriminate. It means they have never seen that a woman is capable and worthy of being a leader. If there is no support from people around, then women will always be hampered.
E	A patriarchal culture [and] lack of trust in women. Women must outperform men to become leaders; women must take care of their families and administrative requirements.
F	Don't ever see obstacles to step on, I think when women have the ability and willingness to be dreamers, then they can.
G	Returning to the position of women who have multiple roles, they must take care of the family, [they face a] lack of opportunities … [the] assumption that men are more capable than women, and the conditions that must be met.
H	"More to the obstacles in yourself, there are many challenges in being a leader and prioritizing family."

The results of the interviews show that some women leaders at Raden Intan State Islamic University have different opinions about the obstacles faced by women in achieving top leadership positions at tertiary institutions. Answers ranged from women being less interested in top leadership positions to a patriarchal cultural and a lack of trust in women leaders to a lack of support and family responsibility. However, some of these claims are more dominant because of the patriarchal culture. Women encounter a lack of support and assume that their role in the family is more important than top leadership positions.

Research Question 2: Do women have the opportunity to achieve top leadership positions? Participants' answers to the second research question are outlined in Table 3.

Table 3. Participant's answers about opportunities for leadership

Participant	Answers
A	There are many opportunities now for women to be top leaders in universities, whether it is at the faculty, postgraduate, or institute level. It is important that women have competence, are professional, and have good-quality work.
B	There are so many opportunities for women to become leaders because now there are many women whose competencies are more qualified in terms of leadership and managerial skills …
C	There are opportunities for women to reach the top of leadership, but when we remove the patriarchal culture. Because anyone can be a leader. Women must prove that they are as good as men, then we must eliminate the patriarchal culture that favours men to be leaders. Besides that, women must fill themselves with positive things. Integrity and loyalty must be developed.
D	Opportunities exist because on this campus there are many capable, smart, and outstanding women … there are indeed many women who deserve to rise to the top.
E	There are opportunities, but women must be able to surpass men, they must have competence. Women can be rational, women have a more subtle approach, discrimination has been minimized.
F	The opportunity for women to become leaders is very open … if they meet the requirements.
G	Opportunities for women certainly exist, because many women have shown their abilities. There is no more discrimination for women, but still women need support.
H	There is an opportunity, women also have the same rights, [they] can be leaders just like men.

The participants agree that women have the opportunity to become top leaders in a college. Each one expressed different thoughts but emphasized that women have the opportunity to reach top leadership positions. Some participants pointed to women leaders in Indonesia, such as the country's fifth president, as proof that women can achieve top leadership.

The level of discrimination women face in each country is different. This may be influenced by the national culture and the local regulations.

Limitations and further research

Study limitations include a small sample size. Research on this topic is still largely unexplored; the results of this study cannot be generalized and require further in-depth study.

Conclusion

This research shows that the obstacles and opportunities women face in reaching top leadership positions vary by country; each country has its own rules, norms, customs, culture, and perceptions. Women in tertiary institutions in Indonesia still face obstacles in achieving top leadership, even though the level of discrimination in Indonesia is almost non-existent. In this study, the most dominant obstacles are familial responsibilities, a patriarchal culture, and a lack of support. However, women are actually given the same opportunities as men to become leaders. The most important note for women is to minimize the obstacles experienced by women themselves. Women must be ready to accept all the consequences and responsibilities if they become leaders.

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