

Exploring the Role of Women Leaders in the Financial Management of Nepalese Schools

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ABSTRACT

Women's leadership positions in Nepal remain low because many still believe women are not worthy of leadership. Moreover, men are considered worthy of being successful leaders. A study examines women's participation in leadership and financial management roles, as patriarchal culture still strongly influences people's perspectives in many countries (Mulawarman & Komariyah, 2021). This paper explores how women principals in Nepal lead their schools and contribute to their advancement by using efficient financial management systems in challenging situations. In this paper, a qualitative approach is used to collect data through in-depth interviews with ten female principals of community, trust, and private schools. Findings showed that women's influence on different stakeholders showed the need for a turning point for female leadership to convert schools into better places to live and learn. Data also revealed that these female principals fostered a home environment and academic advancement by efficiently managing school finances. Based on the findings, women's leadership in Nepalese society could significantly transform schools into successful ones. In this regard, educators, stakeholders, and policymakers should pay more attention to women school principals and empower them to utilize their efficiency to create a better learning environment. This seems like a possible backup for the Nepalese education system to achieve higher academic outcomes through effective financial management.

Keywords: Women principals, Leadership, Financial management, Nepalese Schools.

INTRODUCTION

This study provides a detailed personal experiences of female principals on the role of female leaders in financial management of Nepalese schools. It describes the study's background to set the direction and dimension of the research. There are only a limited number of women in leadership positions worldwide. It is not easy to believe that a woman can manage finances as a leader (Kenny, 2011).

Therefore, the focus is on showing the strengths and difficulties a woman leader faces in managing leadership and finances in schools. It also proves that a woman can be a successful financial leader in schools. Women can manage finances efficiently to ensure an organization's success. Therefore, the work will be focused on exploring the role of a woman leader in the financial management of educational organizations.

Problem

Can women not properly manage finances in schools to make the school effective? There are exemplary efforts and success stories by women worldwide that demonstrate their leadership in education. To answer these questions, this study examines relevant literatures on the research topics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is essential to go through different theoretical perspectives to answer the research question. However, the standard theories to be used are Traditional Leadership Theory and Feminist Theory.

Traditional Leadership Theory

Theories that emphasize leaders' personal characteristics and behavior within an organization are known as Traditional Leadership Theories. They emphasize the social context of leaders' behavior (Ohio and Michigan, 1960s). The study concerns the leadership qualities of women within the school. Therefore, traditional Leadership Theory can be used effectively to explain the leadership qualities of women in this research. Dickson (2023) analyses the contemporary leadership theories and approaches that attempt to define effective leadership differently from traditional perspectives. This also attempts to advance knowledge of the contemporary leadership mix and traditional theories that could provide actionable insights for effective leadership practices in an organization.

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory supports equality for men and women. Feminists strive for gender equality, including liberal, socialist, and radical feminists. There are various ways to analyze this theory to explore the position of women in leadership in the financial management of trust and private schools.

Dubose (2017) researched the roles of United States women in leadership positions and tested the relationship between managerial leaders and women leaders. Her primary purpose was to explore the perspective of women leaders and how managerial leaders had empowered them. She adopted a qualitative standpoint to generate her knowledge claim. Her study reveals that women's empowerment has not yet been materialized in African American women's leadership.

Likewise, another study is related to "participation of women in the family business. The work focuses on perceptions of the succession process in family businesses regarding gender issues. According to it, daughters may feel inhibited or encouraged to join those firms. The main findings are that gender is not considered an obstacle to becoming a successor. However, there are more male successors than female successors in the community. Results also show that family culture influences whether the first child is male or female. However, it is not only a predecessor's decision, as many women also decide not to join the family business (Maseda et al., 2022).

Nevertheless, once they are in, women are highly valued in family businesses.

The third research is about the school leadership of women in Kenyan schools (Nzeli, 2013). The study recommended that, since students and teachers positively viewed female head teachers, they should be given more leadership posts in secondary schools. The female head teachers are effective and can achieve the goals of their respective institutions. Although cultural and social barriers may interfere with the management of school affairs, there is a need for female head teachers to be encouraged to achieve leadership positions since they can manage the roles of leaders through mentorship."

The other research shows that gender diversity in leadership is positively correlated with improved economic performance, financial institutions are investing more in women leaders. Encouraging women to take on leadership roles can boost support for programs that integrate women into financial roles and promote gender diversity. This integration tackles contemporary social issues, promotes local justice, and fortifies institutional positions internationally. It also highlights international collaboration and digital logistics for inclusive economic recovery initiatives headed by women (Tulai, et al., 2026).

The primary findings of another study showed that, despite deeply rooted patriarchal structures and cultural customs, women in top education district leadership roles faced significant challenges in balancing work and family life. Most women showed little interest in applying for senior leadership positions, but with targeted mentoring, effort, and perseverance, they successfully attained these roles (Bodalina & Mestry 2022).

Thus, the research shows that women can be successful leaders. However, the focus of this study is on successful financial management by women leaders, basically in schools. After reviewing the theme, the researchers found that the knowledge produced by various scholars does not bridge the gap between the effectiveness of women's leadership in schools and their financial leadership in schools. Therefore, the researchers aim to fill this gap by demonstrating the successful financial leadership of women in schools, specifically in the developing country of Nepal. We challenge these theories from the perspective: Are these theories guiding school sectors in Nepal? Or do we need new theories to effectively support women's financial leadership in Nepal's current education system? We also noticed a gap: all research studies carried out so far are silent on the influential role of women leaders in the financial management of schools from a grounded perspective of leadership effectiveness.

Significance of Study

Policymakers at the federal, provincial, and local levels, as well as women leaders, will benefit from this study. This study will contribute to policy formulation and system building at the federal, provincial, and local levels by drawing on women leaders' experiences of the opportunities and challenges of financial management in schools. Furthermore, this study will bring out the lived experiences of women leaders. Finally, this study will raise awareness among female leaders about the opportunities and challenges of financial management and help them make informed choices and appropriate actions in their financial management as leaders.

Review of Plans and Policies

In this topic, the aim is to present the policies and plans formulated by the Nepalese government and by international organizations such as the ILO.

In Nepal, Nepalese women leaders have developed policies and plans for women's benefit, as Nepalese women make up nearly 51 percent of the total population. However, they do not have an equal and proportional share compared to their male counterparts. They are lagging in almost all sectors. Their status in health, education, politics, participation in decision-making, access to policymaking, and enjoyment of human rights is very inadequate. It would be appropriate to say that women are economically, socially, and politically excluded in Nepal. About 42 percent of Nepalese women are literate, and 60 percent are economically active (CBS, 2003), whereas women's participation in politics is negligible.

Government sectors and political parties have formulated many policies and programs to protect and promote human rights, enhance good governance, and ensure sustainable peace. However, women's participation and the role therein are often neglected and ignored. Those women on the front line are very few, and their voices are rarely heard. The major obstacle for women's empowerment and women's advancement in Nepal is the low participation of women in politics. There are very few women in policymaking bodies at all levels and sectors, including political parties and parliaments. In the dissolved House of Representatives, only a few women were elected as Members of Parliament (MPs), accounting for hardly six percent of total members.

On the other hand, there were 57 women legislators in the Interim Parliament, which accounted for 17 percent. Currently, the April 2008 election ensured that more than 33% of the constituent assembly were women. This number has increased to at least 50% under a proportional representation system. In the civil service, the situation is worse regarding women's representation, with women holding only 8 percent of seats. Furthermore, this number decreases at the decision-making level, down to 4 percent.

In 1997, the government introduced the Local Self-Governance Act (LSGA), which enabled as many as 40,000 women to participate in local-level politics, as 20% of seats were reserved for women at the ward level of VDCs and municipalities. However, this did not bring significant changes in women's participation in politics because of a couple of reasons. First, the number of reserved seats for women was very low relative to their population. Second, the reservation was limited to the ward level, and no special measures were considered to enhance women's participation in the decision-making level. As a result, a minimal number of women have been elected as mayor, deputy mayor, or DDC chairperson (ESP, 2001).

Some issues have been addressed through the women's leadership forum in ILO policies and plans on women's leadership. It includes program objectives, curriculum, participation, and admission procedures. Regarding objectives, to drive business performance and create competitive advantage, many companies are focusing on developing leaders from within (Bonner, et al., 2018). Nevertheless, when women's talents are underutilized, a country misses an important opportunity to harness women's leadership. An article examines literature on the various aspects of gender and school leadership. Although the researcher focuses on South Africa, the arguments here are universal. Many women are beginning to overcome the social stereotypes that suggest women cannot succeed in leading organizations. Many well-run schools in South Africa today are successfully led by women (Msila, 2013).

Worldwide, female executives will expand general management and leadership skills while exploring the latest research and emerging best practices. Whatever the role, the women's leadership program will help sustain strategic advantage for any organization. The following data show women's participation worldwide.

Table 1: Worldwide Women's Participation in Different Sectors

Industry	%	Region	%
Agriculture	1	Asia/Pacific	22
Chemical/Pharmaceutical/Biotechnology	3	Europe	16
Communications	4	Latin America	6
Consumer Products	10	Middle East/Africa	8
Education	10	North America	48
Environmental	1	—	—
Financial	22	—	—
Health Care	5	—	—
High Technology	9	—	—

Hospitality	1	—	—
Manufacturing	3	—	—
Nonprofit Services	12	—	—
Professional Services	5	—	—
Raw Materials/Energy	3	—	—
Real Estate/Construction	3	—	—
Retail Services	2	—	—
Utilities/Telecommunications	8	—	—

(Source: ILO Women Leadership Forum, 2021)

Conceptual Framework

The study will begin by exploring the role and impact of financial management among female leaders in community, trust, and private schools. It will then examine the perceptions of women administrators and head teachers regarding financial management within these schools. It then identifies the different financial management strategies used by female administrators in community, trust, and private schools. The empirical studies' findings were compared and contrasted with different theoretical perspectives, such as traditional leadership theory and feminist theory. Finally, the study concludes by providing insight into the overall efficiency of women's leadership in the financial management of schools.

Research Design

Every research project is interpretive as the researcher's feelings guide it. It is a set of beliefs about the world and how it should be understood and studied. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 22). Thus, every research project begins with a paradigm, which is a "basic set of beliefs that guides actions" (Guba, 1990, p. 12, as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 22). When we talk about a paradigm, we are concerned with the fundamental questions of ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (the theory of knowledge), and methodology (the way research is conducted) (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, as cited in Parajuli, 2002, p. 61). The most common paradigms include positivist and post-positivist, constructivist-interpretative, critical, and feminist post-structural (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 22).

Basically, there are two types of research methods. Quantitative research methods use experimental methods and quantitative measures to test the hypothetical generalization (Hoefl, 1997, p. 1). On the other hand, qualitative research methods use a naturalistic approach and seek to understand phenomena in natural settings. The research participants' perceptions of the women administrators and head teachers, and the strategies used in managing finances, need to be analyzed from their perspectives. Due to individual interest and situational variables, there can be multiple realities regarding the research question, which is the focus of this study. Thus, this study uses a qualitative research method, including narrative studies of women leaders in the financial management of schools across 10 different schools in the Kathmandu Valley.

Study Method, Group and Location

The study group consists of women head teachers and administrators of community, trust, and private schools in the three districts of the Kathmandu Valley. The districts of Kathmandu Valley include Kathmandu, Lalitpur, and Bhaktapur. The study's respondents will be selected through purposive sampling using snowballing techniques. The purposeful selection enabled the identification of information-rich cases for the in-depth study (Patton, 1990, p. 169).

In this study, both primary and secondary data are used. The primary data have been collected through in-depth virtual interviews. "An in-depth interview's main objective is to get the person being interviewed to talk about his/her experiences, feelings, opinions, and knowledge (Patton, 1990, p. 297). It also uses most participant observation techniques related to the standard rules of social interaction (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 45). In addition, secondary data are collected from various articles, journals, dissertations, and publications related to financial management by women in schools.

Description of findings: In this section, data obtained according to the research questions were described. At this stage, the researchers used direct quotations Pt for Principals of Trust Schools, Pc for Principals of Community Schools and Pp for Principals of private schools to support the findings. Therefore, total ten Principals in the interview was given a separate code number from (Pc.1), (Pc.2), (Pc.3), (Pt.1), (Pt.2), (Pt.3), (Pp.1), (Pp.2), (Pp.3) and (Pp.4). Their opinions were given as (Pc.1), (Pc.2), (Pc.3), (Pt.1), (Pt.2), (Pt.3), (Pp.1), (Pp.2) (Pp.3) and (Pp.4) respectively.

Interpretation of the findings: At this stage, the findings from the end of the research were discussed by correlating them according to the types of schools with other research or findings from different settings.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Creativity and understanding

No one seems unaware of the need to develop new ideas, as there are many creative ideas across various fields, including the education sector. The paradigm is slowly shifting, where the new era of teaching-learning is overtaking the old one. One has to stay up to date with trends in the global market to be competitive. In this trend, women have also proven their strength in managing school finances in the best possible way.

Distributive Leadership and Financial Management

Four principals of private schools were interviewed virtually; they shared their experiences as female leaders in school financial management. Here, their views were collectively coded.

"They have been working as principals for the last few years. To manage the school's financial problems, their team regularly sends the dues bill every month. If the fees are not collected on time, they send a notice to parents requesting payment. Parents are informed about the financial problem and try to help solve it. The School Board is informed about the school's current financial situation and makes decisions based on need."

They take Short-term loans from different sources on a priority basis. Therefore, cost minimization can be done in different activities. All activities are performed from the allocated budget. All the above financial activities are carried out per their instructions. They have always addressed every financial concern related to school development and have become able to manage the school's finances. Their team, under their leadership, is successful in meeting the overall requirements for students' development. The success of their school is the result of the efficient financial management of their school."

This indicates that the principals have valued their learning during the leadership and financial management work. They could use their knowledge to compare their experiences and findings with the experimental results.

Principal as a Transformation Leader with Financial Efficiency:

Three trust schools in the Kathmandu Valley, the Nepalese Army, and the Police were chosen to interview three female principals for this research (Saha, 2015). Their experiences were coded as text. For transformational leaders, efficient financial management is essential. *"They have been working as principals for the last few years. Their work as institutional heads is too tough for women leaders. Socially, academically, and economically, independence is a dream for individuals. To be academically sound, the institution must be successful in academic outcomes, ECA, and co-curricular activities. In schools, students can achieve holistic development. From their experiences, it is identified that to be successful as a leader, there must be a clear vision and mission. A leader's vision is to accomplish the mission; to grasp the opportunity, the institution must be economically sound. Without money, no work can be done on time. Therefore, financial strength is essential. In the case of their institutions, trustees are directly involved in financial strength. Their institutions are run by a Trust Welfare Planning Directorate that manages all financial aspects and human resources. Each fiscal year, trustees discuss the budget; to develop the school, they plan the budget for the upcoming year. There is a planning presentation. If they can convince the trustees of the school development plan, they will get an adequate budget. They do not plan for teachers' salaries because it is almost like a government school; salaries are fixed according to the post. Nevertheless, they should plan for library books, teachers' professional development training, students' educational tours, other ECAs, and present them to the director of welfare planning. If trustees are convinced by their vision of development, they can secure sufficient funding and develop their children's minds and success".*

They have secured adequate budgets for their schools by demonstrating their ability to envision different areas, such as sports, academic results, and the arts. Recently, their schools have won the president's running shield in sports and achieved the best academic results. Wisdom, presentation, and attitude have been their successful assets as women leaders to generate financial support and development of their institutions."

This indicates that the principals, along with the academics, are well aware that financial management is the most critical part of an organization. Proper use, with a unique vision, is an essential factor in effecting change in a school. So, the principals follow transformational leadership, as they tend to recognize the need to use school finances properly. This is an essential factor in bringing change in schools. So they initiated change through their financial management skills and proved to be agents of that change rather than passive recipients. For their contribution, one of the principals of Trust School was awarded the " Best Principal Award " by the Nepalese government. The world is shrinking in the palm of a person in the name of technology. Hence, the principals practice transformational leadership, and their leadership and financial management have become cornerstones.

Envision and Execution

Community schools are operated with support from the government and a group of individuals in the Kathmandu Valley (Dhaka & Panta, 2026). Among them, three schools are led by female principals with a set vision. When they talked about their school's vision, they were clear about what they wanted: their dreams for the school.

"After learning the importance of leadership and efficient financial management, they developed a well-documented vision, mission, goals, and action plan for their schools. Our school is progressive, and our focus is to provide a suitable climate and culture for learners. It also provides a better learning environment for students' holistic development. When we asked if the aim was to address the various financial statuses of parents and their effect on their wards, they replied that there are students from multiple economic backgrounds at the school. However, for all, we have developed a uniform, equity-based system to provide a range of opportunities through our unique financial management skills. This ensures all students have equal opportunities to develop their skills. Thus, financial management is one of the best factors to achieve our mission and vision."

The schools' financial management is carried out regularly by their team, as per their instructions. The principals were particular about their priorities for the proper utilization of available resources. They had already defined their team's understanding of what kind of school is and should be, how the school's identity could be matched with its deeds, and what kind of execution would suit the need. Under female leadership, they successfully provide a suitable academic environment for their students' development. These schools are regarded as successful based on SEE results, admission difficulty, and the satisfaction of faculty members and parents. These female leaders demonstrate reflection, dedication, and the ability to manage finances efficiently.

FINDINGS

The principal of a school has many roles and responsibilities to carry out. Furthermore, as female leaders, they are much more conscious and highly proficient, as it is challenging for females to be competitive (Ndlovu & Gerwel Proches, 2019). In addition, the needs of contemporary society and the expectations of parents and students towards schools and school leaders are changing globally. Thus, many countries have articulated the need for strong leadership. This has placed more pressure on school leadership to improve overall school performance. This research showed a strong leadership role of women principals, including Principals of trust schools (Pt), Principals of community schools (Pc) and Principals of private schools (Pp) for the improvement of the overall school culture.

Efficient financial management is also essential to improve the school's performance. Though women are always in the second position in Nepalese society, they have always been role models in managing finances because of their ability to plan and allocate the budget in their work places. Therefore, the research also showed that female leaders can allocate resources cost-effectively and achieve their vision.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that female principals are key figures in Nepalese schools and can manage finances efficiently. The Nepalese government has also awarded some female principals for their contributions to better leadership and management in schools. As we talk about female leadership, it seems to be a turning point for schools to become better places to live and learn. It has also been proven that the responsibility given to female leaders in schools has been associated with successful records in managing finances. Hence, if the financial management practices throughout the world shift to women, we are sure to experience phenomenal developments in the education sector.

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