

Challenges Faced by Women to Pursue Leadership Role in Colleges Under Royal University of Bhutan (RUB)

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Abstract

This study investigates the challenges faced by women in pursuing leadership roles in colleges under the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB), focusing on personal, organizational, and socio-cultural dimensions. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected via structured questionnaires from 63 female academic and non-academic staff across nine RUB colleges. Descriptive analysis and multiple regression were employed to examine the influence of the identified factors. Results indicate that women exhibit strong aspirations, intrinsic motivation, and commitment toward leadership roles, with personal factors emerging as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.395$, $p < 0.05$), followed by organizational factors ($\beta = 0.384$, $p < 0.05$). However, low self-esteem, limited budget allocation for leadership development, and insufficient policy implementation present significant barriers. Socio-cultural factors, while reflecting persistent stereotypes about women's leadership skills, had the least statistical influence ($\beta = 0.094$, $p > 0.05$). Age significantly shaped perceptions of women's leadership ($p = 0.036$), whereas educational qualifications did not. The findings underscore the need for targeted leadership development programs, increased institutional support, and confidence-building initiatives to translate women's leadership potential into actual representation in decision-making roles within Bhutan's higher education sector.

Keywords: Women's Leadership, Personal Factors, Organizational Support, Socio-Cultural Barriers, Royal University of Bhutan

Abstract

This quantitative study was conducted to explore the factors influencing women leadership (WL) among 63 respondents from various colleges under the Royal University of Bhutan (RUB). The research employed descriptive analysis and multiple regression to assess personal, organizational, and socio-cultural influences on women's leadership

The findings reveal that women possess a high aspiration to pursue a leadership role, with the highest mean score recorded ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.841$), indicating to pursue a leadership role. However, a notable concern is low self-esteem among women, which may hinder their leadership journey. The statement "Women are treated equally during the assignment of individuals in leadership positions" yielded the highest mean ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 1.027$) among perception-based items, reflecting some level of perceived fairness in leadership assignment. Conversely, the statement on organizational

budget allocation for women's participation had the lowest mean ($M = 2.63$), suggesting limited institutional support.

From the socio-cultural perspective, the societal belief that "women have poor leadership skills" scored a relatively high mean of 3.43, indicating persistent stereotypes. However, women leaders are generally accepted by society, as reflected by a close mean of 3.41.

Support for women's leadership was highest among those aged 31 to 40 followed by the age under 25 group. Perceptions of women's leadership are statistically significantly impacted by age, as seen by the p-value of 0.036. Women with master's degrees had the highest mean score ($M = 3.1629$) in terms of educational background, indicating a greater desire to pursue leadership roles, albeit this difference was not statistically significant ($p = 0.472$).

The results of the multiple regression analysis showed that the personal, organizational, and sociocultural components included in the model account for 59.1% of the variance in women's leadership, with an R-squared value of 0.591. It was determined that the model was statistically significant ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$). Personal factors ($\beta = 0.395$) had the strongest positive influence on women's leadership, followed closely by organizational factors ($\beta = 0.384$). The analysis confirms that personal and organizational factors significantly impact women's leadership ($p < 0.05$), while socio-cultural factors have a weaker effect.

Keywords: Women Leadership (WL), Organizational Factor (ORG), Personal Factor(PF), Socio-Cultural Factor(SCF), Royal University of Bhutan (RUB)

1. Introduction

There has been a notable surge in women receiving degrees, leading to more opportunities in the global workforce (Zamin, 2013). Women now hold diverse roles contributing to inclusive workplace and better performance (ILO, 2019; Rockefeller Foundation, n.d). However, despite these encouraging progresses, the United Nations Report on Women in Managerial Positions (2020) highlights that only 20% of managerial positions were held by women in 2019. Although women's depiction in senior leadership has been on the rise, they still face significant underrepresentation across all levels (Huang et al., 2020).

The situation is no different in Bhutan. The enrollment rates in primary education show minimal gender disparities (MOE, 2022). However, as students' progress to tertiary education, the number of female students dwindles in comparison to their male counterparts (RUB, 2020). Additionally, the labor force participation rate of women remains lower at 53.75%, whereas men have a higher rate of 63.1% (LFSR, 2022). Moreover, women hold only 11 out of 72 seats in the parliament and, fewer women are represented as CEO and Board of Directors in companies under Druk Holdings Investment (RIM, 2023)

Therefore, this research aims to identify the following research questions and objectives.

Research Question

Which are the most prominent challenges faced by women to pursue leadership role?

Research Objective

- To assess the status of women participation in leadership role.
- To identify and analyze the most prominent factors affecting women to pursue leadership position.
- To investigate organizational, social, and personal factors affecting women to take up leadership position.
- To investigate how demographic characteristics influence individuals' perceptions of social, cultural, and organization factors.

2. Literature Review

Across the countries all over the world, it is evident that disparities between men and women continue in the form of pay gaps, uneven opportunities, and unbalanced representation in important decision-making (Rockefeller Foundation, n.d). Hence, to create an ideal world and put an effort towards anti-discrimination practices, there should be equal proportionate of man and women on top management position (Al-Alawi & Nagggar, 2018). Due to distinctive qualities women possess such as strong care, love and compassion, these skills contribute to a stronger relationship and bonding in workplace resulting in improved effectiveness and efficiency as a leader (Choden, 2020).

The study aims to adapt the three parameters of Yemenu (2020) namely organizational, social and personal factors to determine the challenges faced by women to pursue leadership

The composition of one's personality comprises a collective consolidation of attributes, encompassing emotional stability, extraversion, agreeableness, openness to experience, and conscientiousness (Shaikh, Shah, Katpar & Shah, 2019). Research conducted by Aryee, Srinivas, & Tan, as cited in Poulouse and Sudarsan (2014), reveals that individuals possessing proactive personalities are more likely to garner support and proactively reshape their roles to mitigate conflicts between work and personal life, ultimately contributing to leadership responsibilities. Stronger relationships and bonding in the workplace, resulting in heightened effectiveness and efficiency as a leader.

Claudia & Schueller (2012) affirm that women continue to shoulder a predominant responsibility for childcare, compounding the challenges of simultaneously juggling dual roles. However, female leaders adeptly devise their own strategies to navigate familial obligations, including seeking external assistance and optimizing time management techniques (Cho et al., 2016). Among the contributing factors to the dearth of women in leadership positions is a reduced inclination to pursue such roles due to lower aspirations (Yemenu, 2020). Moreover, women's diminished confidence significantly impacts their career progression, leading to decreased participation in leadership roles and a reluctance to pursue higher positions (Bauer et al., 2021). Galsanjigmed & Sekiguchi (2023) further affirm that this lack of confidence acts as a hindrance to the professional growth and opportunities of women. women with lower self-assurance tend to exhibit a greater aversion to risk, often shying away from prospects for professional advancement (Day et al., 2019). Likewise, a notable obstacle faced by women leaders is a shortfall in networking, identified as a primary challenge, closely followed by the complexities of raising children and managing household responsibilities (Cho et al., 2016). In contrast, Yemenu (2020) contends that organizational factors exert the most profound influence on women's participation in leadership roles, while personal factors have a comparatively lesser impact.

Female leaders face a range of obstacles within the professional setting, such as unconscious bias, disparities in remuneration, limited opportunities for career progression, incidents of sexual or gender-based harassment, and perpetuated gender stereotypes which collectively create a formidable barrier for women striving to attain higher positions (Botwin, 2022). Furthermore, the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles may be attributed to gender prejudices that tend to favor men, coupled with the misconception that women lack the essential potential and capabilities for effective leadership (Dawa & Ugyen, 2022).

Cultural barriers, encompassing beliefs, values, religion, and attitudes towards gender roles, constitute factors that deter women from pursuing leadership positions, regardless of their qualifications (Mauchi et al., 2020). Likewise, prevalent cultural perspectives in many societies, portraying women as primarily homemakers and caregivers, contribute to the limited acceptance and acknowledgment of women as

leaders (Said et al., 2020). Nonetheless, research indicates that women excel in areas of empathy, communication, and relationship-building, attributes that enhance their effectiveness and efficiency as leaders (Radu, Deacono & Frăsineanu, 2017). Furthermore, traits like expressiveness, composure, and positivity, commonly associated with women, are increasingly recognized as valuable qualities in effective leadership, even surpassing perceptions of male leaders (University of California, 2021)

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted quantitative research design. A survey questionnaire was administered to the female staff of RUB to determine the challenges and opportunities of female leadership.

Population and Sampling Design

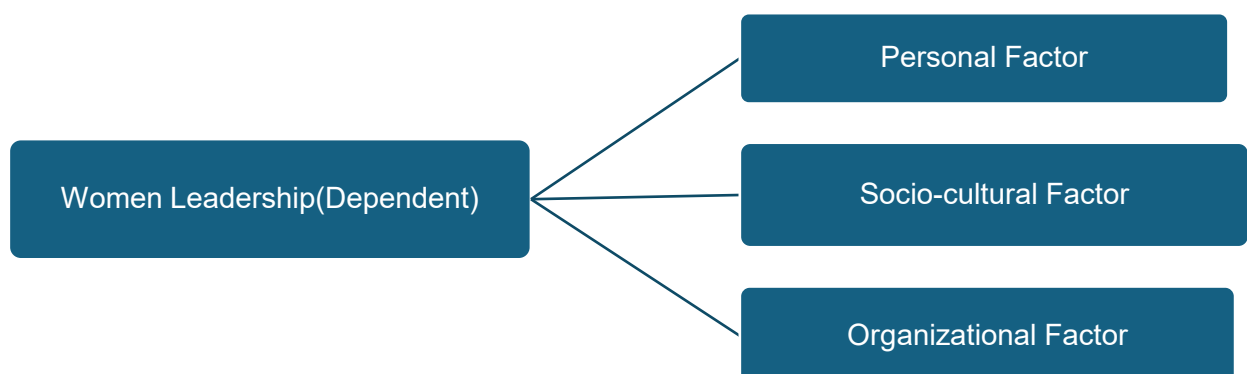
The target population for this study are female employees (Academics & non-Academic) of 9 colleges (JNEC, CST, GCBS, CNR, CLCS, PCE, SCE, SC and GCIT) under the Royal University of Bhutan. There are 421 female employees currently working in these colleges in various position level (RUB-IMS, 2023). The researchers used Taro Yamane's formula to determine the sample size of the study. Then, stratified sampling was deployed to properly represent all the colleges in the sample which would aid to draw more precise conclusion. Finally, simple random sampling was used to select from the stratum.

Yamane's formula: $n = N / (1 + Ne^2)$

3.2 Data Collection Procedures

1. Survey questionnaire was distributed online to all the working women of RUB colleges. The questionnaire consisted of three thematic areas as specified below and it was measured using 5 Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)
2. Organizational factor
3. Socio-cultural factor
4. Personal factor

Figure 1: Research framework for Tax compliance



Adapted from Yemenu (2021)

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Result

4.1.1 Descriptive Statistics

The objectives were fulfilled using descriptive analysis method in which detailed explanation are given below:

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of personal factor

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std.
Women have high self-esteem for leadership.	63	2	5	3.46	1.013
Women have high self-confidence for leadership.	63	2	5	3.49	1.03
Women have high self-assertiveness for leadership.	63	2	5	3.51	0.878
Women leaders have high leadership knowledge.	63	1	5	3.65	0.936
Women personally have high emotional stability for leadership.	63	1	5	3.81	0.965
Women demonstrate a strong commitment to embracing leadership roles.	63	1	5	3.89	0.918
Women have a high intrinsic motivation to solve problems in leadership positions.	63	1	5	3.89	0.863
Women possess an educational background that contributes to strong leadership.	63	1	5	4	0.823
Women have a high aspiration to accept leadership.	63	1	5	4.03	0.842

Table 1 presents an analysis of the influence of personal factors on women's leadership. The findings indicate that women exhibit a strong aspiration to assume leadership roles, as reflected by the highest mean score ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.841$). This suggests a high level of motivation and ambition among women to pursue leadership positions. However, despite these aspirations, the data also reveal a tendency toward lower self-esteem, which may hinder their leadership development and participation.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics on Organisational factors

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Women are treated equally during assignment of individuals in leadership position.	63	1	5	3.57	1.027
There is supportive work system for women leaders.	63	1	5	3.48	1.189
Employees of organization are cooperative for women leaders.	63	1	5	3.43	0.995
Organization provides training to build women capacity.	63	1	5	2.63	1.168
Organizations allocates the required budget to improve women participation in leadership.	63	1	4	2.38	0.974
There is monitoring system to improve women participation in leadership	63	1	4	2.38	1.007
There is no glass ceiling syndromes during implementation of women policies.	63	1	5	2.94	1.076

There is recognition of women for their leadership performance.	63	1	5	3.24	0.995
Organization has commitment to involve women in senior leadership position.	63	1	5	2.95	1.084
Fairness of working situation to participate women in leadership position.	63	1	5	3.4	0.976
There is proper implementation of women policy for leadership.	63	1	4	2.52	0.931
Valid N (listwise)	63				

Source: Obtained from SPSS

Table 2 illustrates the influence of organisational factors on women's leadership. Item 1 (Women are treated equally during the assignment of individuals in leadership positions) has the highest mean ($M=3.57$, $SD=1.027$). However, the study reveals that the organisation allocates the required budget to improve women's participation has the lowest mean of 2.63, which shows the organisation allocates less budget for women participation.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics on Socio-culture factor

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Societal believes that women have poor leadership skill.	63	1	5	3.43	1.118
There is trust on women leadership from the community.	63	1	5	3.03	0.897
Societal belief of women can successfully exercise their leadership responsibility.	63	1	5	3.35	1.003
Women leaders are accepted by the society.	63	1	5	3.41	0.944
Society recognizes and values women's decision-making capacity.	63	1	5	3.13	1.008
Society actively supports and cooperates with women leaders.	63	1	5	3.19	0.877
Society recognizes and values the strong problem-solving capacity of women leaders.	63	1	5	3.11	0.882
Valid N (listwise)	63				

Table 3 indicate how socio culture factor affect the women leadership participation. Society believes that women have poor leadership skill with the highest mean comparatively (mean=3.43). This shows society believes that women has poor leadership skills although women leaders are accepted by the society which is indicated by mean of 3.41.

Table 4: Relationship between Age and WL

Report
WL

Age	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Sig.
Less than 25 years	3.15	10	0.39511	0.036
26-30 years	3.0786	14	0.30427	
31-40 years	3.2138	29	0.23257	
41-50 years	2.85	6	0.15166	
50 and above	2.95	4	0.23805	
Total	3.1222	63	0.29096	

Table 4 shows that the 31-40 years age group has the highest mean, followed by the less than 25 years age group with a mean of 3.15. The significance value ($p=0.036$) indicates that age has a statistically significant effect on how women's leadership.

Table 5. Relationship between Qualification and WL

Report				
WL				
Qualification	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Sig.
class 12 and below	3.05	6	0.38341	0.472
Degree	3.1	17	0.36742	
masters	3.1629	35	0.2365	
Doctorate	2.8667	3	0.25166	
others	3.0	2	0.14142	
Total	3.1222	63	0.29096	

Table 5 illustrates that respondents holding a master's degree report a relatively high mean score ($M = 3.1629$), suggesting a greater inclination among these women to pursue leadership roles. However, this relationship is not statistically significant, as indicated by the p-value of 0.472, implying that the level of qualification alone may not be a decisive factor in predicting women's leadership intent.

4.1.2 Regression Analysis

Table 6: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.127a	0.591	0.175	0.55837

a Predictors: (Constant), PF, ORG, SCF

b Dependent variable: WL

In table 6, the computed R square is 0.591. Taken as a set, the result shows the predictors Personal factor, Organisational Factor and Socio-cultural Factor accounts for 59.1 % of the variance in WL. Therefore, the researcher concludes that there are still other factors that can affect the WL of a working women which are yet to be explored by another researcher.

Table 7: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5.235	3	0.082	0.32	.000b
	Residual	30.096	59	0.012		
	Total	5.842	62			

a Dependent Variable: WL

b Predictors: (Constant), PF,ORG,SCF

In table 7, the significance value was shown. Since the P value is 0.000 which is less than 0.05, the model is deemed fit for the analysis. Therefore, the results in the table are statistically significant.

Table 8: Coefficient

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B		Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.445	0.275		3.524	0
	ORG	0.202	0.065	0.384	2.446	0.034
	SCF	0.253	0.083	0.094	2.717	0.624
	PF	0.038	0.056	0.395	0.384	0.03

a Dependent Variable: WL

Table 12 shows the standardized coefficient beta that represents the coefficient of regression which analyses a unit change in the predictor variables when the predictor changes independently. Higher the Beta value, higher is the influence of independent variables on dependent variables and vice versa. The result shows that personal factor ($\beta=0.395$) has the highest influence on WL followed by organizational factor ($\beta=0.384$). The lowest β value was social cultural factor ($\beta=0.094$). The result of multiple regression analysis shows that personal and Organisational factor have a positive influence on Women Leadership as these variables have p value less than 0.05.

4.2 Findings and Discussion

The descriptive statistics reveal that women exhibit strong personal qualities conducive to leadership. The highest-rated traits included highest aspiration to accept leadership, women having high intrinsic motivation for leadership position, and strong commitment to leadership role. Also, the finding indicates that women are qualified to take up leadership role. These findings reinforce that women in RUB colleges are intrinsically motivated and well prepared to take-up leadership role. However, the slightly lower scores in self-esteem and self-confidence indicate a potential confidence gap, which may be influenced by external factors such as lack of encouragement and organizational barriers. This finding aligns with the research by Amin et al. (2021), which identified that low self-confidence and self-esteem can significantly hinder women's ability to perform effectively in leadership roles. Nevertheless, the regression results confirmed that personal factors have the strongest influence on women leadership ($\beta=0.395$, $P<0.05$),

validating that enhancing women's personal capabilities can significantly contribute to leadership effectiveness.

Organizational support for women in leadership within the institution appears to be moderate. While the study indicates that women are generally treated equitably in leadership role assignments, significant gaps were identified in key areas particularly in capacity-building initiatives, budget allocation for leadership development, and monitoring mechanisms aimed at enhancing women's participation in leadership. These findings are consistent with previous research. For instance, Amin et al. (2021) emphasized the need for structured training programs, leadership development courses, and targeted policy interventions to enable women to perform effectively in leadership roles. Similarly, Mukhtar (2022) highlighted the absence of robust organizational policies as a critical barrier to the advancement of women in leadership positions. Although organizational support was the second strongest predictor of women Leadership (β 0.384, $p < 0.05$), the lack of concrete structures and resources to support women's professional advancement undermines progress. This implies a need for RUB to move beyond symbolic inclusion and ensure systemic and strategic interventions to promote gender equity in leadership.

The analysis revealed mixed societal perceptions regarding women in leadership. Notably, the belief that women possess poor leadership skills emerged as a concern, highlighting persistent stereotypes that may undermine women's confidence. These findings are consistent with the study by Agirumubyara and Jean (2024), which also emphasized the negative impact of societal biases on women's leadership potential. Conversely, the moderate scores relating to society's acceptance and trust in women leaders indicate a gradual shift toward social acceptance, a trend similarly reflected in the findings of Hamzah et al. (2023), where respondents expressed increasing acceptance of women in leadership roles. Despite these evolving attitudes, the socio-cultural factor was found to have the least influence on women's leadership participation ($\beta = 0.094$, $p > 0.05$). This suggests that internal (personal) and institutional (organizational) factors play a more decisive role in shaping women's leadership engagement in academic settings, while cultural norms may be slowly evolving but not yet a dominant influence.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the factors influencing women's leadership from Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) colleges, focusing on personal, organizational, and socio-cultural dimensions. The findings reveal that women have a strong aspiration to take up leadership roles despite the challenges such as low self-esteem, insufficient institutional support, and lack of budget to support women leadership.

The analysis also indicates that age has a statistically significant impact on the perception of women's leadership. In contrast, although women with a master's degree showed a stronger intent toward leadership, this relationship was not statistically significant, suggesting that higher education alone may not drive leadership participation.

The regression analysis confirmed that personal and organizational factors significantly influence women's participation in leadership, with personal attributes such as intrinsic motivation and commitment being the strongest predictors. However, the relatively low levels of self-esteem and confidence indicate an internalized impact of external barriers. Organizational support, though present in terms of equal assignment practices, remains inadequate in areas such as leadership development programs, budget allocation, and policy implementation. Socio-cultural influences, while less statistically significant, continue to reflect underlying stereotypes that subtly shape leadership perceptions.

Overall, the study concludes that more holistic and structured support system at both the personal and organizational levels is essential for translating women's potential into actual leadership roles. Addressing these challenges not only promotes gender equity within academic institutions but also contributes to more inclusive and effective leadership across Bhutan's higher education sector. Future studies should explore the currently overlooked factors influencing women's leadership to provide more comprehensive and targeted recommendations for advancing gender equity in academic and organizational leadership in Bhutan.

5.2 Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made to strengthen women's participation in leadership roles.

1. Develop and Implement Leadership Development Programs.

The study revealed that while women exhibit high aspiration and motivation for leadership, there is a noticeable gap in organizational capacity-building initiatives. To address this, RUB should invest in structured training, mentorship, and coaching programs, particularly targeted at emerging women leaders. This aligns with the need for enhanced personal and professional development identified in the findings.

2. Increase Budget Allocation for Gender-Inclusive Programs

Findings indicated that budget allocation for leadership development is currently inadequate. Colleges should ensure that dedicated funding is allocated for programs such as workshops, awareness campaigns, and networking opportunities. These initiatives can support women's advancement into leadership by addressing structural gaps highlighted in the study.

3. Strengthen Policy Implementation and Monitoring

The study noted that while women are generally treated equally in role assignment, monitoring mechanisms and proper implementation of women-related policies remain weak. Strengthening these areas will ensure that existing policies are translated into tangible support for women leaders and will help close the implementation gap.

4. Foster an Organizational Culture of Support

Although some organizational support was reported, the findings emphasized the need for a more inclusive culture that goes beyond equal treatment in leadership assignments. Institutions should actively cultivate a supportive environment, acknowledge women's contributions, and address challenges such as glass ceiling syndromes that continue to persist.

5. Promote Confidence-Building Activities

Despite strong aspirations, women demonstrated relatively lower levels of self-esteem and self-confidence, possibly due to organizational or societal influences. To bridge this gap, colleges should promote confidence-building initiatives such as leadership retreats, peer learning forums, and formal recognition programs, which can empower women and enhance their leadership effectiveness.

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