

Leadership Development and Opportunities for Women in Higher Education Leadership Roles

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Abstract. This qualitative phenomenological study explores women's leadership development and opportunities at Central Mindanao University (CMU) in advanced leadership positions. It investigates the factors shaping their career trajectories, emphasizing the pivotal role of educational attainment, particularly doctoral degrees, in advancing women into leadership roles. The research highlights the importance of academic distinctions and a solid commitment to service as critical motivators for women to embrace leadership roles despite initial hesitations. The study delves into the expected behaviors and qualities of leaders in higher education, emphasizing attributes vital for fostering academic excellence and inclusivity. Utilizing a qualitative phenomenological approach, the research examines the lived experiences of women leaders at CMU. Semi-structured interviews with purposively selected women in leadership roles provide in-depth insights into their experiences, perspectives, and challenges. Thematic analysis reveals recurring patterns, themes, and nuances, offering a comprehensive understanding of women's leadership trajectories. Leadership roles present opportunities for both professional and personal development, yet biases and systemic barriers persist, perpetuating gender disparities. Environmental factors, such as organizational culture, significantly influence leadership behaviors, necessitating adaptive strategies. Institutional support systems, including mentorship initiatives, foster effective leadership. The diverse experiences of participants underscore the complexity of women's leadership journeys, offering valuable insights for aspiring leaders. Addressing biases, promoting equitable opportunities, and creating supportive environments can pave the way for gender equality at CMU and similar institutions. Embracing inclusive practices can empower CMU to champion gender diversity and equity in higher education.

Keywords: Academician women; Gender equality; Women's empowerment; Women in higher education; Women's leadership.

1.0 Introduction

Leadership in higher education is a complex and multifaceted issue requiring careful attention to the needs and interests of all stakeholders. The role of women in leadership positions has become an increasingly important topic, especially within developing countries like the Philippines. Despite significant progress toward gender equality over recent decades, women still face unique challenges and obstacles in achieving leadership roles within higher education. While there has been some initial optimism regarding gender equality progress in Philippine society, significant disparities persist in access to power and authority within higher education contexts (Magsanoc-Alikpala & Salazar-Clemen, 2015). These issues arise from both explicit discrimination and subtle biases against female candidates for leadership positions. For instance, research suggests that well-intentioned

hiring committees may unconsciously favor male applicants over equally qualified females when deciding on promotions or job offers (de la Cruz et al., 2020). Additionally, many hold ingrained stereotypes about effective leadership behavior, often equating such traits with traditionally masculine qualities like assertiveness or competitiveness (De los Reyes & Wong, 2019). These biases are difficult for individual women to overcome without concerted efforts from society.

A preliminary literature review highlighted professional environments as essential in defining respected leadership styles and behaviors. Higher education traditionally assigns professional roles and norms in a rigid, transactional, structured manner, focusing on specified protocols, influential authority figures, and an emphasis on operations and outcomes (Burns, 1978). In contrast, several female leaders use collaborative, transformative leadership approaches that extend their roles as faculty members and educators. This evolved approach to developmental leadership differs from the traditional system that values policies, practices, and professional roles over collaboration and professional development. For gender equity in higher education, it is crucial to cultivate female leaders despite prevailing gender stereotypes and cultural biases regarding successful leadership behaviors, which limit women's opportunities for professional development and mentoring (Dominici et al., 2013).

Behavioral and situational approaches to leadership behavior provide frameworks for this study. Northouse (2015) explains that these approaches examine leadership styles, skills, and strategies effectively used by female leaders in higher education and identify leadership behaviors not displayed by them. This study also investigates whether task-related, achievement-oriented behaviors (traditionally associated with male leadership traits) are more valued than relational, collaborative leadership styles (usually associated with female leadership traits). Understanding which leadership behaviors are highly valued and respected in higher education and their effectiveness provides insights into biases that may affect women's advancement opportunities (Northouse, 2015).

The situational approach, developed by Hersey and Blanchard (1969), examines leadership in various organizational situations, assuming that different types of leadership are necessary. Leaders must adapt their styles to meet organizational needs and challenges, adjusting according to the developmental levels of their followers. This study focuses on the ability of female leaders in higher education to adapt their leadership styles to meet the expectations of their followers and the institution. Sandberg (2013) notes that female leaders must be flexible in incorporating desired leadership characteristics and techniques while meeting institutional leadership traits and skills.

A research study similar to Hersey & Blanchard's (1993) surveyed 332 university employees and 32 supervisors to explore effective leadership behaviors. The data analysis predicted employee job satisfaction, performance, and successful leadership behaviors while identifying optimal leadership styles. Although initially, situational leadership theory seemed less practical, it accurately described influence dynamics between leaders and followers, particularly in improving performance outcomes (Fernandez & Vecchio, 1997).

This study explores the experiences and advancement of women in higher education, focusing on contemporary colleges and universities where women are advancing their careers at higher rates than in traditional settings. It investigates how these women define and measure leadership skills within modern higher education institutions. The literature review analyzes environmental factors and beliefs associated with successful leadership, aiming to reshape the definition of effective leadership and the role of women leaders in this domain. Furthermore, it examines how their progress can be bolstered beyond current educational settings, pinpointing academic environments facilitating advanced leadership prospects and professional development for women. Such settings provide equal opportunities for career advancement, prompting an investigation into why these institutions are more successful in promoting female leaders.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study employed the phenomenological research approach to comprehend the professional experiences of leaders in online higher education, both familiar and divergent. This research design aims to provide a detailed description or illustration of the nature of a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2017) and an in-depth account of participants' personal experiences of an event or phenomenon. This approach allows us to explore subjective

experiences and perspectives, providing new interpretations and meanings that inform our understanding of experiences and the contexts in which they occur. This approach facilitated the identification of the underlying factors contributing to these experiences and the shared beliefs among the participants. It also enabled the researchers to scrutinize and interpret these shared experiences while addressing the research questions stated in the study.

2.2 Research Locale

This study was conducted at Central Mindanao University (CMU). CMU stands as a beacon of academic excellence and research prowess in the Philippines, situated in the province of Bukidnon at the heart of Mindanao Island. Since its establishment in 1910, CMU has garnered a distinguished reputation, particularly in the country's Southern region. Recognized by the Commission on Higher Education, CMU holds prestigious designations as a Center for Excellence in Agriculture, Forestry, Veterinary Medicine, and Biology and a Center for Development in Mathematics, Environmental Science, and Teacher Education. In a significant milestone, the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (AACCUP) bestowed CMU with Institutional Accreditation (Level II) in 2017, marking a historic achievement as the first institution in Mindanao to receive such recognition. As one of the leading state universities in the Philippines, CMU provides a fertile ground for women holding key positions whose experiences and narratives reflect those of women leaders across academic institutions. Hence, CMU is a suitable venue for conducting this study.

2.3 Research Participants

This study involved interviews with female leaders at CMU, including deans, associate deans, academic program chairs, and directors who hold middle to upper-level leadership positions. The initial research identified twenty (20) potential female leaders at CMU, from which the participants were purposively sampled. These interviews occurred in CMU, University Town, Musuan, Maramag, and Bukidnon. They included a diverse representation of female leaders who have held the Dean, program chair, or director position for at least five years. Potential participants were personally approached to identify their interest in participating in the interviews. During the interviews, questions were asked regarding mentoring, coaching, career advancement opportunities, and the number of women currently in advanced leadership positions at their current educational institution to examine the scope of this issue and its significance (Appendix A). Additionally, focused group discussions (FGD) were conducted in this study to ensure validity and reliability by cross-referencing the participants' responses.

2.4 Research Instrument

The participants in the research study were approached personally with a description of the study and a brief questionnaire. Once 20 eligible participants were identified and consented to participate in the survey, interviews were scheduled. The research questions were sent to the participants two days before the interview. The interviews were conducted in person and recorded with the participants' permission. All data collected were kept confidential, transcribed, and coded for analysis. The interview questions are as follows:

Please share your career path with us and explain how it led you to your current position.

How should leaders in higher education conduct themselves, and what traits should they possess?

Could you please share how your leadership position in higher education impacted your professional growth and career advancement?

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure and Analysis

The data collection process for this study was carefully designed to ensure efficiency, accuracy, and ethical integrity. It began with the initial contact of potential participants through email and Facebook Messenger, where a study description and a brief questionnaire were provided to assess eligibility and interest. Once participants responded and were confirmed eligible, their consent was obtained before scheduling the interviews. Participants received the research questions beforehand to prepare adequately, facilitating productive discussions during the in-person interviews, expected to last between 30 and 40 minutes. With participants' permission, interviews were recorded to capture responses while maintaining confidentiality accurately. After the interviews, all recorded data were transcribed, converting spoken language into written text to facilitate systematic analysis. This transcribed content underwent coding, categorizing, and organizing responses based on emerging themes or patterns. To

achieve the research objectives, interview questions were designed to gain in-depth insight into participants' career paths, leadership experiences, and perspectives on higher education leadership.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

Participants' consents were obtained before interviews were conducted, and they were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher ensured they avoided deceptive practices and managed their biases during interviews. They also took care to code and analyze transcripts objectively. The researcher and adviser addressed these issues through ongoing review and dialogue. All recordings, transcriptions, coding notes, and participants' information were kept confidential on a password-protected computer. The researcher used language that was easy for participants to understand and gave each participant an overview of the study's purpose. We obtained consent forms from all participants before the interviews to ensure voluntary participation. The interviews were recorded individually for accuracy. Participants could opt out at any point, and no questions were mandatory. An informed consent form was developed that stated participants' rights and agreement to participate, along with an acknowledgment that their rights are protected. The researcher informed participants that the study posed no harm to them. Individual participants were notified that they would not receive any direct benefits from the study.

3.0 Results and Discussion

Theme 1: Educational Qualifications and Leadership Experience

Educational qualifications and leadership experience are central themes that encapsulate the factors that led these trailblazing women to higher education, career paths, and current positions. These indispensable factors vouched for the participants' current leadership positions at Central Mindanao University. Most of them have earned Doctoral Degrees, which equipped them with the expected skills and expertise to deliver their functions within the university. Particular academic distinctions and achievements also amplified the career paths of the participants, such as Participant 9, current Chairperson of the Institute of Biological Sciences, who graduated Summa Cum Laude in BS Biology and exhibited exemplary performance in her field as a researcher and a faculty. These women leaders were appointed based on their educational backgrounds and achievements and not primarily on whether or not they were willing to accept higher designations. Based on the focused-group discussion, many participants initially declined the designations offered to them for specific reasons. *"I never dreamed of becoming a leader,"* Participant 7, Participant 10, and Participant 13 expressed precisely in the same manner.

Participant 12, for instance, convinced the University President during her time a couple of times not to designate her as the Director of CMU-Laboratory High School and concurrently the Director of the Office of Admissions, Scholarships, and Placement because, as she confessed, *"I am not ready and I don't have any training for these positions."* However, due to her educational qualifications and years of service at CMU, she was appointed by the president as the director of the said two offices. The same is true with Participant 11, amongst many others who said:

"Like everybody else in this office, I do not want to be designated as the Department Chair because I don't want burdens due to heavy workloads. But I had no choice because everybody in the office became chairpersons already, and now, it's my turn."

Nevertheless, these participants were compelled to take the position because, as Participant 3, Participant 5, and Participant 6 said, *"I was given the trust and confidence to lead our office. So, I took the challenge."* On a positive note, other participants were passionate about becoming trailblazing academic leaders as they wanted to serve the public. Reflecting on her leadership roles, Participant 1 said, *"This journey reflects my enduring passion for education, community service, and academic leadership."* Participant 4, the Center for Biodiversity, Research, and Extension Director in Mindanao, also focused on serving indigenous cultural communities, particularly educating ethnic groups about preserving Biodiversity. These women leaders are committed to the mission and vision of Central Mindanao University, which is to uphold the total development of people. Participant 9 admits, *"It's a waste of your skills and expertise if you don't serve the community. That's God's gift for you to serve the public."*

Moreover, the participants' former leadership roles also paved the way for their current positions. Extensive leadership roles from the previous administrations made Participant 6, Director of the International Relations

Office, view her academic journey as a “smooth sailing career path” because her last roles have become an instrumental training ground for her current designation. Participant 2, Participant 8, and Participant 15 also have previous designations that prepared them for their current positions as the Director of Library Services, Director of the Office of Admissions, Scholarships, and Placement, and Director of the Human Resource Management Office, respectively. The institution prefers to appoint those with previous leadership experiences, excellent work ethics, and service dedication.

The participants' exposure to research and extension studies has significantly accelerated their career progression, as research and publications are key criteria for rankings, promotions, or reclassifications in SUCs. For example, Participant 14, formerly the Extension Director and Head of the Capability Building Unit, reported that her promotion to higher positions was mainly due to her research involvement and numerous publications. Similarly, Participant 4, the former Chair of the Language Education Department and now the Research Coordinator of the College of Education, credited her academic and professional success to her research and extension work on culture and arts. These experiences demonstrate how values, personal influences, and perceptions of work's intrinsic or extrinsic rewards play a crucial role in shaping participants' career choices and aspirations across various fields, including business, science, and the arts (Simpson, et al., 2020).

Meanwhile, institutional and environmental factors influence why these women leaders pursued CMU for their career pathways. They preferred CMU due to its outstanding workforce, consistent ideals, and commitment to excellence. CMU is the best avenue for career advancement and leadership development for them. As Participant 6 stated:

“I was once the director of Camiguin Polytechnic State College, but I decided to transfer to CMU in 2014, and that was one of the best decisions in my life because the atmosphere here is very different. I admire the dedication of the people here at CMU. I appreciate their commitment to excellence. I also love the ambiance, landscapes, trees, and fresh air.”

Participant 7, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, also espoused that the organizational culture at CMU is characterized by intelligent and sophisticated professionals with exemplary leadership and teaching performance, bringing boundless fame and honor to their beloved institution.

Hence, organizational culture significantly influenced participants' career paths, with characteristics and behaviors valued in managers shaping opportunities, particularly disadvantaging women in three out of four case study organizations (Wilson, 2018). In this study, the narratives captured in Table 2 elucidate the diverse factors shaping the career paths of women leaders in higher education. Educational qualifications, leadership experience, passion for service, and institutional culture collectively contribute to their journey toward leadership roles at CMU. These narratives underscore the importance of merit-based appointments, dedication to excellence, and a supportive organizational environment in fostering women's leadership within academia.

Theme 2: Behaviors and Qualities as Leaders in Higher Education

Leaders in higher education must behave in a manner that reflects their commitment to academic excellence, promoting inclusivity, and upholding ethical standards. The following are some key behaviors and qualities that leaders should exhibit, according to the narratives of the participants:

Visionary

A leader must be a visionary. Participant 3 emphasized that leaders should be able to think in advance, five years or ten years from the current time. She said, “We have to be visionary for our organization to meet time demands because we are getting so complicated and competitive.” Participant 9 also highlighted that leaders should have strategic planning abilities to achieve their organization's vision. Otherwise, as Participant 8 pointed out, the organization will stagnate and fail.

Integrity

Higher education leaders must uphold the highest ethical standards and act with integrity in all their interactions. This is akin to the honesty and trustworthiness of leaders that Participant 13 and Participant 5 mentioned. They believed that leaders' colleagues would not trust them if they were not honest and had firm moral principles.

Respect

Treat all academic community members with respect and dignity, regardless of their background, position, or perspective. For Participant 4, a leader must significantly respect individual differences among his/her colleagues since they grew from different orientations and embody varying work ethics and principles.

Communication

Effective communication is critical for higher education leaders to convey their vision, goals, and expectations to faculty, staff, students, and stakeholders.

Collaboration

Promote teamwork among faculty, staff, and students to collectively achieve common goals and address challenges. This is related to Participant 7's contention that *"leaders must be facilitative rather than being so detached from their colleagues and students."*

Adaptability

Responsive to changes in the academic landscape, whether they stem from technological advancements, shifts in student demographics, or evolving pedagogical approaches. "Leaders must be able to respond to the call of globalization and internationalization," said Participant 3. Participant 7 also stated that leaders have to be responsive to the organizational clamors and attend to all concerns of colleagues and students. Participant 14 also went on by saying:

"Since they [leaders] are molding people, they should have a higher emotional, intellectual, and adaptability quotient. They will succeed in their career goals and become effective leaders with all these. When they possess these qualities, they will be flexible and understand what their constituents are experiencing in their office."

Innovation

Leaders must be creative to drive progress and keep their institutions relevant in a rapidly changing world. Participant 2 must be a risk-taker to implement the organization's innovations.

Empowerment

Empowering faculty, staff, and students to reach their full potential by providing opportunities for professional development, recognizing achievements, and fostering a culture of mentorship and growth. According to Participant 10 and Participant 3, mentorship and empowerment can be efficiently delivered through macro and micro levels of management. Macro leaders step back and trust their team to perform their tasks, while micro leaders closely monitor the smallest details of their employees' output and progress. Micromanagement can take time and resources, removing focus from other crucial duties. Conversely, macro-management is concerned with establishing broad objectives and giving staff members greater freedom in achieving them (Gartner, 2024).

Empathy

Leaders in HE should understand the needs, concerns, and experiences of others. *"Try to place yourself in the position of being led, and consider the viewpoints, concerns, and needs of your subordinates,"* said Participant 7, *"they have to be assertive, paying respect for others; thoughts, feelings, and beliefs,"* Participant 5 added. Participant 1 also posits that:

"A leader should demonstrate empathy by actively listening, showing compassion, and fostering a supportive environment that promotes well-being and inclusivity."

Authenticity

Staying true to their values, principles, and beliefs. *"Authenticity builds trust and credibility among colleagues, students, and stakeholders,"* said Participant 1. This also encompasses Participant 6, Participant 11, and Participant 12's takes on diligence, passion, and dedication to service and leadership. *"If you love your work, even if you would extend for hours a day, that's fine. Work would become so much heavier without passion and dedication,"* said Participant 6.

Leaders who embody these attributes can inspire innovation, foster collaboration, and promote inclusivity, advancing academic excellence and fulfilling institutional missions within the dynamic higher education landscape. Research supports this, showing that effective leaders exhibit transformational qualities such as charisma, collaboration, and servant leadership while navigating complex cultural dynamics and fostering intrinsic motivation among faculty and staff (Robles, 2018). Additionally, Hendrickson (2012) emphasizes that creativity, commitment, collaboration, delegation, and courage are essential for academic leaders to navigate change and build partnerships aligned with their institution's mission and values. Similarly, Hoff (2020) highlights the importance of self-knowledge, respect for differences, resilience, and effective communication as successful leaders embrace change and foster continuous learning within complex organizational structures. Together, these qualities form the foundation of impactful leadership in higher education.

Theme 3: Impact of Leadership Roles in Higher Education Towards Career Advancement

Leadership roles have equivalent merits for rankings, which accelerated the advancement of the participants' academic positions. Participant 3 enunciated that administrators should look forward to stepping up to higher positions, and leadership roles are one of the fundamental criteria for reclassifications. *"I advanced my career so early because of my leadership roles,"* said Participant 12. As Participant 1 put it:

"This experience [leadership] helped me advance to more senior positions in the academic community by enabling me to take on more responsibility and leadership duties."

Participant 14 also asserted that her higher designations, such as being the former Extension Director, paved her way to becoming an Associate Professor V. She said, *"My experiences as a leader led me to have a higher rank. Everything I do in school is accepted as part of my professional progress in research, instruction, or production. All these things are connected and made me qualify for a higher position."* Of course, higher positions come with greater responsibilities, which, for Participant 8, amongst many others, requires dedication and sacrifices. She postulated that:

"Being given a higher leadership role in would also mean that sometimes, it is much of a sacrifice to spend time on research and extension, which is also a requirement if you are already in the higher academic ranking. So, if you want to go up the rank, you should learn time management and prioritization. Moreover, you should not forget that while delivering your role as an administrative leader, you have to cater and find time for your professional and personal growth."

Moreover, higher designations opened doors and opportunities, further amplifying the participants' career development. Being designated as the Department of Physical Education Chairperson, Participant 13 shared that she could build connections with brilliant and sophisticated people in her field and learned many leadership styles that further honed her to become a trailblazing woman leader. Participant 2 also admitted that she was able to expand her network due to her leadership role as the Director of Library Services. As stated by Participant 12:

"I would never get to meet those bigger and intellectual people if I was only an ordinary class teacher. Since I have a higher role in the organization, I was able to meet people with big roles, for instance, in the Commission on Higher Education and other agencies. It opened doors of opportunities for my career, especially in research partnerships, extension, linkages, and much other collaboration."

Pertinent training, seminars, and workshops are also key opportunities, further orchestrating the fast development of the participants' academic careers and leadership. *"I was sent to various trainings and seminars that harnessed my career and leadership. CMU is truly generous regarding their employees' personal and professional improvement,"* said Participant 3. Having been designated as the former Chairperson of the Language Education Department, Participant 4 also ascertained that she was given a chance to pursue postgraduate studies with the institution's support.

More so, leadership roles have harnessed the personal and professional capabilities of the participants in myriad ways. For Participant 6, leadership is *"squeezing you to become the best version of yourself, especially when managing diverse kinds of people."* Participant 1 contended that:

"My leadership role has greatly aided my career growth in Higher Education. It allowed me to showcase my strategic planning skills, collaborative decision-making, and creating inclusive settings. I was recognized by my leadership abilities and capacity to promote constructive change inside the organization through the accomplishments of successful projects and the deft handling of difficult problems."

Participant 2 also admitted that her designation improved her planning, teamwork, and decision-making. This goes hand in hand with Participant 3, who said, *"I was able to improve my kind of leadership using exposing myself to the real problems and issues in certain organizations, like department issues, problems, and challenges."*

Fundamentally, the career advancement and outstanding leadership of the administrators at Central Mindanao University are immensely crucial in materializing the vision and mission of their institution. Participant 5, the current Director of the Center for Biodiversity Research and Extension in Mindanao, illustrated how CEBREM has contributed to the goal of CMU towards a globally sustainable environment through their research and extension studies centered on the preservation of the remaining biodiversity and natural resources in Mindanao.

Overall, the impact of leadership roles on career advancement in higher education is profound and multifaceted, as elucidated by the participants' narratives. Leadership roles catalyze career progression, providing individuals with opportunities to ascend to higher academic positions and assume greater responsibilities within their institutions. These roles are not merely titles but signify a significant milestone in one's professional journey, often accompanied by increased recognition and influence.

The narratives highlight how leadership roles pave the way for career advancement by offering avenues for professional development, networking, and skill enhancement. Participants underscored the importance of strategic planning, effective communication, and adaptability as essential qualities cultivated through their leadership experiences. Moreover, assuming leadership entails sacrifices and dedication, as individuals must balance administrative duties with personal and professional growth endeavors.

Furthermore, higher education leadership roles allow individuals to broaden their horizons and expand their professional networks. Through interactions with colleagues, stakeholders, and leaders in their respective fields, participants were able to forge valuable connections and collaborations that furthered their career trajectories. Additionally, access to training programs, seminars, and workshops provided by institutions facilitated the acquisition of new knowledge and skills, enhancing participants' capabilities as academic leaders.

Leadership roles played a crucial part in fostering participants' personal and professional growth, allowing them to refine their leadership styles, decision-making, and problem-solving skills. Participants shared how these experiences challenged them to push their boundaries and become the best versions of themselves, leading to remarkable achievements in their fields. Additionally, their contributions to advancing institutional vision and mission underscored the pivotal role of academic leadership in driving organizational goals and societal impact. Position changes in leadership roles also significantly enhance career advancement for administrators, serving as a key mechanism for increasing earnings, status, and authority within higher education institutions (Sagaria, 2018). Together, these factors illustrate how leadership roles shape individual development and contribute to institutional success.

In essence, the narratives highlight the symbiotic relationship between leadership roles and career advancement in higher education. As individuals take on leadership positions, they propel their professional growth and make significant contributions to their institutions and the broader academic community. By embracing the challenges and opportunities that come with leadership, they chart a path toward continued success and fulfillment in their careers while also helping to realize the collective aspirations of their institutions and stakeholders. Effective leadership fosters essential qualities like collaboration and adaptability, aligning personal growth with institutional missions and values and accelerating career advancement (Hendrickson, 2012). This dynamic underscores leadership's vital role in individual and institutional success.

4.0. Conclusion

Women in advanced leadership positions emphasized the crucial role of mentorship, training programs, and supportive institutional environments in their leadership development. Mentorship and coaching provided valuable guidance, feedback, and skill-building opportunities, enabling them to develop practical leadership strategies. Training programs and workshops further equipped them with essential communication, decision-making, and conflict-resolution skills, contributing to their professional growth. These findings highlight key elements that facilitate women's leadership development in higher education, underscoring the importance of institutional support in advancing women leaders. Future research can expand on this by exploring the long-term effects of these programs, conducting comparative analyses across diverse institutions, and examining the role of peer networks and informal mentorship. Additionally, investigating how intersectional factors like race, socioeconomic background, and field of expertise influence women's leadership trajectories could offer more inclusive insights. Such research can help design more tailored, effective programs that address women's unique challenges in advancing to leadership roles, fostering greater leadership diversity and equity in academia.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

The authors reviewed and approved the final work. The primary author was instrumental in carrying out the comprehensive study, dedicating significant time and effort to its successful completion. This endeavor was not solitary, as it was greatly enhanced with the co-author's supervision, insightful review, and invaluable mentoring.

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