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CHALLENGES FACING FEMALE LEADERS IN PUBLIC GENERAL EDUCATION SCHOOLS IN THE REPUBLIC OF YEMEN: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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This study aimed to identify, from the perspectives of the female principals and vice-principals themselves, the difficulties they face in public general education schools within the Capital Secretariat of Sana'a. The research problem emanated from the researchers' own observations pertaining to the challenges impacting the female leaders in executing their leadership roles. In addition, there is an absence of research in the context of Yemen. The authors utilized the descriptive analytical method and constructed a questionnaire, founded on pertinent educational literature and previous studies. The sample comprised 236 female principal and vice principal of public education schools in the districts of Ma'een and As-Saba'in of the Capital Secretariat, Sana'a. In the analysis of data, the authors relied on the measure of central tendency (arithmetic mean) and the measure of dispersion (standard deviation). The mean for the challenges faced by female leaders was 3.14, thus, the challenges were moderate. The authors also highlight the female leaders' high self-confidence. This is evident in the statement "I possess the necessary competence to overcome leadership challenges in the work environment" as this statement was ranked first. On the contrary The authors state that the challenges were mainly attributed to unavailability of financial resources, minimal backing from the supervisory bodies and absence of the institutions' concern about female leaders

Keywords: Capital Sana'a, Challenges, Female Leaders, Public Education Schools

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1. Introduction

Considering the ongoing evolution within the social and human sciences, the relevance of leadership within professional practice as a core imperative is undeniable at the individual, organizational, and societal levels. Being a core behavioral component, leadership enables productive interaction and relationship building among people, and creates the necessary environment towards the attainment of organizational objectives. In addition, leadership is a crucial element for the advancement of educational institutions and for facilitating meaningful change within these organizations. Central to the definition of leadership is the ability to work with, for the good of the group, and to galvanize members towards the attainment of a collective goal [1].

Women in today's world have made significant contributions to the rebirth of their societies by engaging in numerous occupations. The extent of their contribution to the labor force differs from country to country depending on specific situations, level of development, and prevailing resources. Therefore, it isn't surprising that women are expected to take on roles that involve leading and making decisions, yet women are underrepresented in leadership positions compared to how much they actually want to be in such positions. The United Nations Finance and Development report point-

ed out the disparity between the number of female leaders compared to their male counterparts [2]. The practice of leadership, despite the need for it, faces many organizational, administrative, social, and cultural challenges that may limit its usefulness. These obstacles are particularly present in the unique contexts of different environments, and in Yemen in particular. Educational leaders, for example, are faced with myriad challenges that are a result of the administrative, economic, and social, and these challenges are evident in the level of organizational performance [3, 4]. In addition to the above, female leaders in Yemen face unique challenges resulting from social traditions, scant opportunities for empowerment, and inadequate institutional support.

2. Literature review

Previous literature shows various forms of challenges confronting women educational leaders. In this regard, [5] studied the challenges for Saudi women's empowerment in leadership positions with specific reference to Taif University. They discovered a large disparity between formal empowerment (head of a position) and real empowerment (having control and resources) as there are managerial and social hindrances on the efficacy of women's leadership. Likewise, [5, 6] studied the challenges of female academic leaders in

employing social media at King Saud University. They focused on the managerial, technical, and institutional challenges of the effective use of technology in the management of processes. On a different level, and outside the academia, [7] studied the interplay of working barriers and family responsibilities of female leaders in Egypt. The result is that female leaders experience working on dual challenges of family responsibilities and the job, which adversely affects their leadership. In another distinct context, [8] studied the challenges of rural school leadership in the villages of Mecca. In their qualitative study, they focused on specific challenges, such as insufficient resources, isolation from the centers of support, and the role of the local community, which all stand out in their rural context.

These studies suggest that barriers to female leadership arise from the interplay of institutional, organizational, society and economic forces. Yet, these studies were conducted in different contexts than Yemen (both of them are Saudi Arabia and Egypt) and did not cover the Yemeni context, which has special conditions. Yemen has undergone extraordinary political, economic and social conditions that may have specific implications for women leaders in educational institutions.

As educational supervisor and during field observations, the authors noticed some barriers to female leaders' ability to implement their job leadership roles in public education schools under Capital Secretariat of Sana'a.

3. The aim and objectives of the study

The aim of this study, thus, is to reveal the challenges for female leaders in public education schools in the Capital Secretariat of Sana'a from their own perspective to add a bit toward making these challenges clearer and also suggesting some ideas that might assist in better leadership performance as well as affording women more opportunities to assume their role outside society.

The study's aims can be summarized by the following objectives:

1. Identify the major obstacles faced by females as leaders of public general education schools in the Capital Secretariat of Sana'a.

2. Determine what organizational, administrative, and financial obstacles have the greatest impact on the successful performance of female leaders.

4. Materials and Methods

This research took a descriptive analytical approach to outline and examine the challenges faced by female educational leaders at public schools. The sample for this study was all female principals and vice principals at public and private schools that operate at least partially in Ma'een and As-Saba'in districts of the Capital Secretariat – Sana'a during the 2023-2024 school year, with a population size of 624 females within that sampled group.

The sample selected with the purposive sampling method was 236 principals and vice principals. The authors created a 11-item questionnaire document to capture the challenges female leaders face, based on empiri-

cal literature and published studies of similar populations. Each item in the questionnaire measured a specific challenge and utilized a five-point Likert type scale. The validity of the items was evaluated by 13 academic and education experts, and changes were made as appropriate based on expert opinions.

The Ministry of Education gave its written official approval to carry out the research and, prior to administering the questionnaire, each participant provided written informed consent.

The questionnaire's overall reliability of 0.86 indicated that it was a very reliable research tool, as determined by Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) through SPSS.

5. Results

Before describing the results, the statistical analysis demonstrated that all items on the questionnaire achieved statistically significant Pearson correlation coefficients at $p \leq .01$, which suggested acceptance.

Reliable data was indicated with Cronbach's alpha coefficient found to be 0.86, which represents a high degree of internal consistency.

Table 1 presents the arithmetic means and standard deviations of the study sample's responses to the statements measuring the challenges facing female leaders in public general education schools in the Capital Secretariat of Sana'a. The overall score for the dimension was 3.14 ± 0.88 .

Examining individual statements, the statement with the highest mean (3.51) was: "I possess the necessary competence to overcome leadership challenges in the work environment" (11). The statement (10), "Team participation in decision-making enhances my professional commitment," ranked second with 3.41 ± 1.06 , and statement (7), "Communication with parents contributes to enhancing my leadership effectiveness," came third with 3.40 ± 1.09 .

On the contrary, lower than both statements (2) and (4), statement (8) "Sufficient funds are available for the effective delivery of educational programs" has the lowest mean score as 2.69 ± 0.98 . Additionally, statement (2), which reads "The level of support that I receive from administrative supervisors meets my leadership needs", recorded 2.78 ± 1.05 , whereas statement (9), which is "I believe that my leadership is acknowledged by the senior administrative officers", showed 2.84 ± 1.21 .

The other statements were somewhat similar in scores; statements (3) "The training programs offered at my school will improve my leadership abilities" recorded 3.19 ± 1.27 , and (4) "The incentive programs at my school will promote engagement and excellence" recorded 3.22 ± 1.29 , both received moderate means and statement (5), "The administrative structure of my school makes it easier for me to carry out my leadership responsibilities" received a somewhat higher moderate score of 3.21 ± 1.19 .

Table 1

Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations of the Study Sample's Responses to the Statements of the Challenges Facing Female Leaders

No.	Statement	Mean \pm SD	Rank	Verbal Interpretation
1	I find that the school environment effectively contributes to the development of my leadership performance.	3.37 \pm 1.14	4	Moderate
2	The support provided by supervisory authorities aligns with my leadership needs.	2.78 \pm 1.05	10	Moderate
3	Training programs contribute to improving my leadership competence.	3.19 \pm 1.27	7	Moderate
4	I feel that the incentive system within the school encourages commitment and excellence.	3.22 \pm 1.29	5	Moderate
5	The administrative organizational system within the school facilitates the execution of my leadership tasks.	3.21 \pm 1.19	6	Moderate
6	I receive constructive feedback from supervisors to improve my performance.	2.94 \pm 1.24	8	Moderate
7	Communication with parents contributes to enhancing my leadership effectiveness.	3.40 \pm 1.09	2	Moderate
8	Adequate financial resources are available to implement educational programs efficiently.	2.69 \pm 0.98	11	Moderate
9	I feel that my leadership efforts receive attention from senior administrative authorities.	2.84 \pm 1.21	9	Moderate
10	Team participation in decision-making enhances my professional commitment.	3.41 \pm 1.06	3	Moderate
11	I possess the necessary competence to overcome leadership challenges in the work environment.	3.51 \pm 1.12	1	Moderate
	Overall Dimension	3.14 \pm 0.88	–	Moderate

Note: Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the questionnaire was 0.86, indicating high internal consistency

6. Discussion

According to the research outcome, the magnitude of obstacles to female leaders of Public, General Education Schools within the Capital Secretariat in Sana'a is approximately moderate with an overall score of 3.14 \pm 0.88. Slightly less than three-quarters rated themselves as experiencing organizational and administrative barriers; however, this does not reach an extent where leadership practice is totally impeded by such conditions. This supports earlier research, in which female leaders in educational institutions faced similar organizational and institutional barriers, such as those identified [9] regarding the lack of institutional support and expectations placed upon school leaders.

A very high mean for the statement regarding the ability of female leaders to possess the required competency to lead successfully through the present and future leadership challenges recorded at 3.51 \pm 1.12, indicates a high degree of professional self-assurance in female leaders regarding their abilities to lead. This can be accounted for by many years of field experience, practical application of administrative skills, experience through educational practices, and professional competence that allows them to meet ongoing daily demands in the school context. This also supports findings from [10], Yemeni women leaders have shown comparable levels of competence and resiliency in spite of contextual conditions.

The study's results support the existence of relationships between decision-making and teacher-parent communications, as they relate to improving the effectiveness of school leadership. Through participative

work, the greatest spirit of cooperation is created throughout the educational organisation. Communication with the local community assists in creating a supportive educational environment that helps relieve the pressures experienced by school leaders. [11] has also indicated that collaborative leadership practices can develop a positive school environment and enhance the effectiveness of the educational leaders.

On the contrary, low means were revealed for the financial resource and organisational support items of the survey. Item #8, Financial Resources, had the lowest score with 2.69 \pm 0.98, followed by Supervision Support Alignment with 2.78 \pm 1.05, and Feeling Appreciated by Higher Authority with 2.84 \pm 1.21. This indicates that many of the primary challenges female leaders face are related to the organisational and institutional environment in the educational work setting. This is due to administrative and organisational barriers to leadership flexibility in schools and the lack of resources for implementing educational programs.

The following comparisons of the current findings with past research demonstrate both agreements and discrepancy.

One area of agreement between this research and previous studies is the presence of a gap between formal and actual empowerment in women's leadership [5]. Lack of institutional and administrative support continue to be a significant barrier to women's ability to lead effectively, even when they hold formal leadership positions. [6] also highlighted deficiencies in institutional support as a barrier to women's leadership at

King Saud University, and their findings align with the current study's findings of insufficient supervisory support and inadequate resources.

In addition, results are similar to [7] study conducted in Egypt, wherein female leaders struggle with balancing professional and other responsibilities, however the current research places relatively more emphasis on institutional as opposed to familial-related issues. Furthermore, [8] study of the school leaders in the rural villages of Mecca highlighted that limited organizational and material resources present significant challenges, which is consistent with the finding of current study that the most significant challenge is the lack of financial resources.

The present study revealed a medium level of difficulty 3.14 ± 0.88 . yet several previous analyses reported an even higher level of difficulty experienced by female leaders. For example, several studies in different contexts found significant and overwhelming barriers to female leaders being able to carry out or to develop their leadership style. These variances may be due to the different levels of education or human resource capability as well as having different types of subjects and different types of institutions. In Yemen, due to the exceptional circumstances, female leaders may have developed adaptive strategies that have helped them overcome barriers causing them to have high levels of confidence as leaders.

There are several factors influencing the barriers faced by female leaders in educational settings that are interlinked:

1. The organization/institutional climate: The results of this study indicate that there is a lack of both administrative and institutional support provided to female leaders and that there is a lack of delegating authority in some areas of administration. The lack of accountability to create the ability for female leaders to have the authority to make appropriate decisions and implement developmental programs may limit the female leader's ability to perform their role at an acceptable level as an educational leader. These results support [12] review of the organizational culture of female public sector leaders in Yemen indicating that the bureaucratic structures limit the effectiveness of female leaders in the context of public sector organizations.

2. Professional Development: even though female leaders have confidence in their capabilities, the moderate evaluation of training programs (3.19 ± 1.27) indicates the need for current professional development programs to be developed that are more aligned with the actual professional development needs of female leaders, in terms of both quality and continuity of the programs. [13] emphasized the need for development programs specifically designed for educational leaders.

3. Organizational Culture: Low levels of feeling appreciated (2.84 ± 1.21) may indicate an organizational culture that lacks both success-oriented recognition systems, as well as systems for moral motivation that could impact the professional motivation of school leaders. This is supported by [3], who indicated that in many educational institutions in Yemen, systematic mechanisms for appreciating success are often nonexistent.

4. Economic Conditions and Local Context: limited financial resources can also be viewed through the lens of the overall economic issues facing the funding of educational institutions, which has an immediate impact on the schools' ability to implement developmental programs and ultimately provide the necessary resources to support the educational process (2.69 ± 0.98). [4] noted similar economic constraints impacting Yemeni educational leadership many years ago and continue to exist.

5. Leadership Empowerment Gap: There is a disconnection between how formal empowerment is perceived versus what female leaders are experiencing as actual empowerment. There are cases when a female leader will move into a position of leadership but will not receive the level of authority or the resources needed to fully perform in the role of a leader. There has been a consistent theme throughout various studies conducted in multiple locations [5, 13, 14] that suggests this is a global issue affecting female leaders in educational institutions.

Study limitations. This study has several limitations. It also may be limited in its application, as it was only conducted in the two districts of Ma'een and As-Saba'in in Sana'a district public and private schools within two governorates. Second, while the study utilized quantitative scales backed by expert judgments in development studies, it may still fall short of capturing the lived experience of women leaders at schools. Third, self-reported data are prone to social desirability bias. Hence, future research should focus on mixed methods and larger and more heterogeneous samples.

Recommendations for Future Research. This study was conducted in public general education schools in the Capital Secretariat of Sana'a and thus, as a result, are not necessarily replicable to other educational settings. Also, the questionnaire data only was used for this study. Larger samples from other governorates might be used in future research combined with qualitative interviews providing a richer understanding of the barriers experienced by women as educational leaders.

7. Conclusions

1) The objective of this study was to understand the perspective of female leaders of public and private general education schools in the Sana'a Capital Secretariat in Yemen. Based on the results, these female leaders face a moderate degree of administrative, organizational, and financial challenges, with an average score of 3.14 ± 0.88 . The primary challenges included a lack of financial resources and inadequate supervisory support.

2) The results also showed that staff involvement in decision making and staff-parent communication positively impact the effectiveness of leadership. In spite of the challenges these female leaders encounter, it was revealed that these female leaders hold a high level of confidence in their leadership skills. Based on the results, the average score for self-assessed leadership skills was 3.51 ± 1.12 , confirming that these female leaders believe they can handle the leadership challenges in their respective schools.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in relation to this research, whether financial, personal, authorship or otherwise, that could affect the research and its results presented in this article.

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Data availability

The data that support the findings of this study will be made available on reasonable request from the corresponding author.

Use of artificial intelligence

The authors confirm that they did not use artificial intelligence technologies in creating the submitted work.

Authors' contributions

Eman Ahmed Mohammed Abdulatef Alshameri: Data collection, Questionnaire preparation, Formal analysis, Writing of the original draft, Manuscript preparation; **Masyitoh Chusnan M.Ag:** Conceptualization, Supervision, Methodology review, Critical revision of the manuscript; **Saiful Bahri:** Data interpretation, Language editing, Validation of results, Final review of the manuscript.

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