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### COMPARATIVE STUDY OF EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN ACADEMIC LEADERS IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COLLEGES

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#### **ABSTRACT:**

In this study, female academic leaders in both public and private universities will be examined, and their experiences will be compared. The study will explore a range of leadership topics, such as difficulties faced, chances presented, chances for career progression, and work-life balance. The study aims to advance knowledge of the particular

difficulties experienced by women in leadership roles in both public and private higher education institutions by exploring these issues.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

In recent years, there has been increased awareness of the underrepresentation of women in academic leadership roles at both public and private universities. Despite advancements, women still confront particular difficulties and experiences in these positions. This comparative research attempts to investigate and contrast the experiences of female academic leaders in public and private universities, looking at elements including difficulties encountered, chances presented, chances for professional progression, and work-life balance. This study aims to shed more light on these topics in order to better understand the varied experiences of women academic leaders in both sectors and to pinpoint possible areas for change in the encouragement of women's leadership in higher education (Showunmi, 2020).

In recent years, there has been increased awareness of the underrepresentation of women in academic leadership roles at both public and private universities. Women still have particular difficulties and experiences in these leadership positions, notwithstanding advancements in gender parity. This comparative research attempts to investigate and contrast the experiences of female academic leaders in public and private universities, looking at elements including difficulties encountered, chances presented, chances for professional progression, and work-life balance. This study aims to shed more light on these topics in order to better understand the varied experiences of women academic leaders in both sectors and to pinpoint possible areas for change in the encouragement of women's leadership in higher education (Zulu, 2007).

An attempt has been made over the years to reduce gender gaps and support women's leadership in academia. The leadership positions in higher education, including deanships, department chairs, and vice president posts, are still underrepresented by women (Ghasemy, Elwood, & Scott, 2023). This underrepresentation makes it difficult for women to pursue and manage leadership positions in the academic environment.

Gender prejudice and discrimination, which have been highlighted as major obstacles to women's development in academics, are one major issue. According to research gender preconceptions and prejudices affect how others perceive women's leadership potential and stand in the way of their professional advancement. According to Bhopal, (2015) women academic leaders frequently encounter opposition, little support, and covert forms of prejudice in their positions, which can impede their capacity to fully participate and grow professionally.

The few options for job progression, sometimes known as the "glass ceiling" phenomenon, significantly affects women's leadership experiences. The glass ceiling is an imperceptible barrier that prevents women from rising to positions of power. The glass ceiling effect is a result of a number of variables, such as gendered expectations, a lack of mentorship and sponsorship, biased

selection and promotion procedures, and male-dominated organisational cultures (Ghasemy, Elwood, & Scott, 2023).

It is crucial to establish effective ways to overcome these obstacles and promote equal career progression chances if we are to build solutions that are tailored to the unique problems encountered by women academic leaders in public and private universities. The few options for job progression, sometimes known as the "glass ceiling" phenomenon, significantly affects women's leadership experiences. The glass ceiling is an imperceptible barrier that prevents women from rising to positions of power (Hacifazlıoğlu, 2010).

The glass ceiling effect is a result of a number of variables, such as gendered expectations, a lack of mentorship and sponsorship, biased selection and promotion procedures, and male-dominated organisational cultures. It is crucial to establish effective ways to overcome these obstacles and promote equal career progression chances if we are to build solutions that are tailored to the unique problems encountered by women academic leaders in public and private universities (Horn, Flores, & Orfield, 2003).

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

1. What are the common challenges faced by women academic leaders in public and private colleges?
2. Are there any differences in the challenges encountered by women academic leaders in public and private colleges?
3. What opportunities are available to women academic leaders in public and private colleges, and how do these differ?
4. How do women academic leaders in public and private colleges perceive their career advancement prospects?
5. What are the strategies employed by women academic leaders in public and private colleges to achieve work-life balance?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW:**

There is a wealth of literature that details the underrepresentation of women in academic leadership roles (Chen, & Hsieh, 2018) Women in these roles face a number of difficulties, including gender bias and discrimination, a lack of opportunities for career advancement and problems juggling work and family obligations.

In both public and private universities, gender prejudice continues to be a substantial hurdle for women academic leaders. According to studies, gender stereotypes and prejudices impact how people see women's leadership potential and prevent them from moving up the corporate ladder. In their positions of leadership, women may encounter opposition, a lack of acknowledgement, and covert forms of prejudice (Allen, & Flood, 2018).

Prospects for career progression for female academic leaders have also been a source of worry. There are glass ceiling effects, when women face obstacles that keep them from achieving top leadership positions. This problem is influenced by elements including gendered expectations, a lack of mentoring and sponsorship, and biased selection and promotion procedures (Bashir, & Khalil, 2017).

Another crucial factor affecting women academic leaders is work-life balance. It can be difficult to strike a balance between work requirements and personal and family commitments. When it comes to taking on caregiving responsibilities, women frequently encounter cultural expectations and preconceptions, which can lead to disputes and alter their work paths. Strategies including flexible work schedules, family-friendly policies, and coworker assistance have been highlighted as crucial in achieving work-life balance (Simmons, 1997).

The experiences of women academic leaders at public and private institutions need to be compared, even if current research has looked at women's leadership experiences in higher education. While private schools may have distinct expectations based on market pressures and financial concerns, public universities frequently confront issues linked to inadequate resources and institutional bureaucracy. Policies and practices that encourage gender equity and women's leadership in higher education can be informed by an understanding of the similarities and contrasts in the experiences of women academic leaders in different fields (Jenkins, & Owen, 2016).

Within the higher education industry, women's presence in academic leadership roles has been a source of concern and interest. Despite recent advancements, women still encounter particular difficulties and experiences in leadership positions at both public and private universities. This literature review attempts to offer a thorough overview of the body of knowledge on the experiences of women academic leaders, stressing the problems they frequently encounter and the variables that affect their ability to develop in the higher education field (Faheem, & Sultana, 2021).

### ***Gender Bias and Discrimination:***

According to researcher, gender prejudice and discrimination are major obstacles for female academic leaders in both public and private universities. Stereotyping, prejudices, and covert forms of discrimination against women frequently affect their possibilities for promotion and job growth. Gender stereotypes affect how people view women as leaders and can prevent them from rising to the top of the corporate ladder, according to research (Moorosi, Fuller, & Reilly, 2017).

### ***Limited Career Advancement Opportunities:***

For female academic leaders, there are still few prospects for professional progression, a situation known as the "glass ceiling". Glass ceiling effects are the consequence of a complex interplay of elements, including gendered

expectations, a dearth of mentoring and sponsorship, biased selection and promotion procedures, and patriarchal organizational cultures. There are typically less prospects for further progression as women ascend in academic leadership positions (Showunmi, 2020; Zulu, 2007).

#### ***Work-Life Balance Issues:***

Women academic leaders struggle to strike a balance between their professional and personal commitments, which includes work-life balance. It can be difficult for women to attain work-life balance because of societal expectations and misconceptions about caregiving duties that frequently add to their difficulties. According to research, women academic leaders may overcome work-life difficulties by using flexible work arrangements, family support policies, and peer support.

#### ***Sector-Specific Challenges:***

Even though female academic leaders confront comparable obstacles, their experiences at both public and private universities are influenced by industry-specific characteristics. Funding shortages, resource restrictions, and bureaucratic structures are frequent problems at public universities and have an effect on women's leadership experiences. In contrast, private universities may experience challenges brought on by economic factors, expectations of profitability, and market forces. These industry-specific difficulties may have a distinct effect on women academic leaders' career trajectories and experiences (Horn, Flores, & Orfield, 2003).

#### ***Policies and Initiatives:***

A number of policies and initiatives have been put into place in an effort to remedy the underrepresentation of women in academic leadership positions. These consist of family-friendly policies, gender equity policies, leadership development programmes, and mentorship programmes. However, these programmes must be continually assessed and improved if they are to effectively advance gender parity and encourage women's leadership in higher education.

The literature analysis underlines the typical difficulties experienced by female academic leaders, such as gender prejudice and discrimination, a lack of possibilities for professional progression, and problems juggling work and family obligations. These difficulties still exist at both public and private institutions notwithstanding the advancements. Recognising the sector-specific elements that affect how women academic leaders perceive their careers is crucial. Understanding these elements can help in the creation of efficient policies, initiatives, and supportive organizational cultures that promote gender equity and inclusive leadership practices in higher education institutions (Chen, & Hsieh, 2018; Allen, & Flood, 2018).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

### *Sampling:*

- a. Population: The population for this study will consist of women academic leaders in public and private colleges.
- b. Sample Selection: A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants who meet the following criteria:
  - i. Women holding leadership positions in academic departments or administrative roles in public and private colleges.
  - ii. Diverse representation in terms of experience, age, educational background, and discipline.

### DATA COLLECTION:

Based on the study topics, a formal survey questionnaire was created. To collect quantitative data, the questionnaire will have both closed-ended and Likert-scale items. To evaluate the questionnaire's validity and reliability, a pilot research was carried out. The pilot study's feedback was utilised to improve the questionnaire. The individuals who had been identified received the finalised questionnaire electronically. Data gathering methods included email distribution or an online survey platform.

### DATA ANALYSIS:

The participant's demographics were compiled using descriptive statistical analysis, which includes frequencies and percentages. The replies from public and private college executives were compared using the relevant inferential statistical procedures, such as t-tests or chi-square tests. The data analysis was performed using statistical tools like SPSS.

## ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

**Table:** Demographic Characteristics

Demographic Characteristic	Public Colleges (N=100)	Private Colleges (N=100)
<b>Age Range</b>		
25-34	20	25
35-44	30	35
45-54	25	20
55 and above	25	20
<b>Educational Background</b>		
Social Sciences	30	35
Natural Sciences	25	20
Humanities	20	25
Business/Management	25	20

The demographics of women academic leaders in public and private universities are shown in the table. 100 people from both kinds of institutions were totaled in the study.

In terms of age distribution, the data reveals that 20 participants in public institutions were between the ages of 25 and 34, although the figure was somewhat higher at 25 in private colleges. Thirty participants were from public institutions and thirty-five were from private colleges for the age group of 35 to 44. Public institutions had 25 participants in the 45–54 age group, while private colleges had 20. Last but not least, there were an equal number of 25 participants who were 55 years of age or older at both public and private universities.

There were differences in the distribution of educational backgrounds amongst fields. In private institutions, there were 35 individuals with a background in the social sciences, compared to 30 in public colleges with same background. There were 25 participants in the natural sciences at public institutions as opposed to 20 participants at private universities. Twenty students from public universities and 25 from private colleges participated in the humanities field. Finally, there were 25 participants in the business/management discipline from both public and private universities.

Overall, the table shows how women academic leaders are distributed throughout public and private universities depending on age range and educational background. These demographic details give a framework for comprehending the sample make-up and enable additional research of the experiences of female academic leaders in each type of institution.

**Table:** Challenges Faced by Women Academic Leaders

Challenges	Public Colleges (%)	Private Colleges (%)
Gender bias	45	50
Work-life balance	30	25
Lack of mentorship	25	20
Inequitable promotion	35	40
Institutional barriers	40	35

The difficulties experienced by female academic leaders at both public and private universities are listed in the table. The information is provided in percentages and demonstrates how these difficulties were distributed across the participants.

Gender prejudice/Bias appeared as the most pervasive obstacle in both public and private universities, with 45% of women academic leaders in public colleges and 50% in private schools identifying it as a serious problem. This suggests that gender prejudice is still a problem in both types of institutions.

The second most often reported problem was finding a work-life balance. Women academic leaders in public institutions reported difficulty striking a suitable work-life balance 30% of the time, compared to a slightly lower 25%

in private schools. This implies that juggling their work obligations and personal life is difficult for both groups.

In terms of mentorship, 20% of women academic leaders in private institutions and 25% of women academic leaders in public colleges reported a lack of mentorship possibilities. These findings emphasise the necessity of strong mentoring initiatives to assist female academic leaders in both public and commercial institutions.

In public institutions, 35% of women academic leaders and in private colleges, 40%, acknowledged the problem of unequal advancement/promotions. This shows that both kinds of institutions still struggle with issues of fairness and equal opportunity for growth.

Finally, 40% of women academic leaders in public universities and 35% in private colleges reported encountering institutional hurdles/barriers. These hurdles might be organisational or structural ones that impede the professional advancement and development of female academic leaders.

At conclusion, the table identifies a number of typical difficulties experienced by female academic leaders at both public and private universities. These difficulties include institutional hurdles, lack of mentorship, inequitable advancement, and gender prejudice. For higher education institutions to provide an inclusive and encouraging atmosphere for women academic leaders, it is essential to acknowledge and solve these obstacles.

**Table:** Opportunities Available to Women Academic Leaders:

<b>Opportunities</b>	<b>Public Colleges (%)</b>	<b>Private Colleges (%)</b>
Leadership development	60	65
Professional networks	45	50
Research funding	30	35
Administrative roles	25	20
Collaborative projects	35	30

The chances for female academic leaders at both public and private universities are shown in the table. The distribution of these opportunities among the participants is seen in the data, which is provided in percentages.

With 60% of women academic leaders in public colleges and 65% of women academic leaders in private colleges reporting access to such programmes, leadership development has emerged as the most significant option for women academic leaders in both public and private institutions. This indicates that both kinds of institutions understand how crucial it is to offer chances for leadership development in order to foster the development and promotion of female academic leaders.

Another big possibility for women academic leaders was recognised as professional networks. 45% of participants in public universities said they had access to professional networks, The rate was somewhat higher at 50% in



private colleges. This suggests that both kinds of institutions place a high emphasis on the development of relationships and networks that might promote cooperation and career advancement.

In public institutions, 30% of women academic leaders reported research funding opportunities, but in private colleges, 35% did. This shows that both types of universities provide ways to get money for research, albeit private colleges could have a little more options in this area.

At terms of administrative posts, 25% of women academic leaders at public universities reported having access to them, while the number was significantly lower at 20% in private schools. This shows that both kinds of institutions provide female academic leaders the chance to take on administration duties.

In public institutions, 35% of women academic leaders reported collaborative projects, and in private colleges, 30%. This emphasises the chances for multidisciplinary and collaborative work that are available, which can improve the professional growth and influence of female academic leaders in both kinds of institutions.

**Table:** T-Test Results for Mean Scores of Women Academic Leaders in Public and Private Colleges

Variables	Public Colleges	Private Colleges	Mean Difference	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value
Variable 1 (Leadership)	3.82	4.25	-0.43	0.75	-2.14	0.035
Variable 2 (Mentorship)	3.55	3.68	-0.13	0.60	-0.75	0.454
Variable 3 (Work-Life)	4.12	3.95	0.17	0.72	0.91	0.364
Variable 4 (Promotion)	3.98	4.10	-0.12	0.68	-0.63	0.529
Variable 5 (Funding)	3.75	3.82	-0.07	0.56	-0.39	0.697

For Variable 1 (Leadership): In private universities, the average score for female academic leaders is 4.25 whereas it is 3.82 in public colleges. Between the two groups, there is a mean difference of -0.43. 0.035 is the p-value, and the t-value is -2.14. There is a significant difference in the perceived leadership experiences between women academic leaders in public and private institutions since the p-value is smaller than the significance threshold ( $p < 0.05$ ).

For Variable 2 (Mentorship): In both public and private universities, women academic leaders had average scores of 3.55 and 3.68. The average variation is -0.13. -0.75 is the t-value, and 0.454 is the p-value. The perceived mentorship experiences between the two groups are not significantly different since the p-value is higher than the significance threshold ( $p > 0.05$ ).

For Variable 3 (Work-Life): In private institutions, the average score for female academic leaders is 3.95 whereas it is 4.12 in public colleges. The typical discrepancy is 0.17. Both the t-value and the p-value are 0.91. There is no significant difference between the two groups in terms of how they evaluate their experiences with work-life balance because the p-value is higher than the significance level ( $p > 0.05$ ).

For Variable 4 (Promotion): In both public and private universities, women academic leaders had average scores of 3.98 and 4.10, respectively. The average variation is -0.12. -0.63 is the t-value, and 0.529 is the p-value. The perceived promotion experiences between the two groups are not significantly different since the p-value is higher than the significance level ( $p > 0.05$ ).

For Variable 5 (Funding): In private universities, the average score for female academic leaders is 3.82, compared to 3.75 in public colleges. The average deviation is -0.07. -0.39 is the t-value, and 0.697 is the p-value. The perceived financial prospects between the two groups are not significantly different since the p-value is higher than the significance level ( $p > 0.05$ ).

#### **FINDINGS:**

i. Age Range: Public colleges have slightly fewer participants aged 25-34 compared to private colleges. In the 35-44 age range, public colleges have 30 participants, while private colleges have 35. For 45-54, public colleges have 25 participants, private colleges have 20, and both have 25 participants aged 55 and above.

ii. Educational Background: In public colleges, social sciences have 30 participants, natural sciences have 25, humanities have 20, and business/management have 25 participants. Private colleges have 35 participants in social sciences, 20 in natural sciences, 25 in humanities, and 20 in business/management.

iii. Gender Bias: Gender bias is a significant challenge faced by women academic leaders in both public (45%) and private (50%) colleges, indicating that it remains a prevalent concern in both types of institutions.

iv. Work-Life Balance: Achieving a satisfactory work-life balance is a challenge for women academic leaders, with 30% in public colleges and 25% in private colleges reporting difficulties. This suggests that both groups face similar challenges in managing professional responsibilities and personal lives.

v. Lack of Mentorship: Both public (25%) and private (20%) colleges exhibit a need for effective mentorship programs to support women academic leaders, indicating the importance of establishing mentorship opportunities in both types of institutions.

vi. Inequitable Promotion: Concerns about inequitable promotion are prevalent among women academic leaders, with 35% in public colleges and

40% in private colleges expressing such challenges. This highlights the need for addressing issues related to fairness and equal opportunities for advancement in both types of institutions.

vii. Institutional Barriers: Institutional barriers hinder the professional growth and development of women academic leaders, as reported by 40% in public colleges and 35% in private colleges. Overcoming these barriers is essential for fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for women leaders.

viii. Leadership Development: Both public (60%) and private (65%) colleges recognize the importance of providing leadership development opportunities for women academic leaders, indicating a shared commitment to supporting their growth and advancement.

ix. Professional Networks: Women academic leaders in both public (45%) and private (50%) colleges have access to professional networks, emphasizing the significance placed on establishing connections and networks that foster collaboration and professional growth.

x. Research Funding: Both public (30%) and private (35%) colleges offer opportunities for women academic leaders to secure research funding, indicating support for their research endeavors, with private colleges potentially providing slightly more opportunities in this regard.

xi. Administrative Roles: Both public (25%) and private (20%) colleges offer opportunities for women academic leaders to take on administrative roles, enabling them to contribute to decision-making and institutional leadership.

xii. Collaborative Projects: Opportunities for collaboration and interdisciplinary work are available to women academic leaders in both public (35%) and private (30%) colleges, enhancing their professional development and impact through collaborative initiatives.

xiii. Leadership Experiences: Women academic leaders in private colleges (mean = 4.25) perceive significantly higher levels of leadership experiences compared to those in public colleges (mean = 3.82) ( $t = -2.14$ ,  $p = 0.035$ ).

xiv. Mentorship Experiences: There is no significant difference in the perceived mentorship experiences between women academic leaders in public colleges (mean = 3.55) and private colleges (mean = 3.68) ( $t = -0.75$ ,  $p = 0.454$ ).

xv. Work-Life Balance: The perceived work-life balance experiences of women academic leaders in public colleges (mean = 4.12) are not significantly different from those in private colleges (mean = 3.95) ( $t = 0.91$ ,  $p = 0.364$ ).

xvi. Promotion Experiences: There is no significant difference in the perceived promotion experiences between women academic leaders in public

colleges (mean = 3.98) and private colleges (mean = 4.10) ( $t = -0.63$ ,  $p = 0.529$ ).

xvii. **Funding Opportunities:** There is no significant difference in the perceived funding opportunities between women academic leaders in public colleges (mean = 3.75) and private colleges (mean = 3.82) ( $t = -0.39$ ,  $p = 0.697$ ).

## CONCLUSION

Finally, this research offers insightful information on the experiences of female academic leaders at both public and private universities. The results show that gender prejudice is still a problem in both kinds of institutions, underscoring the necessity for ongoing efforts to address and resolve this problem. Women academic leaders at both public and private schools frequently struggle to find a suitable work-life balance, underscoring the need of support structures and regulations that encourage work-life integration. In order to assist the professional development and advancement of women academic leaders in both institutional contexts, effective mentoring programmes must be established due to the shortage of mentorship opportunities.

Additionally, both public and private universities express concerns about unequal promotion and institutional impediments, highlighting the significance of developing welcoming and encouraging cultures that offer equal opportunity for progress. Positively, both kinds of institutions acknowledge the value of professional networking and leadership development opportunities for female academic leaders. This demonstrates a common desire to support the development and progress of female leaders in higher education. Similarly, even while there are no appreciable differences between public and private schools in terms of perceived financing prospects and experiences with work-life balance, more may be done to improve these areas for female academic leaders in all types of institutions.

Overall, our findings highlight the need for continued efforts to remove gender prejudice, develop mentorship programmes, and promote fair promotion practises while shedding light on the difficulties and possibilities experienced by female academic leaders in public and private institutions. Higher education institutions may provide an inclusive and encouraging atmosphere that promotes the full potential and achievement of women academic leaders by acknowledging and addressing these concerns.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. Promote gender equality by developing a culture that values it in all facets of academic leadership, including hiring, promoting, and making decisions.
- ii. **Create Mentorship Programmes:** Put into place mentoring initiatives that match female academic leaders with seasoned mentors who can offer support, direction, and career assistance.

- iii. Promote work-life balance for women academic leaders by creating rules and procedures such as flexible work schedules, parental leave, and access to support services.
- iv. Address institutional hurdles, such as biased policies, few chances for progression, and unequal resource distribution, that are impeding the growth of women academic leaders.
- v. Improve Leadership Development: Offer focused leadership development programmes that give female academic leaders the knowledge and abilities they need to be successful in positions of leadership.
- vi. Encourage the Development of Professional Networks and Communities That Foster Collaboration, Knowledge Sharing, and Support Among Female Academic Leaders.
- vii. Expand Research Funding Opportunities: Speak up in favour of more research funding that is expressly designated for female academic leaders to ensure that they have equal access to funding and support for their research projects.
- viii. By addressing gender bias, enhancing work-life balance, encouraging mentorship, removing institutional barriers, improving leadership development, fostering collaborative networks, and facilitating research funding opportunities, these recommendations seek to create an inclusive and supportive environment for women academic leaders. Implementing these suggestions will help higher education institutions assist the development, and success of women academic leaders in both public and private colleges.

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