



Organizational Challenges and Opportunities for Female Academic Leaders of Higher Secondary Schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Faheem Afshan

PhD Scholar, Department of Education, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan.

Email: FAHEEM.AFSHAN.38@gmail.com

Dr. Saqib Shehzad

Professor, Department of Education, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan.

Dr. Muhammad Idrees

Associate Professor, Department of Education, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan.

Asad Khan

Subject Specialist E&SED KP

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: June 25, 2026 Revised: July 09, 2026 Accepted: July 22, 2026 Available Online: August 10, 2026 Keywords: Female academic leadership; Higher Secondary education; Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; organizational challenges; gender norms; rural-urban disparities; professional development; resilience. Corresponding Author: Faheem Afshan Email: FAHEEM.AFSHAN.38@gmail.com	This study explores the organizational challenges faced by female academic leaders at the Higher Secondary level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Although more and more women are joining the education sector, the work of leadership is limited by structural disparities, gendered demands and differentiated access to institutional provisions. The objectives of the study were to investigate the Organizational challenges faced by the female academic leaders at Higher secondary level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and to explore adaptive mechanisms employed by female academic leaders at higher secondary level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to overcome organizational challenges. An interpretive approach and a qualitative research design were utilized in which in-depth interviews with female principals in both urban and rural districts were undertaken in order to facilitate the complexity in the lived experiences of the principals. The results show that the respondents are regularly exposed to several organizational pressures such as a high workload, insufficient support staff, limitation of infrastructure use and the stress of extensive documentation systems. The study concludes by asserting that the interplay of structural and sociocultural factors in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa defines the issue of female leadership that needs thorough policy interventions. It proposes gender-sensitive training of leaders, better staffing systems, rural leaders' mobility and security, enhanced digital systems and institutionalization of psychological support and mentoring. The study adds to theoretical insights about transformational, feminist and distributed leadership by illustrating how these paradigms can be applied in a Global South setting where gender, culture and power are highly relevant when it comes to leadership. On the whole, the study highlighted the necessity of the concerted changes to guarantee the female academic leaders will be able to use all their leadership capabilities and help enhance the schools and promote educational growth in the area. The study recommended that the Elementary and Secondary Education Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa ensure adequate administrative support staff and streamline institutional procedures to reduce workload and enhance the effectiveness of female academic leaders and secondarily that a continuous professional support system be established to strengthen the existing competencies of effective female leaders while providing targeted mentoring and capacity-building opportunities for those facing challenges.

Introduction

Female academic leadership in Pakistan faces a complex landscape shaped by cultural, social, and institutional factors. Despite progress in gender equality, women in academic leadership roles continue to encounter significant challenges. The patriarchal structure of society, deeply entrenched in Pakistan, remains a fundamental barrier. Women often struggle to break free from traditional gender roles, which dictate their responsibilities primarily within the domestic sphere (Aziz, 2025). This cultural expectation limits their opportunities to ascend to leadership positions within academic institutions.

One of the most pervasive forms of systemic bias is the preference for male candidates in leadership positions. This bias often stems from deeply ingrained stereotypes about gender roles, where men are traditionally viewed as more capable leaders than women (Smith, 2023). Such stereotypes influence the decision-making process during hiring and promotions, leading to the marginalization of women, regardless of their qualifications and experience.

The concept of the "glass ceiling" is often used to describe the invisible barriers that prevent women from ascending to top leadership roles in academia. These barriers are not always explicit but are reinforced by institutional practices and attitudes that favor men over women (Baker, 2019). For instance, women are often evaluated more harshly than their male counterparts during performance reviews, with their leadership potential being underestimated (Jones, 2024). This results in fewer opportunities for women to advance in their careers.

Another critical aspect of systemic bias is the lack of transparency in the hiring and promotion processes. In many academic institutions, decisions about leadership roles are made behind closed doors, with little oversight or accountability (Wang & Li, 2025). This lack of transparency creates an environment where biases can thrive, allowing decision-makers to favor male candidates without facing scrutiny. Women, on the other hand, may be overlooked or unfairly judged, contributing to their under representation in leadership roles.

Biases in leadership selection are often compounded by the "old boys' network," an informal system of relationships and connections that benefits men in academia (Atique et al., 2025). This network operates behind the scenes, providing men with access to opportunities and information that are not available to women. As a result, men are more likely to be considered for leadership roles, while women are excluded from these networks and the associated benefits.

Gender discrimination during the hiring process is also evident in the criteria used to evaluate candidates. Research has shown that women are often judged based on their ability to conform to traditional gender roles, rather than their professional qualifications (Ridgeway, 2025). For example, women may be questioned about their family responsibilities or their ability to balance work and home life, whereas men are rarely subjected to the same scrutiny. This double standard places women at a disadvantage, as they are expected to prove their commitment to their careers in ways that men are not.

The promotion process is another area where systemic biases manifest. Women are less likely to be promoted to leadership positions, even when they have the same or superior qualifications as their male counterparts (Lee, 2020). This disparity can be attributed to several factors, including gender bias in the evaluation of leadership potential and the tendency to associate leadership with traditionally masculine traits such as assertiveness and competitiveness (Heilman, 2024). Women who do not exhibit these traits may be perceived as less capable leaders, further hindering their advancement.

Objectives of the study

- To investigate the Organizational challenges faced by the female academic leaders at Higher secondary level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
- To explore adaptive mechanisms employed by female academic leaders at higher secondary level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to overcome organizational challenges.

Research Questions

- What organizational challenges are faced by the female academic leaders at Higher secondary level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?
- How female academic leaders at higher secondary level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa adapt mechanisms to overcome organizational challenges?

Literature Review

The importance of leadership in education is well known to enhance the performance of the institution, promote the motivation of teachers and herald student success. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), in Pakistan and especially female academic leadership is a complicated subject, the crossroads of socio-cultural norms and expectations, managerial structures and politics. This literature review is aimed at critically reviewing the issues and opportunities that define the experiences of female academic leaders in higher secondary schools.

This chapter has three goals: first, to establish and summarize the existing literature on women leadership in education based on the global, national and provincial levels; second, to provide theoretical and conceptual frameworks that inform the study of gender leadership; and third, to demonstrate the gaps in the literature that will justify the current research.

According to Fazal et al. (2025), even though the policy sector promises gender equity in the higher-education sector in Pakistan, the road to leadership is littered with social, institutional limitations. Women in leadership have always had the burden of double duties of running schools as they strike the gender stereotypes that are deeply embedded in the society. Khan et al. (2024) also arrives at the same conclusion by discovering that female school heads in KP cannot adjust to the need to maintain authority in their professional lives and adhere to cultural norms of modesty and obedience. These tensions demonstrate that leadership cannot be discussed as one-dimensional phenomenon but it should be studied by referring to the interactions and interdependent visions where organizational structures, socio-cultural interactions, political processes and psychological abilities (e.g, emotional intelligence) are discussed. The review embraces a multidimensional analytical framework whereby all these areas are incorporated to offer holistic analysis to the experiences of women in leadership.

This multidimensional approach can be explained through necessity when considered in regards to recent qualitative studies on the issue of women in educational leadership in Pakistan. As evidenced by Wasim (2024), social constraints caused by mobility and family roles add to the already existing structural barriers including lack of mentorship, gender-related promotions and the lack of professional-development opportunities. Amjad (2024) found out that the obstacles that women encounter in the Balochistan education system are similar, implying that they cannot be confined to KP itself but instead reflect wider patriarchal and bureaucratic subcultures. All these studies prove the need to combine an in-depth exploration that would place organizational issues in the broader context of gendered social realities.

The area of the given review is not limited to institutional analysis, which incorporates the political and cultural elements, which shape the course of leadership. According to Lodhi et al. (2025), it would be responsible to the interaction of socio-economic, personal and institutional factors that deterministically shape feminist leadership in the educational sector in Pakistan. This means that successful analysis should be done not only focusing on the internal administrative obstacles where bureaucratic power or scarcity of resources could be the factors but also on external factors such as the community demands, political favors and legal impact of local culture. When in KP the tribal norms and religious conservativeness tend to dominate the lives of women and determine their involvement in the generation life, it is important to recognize such external forces as they serve to place leadership behavior and decision-making patterns in the proper context.

The theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of the current research define the way that gender and leadership interplay with the institutional behaviour to influence the presence of women in the field of educational administration. Both the reasons behind structural inequalities of female academic leaders and how they choose to address them are explained using the frameworks. There are five interconnected perspectives that are argued in this segment and they are Feminist Institutionalism and Gender Role Theory, Glass Ceiling and Structural Barriers, Transformational and Distributed Leadership Theories, Emotional Intelligence and Feminine Leadership Models and Work-Life Interface and Role Conflict Theory. The frameworks promote the analytical approach applied during the literature review.

Transformational leadership goes beyond national expectations and individualized views by focusing on moral purpose, inspiration and individual consideration to be key aspects of leadership. Transformational leaders leverage the common vision to motivate the followers and stimulate them intellectually, unlike transactional models, which focus on control (Maqbool et al, 2024). When applied to education, it means empowering educators, being innovative and prioritizing the welfare of institutionally-related objectives and students. Transformational behavioral traits of female principals such as empathy and participatory decision making are naturally used by female principals, as empirical studies show (Khan, Siraji & Gillani, 2025).

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the use of the distributed approaches by female leaders is often driven by necessity. As they lack authority formally, they depend on relational type of influence, delegating duties, developing trust to teachers and establishing supportive communities (Shah et al, 2025). The given adaptive behavior enables them to maneuver between hierarchical limitations and continue operating efficiently. Both transformational and distributed theories are used to model the process of redefining women as leaders of leadership based on being dominant instead of collaborative, which fits trends worldwide in the spirit of inclusive school leadership (Maqbool et al, 2024).

The frameworks also bring out the leadership capability that emotional and social skills have as opposed to positional power. They are related to the present research because they demonstrate that women are not only passive victims of structural bias, they proactively redefine the leadership norms in the institutional contexts where they operate (Khan, Siraji & Gillani, 2025).

Research Methodology

Research Design

The current research was based on qualitative case study design to research and comprehend the issues that the female academic leaders in Higher Secondary level in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa encounter and also focus on one district of Nowshera. Case study design is especially appropriate when the aim is to achieve a deep insight into the modern phenomena in the context of their life (Yin, 2018). The Pakistani female educational leadership operates on a distinct socio-cultural and bureaucratic context and necessitates a methodology that would be able to encompass the multiple contextual variables, cultural nuances and power structures.

Population of the study

This research carried out a survey of female leaders in academic institutions in the public education system of the Nowshera district, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which included female heads of institutions of secondary education as well as female district education officers overseeing the schools. The target population was carefully chosen in order to capture the views of women who have official leaderships in the secondary education system in the province and who are directly engaged in administrative decision making, supervising instruction, interacting with communities and school governance.

Sample size

The sample comprised of nine educational female leaders of various leadership positions in the public-sector institutions in the District Nowshera. This is appropriate in terms of qualitative inquiry, where breadth and quantity do not matter but rather depth and insight do (Creswell, 2014). Since the study required exploring experiences and not making generalizations and statistics, the chosen sample enabled an in-depth approach and deep narrative.

Sample Composition

Participant Type	Number Selected	Rationale for Inclusion
Female Principals – Urban Schools	3	Represent leaders with relatively better institutional access and mobility
Female Principals – Rural Schools	3	Reflect challenges in resource-scarce, culturally conservative environments
District Education Officer (Female)	1	Provides system-level oversight and policy implementation perspective
Deputy DEO (Female)	1	Offers mid-level administrative insight on monitoring and support mechanisms
Assistant DEO (Female)	1	Illustrates field-level supervision challenges and coordination role
Total Participants	9	—

Research Tool

This study employed semi-structured written interview guide as the main research instrument, which aimed at gathering rich narrative data on the respondent female academic leaders and in their lived professional experiences. Written interviews were chosen, over audio-recorded and face-to-face verbal collections of information, due to the contextual, cultural and administrative concerns in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, wherein this approach provided participants with the freedom to respond freely, privately and at their own pace whilst minimizing the reluctance to discuss sensitive topics regarding gender, departmental hierarchy and politics that affect performance. The guide was divided into 24-26 open ended questions that were divided in thematic areas such as background information, administrative and organizational duties, gender based social expectations, political and community intrusion, access to professional growth, leadership style and leadership achievements and coping strategies. These sections were systematic to stay in tandem with all goals of the research as well as the participants being given the opportunity to openly think about their work realities. The open-ended questions brought out descriptive and thought-provoking answers, which would allow the power of inquiry into obstacles and approaches utilized by female school heads. Written responses were transcribed manually and kept in a safe place and the identity of the participants was anonymized with the use of coded identifiers like P-U1(Principal-Urban 1) and P-R1 (Principal-Rural 1). All written responses sets were the main sources of primary data, which could be coded manually using the thematic analysis, a consistent with the aspiration of this qualitative investigation coherent and ethically-collected and which could be subjected to the interpretative analysis.

Data Collection

The professional integrity and respect were upheld in the data collection process which followed ethical and administrative protocols. To start with, the District Education Office in Nowshera was approached to allow formal permission to interview female principals and

other female officials on the district level. This move made the research legitimate and provided ease in accessing the participants. Following the institutional approval, the potential participants were approached individually and informed about the study and the interviews were scheduled at the most convenient time possible, with the least interruption of school activities.

Before every interview, the participants were informed of the aim of the research, the approximate duration of the interview, voluntary participation, anonymity and recording. Informed consent was taken, both oral and written. The researcher had provided a respectful environment and the participants felt free to give the required answers without the fear of being judged or terminated by the workplace.

All questions were posed in an informal and culturally sensitive way during every interview, not making the participant feel uncomfortable, particularly, when talking about gender norms, community behaviour or political pressure. The recordings and field notes were locked up after every interview. Soft files were put in password folders and physical note locked up. Raw data were accessible only to the researcher in order to protect privacy.

The process of collection was repeated until adequate depth was reached and frequency of reoccurring themes was an indication of saturation which ensured that there was sufficiency of sample size and data richness.

Data Analysis

The analysis of data was conducted in accordance with the thematic analysis template proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) that is commonly attributed with the suitability of qualitative research to elucidate patterns of meaning based on narrative data. The study commenced with verbatim transcribing of interviews and this allowed immersion into the voices of the participants. Secondly, the transcripts were thoroughly read and reread to put the researcher at ease with content and context.

Manual coding was embraced so that in-depth analysis of the data could be done. Important statements were underlined and given first codes. These codes were subsequently grouped into possible themes of repetitive problems like administrative overload, cultural expectations, community and political interference, inequality in professional development and resilience strategies. Themes were consulted and narrowed down to eliminate duplications and achieve clarity.

The comparison to rural and urban was to be incorporated to achieve the aim of determining the contextual differences. Rural and urban codes were compared to show contrast in the mobility, accessibility to resources, political pressure and training prospects.

Analytical coherence was provided when themes were explicitly related to research questions and objectives. The process of triangulation was done by cross-checking transcripts and field notes as well as convergence of narratives among participants. This analytical process was strict and well-structured and this guaranteed trust and meaningful interpretation of the data.

Results and Findings

Participants Profile

Demographic Overview

The following table is the summary of the core demographic data of the participants such as position, school location, years of leadership experience, academic qualifications. The respondents all had graduate or postgraduate qualifications, with some having M.Phil. qualifications and professional education qualification e.g. B.Ed. or M.Ed.

Note: Participant names and institutional identities are withheld to protect confidentiality.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Study Participants

Code	Position	School Location / Posting	Leadership Experience	Academic Qualification
P-U1	Principal	Urban School	10+ years	M.Ed.
P-U2	Principal	Urban School	12+ years	M.Phil. (Education)
P-U3	Principal	Urban School	8+ years	MA English, M.Ed.
P-R1	Principal	Rural School	9+ years	M.Sc. + B.Ed.
P-R2	Principal	Rural School	7+ years	Master's in Education
P-R3	Principal	Rural School	11+ years	M.Sc. (Biology), B.Ed.

DEO-F	District Education Officer	District Office	15+ years	M.Phil. / Leadership Training
DDEO-F	Deputy District Education Officer	District Office	12+ years	Master's in Education
AEO-F	Assistant Education Officer	District Office	8+ years	Master's in Education

Presentation of Major Themes

This section introduces the most prominent themes which were revealed in the process of data analysis. All of the themes describe a fundamental aspect of female academic leadership experience in the higher secondary schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The themes are based on the real-life experiences of the participants and they are backed with the word-to-word quotes to retain authenticity and relevance. These results are consistent with the research questions and objectives, both similar and specific to the contexts in urban and rural schools and district-level education officers.

Theme 1: Structural & Organizational Challenges

The initial significant theme of the interviews is based on structural and organizational issues that female academic leaders in higher secondary schools of KP have. The respondents repeatedly highlighted that systemic constraints, resource shortages and administrative load play a huge role in influencing their everyday leadership practice. Rather than playing the role of academic leaders and strategic planners, the female principals said that they have been forced to perform multiple operational duties as a result of permanent staffing shortages, a dearth of clerical support and burdensome reporting requirements. These limitations limit their capacity to emphasize on instructional leadership, staff development and school improvement programs.

The narratives point out that these issues are structural in nature and they are long-term and institutional and not short-term or isolated in the school. Although principals in both urban and rural schools complained of overworking, the pressure seemed to be more apparent in more rural schools where teachers were not necessarily present, infrastructure was a substantial problem and IT facilities were unsupportive. Comprehensively, this theme demonstrates the structural burden that female leaders feel to ensure that schools run smoothly, which is usually at personal expense and with minimal institutional support.

Sub-themes

a) Staff Shortages and Multi-Role Overload

Nearly all principals described the shortage of teachers particularly specialist teachers such as a major constraint. They frequently cover classroom teaching themselves in addition to leadership duties.

“Sometimes I am principal, teacher, clerk and counselor in one day.” (P-R2)

“Science subjects are short of staff. I personally take biology classes to ensure students do not suffer.” (P-U1)

This multi-role overload is an indication that there is lack of adequate teaching personnel and substitute plans, which means that female leaders are forced to reduce strategic leadership time so as to sustain student learning. The consequences are radically far-reaching, as principals are turned into working employees instead of educational leaders, space to be devoted to pedagogical leadership, teacher development and school development planning is reduced.

b) Administrative Burden and EMIS/Reporting Responsibilities

Respondents noted high administrative loads caused by the EMIS reporting, data entry, documentation, financial records keeping, compliance reporting and communication with the district authorities. In the absence of clerical personnel, this has been thrust on female leaders.

“Digital reporting without IT help consumes hours. Sometimes I sit late just to upload data.” (P-U3)

“Most days are spent in paperwork and EMIS. Leadership work is pushed to second priority.” (P-R1)

This is the increasing centralization and digitization of school reporting in KP. The absence of trained data handlers and clerical assistance, though technically transparency is enhanced by digital systems, female principals will still have to conduct technical work, which they have not been directly trained or even given official time. The administrative burden is also increased due to the board examinations, the cycles of results taking and visits by government auditors.

c) Lack of Support Staff (Clerical & Technical)

The lack of junior clerks, IT assistants and laboratories attendants was repeatedly mentioned by school leaders, as they were forced to do the registration, record keeping and even laboratory assistance duties by themselves.

“We urgently need a data entry person. Without clerical assistance, everything falls on the principal.” (P-U2)

“Even lab maintenance and record keeping we manage ourselves because no support staff exists.” (P-R3)

This sub- theme highlights the human resource deficiency in government schools. Female principals revealed that even though male-headed schools are occasionally informally assisted in the administration office or even provided by the community members, the female leaders are more likely to find no help as a result of gender expectations and restricted mobility.

d) Infrastructure and Technological Limitations

The majority of participants, particularly those from rural settings, identified infrastructure deterioration, lack of maintenance, inadequate learning resources and unreliable internet connectivity as daily operational challenges.

“School building and washrooms need repair. Funds do not come regularly.” (P-R2)

“Internet is weak and computers are outdated. Online reporting becomes difficult.” (P-R1)

Such circumstances are detrimental to efficient teaching, restrictive to innovation and burden the leadership role with emotional pressures. The interviewees emphasized that despite the government discourse of digital transformation and quality education, there are discrepancies in the allocation of resources, especially those of the rural schools of girls.

Interpretation

The results explicitly show that female academic leaders in KP work in a highly challenging and structurally bound school environment. Their leadership is also influenced by institutional deficits rather than formal requirements as well as administrative overload and lack of technical support systems. This creates a chronic role inflation where principals all play the roles of teachers, clerks, data-entry operators, counsellors and community liaisons at the same time. This multi-role activity is indicative of systemic inefficiencies and points out that the existing government policies with regard to staffing and administration of schools do not always reflect the realities of school occurrence- especially in girls’ secondary schools.

Though school leadership is supposed to be instructional, strategic and transformational, the accounts offered by the participants demonstrate that female principals in KP are pressured to focus on the survival of the operations rather than the strategic development. They spend their leadership time in bureaucratic reporting, EMIS compliance and daily management of crisis issues other than in pedagogical supervision or vision building of their school. This is also compounded by the circumstances in rural areas where teachers and infrastructure gaps as well as digital disparity add to the strain of operation.

The statements suggest that female leaders are institutionally invisible in terms of support - the administrative work usually performed by clerical personnel is given them without power and resources. This is systemic gendered neglect, as the improvements in the educational infrastructure of girls tend to lag behind those of boys and where schools led by women are given less informal assistance by their culture around women mobility and power.

Theme 1 shows that professional agency of female academic leaders does not constrain their capability but prevents it through structural factors. They are resilient at what expense, namely strategic leadership time, emotional energy and work-life balance. These structural issues are important to address in case KP wants to empower school leadership, enhance student achievements and have a gender-equitable educational administration.

Table 2: Theme 1 (Structural & Organisational Challenges)

Sub-Theme	Key Issue	Illustrative Quote	Interpretation
Staff Shortages & Multi-Role Burden	Principals covering teaching & clerical roles due to absent/insufficient staff	“I am principal, teacher, clerk and counsellor in one day.” (P-R2)	Female leaders perform multiple roles, reducing time for academic leadership
Administrative & EMIS Pressure	Excessive reporting workload, digital compliance without support	“Digital reporting without IT help consumes hours.” (P-U3)	Bureaucratic tasks overshadow instructional leadership duties
Lack of Support Staff	No data entry operator, clerk or lab assistant in most girls’ schools	“We urgently need a data entry person; everything falls on me.” (P-U2)	Female principals shoulder operational tasks beyond job scope

Infrastructure Limitations	Repairs delayed; insufficient furniture/maintenance	“School building and washrooms need repair.” (P-R2)	Facility challenges consume leadership attention and time
Technology Constraints	Weak internet, outdated systems affecting EMIS work	“Internet is weak; reporting becomes difficult.” (P-R1)	Digital reforms not matched with resource capacity, esp. rural

Conclusion

The study established that the organisational burden of female academic leaders in Higher Secondary schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is disproportionate and characterized by heavy workload, multitasking and insufficient support by the institutions. The participants emphasized that they often have to fulfill two roles of an administrator and teacher, their ability to allocate time to pedagogical leadership is reduced. These results are related to the studies of Begum et al. (2025), who found out that school heads of KP cannot easily balance their role as instructors and their functions as administrators because of staff shortage and bureaucratic reporting.

One of the biggest organisational obstacles reported by participants was the lack of vital support personnel (clerks, IT experts and support personnel in the lab). In multiple instances, principals explained that they did clerical work, typed EMIS data and repaired infrastructure without technical support. This is similar to the findings of Jamil et al. (2024), who concluded that short supply of trained staff diminishes the efficiency of schools in Pakistan in terms of administration. Likewise, Babbal and Mehmood (2024) believe that the lack of support systems in learning institutions contributes to the low effectiveness of the leadership team and the increase in administrative pressure.

The documentation and reporting burden (especially EMIS) were considered to be a pressure source recurrently. According to respondents, frequent and demanding reporting deadlines, the lack of infrastructure (faulty internet and inoperable computers) only complicated the process. These findings are consistent with those of Mehmood (2024), who established that the administrative reforms in KP subjected school heads to a lot of documentation without administrative improvements. Siraji et al. (2023) affirm that student-focused leadership may be undercut by the cumulative impact of administrative overload.

Insufficiency in infrastructure also came out as one of the organisational concerns. Things that rural principals reported include unreliable electricity, broken classrooms, lack of learning materials and poor sanitation facilities. These results echo Zada and colleagues (2023) who note that infrastructural barriers have a disproportionate impact on schools of girls in KP and cause dropout and poor academic achievements in school. Such limitations limit the capacity of leaders to establish favorable learning conditions, which is in line with the study by Khan et al. (2023) on the administrative issues in KP schools.

Recommendations

Recommendations Related to Organizational Challenges

The findings and conclusions of the study revealed that female academic leaders at the higher secondary level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa experience substantial organizational challenges due to limited administrative support, insufficient staffing and inadequate institutional resources. Many female principals are required to perform multiple roles simultaneously, including administrative, technical and managerial tasks, which reduces their capacity to concentrate on instructional leadership and strategic school development. In view of these challenges, it is recommended that the Elementary and Secondary Education Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa strengthen the administrative structure of higher secondary schools by ensuring the availability of adequate support staff such as clerks, laboratory assistants, IT technicians and data entry operators. These measures would enable academic leaders to delegate routine administrative responsibilities and focus on educational leadership, teacher supervision and institutional improvement. Furthermore, administrative procedures related to reporting systems, documentation and school management should be streamlined in order to reduce bureaucratic burden on school leaders. Strengthening organizational resources and support mechanisms will enhance leadership efficiency and contribute to improved institutional performance.

It is recommended that the education department establish a structured and ongoing system of professional support for female academic leaders that simultaneously consolidates existing strengths and addresses observed gaps in leadership practice. While those leaders who demonstrate effective communication and sound management approaches should be further facilitated through advanced training and opportunities for professional growth, those encountering difficulties in dealing with organizational challenges should be provided with focused guidance through mentoring, coaching, and context-specific leadership development initiatives. Furthermore, the creation of collaborative platforms, such as peer networks and professional forums, may enable the exchange of experiences and practical strategies, thereby fostering collective learning. Such measures are likely to ensure that all female academic leaders are better positioned to respond effectively to organizational challenges in a manner consistent with institutional goals.

References

- Amjad, S. (2024). Breaking Barriers: The Opportunities and Challenges of Women in Educational Leadership in Balochistan. *South Asian Journal of Management*, 18(2), 117-132.
- Atique, B., Hasan, S. T., Bano, S., & Shakoor, J. (2025). GENDER DISPARITIES REGARDING REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES WITHIN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION. *International Journal of Social Sciences Bulletin*, 3(8), 206-219.
- Aziz, M. I., Khan, U. A., & Khan, A. N. (2022). A Study of Quality Indicators at Intermediate Level Institutions in Southern Districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan. *Journal of Educational Research and Social Sciences Review (JERSSR)*, 2(2), 63-68.
- Fazal, S., Nazir, F., Khan, M. I., & Khan, S. I. (2025). Gender Equity in Higher Education in Pakistan: Bridging Dreams and Realities. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 1-19.
- Heilman, M. E., Caleo, S., & Manzi, F. (2024). Women at work: Pathways from gender stereotypes to gender bias and discrimination. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 11(1), 165-192.
- Jones, A. G. (2024). At the Intersection of Culture and Capability: Exploring Leadership Perceptions and Teacher Efficacy among Foreign Faculty in Korean Universities. *Dallas Baptist University*.
- Khan, B. A., Abdullah, F., & Shah, M. (2024). Unleashing Equality and Women Empowerment: Analyzing Pakistan's Path to SDG-5. *Pakistan Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 12(2), 2067-2074.
- Khan, M., Siraji, M. J., & Gillani, S. A. R. S. (2025). Impact of Distributed Leadership of School Heads on Teachers' Job Commitment in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. *Journal of Asian Development Studies*, 14(2), 1742-1753.
- Li, Y., Wang, X., & Wang, Y. (2025). The impact of gender norms on women's leadership advancement: An empirical study in China. *Economic and Political Studies*, 1-17.
- Lodhi, A. S., Iqbal, K., Ahmad, S., Jabin, B., & Hayat, F. (2025). Socioeconomics, Personal And Institutional Dynamics Affecting Feminist Leadership In Educational Sector Of Balochistan, Pakistan. *Journal of Social Horizons*, 2(1), 202-213.
- Maqbool, S., Zafeer, H. M. I., Maqbool, S., Zeng, P., Draissi, Z., & Javed, S. (2024). Stance of numerous leadership styles and their effect on teaching to sustain academic performance at the high school level. *Heliyon*, 10(16).
- Pifer, M. J., Baker, V. L., & Lunsford, L. G. (2019). Culture, colleagues, and leadership: The academic department as a location of faculty experiences in liberal arts colleges. *The Review of Higher Education*, 42(2), 537-564.
- Ridgeway, S. (2025). Exploring the Perceptions and Experiences of California Female Superintendents (Doctoral dissertation, Pepperdine University).
- Shah, S. G. M., Azam, R., & Ali, Z. (2025). Social and Emotional Learning of Students: Insight from Teachers Perspective at Primary School Level. *The Critical Review of Social Sciences Studies*, 3(2), 1476-1490.
- Smith, D. G. (2023). Men as the missing ingredient to gender equity: An allyship research agenda. In *A research agenda for gender and leadership* (pp. 141-154). Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Wasim, A. (2024). A Qualitative Study on Leadership Experiences of Women in Higher Education Administration in the Province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan (Doctoral dissertation, Indiana Institute of Technology).



2026 by the authors; Journal of The Kashmir Journal of Academic Research and Development. This is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).