

# Culture and Women's Leadership in Advanced Education in Vietnam: A Research Paradigm

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**Abstract:** The purpose of the present study is to propose a research paradigm of the impact of culture on women leadership in advanced education in Vietnam, an emerging country. In the study, women's leadership consists of transformational leadership, transactional leadership and interactive leadership or female leadership; culture covers traditional culture and organizational culture. Qualitative approach is utilized to gather the necessary data with semi-structured interviewing among target participants who are women leaders in advanced education in Vietnam, particularly in Ho Chi Minh city and Hanoi. The collected data is then processed and analyzed using the case study approach to discover the influence of culture on women's leadership in advanced education in Vietnam.

**Keywords:** Culture, Women Leadership, Qualitative Method, Case Study, Advanced Education, Vietnam.

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## I. Introduction

The women problems are one of the most instrumental discussions throughout the world. In recent years, the women in leadership in developed countries has been increasing in different fields such as economics, agriculture, politics, service, and so on, which has been creating more profits and developing the businesses (Hoyt and Murphy, 2016). However, in underdeveloped and developing countries, the gap between men and women has been larger, so that the presentation of men's leadership has been higher than women. With the case in Vietnam, is the emerging country in South-East Asia, which has been developing within Eastern Culture. In Eastern Culture, men are more appreciated in leadership and decision-making than women in terms of the norms and perceptions of people. Therefore, women could be influenced by the gender inequality in Eastern perceptions in their careers and daily life. However, Vietnam has been integrating into global economy and having open-minded so that the gender discrimination has been decreased, especially in politics. Nowadays, Vietnamese women's leadership are more popular, which achieve remarkable positions in some sections and break the 'glass ceiling'. As a result, it cannot deny that eastern culture is ingrained in the minds of Vietnamese people so that culture has influenced women leaders or not is also interested in many researchers. Hence, the aim of the study is to dig out how culture influences on women's leadership with the advanced education in Vietnam.

In Vietnam, female form half the population, also they were experienced that female with advanced education in labor workforce accounts appropriate 88.674% of female in working-age group with advanced education (World Bank, 2018). On the basis of the information of the International Standard Classification of Education 2011, advanced education can be explained by concluding the short-term tertiary learning, a bachelor's program or similar level of study, a master's program or similar level of study, PhD's program or similar level of study (ISCED 2011). With the high number of women in workforce, Vietnamese women's leadership has been changing in the positive way in current years. Therefore, factors affecting women's leadership are being discussed, which are economic issues, culture and so on (Bullough, 2008). Nevertheless, with the perception of eastern culture is rooted in many Vietnamese people, and whether culture influences on women's leadership or not is controversial.

There are few studies on how culture influences women's leadership conducted in Vietnam. However, these previous studies focused on the educational areas in the universities in Vietnam (Le, 2011a), political field among different levels (Truong, 2008) and public sector (Huyen, 2012). For this reason, the present research explores the effect of culture on women's leadership in various fields such as hospitality, politics, business, human resources.

## II. Literature Review

### 1.1 Gender and Leadership Styles

#### 1.1.1 Gender

In the leading-edge science, gender is differentiated from sex, the previous researchers has been seen as a set of characteristics classified male or female (Gray, 1987) and the latter as consisting of figures which are

focused on biological traits (Korac- Kakabadse, Korac- Kakabadse and Myers, 1998). According to (Park, 1996) gender attributes of men are competitive, autonomous, independent, reasonable, realistic, logical, decisive, optimistic, assertive, ambitious, duplicitous and unemotional and that are distinct from the characteristics of women described as being emotional, flexible, articulate, friendly, intelligent, strong, thoughtful, open to ideas, sociable, sensitive, respectful, empathic and subordinate. Therefore, many researchers found that there was a different in leadership styles and gender (Eagly and Carli, 2003) , (Dobbins and Platz, 1986), (Pounder and Coleman, 2002a).

### **1.1.2 Gender is a Determining Factor of the Leadership Style**

The statement that “Gender is a determining factor of the leadership style” (Pounder and Coleman, 2002b) has been proving in many years with some following literatures. (Rigg and Sparrow, 1994) pointed out that women leaders could accentuate their team members approach than men and men leaders were seen more patriarchal and autocratic than women leaders. Moreover, women leaders strove to establish their exceptional correlations with subordinates, which could influence on the leadership style (Yammarino *et al.*, 1997). (Rosener, 2011) and (Daley and Naff, 1998) researched the quantitative study of men and women were both in the same ages, careers, qualifications and positions and concluded that female consider to apply transformational leadership style more than male. Based on the other researches in UK head teachers, both men and women considered to guide in the employee’s decision makings in different leadership styles, while female worked in partnership, male tended to more assign (Jirasinghe Dilum and Geoffrey Lyons, 1996).

### **1.1.3. Gender is not a Determining Factor of the Leadership Style.**

Other researchers have been finding out the consensus opinion with the declaration “Gender is not a determining factor of the leadership style.”. There was a self-contained relationship between gender and leadership style (Ronk, 1993). (Kolb, 1999), (Carless, 1998) and (Davidson, Marilyn J., and Ronald J. Burk, 2000) found that there was a few or little disparity style, characteristic of leadership in both men and women. (Thompson, 2000) researched that no dissimilarity in leadership approach in gender according to the leadership effectiveness. Furthermore, based on the UK’s research of head teachers, (Julia Evetts, 1994) pointed out the same result, which no distinction in leadership style in male and female.

## **1.2. Women Leadership Styles**

In academe, the key word “leadership” is gotten the result of more than 165,000 journal articles Science Website. Women leadership studies has also deliberated with about 5% of the mentioned website articles, which are specific to female leaderships. (Gipson *et al.*, 2017).

### **1.2.1. Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leaders who encourage and motivate followers to achieve exceptional results and improve their own leadership potential in the process (Bernard M. Bass, Ronald E. Riggio, 2006). Based on the supporting theory of (Bass, Avolio and Atwater, 1996), he claimed it has been demonstrated that transformational leadership are required four interconnect elements: charismatic, motivating, mentally encouraging and individualized consideration. Moreover, the emphasis of transformational leadership is “individualized consideration” that leaders are constantly concerned with the personal needs, coaching and advancement of subordinates (Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Thus, this style of leadership seem to more appropriate to female because of their characteristics such as caring, thoughtful, cooperative (Le, 2011a).

### **1.2.2. Transactional Leadership**

The signature of transactional leader is “exchange”, which means that an exchange of desired results between subordinates and leaders by satisfying the desires of the leader and the aspirations of the subordinates, including assurances or obligations expressed in admiration and trust (Paracha, Qamar and Mirza, 2012; Bernard M. Bass, Ronald E. Riggio, 2006). The behaviors of transactional leaders are aim to monitor and manage workers through logical or economic means through rewards and exceptional management ( setting the goals for workers and evaluating performance based on these goals) (Bass and Bass Bernard, 1985)

### **1.2.3. Interactive Leadership**

Over the last few years, (Rosener, 2011) found that there is a neoteric leadership approach namely interactive leadership style or female leadership style. The interactive leadership model aims to empower workers themselves to develop and become pioneers in innovation (Bossink, 2007). Interactive leaders focus on personalized concern in helping, mentoring and directing based on the two main elements: team-building orientation and female interaction skills (Koh and Hia, 1997; Eisenbach, Watson and Pillai, 1999). A significant

aspect of interactive leadership is a team building orientation. This guideline involves promoting shared trust, understanding between people and engaging them in teamwork (Stanford, Oates and Flores, 1995). Female leaders were also shown to have a better ability to coordinate team work than the males (Koh and Hia, 1997). The other component is female interaction skills which consist of these characteristics such as a strong auditor, compassion, knowledge sharing and a "soft" attitude to people management.

### **1.3. Culture and Leadership**

According to Hofstede (1984), culture is the assemblage of cognitive program that differentiate between members of one team and another. There are two groups of people, which are national culture and organizational culture. (Anon, 2002). Moreover, based on the theory of (Schein, 2010), culture exists from societies, countries, associations to communities at different levels, which is based on the three levels of culture: Artifacts, Espoused Beliefs and Values and Basic Assumptions. Moreover, (Walker and Dimmock, 2002) found out that culture is identified as the continuous collection of ideals, beliefs and philosophies that consolidate systems, procedures and behaviors that distinguish one group to another. The communities can be at the stage of organizational culture or social culture.

In many literatures about culture, scholars referred to the concepts of Western culture and Eastern culture (Chang, 2001; Zhang, van Doorn and Leeftang, 2014; Joshanloo, 2014). (Lazarus, 2006) point out that there are four dimensions which differentiate between Eastern culture and Western culture, which leads to the attitudes of women and men leaders.

Beside the theories mentioned, the terms of patriarchal culture are controversial in many studies. At the root of patriarchal societal values stands male domination, female animosity, envy and negative reactions to the behavior of a partner, which were based on the research with Asian and European education (Ozaki and Otis, 2017). Therefore, according to literatures on women leadership has established the role of patriarchal culture as an obstacle to women's development (Le, 2011a; Rutherford, 2001; Moghadam, 2004).

#### **1.3.1. Culture Obstacles and Limits on the Female Leadership**

Women's leadership researches have shown that women may suffer challenges to achieve their top careers and whereas in those leadership roles they can face unfair work chances, conflicts of roles and patriarchal views of women (Rutherford, 2001; Shah, 2009). (Brown, 1997) pointed out that the influences have come from the consequences of tradition, either the Western or Eastern countries, and built a "glass ceiling". According to the authors' opinions, men dominance is the biggest obstacle to women as all established common challenges can be attributed to a community that promotes and enforces a patriarchal culture (Ozaki and Otis, 2017).

Several scholars have claimed that culture has an influence on leadership (Levin *et al.*, 1999), which leads to some cultural biases that make it hard for women to gain leadership seats (Brown, 1996; Kalaitzi *et al.*, 2017).

#### **1.3.2. Traditional Culture**

Traditional culture has a strong impact on individual behavior and the variations between Western and Eastern cultures are very important (Lok and Crawford, 2004), which leads to the obstacles for women in leadership position:

##### **Gender-Related Attitudes**

Based on the opinions of (Ouston, 1993), the term of androcentrism (which means the universe-view focused on men) emphasizes men and honors and the masculine ideology over women and men. This patriarchal hierarchy of needs and the cycle of socialization contribute to gender inequality, also linked to negative views on women (Le, 2011a). Opinion of the male attitudes arising from patriarchal culture and the cycle of social interaction creates "internal barriers" for females including such loss of confidence and encouragement or interest (Brown, 1996; Norris and Inglehart, 2014)

##### **Family-Related Barriers**

Lirio *et al.*, 2007, claimed that family obligations related to marriage status and childcare are an important factor for women's career growth, especially in leadership position. Managers must make hard choices, such as being single or childless compared to their male counterparts who are married with kids in the majority of situations (Graves and Powell, 2003), therefore in some firms in the West, the married female seems less career promotions than those are single (Mae Kelly and Dabul Marin, 1998).

### **1.3.3. Organizational Culture**

#### **Gender-Related Stereotypes in Leadership Roles**

There have been many reasons why females are struggling to achieve leadership positions, including the stereotypical charges lacking of agreement between the attributes, abilities and expectations of females which those considered appropriate for successful leadership. Gender-related stereotypes not only influence people who consider a leader to be "fit" but also impact females themselves (Hoyt and Murphy, 2016). (McGlashan, Wright and McCormick, 1995) argued that almost leadership positions were related to male traits, i.e. male "typing of sex" or gender related. Such distinctions in attributes have linked to an overarching idea that men should acquire as much as possible the typical characteristics that they find important for success (Deaux and Emswiler, 1974). Males are more physical and autonomous while females are seen as thoughtful, softer and more discreet which leads to assign the masculine and feminine tasks according to the gender stereotypical tasks (Garland and Price, 1977).

### **1.4. Culture and Women's Leadership in Vietnam**

People usually the well-known terms that are consists of Western and Eastern cultures. (Schein, 2004). In particular, Vietnam is characterized as Eastern cultures, which focus on the group, high power distance and ranked associations (Nguyen *et al.*, 2009).

According to (Le, 2011b) the past researches are fundamentally focused on culture significantly impacts on women's leadership in higher education with Vietnam's case study through their leadership styles, roles and achievements. Although women's values are admired through Vietnamese nation, the study find out that the undersized amounts of women in higher education are a result of a patriarchal culture, which means that women who has masculine traits are more appropriate than recognized female traits in leadership.

In the research about the women leadership in political positions of Truong, 2008, she found out that based on the National Assembly of Vietnam in 1976, first Vietnamese woman leader was achieved into political positions but advancement is unstable. The number of women in the national assembly rose from 18.5% to 27.3% during the period of about ten years (1992-2007), while women 25.7% of the positions in the present parliamentary. In the national governmental unions, women represent 19.5%, 23%, 23% of representatives in villages level, district level and regional level respectively. In leadership positions, the proportion of women representatives is lower, which is approximately 2%, 6% and 10% in villages level, district level and province level respectively. Work and family arrangement is one of the barriers for women to entry and promote to their leadership roles (Nguyen, 2013). Huyen, 2012, based on the figures of 2004, showed that Vietnamese female spent 2.5 times of doing housework than male urban areas while in the rural locations only 2.3 times in the same situations. Huyen, 2012, argued that both national and organizational cultures have had a significant effect on female leadership, contributing to unequal representation in leadership roles in the public sectors. Age has been a very significant element in leadership with the case in Vietnam. The self-confidence and career ambition of women have been diminished along with the cycle of selection and stereotypical tasks by conventional gender concepts and sociocultural principles.

### **1.5. Research Questions**

Based on the preceding literature review and analysis, the current research concentrates on answering the following key research questions.

- How does culture impact on women's leadership perceptions?
- What are the Vietnamese women leadership practices in advanced education?
- What are the relationships between the culture and practices in women's leadership styles, roles and achievements?

## **III. Methodology**

### **3.1. Research Paradigm**

Different researchers have defined the word 'paradigm' differently. A paradigm of research is a structure that determines how to perform research according to the beliefs of people and their perceptions about the society and the essence of knowledge (Collis and Hussey, 2014). Based on (Mac Naughton *et al.*, 2001) clarified that three components are included in a research paradigm: a belief in the essence of understanding, the method and validity standards. The framework of (Creswell, John W and J. David Creswell, 2017) is epistemology, ontology, and even the methodology. However, (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006) categorized the conceptual paradigms as positivist (post-positivist), constructivist or interpretivist. The aspect of interpretivist in order to address truth, compares with the positivist paradigm (Thanh and Thanh, 2015).

In the scope of women's leadership, interpretivist approach would be chosen to collecting the data. Interpreters explore truth through the perceptions, context and experiences of participants (Yanow, Dvora, and

Peregrine Schwartz-Shea., 2011). The strength of the interpretative approach is its capacity to deal with the ambiguity and sense of circumstances (Black, 2006). Therefore, the information about the background, knowledge or even proficiency of the women leaders can be collected and analyzed effectively through the interpretivist approach(Huyen, 2012).

### **3.2. Research Method**

Many scholars classified the research methodology into two main types of approach that are qualitative research and quantitative research based on two different paths about reflection and science respectively (Davies, Martin Brett and Nathan Hughes, 2014). According to Padgett, and Deborah K., 2016, the most appropriate approach depends on distinct situations and topics. They claimed that the interesting scopes related to internal perceptions such as gender, family, children, etc. can be handled with qualitative research method.

This research focuses on discovering effect of culture on Vietnamese female leadership through the practices and experiences, qualitative research is appropriate to collect the information. Qualitative approach is ideal for the simplification and management of data without affecting sophistication and meaning (Atieno, 2009). The purpose of the qualitative research is to discover the exclusive of the contributors 's lives experiences to develop the indulgence of specific issues (C. Mutch, 2015). Burns, R., 2000 further indicates that qualitative authors prefer to focus their work on the perception and recognition of the values of reality life experiences of participants. Therefore, qualitative research is the best method to explore the experiences of female in Vietnam, which consists of their credence and discernments about woman leadership (Le, 2011b). Nevertheless, the key drawback of qualitative research methods is that the outcomes cannot be applied to larger populations to a certain degree that quantitative research can be carried out. This is because the outcomes of the study are not checked to assess whether or not they are statistically valid (Atieno, 2009).

### **3.3. Data Collection and Analysis**

Gill *et al.*, 2008, pointed out three elementary categories of interviews, which are unstructured interviews, structured interviews and semi-structured interviews. In the current study, semi-structured interviewing is useful research method to explore the female leadership experiences (Louise Barriball and While, 1994). According to Denzin (1989), instead of reiterating the same questions, semi-structured interview may transfer correspondence of meaning to get the systematize of the practices' interviewers. Furthermore, the participants may have the opportunities to express their experiences and perceptions instead of completing survey. Based on this kind of interview, the detailed data will be stored with profound unique opinions (Louise Barriball and While, 1994). A single interview is required to fulfill the most appropriate information from the interviewee. The participant may have an appointment with twenty minutes to state and answer the questionnaires about cultures and women's leadership with her experiences and background.

The gathered data is analyzed utilizing the thematic approach. Thematic analysis is a form of qualitative research method that is available, versatile and increasingly common (Anon, 2012). This thematic analysis appeared less to get a rich summary of the total data and more thorough analysis of certain elements of the data. Thematic analyzes offer a versatile and valuable analysis tool, capable of delivering a rich, comprehensive and yet complicated data account (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A six-step method, involving information familiarization, preliminary codes development, research on subjects, themes analysis, naming of topics and reporting, is applied to analyze the collected data.

## **IV. Conclusion**

The present research aims to investigate the influence of culture on Vietnamese women's leadership in advanced education. In the study, women's leadership includes three main elements namely transformational leadership, transactional leadership and interactive leadership or female leadership; culture concentrates on traditional culture and organizational culture. The target participants will be interviewed individually in Vietnamese with the semi-structured interviewing. All the transcripts are then translated into English version in order to analyze with the qualitative method. On the basis of the gathered data, how culture influences on the way women leads, including about their roles, styles, advancements and women's perceptions will be analyzed and discussed.

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