

Effectiveness of Women Leaders in Georgian Educational Institutions

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Abstract

There is great interest in educational leadership in the early part of the 21st century. Because there is a general belief that the quality of leadership makes a main difference to any educational institution and student outcomes" (Bush, 2008:391).

Even though women are lauded for having the right combination of skills for leadership which yield outstanding effectiveness, there appears to be a widespread belief that women often come in second to men when competing for upper level leadership positions (Eagly, 2007). The Government of Georgia and civil society organizations have a history of making efforts to promote gender equality in the country. In Georgia the achievement of gender equality was the main problem. However, from 2013 there have been many positive changes in Georgian legislative and civil society's action. Georgian society strongly tends to promote gender equality at all levels of social spheres. Great efforts and active participation in the field of human rights changed the attitudes to women empowerment. The article will analyze the biases about women's effective leadership in Georgian educational organizations, identify female leaders' perception by opposite gender in educational community, and measure the qualifications, leadership styles and effectiveness of women leaders in Georgian educational organizations.

Keywords: Educational leadership, leadership characteristics, leadership strategies, leadership styles, women leaders.

Introduction

Few people in the 21st century would suggest that women are less able than men to take responsible positions in any occupational sector for which they have been trained. Countries with greater gender equality generally have economies that are more competitive and grow faster. Moreover, the empowerment of women is an investment in communities and society as a whole. By contrast, there where women do not have full participation in economic and political life, development is not truly sustainable (Julian, 2014).

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According to Batliwala (1994), women empowerment should have a perception that both men and women are equal beings despite of their gender. Using their skills can help form a more humane society for all.

Gender relationships in Georgia, till the middle of the 1980s, have been developed under the influence of dominating ideology common for all Soviet republics. This ideology propagated equality of rights and women's participation in all spheres of social life. But everything largely was on declarative level. Meanwhile, patriarchal traditions continued to rule on the level of family relationships: the man was the head of the family, protector and supporter for the woman, who brings up the children and runs the households. However, in today's Georgia, where democracy and a market economy are still at the stage of formation, the realization and implementation of social, economic and cultural rights acquire a special importance for the most vulnerable social groups of the society, including women (Nadaraia, 2013).

The respect for women has been highly valued in Georgian culture for centuries. Women can have the role of both as breadwinner and housewife. However, irrespective the traditions (including having the female "King" Tamar in the 12th century), top-level political and business jobs are less accessible for women and only a few are in the government. But there are many women in educational organizations.

As for the education sector, it can be considered that a woman's role is clearly higher than a man's. The field of education is considered 'appropriate' for women, as it deals with upbringing the young generation. We can assume that Georgian culture and traditions do not conflict with women's leadership in education, based on the evidence of their activities and achievements in this field. It can be considered that a woman as a teacher, lecturer, head of the educational institution and the initiator holds the leading position in education. Compared to the role of women in politics and business, the field of education for women in Georgian society is open.

Problem statement

In Georgian education, gender misbalance is evident from the data of National statistics of Georgia (2013), according to which out of 68670 teachers, 58324 are women. Although most of the teachers, lecturers, school directors, etc. are women, the biases about women's effective leadership in educational organizations still exists and to some extent and remains to be the concern of the society. The fact that at Georgian universities usually men hold the positions of the rector or dean cannot be used as the indicator to confirm that women do not deserve this position, it only proves that Georgia is still largely a man-dominated country, where women do much work, but are given little power in decision making.

Goal of the Research

As the traditional Georgian view point hinders, to some extent, the appropriate understanding of women empowerment, this research tries to question the stereotype that women represent the 'weak' gender and are not appropriate for leaders' positions.

The study examines the perception of female leaders as strong and effective leaders in educational organizations. The purpose of this research is to identify female leaders' perception by the opposite gender in educational community and define the qualifications, leadership styles and effectiveness of women leaders in educational organizations. Generally, female-educators are very confident in their skills and abilities, but this study aims to encourage more females to seek high leadership positions in education.

Significance of the Research

This research will help to understand better what the perception of female leaders' effectiveness is in educational community in order to allow more female leaders to emerge in educational organizations to promote new ideas and diversities. Challenges of gender leadership are represented in every culture. Despite the freedom and democracy, there is still the tendency to appoint men on leading positions. There is a need to reflect on the importance of female leadership. In previous decades, many organizations did not support females in leadership because of traditional, stereotypical ideas. This research illustrates a paradigm shift of women leaders' authority in educational organizations. This study provides an awareness that leadership has begun to acknowledge female capabilities in educational organizations, which may lead to appointments of more female leaders on higher positions to influence the change successfully.

Hypothesis of the Research

Educational community attitudes toward women's 'weak' leadership can be changed through the awareness of women effectiveness as leaders in educational organizations.

Novelty of the Research

Women leadership is mostly discussed only in political and business sectors and in these spheres in Georgia women are considered to be weak and powerless leaders. But women leadership in educational organizations has been less investigated. The novelty of the research is that the study will define the qualifications, leadership styles and effectiveness of women leaders in educational organizations and increase the perception of women leaders' successful and important role in educational organizations. Therefore, the research will question the biases existing in Georgian society concerning women leadership in education.

Practical Value of the Study

This study has discovered that Georgian society needs to be aware of the significance of women leadership and its impact on education. Women are considered less effective and consequently are low-paid leaders - that is not the right approach. Gender equality remains only a declarative opportunity in some cases. According to this research, it becomes evident that women are effective leaders by their successful achievements in educational organizations.

Besides, this study can be used for future, larger scale researches to mirror and prove the effectiveness of Georgian women in educational leadership.

Methods/Approaches of the Research

The article presents empirical findings generated from the questionnaire conducted via Survey Monkey and a face-to-face interview. As a research paradigm, we used mixed - qualitative and quantitative - methodology, because it is more flexible in its approaches. The questionnaire, as the instrument of a quantitative study, was composed on the bases of the methods of data collection, taking into consideration the main 15 principles of questionnaire construction. The questionnaire comprised closed-ended and open-ended questions which met the research objectives. The interview was conducted face to face and the observation method was used to have more chances to record and analyze the situation in which women act as leaders. The informal piloting tested the questionnaire and interview questions for reliability, validity and errors.

Research Design

The research was carried out in Georgian educational organizations, such as schools, universities, private educational organizations. The questionnaire was conducted among men and women volunteer participants, holding the positions of leaders, lecturers and administrative staff in educational settings. The questionnaire consists of 13 closed-ended and 1 open-ended questions. The data collection is based on Likert Scale ranging from – 1 - strongly disagree, 2 - partially disagree, 3 - neither agree nor disagree, 4 - partially agree, and 5 - strongly agree. This type of scale makes the answers more adequate. The open-ended question aimed to depict participants' point of view towards the characteristics that make women efficient leaders.

The interview was held among women leaders in educational organizations and comprised 9 open-ended questions. The interview questions aimed to reveal their leadership style and career path and the actions they applied for their effective leadership. All the requirements to protect the confidentiality and anonymity were fulfilled while interview data gathering.

Findings and Analyses

Good leadership results in appropriate changes that are required by the society, especially in education of all levels. The goal of the research is to find out the attitude of Georgian educational community towards the effectiveness of women leaders in educational organizations, the reasons causing the biases that may question women's efficiency in leadership, to depict the opposite genders' perception of being a leader and their point of view concerning stereotypes and limitations that women face in leadership. The research also aimed to show how women act as leaders, are they effective leaders or not, how they formulate their vision and carry it out in accordance to the structure, how they direct the followers, and what they have done for being effective leaders. It is obvious that there are more women leaders in Georgian educational organizations than in political and business sectors.

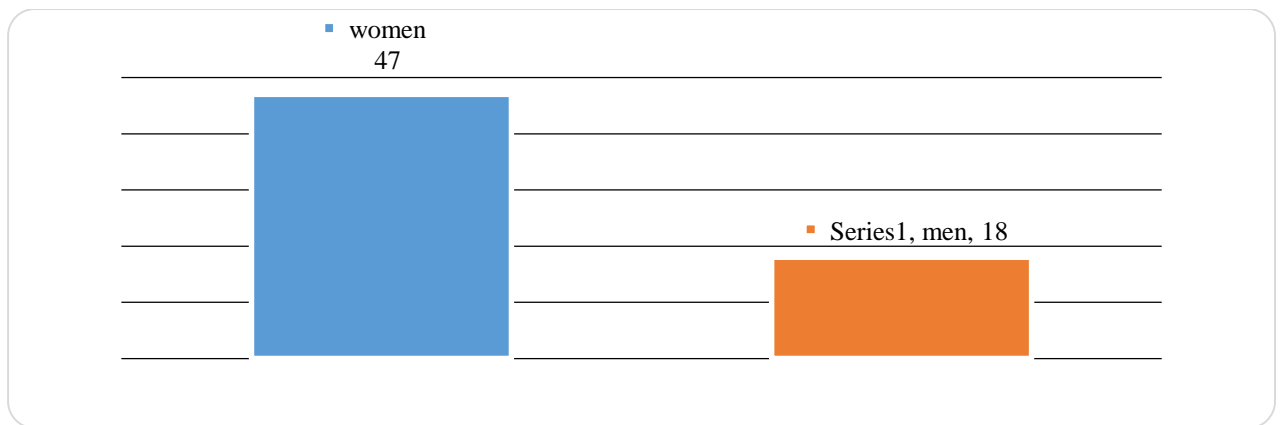
Therefore, the aim of this research was to observe and prove the effectiveness of women as leaders in educational organizations.

The questionnaire was conducted via Survey Monkey. The results revealed that the research participants were women and men from educational organizations. Totally 65 volunteers participated in the survey out of which 47 were women and 18 were men. No selection procedure was applied; all completed answers were accepted.

The response statistics of question 1 disclosed that there are more women in Georgian educational organizations than men.

Figure 1. Response statistics of question 1.

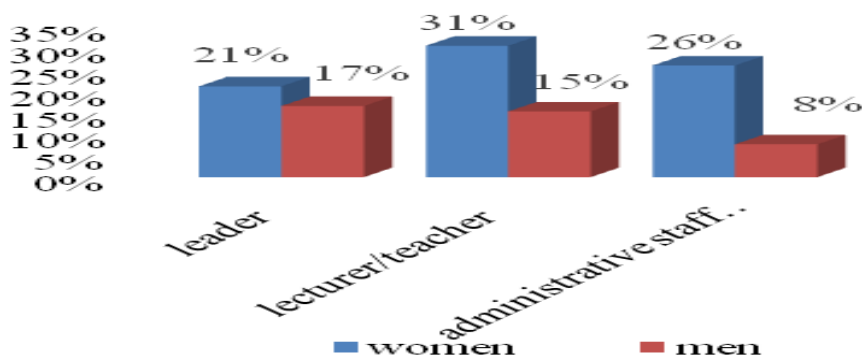
Q 1: What is your gender?



The second question aimed to reveal the positions of the participants in educational settings. The statistics in Figure 2 shows that women overweight men as leaders, lecturers/teachers and administrative staff in educational organizations.

Figure 2. Response statistics of question 2.

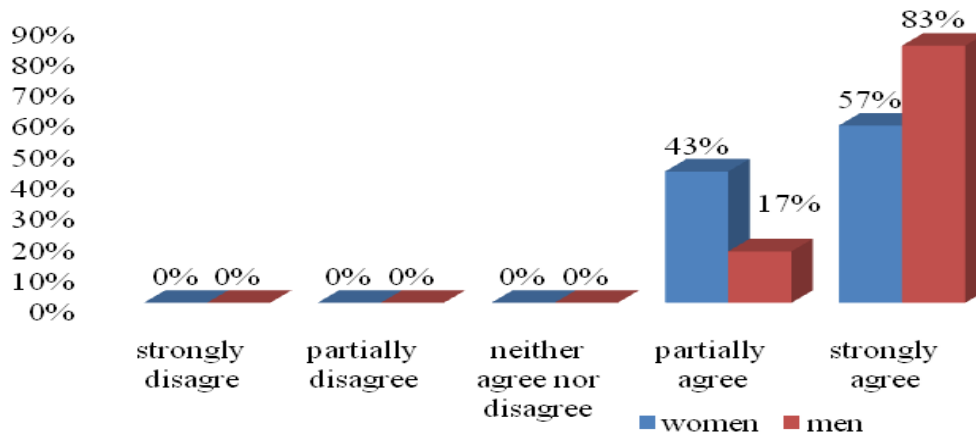
Q 2: What category do you belong to?



To the statement “I perceive myself as a leader” the respondents, both men and women, showed a strong belief in their leadership abilities.

Figure 3. Response statistics of question 3.

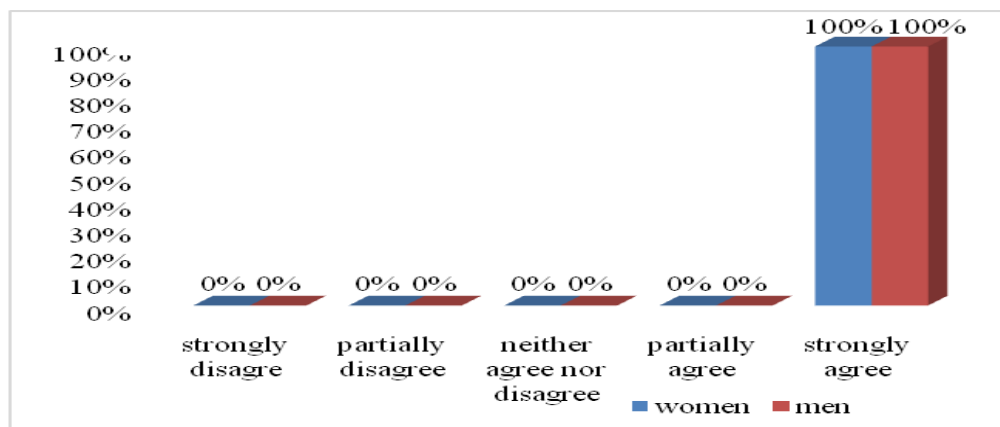
Q 3: I perceive myself as a leader



The responses to the item “Gender does not have a direct influence on the success of leaders in Georgian educational settings” depicted that both men and women strongly believe that gender has no direct influence on the success of educator leaders. The responses can also highlight the idea that men and women in Georgian educational settings have equal opportunities to show themselves as successful leaders and manage educational organizations effectively.

Figure 4. Response statistics of question 4.

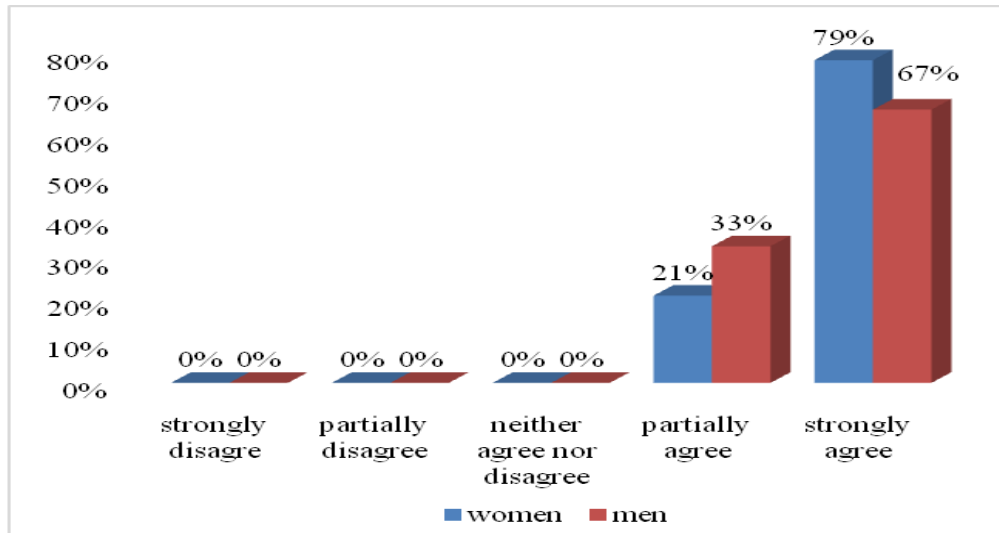
Q 4: Gender does not have a direct influence on the success of leaders



The statistics of Figure 5 reveals that in Georgia the opportunities are equal for men and women to become a leader, especially in educational settings. The statistics also shows that women believe in this idea slightly more than men.

Figure 5. Response statistics of question 5.

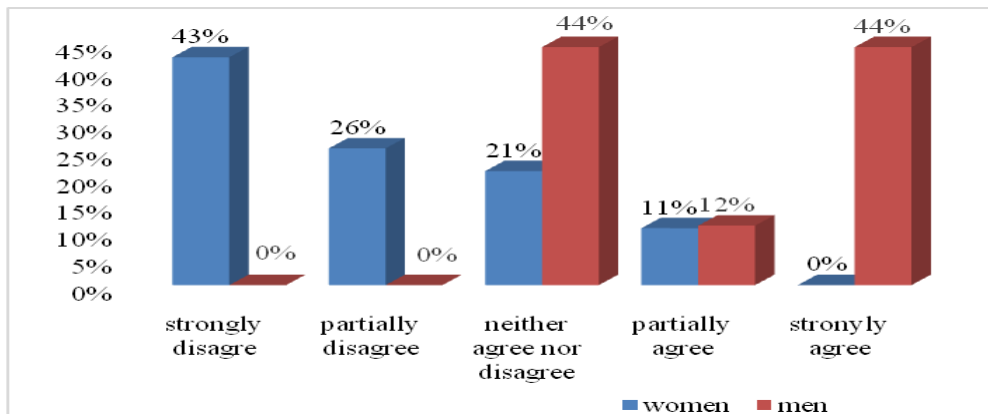
Q 5: Men and women have equal opportunities in becoming leaders in educational settings



One of the reasons why women are considered less appropriate for leadership positions is that women more likely feel that their family takes priority over their jobs than men. This statement was posed to find out the respondents' attitude towards this stereotype.

Figure 6. Response statistics of question 6.

Q 6: One of the reasons why women are considered less appropriate for leadership positions is that women more likely feel that their family takes priority over their jobs than men

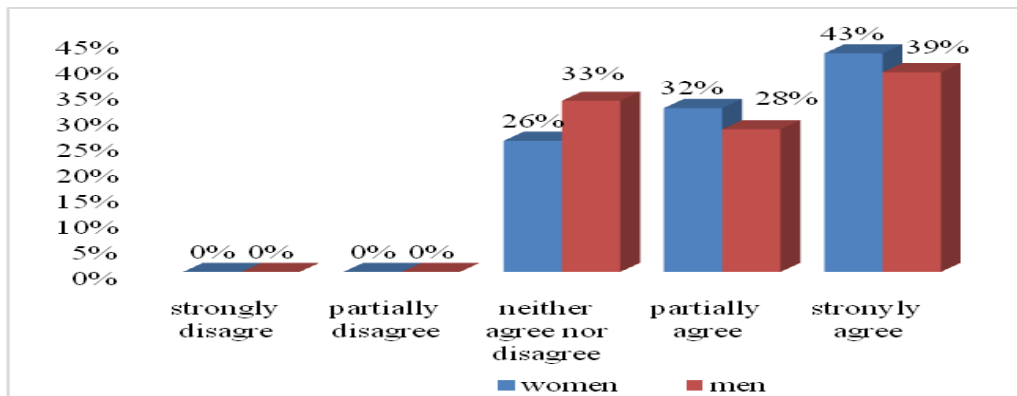


Based on the statistics of Figure 6, 43% of women think that it is a wrong attitude towards them and there is no reason to think that they much tend to family, but it is evident that 44% of men respondents strongly agree with the idea, 44% neither agree nor disagree and 12% partially agree. But the overall picture is that men consider women less effective due to their attitude towards family.

The following question was whether men are more confident in financial decision making than women. The percentage of the responses given by women and men in Figure 7 slightly differ from each other, which gives us the right to assume that they all almost equally agree with the idea that financial decision making is better done by men rather than women. But this opinion, besides the real experience, could be based on cultural attitude of men's dominance in financial management.

Figure 7. Response statistics of question 7.

Q 7: Men are more confident in financial decision making than women



The responses to the question whether cultural and structural barriers in Georgia possess challenges for women in educational leadership positions varied a little. 36% of women consider that Georgian culture does not create challenges for their managerial skills and 26% of women neither agree nor disagree with this statement. It is worth mentioning that 22% of men strongly agree that women have challenges due to the culture, but the highest percentage we got from men respondents who neither agree nor disagree with this idea. Based on the statistics, we can assume that Georgian culture is tolerant towards the gender issue in leadership.

Figure 8. Response statistics of question 8.

Q 8: Cultural and structural barriers in Georgia possess challenges for women in education leadership positions

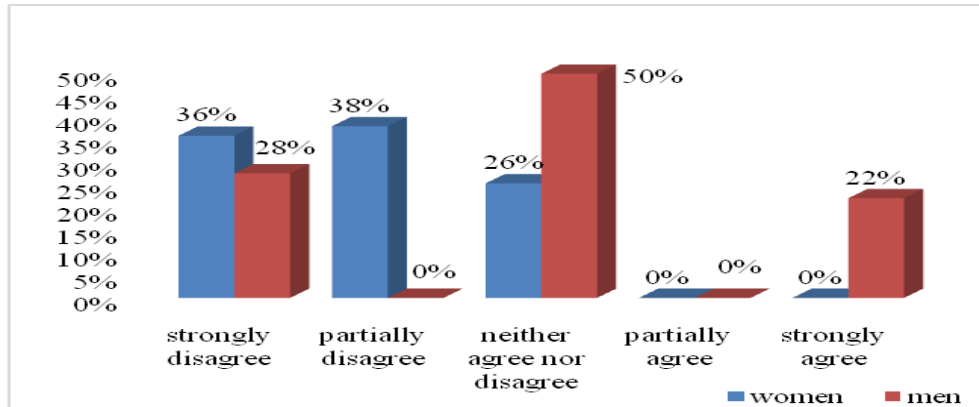


Figure 9 shows that to the statement “Women benefit and advance as leaders by having more sensitive and encouraging leadership characteristics than men”, we got the highest point (57%) of partial agreement from women, but 39% of men strongly agree with this idea and this proves that men highlight these traits in women’s advancement as leaders.

Figure 9. Response statistics of question 9.

Q 9: Women benefit and advance as leaders by having more sensitive and encouraging leadership characteristics than men

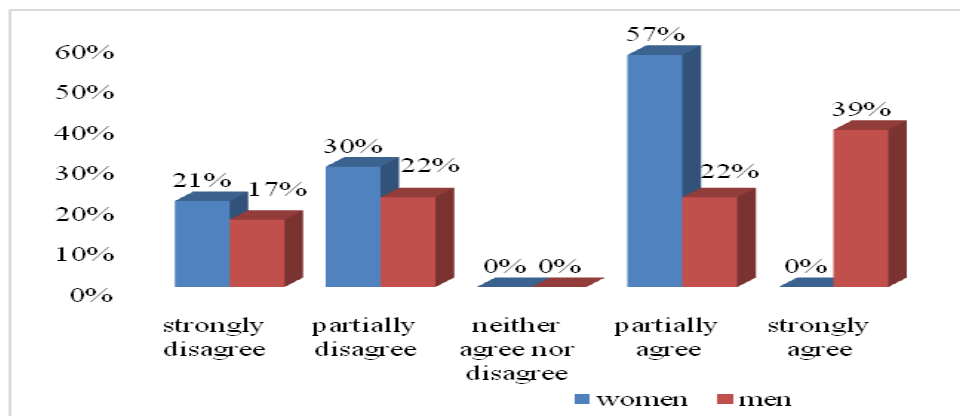
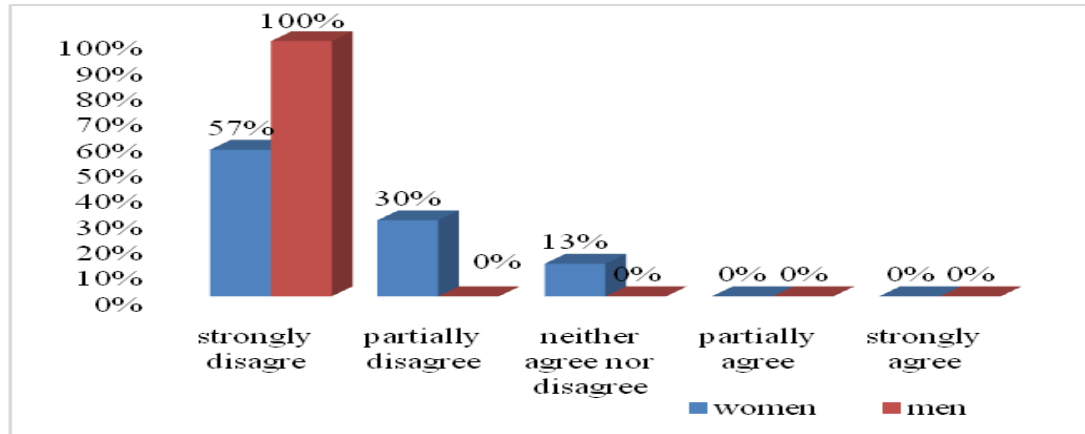
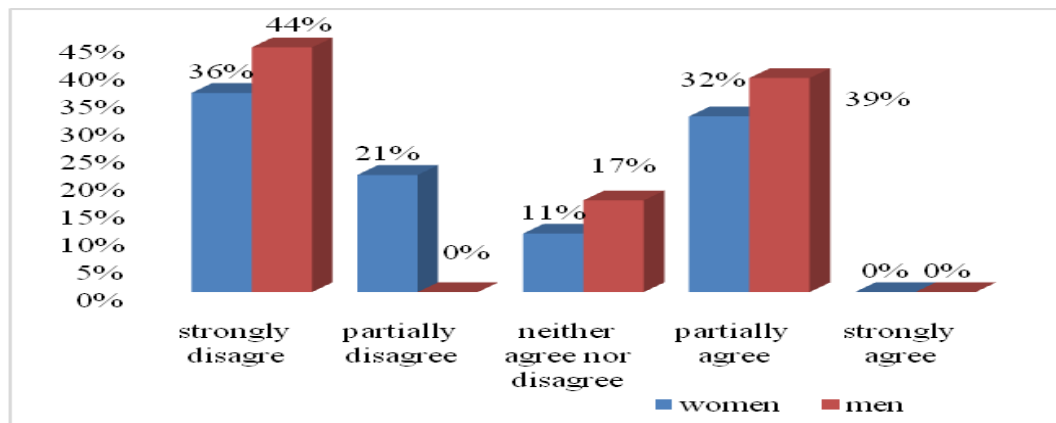


Figure 10 depicts that 100% of men strongly disagree with the idea that women are less involved in decision making, though the percentage of the responses obtained from women-respondents is not as high, which gives us the right to assume that women experience those limitations in decision making that men are not able to realize (‘glass ceiling’). But still we can consider that women are active participants in decision making process.

Figure 10. Response statistics of question 10.**Q 10: Women leaders are less involved in decision making**

When respondents were posed the following question – “Women in education leadership are more likely to use participative approach than men” - the majority of women and men strongly disagree with this idea. Though there was a slightly less number of men and women respondents who partially agreed with this statement, still, based on the highest percentage of disagreement, we can assume that both genders do not consider that participative approach is more used by women than men.

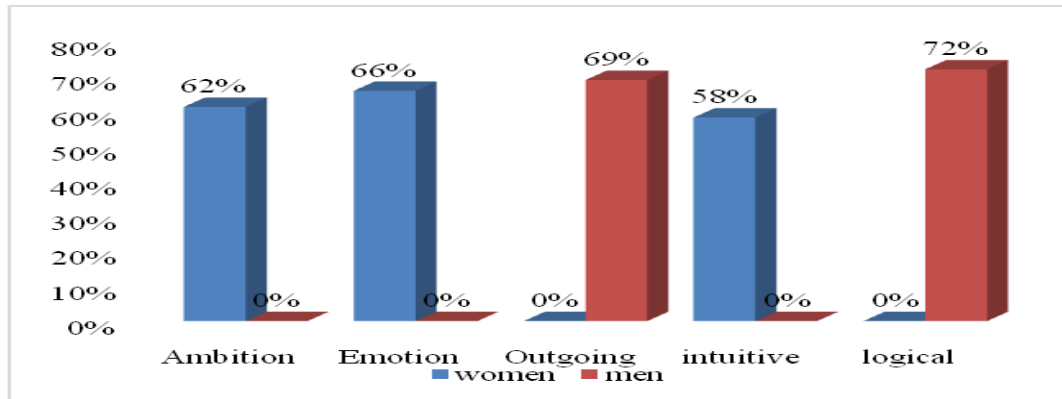
Figure 11. Response statistics of question 11.**Q 11: Women in educational leadership are more likely to use participative approach than men**

The question 12 asked the participants to define men’s and women’s leadership traits. About 17 traits were listed (arrogant, stubborn, enthusiastic, decisive, ambitious, inspiring, persuasive, outgoing, hardworking, communicable, honest, creative, intelligent, emotional, logical, intuitive, and visionary). Most of the participants assessed women leaders as ambitious, emotional and intuitive while others assessed men as more outgoing and logical. Other traits were assigned to both genders. Based on this statistics, we can conclude that, though women

are emotional, their intuition helps them to strive to fulfill their ambitions in life. Men are more outgoing, maybe due to the cultural background. As for being more logical, this can be the result of applying fewer emotions.

Figure 12. Response statistics of question 12.

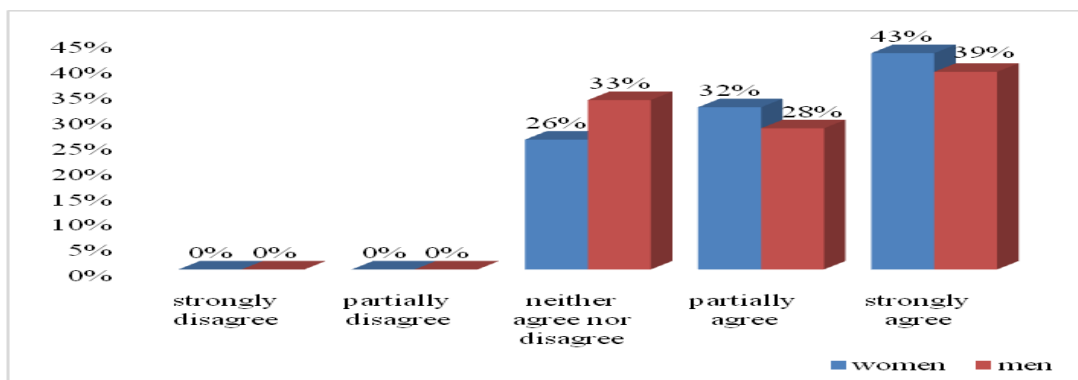
Q 12: Define men and women leadership traits



Each culture has its viewpoint about gender differences. The following question aimed to see whether Georgian society is culturally and mentally ready to see more women leaders in educational organizations for more efficient education system. As the results revile, both men and women-respondents have positive attitudes towards this issue, but with slightly different extent of agreement. It is notable that with a slightly different percentage 43% of women and 39% of men strongly agree that Georgian society is ready to see more women leaders in educational organizations for more efficient education system (still women seem to be more ready than men for it). This result, on the one hand, underlines the effectiveness of women leaders in Education settings in Georgia, and, on the other hand, proves that gender differences are not highlighted in Georgian culture and women are not culturally limited to lead educational organizations.

Figure 13. Response statistics of question 13.

Q 13: Georgian society is culturally and mentally ready to see more women leaders in educational organizations for more efficient education



The last item of the questionnaire was an open-ended question aiming to show respondents' point of view towards the characteristics that make women efficient leaders.

From 65 participants only 43 answered this question. Most women consider that characteristics such as rational thinking, intuition, besides, organizational, participative and communicational skills help women to be efficient leaders. Though, they also highlight that in many cases it depends on personal traits, not on gender.

We would like to cite one woman participant's response which we find extremely interesting.

"In society there is the common point of view that women are weak but it is the wrong attitude. I think that men and women have almost equal opportunities in any cases. However, in educational organizations there must be more women than men due to their characteristics. I think their creativity, communicable skills makes them effective leaders".

The overall picture of the questionnaire responses benefited the aim of the research to find out the attitude of Georgian educational community towards the effectiveness of women leaders in educational organizations, reasons causing the biases that may question women's efficiency in leadership, to depict the opposite genders' perception of being a leader and their point of view concerning stereotypes and restrictions that women face in leadership. The results confirmed the official statistics that the number of women exceeds the number of men in Georgian educational organizations, although both genders perceive themselves as leaders. The respondents believe that in Georgian educational settings men and women have equal opportunities to become a leader and show their efficiency in managing educational organizations. Though it is notable that men respondents consider women less effective due to their attitude towards family. Men and women respondents almost equally agree with the idea that financial decision making is better done by men rather than women. But this opinion, besides the real experience, could be based on cultural attitude of men's dominance in finance management and underline the reasons for limiting women in financial decision making. From the overall picture of the responses it is clear that Georgian culture does not create challenges for women in their managerial skills and we can assume that it is tolerant towards the gender issue in leadership. The survey also made it evident that men highlight more sensitive and encouraging leadership characteristics in women's advancement as leaders. As for participative leadership style, all respondents do not consider gender to be decisive in applying this approach. Based on the statistics, we can conclude that though women are emotional, their intuition helps them to strive to fulfill their ambitions in life. Georgian educational communities are ready to see more women leaders in educational organizations for more efficient education system. This result, on the one hand, underlines the effectiveness of women leaders in education settings and, on the other hand, proves that gender differences are not so much highlighted in Georgian culture and women are not limited to lead educational organizations. It is worth mentioning that rational thinking, intuition, besides, organizational, participative and communicational skills help women to be efficient leaders. In this case not the culture, but the habitual situation and the inertia towards changes may have an impact on the existing situation.

Interview Responses

Interviews were held with six women leaders in educational organizations. The respondents were selected based on their position. They were explained that interview responses would only be used for the purposes of the research. All the requirements to protect the confidentiality and anonymity were fulfilled while interview data gathering (unless the interviewee herself agreed that her name would be publicized). And, of course, a consent to participate in the research was obtained from them.

The interview questions aimed to find out:

1. Whether participants perceive themselves as leaders in education and what makes them think so
2. Their carrier path to the position of the leader
3. Participants' opinion concerning successful leadership
4. Participants' characteristics making them effective in leadership
5. The biases and stereotypes they encountered in their position
6. Whether women leaders are supported by other women-educators
7. Whether women leaders are supported by other men-educators
8. Some experiences that transformed or changed them as leaders
9. The changes they have done to outline their effectiveness.

Interview Analyses

All 6 respondents answered that they perceived themselves as leaders because, due to their current positions, they have made some successful steps to modernize the educational settings. They acknowledged that it was not easy to reach leadership positions as their career path required hard work, responsibility, persistence, love and loyalty to their job. To their minds, successful leadership is to have clear vision of your organization, being a good listener and lead the group as a whole, do the right thing when appropriate, apply changes that foster the development of the organization, set direction, share responsibilities, encourage and empower your followers to meet the goals of the vision. They outline responsibility as the main characteristic of a successful leader. For a good team work, a leader must consider team members' characteristics, skills and point of view. All respondents underlined the necessity of good communication skills to reveal and solve the problems in organization. As women are much more in educational organizations rather than men respondents consider that women are more supportive. As for the changes the respondents experienced throughout their leadership career all respondents said that they changed their character, became more severe, decisive and communicable. This response somehow broke down the stereotype that women leaders are more sensitive and less decisive and outgoing.

The responses to the question that aimed to depict what they did to make themselves more effective in leadership revealed some quite interesting facts which are discussed below.

Respondent 1: Maia Kobakhidze - the President of the Educational and Scientists Free Trade Union of Georgia (ESFTUG): "I was elected as the head of a primary school union structure in 2006. My biggest accomplishment in the structure was that I managed to change the practice of one-year employment contracts to open-ended employment contracts. This is still the only school in Georgia with open-ended employment contracts. We had a proper collective agreement between the Teachers' Union and the Ministry of Education". Maia Kobakhidze has also shown herself as a courageous and decisive leader, notwithstanding the barriers on her carrier path, and she continues working effectively in leading a successful organization.

The majority of respondents consider that their effectiveness has been proved by changing the attitudes in the organization. The main effective step made by them is reaching more communication among administrative staff, teachers, pupils and parents. One respondent who was a school director said that when she was appointed to this position, there were 647 pupils and 35 teachers at the school. She introduced many positive changes changed in the school, which increased the quality of education and the popularity of the school. She made teachers more responsible for pupils' learning outcomes by facilitating them more in their studying period and encouraging them to participate in different educational competition. Now she has 1100 pupils and 64 teachers at her school.

The overall picture of the interview responses reveal that women leaders in educational organizations are quite confident in their leadership skills. Although they encounter some challenges on their career path, they do not surrender and are decisive in their actions. All above- mentioned stories prove their braveness and persistence, which results in effective educational leadership.

Study Limitations

Though the study results met the goals of the research, it had some limitations that should be focused upon in future researches. The number of participants in both the questionnaire survey and interview is the main, which was cause to lack of funding for research ad time limitations (the research was undertaken for an MA thesis).

One limitation was that only computer owners with internet facilities could participate in it, so the majority of the participants, most probably, came from cities. Participants from villages could have given more insights to the research.

Another limitation can be considered the fact that the research evolved only those respondents who were already involved in Educational processes. It would be more desirable if future researches, studying the opportunities of women leaders in educational settings and their effectiveness, would involve students and people who are not in the educational organizations and consider their point of view.

Conclusion

Women typically value themselves based on the degree to which they are needed by members of their company, family and community. Women's abilities to share freely, collaborate, and build teamwork, distinguish them as good

and successful leaders. Women leaders tend to be more persuasive, assertive, determined, and willing to take risks than men leaders. Because women have strong skills to assess a situation from different angles, they are more convinced in their solutions to problems.

This study explores the experiences of current female leaders in educational organizations and argues that women can play an effective role in shaping a successful educational system. While attempting to become a leader in organizations, women have some but not direct challenges from cultural / traditional point of view.

Women meet the necessary skills and qualifications on many levels such as education, training, and experience. Women's style of leadership is effective in many organizations and has a positive influence on mission fulfillment. Many female leaders have adopted male traits and style of leadership which is seemingly successful for being appointed.

The effectiveness of women in leadership has been proven to be successful by their ability to influence the changes and carry out successfully their duties on different levels of leadership. Thus, today in Georgia there are more women in educational organizations compared to other spheres of life and they have become effective through their successful achievements.

The study revealed that there were a lower number of female leaders than male leaders in educational organizations. However, the conducted research also revealed the equal opportunities for both genders to become leaders, which may become the basis of changing the situation. The effectiveness of women leaders in educational settings was proved by the responses of both genders, which confirmed the readiness of Georgian educational community, therefore, Georgian society to see more women leaders in educational organizations due to their successful achievements in this field.

The interview in this study which involved six women leaders in educational organizations revealed women as strong, decisive, charismatic and self-confident leaders. They have done their best to prove their effectiveness during their leadership and benefited their organizations in many ways. Despite the hard career path to become effective leaders, their enthusiastic, responsible and hard-working characters accompanied their everyday leadership style. The responses to the interview questions also prove that women leaders are assertive and persuasive, have a strong desire to accomplish the steps they started and are willing to take risks.

It is worth mentioning that both questionnaire and the interview met the goal of the research and proved the effectiveness of women leaders in Georgian educational institutions. More such researches have to be taken, to enable women leaders find their deserved place in education system in Georgia.

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