**THE STRENGTH OF WOMEN LEADERS IN THE IMPROVEMENT OF EDUCATION QUALITY**

**Abstract**

by:

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The capabilities of women as leaders recently are still doubted by many people. Unfortunately, the number of women leaders, quantitatively, is still far below than that men. This research aims to identify the strength of women leaders in schools in improving education quality. It uses qualitative method based on grounded theory, which is performed in various education levels in Yogyakarta, Indonesia from April until September 2015. The data was gathered through in-depth interviews in order to formulate the leadership strength items. To maintain the data validity, some credibility standard steps were performed, such as performing data triangulation. The results show that there are seven aspects of women leader strengths, which are: (1) school leadership qualification aspect lies in physical maturity, competence, and formal legality, (2) performance aspect is the ability to do assignments in supporting the school performance, (3) character aspect which are unambitious, honest, patient, exemplary, and able to behave decisively. (4) leadership style which tend to be democratic, maternal, and collegial, (5) managerial aspect in achieving the school’s vision and mission, (6) mental, spiritual, and religious aspect, and (7) family support aspect as an external force in performing their activity as a leader. It can be concluded that women achieve leadership strength.

Keywords: Leadership strength; Women leader; Education quality; Improvement.

1. **Introduction**

Today, Indonesia is facing global problems, especially in the ever-changing, confusing, uncertain eras. Many institutional problems need new solutions, the abilities to become the front-runner in the competition of the world of work. The keyword to all of those is leadership (Nahiyah, 2013, p. 2).

Leader is a determining factor in the success or failure of an organization. The quality of a leader highly influences an organization’s success. Therefore, a leader is the key of success for an organization to realize its vision and mission.

Meanwhile, women leadership is a public issue that is always discussed. There are still many pros and cons toward women leaders on all levels of organizations and institutions. Many people still believe that women are less capable as leaders compared to men, as they’re regarded to be too emotional, and has less power.

The notion of women aren’t fit as leaders is still on debate, although the acknowledgement of basic human rights that includes the right of women to be equal with men is always defended and has gained a significant acknowledgement. This is enforced by the Presidential Regulation No. 5 year 2010 about the 2010-2014 National Medium Term Development Plan (RPJMN) about gender mainstreaming will be the soul and spirit that embody various development policies in every developmental areas.

Gender Mainstreaming (PUG) is a strategy to reduce the gender gap by using gender perspective in the development process in order for women and men to have the same access and control in all development processes, so both men and women are able to benefit from them.

Department of Education seemed to answer this issue, by giving the chance to women to formally become leaders in schools for all education levels and units. Regulation of the Minister of National Education of Indonesian Republic (Permendiknas RI) no. 13 year 2007 about the standard of a principal, doesn’t specify about gender requirement and mostly empashizes on the competence and capabilities.

The legal foundation that guarantees the gender equality has been formulated in the 1945 Constitution, article 27, which reads: “All citizens shall be equal before the law and the government and shall be required to respect the law and the government, with no exceptions.” Presidential Instruction no. 9 year 2000 about gender mainstreaming in national development states that all departments and non-department governmental institutions and provincial and district / city governments must perform gender mainstreaming in planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation from all development programs and policies. Aside those, there are numerous policies, legislations, presidential instructions, and regulations of the ministers which state the idea of the eradication of discrimination and supporting the realization of gender equality and equity.

The gap that exists nowadays, and the assumptions from various elements of society will certainly be very helpful in providing inputs to manifest the gender-equal society, so both men and women will have the same rights and opportunities.

Indonesia for quite a long time, has given the attention to the importance of the manifestation of gender equality. The matter to be given attention in the struggle for gender equality lies in the strategy and policy in determining access and control, so the opportunities can be optimally used for the mutual prosperity.

Some experiences showed that women leaders, in this case, principals, have proven themselves to be able to perform their job well. Although, in some cases, the negative issues still occur, hence some proofs, both theoretical and empirical, are still needed on what makes the strength of women leaders.

Education isn’t only regarded as the main element in the effort to enlighten a nation, but also as a social product or construction. Thus, education also has a role in forming a gender relation in the society. The emergence of women leaders seems to be accelerating the realization of gender equality. The proof of their capabilities as a leader can inspire the society so in time, the gender gap will diminish even further.

Leadership is complex. When someone speaks about leadership, it will be related to management, past reference, the present and future, handling of change or regulation of stability, a character, figure, or symbol, and influencing process. The thought behind the leadership concept changes as time goes by. The comprehension of leadership needs the leadership concepts to be applied with social contexts, and might differ by the place and time. Leadership is a process where someone or an individual is able to influence another person or group to achieve the desired group or organizational goal (Hemhill & Coons, 1957. Kartono, 1986. Greenberg, Baroon. 1997).

This research intends to find out the aspects that became the strength of women leaders in improving education quality, so that they will be able to be identified into items of women leadership strength, obtained inductively from the reviews of the exploration of occuring phenomenons, and give a clear picture of what makes the strength of women in leading educational institution.

1. **Method**

The research uses qualitative method, which involves data analysis and interpretation to find patterns from a certain phenomenon. The phenomenon is leadership strength. The research is based on grounded theory, in order to find the theory obtained inductively from the reviews of the exploration of occuring phenomenon.

Leadership strength are aspects that become the strength of women leaders in improving education quality. The findings from the observation and in-depth interviews will be compared with the theories related to the qualification in the position, the performance aspect, integrity character, and leadership style.

The research was done in various levels of education in Yogyakarta municipality, which are SD Ungaran 1 Kota Yogyakarta, SMP Negeri 7 Kota Yogyakarta, SMA Negeri 3 Yogyakarta, and SMK Negeri 6 Yogyakarta. The schools were chosen due to them being led by women principals and their status as outstanding schools on each education levels in Yogyakarta municipality. This research was performed from April 2015 to September 2015.

The subject and object of this research are the behavior of the principal, their words and values contained within, while the supporting data are photographs, documents and the opinions of students, teachers, or society toward the research focus.

Data was gathered through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation. The interview was used to gather a thorough information through a direct interaction with the research subject. Observation and documentation was performed as supporting data and for the purpose of data triangulation. In the effort of data gathering, principles of emic and etic, holistic, and consistency were used. The emic is in the form of the illustration of data resulting from the research in the field, while the etic is the explanation or interpretation of data attributed to the used theory framework (Tutin Aryani & Ira Ermandayani, 2012). Holistic principle: think systematically, referring to data wholly and completely, and consistency principle deals with the consistency in systems, observation, and categorization.

In order to test the data validity, transcribing and recording were done to the interview process, so the validity can be checked by comparing the written and recorded data, while considering the credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability or objectivity standards.

Data analysis technique used for the research is the model presented by Miles and Huburman (1992,p 2), which are data reduction phase, data presenting phase, and conclusion drawing and data verification.

1. **Results**

The finding of the research has been able to identify the strength of women leadership from these aspects:

1. **Qualification as a principal**

Every principal who leads legally and formally has the capacity to become a principal, which is having a minimum of bachelor degree, and age, of which all respondents shows the age of above 45 years old. The ranks, on average is Rank IV, has a special qualification as a teacher, and has a certificate as a teacher and as a principal. Therefore, the leadership strength on the aspect of qualification on all education units lie in the age maturity, competence, and formal legality. This is in accordance with the law no. 20 year 2003 about a person’s qualifications to be given the role of a principal.

1. **Performance**

The performance is strongly related to discipline, exemplary, spirit, and the dedicated time. Becoming a leader demands an outstanding performance, which shows the action pattern in completing all of the assignments. Performance is also determined by how much work can be done by the respondent.

1. **Has good characteristics**

The strength of the leader is also shown by the possession of good characters, which are unambitious, honest, patient, exemplary, and decisive.

1. **Unambitious**

An excerpt from in-depth interview finding with the principal of SMK 6 stated that “to be a principal, you can’t be ambitious, because even if you passed the test, it doesn’t guarantee your position.” The unambitiousness was shown with the management of feeling from the principal of SMA 3: “I was trusted as a principal, and because of that, I have to be able to do it.” The same with other opinions which stated that: “This role is a mandate, the challenge is the same, and it has to be carried on as well as possible.”

* 1. **Honest**

Honesty is also one of the strength of a leader. One of the important example in school management related to honesty is about the school finance. “A principal is not the one in charge of a school’s finance, but the one who manages it instead. So everything must stick to the established plan.”, stated by the principal of SMK 6. On finance-related matters, the three principals who are the respondents in this research, was none in charge of the finance, be it the School Operational Aid (BOS) or Regional School Operational Aid (BOSDA) funds. A principal has a large autonomy, including the usage of funds, but in the effort to maintain transparency and accountability, the financial aspects were completely managed by the schools’ treasurer.

* 1. **Patient**

Becoming a principal demands patience. As a principal, a person has to be patient in facing problems, as problems will be encountered often, both the easy and the difficult ones. Patience is also shown by the behavior observed by the author in serving teachers who seek services. It is clear from here that without sincerity, a leader will find it very difficult to perform the assignment. Patience is also shown by the principal of SMP 7. Amidst of her business, she came into a classroom to wait for the teacher back, did a clinical supervision, and faced various complaints from teachers and students.

* 1. **Exemplary**

Giving a good exemplary in attitude and behavior, arrive on time, tolerant, passionate and enthusiastic in working, being careful, not blaming someone when a trouble comes without concrete proof. These are observed in the attitude and behavior of the principal of SMA 3, who is humble but independent. Her humbleness was shown in her dress code, and the low profile way of greetings.

* 1. **Decisive**

Although all respondents generally have a motherly appearance, all of them exhibit a decisive / brave trait. The courage to warn the seniors, and sometimes showing angry expression were needed when there’s something not in line. The decisiveness was also shown by the principal of SMPN 7. Despite the gentle appearance, she’s able to warn people for the good of them.

Based on the traits above, it can be concluded that the characteristics that became the strength of the leaders are as follows:

Table 1. A leader’s characteristics

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **No** | **Qualification** | **Supporting Theory** |
| 1. | Unambitious | Organic leadership (Avery, 2004) |
| 2. | Honest | Power of Personality by Pat Heim and Chapman (1991), Suharsimi (1988) |
| 3. | Patient |
| 4. | Exemplary (disciplined, humble, independent) |
| 5. | Decisive / Brave |

1. **Managerial Ability**

Managerial ability can be observed through the strategy in managing school activities. Delegation with authority and responsibility were fully submitted to representatives and teachers, but still seriously observed and monitored.

The role of principal as a manager was shown through the placement of teachers and class rotations suitable with their competence, forming a team dealing with curriculum, means and infrastructures, so the eight education standards can be supported.

Generally, all respondents have a commitment to achieve their school’s vision and mission and they also feel that maintaining them is harder than obtaining them. Based on some of the interview and observation findings, in order to achieve the school’s vision and mission, a few things were performed, which are making breakthroughs to improve quality, creating and performing the school’s work plan consistently, and creating religious culture in the school.

1. **Leadership Style**

The leadership of SMK 6 principal is more democratic. Proven with the election process of the vice principal, although she has the right to choose one herself, it was handed to the mechanism determined by the ISO and added by the election procedure by voting. The same can be seen with the principal of SMPN 7. She showed a democratic trait in choosing her vice principals, although she already has her own candidate, the decision was handed to the forum through a balloting activity.

The principal of SMKN 6 is willing to receive suggestions from the teachers, vice principals, and others. She facilitates a briefing every Monday, such as when looking for a way to solve problems, like how to raise the image of the school’s graduates. Thus, she is open to various critics and suggestions toward improvements.

The leadership style of SMAN 3 principal is attributed to the relationship of the leader and the subordinates. She seemed to emphasize a collegial, familial, and togetherness leadership. This can be seen when the teachers were filing for certification, they worked in the principal’s room and seemed to have quite a close relationship with her.

Based on the findings of interviews and observations on all respondents, it shows that a democratic leadership is more dominant by the women leaders with the characteristics of familial, maternal, and collegial. Such leadership doesn’t reduce the power of leaders in education field, and it makes them closer with their subordinates instead.

1. **Problem Solving and Decision Making**

According to the interview findings with the respondents, the task they deemed difficult is to make decisions and find solutions. Making a decision is based on several considerations, be it logic, experience, or suggestions from colleagues or experienced people. One of the commonly taken step is by visiting senior teachers or former principal for their considerations and advices. The seniors’ experience in solving problems can be assessed as guides or considerations in finding a solution for the trouble being faced. The same goes when there are unsolved troubles. Some steps taken are consulting with supervisors for problems about learning, and consulting with the related Technical Implementation Unit (UPT) for employment problems.

How to deal with problems and making decisions seemed to be also influenced by the maturity factor. A mature leader makes him / her more intimate with the Almighty. Life is a mandate, so problems are dealt with patience and yielding. The conviction that problems always exist in life makes one has the conviction in making a decision. When difficulties cannot be overcome, there’s a conviction that a solution will come from the Almighty after humans has strived enough.

Based on the interview findings, there are numerous ways the women leaders do when facing troubles. Ranging from asking for advices, suggestions from colleagues, sticking to the rules, until the effort to yield and ask for the guidance of God, with the conviction that everything will be settled well. Some cases of decision making needs them to stick with the rules, because it is a good way to maintain something highly upheld.

1. **Innovation**

In order to develop the school, a leader strives to innovate on his / her leadership while still abiding to the familial leadership principle. Every women principal who serve as respondents in this research truly understands on what they have to do concerning with the school development. The principal of SD Ungaran 4developed activities aimed toward the demand of global competition through extracurricular activities, SMP 7 principal accustomed the spiritual activities and searched for the root of problems in the school, while the SMA 3 principal realized the uniqueness in the school she leads, she stated: “ It must be realized that all of the students here are smart, hence they have a high level of ego. They don’t want their ideas and creations to be imitated or identical with the others. This ego has to be managed, and the principal and teachers have to be able to guide them without frustrating or disappointing them.“

1. **Family Support**

In general, all of these women leaders have a strong support from their families, parental guidances, and the support from husbands and children who are gender-responsive. These supports make the respondents to carry out their roles as wives and mothers comfortably without excessive demands from their families. “For the career’s success, the family must be built first, so when the family finally be able to live well, then everything will be comfortable.” Hence the family will support the success of the careers of their members. The findings of this research illustrate that how a gender-responsive family truly supports the success of the leading women in education field.

1. **Conclusion and Recommendation**
2. **Conclusions:**
   1. The strength of leadership on all education units can be seen from the school leadership qualification aspect, which are: (a) physical maturity, (b) competence, and (c) formal legality.
   2. The strength of women leader from the performance aspect is the ability to perform core duties as a principal in the effort to support the school’s performance.
   3. Characteristics that shows the leader integritiy are: unambitious, honest, patient, exemplary, with disciplined, humble, and independent behaviors, and decisive.
   4. The implemented leadership style are democratic, familial, maternal, and collegial.
   5. Managerial ability of the women leaders in the effort to achieve the school’s vision and mission are shown through commitment, perseverance in reaching the goal, and the courage to try new breakthroughs.
   6. On the mental and spiritual strength aspect, they were shown by the piety, treating leadership as a mandate, and yielding to the Almighty, especially when facing troubles related to the institution they lead.
   7. External strength consisting of family, husband, and children supports which give the opportunity and motivation to take on the women leadership activities.
3. **Recommendation:**
4. The election of women leaders based on the age maturity, competence, and formal legality aspects are appropriate to be maintained.
5. The strength of women leaders based on performance aspect shows that performance isn’t determined by gender, hence the performance can be considered as a success indicator of a leader.
6. Character profiles from the women leaders need to be set as an example for other leaders, both men and women.
7. Leadership style and managerial ability implemented by the women leaders shows that with their flexibility, the leadership in schools can be carried out.
8. Managerial ability of women leaders in the effort to achieve the school’s vision and mission show that there’s no gender bias in improving education quality.
9. Mental, spiritual, and piety aspect needs to be made into main criterias from a leader, considering the immense demands and pressures they have to face in order for them to be able to stay calm in facing all troubles.
10. Family condition cannot be separated as a main supporter of the leadership outside the home. The aspirate leaders need to settle their family first, because a strong family is significantly helpful in a woman’s leadership. Aside that, gender-responsive family activities will be truly helpful in supporting all family members, especially the women to develop themselves optimally.

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