

# Transformational Exemplary Leadership Practices of Females: Challenges and Prospects

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## Abstract

This study explored the challenges faced by female leaders in four Jiangsu Province universities, as perceived by teachers, aiming to enhance high-quality college development. It identified hindering factors and proposed development directions for female leaders. A descriptive comparative-correlational approach was used, examining relationships and differences between variables with validated instruments modified for this study. Semi-structured interviews gathered data from key informants about their experiences, attitudes, and beliefs related to leadership practices. Statistical tools used included frequency count, percentage, weighted mean calculation, ranking, standard deviation, Spearman's rho Correlation Analysis, Mann-Whitney U Test, and Kruskal-Wallis H test. Results indicated that diverse respondent backgrounds provided a comprehensive understanding of female leadership effectiveness in Jiangsu. Generally positive ratings suggested effective leadership qualities in higher education. Demographic factors like sex and marital status significantly influenced vision inspiration. Challenges included work-family conflict, biases, and gender role expectations, but progress in gender equality and career opportunities was noted. Institutions were advised to support work-life balance, promote gender equality, foster inclusive leadership, and develop programs to address biases and stereotypes.

## Keywords

Transformational Exemplary Leadership; Female Leadership Practices; Challenges; Prospects.

## 1. Introduction

With social development, the number of women in leadership positions in tertiary education has been gradually increasing in China. Female leadership has become a significant force and a valuable talent reservoir. However, compared to their male counterparts, female leaders still occupy only a limited proportion of leadership positions in tertiary institutions, despite recent growth. Few female leaders reach core leadership roles within their organizations. It is rare to see female leaders alongside chairpersons in meetings, whether governmental or academic. Additionally, female leaders are often not given the recognition they deserve for their significant contributions to society and education. They are sometimes viewed negatively by the public, who may attribute their success solely to gender factors.

Leadership has garnered extensive attention within organizational research, with numerous studies exploring various facets (Bryman, 2018; Sahni & Sinha, 2018). While previous investigations have examined leadership styles, theories, and their consequences, there has been a notable lack of focus on women's leadership within the literature (Kellerman & Rhodes, as cited by Bilal et al., 2021).

The role of leaders involves empowering individuals to feel capable, knowledgeable, and interconnected. Exceptional leaders use their authority to benefit others, distributing power rather than retaining it, and empowering others to take action.

Scholars have devised leadership models within the field of education distinguished by specific leadership attributes that are clearly defined and adaptable to various educational settings (Berkovich, 2016). Furthermore, expanding on earlier research on transformational leadership, Poutiatine (as cited by Bilal et al., 2021) outlined nine principles of transformational leadership, serving as a guide for leaders: transformation differs from mere change; transformation necessitates consent to change; transformation invariably requires significant change; transformation encompasses all aspects of an individual's or organization's existence; transformational change is permanent; transformational change entails relinquishing the notion of control; transformational change entails elements of risk, apprehension, and forfeiture; transformational change always involves a broader worldview; and transformation continually moves towards greater identity integrity and wholeness.

Sun (2017) disclosed in an article titled "Why China Has Few Leaders?" that the People's Republic of China has never had a female president, nor have any women served on the Standing Committee, where all key decisions about running the country are made, since the party came to power in 1949. Mao Zedong famously proclaimed that "women hold up half the sky," so why, four decades after his death, are there still so few high-level female politicians in China? Despite the fact that China's constitution enshrines gender equality, discrimination remains on a large scale, according to political analysts. Existing retirement policies require female public servants to stop working up to 10 years earlier than men. For government employees, including those at state-owned enterprises, the mandatory retirement age for men is 60, while women retire at 50 or 55. Some experts argue this age gap perpetuates perceptions that women are physically unable to work as long as men and discourages employers from hiring women for long-term positions. It also leads to fewer opportunities for women seeking advancement in Chinese politics, where cadres only reach the height of power as they near their 60s.

The public tends to think that successful female leaders must have taken advantage of their gender, i.e., they may either have achieved their success because the public tolerates their performance, or they have won the favor of their male bosses for their beauty. Otherwise, they are deemed to have failed, or the public will create dramatic and absurd stories to prove that God favors successful female leaders instead of acknowledging the efforts and talents they put into their work. At the same time, the environment and atmosphere within organizations are rapidly changing. The traditional rigid leadership style represented by male leaders is no longer adaptable to the demands of society. Female leaders, with their softness, sensibility, and affinity, cater to the flexibility required in the present leadership atmosphere.

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), significant progress has been made in promoting women's rights and development, both globally and domestically, with continuous improvements in women's living and development conditions. The Chinese government at all levels has implemented proposals and measures to promote gender equality and the all-round development of women. More women have gained access to higher education. In 2018, female university undergraduates and junior college students made up 52.5% of all higher education students. Females comprised 51.2% of master's program students and 40.4% of doctoral program students. These figures partly explain the high percentage of female educational personnel in tertiary institutions in China and underscore the urgency of conducting such studies.

While it is heartening to see the achievements in promoting women's rights in China, significant challenges remain. Discrimination against women in the job market persists, and the level of women's participation and influence in decision-making and management still needs

improvement. Deep-seated gender stereotypes that perpetuate inequality between men and women continue to influence people's perceptions and behavior. As the vice-director of the president's office, I am responsible for the high-quality development of the college. With the increase of females in leadership, it is crucial to utilize the diverse skills and imaginative perspectives that female leaders bring, which are vital for the sustainable development of the college.

The goal of college management is to maximize its human resources, including female staff. Numerous studies show that female leaders help increase productivity, enhance collaboration, inspire organizational dedication, and improve fairness. Women leaders can introduce structural and cultural differences that drive effective solutions and bring unique transformational ideas to the team, enhancing teamwork. Greater gender diversity in the senior executive team corresponds to higher organizational performance, which is crucial for the college.

The researchers have received complaints and concerns from both female leaders and employees. The main challenges for women include strong domination and manipulation by men in the workplace, difficulties in creating supportive networks, balancing work and family, contradictory societal expectations, and biases against women. These barriers hinder the rise of women in leadership and, consequently, the high-quality development of the college.

Therefore, the researchers decided to study the transformational exemplary leadership practices of females to explore and analyze female leadership and the challenges and prospects faced by female leaders, with the goal of further improving the high-quality development of the college.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

The study aimed to find out the challenges faced by female leaders in selected universities in Jiangsu, China, to further improve the high-quality development of the college. In other words, the study sought to find out the factors hindering the development of female leaders and to point out the direction of development for them. To achieve this, the study explored the following questions:

(1) What is the profile of the respondents in terms of:

- 1) Sex
- 2) Age
- 3) Marital Status
- 4) Highest Educational Attainment
- 5) Years of Teaching

(2) What is the perception of the respondents regarding female leadership effectiveness in Jiangsu China higher education institutions when employing the following commitments of exemplary leadership of Kouzes and Posner:

- 1) Model the Way
- 2) Inspire a Shared Vision
- 3) Challenge the Process
- 4) Enable Others to Act
- 5) Encourage the Heart

(3) Are there significant differences in the perception of the respondents regarding female leadership effectiveness in Jiangsu China higher education institutions when their profile is taken as test factor?

(4) Are there significant relationship between the demographic profile of the respondents and their perception regarding female leadership effectiveness in Jiangsu China higher education institutions?

(5) What are the challenges and prospects of women faced daily in their position as a leader in higher education?

(6) What leadership framework can be proposed to enhance the organizational productivity and to show the continuum of behaviours in the higher institutions?

### 3. Hypotheses

This study tested the following hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

(1) There are no significant differences in the perception of the respondents regarding female leadership effectiveness in Jiangsu China higher education institutions when their profile is taken as test factor.

(2) There are no significant relationship between the respondents' demographic profile and their perception of male and female respondents regarding female leadership effectiveness in Jiangsu China higher education institutions?

### 4. Significance of the Study

Even though women are vaulting to leadership seats, communities remain adamantly resistant to women in leadership roles. This is also true of the trust given to women to hold high positions in China. Due to patriarchal influences, society too often perceives women as too flimsy to lead. This tendency, among many other deeply-seated and unconscious gender biases, forces potential women leaders to withdraw into their shells. Yet, women possess inherently strong attributes that can help lead more effectively.

The benefits that could be derived by higher education institutions from trusting the leadership potential of women would surely pave the way for the realization of set goals and priorities in the higher educational system. Specifically, the findings of the study could prove beneficial to the following groups/individuals:

The organization. The exploration of the qualities and experiences that contributed to women's leadership surely benefited the organization as a whole in that the organizational leadership was greatly improved once the female leaders' performance improved.

Female employees in the organization. By outlining challenges and opportunities shared by the female leaders, the study offered concrete steps that could be taken to move more female employees into leadership positions.

Female leaders in the organization. The study helped female leaders understand what characteristics were associated with leadership, which helped them address the challenges and encouraged them to take clear and decisive steps to develop their leadership potentials. Future researchers. The study might have encouraged and provided other researchers with additional references in the pursuit of the same field of interest.

### 5. Ethical Consideration

The process in the study with the title "Challenges of Female Leadership Effectiveness Employing Kouzes and Posner's Practices of Leadership Model: Basis for Proposed Action Plan to Improve Organizational Productivity" was one of the requirements for the partial fulfillment of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy major in Educational Leadership. It was clear to the researcher that the study was voluntary. The researchers understood that an interview was welcome about the challenges of the learnings that had been acquired in the study. Voluntary

participation of respondents was also ensured. Both the teacher and administrator respondents took part in the survey on a voluntary basis. No pressure or coercion was imposed.

Informed consent was guaranteed. Respondents participated based on informed consent. Full consent was obtained from the participants prior to the study. The researcher provided sufficient information to enable the participants to understand the implications of participation, and then they were free to make a decision about whether or not to do so. Communication in relation to the research was done with honesty and transparency. The researcher adhered to specific laws in the conduct of the study in the light of the COVID-19 Public Health emergency.

## 6. Results and Discussion

**Table 1.** Frequency and Percentage of Demographic Profile

| Sex                    | Counts     | Percentage to the Total |
|------------------------|------------|-------------------------|
| Male                   | 128        | 37%                     |
| Female                 | 215        | 63%                     |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>343</b> | <b>100%</b>             |
| Age                    |            |                         |
| 21-30                  | 22         | 6%                      |
| 31-45                  | 123        | 36%                     |
| 46-55                  | 92         | 27%                     |
| 55-65                  | 106        | 31%                     |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>343</b> | <b>100%</b>             |
| Marital Status         |            |                         |
| Single                 | 59         | 17%                     |
| Married                | 144        | 42%                     |
| Separated              | 71         | 21%                     |
| Divorced               | 69         | 20%                     |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>343</b> | <b>100%</b>             |
| Educational Attainment |            |                         |
| Bachelor's degree      | 145        | 42                      |
| Master's degree        | 114        | 33                      |
| Doctorate degree       | 84         | 25                      |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>343</b> | <b>100%</b>             |
| Years in Teaching      |            |                         |
| 1-10                   | 120        | 35                      |
| 11-20                  | 197        | 57                      |
| 21-30                  | 22         | 7                       |
| 31+                    | 4          | 1                       |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>343</b> | <b>100%</b>             |

Table 1 presented the respondents' profile, including their frequency and percentage from the total. Regarding gender, males accounted for 37% of respondents, while females comprised 63%, reflecting the predominant presence of females in the teaching profession, consistent with global trends. In terms of age, 6% fell within the 21-30 age group, 36% were aged 31-45, 27% were 46-55, and 31% were 55-65, indicating a broad age range among respondents. Marital

status revealed that 17% were single, 42% married, 21% separated, and 20% divorced, suggesting a significant portion of married or previously married individuals. Educational attainment showed that 42% held bachelor's degrees, 33% held master's degrees, and 25% held doctorates, with the majority holding bachelor's degrees. Regarding years in teaching, 35% had 1-10 years, 57% had 11-20 years, 7% had 21-30 years, and 1% had over 31 years, indicating a mix of experienced and newer teachers. Overall, the respondents represented a diverse spectrum, suggesting a rich background across variables, which could serve as a foundation for developing a developmental plan to enhance the leadership capabilities of female educational administrators.

**Table 2.** Perception of the Respondents on the Effectiveness of Female Leadership in Jiangsu Higher Education Institutions as to Modelling the Way

| Indicators                                                                                                                                      | Mean        | SD          | Verbal Interpretation | Rank |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|------|
| 1. Female leaders set a personal example of what is expected.                                                                                   | 3.09        | .912        | Effective             | 3.5  |
| 2. Female leaders talk about future trends that will influence how work gets done.                                                              | 3.11        | .963        | Effective             | 2    |
| 3. Female leaders seek out challenging opportunities that test the skills and abilities.                                                        | 3.06        | .919        | Effective             | 5    |
| 4. Female leaders develop cooperative relationships among the people they work with.                                                            | 3.16        | .902        | Effective             | 1    |
| 5. Female leaders build consensus around a common set of values for running the organization                                                    | 3.04        | .968        | Effective             | 7    |
| 6. Female leaders ask for feedback on how her actions affect other people's performance                                                         | 3.09        | .932        | Effective             | 3.5  |
| 7. Female leaders spend time and energy making certain that people they work with adhere to the principles and standards they have to agree on. | 3.05        | .987        | Effective             | 6    |
| <b>Composite Mean</b>                                                                                                                           | <b>3.09</b> | <b>.728</b> | <b>Effective</b>      |      |

Legend: 1.00-1.50, Strongly disagree (not at all effective); 1.51-2.50, Disagree (not effective); 2.51-3.50, Agree (Effective); 3.51-4.00, Strongly Agree (Very effective).

Table 2 presented the respondents' perception of the effectiveness of female leadership, focusing on modeling the way. The grand mean was 3.09 with a standard deviation of .728, indicating an overall agreement and effectiveness in this aspect. The SD suggested that most data points clustered around the mean, with some slight deviations. This aligned with the results of the SW test.

The evaluation revealed that females were effectively leading and modeling the way inherent to their leadership roles. Indicator 4, which highlighted the development of cooperative relationships, showcased their commitment to this essential aspect of leadership. However, indicator 5, concerning the building of consensus around common values, received the lowest mean among the indicators, though still within the effective range. This indicated an opportunity for female leaders to align their practices more closely with a standard comparable to their male counterparts.

These findings contradicted the claims of Meng and Baker (2018) and Garves (2018), who suggested that outdated Chinese consciousness influenced gender stereotypes, particularly prescriptive gender stereotypes. The current study indicated that female leaders were adept at developing consensus and cooperative relationships, as well as establishing common values, challenging traditional beliefs about women's conduct. Analysis of the data suggested that female leaders embraced traits such as individuality, decisiveness, dominance, and competence,

which contradicted the chained Chinese norm typically associated with men. This contrasted with the findings of Krawczynszyn (2021).

**Table 3.** Perception of the Respondents on the Effectiveness of Female Leadership in Jiangsu Higher Education Institutions as to Inspiring a Shared Vision

| Indicators                                                                                                  | Mean | SD   | Verbal Interpretation | Rank |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|-----------------------|------|
| 1. Female leaders describe a compelling image of what their future could be like                            | 3.07 | .923 | Effective             | 5    |
| 2. Female leaders challenge people to try out new and innovative ways to do their work.                     | 3.05 | .958 | Effective             | 7    |
| 3. Female leaders actively listen to diverse points of view.                                                | 3.10 | .978 | Effective             | 4    |
| 4. Female leaders appeal to others to share an exciting dream of the future                                 | 3.14 | .923 | Effective             | 2    |
| 5. Female leaders show others how their long-term interests can be realized by enlisting in a common vision | 3.13 | .959 | Effective             | 3    |
| 6. Female leaders paint the "big picture" of what we aspire to accomplish                                   | 3.06 | .985 | Effective             | 6    |
| 7. Female leaders speak with genuine conviction about the higher meaning and purpose of our work            | 3.16 | .945 | Effective             | 1    |
| <b>Composite Mean</b>                                                                                       | 3.10 | .772 | Effective             |      |

Legend: 1.00-1.50, Strongly disagree (not at all effective); 1.51-2.50, Disagree (not effective); 2.51-3.50, Agree (Effective); 3.51-4.00, Strongly Agree (Very effective).

Table 3 presented the respondents' perception of the effectiveness of female leadership, particularly in inspiring a shared vision. The grand mean was 3.10 with a standard deviation of .772, indicating an overall agreement and effectiveness in this aspect. The SD suggested that most data points clustered around the mean, with some slight deviations. This validated the results of the SW test.

The evaluation revealed that females were on the verge of inspiring a shared vision among their people. Indicator 7 (M, 3.16; SD .945), which highlighted female leaders speaking with genuine conviction about the higher meaning and purpose of work, showcased their leadership's unique characteristic in orchestrating a sound drive for making a difference. However, indicator 2 (M, 3.05; SD, .958), concerning female leaders challenging people to try out new and innovative ways of working, received the lowest mean among the seven indicators, though still within the effective range. This indicated that female leaders were at least challenging their people to innovate their work.

These findings contradicted the claims of Ebrey (2020), who underscored the Yin-Yang Theory, suggesting that the natural relationship between yin and yang dictates men lead and women follow. This contradicted the prescriptive gender stereotypes outlined by Graves (2018), where women were expected to demonstrate collective qualities.

On the other hand, women leaders were now on the verge of modernization, perceived as passionate and creative in their work, viewing the world through a lens of opportunity as powerful agents of change. Kambala (2021) claimed that women were now genuine and practical, key players in strategic thinking, innovative, action-focused, sociable, adaptable, and effective in interpersonal environments.

**Table 4.** Perception of the Respondents on the Effectiveness of Female Leadership in Jiangsu Higher Education Institutions as to Challenging the Process

| Indicators                                                                                                                                       | Mean | SD   | Verbal Interpretation | Rank |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|-----------------------|------|
| 1. Female leaders seek out challenging opportunities that test her own skills and abilities                                                      | 3.09 | .966 | Effective             | 7    |
| 2. Female leaders challenge people to try out new and innovative ways to do their work                                                           | 3.12 | .934 | Effective             | 2    |
| 3. Female leaders actively search for innovative ways to improve what we do                                                                      | 3.10 | .953 | Effective             | 6    |
| 4. Female leaders ask "What can we learn?" when things don't go as expected                                                                      | 3.11 | .919 | Effective             | 4    |
| 5. Female leaders identify measurable milestones that keep projects moving forward                                                               | 3.11 | .934 | Effective             | 4    |
| 6. Female leaders take initiative in anticipating and responding to change                                                                       | 3.11 | .929 | Effective             | 4    |
| 7. Female leaders encourage the diversity of perspectives, and innovatively adapting strategies to overcome obstacles and drive positive change. | 3.13 | .921 | Effective             | 1    |
| <b>Composite Mean</b>                                                                                                                            | 3.11 | .749 | Effective             |      |

Legend: 1.00-1.50, Strongly disagree (not at all effective); 1.51-2.50, Disagree (not effective); 2.51-3.50, Agree (Effective); 3.51-4.00, Strongly Agree (Very effective).

Table 4 presented the respondents' perception of the effectiveness of female leadership, particularly in challenging the process. It was noted that the grand mean was 3.11 with a standard deviation of .749, indicating an overall agreement and effectiveness in this aspect (Researcher, Year). The SD suggested that most data points clustered around the mean, with some slight deviations. This validated the results of the SW test.

The evaluation revealed that females were on the verge of inspiring a shared vision among their people. Indicator 7 (Mean, 3.13; SD, .921), which highlighted female leaders encouraging diversity of perspectives and innovatively adapting strategies to overcome obstacles and drive positive change, showcased their unique characteristic in leading people to innovate strategies amidst diversification measures. However, indicator 1, which stated that female leaders seek out challenging opportunities to test their own skills and abilities, received the lowest mean (Mean, 3.09; SD, .966) among the seven indicators, though still within the effective range. This indicated that female leaders were at least considering challenging opportunities that would test them rigorously in their leadership roles. Thus, women leaders were beginning to embrace the idea of taking on the most challenging tasks and performances, learning risk-taking behaviors as a springboard for greater heights in their careers as academic leaders.

These findings contradicted the findings of Dong (2021) and Sun (2015). Dong (2021) suggested that women did not seek to enter traditionally male-dominated fields but instead pursued opportunities overseas. Conversely, Sun (2015) claimed that women were not at the cutting edge of leadership, as gender differences were still prevalent within the native Chinese culture. However, in the current study, female leaders were seen to seek challenging opportunities within the male-dominated spectrum of work, testing their skills and abilities in leading people, particularly in academia (Dong, 2021; Sun, 2015). Nonetheless, Sun (2015) noted that her findings were limited by constraints such as the number of respondents, as only a few were engaged in leading higher education institutions.

**Table 5.** Perception of the Respondents on the Effectiveness of Female Leadership in Jiangsu Higher Education Institutions as to enabling Others to Act

| Indicators                                                                                                       | Mean | SD   | Verbal Interpretation | Rank |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|-----------------------|------|
| 1. Female leaders develop cooperative relationships among the people she works with                              | 3.05 | .960 | Effective             | 7    |
| 2. Female leaders actively listen to diverse points of view                                                      | 3.07 | .974 | Effective             | 5    |
| 3. Female leaders treat others with dignity and respect.                                                         | 3.12 | .970 | Effective             | 1    |
| 4. Female leaders involve people in the decisions that directly impact their job performance                     | 3.10 | .974 | Effective             | 3    |
| 5. Female leaders give people a great deal of freedom and choice in deciding how to do their work                | 3.11 | .946 | Effective             | 2    |
| 6. Female leaders ensure that people grow in their jobs by learning new skills and developing themselves         | 3.06 | .969 | Effective             | 6    |
| 7. Female leaders enable others to act by cultivating inclusive cultures, and nurturing mentorship opportunities | 3.09 | .951 | Effective             | 4    |
| <b>Composite Mean</b>                                                                                            | 3.09 | .742 | Effective             |      |

Legend: 1.00-1.50, Strongly disagree (not at all effective); 1.51-2.50, Disagree (not effective); 2.51-3.50, Agree (Effective); 3.51-4.00, Strongly Agree (Very effective).

Table 5 presented the respondents' perception of the effectiveness of female leadership, particularly in enabling others to act. It was noted that the grand mean was 3.09 with a standard deviation of .742, indicating an overall agreement and effectiveness in this aspect. The SD suggested that the majority of data points clustered around the mean or were relatively close to it, with some slight deviations or fluctuations. This validated the results of the SW test.

The evaluation revealed that females were on the verge of inspiring a shared vision among their people. Indicator 3 (Mean, 3.12; SD, .970), which highlighted female leaders treating others with dignity and respect, showcased their special characteristic of embodying dignity and respect for others. However, indicator 1, which stated that female leaders developed cooperative relationships among the people she worked with, received the lowest mean (Mean, 3.05; SD, .960) among the seven indicators, though still falling within the effective range. This indicated that female leaders fell short in developing cooperative works among their people compared to the other indicators.

These findings aligned with the findings of Pan et al. (2019), who explored the relationship between female executives and strategic deviance. They found that strategic deviance inherent to women leaders was important for companies to differentiate themselves from the conventional behavior of the industry to be more competitive. In the current study, women leaders treated others with dignity and respect, in addition to the usual collective qualities associated with women (Graves, 2018).

However, it is worth noting that Reding (2020) began exploring exemplary leadership more than four decades ago. Reding's research also employed Kouzes and Posner's leadership structure, predicting that leadership is "not about who you are and your gender, it's about what you do and contribute to the success of the organization." Thus, based on the analysis of the indicators of this construct, it can be said that female leaders effectively enable others to act (Reding, 2020).

Table 6 presented the respondents' perception of the effectiveness of female leadership, particularly in encouraging the heart of their people. It was noted that the grand mean was 3.11 with a standard deviation of .747, indicating an overall agreement and effectiveness in this aspect. The SD suggested that the majority of data points clustered around the mean or were

relatively close to it, with some slight deviations or fluctuations. This validated the results of the SW test.

**Table 6.** Perception of the Respondents on the Effectiveness of Female Leadership in Jiangsu Higher Education Institutions as to Encouraging the Heart

| Indicators                                                                                                               | Mean | SD   | Verbal Interpretation | Rank |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|-----------------------|------|
| 1. Female leaders praise people for a job well don                                                                       | 3.20 | .962 | Effective             | 3    |
| 2. Female leaders make it a point to let people know about his/her confidence in their abilities                         | 3.08 | .964 | Effective             | 6    |
| 3. Female leaders make sure that people are creatively recognized for their contributions to the success of our projects | 3.09 | .910 | Effective             | 4.5  |
| 4. Female leaders publicly recognize people who exemplify commitment to shared values                                    | 3.09 | .951 | Effective             | 4.5  |
| 5. Female leaders tell stories of encouragement about the good work of others                                            | 3.05 | .965 | Effective             | 7    |
| 6. Female leaders get personally involved in recognizing people and celebrating accomplishments                          | 3.14 | .957 | Effective             | 1    |
| 7. Female leaders inspire and encourage the heart by cultivating a sense of belonging and purpose within their teams.    | 3.13 | .958 | Effective             | 2    |
| <b>Composite Mean</b>                                                                                                    | 3.11 | .747 | Effective             |      |

Legend: 1.00-1.50, Strongly disagree (not at all effective); 1.51-2.50, Disagree (not effective); 2.51-3.50, Agree (Effective); 3.51-4.00, Strongly Agree (Very effective).

The evaluation revealed that females were on the verge of inspiring a shared vision among their people. Indicator 6 (Mean, 3.14; SD, .957), which highlighted female leaders getting personally involved in recognizing people and celebrating accomplishments, showcased their special characteristic towards winning the hearts and sympathies of their people. However, indicator 5, which stated that female leaders told stories of encouragement about the good work of others, received the lowest mean (Mean, 3.05; SD, .965) among the seven indicators, though still falling within the effective range. This indicated that female leaders fell short in inspiring others using the cornerstone of others' stories. It can be underscored that there is synergy in underscoring the success stories of other people as it inspires others by leaving a mental schema worthy of emulation. This is how other people get inspired.

These findings aligned with the claims of Graves (2018) and Kambala (2021). Graves (2018) stipulated that women are into prescriptive gender stereotypes as they are expected to demonstrate collective qualities such as pleasantness, responsive articulateness, furtherance, and compassion. On the other hand, Kambala (2021) claimed that aside from being sociable, women leaders are now adaptable and work well in interpersonal environments.

Corroborating the results with these findings in relation to Kouzes and Posner's leadership structure, it can be said that the women leaders in the current study exuded a unique characteristic differing from the customary male spectrum. In the structure, it is stipulated that predicting leadership is "not about who you are and your gender it's about what you do and contribute to the success of the organization. Thus, women leaders are potential leaders given the chance to challenge the status quo in China, a culture that puts man on top of everything.

**Table 7.** Difference on the Perception of Female Leadership Effectiveness when the respondents are grouped by Sex

| Constructs              |        | Mean | SD   | Mean Rank | Sum of Ranks | U-value  | p-value | Decision  |
|-------------------------|--------|------|------|-----------|--------------|----------|---------|-----------|
| Model the way           | Male   | 3.03 | .751 | 163.31    | 20904.00     | 12648.00 | .207    | Accept Ho |
|                         | Female | 3.12 | .715 | 177.17    | 38092.00     |          |         |           |
| Inspire a shared vision | Male   | 3.05 | .749 | 158.05    | 20230.00     | 11974.00 | .043*   | Reject Ho |
|                         | Female | 3.13 | .786 | 180.31    | 38766.00     |          |         |           |
| Challenge the process   | Male   | 3.08 | .757 | 167.96    | 21489.50     | 13242.50 | .557    | Accept Ho |
|                         | Female | 3.13 | .748 | 174.41    | 37497.50     |          |         |           |
| Enable others to act    | Male   | 3.07 | .739 | 167.36    | 21421.50     | 13165.50 | .500    | Accept Ho |
|                         | Female | 3.10 | .746 | 174.77    | 37574.50     |          |         |           |
| Encourage the heart     | Male   | 3.10 | .791 | 171.88    | 22000.00     | 13744.00 | .986    | Accept Ho |
|                         | Female | 3.12 | .722 | 172.07    | 36996.00     |          |         |           |

Legend. \*significant at .05 level.

Table 7 presented the group descriptive on the five constructs of effective leadership of women when grouped by sex. It showed that the construct on inspiring a shared vision posted significant results ( $U=11974.00$ ;  $SD=.043$ ). Also, the mean difference of .80, in favor of the females, posted a great margin. This indicated that the null hypothesis specifically for this construct was rejected. This meant that sex, particularly female, was attributable to the ability to inspire a shared vision – a unique characteristic of female leaders.

On the other hand, no significant differences were found in the four remaining constructs: model the way ( $U=12648.00$ ;  $p=.207$ ); challenge the process ( $U=13242.50$ ;  $p=.557$ ); enabling others ( $U=13165.50$ ;  $p=.500$ ); and encourage the heart ( $U=13744.00$ ;  $p=.986$ ). The p-values, which were greater than .05, suggested that there were no significant differences in the posted means between male and female respondents in the study. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted in these particular constructs of effective leadership.

The foregoing results implied that female leaders in the locale of the study were known to leave a unique and inherent practice on inspiring a shared vision through their motherly figure and attributes. Supporting these findings, Reding (2020) in "The Dynamic of Women Leading Women in Higher Education" further corroborated the effectiveness of women in leadership roles. Reding's study, published in the Journal of Women in Educational Leadership, emphasized that women leaders in higher education were particularly successful in creating supportive environments, fostering collaboration, and driving institutional success. This research highlighted the unique strengths of female leadership in educational settings, reinforcing the positive impact women leaders have on organizational effectiveness (Reding, 2020). However, they were found to fall short in terms of modeling the way, challenging the process, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart.

Table 8 presented the group descriptive on the five constructs of effective leadership of women when grouped by age along with H-test in testing significant differences between and among the perception of the varying groups. The analysis of Kruskal-Wallis H-test revealed that the p-values were greater than .05 across all five constructs of effective leadership: model the way ( $H=1.755$ ,  $p=.625$ ); inspire a shared vision ( $H=4.187$ ,  $p=.242$ ); challenge the process ( $H=1.009$ ,  $p=.799$ ); enable others to act ( $H=2.636$ ,  $p=.451$ ); and encourage the heart ( $H=4.513$ ,  $p=.211$ ). Evident by the meager mean difference across the age groups, it meant that age was not a considerable factor in distinguishing the leadership attributes of women along the five areas. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted.

**Table 8.** Difference on the Perception of Female Leadership Effectiveness when the respondents are grouped by Age

| Constructs              |       | Mean | SD   | Mean Rank | H-value | p-value | Interpretation  | Decision  |
|-------------------------|-------|------|------|-----------|---------|---------|-----------------|-----------|
| Model the way           | 21-30 | 3.25 | .603 | 186.50    | 1.755   | .625    | Not significant | Accept Ho |
|                         | 31-45 | 3.09 | .752 | 177.09    |         |         |                 |           |
|                         | 46-55 | 3.15 | .653 | 172.45    |         |         |                 |           |
|                         | 55-65 | 2.99 | .782 | 162.69    |         |         |                 |           |
| Inspire a shared vision | 21-30 | 3.34 | .614 | 206.18    | 4.187   | .242    | Not significant | Accept Ho |
|                         | 31-45 | 3.08 | .777 | 167.65    |         |         |                 |           |
|                         | 46-55 | 3.17 | .737 | 179.38    |         |         |                 |           |
|                         | 55-65 | 3.01 | .819 | 163.55    |         |         |                 |           |
| Challenge the process   | 21-30 | 3.29 | .570 | 189.11    | 1.009   | .799    | Not significant | Accept Ho |
|                         | 31-45 | 3.10 | .788 | 173.91    |         |         |                 |           |
|                         | 46-55 | 3.17 | .664 | 171.30    |         |         |                 |           |
|                         | 55-65 | 3.03 | .802 | 166.84    |         |         |                 |           |
| Enable others to act    | 21-30 | 3.28 | .644 | 199.27    | 2.636   | .451    | Not significant | Accept Ho |
|                         | 31-45 | 3.06 | .759 | 168.72    |         |         |                 |           |
|                         | 46-55 | 3.17 | .662 | 177.88    |         |         |                 |           |
|                         | 55-65 | 3.00 | .801 | 165.21    |         |         |                 |           |
| Encourage the heart     | 21-30 | 3.23 | .579 | 177.18    | 4.513   | .211    | Not significant | Accept Ho |
|                         | 31-45 | 3.12 | .762 | 174.61    |         |         |                 |           |
|                         | 46-55 | 3.21 | .690 | 185.32    |         |         |                 |           |
|                         | 55-65 | 2.99 | .799 | 156.34    |         |         |                 |           |

Legend. \*significant at .05 level

Table 9 presented the group descriptive on the five constructs of effective leadership of women when grouped by marital status along with H-test in testing significant differences between and among the perception of the varying groups. The analysis of Kruskal-Wallis H-test revealed that the p-values were greater than .05 across all five constructs of effective leadership: model the way ( $H=5.247$ ,  $p=.155$ ); inspire a shared vision ( $H=4.441$ ,  $p=.218$ ); challenge the process ( $H=5.552$ ,  $p=.136$ ); enable others to act ( $H=.833$ ,  $p=.842$ ); and encourage the heart ( $H=1.566$ ,  $p=.661$ ). This meant that there were no significant differences in the perceived effectiveness of

women academic leaders when the respondents were grouped by their marital status. Evident by the meager mean difference across the marital status groups, it meant that marital status was not a considerable factor in distinguishing the leadership attributes of women along the five areas. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted.

**Table 9.** Difference on the Perception of Female Leadership Effectiveness when the respondents are grouped by Marital Status

| Constructs              |           | Mean | SD   | Mean Rank | H- value | p-value | Interpretation  | Decision  |
|-------------------------|-----------|------|------|-----------|----------|---------|-----------------|-----------|
| Model the way           | Single    | 3.14 | .705 | 1479.45   | 5.247    | .155    | Not significant | Accept Ho |
|                         | Married   | 3.12 | .783 | 187.44    |          |         |                 |           |
|                         | Separated | 3.02 | .725 | 155.70    |          |         |                 |           |
|                         | Divorced  | 3.01 | .737 | 160.01    |          |         |                 |           |
| Inspire a shared vision | Single    | 3.18 | .736 | 185.10    | 4.441    | .218    | Not significant | Accept Ho |
|                         | Married   | 3.07 | .874 | 164.82    |          |         |                 |           |
|                         | Separated | 3.05 | .785 | 161.51    |          |         |                 |           |
|                         | Divorced  | 3.02 | .823 | 161.51    |          |         |                 |           |
| Challenge the process   | Single    | 3.14 | .723 | 172.01    | 5.552    | .136    | Not significant | Accept Ho |
|                         | Married   | 3.16 | .805 | 190.56    |          |         |                 |           |
|                         | Separated | 3.02 | .747 | 151.05    |          |         |                 |           |
|                         | Divorced  | 3.11 | .765 | 177.67    |          |         |                 |           |
| Enable others to act    | Single    | 3.11 | .739 | 173.04    | .833     | .842    | Not significant | Accept Ho |
|                         | Married   | 3.11 | .778 | 180.52    |          |         |                 |           |
|                         | Separated | 3.07 | .728 | 169.37    |          |         |                 |           |
|                         | Divorced  | 3.03 | .744 | 165.25    |          |         |                 |           |
| Encourage the heart     | Single    | 3.16 | .746 | 178.99    | 1.566    | .667    | Not significant | Accept Ho |
|                         | Married   | 3.12 | .729 | 172.08    |          |         |                 |           |
|                         | Separated | 3.07 | .756 | 162.38    |          |         |                 |           |
|                         | Divorced  | 3.05 | .765 | 167.24    |          |         |                 |           |

Legend. \*significant at .05 level.

**Table 10.** Difference on the Perception of Female Leadership Effectiveness when the respondents are grouped by Education

| Constructs              |     | Mean | SD   | Mean Rank | H- value | p-value | Interpretation  | Decision  |
|-------------------------|-----|------|------|-----------|----------|---------|-----------------|-----------|
| Model the way           | BS  | 3.13 | .679 | 177.36    | 1.191    | .551    | Not significant | Accept Ho |
|                         | MA  | 3.08 | .758 | 172.09    |          |         |                 |           |
|                         | PhD | 3.02 | .772 | 162.63    |          |         |                 |           |
| Inspire a shared vision | BS  | 3.14 | .764 | 181.63    | 3.277    | .194    | Not significant | Accept Ho |
|                         | MA  | 3.11 | .762 | 170.56    |          |         |                 |           |
|                         | PhD | 3.12 | .804 | 157.33    |          |         |                 |           |
| Challenge the process   | BS  | 3.12 | .732 | 170.16    | .088     | .957    | Not significant | Accept Ho |
|                         | MA  | 3.12 | .764 | 173.37    |          |         |                 |           |
|                         | PhD | 3.09 | .766 | 173.32    |          |         |                 |           |
| Enable others to act    | BS  | 3.11 | .721 | 175.44    | .308     | .380    | Not significant | Accept Ho |
|                         | MA  | 3.09 | .731 | 169.68    |          |         |                 |           |
|                         | PhD | 3.04 | .798 | 169.20    |          |         |                 |           |
| Encourage the heart     | BS  | 3.10 | .710 | 166.22    | 2.518    | .284    | Not significant | Accept Ho |
|                         | MA  | 3.16 | .766 | 183.95    |          |         |                 |           |
|                         | PhD | 3.06 | .789 | 165.76    |          |         |                 |           |

Legend. \*significant at .05 level

Table 10 presented the group descriptive on the five constructs of effective leadership of women when grouped by education along with H-test in testing significant differences between and among the perception of the varying groups. The analysis of Kruskal-Wallis H-test revealed that the p-values were greater than .05 across all five constructs of effective leadership: model the way ( $H=1.191$ ,  $p=.551$ ); inspire a shared vision ( $H=3.277$ ,  $p=.194$ ); challenge the process ( $H=.088$ ,  $p=.957$ ); enable others to act ( $H=.308$ ,  $p=.380$ ); and encourage the heart ( $H=2.518$ ,  $p=.284$ ). This meant that there were no significant differences in the perceived effectiveness of women academic leaders when the respondents were grouped by their education. Evident by the meager mean difference across the education groups, it meant that education was not a considerable factor in distinguishing the leadership attributes of women along the five areas. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted.

**Table 11.** Difference on the Perception of Female Leadership Effectiveness when the respondents are grouped by Years in Teaching

| Constructs              |       | Mean | SD   | Mean Rank | H-value | p-value | Interpretation  | Decision  |
|-------------------------|-------|------|------|-----------|---------|---------|-----------------|-----------|
| Model the way           | 1-10  | 3.07 | .731 | 1479.45   | 5.247   | .155    | Not significant | Accept Ho |
|                         | 11-20 | 3.07 | .745 | 187.44    |         |         |                 |           |
|                         | 21-30 | 3.26 | .571 | 155.70    |         |         |                 |           |
|                         | 31+   | 3.50 | .502 | 160.01    |         |         |                 |           |
| Inspire a shared vision | 1-10  | 3.11 | .770 | 185.10    | 4.441   | .218    | Not significant | Accept Ho |
|                         | 11-20 | 3.07 | .785 | 164.82    |         |         |                 |           |
|                         | 21-30 | 3.27 | .705 | 161.51    |         |         |                 |           |
|                         | 31+   | 3.50 | .474 | 161.51    |         |         |                 |           |
| Challenge the process   | 1-10  | 3.11 | .751 | 172.01    | 5.552   | .136    | Not significant | Accept Ho |
|                         | 11-20 | 3.09 | .756 | 190.56    |         |         |                 |           |
|                         | 21-30 | 3.20 | .745 | 151.05    |         |         |                 |           |
|                         | 31+   | 3.43 | .421 | 177.67    |         |         |                 |           |
| Enable others to act    | 1-10  | 3.09 | .745 | 173.04    | .833    | .842    | Not significant | Accept Ho |
|                         | 11-20 | 3.06 | .740 | 180.52    |         |         |                 |           |
|                         | 21-30 | 3.23 | .787 | 169.37    |         |         |                 |           |
|                         | 31+   | 3.50 | .502 | 165.25    |         |         |                 |           |
| Encourage the heart     | 1-10  | 3.11 | .731 | 178.99    | 1.566   | .667    | Not significant | Accept Ho |
|                         | 11-20 | 3.08 | .765 | 172.08    |         |         |                 |           |
|                         | 21-30 | 3.27 | .702 | 162.38    |         |         |                 |           |
|                         | 31+   | 3.71 | .308 | 167.24    |         |         |                 |           |

Legend. \*significant at .05 level.

Table 11 presented the group descriptive on the five constructs of effective leadership of women when grouped by years in teaching along with H-test in testing significant differences between and among the perception of the varying groups. The analysis of Kruskal-Wallis H-test revealed that the p-values were greater than .05 across all five constructs of effective leadership: model the way ( $H=5.247$ ,  $p=.155$ ); inspire a shared vision ( $H=4.441$ ,  $p=.218$ ); challenge the process ( $H=5.552$ ,  $p=.136$ ); enable others to act ( $H=.833$ ,  $p=.342$ ); and encourage the heart ( $H=1.566$ ,  $p=.667$ ). This meant that there were no significant differences in the perceived effectiveness of women academic leaders when the respondents were grouped by their number of years in teaching. Evident by the meager mean difference across the number of years in teaching groups, it meant that years in teaching was not a considerable factor in distinguishing the leadership attributes of women along the five areas. Thus, the null hypothesis was accepted.

**Table 12.** Correlation Matrix between the Respondents' Demographic Variables and their Perceived Leadership Effectiveness of Women

|                   |                         | Model the way | Inspire a shared vision | Challenge the process | Enable others to act | Encourage the heart |
|-------------------|-------------------------|---------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Sex               | Correlation coefficient | .068          | .109                    | .032                  | .036                 | .001                |
|                   | p-value                 | .208          | .043*                   | .558                  | .501                 | .986                |
| age               | Correlation coefficient | .070          | .052                    | .046                  | .043                 | .069                |
|                   | p-value                 | .196          | .333                    | .392                  | .430                 | .202                |
| Marital status    | Correlation coefficient | .093          | .106                    | .014                  | .028                 | .060                |
|                   | p-value                 | .085          | .049*                   | .798                  | .600                 | .267                |
| Years in teaching | Correlation coefficient | .061          | .020                    | .024                  | .031                 | .033                |
|                   | p-value                 | .264          | .717                    | .660                  | .572                 | .544                |

Legend: \*significant at .05 level; .00-0.19: Very Weak; 0.20-0.39: Weak; 0.40-0.59: Moderate; 0.60-0.79: Strong; 0.80-1.00: Very Strong.

Table 12 presented the correlation matrix between the respondents' demographic variables and the perceived leadership effectiveness of women in the locale of the study. The analysis of Spearman's rho correlation results revealed that sex and marital status were significantly correlated with the ability of women to inspire a shared vision,  $r=.109$  and  $p=.043$ , and  $r=.106$  and  $p=.049$ , respectively. This meant that the null hypothesis was rejected, although the results were found to post very weak correlation, with  $r$  values of .109 and .106. All other demographics (age, education, and years in teaching) posted no significant correlation along this construct, inspire a shared vision.

On the other hand, the examination of the correlation matrix revealed that the remaining constructs, model the way, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart, posted no significant correlation, with the  $p$ -values higher than .05. This meant that the null hypothesis was accepted. Thus, there was no significant correlation between the demographic variables and the constructs of effective leadership in terms of model the way, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart.

## 7. Challenges and Prospects Women Faced Daily in Their Position as a Leader in Higher Education.

Below were the challenges of women academic leaders, presented thematically. Six themes emerged from the responses of the informants: Work-Family Conflict, Workplace Disparities and Bias, Gender roles and expectations, Stereotypes and Biases in Leadership, Leadership Styles and Preferences, and Biased Perceptions on Emotional Stability.

Theme 1: Work-Family Conflict. Understanding and mitigating work-family conflict is crucial for promoting employee well-being, enhancing job satisfaction, and fostering a more inclusive and equitable work environment. Organizations that prioritize work-life balance and implement supportive policies can contribute to the overall success and satisfaction of their employees. Thus, work-family conflict refers to a situation where the demands and responsibilities of work and family life are perceived as incompatible or mutually exclusive, creating challenges for individuals in managing both domains effectively.

This implied their balancing act as professionals and their inter-role conflicts. Work-family conflict highlighted the difficulty individuals faced in balancing their professional and personal lives. The term underscored the struggle to allocate time, energy, and attention to both work responsibilities and family obligations. On the other hand, it also signified the tension arising from conflicting roles individuals played in their work and family domains. The expectations and demands from these two spheres could clash, leading to stress and challenges in meeting both sets of responsibilities.

This theme was evident and fortified with the following transcripts where the respondents categorically claimed it, to wit:

"...the biggest obstacle for Chinese women leaders in higher education is a severe work-family conflict..."

"...Women leaders in Chinese higher education experience an inter-role conflict when work and family demands are mutually incompatible, affecting negatively their well-being..."

"...It is a widespread inability to harmoniously reconcile one's professional and domestic obligations for female leaders..."

**Theme 2. Workplace Disparities and Bias.** Workplace disparities and bias refer to unequal treatment, opportunities, and outcomes experienced by individuals based on factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, or other characteristics. The meanings and implications of workplace disparities and bias are multifaceted, impacting individuals, organizational cultures, and broader societal structures.

This implied unequal treatment and systematic bias. Workplace disparities signified unequal treatment of employees based on characteristics unrelated to their skills, qualifications, or performance. This could include differences in pay, promotions, or access to career development opportunities. Moreover, workplace bias indicated the presence of prejudiced attitudes, stereotypes, or discriminatory practices embedded within organizational structures, policies, and decision-making processes. This bias may have been unintentional but had a significant impact on individuals' experiences.

Thus, addressing workplace disparities and bias required a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Organizations needed to implement fair and transparent policies, promote diversity at all levels, provide anti-bias training, and foster a culture that valued and respected the contributions of every employee. Such efforts contributed to a more equitable workplace, positively impacting both individuals and the organization as a whole.

This theme was evident and fortified with the following transcripts where the respondents categorically claimed it, to wit:

"...Some institutions still have a strong bias against women..."

"...Women are paid less than men, and the gap is closing too slowly..."

"...Across a wide range of settings, women still face disparities in the workplace relative to men, even in seemingly equitable professions like academia..."

"...When choosing a leader in higher education, people often choose familiar insiders, which invisibly connects leadership and masculinity..."

**Theme 3. Gender roles and expectations.** Gender roles and expectations refer to societal norms and beliefs about the behaviors, responsibilities, and attributes deemed appropriate for individuals based on their gender. These roles and expectations often influence how individuals are perceived and treated in various aspects of life, including the workplace. Understanding the meanings and implications of gender roles and expectations is crucial for addressing gender-based challenges:

This implied prescribed behaviors and social norms. Gender roles dictated societal expectations regarding how individuals of a particular gender should behave. For example,

traditional gender roles prescribed that women should be nurturing and focused on family, while men should be assertive and career-driven. Moreover, gender expectations reflected societal norms that influenced the roles and responsibilities assigned to individuals based on their gender. These norms were often deeply ingrained in cultural beliefs and traditions.

Thus, addressing gender roles and expectations required promoting gender equality, challenging stereotypes, and creating inclusive environments that recognized and celebrated diverse talents and perspectives. Organizations could benefit from fostering a culture that allowed individuals to break free from traditional gender roles, promoting a more equitable and supportive workplace for all.

This theme was evident and fortified with the following transcripts where the respondents categorically claimed it, to wit:

"...There is a traditional assumption that employees should give priority to their work ahead of other life pursuits..."

"...Women should have a greater responsibility for family chores..."

"...Gender bias and gender stereotypes exist in many countries..."

"...One of the gender roles for females is that they are expected to be non-aggressive and are meant to raise children and take care of the tasks at home, bringing a conflict between women's gender roles and their leadership roles..."

"...In traditional Chinese culture, it's the responsibility of a wife to look after the house and not meddle in business affairs..."

**Theme 4. Stereotypes and Biases in Leadership.** Stereotypes and biases in leadership refer to preconceived notions, generalizations, and unfair judgments that individuals may hold about the leadership abilities and qualities of certain groups based on characteristics such as gender, race, ethnicity, or other personal attributes. Understanding the meanings and implications of these stereotypes and biases is crucial for addressing barriers to inclusive leadership:

This implied prejudiced beliefs and unconscious biases in the workplace. Stereotypes involved fixed, oversimplified beliefs or images about the characteristics, roles, and abilities of individuals based on their membership in a particular group, such as gender or race. Moreover, biases in leadership occurred when individuals held unconscious preferences for certain groups over others. These biases could influence decision-making, evaluations, and opportunities for leadership roles.

Thus, addressing stereotypes and biases in leadership involved promoting awareness, implementing diversity and inclusion initiatives, providing bias training, and creating a culture that valued individuals based on their skills, contributions, and potential rather than superficial characteristics. A commitment to unbiased decision-making and fostering diverse leadership could enhance organizational effectiveness and promote a more equitable workplace.

This theme was evident and fortified with the following transcripts where the respondents categorically claimed it, to wit:

"...Women holding leadership or management positions in organizations is much lower than that of men..."

"...Women leaders in organizations may face stereotypes or organizational biases, limiting their promotion and leadership development..."

"...Even if women leaders break through the "glass ceiling" and are promoted, they are more likely to be assigned to marginalized or uncertain positions, putting pressure and risks on the development of women's leadership..."

"...Gender bias and stereotypes can easily lead subordinates to have biases towards the personal abilities of female leaders, affecting competition and leadership development..."

Theme 5. Leadership Styles and Preferences. Leadership styles and preferences refer to the varied approaches and personal inclinations that individuals have when leading and managing others. These styles can be influenced by a range of factors, including personality, experiences, cultural background, and organizational context. Understanding the meanings and implications of leadership styles and preferences is essential for promoting effective leadership and organizational success:

This implied leadership styles and personal preferences. Leadership styles encompassed the characteristic behaviors, attitudes, and strategies that leaders adopted in their interactions with followers. Common styles included autocratic, democratic, transformational, transactional, and servant leadership. Moreover, leadership preferences involved the individual leader's inclinations, values, and approaches to leadership. These preferences might have influenced decision-making, communication, and overall leadership philosophy.

Thus, understanding and embracing diverse leadership styles could lead to a more dynamic and adaptive organizational culture. Organizations that valued and leveraged different leadership preferences contributed to a more inclusive and innovative workplace, driving long-term success and sustainability. Leadership development programs that recognized and nurtured a variety of leadership styles could further enhance organizational effectiveness.

This theme was evident and fortified with the following transcripts where the respondents categorically claimed it, to wit:

"...The image and behavior patterns of leaders are mostly shaped or defined by men..."

"...Male leadership styles and patterns are in the mainstream position and have been familiar and accepted by organizational members..."

"...Women generally have a preference for stability and are unwilling to take on leadership jobs or positions that may bring greater risks..."

"...Women usually have an advantage in language expression and demonstrate stronger coordination and communication skills in their work..."

## 8. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following were concluded:

- (1) The diverse backgrounds of the respondents in this study contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the subject, highlighting the importance of considering varied perspectives and experiences.
- (2) The evaluation of female leadership effectiveness in Jiangsu, China, based on the Kouzes and Posner model, revealed generally positive ratings. This suggested that the leadership qualities outlined in the model were perceived as effective in the context of higher education institutions in the region.
- (3) The analysis of demographic variables demonstrated that, among the factors considered, only age significantly influenced the perception of leadership effectiveness in terms of inspiring a shared vision. This nuanced understanding provided insights into specific demographic factors that may impact leadership perceptions.
- (4) While certain demographic factors showed no correlation with perceived effectiveness in most leadership dimensions, the significance of sex and marital status in relation to inspiring a shared vision revealed specific areas where demographic considerations may play a role in leadership effectiveness assessments.
- (5) Female education leaders faced multifaceted challenges, including work-family conflict, biases, and gender role expectations. However, there were promising prospects, such as progress in gender equality and a global perspective on career opportunities. Recognizing these

challenges and prospects was crucial for fostering an environment conducive to effective female leadership in higher education.

## 9. Recommendations

Based on the conclusion of the study, the following were recommended:

- (1) Considering the richness of respondent backgrounds, future research could delve deeper into specific subgroups within the diverse spectrum. This approach would provide a more nuanced understanding of how different backgrounds influenced perceptions and experiences.
- (2) To enhance female leadership effectiveness, institutions could leverage the positive perceptions identified in the study. Leadership development programs tailored to the Kouzes and Posner model might prove beneficial in further empowering female leaders within Jiangsu's higher education institutions.
- (3) Recognizing the impact of age on perceptions of leadership effectiveness, institutions could implement targeted strategies to address the unique needs and expectations of different age groups. Tailored leadership development initiatives could be particularly beneficial in this regard.
- (4) Institutions could be mindful of specific demographic factors, such as sex and marital status, that impact perceptions of leadership effectiveness in inspiring a shared vision. Implementing diversity and inclusion initiatives could further support a holistic and equitable leadership environment.
- (5) Institutions and policymakers could actively address the identified challenges faced by female education leaders. This might involve implementing policies that support work-life balance, promoting gender equality initiatives, and fostering a more inclusive leadership culture. Additionally, leadership development programs should focus on enhancing skills related to navigating biases and stereotypes.

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