



Affiliative Leadership Styles of Female Headteachers in Public High Schools in Nepal

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This study explores the affiliative leadership styles of female head teachers in public high schools in Nepal. It aims to comprehend how subjective experiences and varied perceptions impact the leadership practiced by female headteachers through phenomenological feminist theoretical lenses. Two female headteachers were purposefully selected and interviewed for the purpose of data collection. Findings show that gender bias has a detrimental effect on female headteachers feelings of doubt about their own capacity for leadership. Nevertheless, these headteachers demonstrated resilience and accountability, which, in turn, projected their transformative potential, a change in stereotypes, and a positive impact on school governance. Affiliative leadership involves proactive and empowering strategies to promote diversity and teamwork. Also, the finding shows that female headteachers improve employee satisfaction by questioning conventional leadership norms and fostering a good culture at the workplace. By emphasizing the value of affiliative leadership in creating positive organizational cultures and improving educational outcomes, this study adds to the body of knowledge on educational leadership. It contributes to the understanding of effective leadership practices in educational contexts by referencing the insights, strategies, and contributions of female leaders in high schools in Nepal.

Keywords: *Affiliative leadership, Female headteacher, Leadership, Public high schools***Introduction**

In Nepal, the representation of women in school leadership remains limited, particularly with very few female head teachers in public schools. The significance of women's involvement in school governance is emphasized by its contribution to the advancement of good governance, an idea linked to efficient decision-making and execution in public administration and government (Khanal et al., 2023; Wuya, 2021). The exercise of power for the common good, which includes choosing, observing, developing policies, and providing public schools, is practiced in the schools in Nepal. Women in school governance is a tactic for inclusive decision-making (Chandrika, 2023; Jabeen & Iqbal, 2020). Empowering more women to take on leadership roles in schools is crucial for fostering a more equitable and effective educational system in Nepal.

The constitution of Nepal (2015) provides women with equal rights to employment, health care, education, and social security, as well as proportionate participation in all state entities. The Education Act of 2028, eighth amendment 2016, requires women to be represented on School Management Committees (SMCs) at least 33 percent of the time; the current percentage is 22.1 (Paudel et al., 2023; Khanal et al., 2023). Equal participation of marginalized groups, including women, people with disabilities, indigenous people, and those in low-income situations, is further promoted by the School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) 2016-2023. With an emphasis on equity, the plan seeks to reduce inequities among those who face the lowest levels of access and outcomes in order to build an inclusive and fair system in terms of participation, access, and learning outcomes.

The difficulty of attaining meaningful engagement and inclusive development in the education sector is linked to the under representation of women in the school administration structure. Research shows that whereas government laws in Nepal advocate for minimal percentages of women in different social groups, actual implementation falls below the policy expectation (Chandrika, 2023; Khanal et al., 2023; Sunar, 2023). Women in Nepal participate in governmental and non-governmental structures at a relatively low rate and have little influence over decisions (Chandrika, 2023). Moreover,

as stated in the School Sector Reform Plan (2009-2015), the implementation of inclusive school decentralization policies was impeded by the lack of elected representatives at the local levels from 2002 to 2016. The National Education Policy 2019 and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) under the Nepal Education Framework 2030 emphasize the critical role of head teachers in advancing quality education, inclusive practices, and equitable access to learning. These policies highlight the importance of strong leadership in schools, particularly the head teachers' responsibility for implementing educational reforms, enhancing teaching quality, and fostering an inclusive environment for all students. Gender presence in school leadership is a key focus of these policies, advocating for increased participation of women in head teacher roles. This aligns with the broader goal of gender equality, promoting the need for balanced representation in educational leadership to ensure diverse perspectives and fair opportunities for all genders in the education system. Due to political unpredictability and shoddy governance frameworks, the plan's expectations are that local government heads of SMCs guarantee the provision of high-quality educational services.

A thorough investigation of female headteachers' affiliative leadership philosophies in high school reveals a complex and ever-changing environment. This study explores the various strategies used by female leaders and sheds light on their distinctive contributions to educational leadership through a qualitative analysis. The stories of these women reveal affiliative leadership as a prominent theme, defined by a proactive and uplifting approach. Moreover, there is still a lack of thorough studies that especially address women in leadership positions in the high school education sector, despite the growing understanding of the value of diversity in leadership. It is imperative to comprehend the affiliative leadership styles that women utilize in this particular situation in order to illuminate their distinct methodologies, obstacles, and accomplishments. It is also critical to recognize effective leadership styles as global educational environments continue to change. The unique viewpoint and skill set that women leaders bring to the table can make a big difference in the advancement of high school education. This study intends to provide a better understanding of the impact of affiliative leadership among women in high school on organizational culture and student results by providing nuanced insights into the multidimensional character of such leadership through a qualitative analysis. In the end, this study is a useful tool for academics, politicians, and educational institutions who want to advance diversity and improve leadership in the field of educational leadership.

Despite policies advocating for gender equality in school leadership, the representation of female head teachers in Nepal's public schools remains significantly low. The involvement of women in school governance is crucial, as it contributes to better governance, inclusive decision-making, and the overall effectiveness of public administration. Although the Constitution of Nepal (2015) and various educational policies like the Education Act of 2028 and the School Sector Development Plan (SSDP) 2016-2023 emphasize the need for women's participation in school management, the actual implementation has fallen short. Research indicates that the representation of women in School Management Committees (SMCs) is only 22.1%, below the mandated 33%, reflecting a broader issue of underrepresentation in leadership roles. The National Education Policy 2019 and SDG 4 also stress the importance of gender balance in educational leadership, yet political instability and weak governance frameworks have hindered progress. This underrepresentation not only limits the inclusivity of decision-making but also hampers the advancement of equitable educational practices. Comprehensive studies focusing on the unique leadership styles of women in education, such as affiliative leadership, are necessary to better understand and support their contributions to improving school governance and student outcomes. This study is to explore the unique leadership styles, particularly affiliative leadership, of female head teachers and their influence on school governance and student outcomes.

Literature Review

Affiliative leadership is a leadership style that prioritizes creating and maintaining positive relationships within a team or organization. Leaders who adopt this style focus on emotional bonds, trust, and harmony, aiming to foster a supportive and collaborative work environment. This approach is characterized by a strong emphasis on the well-being of team members, open communication, and conflict resolution through empathy and understanding. In an academic context, affiliative leadership is understood as a people-centered approach that can enhance team cohesion and morale, particularly in settings where collaboration and emotional support are crucial for success. However, while affiliative leadership is effective in building strong relationships and a positive organizational culture, it may need to be complemented by other leadership styles to ensure that goals are met and challenges are addressed effectively. It is particularly valuable in environments requiring high emotional intelligence, such as educational settings, where fostering a supportive atmosphere can significantly impact both staff performance and student outcomes. Affiliative leadership

focuses on promoting diversity, teamwork, and empowerment (Özdemir, 2020). Leadership develops collaboration and cooperation (Dhakal, 2020).

Affiliative leadership styles among female leaders in high school, with a focus on qualitative examination of their practices and experiences. Research on gender differences in educational leadership shows that there are still gender differences in leadership positions in education (Herbst, 2020; Wuya, 2021). Women continue to be underrepresented in administrative roles, particularly in high school, despite their growing presence in the field of education (García-Holgado et al., 2020). This disparity begs the question of how gender affects leadership philosophies and the necessity of investigating affiliative leadership among females in high school education. In the same vein, Dhakal (2017) found in his doctoral dissertation that to improve classroom conversations, it is necessary to integrate different, value-based ideas and behaviors to overcome conventional difficulties. Addressing gender-based issues, encouraging diversity, and fostering an inclusive leadership environment are some examples of an affiliative strategy for women leaders in high school (Bush, 2020; Kwan, 2020). Qualitative study in this area offers a deeper comprehension of the viewpoints and experiences of female leaders in high school. Rich insights into the actual experiences of female administrators can be gained through semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and narrative analysis (Acharya et al., 2020; Gautam & Acharya, 2023; Karakose et al., 2021).

Gender prejudice, preconceptions, and a dearth of mentorship opportunities are among the particular difficulties faced by women leaders in high school education (Mutekwe & Khumalo et al., 2023). Determining affiliative leadership tactics requires an understanding of how these obstacles influence leadership styles. Examining affiliative leadership among women in high school education requires an understanding of intersectionality, which recognizes the interdependence of several identity components (Carroll, 2021; Khanal et al., 2023; Wuya, 2021). The confluence of socioeconomic, racial, and gender variables shapes leadership tactics and experiences (Khoza, 2021). Qualitative research that takes intersectionality into account offers sophisticated insights into the intricate dynamics that female leaders must negotiate (Khoza, 2021). Advantages of affiliative leadership studies indicate that employee happiness and organizational effectiveness are enhanced by affiliative leadership approaches (Cruz-González et al., 2020). An affiliative approach may have a favorable effect on teacher morale, student outcomes, and the general school climate in high school education (Alemu et al., 2020).

Female high school administrators provide useful information on affiliative plans of action. Best practices for aspiring female administrators can be developed by examining the tactics used by leaders who have surmounted obstacles based on gender (Chitsamatanga et al., 2020). The research emphasizes the advantages of affiliative leadership, the difficulties experienced by women leaders, and the ongoing gender gaps. Through the consideration of intersectionality and the utilization of successful stories, qualitative analysis offers a thorough knowledge of the ways in which women navigate leadership roles in high school. In order to advance diversity, equity, and exclusivity in educational leadership, further study in this field is necessary. The idea of affiliative leadership styles has become more well-known in recent years as a way to create inclusive and fair work environments.

A proactive and deliberate strategy, affiliative leadership aims to advance diversity, equity, and exclusivity within a company. It involves more than just recognizing differences; it also actively addresses structural injustices and fosters an atmosphere that values and embraces variety. Affiliative leaders place a high value on inclusive decision-making procedures that incorporate a range of viewpoints (Kulkarni & Mishra, 2022; Khanal et al., 2023; Wuya, 2021). This strategy makes sure that when decisions are made within an organization, the opinions of all people are taken into account, regardless of their background. Proactively attempting to demolish prejudice and stereotypes within the company are affiliative action leaders. They dispel myths and raise understanding of how stereotypes hinder people's ability to advance professionally (Acharya et al., 2023; Guillemin et al., 2023). Part of affiliative leadership is putting policies that support diversity and inclusion into action. This covers projects like unconscious bias training sessions, mentorship programs, and open hiring procedures (Chitsamatanga et al., 2020).

Providing marginalized groups inside the organization with more authority is a crucial component of positive leadership. This could entail giving everyone the same chances for leadership positions, mentorship, and professional growth (Carroll, 2021; Khanal et al., 2023). Affiliative leadership plays a critical role in the education sector in fostering a healthy learning environment. A more inclusive school culture, higher teacher satisfaction, and better student outcomes are all attributed to affiliative action by educational leaders, according to research (Chitsamatanga et al., 2020). According to studies, companies led by individuals who actively support diversity and inclusion typically have higher

levels of employee engagement, creativity, and general performance (Carroll, 2021; Wuya, 2021). Addressing societal imbalances in the field of public administration is made possible by affiliative leadership. Affiliative action leaders in public administration help create and carry out policies that are more equal (Mutekwe & Khumalo et al., 2023).

Affiliative leadership organizations frequently have better employee engagement and satisfaction levels. People are more likely to make a constructive contribution to the organization when they feel appreciated and involved (Acharya & Acharya, 2022; Carroll, 2021). Diverse viewpoints and ideas are promoted in an atmosphere that is fostered by affiliative leadership. Employees feel empowered to contribute their special ideas as a result, which fosters innovation and creativity within the company (Carroll, 2021; Mutekwe & Khumalo et al., 2023; Khanal et al., 2023; Wuya, 2021). Inclusive and egalitarian organizational cultures are greatly aided by affiliative leadership approaches.

Methodology

The study investigates experiences, perspectives, and actions of female head teachers in public high school, qualitative research design is used. The study uses phenomenological feminist theoretical lenses (Hood, 2016) who said the emphasizes understanding women's lived experiences by examining how gender shapes their perceptions and realities. Gaining in-depth understanding of human behavior and examining intricate social phenomena are two areas where qualitative research. Interpretivism as a philosophical perspective in this study. The study takes an interpretivism stance, recognizing that everyone interprets and makes meaning of their experiences in different ways and highlighting the subjective character of reality (Lundberg et al., 2023; Pant et al., 2023). The research design used in the study is qualitative, in keeping with the interpretivism school of thought. Interpretivism stresses many realities while acknowledging the subjectivity of human experiences (Lundberg et al., 2023). I examined how individual i.e., woman leader (head teacher) viewpoints and the context-based nature of reality interact to comprehend women's affiliative leadership styles in high school. Female head teachers in the public schools in Kirtipur municipality is taken purposively selected for the study. The purpose of choose Kirtipur municipality is that I am residing at the same municipality, head teachers are well known most of them, easy access to reach, diversity of students. Two public high school with a female head teacher are interviewed. Because the researcher lived in the same municipality and knew the head teachers, this location was selected. The municipality was chosen as the research location due to its accessibility, personal relationships, and diversified student population.

Interviews with female head teachers were conducted, with an approximate one-hour time for each interview. Interviews were taken until data saturation is attained, guaranteeing a thorough comprehension of affiliative leadership approaches. Establishing rapport before the interviews was an important stage. This includes introducing the researcher, discussing the study, having both official and informal conversations, and partaking in informal meetings known as *chautara guffs* (informal conversation under a big green tree in Nepali language) when tea is shared. The basis for open communication and trust is established by these exchanges.

The audio files that make up the collected data undergo a thorough analysis procedure, starting with transcription and translation of the interviews into English to create a common platform for analysis. The author then reads the transcriptions multiple times to fully grasp the intricacies and meanings contained within the comments. Following this, categories are determined and organized into main themes and supporting topics. These established themes guide the study, allowing patterns and insights regarding affiliative leadership styles among female head teachers to emerge. A thematic analysis is conducted, and to complement the thematic findings, a conversational analysis approach is employed, using verbatim excerpts from the interviews to enrich the understanding of the data.

Findings

The study's findings reveal that female headteachers have demonstrated significant resilience and accountability, which have contributed to their transformative leadership potential. The data indicate that these headteachers actively challenged traditional stereotypes associated with female leadership in educational settings. These findings highlight the critical role that female headteachers play in redefining leadership, showcasing their ability to break gender norms while fostering positive change and growth in school environments.

Affiliative Leadership

The study explores the transformative impact of affiliative leadership among female headteachers, emphasizing inclusivity, collaboration, and empowerment in creating a supportive and positive school culture. For instance, Participant A shared, "*Despite the challenges, I have always prioritized the welfare of my students and staff, ensuring that everyone*

feels supported.” This commitment to inclusive leadership has resulted in a positive shift in school governance, with teachers and staff expressing greater satisfaction and trust in their headteachers. Participant B highlighted this change, stating, *“Policy has encouraged us to share our ideas and concerns without fear, which has significantly improved our working environment.”*

Moreover, the study underscores the impact of affiliative leadership among these female headteachers, characterized by proactive and empowering strategies that promote diversity, teamwork, and a supportive school culture. The participants consistently emphasized the importance of fostering a positive and inclusive work environment. Participant A mentioned, *“By encouraging collaboration and recognizing individual strengths, I created a culture where everyone feels valued.”* This approach not only challenged conventional leadership norms but also led to improved employee satisfaction, as the staff felt more empowered and engaged. These findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on educational leadership by highlighting the critical role of affiliative leadership in enhancing organizational culture and educational outcomes.

Breaking Stereotype

The findings of the interviews conducted with female head teachers in Nepali high school education provide insight into a typical story of early doubt and uncertainty about their capacity to successfully manage and lead a school. One female head teacher shared, *“Because of my gender, I initially faced doubts and concerns about my ability to manage the school effectively, communicate with stakeholders, and participate in professional development activities. However, by consistently demonstrating accountability and taking full responsibility for my work, I was able to overcome these challenges. Over time, my colleagues and the community began to recognize the positive impact of female leadership in educational settings, which helped to challenge traditional gender stereotypes and improve school governance and management.”* Head teacher have concerns about the capacity to manage the school well, communicate with stakeholders, and take part in different professional development activities. But, she allayed these fears and demonstrated her expertise by continuously exhibiting accountability and accepting complete responsibility for her work. Her coworkers and the community eventually realized how beneficial female leadership in educational environments can be. This change in perspective demonstrates the transformative ability of female leadership in dispelling conventional gender preconceptions and favorably influencing school governance and management.

Women’s Leadership in Nepali School Governance

The actual implementation falls short of policy aspirations despite legislative measures requiring women’s representation in school governance. Increased participation is hampered by ingrained prejudices and weak governance practices. Policies for inclusive school decentralization have also been difficult to implement because of governance issues and political instability. One female leader remarked, *“Despite the policies requiring women’s representation in school governance, the reality on the ground is quite different. Ingrained prejudices and weak governance practices continue to obstruct our participation. It’s not just about having policies; it’s about implementing them effectively.”* One recurring theme among female leaders in Nepalese high school. In addition to supporting initiatives pertaining to fairness and diversity in educational settings, female leaders also use a variety of other tactics. These executives challenge traditional leadership conventions and highlight the significance of positive company cultures by exhibiting resilience and adaptability.

Another female head teacher stated, *“We, as female leaders, often have to challenge traditional leadership norms. By demonstrating resilience and adaptability, we not only support initiatives around fairness and diversity but also emphasize the importance of cultivating positive school cultures. This approach has proven to enhance organizational effectiveness and create more inclusive educational environments.”* Through shedding light on their approaches, challenges, and achievements, the research advances diversity and enhances leadership in academic environments. Enhanced organizational effectiveness, inclusive school cultures, and employee happiness have all been linked to affiliative leadership techniques. In order to advance diversity, equity, and inclusivity in educational leadership, further research on affiliative leadership styles is necessary, according to the findings overall.

Discussion

Understanding the distinctive tactics used by women in educational leadership roles is crucial, as demonstrated by the study, which examines affiliative leadership among female leaders in Nepali public schools. Comprehensive studies that concentrate explicitly on women leaders in high schools are still rare, despite the growing understanding of the value

of diversity in leadership, especially in educational settings (Bhattarai & Maharjan, 2016; Posner et al., 2009). Since its establishment, Nepal's educational system has experienced tremendous change, moving from exclusive establishments to a more inclusive strategy after democratization. Legislative provisions requiring women's representation in school governance do exist, but in practice, they frequently fall short of the goals set forth in policy (Neupane, 2022; Tiwari, 2021). Political instability, bad governance standards, and ingrained biases are all contributing factors to this disparity. Thus, getting meaningful involvement in school governance is still quite difficult, particularly for women and parents.

Among female leaders in Nepalese high school, affiliative leadership stands out as a recurring theme. It is defined by proactive, upbeat methods that place an emphasis on empowerment, diversity, and teamwork.

Apart from advocating for inclusive work environments and aiding initiatives about fairness and diversity in learning environments, female leaders utilize several strategies that subvert conventional leadership conventions. Their adaptability and resilience highlight how critical it is to cultivate positive corporate cultures, which are essential for successful leadership in the field of education. The study's conclusions emphasize how crucial it is to understand female affiliative leadership styles in the context of high school. Through the illumination of the approaches, obstacles, and achievements of female leaders, this study advances diversity and enhances leadership practices within educational environments. The data says "Higher employee happiness, inclusive school cultures, and improved organizational effectiveness have all been linked to affiliative leadership techniques" It is linked with the literature that the higher employee happiness, inclusive school cultures, and improved organizational effectiveness have all been linked to affiliative leadership techniques (Khanal et al., 2023; Khadka et al., 2024). Thus, further research on affiliative leadership philosophies is required to advance inclusivity, equity, and diversity in educational leadership.

The importance of diversity and inclusivity in creating positive organizational cultures and enhancing educational results is emphasized in the literature on educational leadership. Herbst (2020) and García-Holgado et al., (2020) conducted research that highlights the significance of tackling gender inequality in leadership roles in the education industry. Since women are still disproportionately underrepresented in administrative positions, more research is required to fully understand how female leaders in high school education approach leadership.

Additionally, research highlights how crucial it is for educational leadership to foster inclusivity, diversity, and teamwork (Bush, 2020; Dhakal, 2017; Dhakal, 2021). By emphasizing inclusivity, empowerment, and teamwork, Özdemiş (2020) and Kwan (2020)'s description of affiliative leadership complies with these guidelines. Female leaders in Nepalese high school can build more welcoming workplaces and uplifting corporate cultures by implementing affiliative leadership techniques.

Affiliative leadership has been linked to increased employee happiness and organizational effectiveness, in addition to fostering inclusivity and diversity. Research by Alemu et al., (2020) and Cruz-González et al., (2020) demonstrate the beneficial effects of affiliative leadership on student outcomes, teacher morale, and the general school climate. Female leaders can foster cultures that promote the professional development and well-being of educators and students by placing a high value on empowerment and collaboration (Dahal et al., 2023; Neupane, 2020; Joshi & Anderson, 1994). Furthermore, the literature on the significance of comprehending the subjective experiences and viewpoints of female leaders in high school education is consistent with the study's focus on qualitative research methods. A fuller comprehension of the intricacies of affiliative leadership and its effects on corporate culture is made possible by qualitative study (Dahal, 2020; Adhikari & Adhikari, 2021). Studies by Chitsamatanga et al., (2020) and Karakose et al., (2021) highlight the importance of qualitative methods in capturing educational leaders' real-world experiences and offering deep insights into their leadership styles.

Additionally, the study's focus on interpretivism as a philosophical approach recognizes the subjectivity of reality and the significance of personal viewpoints in influencing leadership behaviors. A more complex understanding of affiliative leadership styles in Nepalese high school is made possible by interpretivist approaches, which acknowledge the varied origins and experiences of female leaders. The importance of intersectionality in comprehending the intricate dynamics of leadership practices is highlighted by researches, especially for women in educational contexts (Carroll, 2021; Khanal et al., 2023; Dhakal, 2019, Dhakal et al., 2023; Kunwar et al., 2023). Overall, by offering insights into the distinctive tactics and contributions of female leaders in Nepalese high schools, the study adds to the expanding body of research on educational leadership. This research highlights the need for more investigation into leadership strategies that support positive corporate cultures and improve educational results by emphasizing the role that affiliative leadership plays in promoting diversity, inclusivity, and organizational effectiveness.

Conclusion

The study concludes that female headteachers, through their resilience and accountability, have effectively challenged traditional stereotypes and contributed to transformative changes in school governance. Their leadership has not only improved organizational culture but also fostered greater trust and satisfaction among teachers and staff. The affiliative leadership strategies employed by these headteachers have been instrumental in promoting diversity, teamwork, and a supportive school environment, thereby enhancing overall employee satisfaction and organizational effectiveness. These findings underscore the vital role that inclusive and empowering leadership plays in driving positive educational outcomes. Educational institutions should prioritize the development and support of affiliative leadership practices among headteachers to enhance school culture and employee satisfaction. Additionally, training programs that focus on resilience and accountability should be encouraged to further empower female leaders in education.

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