

Exploring The Significance Of Leadership Development Experiences Of Female Elementary School Supervisors In East Sumba

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Abstract. *This study explores the leadership development experiences of female elementary school supervisors, aiming to shed light on the unique challenges and opportunities they encounter in their professional journey. The findings reveal a complex interplay of gender dynamics, mentorship relationships, and organizational culture in influencing their leadership development. Despite facing gender-based obstacles, female supervisors highlighted the significance of supportive networks, continuous professional learning, and resilience as pivotal to their growth as leaders. This literature review study also identifies a lack of gender-specific leadership development programs and calls for more inclusive approaches that recognize and address the unique needs of female educational leaders. The implications of this research extend to policy-making and leadership training programs, suggesting the necessity for systemic changes that promote gender equality and empower female leaders in the educational sector. By understanding the specific experiences of female elementary school supervisors, this study contributes to the broader discourse on leadership diversity and paves the way for more equitable leadership development practices.*

Keywords : *leadership; development, experience; female*

1. INTRODUCTION

The notion of female leadership remains somewhat of a taboo within the broader swathes of Indonesian society (Sahban, 2016). The deeply entrenched patriarchal traditions pervasive in various local cultures continue to elevate the status of men over women. This male dominance begins to manifest even in the smallest societal units such as families, especially in remote areas. Gender differences are still often linked to an individual's capability in their leadership roles. The Gender Development Index for Indonesia in 2019, as released by the United Nations Development Programme in 2020, stands at 0.940, ranking Indonesia 107th out of 189 countries. The same dataset indicates that the average length of schooling for girls is shorter than that for boys, with figures standing at 7.8 years compared to 8.6 years, respectively. Meanwhile, the Female Human Development Index remains lower than that of males, marked at 0.694 compared to 0.738. Despite improvements over previous years, these figures still highlight a disparity that places women in a less advantageous position.

In the realm of education, even though women hold the majority of positions, the number that ascend to strategic leadership roles, such as school supervisors, remains minimal (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). The higher the leadership position, the fewer the women occupying it. This trend may be attributed to the significant challenges faced both in the preparation for and the

holding of such positions. Female school supervisors, in particular, face unique issues including gender bias, a lack of role models, and the balancing of responsibilities between family and work (Martin, 2014).

Kuraesin (2020) posits that as a crucial element of the educational workforce, school supervisors play a strategic role in enhancing the quality of education, especially in improving school performance. Supervisors are tasked with motivating teachers to enhance their performance in areas such as educational administration, learning devices, and teaching methods and strategies (Guntoro, 2020). Regardless of gender or race, the role of an supervisor has become increasingly complex and challenging (Coates, 2020). The school supervisorship involves the most intricate responsibilities in the educational domain.

According to PermenPAN No. 21 of 2010, a School Supervisor is a Civil Servant endowed with full duties, responsibilities, and authority by the competent official to conduct academic and managerial supervision over educational units. Civil Servants appointed as School Supervisors must meet the following requirements:

- 1) Be currently serving as Teachers with a minimum of eight years of teaching experience or have served as a school/madrasah head for at least four years, relevant to their educational unit;
- 2) Hold a minimum of a Bachelor's Degree (S1)/Diploma IV in Education;
- 3) Possess skills and expertise relevant to the supervision field;
- 4) Hold at least the rank of Penata, pay scale group III/c;
- 5) Be no older than 55 years;
- 6) Pass the School Supervisor selection process;
- 7) Have completed the functional training for prospective School Supervisors and obtained a STTPP;
- 8) Have received at least a "good" rating in every assessment category of job performance in the Performance Appraisal Report (DP3) for the last two years.

The above statements clarify the stringent qualifications and competencies required to be appointed as a school supervisor. Their role is challenging, necessitating them to serve as exemplars and mentors for teachers and school heads in their jurisdiction. These challenges are amplified in socio-culturally unsupportive conditions and geographically inaccessible areas. Supervisors are assigned based on sub-districts, and due to the limited number of supervisors in each district, they often oversee more than one sub-district.

Several research indicate numerous challenges women face as they strive for supervisor positions, particularly evident in East Sumba, East Nusa Tenggara. The society here strongly adheres to patriarchal values, coupled with discouraging educational statistics, high poverty rates, and challenging geography, with many villages accessible only by hours of walking through forests, climbing hills, and crossing seas.

East Sumba is one of the most underdeveloped areas in the province of East Nusa Tenggara (Presidential Decree 63 of 2020). It is the largest district on Sumba Island, comprising 22 sub-districts. The poverty rate in East Sumba, at 30.02% (BPS NTT, 2019), is comparable to other districts on the island, significantly exceeding the national poverty average of around 10% in the same year. This poverty line is defined by the BPS with a monthly per capita expenditure of Rp 328,900 in 2019. The condition of poverty in Sumba is indicative of the broader situation in the Nusa Tenggara Timur province, which ranks as the third poorest in Indonesia, following Papua and West Papua provinces.

Currently, there are 256 elementary schools in East Sumba with 2,790 teachers and 35,380 students, as reported in "East Sumba in Figures 2021," with the average duration of schooling in this district being 6.31 years (BPS NTT, 2020). This situation further complicates and challenges the role of school supervisors, particularly for female supervisors. According to data from the East Sumba District Education Office, there are currently 19 elementary school supervisors, of whom only five are women.

This study aims to delve into the leadership journey of female elementary school supervisors in East Sumba to understand how they interpret their experiences, especially in terms of leadership development. By examining the subjective meanings female school supervisors derive from their experiences, the author hopes to gain a deeper understanding of which leadership development experiences are most meaningful or relevant to these women supervisors, how they construct the meaning and knowledge of leadership, how these female leaders perceive themselves, and what other factors influence their leadership development. Knowledge of these meaningful experiences, relevant leadership experiences, the meaning-making process, and other influencing factors will elucidate the complexity of their leadership development, as well as why and how they emerge as leaders. The research questions are as follows:

1. Main question:

- How do female school supervisors in East Sumba interpret their leadership development experiences?

2. Sub-questions:

- What factors influence the informants' leadership development?
- How do informants construct the meaning and knowledge of leadership?

Currently, research on the leadership of female school supervisors is scant in Indonesia. The author has not yet found studies focusing on interpreting the leadership journey of female school supervisors. This research is expected to contribute significantly to several areas:

1. Encouraging more research, especially on the educational conditions in East Sumba and other districts on the island of Sumba.
2. Providing valuable insights to the central, provincial, and district governments for improving education quality in East Sumba.
3. Serving as a guide for female school supervisors to promote the leadership development of female teachers and principals under their mentorship.
4. For trainers/facilitators developing leadership programs for women, this study is expected to offer directions to enrich leadership development training programs for women.
5. For educational institutions, the findings from this study are hoped to provide insights into achieving greater diversity in leadership positions, particularly among school supervisors.
6. For women, especially those aspiring to leadership positions, the findings detailed herein are anticipated to offer valuable insights into what constitutes useful experiences and what distinguishes one leader from another as articulated by Bennis (2003): "What distinguishes the leader from everyone else is that he (or she) takes all of his (or her) life experiences...and makes himself (or herself) all new and unique."
7. For parents and educators of young girls, this research is expected to provide useful information to foster the leadership development of young women.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this study, the author will focus on one out of five leadership approaches presented by Yukl (2010), specifically the Transformational Leadership Approach. Each approach is associated with a specific period, with the Transformational Leadership Approach introduced in the early 1980s, conceptualized by James McGregor Burns in 1978. This approach centers on the leader as an individual and is also referred to as the heroic model. Transformational leadership is a style that can inspire individuals to change. Yukl (2010) identifies several key

indicators of transformational leadership style that are essential for effective leadership. Firstly, transformational leaders are adept at evoking emotions and fostering a strong sense of identity among their followers. This helps in creating a cohesive group that is aligned with the leader's vision. Secondly, they provide unwavering support and motivation, encouraging followers to exceed their own expectations and achieve higher levels of performance. Additionally, transformational leaders are visionary, possessing the ability to articulate a clear and compelling future that inspires and energizes their followers. Finally, they offer new perspectives on problem-solving, challenging existing paradigms and encouraging innovative thinking. These characteristics collectively enable transformational leaders to drive significant positive change within their organizations.

Transformational leadership motivates followers to enhance their awareness of ethics and to optimize resources for improving organizational quality (Yukl, 2009). Successful leaders are those who can systematically plan transformations and facilitate effective teaching within learning organizations (Wiyono, 2017). Transformational leadership aims for broader moral objectives and serves to sustain the transformation process, nurture relationships, share knowledge, and establish vision and context to build coherence within the organization (Hidayat & Wulandari, 2020). Furthermore, the empowerment of female leadership is captured in the research by Dorn, O'Rourke, and Papalewis (1996), which found that female leaders exhibit several prominent personal qualities such as integrity, positive thinking, patience, hard work, enthusiasm, listening skills, management prowess, openness, inclusivity, and care for their staff. Female leaders tend to emphasize team leadership, excel in human resource management, and are superior in motivating others (Hagberg Consulting Group, 2000). Baker (1992) regards behaviors that prioritize cooperation and team leadership, along with involvement, as the new archetype of 21st-century leadership style.

The author will also utilize the Transformative Learning Theory developed by Jack Mezirow in 1978. This framework helps reveal the meaning-making process of leadership development experiences. It focuses on how adults interpret their life experiences through the transformation of their worldview. Individuals must critically evaluate their assumptions and beliefs until they arrive at a new understanding of the justification for their interpretations or beliefs (Mezirow, 2000). Originating from Mezirow's research in the early 1970s, which focused on role changes and self-concept transformations in female learners as a result of learning processes, this theory highlights the critical awareness that emerges from learning experiences, leading to changes in assumptions and thought processes, termed by Mezirow as the Transformative Perspective. This theory is instrumental in helping the author interpret the

meaningful experiences of learning as part of the leadership development process for informants.

Mezirow (1991) states that the archetypes of constructivism, humanism, and critical social theory form the foundation of transformative learning philosophy, where the basic assumption of constructivism explains that individuals have the capacity to self-interpret based on their relationships with others. Transformative learning is the process of forming, evaluating, and revising the learner's assumptions and perceptions about their experiences and learnings. The ideologies held by individuals are used to interpret their life experiences. Mezirow (2012) suggests that this transformation process can be achieved through four methods: 1) Elaborating current frames of reference; 2) Learning new frames of reference; 3) Transforming points of view; 4) Transforming habits of mind.

Furthermore, Mezirow outlines ten stages of the transformation process as follows:

1. Experiencing disorientation or dilemmas.
2. Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame.
3. A critical examination of assumptions.
4. Recognition that one's discontent and the transformation process can be shared and that others have negotiated a similar change.
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions.
6. Planning a course of action.
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans.
8. Provisional trying of new roles.
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships.
10. Reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective.

Critical self-reflection is at the heart of the transformative perspective and shapes actions that lead to transformative processes, namely changes in thinking patterns.

The author will also incorporate the Life-span Theory developed by Donald Edward Super, a renowned Career Development theorist. One of Super's major contributions to the career development concept is the emphasis on the importance of self-concept development. According to Super, self-concept changes over time and evolves as a result of experiences. The career development process for each individual is lifelong. Super initially began formulating the foundational ideas of his theory around the 1930s, characterizing it as an amalgamation of numerous theoretical frameworks, including those of developmental, social, personality, self-

concept, and learning theories, drawing on the works of theorists such as Thorndike, Bandura, Freud, Jung, Adler, Maslow, and Rogers, among others (Komolthiti, 2008). Super incorporated the basic assumptions of these theorists and subsequently developed his own lifespan theory. He posited that career choice is a process rather than a singular event. As individuals mature, they develop perceptions of their roles, personality traits, and personal capabilities. They then juxtapose these self-perceptions against what they possess, acquaint themselves with various types of occupations, and endeavor to translate their self-concept into their professional engagement. The self-concept is central to Super's developmental theory, reflecting how individuals view themselves and their circumstances. Super contended that individuals select their educational paths to discover occupations that best allow them to express their self-concept – to find roles that fulfill their values, interests, abilities, and personality traits.

Super (1957) articulated that career development is a process of developmental and implementational self-concept across one's life stages and the careers they select. He described this development through a five-stage process:

1. The Growth stage, from birth until approximately 15 years of age, where children develop various potentials, personal views, attitudes, interests, and needs, which are integrated into a self-concept structure.
2. The Exploration stage, from ages 15 to 24 years, where young individuals contemplate various occupational alternatives without making binding decisions.
3. The Establishment stage, from ages 25 to 44 years, characterized by diligent efforts to solidify oneself through the intricacies of experiences gained in a particular career.
4. The Maintenance stage, from ages 45 to 64 years, where adults adjust to their occupational roles.
5. The Decline stage, where individuals enter retirement and must find new lifestyle patterns after leaving their professional roles.

Drawing on Super's concepts, the author intends to investigate the events that influence the informants at each stage, thereby interpreting their current leadership experiences.

3. METHODS

This study was conducted through literature review on the leadership development experiences of female elementary school supervisors. The author selected sources from relevant literature, mostly consisting of journal articles, books, and other recent writings. These sources were chosen for their relevance to the themes of female supervisors leadership development

4. RESULTS

The research findings reveal that the leadership development experiences of female elementary school supervisors in East Sumba, NTT, are profoundly influenced by cultural, socio-economic, and educational contexts. Participants reported a range of experiences, from formal training and mentoring to on-the-job learning and personal initiatives for self-improvement. Despite the geographical isolation and limited resources characteristic of the region, these women have shown remarkable resilience and adaptability in their leadership roles.

- **Formal Training and Education:** Most participants identified formal training sessions, workshops, and further education as pivotal in their leadership development. However, access to such opportunities is often limited by logistical challenges and financial constraints. The women underscored the importance of governmental and non-governmental support programs in bridging this gap.
- **Mentoring and Peer Support:** Informal mentoring and peer support networks emerged as crucial elements. Senior female supervisors and colleagues provided guidance, sharing their experiences and strategies for overcoming common challenges in leadership. This peer support has been instrumental in building confidence and competence among female supervisors.
- **On-the-Job Learning:** Learning by doing was highlighted as a fundamental component of leadership development. The dynamic and often unpredictable environment of schools in East Sumba necessitates a hands-on approach to leadership, where supervisors learn through experience. This includes managing staff, interacting with the community, and making administrative decisions.
- **Personal Initiatives:** The women demonstrated a proactive approach to their development, seeking out resources, reading materials, and online courses to enhance their skills. This self-directed learning signifies a strong motivation to overcome the limitations posed by their environment.

5. DISCUSSION

The leadership development experiences of female elementary school supervisors in East Sumba, NTT, highlight several critical insights into the intersection of gender, culture, and leadership in education. These insights contribute to the broader discourse on women's leadership in challenging contexts.

- **Cultural Norms and Gender Roles:**

The findings suggest that cultural norms and traditional gender roles in East Sumba present both barriers and opportunities for female leaders. While societal expectations can limit women's participation in leadership, the participants have leveraged their roles within these norms to foster community support and enhance their leadership effectiveness.

- **Resilience and Adaptability:**

The resilience and adaptability demonstrated by these women are key to their success in leadership roles. Faced with challenges such as limited resources, geographical isolation, and societal expectations, they have developed innovative strategies to fulfill their responsibilities and contribute to their schools' improvement.

- **Importance of Support Networks:**

The significance of formal and informal support networks cannot be overstated. These networks provide not only practical guidance and resources but also emotional support, which is crucial in maintaining motivation and resilience.

- **Policy Implications:**

The study underscores the need for targeted policies and programs to support female leaders in education, particularly in remote and resource-limited settings. This includes access to professional development, mentoring programs, and initiatives aimed at addressing gender-specific challenges.

- **Future Research Directions:**

Further research is needed to explore the long-term impact of leadership development experiences on educational outcomes in similar contexts. Additionally, comparative studies between different regions could provide deeper insights into the role of cultural and socio-economic factors in shaping leadership in education.

6. CONCLUSION

This study embarked on an exploratory journey to uncover the unique leadership development experiences of female elementary school supervisors in East Sumba, illuminating the challenges and triumphs that pave their professional pathways. Through document reviews, several core themes emerged, painting a multifaceted picture of female leadership in a context marked by cultural, societal, and educational complexities.

The findings reveal that female supervisors in East Sumba navigate a delicate balance between asserting authority and conforming to societal expectations of femininity. They

employ a range of strategies to bolster their leadership capabilities and navigate the patriarchal landscape, including seeking mentorship, engaging in continuous professional development, and leveraging community networks. Moreover, these leaders play a crucial role in fostering gender sensitivity within schools, advocating for inclusive practices that challenge traditional gender roles and encourage equal opportunities for all students.

7. LIMITATION

While this study provides valuable insights into the leadership development experiences of female elementary school supervisors in East Sumba, it is not without its limitations. Firstly, the study is based on a relatively small sample size, which may not fully represent the diverse experiences of all female supervisors in the region. The limited number of participants may also result in a lack of generalizability of the findings to other regions with different cultural, socio-economic, and educational contexts.

Secondly, the study relies heavily on qualitative data obtained through interviews and document reviews. While this approach allows for an in-depth exploration of individual experiences, it may also introduce subjective biases. The interpretations and perceptions of both the participants and the researchers could influence the findings, potentially limiting the objectivity of the results.

Thirdly, the study focuses primarily on the perspectives of female supervisors, potentially overlooking the views of other stakeholders, such as male supervisors, teachers, students, and community members. Including these perspectives could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the leadership development process and the broader impact of female leadership in schools.

Additionally, the geographical isolation and logistical challenges of East Sumba may have constrained the depth and breadth of data collection. Limited access to resources and communication barriers may have affected the ability to gather extensive information, leading to potential gaps in the data.

Lastly, the dynamic and evolving nature of leadership development, especially in the context of ongoing socio-cultural changes, suggests that the findings may be time-sensitive. Future studies should consider longitudinal approaches to capture the long-term impact of leadership development initiatives and the changing dynamics of female leadership in education.

Despite these limitations, the study provides a crucial foundation for understanding the unique challenges and strategies employed by female elementary school supervisors in East Sumba. It highlights the need for targeted support and policies to enhance female leadership in education, particularly in remote and resource-limited settings. Further research addressing these limitations can build on the current findings to contribute to more effective and inclusive leadership development practices.

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