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Smart leadership for female empowerment in education in Pakistan

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Smart leadership for female empowerment in education in Pakistan

Nayyab Farooq, Pakistan

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School context

Located in the bustling city of Peshawar, Pakistan, Peshawar Model Girls High School – V(5) stands proudly in the vibrant neighbourhood of Pakha Ghulam, along Dalazak Road. This school caters to a diverse demographic, drawing students from various socioeconomic backgrounds within the urban landscape. Embracing the rich tapestry of its region, the school serves as a beacon of opportunity and inclusivity, fostering an environment where every student can thrive. Positioned amidst the cultural mosaic of Peshawar, the school embodies the spirit of unity and progress, preparing young minds to navigate the global landscape with confidence and resilience.

About the author

Nayyab Farooq coordinates the Peshawar Model Education Network for Peshawar Model Schools, overseeing educational initiatives across 11 branches. She also leads the Cambridge O Level programmes across multiple campuses, organising training sessions, developing policies, and managing recruitment with skill. Her international recognition includes two ISA Awards from the British Council, showcasing her commitment to global educational standards. Farooq's leadership and achievements highlight her dedication to excellence on a global scale.



Key learnings

This research aimed to empower female students and cultivate leadership through mentoring and teacher training.

- The mentorship programme enhanced teacher professional advancement, fostered confidence, sharpened skills, and increased collaboration among participants.
- Advocating for inclusive mentorship practices was essential to cater for the diverse needs and backgrounds of educators, and in promoting equitable opportunities and collaboration.
- Some challenges occurred in mentor-mentee dynamics, including in communication and mismatched expectations, suggesting the need for enhanced training and support.
- Participants expressed the need for ongoing support beyond the initial mentorship programme.
- Ultimately, these initiatives will benefit students, as the trained female adults utilise their new skills to enrich classroom experiences.

'Empowering educators through mentorship cultivates leaders who shape tomorrow's generation.'

Ms Sadia Ateeq

Action research rationale

Peshawar Model School combines academic excellence with innovative educational strategies to meet diverse student needs, proposing a pioneering smart leadership model integrating data analysis, artificial intelligence, and collaborative decision-making. This initiative aims to enhance academic performance and foster individualised, student-centred learning.

The UNESCO report, *Orientation Balance in Training: Looking Past Equality*, notes that young ladies in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia face more difficulties in attending and finishing schooling compared with young men. The goal of my research is to engage young ladies to overcome these obstacles and understand their true capacity. The programme aims to develop balanced female leaders who succeed in both academic and extracurricular pursuits.

This action research emphasises female empowerment in a cultural context where women's education may be undervalued. It aims to empower female students as catalysts for change within their families and communities. In this initiative, 15 students and five teachers will be chosen as role models. The school seeks to cultivate well-rounded female leaders excelling academically and in extracurricular activities, challenging gender biases and driving broader societal transformation.

Expected outcomes

- Improved academic performance through tailored educational strategies facilitated by leadership programmes.
- Creation of a personalised learning environment, fostering inclusivity. Supported by leadership programmes emphasising collaborative decision-making processes and student-centred approaches.
- Cultivation of empowered female leaders among teachers and students.
- Increased female self-esteem and confidence.
- Skill development in communication and collaboration.



Exploratory research questions

1. Exploring Your Own Perceptions
What are my assumptions and biases about the challenges and opportunities faced by female leaders in Pakistani educational institutions?
2. Exploring Others' Perceptions (Students' Perspectives)
What barriers or stereotypes do female students believe exist that might hinder their own leadership aspirations within our school?
3. Exploring Behaviour (Your Students' and Yours)
What steps have the teachers taken to create a safe and encouraging environment?

Methodology

A multifaceted methodology incorporating digital tools, personal reflections and collective insights will be employed.

Researchers will maintain digital journals throughout the process, aiding in identifying and acknowledging assumptions and biases.

Focus group sessions will facilitate open discussions on challenges and opportunities faced by female leaders in Pakistani educational institutions, incorporating diverse voices, including students.

An online survey distributed to a representative sample of female teachers will provide quantitative insights into common beliefs, stereotypes and barriers hindering their leadership aspirations.

This comprehensive approach aims to gather rich data and insights to inform strategies for female empowerment in education.



Figure 1: Research participants providing their perspectives and discussing mentorship programmes.

Participant selection

Participants for the research will be selected through purposive sampling, ensuring representation from diverse perspectives. Researchers involved in the study will voluntarily contribute to the digital journal component. Two focus groups, each comprising 8 to 10 participants, will be carefully chosen to ensure diversity.

The online survey will include a minimum of 50 female teachers teaching various subjects and levels, prioritising socio-economic and educational diversity.

The selection criteria aim to capture a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by female leaders in Pakistani educational settings, enriching the data by incorporating diverse voices and experiences and enhancing the validity and applicability of the research findings.

Ethical considerations

Prior to participating in any aspect of the research, all participants will be fully informed about the purpose, procedures and potential outcomes. Consent will be obtained, ensuring the voluntary nature of participation. All information collected will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Participants will be assured that their responses will be anonymous to encourage open and honest sharing.

Analysis

Data collected from digital journals, focus group discussions, and online surveys will be analysed using qualitative and quantitative methods. Themes and patterns will be identified to answer the research questions and contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities for female empowerment in Pakistani educational leadership.

This research methodology aims to synergise diverse perspectives, fostering a holistic understanding of the complex dynamics surrounding female leadership in the educational landscape of Pakistan.

Summary and analysis of the findings

Research on female leadership aspirations and educational conditions in Peshawar Model School highlights several challenges and insights, including concerns about balancing fun and serious activities, limited opportunities, cultural biases, and obstacles like gender generalisations and peer pressure. Proposed solutions involve implementing mentorship programmes, refining school policies, and promoting inclusivity through awareness and targeted leadership programmes. Strategies for fostering a positive educational environment include addressing bullying, promoting collaboration through extracurricular activities, fostering open communication, and prioritising personal well-being support.

Overall, the findings underscore the importance of structured initiatives, collaborative efforts, and holistic approaches to empower female leaders and cultivate positive school communities. However, the research also identifies gaps in areas such as daily reinforcement, measurable outcomes for inclusivity initiatives, clarity in demonstrating improvements, student involvement in safety education, and assessing communication platforms.

The imperative to empower female leaders in Pakistani education is unmistakable amidst enduring challenges like work-life balance issues and societal biases. Proposed solutions, including mentorship programmes and awareness initiatives, aim to tackle these hurdles head-on. Female students, facing barriers, advocate for refined school policies and targeted programmes, while teachers and prospective student welfare officers underscore their commitment to a safe and inclusive environment. In conclusion, there is a resounding call for a comprehensive strategy that integrates awareness campaigns, mentorship initiatives, policy refinement, and a steadfast commitment to fostering a positive educational environment.



Figure 2: The action plan focused on training 20 female adults and launching a student peer mentorship programme.

Key findings from exploration

- Challenges for female leadership: Concerns regarding work-life balance, limited opportunities, societal biases, and gender stereotypes pose significant hurdles for aspiring female leaders.
- Proposed solutions: Mentorship programmes, refinement of school policies, and awareness initiatives are suggested as practical solutions to address barriers to female leadership.
- Educational environment: Strategies to nurture a positive educational environment include addressing bullying, promoting teamwork through extracurricular activities, fostering open communication, and prioritising emotional well-being support.
- Identified gaps: Gaps in emotional support, measurable outcomes for inclusivity initiatives, clarity in teaching enhancements, student involvement in safety education, and assessing communication platforms reveal areas for improvement in empowering female leaders and students.
- Call for comprehensive strategy: There is a pressing need for tangible actions, encompassing awareness, mentorship, policy refinement, and a commitment to fostering a safe and inclusive educational environment, to empower female leaders in Pakistani education.

Action plan

- Train 20 female adults in a one-month intensive mentorship programme emphasising leadership and mentoring skills.
- Launch a student-to-student peer mentorship programme pairing each mentor with at least two peers.
- Collaborate with administrators to refine and implement gender-inclusive policies within two months.
- Conduct a comprehensive policy review after six months.
- Establish a continuous evaluation system with feedback collected every three months.

Action plan implementation

The mentorship programme for 20 female adults integrates action research principles to optimise its effectiveness in cultivating leadership and mentoring skills. It begins with a pre-assessment phase to tailor curriculum development based on existing competencies and aspirations. Collaboration with experienced mentors ensures a comprehensive syllabus covering essential areas like communication and conflict resolution. Interactive workshops and peer learning sessions facilitate practical application and insights exchange. One-on-one mentoring provides personalised support throughout the programme. Reflection exercises promote self-awareness and goal-setting, while skill application projects facilitate real-world development. Post-programme assessments gather feedback for continuous improvement. By embracing action research principles, the programme empowers female adults to navigate leadership roles confidently and excel as mentors in their communities and workplaces.

‘Mentorship programmes empower teachers, foster collaboration and professional growth.’

Ms Gohar I Nayab Zahid



Figure 3: Qualitative insights were gathered through interviews with teachers, administrators and mentors, enriching the evaluation process.

Data collection procedure

The action research employed a range of data collection methods, including surveys, interviews and observations, to thoroughly evaluate the mentorship programme's effectiveness. Twenty teachers participated in pre- and post-implementation surveys, providing quantitative data on their expectations, concerns and perceived benefits, with explicit consent. Qualitative insights were gathered through interviews with teachers, administrators and mentors, enriching the evaluation process. Direct observations of mentor-mentee interactions were conducted with participant consent to offer real-time feedback. Prioritising participant consent underscored ethical considerations, ensuring autonomy. Active engagement of participants validated the collected data, facilitating informed decisions to optimise programme outcomes and enhance the learning experience for all stakeholders.

Key findings

- Positive impact on teacher expectations: Pre- and post-implementation surveys indicate a significant increase in teachers' expectations regarding the mentorship programme's effectiveness in enhancing their professional skills and confidence.
- Enhanced teacher-administrator collaboration: Interviews reveal improved collaboration between teachers and administrators, with mentors facilitating constructive dialogue and problem-solving approaches.
- Challenges in mentor-mentee dynamics: Observations highlight some challenges, including communication barriers and mismatched expectations, suggesting the need for enhanced mentorship training and support.
- Opportunities for programme refinement: Feedback from participants underscores the importance of refining activities and resources to better align with participants' diverse needs and preferences.
- Importance of continued support: Participants express the need for ongoing support and resources beyond the initial mentorship programme, emphasising the importance of sustained professional development initiatives.

**'MentorHERs:
Nurturing leadership qualities
in educators to sculpt
future leaders.'**

Participant

The action research sheds light on the profound impact of mentorship programmes on teacher professional growth and collaborative culture within our educational sphere. Ultimately, these initiatives benefit students, as the teachers will utilise their skills to empower our youth..

Conclusion

The findings of this action research outline the various ways the mentorship programme has affected teacher professional development and collaborative culture within our educational context. These insights provide valuable lessons with global relevance for learning environments.

- The mentorship programme significantly enhances teacher professional advancement, fostering heightened confidence, sharpened skills, and increased collaboration among participants.
- Collaborative support frameworks, such as mentorship initiatives, play a crucial role in nurturing a culture of continual learning and professional enrichment within educational institutions.
- Sustained professional enrichment efforts are imperative beyond the initial mentorship period to continually nurture teachers' growth and efficacy.
- Advocating for inclusive mentorship practices is essential to cater to the diverse needs and backgrounds of educators, promoting equitable opportunities for professional development and collaboration.
- The success of mentorship programmes in enhancing teacher professional development and collaboration has global relevance, demonstrating the pivotal role of collaborative support frameworks in fostering ongoing learning and growth among educators.

The action research sheds light on the profound impact of mentorship programmes on teacher professional growth and collaborative culture within our educational sphere. It offers valuable lessons and insights applicable across global learning environments and the enhancement of the school development cycle. Ultimately, these initiatives benefit students, as the 20 trained female adults will utilise their newly acquired skills to enrich classroom experiences and nurture youth imbued with leadership qualities.

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I have used AI technology, particularly ChatGPT, for aiding in spell checks, grammar corrections and content rephrasing.

Female students face barriers like stereotypes, societal expectations and peer pressure in leadership aspirations, emphasising the importance of challenging stereotypes and embracing leadership roles collectively.

Teachers implement diverse strategies for a safe environment, prioritising addressing conflicts, promoting respect and enhancing inclusivity through extracurricular activities, open communication, emotional well-being support, and recommending teaching experiences for improved teaching quality.