



## Solutions to facilitate women's leadership path

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### Abstract

The present study aimed to identify strategies that facilitate women in their path to school management positions. The research method was qualitative and the strategy used was classic grounded theory. The research field was female teachers applying for management positions who had participated in the selection and appointment test for school principals in Kurdistan Province. Using purposive sampling and based on the theoretical saturation rule, 18 people were studied. The data collection tool was a semi-structured interview. Data were analyzed through open coding and categorization. The validity of the research was ensured by relying on the four criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. The findings indicated the identification of 66 open codes and 6 sub-concepts that were placed under the main concept of strategies. The strategies include holding briefing workshops, building a social culture about women's management capabilities, building a culture of gender-equal thinking, providing a platform for women's promotion, appointing individuals based on meritocracy, and providing welfare facilities.

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## Introduction

Today, paying attention to the role of women as half of human resources is not only a fundamental issue of development and social participation, but also an important tool in achieving other development goals (Rifatjah et al., 2012). In order to survive and grow, organizations must use women, regardless of gender, as sustainable and effective human capital. Because if there is a more supportive atmosphere regarding women's management and their organization at management levels, the level of employee capability increases (Aibaghi et al., 2018). According to statistics published in 2018, women accounted for an average of 31 percent of the world's workforce. This indicator for Germany was 46.5%, France 46.9%, Switzerland 46.5%, Japan 43.6%, India 22.1%, and Iran 19% (Worldbank, 2019). An important goal that the Islamic Republic of Iran has set in the sixth development document is to increase the share of organizational productivity in the economic growth of the society to 31 percent, which requires the use of the abilities of all qualified individuals in the society. In view of this, women, as half of the country's population, can be considered an important factor in achieving this goal (Boostani et al., 2014). Developing countries and the Third World, due to their specific backwardness, need the active presence of women in various economic, social, etc. fields, and despite the importance of this issue and the efforts and planning of these countries, the presence of women, especially in decision-making and planning positions, has not been very significant, and in this respect they are far from developed countries. In Iran, the population of women who have completed higher education has increased significantly in recent years and have acquired the necessary skills in various fields. Unfortunately, statistics and studies show that the presence of women in management fields is still very low, and our country is in a much more unfavorable situation compared to many countries in the world (Fouladi and Fathollahi Nargeseh, 2024). Despite the lack of evidence for significant differences in the leadership abilities of women and men in public relations, women are still largely absent from senior management and leadership roles (Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2018).

One of the professions in which women can play a meaningful role in the effective implementation is school management. Of course, differences in the

gender of school principals affect their career paths, and the personal lives and gender of the leader can also affect workplace characteristics. In a series of studies on women's leadership, it was found that men and women in educational leadership differed in the way they led organizations. The research examined the social changes that women leaders promoted, including their efforts to promote social justice education (Grogan and Shakshaft, 2011; Mansfield, 2013). Grogan and Shakshaft (2011) found that four main types of activities engaged female principals in the United States: (1) shaping the educational vision, (2) building a foundation for engagement, (3) providing support, and (4) bridging the gap between students under their jurisdiction. They also found that female principals were more involved in development, empowerment (performance, and collaborative management) than their male counterparts. Women focused on relationships with others; their primary interest was teaching; They have a democratic style, they share more (Kuchan et al., 2000; Robinson et al., 2017). However, most of the above-mentioned sources are from "Western" countries, and these findings may be context-dependent (Arar, 2019). According to Puss, Brown, and Hipper (2015), cultural values can negatively or positively influence gender roles in an organization. For example, Chaudhry et al. (2019) examined cultural values in Indian and Korean cultures in the context of women's experiences, showing that although patriarchy poses a similar challenge for female leaders in both countries, how women cope with these challenges differs culturally. In many organizations, management structures are designed to favor men, and this can affect the appointment of women to management positions (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 2021).

According to studies, organizations with women in leadership positions tend to perform better. For example, a study conducted by Credit Suisse (2016) shows that companies with a high number of women on the board of directors have better financial performance. Women are usually able to balance work and life well due to their special abilities in time management. This skill can help create a positive and healthy work environment (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Evidence shows that women's desire to lead is different from that of men. Women usually act more inclusively and collaboratively in leadership positions. They tend to seek consensus and participation, and it

can be assumed that these characteristics are truly modern and can contribute to the success and progress of today's creative economy and entrepreneurs (Fouladi and Fatholahi Nargese, 2024). They are also more willing to share knowledge and receive information before taking action. They value less dominance or hierarchy and tend to behave as individuals at the center of the human resource network (Adib Far & Chitsaz, 1402).

The lack of successful female role models at leadership levels can lead to feelings of loneliness and hopelessness among women (Kark & Eagly, 2010). Women who have benefited from mentoring can become role models for other women and girls, showing others what is achievable and encouraging others to follow in their footsteps (Jackson & Bourne, 2020). Since many organizations lack clear policies to support women in their career paths, this can lead to their lack of promotion and professional growth (Catalyst, 2020). Support from family and community can help women cope with their career challenges and achieve greater success (Eagly & Carli, 2021).

In summary, reflection on previous empirical evidence indicates that a significant portion of women's potential for organizational leadership—particularly in school leadership—remains overlooked, with numerous barriers persisting in their path. However, limited research is available on solutions to address these obstacles. Thus, in an effort to bridge these gaps, the present study aims to explore solutions to facilitate women's leadership trajectory in schools.

### **Research background**

In their study titled "Women Professionals in the Transition to the Fourth Industrial Revolution," Santana et al. (2022) stated that a growing number of studies have been conducted to understand the discriminatory practices associated with the management of female professionals. With the aim of expanding these discussions within the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, this study examines the results of a quantitative survey conducted with 45,217 professionals (both men and women) from Brazilian companies participating in the Alliance for Women's Empowerment.

(1402) Adib Far & Chit Saz, in their study titled "Gender Dynamics in the Workplace: Strategies for Coaching Women in Organizations," stated that while

progress towards gender equity remains a struggle, coaching can play a vital role in helping women achieve their full potential in the workplace.

Burke (2019) in a study titled "Women in Management and Corporate Boards: Accelerating Progress" collected extensive data from various developed countries and showed that women are usually placed at lower levels than men in management, and senior levels are only in the sphere of male supervision, and this is due to the underestimation of women's ability to lead work and subordinates.

Shahriari et al. (1403) conducted a study to examine the management challenges of women managers in Khuzestan Province. The challenges identified in this study were categorized into five main concepts including the glass ceiling, historical male dominance over women, low self-confidence of women, incompatibility of customary and religious frameworks for women's presence, and lack of obedience from female colleagues.

Hassani (2021) conducted a study aimed at examining the relationship between different leadership styles of women in the statistical population of non-governmental organization employees and snowball sampling. After analyzing the data, he concluded that women use a transformational leadership style and men use a transactional and free-spirited leadership style. Women are relationship-oriented and men are task-oriented. Bambula and Chamaru (2020) concluded in a study titled "The Effect of the Glass Ceiling on Women's Career Development" that was conducted in Sri Lanka and among women working in the private sector that there is a negative relationship between the glass ceiling and women's career development.

### **Method**

The present study was conducted with a qualitative method. Given that the researcher's goal was to study effective strategies for women in the process of appointing school management positions, a classical approach was used. The research field included female teachers applying for management positions who had participated in the selection and appointment test for school managers in Kurdistan Province. Using purposive sampling and relying on the theoretical saturation rule, 18 people were studied. The data collection tool was a semi-structured interview. The duration of each interview ranged between 40 and 60

minutes, and the data collection process continued until the theoretical concentration was achieved. The interview began with general questions such as "What were your main strategies for assuming a management position?" and then follow-up questions such as "Please explain by giving an example" were asked to encourage participants and access more in-depth information. In the present study, a three-stage data coding process was used, namely open, selective, and theoretical coding. To examine the validity of the research, the four criteria of Guba and Lincoln (1985) including credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability were used. Specifically, to calculate the credibility feature, examples of quotes from sample individuals were referred to. To achieve the

dependability criterion, the control method was used by sample members. To achieve the confirmability criterion, an attempt was made to clearly explain the steps and stages of conducting the research, and finally, to ensure the transferability of the research, an attempt was made to observe the diversity criterion during sampling. It is worth noting that Nvivo software was used to facilitate and increase the accuracy of the data analysis process.

### Findings

Identifying solutions to facilitate the process of women assuming school management positions

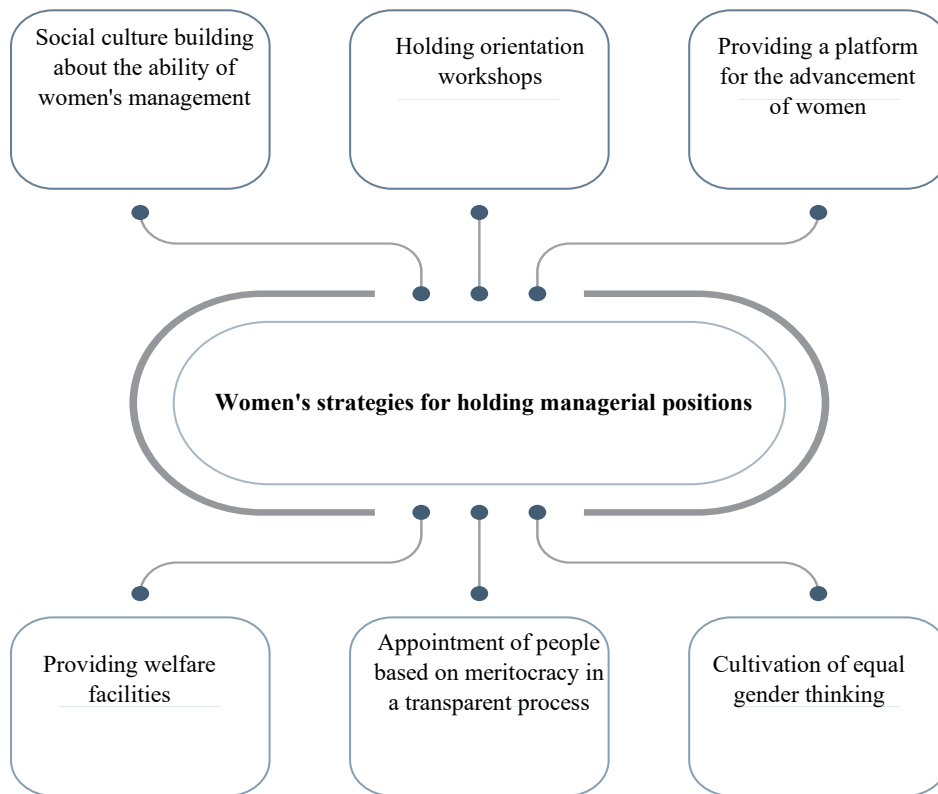
**Table 1. Strategies to facilitate the process of assuming a management position**

core codes	Open codes
Social culture building about the ability of women's management	Using the management experiences of other women, women supporting women managers, taking advantage of the accepted solutions of previous managers, motivating successful women managers to others, using women managers for training workshops, supervising women managers on each other, holding group meetings of women with each other.
Holding orientation workshops	Holding effective executive courses, holding briefing sessions for women's family members, training managerial skills and capabilities, properly training people in the community to accept female managers, improving the decision-making power of women, reducing job anxiety.
Providing a platform for the advancement of women	Special financial aid to female principals, appropriate organizational support for schools, organizational expectations in official hours, increasing the salaries of female principals in proportion to performance, employing female principals in elementary schools, changing organizational rules in line with the presence of women in high-ranking positions, changing the criteria Evaluating women according to women's conditions, equal advantage for women to prove themselves, providing an environment for women's growth, giving women the opportunity to challenge themselves, appointing women to high-level management positions, Providing a safe and calm work environment, financial support for capable women, examining their main concerns, trying to remove obstacles for women to progress.
Providing welfare facilities	Providing a place to keep the children of the manager's colleagues, providing remote working conditions for women, reducing the working hours of women in schools, considering suitable amenities, providing a comfortable environment for the children of women in management positions.
Appointment of people based on meritocracy in a transparent process	Career promotion of female managers in case of success, defining people based on merit, emphasizing acquired skills, appointing outstanding women at the head of the organization, paying benefits based on abilities, reducing party games in the appointment of managers, evaluating women based on the amount of effort, complete clarification Exam stages from the beginning to the end, announcing the results in each stage in a transparent manner, clarifying the resources of the management exam, specifying the exact time and place of the interview, logical feedback from the exam stages, providing the opportunity for reconsideration, revealing the effective factors in the

core codes	Open codes
	promotion of women, use Educated officials for interviews, elimination of party games in the tenure process, elimination of discrimination in the tenure process.
Cultivation of equal gender thinking	Making the society aware of the role of women, the government supporting women in management positions, justifying parents to the ability of women in management, not separating jobs based on gender, correcting people's irrational thoughts, creating the right culture in society, judging women fairly, changing traditional attitudes. to women's management, changing the perspective in line with ability, correct education of equal opportunities in society, removing the gender view of management, equal gender view of women, not prejudging women's ability, breaking the glass ceiling regarding women's management, compilation Suitable books for women's management

According to Table 1, the solutions to facilitate the tenure of women in school management positions, such as; Holding briefing workshops, creating a social culture about the ability of women to manage, creating

a culture of equal gender thinking, providing a platform for the promotion of women, appointing people based on meritocracy and providing welfare facilities.



**Figure 1. Women's strategies for holding management positions**

Each of these six proposed solutions includes the items that are well shown in Table 3, each of which attracts attention as an effective solution, which one of the managers explains as follows:

"Holding useful and constructive courses and workshops in the field of management, appropriate financial and organizational assistance and support, providing specific places covered by education and

training to keep the children of working colleagues, providing remote working conditions to reduce working hours, considering benefits and Adequate amenities.

While another manager explained his opinion in this way: "To make it easier for women to accept responsibility:

1) Effective factors in the promotion of women to managerial jobs should be identified.

2) Teaching management skills and capabilities to women so that they accept responsibility with greater awareness and ability.

3) Strengthening their self-confidence and judging them fairly

4) The traditional view and attitude of the society, which is very annoying for educated women and hinders their growth and development, should be corrected.

5) And that family support is one of the important factors to encourage women in management.

### Discussion and conclusion

In relation to the ways to facilitate women managers to hold management positions, one of the most important ways is to hold orientation workshops such as the development of committees and working groups with the aim of strengthening the goals of women's leadership and increasing appreciation, promoting gender-based research and considering women as consultants, among other solutions. It is to promote gender equality in leadership that Chaudhuri, Park & Kim (2016) reviewed and acknowledged that in Indian and Korean cultures, although patriarchy is equally important for female leaders in both countries. It creates problems, but how women fight against these problems is culturally different, so it is suggested that training courses and workshops be held in various fields and needed by women at times appropriate to their activities. As (Pascua, Kushner & Woodward, 2019) showed, strategies such as the expansion of forums and workshops with the idea of developing the goals of women's leadership and promoting recognition and appreciation, the dissemination of research based on gender and considering women as

consultants, including suggestions for promoting gender equality is in leadership, another way to facilitate women's leadership was creating a social culture about the ability of women to manage, which should inform the society about their ability and competence Women, in order to manage a part of society's affairs, is one of the most basic things that should be paid attention to, which is in line with the results of Shahriari, Sharifi Fard and Nderlou (1403). Another solution is the culturalization of gender equality thinking, which, as Heath and Murphy (2016) showed, women's leadership style is adapted to the culture, not to the gender of individuals, just as business leaders around the world pursued gender equality through the principles of women's empowerment. and Kazuba (2018) and another effective solution was to provide a platform for the promotion of women, which Porbehrorzan et al. (1400) showed that male and female cultural values, The existence of approaches that support women's rights and the existence of gender justice all originate from the ruling culture, as well as the empowerment and professional development of women to hold managerial positions are among the factors that affect the promotion of women in the organization. Another solution is to appoint people based on meritocracy, more precisely, key competences.

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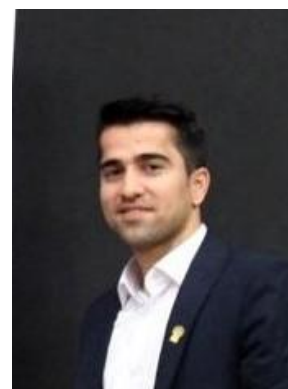
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