Perceived Leadership Competence Among Women Working in Wolaita Sodo University

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ABSTRACT

Background: Women's active participation in leadership is central to development and poverty alleviation. Yet they are underrepresented in different position. So, this study aimed to identify their perception of towards leadership competency in order to increase their involvement in leadership position.

Method: Institutional based cross-sectional study design was carried out from May 1-30, 2019 among 280 women selected by using simple random sampling technique. After entering to Epi Data version 3.1; exported to SPSS version 22 for analysis. Principal component factor analysis was done and a component with Eigenvalue > 1 taken as a strong factor.

Result: A response rate of 91.7% was achieved. Majority 136 (52.9%) were in the age group 20-30 years. Women's perceived leadership competence was 68.8%. The factor analysis procedure revealed four factors that explained the 55.3% of variation. Among them component 1 which consists of time management, presentation skill, communication planning, problem solving, process management, conflict management and strategic thinking identified as strongest factor.

Conclusions: According to this study woman perceived leadership competence was good. Time management, presentation skill, communication planning, problem solving, process management, conflict management and strategic thinking perceived as strong factor to be a competent leader.

Keywords: Leadership, Competency, Perception, Women, Wolaita, Factor Analysis

INTRODUCTION

Leadership is the ability to influence a group toward the achievement of a vision or set of goals whereas leadership competencies means leadership skills and behaviors that contribute to superior performance. Effective leadership skill helps leaders to gain the trust of employees and makes other tasks easier to operate [1-3] Female leadership is a current issue and it has reached quite a lot of attention in the media but almost null research is conducted on self-perceived leadership competence. So, the aim of this study is to assess perception of women towards their leadership competence and associated factors.

Research Problem

Working in a world dominated by male decision-makers and their established practices, women encounter a variety of barriers that impede their progress to the top of their careers [4]. In recent studies it has been widely recognized that women's active participation in leadership is central to development and poverty alleviation [5]. But studies across different countries indicated that women's participation in leadership positions not as expected. The latest available estimates show that women account for less than one-third of senior and middle management positions in the majority of developed countries [6,7] evidence also shows women are underrepresented in higher-level professional leadership

positions [8]. Women in developing countries are generally silent and their voice has been stifled by economic and cultural factors [9]. The number of women in administrative and leadership positions in Ethiopia remains extremely low in all administrative areas in general and schools in particular [10].

Research Objectives

This study tries to identify the following points:

1. To identify women's perception of leadership competence

2. To determine factors associated with perceived leadership competence

3. To examine their perception of competence qualitatively

Theoretical Background

A theory of performance is the basis for competency. To be a competent leader, it needs a mechanism of change, for this basic contingency theory is helpful. According to this theory, there is no best way to organize a corporation, to lead a company, or to make decisions. Instead, the optimal course of action is contingent (dependent) upon the internal and external situation [11]. The contingency theories of leadership states that the need for the leader is to adjust the behavior based on a rational understanding of the situation and assume a leadership style that is appropriate for the occasion and they need to possess the ability to hand out punishments and rewards, as well [12]. Also, study suggest that maximum performance is believed to occur when the person's capability or talent is consistent with the needs of the job demands and the organizational environment [13].

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Study Setting and Design

The study was conducted in Wolaita Sodo University, which have three campuses, namely Gandaba, Ottona and Tercha campuses. 1737 Staffs of the university are women. The study conducted from May 1- 30, 2019. Institutional based cross-sectional study design was employed.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

This study used self -reporting of women toward their perception of leadership competence, so all women whether they have experience of leadership or not included in the study. Additionally, their voluntariness to participate and on duty during the study period were included in the study, while cleaners, security guards and runners excluded from the study.

Sample Size Determination

Sample size was determined by using a single population proportion formula by considering proportion of leadership competence hence, there is no reasonable estimate about leadership competence among women, and then 50% was used to get the maximum sample size, 95%confidence interval (CI) and 5% of marginal error. But the total eligible population (N=742) which is less than 10,000 population correction formulas was used and considering 10% non-response rate, total 280 sample was taken.

Sampling Technique

All the three campuses were included in the study. The sample size for each campus was determined proportionally for the number women in each campus. Simple random sampling technique was used. For qualitative study key informants (those who were leaders in the university in different position) were selected using purposive sampling technique.

Data Collection Tool and Technique

A translated Amharic version (local language) questioner was used to collect data. Six data collector and 4 supervisors who had BSc degree recruited and collected the data after taking two-day training. Continuous follow up and supervision was made by principal investigator and co-investigators throughout the data collection period.

Quantitative Data

The questionnaire was adopted from different literatures and modified contextually. Data was collected by using self-administered structured pre-tested on the 24 competence-related Likert-scale items.

Qualitative Data

For Expert scrutinized semi-structured interview were developed by the investigators before data collection. Probing questions used to explore their perception of leadership competence. Voice recorders and field-notes were used to capture the information after taking written consent.

Data Processing and Analysis

The collected data first checked manually for completeness, missed values, unlikely responses then coded and entered to Epi data 3.5.1 then exported to SPSS version 22 for analysis. Simple descriptive statics was used to summarize the finding. Principal component analysis was performed to assess factors with varimax rotation was conducted. After transcription, manual thematic Analysis was used for qualitative data. Also, in-order to know their perception, perception score was calculated by categorizing those answered strongly agree and agree as having good perception and strongly disagree and disagree as poor perception.

Data Quality Control

Principal investigator and co-authors supervised data collectors on daily bases. The questionnaire was pre tested on 5% of calculated sample size out the study area before two weeks of the main data collection period. The validity of the tool will also be approved by experts.

The Cronbach Coefficient Alpha of the questionnaire was calculated in the pre-test study. Considering the findings, from a total of 40 items, 16 items with low internal consistency were dropped. The final questionnaire contained 24 items with a 4-point Likert scale item. The internal consistency reliability of the questionnaire was 0.916.

RESULTS

Socio Demographic Characteristics

A total of 262 women participated in this study, providing a response rate of 93.5%. Out of the total respondents, a majority (136, or 52.9%) were in the age group 20-30 years old. The most numerous religious followers self-identified as Protestant (139, or 53.1%). A majority (184, or 70.2%) were married, and 115 (43.9%) of the women indicated having a diploma as their educational status. Of those that were married, most (120, 65.2%) had a husband that was a government employee, and the husbands of 68(37.0%) had completed just a first degree **(Table 1)**.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of study subjects, in Wolaita Sodo University, 2019 (n=262).

Characteristics	Category	Frequency(N)	Percent (%)
Age of women	20-30	139	53.1
	31-40	97	37.0
	>40	26	9.9
Religion	Protestant	140	53.4
	Orthodox	93	35.5
	Others[1]	29	11.1
Marital status	Married	184	70.2
	Single	71	27.1
	Others[2]	7	2.7
Educational status of women	Diploma	115	43.9
	First degree	93	35.5
	Second degree	54	20.6
Husband education (N=184)	Diploma	59	32.1
	First degree	68	37.0
	Second degree	41	22.3
	Others[3]	16	8.7
Husband occupation (n=184)	Government employee	120	65.2
	Merchant	35	19.0
	Other[4]	29	15.8

Others[1]- Muslim, Catholic, Johba

Others[2]- Divorced and widowed

Other[3]- completed secondary school, PhD

Other[4]- daily laborer, private institute worker

Perceived Leadership Competence

One hundred and fifty-two (58.0%) of women had good perception of leadership competence. The qualitative study data support this finding. Most of the participants in the in-depth interviews stated that there was no problem regarding leadership competence, rather women need to act responsibly similar to as they do in their homes. Due to a fear of harming their home environment, they don't become involved in demonstrating their leadership competence.

As explained by a 31-year-old participant, "*naturally women fear, actually it is a good thing… when she holds a position; she strives not to make a mistake, (….) You see it when she pays for her home…, she even ignores herself…. similarly, for her work…women are better than men …it is not competence related, rather it is due to fear*".

Principal Component Analysis

Principal component analysis allows us to summarize and to visualize the information in a data set containing individuals/observations described by multiple inter-related quantitative variables; if we have more than 3 variables it is very difficult to visualize a multi-dimensional hyperspace, so it is best to use PCA as well as it reduces data by geometrically projecting them onto lower dimensions or principal components (PCs), with the goal of finding the best summary of the data using a limited number of PCs. So, we selected PCA as appropriate analysis for our data in-order to identify appropriate items to be a competent [14,15].

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) = 0.881 and the Bartlett's test of sphericity χ^2 (276) =2945.207, p< 0.000 making the sample of this study adequate for factor analysis. From the scree plot six factors were retained with Eigenvalue of greater than 1 (**Figure 1**).
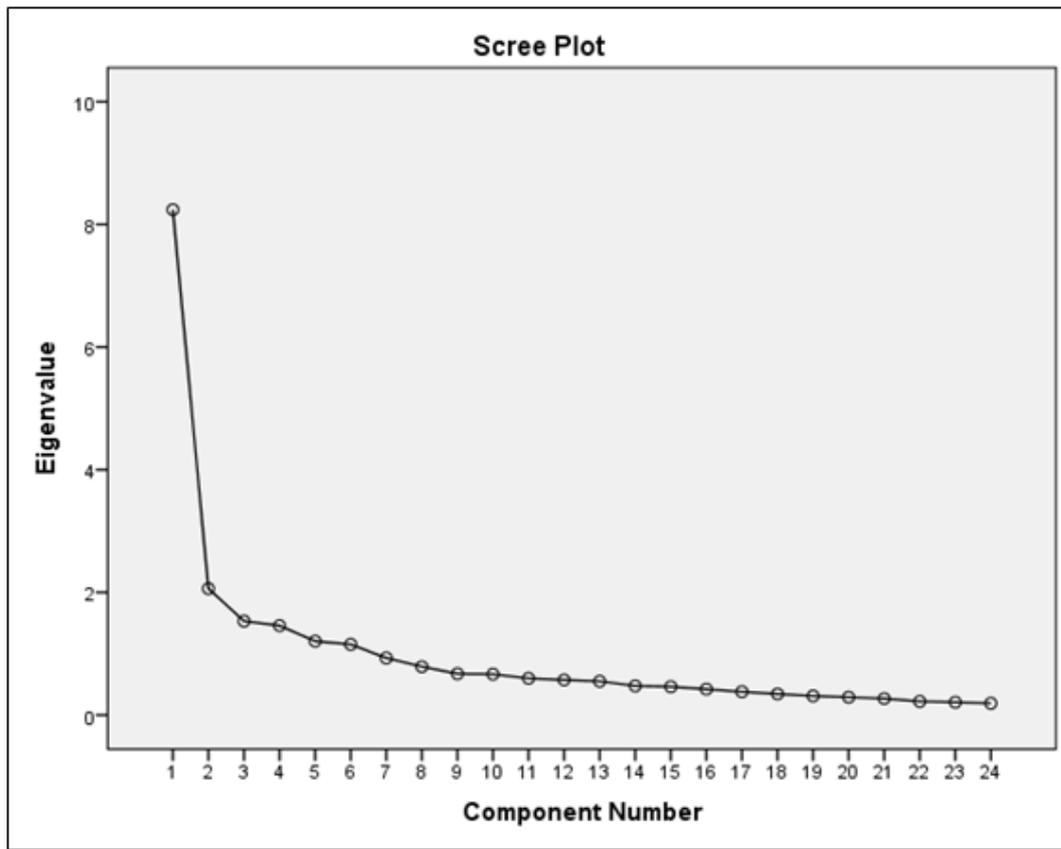

Figure 1. Scree Plot of eigenvalues of perceived leadership competence related variables.

A factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted and items that had loadings less than 0.4 on any factor were excluded (**Table 2**).

The items were designed to index four constructs: knowledge, skills, experience and personal qualities. After the rotation, the first factor component accounted for 15.4% of the variance, the second accounted for 29.8%, the third accounted for 42.6% and the fourth component 55.3%.

Based on this study, Component 4 had six items with loadings higher than 0.4 that supported skills, and knowledge. Component 3 had six items with loadings higher than 0.4 with that supported skills, experience knowledge and personal quality. Component 2 had six items with loadings higher than 0.4. Lastly, Component 1 was the strongest and had seven items with loadings higher than 0.4. These involved time management, presentation skills, communication planning, problem solving, process management, conflict management and strategic thinking showing knowledge and skills.

Table 2. Values of factor loading from Principal component analysis in Wolaita Sodo University, 2019 (n= 262).

Number	Variable	Component				Themes
		1	2	3	4	
1	Time management	0.675				Skill
2	Presentation skill	0.707				
3	Conflict management	0.704				
4	Applying new skill				0.648	
5	Financial management				0.637	
6	Problem solving	0.687				
7	Listening			0.476	0.545	
8	Delegation		0.815			
9	Building effective teams		0.458			
10	Building effective teams		0.618			
11	Process management	0.629				Knowledge
12	Communication Planning	0.503	0.548			
13	Strategic thinking	0.564				
14	Decision making		0.842			
15	Recruiting staff			0.685		
16	Leading change				0.689	
17	Negotiating				0.613	
18	Developing community				0.660	Experience
19	Peer relationship			0.649		
20	Written communications					
21	Perspective			0.626		
22	Understanding others			0.581		
23	Understanding self			0.640		Personal qualities
24	Cross-cultural flexibility		0.621			

DISCUSSION

This study has provided vigorous information on perceived leadership competence and factors that were perceived as important to be a competent leader. The findings of this study showed that the perceived leadership competence among the women was good.

The overall perceived leadership competence in this study was 58.0%, which is similar with the results of the study carried out in Finland [16]. Most of the time, the self-assessment gave the respondents the possibility to take ownership of developing their leadership competencies. Taking this as a clue, it may not be perceived as a major concern among the women whether they are involved in leadership position.

As this study showed, the items that contributed to component1(with loadings higher than 0.4) were perceived as important to being a competent leader. These seven items were: strategic thinking, process management, presentation skills, problem solving, communication planning, conflict management and time management.

According to this study, strategic thinking was one of the items that contributed to component 1. It had the highest loading with a value of 0.564. This supports the view that strategic thinking is an important determinant of leadership effectiveness, and it is a vital leadership competency [17]. Also, it is associated with successful organizations in enabling them to respond to environmental challenges and adapt to future demands [18]. Recently study has shown that a lack of competency in strategic thinking has been associated with top executives' failures and ineffectiveness worldwide [19].

If someone has effective communication skills, they are able to deliver what they have. Based on this study, communication planning and presentation skills had factor loadings of 0.503 and 0.707, respectively. Most people agree that it is impossible to lead people without planning a course of action. Communication is one aspect that should be planned. Effective and accurate communication acts as an

important factor to grow as an efficient and successful leader. It is argued that great leaders are always considered as first-class communicators and invest most of their time in communicating in order to stay in their position and also to achieve the ultimate goals of the organization [20,21]. A leader who is unable to deliver an effective presentation is unable to express their ideas in a way that inspires people to act. So, an effective leader should have superior presentation and speaking skills [Darren M. 2015]. About 85% of a leader's success depends on communication skills, and good communication skills are the foundation of effective leadership [22].

As explained in the qualitative part of this study, most of the participants also agreed with the quantitative findings. If a leader has poor communication skills, no one can know what he/she thinks; so, communication scillaren of the most important skills that all leaders should have.

Leaders with creative problem-solving skills have the ability to stimulate, challenge and inspire others to continually pursue prominent problems and devise creative solutions to feed future organizational growth and success [23]. As evidenced in this study, problem-solving skills identified as are very essential for leaders to stay successful in their careers as well as in life.

The qualitative study participants also suggested that leaders face problems while performing their duties. Yet, they should have keys to solve those problems; otherwise, they will lose the trust of their followers.

According to this study, time management was one of the important leadership skills with a loading of 0.675. The study indicated that a leader's time management skills was one of the requirements for the effectiveness of managers and is crucial to accomplishing organization tasks as well as to avoiding wasting valuable organizational assets [24,25]. Also, in the qualitative study, most of the participants suggested that women's limited involvement in leadership positions was due to their double burdens, that is their home and office responsibilities. Without time management skills, no women would now hold a position or in the future. Process management was also identified as an item with a loading of 0.629. It is important for analyzing, defining, optimizing, monitoring and controlling business processes and for measuring and driving the improved performance of interdependent business processes.

There is a realization that conflict management should be a skill that leaders need to give priority to learning and mastering; if they don't have the skill lead to negative outcome [26]. Besides organizational conflict is considered legitimate and inevitable and a positive indicator of effective organizational management [27]. In this study women perceived it as important item with a loading of 0.704.

CONCLUSION

According to this study woman perceived leadership competence was good. After varimax rotation four components were identified from those components 1 consisting of time management, presentation skill, communication planning, problem solving, process management, conflict management and strategic thinking perceived as strong component to be a competent leader with loading greater than 0.4.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical clearance and approval letter to conduct study obtained from Wolaita Sodo university ethical review committee and the purpose of the study was explained to the study participants and written consent secured before data collection and confidentiality of the information were ensured by coding. The interview was undertaken privately in separate area. Only authorized person was got access to raw data collected from the field.

LIMITATION OF HIS STUDY

This study will be better if it is purely qualitative and if large sample size was considered even if it is adequate in this case.

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