Gender and Educational Leadership

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Abstract

It is imperative to achieve gender equality in educational institutions. Gender equality focuses on initiatives aimed at achieving parity between the two genders, ensuring that both can enjoy equal advantages in all aspects of life. One possible measure is to introduce education management practices in educational institutions. The objective of this study is to investigate possible gender differences in education leadership. In order to do so 22 female education professional aged between 30 to 60 years old (47±8,3) with 18 (±7,3) years of experience took part in the study. The results revealed gender inequalities in favor of men. Still, the views of the respondents were affected by their demographics, age, experience, educational level and family status.

Keywords: Leadership, Gender Education

Introduction

In the modern school, its management has a complex role, while each principal is called upon to become, in addition to a good administrator, a competent leader who will contribute to its effective functioning as a learning organization (Matthews et al., 2007). Therefore, principals should have knowledge and skills of a leader who inspires teachers, students, and community members in order to ensure the best learning outcomes and create appropriate professional relationships and structures at school (Darling-Hammond, 2008). In addition, leadership positions are assumed by men, male and female teachers, who have similar qualifications, at all levels of education. There is no doubt, today, that there are more women leaders than at any time in history (Carli & Eagly, 2016). In fact, educational administration is one of the sectors in which the percentage of women is high. Thus, gender in leadership holds an important research element, even if women are not significantly represented (Schuh et al., 2014). In general, although there are no significant qualitative differences in the way men and women exercise leadership (Gipson et al., 2017), several differences emerge. Women with tertiary degrees have more opportunities in the labor market than men with lower education, but when they compete with men with the same degrees, they have unequal opportunities. (EC, 2012). Moreover, it is noteworthy that women are largely not represented in managerial positions and even high-ranking ones (Gipson et al., 2017). Positions of power and influence in society have traditionally been occupied by men, while women have historically held lower positions (Hoyt & Burnette, 2013). This stems from existing stereotypes and barriers faced by women. Women leaders have to deal with problems personally, such as family and gender stereotypes, professionally, such as education, mentoring, communication networks, and socially, such as effective communication and cooperation with others. It is recognized that women face significant challenges and obstacles on the way to leadership (Gipson et al., 2017) as the leadership environment for many years was dominated by men.

Literature review

One of the most difficult processes in the objective exercise of leadership in general, and educational, is the selection of appropriate leadership-managers. What is needed is a fair promotion system, a framework of objective selection criteria. In addition to the formal definition of this framework, however, there is also the informal expression of an unwritten convention of criteria known as the "glass ceiling effect". This is the term (Vosenberg, 2015), used by journalists of the Wall Street Journal in 1986, to describe obstacles, which are not visible and based on prejudice, aiming to limit the professional advancement of women to positions of responsibility in the hierarchy of the structure they serve.

As Saitis, (2014) argues, the phenomenon of the "glass ceiling" could not leave the field of education unaffected on the issue of women's professional development, both the concept of its hierarchical development and the devaluation and improper utilization of human capital.

The treatment of women's presence in the administrative structures of a public or private organization, educational or not, is directly related to the weakness they give her in matters of exercising duties from a position of responsibility. This attitude, which clearly affects the dynamics of women's choice in managerial positions, is a consequence of the patriarchal society that characterizes the structures of the Western world and (Senior & Swailes, 2017). However, what emerges as a requirement of the time is the need to define reliable and meritocratic criteria that will ensure the selection of the most qualified person in a managerial position, without gender discrimination, to effectively operate the school unit.

The term leadership includes the set of methods used by a person, the leader, to motivate the voluntary contribution of members of a group or organization to ensure the best outcome. As Saitis, (2002) argues, leadership is not identical with management but is part of it with the pursued goal of changing human behavior and mentality. The main purpose of a competent leader in education is to instill the value and mission of school in teachers, students, parents, the community (Pasiardis, 2012).

Women, as working teachers, only gained the right to participate in decision-making centers in the last century. However, to date, the representation of women in leadership positions remains low in proportion to the number of women active in education. Patriarchal social structures, lack of leadership ambitions of women and biased attitude in the process of selecting an executive in a position of responsibility, to the detriment of women, they are the main causes of their underrepresentation in leadership positions and in the field of education (Saitis, 2002).

School is an open system consisting of many subsystems and coexists with other smaller or larger systems in an environment (Saitis, 2014). Inevitably, both between the subsystems that compose and constitute the school and between the other systems of the environment, a constant interaction and interdependence develops. In school there are all those parts that make up a system. There are the inputs (students, teachers, programs, books, etc.). Next is the processing or transformation of inputs and their performance in the external environment, outflow. The effectiveness of the school requires competent leadership that will ensure the harmonious functioning of the elements that compose it, will convince and strengthen all those involved in the educational work (Starratt, 2017).

Secondary education is the second tier of the country's formal education system. It includes two cycles. The compulsory one corresponding to the Gymnasium and is three years and the optional one corresponding to the Lyceum, General and Vocational and is three years, while there is also a four-year cycle corresponding to the Evening Lyceums (EC, 2012).

Gender discrimination or barriers in leadership

The number of women in leadership positions remains low despite improvements in recent years. Education seems to be the sector where women hold a significant number of managerial positions. However, the number of women in senior positions remains low (White et al., 2011). The reason could be considered the prejudice against women leaders due to the "relevance of roles", on the one hand that the characteristics of the leader are always linked to the man and on the other hand the discrepancy between the role of the woman and the leader (Gipson et al., 2017). Women on the road to leadership must face several obstacles due to stereotypes of their role.

Stereotypes are cognitive structures that contain individuals' beliefs about certain social groups (Latu & Mast, 2015). The stereotype of the leader who must be strong and tough is associated with masculine characteristics (Schachter, 2017). In addition, men are considered more practical and women more sociable. Men are considered strong, competitive, able to control situations and impose themselves more easily, while women have rather supportive abilities and act with empathy and kindness (Schuh et al., 2014). That is why women take on leadership positions in work sectors such as education, rather than in companies.

When women try to occupy a position previously held only by men, they must adapt to the facts. Noteworthy are the statements of women who talk about the struggle they made to occupy a high-ranking position in education, that they learned to function in existing structures so as not to suffer disapproval because of gender (Mertz, 2009). In fact, culture, rules and processes are structured by men who may no longer be in the same room, but women will have to adapt to the facts (White et al., 2011). Thus, they face difficulties in showcasing their ideas and their effectiveness.

As it turns out, although women occupy a significant number of leadership positions in recent years, they have to overcome obstacles stemming mainly from stereotypes about the role of leader and woman. Thus, they need to make greater efforts to achieve recognition and respect from others, either those responsible for promotion or those who work with them. However, according to pipeline theory, there is potential for women to break the ceiling, because the more women qualified, the more they will be promoted to high leadership positions (Aiston & Yang, 2017). Although there is ample evidence that there are prejudices against women in leadership positions, over the years these tend to decrease (Hoyt & Burnette, 2013) and even people may prefer female leaders.

Consequently, in the development of educational leaders, there is no evidence of gender segregation and the participation of both men and women is considered indisputable. The world of management, however, and of course the field of education is under male domination, while the framework governing the way of promotion and development of persons in positions of responsibility has strong signs of male mentality (Drakaki, 2007).

Purpose of the study

Although secondary schools are seeing an encouraging increase in the proportion of women in leadership positions, women are still under-represented in these positions. All the research efforts (Saitis, 2002) that have been carried out in our country attest to this situation, although the numerical presence of women in the field of education in general and secondary is disproportionate to the positions of leadership held by them. For this reason, it was considered necessary to investigate and highlight the perceptions that prevail in the minds of women teachers serving in secondary education about the reasons that keep them away from leadership positions in schools of this level. Perhaps in this way we

will contribute to removing the unequal treatment of women in the issue of representation in leadership positions in secondary schools.

It is a fact that great interest is shown nowadays for the equal treatment of all groups that make up the social stratification both in Greece and abroad, at least in advanced societies. Despite the legislation enacted for the equal treatment of women in decision-making centers and in the field of educational leadership, the results are not considered optimistic. Women are not only not equally represented but are often excluded subject to gender social stereotypes. The relevance for the conduct of this investigation stems from the need to lift this exclusion. Our research effort will identify the causes, perceptions, prejudices, etc., that lead to the exclusion of women from positions of responsibility in secondary education schools, contributing to the reduction of existing inequalities.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the reasons that differentiate the attitude of women teachers themselves to the issue of leadership in secondary schools. The research will explain how women are treated in the leadership of schools at this level, the factors that influence this attitude, as well as the social stereotypes that exist on this issue. Also, through this study, to present the positions that will lead to the removal of obstacles that hinder the unhindered professional development of women in leadership roles in secondary schools. The present research is based on the 2 research questions as follows:

1. Do women find themselves different in their leadership skills.
2. Do women believe or sense that there are stereotypes about their leadership skills?

In addition, the following hypotheses were investigated:

H1: Marital status differentiates women's views of their place in educational leadership.

H2: The level of education differentiates women's views of their place in educational leadership.

H3: Years of experience differentiate women's views of their position in educational leadership.

H4: Age differentiates women's views of their place in educational leadership.

H5: Service in a unit with a female director diversifies women's views of their place in educational leadership.

Methodology

Quantitative research methodology was applied by collecting data through the completion of a pencil and paper questionnaire by 22 female teachers serving in a secondary education school. The data was collected between XXX and XXX in the 5th General Lyceum of Lamia.

Research tool

The data collection tool was the questionnaire, and it was based on the tool used from Daraki Eleni (2007). The questions included in the questionnaire were divided into six main sections. The first part included demographic information such as age, marital status, level of education, years of experience and whether the participants had been under the direction of a female during their career.

The rest of the questionnaire investigated obstacles to the promotion and advancement of women to leadership positions in secondary schools. These parts refer to leadership, gender, leadership and gender, barriers to promotion and feminism. Scoring was based on a 5-point Likert scale (i.e., Strongly Disagree … Strongly Agree).

Sample

The sample consists of twenty-two female teachers. Their average age was 47 ±8.3 years and they had an average of 18±7.3 years of experience in education. According to their responses 16 (N% = 72.7%) are married, 15 (N% = 68.2%) hold a university degree, 6 (N% = 27.3%) have a master's degree and 1

(N% = 4.5%) is a PhD holder. Of the 22 women, 15 (N% = 68.2%) had a female director in their career path.

Methodology

Statistical package IBM SPSS V23 was used under 5% alpha values (p-level = 0.05). Nonparametric tests of Mann-Whitney and Kruskal-Wallis were employed to investigate the effect of demographics as well as the effect of having woman director.
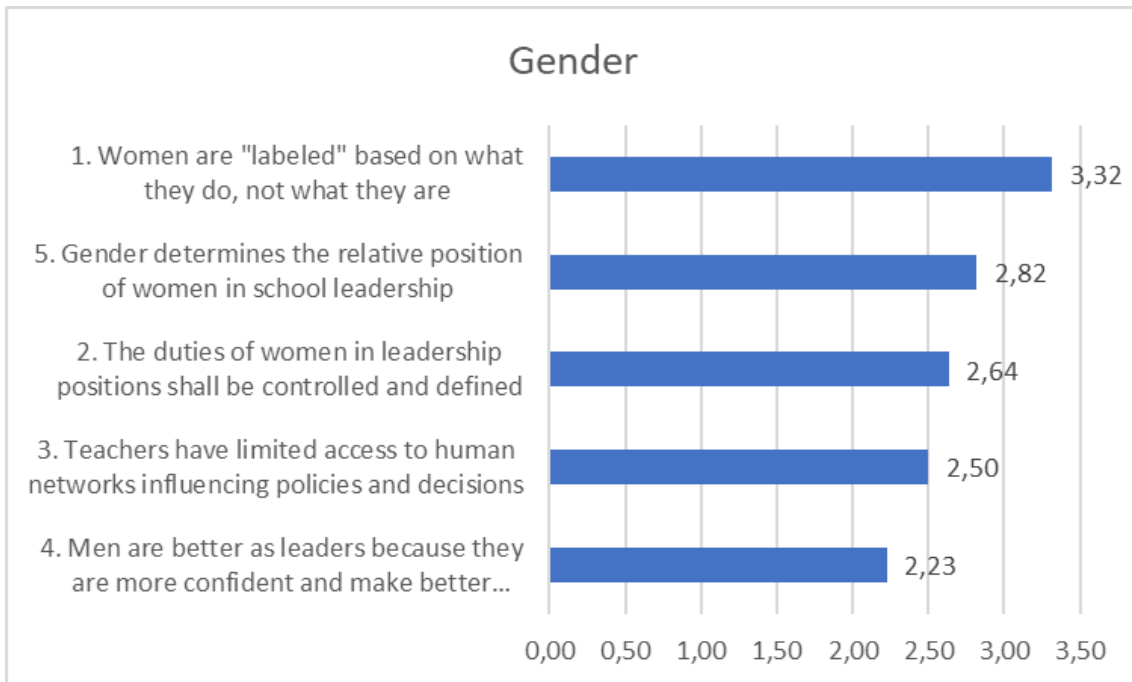
Results

According to the results of the study (Figure 1), women have neutral opinion on the question which states that managers try to imitate men in management style (Mean = 3.14, SD = 0.255), that women are not involved in management as much as men.(Mean = 3.09, SD = 0.043), and that female directors are considered weak by their fellow directors(Mean = 3.05, SD = 0.321). Small disagreement was found on the statement that men cannot recognize that the women are equal (Mean = 2.82, SD = 0.719) and that women do not apply for leadership positions in the education system (Mean = 2.55, SD = 0.133).
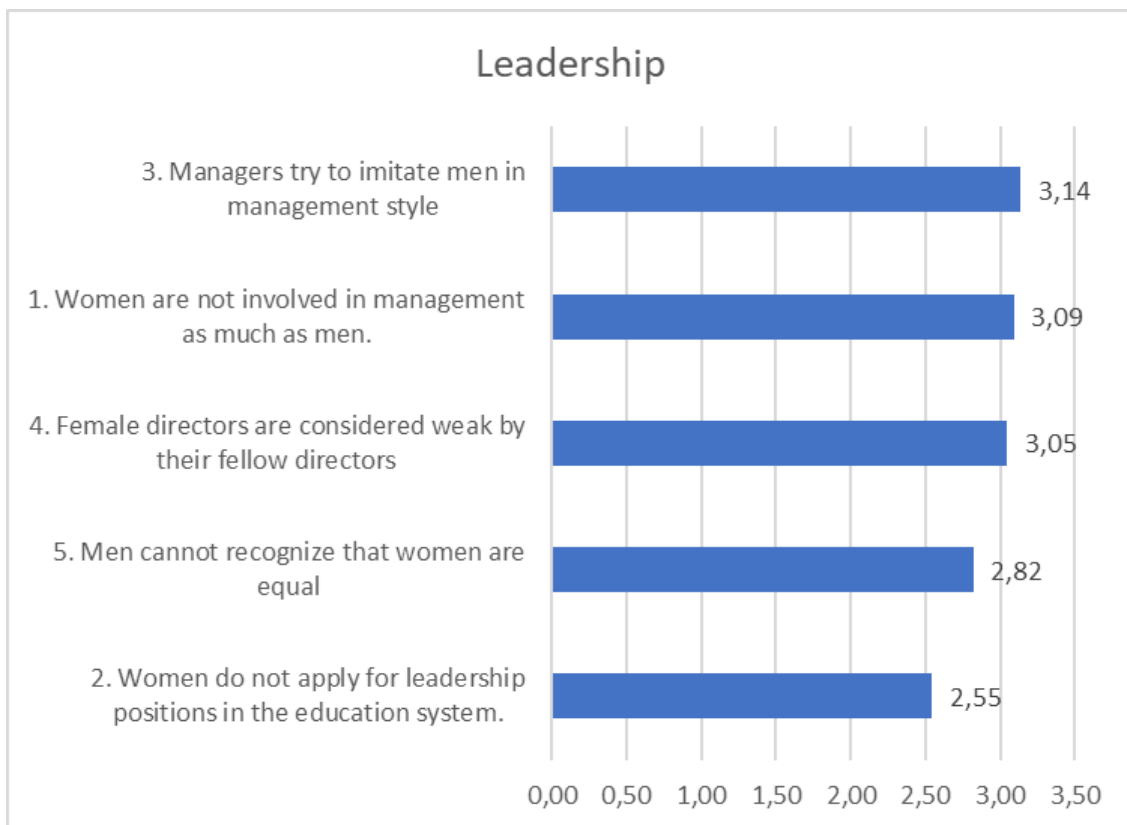
Figure 1. Mean score values per each question of Leadership part.

The next 4 questions involved the part of the gender in working environment. According to their opinions (figure 2), women agreed on a small scale that women are "labeled" based on what they do, not what they are (Mean = 3.32, SD = 0.490). Lower scores that show disagreement were observed on the statement that gender determines the relative position of women in school leadership(Mean = 2.82, SD = 0.109), the duties of women in leadership positions shall be controlled and defined(Mean = 2.64, SD = 0.212), teachers have limited access to human networks influencing policies and decisions(Mean = 2.50, SD = 0.774) and that men are better as leaders because they are more confident and make better decisions(Mean = 2.23, SD = 0.125),

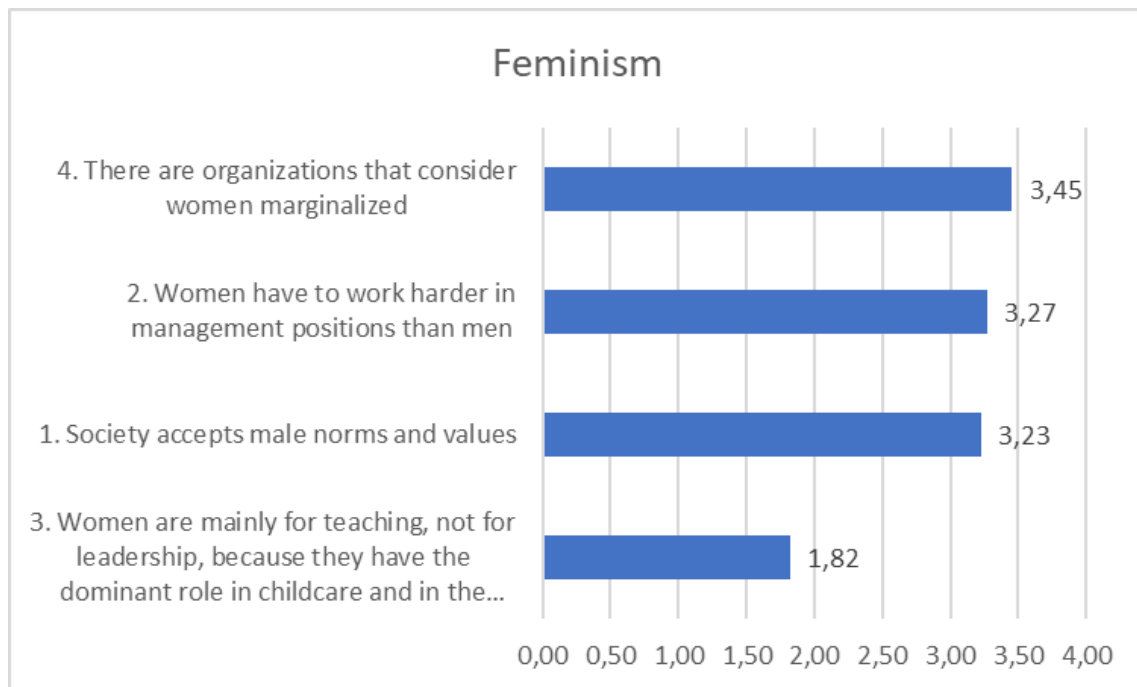**Figure 2. Mean score values per each question of Gender part.**

The next part of the questionnaire investigated leadership and gender. According to the results (Figure 3), small agreement was found in statements "Women can adopt both male and female management behavior "(Mean = 3.27, SD = 0.099) and that "Directors are characterized by their good public relations" (Mean = 3.18, SD = 0.240). Lower scores, showing disagreement were observed in the statements that the male leadership style is different from the female one (Mean = 2.86, SD = 0.682) and that women are marginalized because of gender (Mean = 2.73, SD = 0.508).

Figure 3. Mean score values per each question of Leadership and Gender part.

The last part of the questionnaire investigated the actions of women towards inequality. According to the results (Figure 4) women agree that there are organizations that consider women are marginalized (Mean = 3.45, SD = 0.896), that women must work harder in management positions than men (Mean = 3.27, SD = 0.660) and that society accepts male norms and values (Mean = 3.23, SD = 0.208). Disagreement was shown in that statement that women are mainly for teaching, not for leadership, because they have the dominant role in childcare and in the household (Mean = 1.82, SD = 0.444).

Figure 4. Mean score values per each question of Feminism part.

The comparison between married and unmarried women showed that their answers to the question "Male management style is different from female one", where married women agree more than single women (p=0.030). Hence, we can accept the first research hypothesis regarding the effect of marital. Comparison between different levels of education found differences in women's responses. Specifically, women with master's and doctoral degrees agreed more with the question "The education system does not promote gender equality" than those with a degree (p=0.027), while in the question "Selection boards evaluate women equally with men", women with a bachelor's degree agreed more than those with a master's degree and a doctorate (p=0.025). Therefore, the second hypothesis can be accepted stating that education level is a significant factor in educational leadership views. The comparison between women who had a female manager in their careers and those who did not showed differences in the question "Men are better leaders because they are more confident and make better decisions", with women who did not have a female manager agreeing more (p=0.026). Age differences were also found in the answers to the question "women cannot impose themselves on their subordinates and do not meet the expectations of superiors", where those who disagreed are on average 10 years older than those who agreed (p<0.05) which leads to the acceptance of the fourth hypothesis. Also, women who agreed the most with the question "women's leadership style is more authoritarian but also more compassionate with students" are on average 7 years younger than those who disagreed (p<0.05). Finally, women with more years of service disagreed on the question "Women lack planning and planning" more than those

with less ($p<0.05$), with the average difference in experience being 7 years which leads to the acceptance of the third research hypothesis.

Conclusions

As shown by this study and research, the selection process for a position of responsibility is a responsible but also laborious process. More so when this choice concerns the female presence in a leading position in education. Although most women, as the survey showed, are interested in gaining a leadership position, there is no equal presence to that of men. The patriarchal structures of Western societies have had a decisive influence on the prevalence of men in the administrative structures of all public and private sector organizations and, by extension, teachers. Besides, as the survey finds, women's perception is that society accepts male role models more.

Despite the apparent effort to eliminate gender inequalities in the exercise of leadership in education, existing stereotypes prevent them from being treated equally (Aiston & Yang, 2017). According to the survey, women do not consider themselves inferior in qualifications compared to men, while they believe that today family and career can move forward in parallel.

Around the world, choice for senior leadership positions differs for men and women (Gipson et al., 2017). For women, claiming a position in educational leadership is still fraught with obstacles and usually a man will be the one to promote them to this position (Mertz, 2009). The survey found that women find that they differ in their leadership skills from men. However, selection boards do not treat male and female leadership nominations so objectively, although the education system ensures gender parity.

It is considered a natural consequence that the weak presence of women in the leading structures of the education system, e.g., secondary schools, obliges them to work more in order to satisfy the expectations of their superiors but also to be able to impose herself on her inferiors. The attempt to exclude women from leadership positions is expressed, according to research, by the trade union activity of feminist organizations.

Suggestions

As shown by both the literature review and the results of the survey, it is necessary to understand the reasons that led to the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in secondary schools. In this way, it will be possible to guide stakeholders and persons to carry out the necessary practical interventions that will ensure the equal participation of both sexes with the sole criterion of competence in the exercise of leadership.

Limitations of study

The basic limitation of this study was the limited number of samples. This limited sample cannot guaranty accurate results. In addition, the generalization of the conclusions is precarious.

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