Exploring Women's Transformational Leadership Style And Competency : A Higher Education Malaysia Perspective

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Abstract: Men have traditionally held most of the top leadership positions in Malaysian higher education, notably in the country's public universities. Nevertheless, in this ever-changing world, an increasing number of empowered women are adopting leadership roles in this profession and adjusting admirably to the finest practises that will benefit the institution they represent. Seven women academic leaders at the top and middle levels were interviewed for this study to learn about their perceptions of transformational leadership and the aspects they employ to manage university personnel. Furthermore, the abilities of women academic leaders are being explored. According to the findings, women academic leaders at both levels have a clear understanding of transformational leadership, which is leadership that leads to change. Meanwhile, transformational leadership was discovered to be applied in their university leadership. When leading, informants are more likely to apply the aspects of intellectual stimulation and idealised influence. Communication and decision-making skills are crucial, and they should be present in every women academic leader in higher education. Women have made tremendous strides as leaders during the last decade, but they still confront several challenges. Future proposals for Malaysian higher education institutions are needed including developing relevant guidelines, a suitable model, and methodical procedures, as well as developing numerous programmes focusing on women academic leadership.

Keywords: Transformational Leadership,Women Leadership,Women Competency, Higher Education

1.   Introduction

The importance of women in decision-making as an indication of the accomplishment of SDG 5: Gender Equality has made women's leadership a topic of global study interest (United Nation, 1995). Women's access to higher education is crucial at all levels of the higher education system as this is indisputable. Furthermore, women face stereotypes because executive leadership has historically been associated with men and effectively executed by them (Chizema et al., 2015). Higher Education statistics for the year 2021 indicate that there are (17,751) more Malaysian women academic staff than (12,629) Malaysian male academic staff in 20 Malaysian state universities.This demonstrates that the higher education ecosystem in Malaysia is dominated by women, thus it should not be an issue if women are given leadership roles in these institutions. Universiti Teknologi MARA

(UiTM) (Berita Harian, 2021) and Universiti Teknikal Melaka (UTEM) (Berita Harian, 2022) are the only two women Vice Chancellors among the twenty public institutions in Malaysia as of December 30, 2022. This indicates that the quota for women academic leaders at the strategic and key decision-making levels of public universities has not yet been met.

Although there is no doubt that there is a rise in the number of women academic leaders in higher education institutions, the percentage of women in these positions remains moderate. Previous study in the sector has addressed the challenges and/or obstacles women faced in attaining the most senior positions (such as vice chancellor/deputy vice chancellor) (Unesco, 2017). According to reports, women academic leaders confront a number of problems and barriers in order to ascend to the highest levels of university administration. One of them is that it is tough to break through the glass ceiling at higher education institutions. According to Adair (1999), the concept or phenomena of the glass ceiling occurs when women face difficulty obtaining the top career successes. The problem is not solely attributable to substantive obstacles, but also to the fact that a woman vulnerable is to the surrounding cultural value system. The phenomenon of the glass ceiling happens frequently in institutions with a biassed view of women, which makes it harder for women to attain the highest positions because they are regarded a distinct subject than men. Therefore, this research focuses mostly on women academic leaders in higher education, and the necessary leadership abilities that must be applied.

2.   Objectives

The following are the aims of this study in the context of higher education in Malaysia:

i.   To investigate women academic leaders' perceptions on transformational leadership styles.
ii.   To investigate the dimension of transformational leadership styles among women academic leaders.
iii. To investigate the perceived competency of women academic leaders.

Research Question
i.   What the women academic leader's perception on transformational leadership styles?
ii.   What the dimension of transformational leadership styles using among women academic leaders?
iii. What the competency perceived of women academic leaders?

3.   Literature Review

3.1   Leadership Styles by Gender

The increased number of women in the workforce has influenced and spurred study on women's leadership styles. Furthermore, recent study has found that there is a general negative perception of women in positions of leadership (Schein, 1994). This view has contributed to the underrepresentation of women in senior management roles in numerous businesses. By approximate estimations, women dominate education as teachers or students, but men dominate as managers and academic leaders in education. However, there is rising evidence (progress) that women are willing to occupy leadership positions in education (Leithwood, 1994).

Women's self-reports frequently identify distinct leadership styles and characteristics associated with gender, whereas empirical studies on gender and leadership (Eagly & Johnson, 1990) frequently show that when men and women leaders occupy the same positions, they behave more similarly than differently. Gender differences in organisational research between interpersonal vs. task oriented style did not emerge in a meta-analysis of gender and leadership style (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Furthermore, social perceptions and expectations appear to influence women's leadership styles, with women leaning toward being more relationship centred when self-assessing or assigned to

leadership responsibilities. There is significant evidence to support women's tendency to adopt a more collaborative, cooperative, or democratic leadership style and men's tendency to adopt a more directive, competitive, or autocratic approach; this emerged in all types of studies. Women leaders, according to Blackmore (1999), are likewise more relationship focused. Furthermore, Alice and Mary (2001) did a study on leadership styles in men and women. The study found that women leaders employ a more transformative leadership style and a variety of rewards when leading. Diverse theories, ranging from gender role theory to leadership theory, propose that women and men may exert different actions when serving as corporate leaders (Eagly & Wood, 2016).

The leadership style shifts with the passage of time and era. Previously, leadership was associated with emphasising top-down, command and control structures; however, this has now shifted to more collaborative and transformational approaches, which have had a significant impact on social and technological advancements in the global society of the twenty-first century.

3.2   Women as Transformational Leader

According to theoretical literature, women are more likely to practise a democratic and participative leadership style, hence the transformational leadership style is acceptable. Transformational leadership is a leadership style that focuses on another key skill set required for an organization's executives (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Women leaders must be able to affect change while also bringing out the best in their employees through employee development and encouraging initiative and innovation. Few studies suggest that the values and skills women were socialised to develop are compatible with transformative leadership. The statement of research is backed by a comprehensive meta-analysis, in which women managers score higher than males in both transformational and transactional leadership (Eagly et al., 2003).Meanwhile, Marbeya Makekau (2022) is conducting dissertation research on the leadership experiences of ethnic minority academic women leaders (women of colour) at California State University, Chico. The findings highlighted important themes that clearly coincided with a feminist transformational model of leadership and exposed exchange relationships as symptoms of patriarchy and white supremacy, both of which are still prominent in the fabric of higher education institutions. Transformational feminist leadership, according to the findings, operates in such a way that leaders and followers boost each other to higher levels of excellence.

3.3   Competency as Women Academic Leaders in Higher Education

In Malaysia, the majority of women lack training for academic leadership positions. According to Unin (2014), women in colleges acquire leadership skills through self-directed, experiential, and intentional or unintentional informal learning. Consequently, the competency of a women leader requires ongoing study. According to studies, an academic leader is courageous and capable of bringing about change. Change management must be a substantial modification. According to Geoff Scott (2003), a leader must be more astute in recognising "what" must be changed and "how" it can be changed (we have to get smarter at both the "what" of change and the "how" of the change). The concept or modification that an academic leader wishes to offer must be complete. A great and effective academic leader, according to Ramsden (2007), must be able to communicate effectively.

Participants in research conducted by Bhatti & Ali (2021) in Pakistan revealed that academic leadership requires good managerial skills in addition to research and academic achievement. A women leader should possess a variety of capabilities, including education, research, and administrative competence. While research involving Muslim women academic leaders in Malaysia indicated that effective communication skills topped the list of the most important leadership practises, academic leaders concurred that effective leadership practises included excellent communication skills. In addition, Muslim women leaders' perceptions of exhibiting leadership through leadership characteristics such as influence and persuasion, problem-solving, decision-

making, team-building, enhancing knowledge capacity, and professionalism skills were examined (Samah Hatem Almaki et al, 2016). Undeniable, leadership competencies are necessary for career advancement, particularly for women leaders in education, and can assist women leaders in determining where they may need to improve their leadership skills in education.

3.4   Conceptual Framework

This study's conceptual framework is comprised of three circles: (i) the inner circle, which contains the individual experiences of women academic leaders when leading; (ii) the outer circle, which contains the dimensions of transformational leadership used; and (iii) the expanding circle, which is the competence that women need to lead. This conceptual framework is based on the Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1985) and the leadership model of Sheryl Bond (1996), which requires competency in women's leadership. The conceptual structure is depicted in Figure 1.
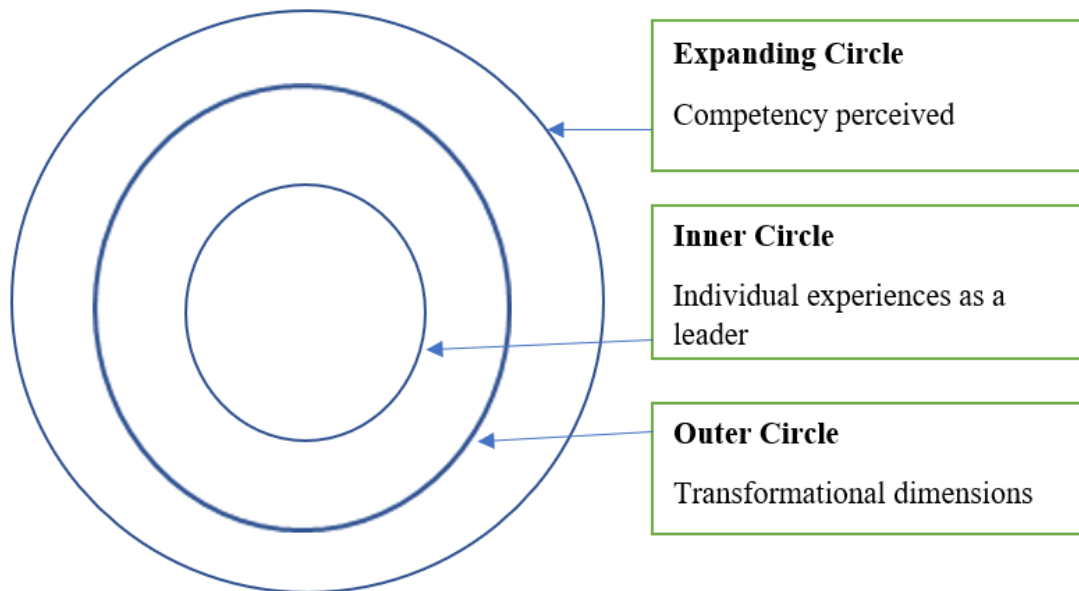

Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework (Bass, 1985 & Bond, 1996)

4.   Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design with semi-structured questioning employed in in-depth interviews (Seidman,2006). The purpose of these interviews is to elicit the informants' recollections of their experiences as women academic leaders embracing transformational leadership techniques. The argument for doing a qualitative study is that it enables researchers to comprehend informants' perspectives and to focus on their concerns regarding the issues or scenario (Creswell, 2014). To ensure accuracy and transparency throughout the data processing process, the researchers requested input on transcripts from informants. Regarding this study, seven university academic women leaders who presently or formerly held the position of academic leader at the top (VC & DVC) and middle management level (Dean) at universities were interviewed. Approximately two to three hours were spent on each session. All informants are informed that their participation in this study is voluntary and that all information collected will be kept totally confidential. Table 1 provides a summary of the informants' demographic information.

Table 1. Informant's Background Information

Management Level	Informants	Academic Leadership Position	Type of University	Years of Experience Holding Position	Field
Top	W1	VC & DVC	Public University	2y	Mathematics & Statistics
	W2	DVC & VC	Public & Private University	5y	Linguistics
	W3	DVC & VC	Public & Private University	5y	Industrial Relation
	W4	DVC	Public University	4y	Science
	W5	DVC	Public University	1y 5mth	Education
Middle	W6	Dean	Public University	4y	Communication
	W7	Dean	Public University	2y	Social Policy

4.1   Population and Sampling

The sessions included questions designed to elicit information about the informants' experiences and reflections regarding their leadership styles, with a focus on transformational leadership, their daily work as women academic leaders in relation to dimensions of transformational leadership styles, and the competencies required to be effective women academic leaders in universities. According to Mason (2010), a qualitative sample size is controlled by the design, and saturation could be obtained with as little as six participants. This study employed the non-probability sampling technique of purposive sampling due to the small number of informants selected.

The focus is to contextualise the informants' interpretations of their past and present experiences in order to encourage them to reflect on what they perceive to be women's transformational leadership style and leadership competency, as well as how these can be applied to team effectiveness in Malaysian higher education institutions. The characteristics of informants are as follows: (i) women academic leaders at the top level such as Vice Chancellor or DVC (ii) women academic leaders at the middle level as deans and equivalent (iii) holding the academic leadership post in 2019-2022 (iv) more than one years of experience as an academic leader (iv) more than ten years of experience as an academic in higher education.

In addition, a thematic approach was explored for the descriptive data analysis due to the qualitative nature of this study's research. This method is most frequently employed for qualitative data (Braun & Clarke 2006). Therefore, version 9 of the ATLAS ti software has been selected to aid in the sorting and organisation of the massive data set analysis.

5.   Findings and Discussions

This study's findings indicate that the majority of informants employ a transformational leadership style. A number of them were unaware that they were utilising transformational leadership in their daily work as leaders to solve the problem. When people recognise that their behaviour fits the qualities of transformational leadership, only then are they conscious of employing the style. In addition, the informants have indicated the competences academic women must possess in order to lead in the ecosystem of higher education. The responses of the informants were organised into topics along with a description and example statement regarding their experiences as leaders.

5.1 Understanding of Transformational Leadership Among Women Leader

The results demonstrate the respondents' comprehension of transformational leadership. All respondents agreed that transformational leadership is a type of leadership that results in organisational change. The informants have discussed their experiences implementing change on a small or large scale at their respective colleges. The process of reform has encountered numerous obstacles and opposition. Among the change processes that have occurred are the implementation of a quality system at the university, internationalisation, the merger of faculties/centres/departments, the review and closure of programmes, the introduction of new programmes, changes in the organization's social culture, the increase of staff motivation, and the management of technological changes.

5.1.1 Implementing Changes

All seven informants agreed that transformational leadership is a leadership style that results in organisational change. The adjustments have been fully articulated, including the informants' experience in implementing the changes. Among the statements of the informant:

Informant 3: Transformational leadership? If transformational leadership is according to my understanding, in the context of this public university, it is a leadership that brings a big change from before to the situation that it wants to bring (W3-3:1) *"Kepimpinan transformasi ye? Kalau kepimpinan transformasi menurut kefahaman saya lah dalam konteks Universiti awam ni adalah satu kepimpinan yang membawa perubahan yang besar daripada sebelumnya kepada keadaan yang ingin dibawa lah"* (W3-3:1)

Informant 5: Praise to God. I understand about transformational leadership. If by definition what I always refer to is a model that brings transformation or big change either to the individual or to the community of the organization that brings impact to the whole organization as a whole (W5-5:1) *"Alhamdulilah yang saya faham tentang kepimpinan transformasi atau transformational leadership ini, kalau by definition apa yang saya selalu rujuk ialah model yang membawa transformasi atau perubahan besar samaada kepada individu atau kepada komuniti organisasi itu yang membawa impak kepada the whole organisasi tersebut secara keseluruhan"* (W5-5:1)

Informant 6: In the context of this public university, transformational leadership means to me, the extent to which you can change the situation and business run by institutions of higher learning, especially in the form of public universities. That is my view regarding transformational leadership (W6-6:1) *"Dalam konteks universiti awam ni kepimpinan transformasi bermakna bagi sayalah, sejauh mana you boleh mengubah keadaan dan business yang dijalankan oleh institusi pengajian tinggi terutama dalam bentuk universiti awam. That is my view berkaitan kepimpinan transformasi"* (W6-6:1)

Apparently, the transformational leader is regarded as a university-change-seeking leader. Moreover, the adjustments made are an indicator of gauging the success of an academic leader, particularly for women who lead university workers.

5.1.2 Change Process

The shift is difficult to quantify and takes a long time to occur, depending on the circumstances. Table 2 is an example of a change process reported by informants based on their experience with the scenario they experienced at the university. When informants effectively execute

change, they regard themselves as transformational leaders. After all, Bass and Avolio (1994) stated that "women may make better managers" more than a decade ago.

Table 2. Change Process by Informants

Informants	Informant's Statement Regarding the Process	Aspect
W1 (W1 41:30)	After I learned change management from Prof Vasu (Project 2000 or P2000) I applied directly into 2006 and I managed to get RMK9 document for university. It was completed in March (published) and launched in May (5). *Selepas saya belajar change management daripada Prof Vasu (projek 2000 atau P2000) saya apply direct masa 2006 and I manage to get document RMK9 for university. Ia disiapkan pada Mac (publish) dan launch bulan Mei (5).*	The main document of the university
W2 (W2 2:42)	So at that time, transforming the university was very timely for me, when I held that position there were many programs that needed curriculum review. Not only from the curriculum review, we need to look at whether this faculty can provide the appropriate level of higher education to our students so that they can actually function when they go out there. So, the change that I was involved in, is very specific to academic and international scope. *So at that time, transforming the university was very timely bagi saya, masa saya memegang jawatan tu banyak program yang memerlukan semakan kurikulum. Bukan sahaja dari semakan kurikulum, kita perlu lihat dari segi adakah fakulti ini boleh memberi tahap pendidikan tinggi yang sepatutnya kepada pelajar kita so that they can actually function when they go out there. Jadi, the change that I was involved in, is very specific to academic and international scope.*	Curriculum review and new university program offerings.
W3 (W3 71:191)	HEP for permission to open a marque tent. Then we gave him (the student) a Chinese community drum, that's for the first year. But I said why not next year, can you all make changes so that there is a multi-ethnic performance? *HEP bagi kebenaran untuk buka marque tent. Kemudian kita bagi dia(pelajar) ada gendang masyarakat Cina lah, itu untuk tahun pertama.Tapi saya kata why not tahun depan, boleh tak you all buat perubahan supaya ada persembahan berbilang bangsa?*	Organising student programs
W4 (W4 6:20)	In terms of PJI (research, networking & industry) transformation changes are in terms of culture, that is research culture *Dari segi PJI(penyelidikan, jaringan & industri) perubahan transformasi adalah dari segi budayalah iaitu budaya penyelidikan*	Research culture

5.2   Dimension of Transformational Leadership Among Women Academic Leaders

According to the informants, transformational leadership is ideal for women since it includes four (4) elements that they have employed in directing personnel. However, the characteristics that are frequently mentioned and employed are intellectual stimulation and idealised influence. This is most likely due to the academic nature of the organisations and the majority of the employees they oversee are intellectual person in various field. This requires these women academic leaders to think critically and intellectually in order to motivate their work team to fulfil the university's common goals.

5.2.1   Intellectual Stimulation

One facet in which this transformational leader will aim to inspire and involve followers is intellectual stimulation, which will excite old ideas or even old ways into something new. As a result, followers may think imaginatively and innovatively in challenging situations. Idealised influence is highlighted when a leader establishes future goals and is able to explain and lead subordinates towards accomplishing the intended goals by setting a good example to follow. As a result of this research, it is discovered that leading university citizens is a difficult assignment because when a change is to be done, it requires thorough planning and the participation of all employees to achieve the aim. One of the ways chosen by the informants is to have great teamwork so that every issue that emerges can be dealt with efficiently and the university's KPI can be met.

Informant 7:   Intellectual stimulation? I think that is an important characteristic as a women leader, she must have a high intellect to get people to be influenced, that is, her way of thinking and her way of leadership and the ideas and strategies she brings are very important (W7 14:28) "*Rangsangan intelektual? saya rasa itu ciri yang penting sebagai pemimpin wanita beliau mesti mempunyai intelektual yang tinggi to get people to be influence iaitu cara pemikiran beliau dan cara kepimpinan beliau dan idea-idea serta strategi yang dibawa amat penting". (W7 14:28)*

Informant 2:   Always, always with a team. Always with input, get it from as many people as possible. Not just lecturers not just the deans, not just heads of departments, but all inputs including the students when we wanted to change (W2 73:324)

Informant 4:   In terms of intellectual stimulation, that has to be there. From our conversation, we have to show off our abilities, for example a publication with a high H-Index in scopus at the university. That is one of the intellectual stimulation that can be a source of inspiration for all women (W4 27:43) "*Dari segi rangsangan intelektual, itu memang kena ada. Daripada percakapan kita, kita kena pamerkan kebolehan contohnya penerbitan yang tinggi H-Index dalam scopus di universiti. Itu salah satu rangsangan intelektual yang boleh menjadi sumber inspirasi kepada semua wanita" (W4 27:43)*

5.2.2   Idealised Influence

Informant 1:   That is the starting point for me to become a visionary and a motivator...motivate people to come in (W1 38:30) "*That is the starting point saya menjadi visionary dan motivator…motivate people to come in" (W1 38:30)*

Informant 2:   We all have a vision to make our university an organization that has a quality management system (W2 13:80) "*Kita semua mempunyai satu vision untuk*

> *menjadikan universiti kami sebagai satu organisasi yang mempunyai quality management system" (W2 13:80)*

Informant 5:   I ceated the tagline "Together We Exhale" "Together we are Excellent". Because I know that if anything happens, I cannot blame them and cannot leave them alone. It must, have to be collaborative effort (W5 10:23) "*Saya ceate tagline " Together We Exhale" "Bersama-sama kita Cemerlang". Sebab saya tahu kalau apa-apa I cannot blame them dan tak boleh biarkan alone. Ia mesti, have to be collaborative effort"(W5 10:23)*

Women academic leaders in higher education who utilise a transformational leadership style are capable of influencing all university employees. Pamela L. Peterson (2016) using the measurement of transformational characteristics associated with participant habits of mind versus women academic leader responders at an American university, determined that women academic leaders are innovative in establishing direction. In addition, women academic leaders are capable of influencing their following. This equation demonstrates that women academic leaders can and should conduct transformative leadership in higher education.

5.3   Competency Perceived for being an Effective Woman Academic Leader

In order to meet the difficulties of the globe and the speed of change in the scenario, or to use the term VUCA today, all parties must prepare for very dynamic changes. In the context of higher education, the university requires a pipeline of women academic leaders in order to improve university administration efficiency and maintain a global perspective. Spencer & Spencer (1993) define competency as "a competency is an underlying attribute of an individual that is informally associated to criterion-referred effective and/or exceptional performance in employment circumstance". As a result, competency is the primary foundation for efficient job management. It is critical for an organisation to hire a skilled leader in order to boost production.

The purpose of this study is to look into how women academic leaders assess their own competence. The research informants identified some competencies that women academic leaders must master when leading a university or a responsibility centre (PTJ) inside it in the form of a department, centre, academic college, or faculty at the pinnacle of education in Malaysia.

The importance of academic leadership and management at the top cannot be overstated. Women as university leaders remain in the minority, particularly at the top or executive level. It is therefore critical that women aspiring to leadership positions are fully aware of all facets of leadership and given opportunity to develop themselves, acquiring the specific abilities that will allow them to step into these positions. Women must build their leadership potential because they have less opportunities to learn on the job than males.

5.3.1   Competencies needed to Lead Universities by Women Academic Leaders

Based on the outcomes of interviews with two sets of women academic leaders, namely those at the top level (VC and DVC) and those at the middle level, namely the dean, it was discovered that they share nearly identical opinions. Table 3 shows the list of competencies for women academic leaders:

Table 3. Competency perceived for Women Academic Leaders

Top Level	Middle Management Level
1.Communication	1.Communication
	*Intercultural Communication Competence
2.Critical & Responsible Decision-Making	2. Decision-Making skill
* informed decision	
3.Visionary	3. Planning
4.Teamwork	4.Visionary
*identify the team	- ability to predict
5.Technology Savy	5.Technology Savy
6.Subject Expect	6.Networking
7.Appearance (Image)	7. Academic Expertise (Kepakaran)
8.Emotional Intelligence skill	8. Teamwork
9.People skills	9. Academic process
* getting information	* academic engagement
10.Responsiveness to change	10. Diplomacy skills
*Scanning the environment	* gain concensus
	* keep situation harmony
11.Problem-Solving	
12.Adaptability	
13.Collaboration & Networking	
14.Motivator	
15.Result Orientation skills	
* Setting the goal	
* making it happen (outcome)	
16.Data Analytic	
17.Leadership skills	

5.3.2 Experience and Attribute Required for Managing Challenge in University

Undoubtedly, women academic leaders have unique obstacles when directing university departments. As a result of the difficulties they experience, women departmental leaders have highlighted a number of extra skills that they believe are essential for resolving conflicts and managing crises. Women leaders who possess the necessary characteristics or qualities will accomplish their academic leadership duties more effectively. The variety of academic responsibilities, including research, teaching, and supervision, necessitates that they be performed concurrently and efficiently. However, the experience of holding various an administrative position such as coordinator, head of study centre, deputy dean, or head of unit, in the beginning of a career as a women lecturer helps boost confidence and provides a comprehensive view of how the university operates. Among the themes are:

Table 4: The themes of attribute required for women academic leaders.

i.Knowledgeable	ii. Perseverance	iii.Managing perception	iv.Beyond self-interest
v.Respect	vi.Transparency	vii.Honesty	viii. Wisdom
ix.Intuitive	x. Humanity	xi.Leading with love	xii.Passionate
xiii. self-management	xiv. Ethics		

In positions of educational leadership, women in positions of authority have demonstrated their worth. Studies have demonstrated that women leaders possess skills that can be developed into professional strengths in order to become effective leaders. Women are more likely to be viewed as

communal and interpersonal, with qualities that seem more suited to submissive and service roles (Kite, Deaux, & Haines, 2008). This is seen in the increasing number of women in service-oriented occupations such as teaching and nursing. In addition, they are capable of bringing people together, fostering dialogue, achieving consensus, and leading with love. Women academic leaders are predominantly perceptive. All of these skills can bring about major change in higher education administration since they are all good leadership qualities.

6.   Conclusion

The educational opportunities available to Malaysian women are gradually expanding. Even as chances improve, women in academia continue to encounter obstacles, particularly from a cultural background standpoint. Women fear that if they become more active, they will not be able to manage their home and work responsibilities. Thus, women academic leaders in Malaysian higher education have a long way to go. To ensure that women in academic fields receive the necessary support and opportunities, significant effort need to be done. This will ensure that the nation's university human resource is maximised, which will ultimately benefit the country.

Transformational leadership is appropriate since it is the driving force behind change. An intellectual leader, on the other hand, is someone who is courageous and capable of bringing about change. Change management (shift management) must be a considerable change, large enough and important enough to warrant attention. As a result, capable women academic leaders must take the risk of driving change in order to put the country's higher education on a sustainable course.

7.   Suggestions and Recommendations

This study has proven that women's leadership in higher education requires substantial attention from both the ministry and the university's administration. Many efforts must be made to ensure that women in administrative roles do not feel overwhelmed by the tasks and positions assigned to them.Women lose their aspiration for senior jobs due to a variety of factors such as nurturing nature, stereotyping, gender discrimination, and home duties (Annis, 2008). Davies et al. (2005) discovered that convincing women that their gender is not a barrier to success on the task in their study, simply reminding participants that there were no gender disparities on the test, helped revive hopes for a leadership post. Because the majority of these women academic leaders are in the middle tiers of university administration, leadership should be supported. Their abilities must be recognised and included in the university's succession planning.

In addition, women academic leaders in higher education must have access to a systematic mentoring programme in order to be motivated to lead in academia. The absence of women academic leaders in the executive levels of institutions limits exposure to the successful experience of Malaysia's top universities. Relationships with mentors are essential to the retention, success, and well-being of academic women. Mentoring gives not just professional support, direction, knowledge, and advice, but also behavioural models. Due to the absence of this mentorship strategy in the higher education system, many women academic leaders lack basic leadership guidelines, especially those pertaining to the leadership style that best matches them.

Policy changes relating to women's participation in decision-making in numerous domains must be re-examined and reinforced. The review of the achievement of the composition determination in Malaysian higher education requires a precise measurement, as stated by the Minister of Higher Education in an official government meeting. One of the efforts implemented by the country to satisfy the standards of SDG 5 is the 30% women in decision-making policy. As a result, the policy must be clearly defined in any official document at the university level in order for it to be instantly implemented at the grassroots level. The failure to implement the strategy slowed the empowerment of women in higher education since it was not given the organization's primary focus.

Therefore, future research must identify factors that contribute to enhancing the competence of women academic leaders and transformational leadership in a more comprehensive manner. In addition, the report suggests investigating the factors that make male leaders in higher education more competent as leaders than women leaders. It is recommended that institutions of higher education

develop useful guidelines, systematic approaches, and various programmes focusing on the academic leadership of women. Future research is also recommended to study the perceived degree of competence of women academic leaders on a larger scale and with more respondents. A comparative study should also be conducted across institutions in Malaysia and other Asean nations to identify the abilities and leadership styles required of future women academic leaders.

8.   Co-Author Contribution

The authors affirmed that there is no conflict of interest in this article. SO carried out the field work, prepared the literature review and overlook the writeup of the whole article. AH wrote the research methodology and did the data entry. SO & AH carried out the statistical analysis and interpretation of the results.

9.   Acknowledgements

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