

Investigating the Impact of Leadership Effectiveness on Gender Egalitarianism in the Public Universities of Pakistan with the Mediation of Talent Development and Moderation of Perceived Government Support

Abstract

This study aims to investigate the relationship between leadership effectiveness and gender equality by moderation of perceived government support and mediation of talent development. Through online and self-administered questionnaires, 215 female leaders working at Pakistan's public universities in Lahore, Rawalpindi, and Islamabad provided the data. Purposive sampling is employed in this study, and the association between the variables is assessed using PLS-SEM. Findings show that perceived government support has a significant relationship with women's leadership effectiveness, it doesn't moderate the relationship between gender equality and leadership effectiveness. Instead, talent development mediates this relationship. The research demonstrates that universities should concentrate on the talent development of their female employees along with government support by creating strategies for women's empowerment to make use of inherent women leadership effectiveness. With emphasis on the higher education in Pakistan, study focuses on the empirical investigation of gender equality and leadership effectiveness in the Asian context.

Keywords: Gender egalitarianism, Higher Education Institutions, Leadership effectiveness, Perceived government support, Talent development.

INTRODUCTION

Women's participation in leadership positions has been considered in various fields, including academics, medicine, administration, and entrepreneurship (Shaukat et al., 2021). Since empirical research has shown that women-managed organizations are more successful with consistent growth rates and fewer failures due to their innate inclination to empowerment and participation, it is reasonable to associate leadership effectiveness with female leadership characteristics (Al-Halwachi, 2018). It promotes the idea that facilitating women's leadership roles would lead to diverse leadership skills focused on incorporating different ways of thinking into the institutions (Shaukat et al., 2021). According to research, female board members may be more receptive to shareholder demands and take managerial actions that motivate companies to invest more in innovation (Lakhal et al., 2024). Due to their stronger attention to excellence, female directors may have more influence over business decisions than their male counterparts, thereby improving the organization's success (Khandelwal et al., 2023; Pandey et al., 2022). Gender diversity on boards enhances corporate innovation, according to empirical results based on 81 organizations sampled over 13 years from 2007 to 2019 (Lakhal et al., 2024). There is undoubtedly enough data to confirm that female leaders are on par with their male counterparts. This is because of their innate collaborative and

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cooperative leadership style, which fosters an engaged workforce; they also take a risk-averse and comprehensive approach to organizational decisions, which results in more stable organizational growth (Al-Halwachi, 2018). Particularly when it comes to women's experiences in leadership roles, organizational dynamics, and stereotypes often obscure the character trait of bravery in leadership, which is crucial for inspiring individuals to overcome challenges and effect positive change in businesses (Bartlett, 2024). The average percentage of women in leadership positions is 16.7%, varying from 3% in Japan to 19% in the US and 30% in France. Women comprise 19% of organizations with female senior managers and 6% of CEOs at S&P 500 companies. Women are also largely inactive in politics, holding only 23% of seats in national parliaments worldwide. In contrast, in the US, only 10% of governors and 20% of mayors of the 100 largest American cities are female. In the academic sector, less than one-third of full professors are female, with the percentages falling to 13.9% in economics and 10.5% in engineering (Yoder, 2018).

Problem Statement

Strength, decisiveness, effectiveness, competitiveness, and assertiveness are male (i.e., agentic) traits that have long been associated with leadership (Jongen, 2024). According to a recent update from Times Higher Education, the proportion of women leaders in the world's top universities has increased for the first time since 2017, but it is still below 20% (Bothwell, 2020). It is not surprising that there is a significant gender gap in university leadership throughout the world (Kohtamäki et al., 2024). Significant gender disparities have been found in academics, even in the Nordic countries, which are highly regarded globally for gender equality (Kohtamäki et al., 2024). Despite the efforts to improve women's status at higher levels, it is observed that female participation in upper-level higher education has remained low (Shaukat et al., 2021). Women in the higher education industry continue to fall behind men in leadership positions despite having a thorough record of educational accomplishments (Baptist, 2017). Women are believed to typically follow a traditional career path that leads to senior academic positions (Shaukat et al., 2021). Social and cultural barriers prevent women from participating in leadership roles, even though most women in higher education institutions prefer teaching (Batool et al., 2013).

In the higher education industry, women's labor, work experience, and results are heavily influenced by their intersecting individualities (Warren & Bordoloi, 2021). The gender gap in higher education persists, as demonstrated by the 2.3:1 male-to-female full-professor ratio in the US (Baptist, 2017), compared to 0.03 in Pakistan. The glass ceilings female academicians face is ascribed to gender-related practices at higher education institutions. This has resulted in a latent bias favoring women seeking leadership positions (Shaukat et al., 2021). It has become the duty of women to fight for themselves in settings that suppress their voices in an orderly fashion (Warren & Bordoloi, 2021). Accordingly, tests and challenges within the academic domains, such as poor performance, discouragement over professional development, personal reservation, and invisible rules in the organization, have been linked to the lack of talented female leaders in senior roles in the higher education sector (Croucher et al., 2018; Elkington et al., 2017; Rashwan, 2015; Lapovsky, 2014).

Furthermore, women instructors form up to 19 percent of professors in Australian higher education institutions and 16.5 percent of full professors in English universities (Morley, 2013; Schneider et al., 2011; Tessens et al., 2011). In practical terms, compared to Asian nations, women make up around 27% of associate professors and full professors in Australian universities (Alajmi & Ahmad, 2016; Pyke, 2013). Women face more complex and varied obstacles than men, preventing them from rising to leadership positions. Numerous factors may contribute to these obstacles (Steele et al., 2024). The idea of gender equality, which holds that gender should not influence how work is distributed or how both genders' tasks are evaluated (Gheaus & Robeyns, 2011), does not seem to be applied enough to working women. According to Gipson et al. (2017), women are harmed throughout the leadership selection process, a global issue (Samo et al., 2019). Social limitations hinder the presence of women in leadership roles (Faizan et al., 2018). Gender-related stereotyped expectations mainly cause prejudice and discrimination against women. Thus, the pervasiveness of patriarchy, as defined by Glick and Fiske (1997), is a system in which men control the political, economic, legal, and religious spheres, leading to prejudiced and discriminatory behavior toward women (AL-SULAITI, 2018).

Purpose of the Study

In addition to raising living standards, promoting social gender equality, and increasing public investments, policies that represent the interests of women, families, and ethnic minorities should be linked to the empowerment of female leaders (Beaman et al., 2012; Cohen & Huffman, 2007; Paxton et al., 2007). The substantial role of government in women's empowerment cannot be renounced. Policymakers and academics must work hard to create positive, action-oriented practices that empower women professionals and secure the goal of gender equality in the workplace in order to address the issue of gender equality in the higher education sector (Farooq et al., 2020). Likewise, higher education institutes must also avail themselves of this vital female leadership effectiveness with the support of talent development practices. By attracting new students, providing excellent coaching and learning, undertaking out-of-class research, and obtaining funding for additional research, these skilled individuals significantly improve university performance (Horseman, 2018; Hazelkorn, 2017; Bradley, 2016). Establishing talent development strategies, such as talent pools, enhancing staff competencies, supporting effective planning, and boosting human resource performance are further advantages for institutions of higher learning (Kasemsap, 2017; Wu et al., 2016). These are the ensuing research questions as a result.

RQ1: What is the effect of gender egalitarianism on female leadership effectiveness?

RQ2: What is the effect of talent development on gender egalitarianism?

RQ3: What is the effect of talent development on leadership effectiveness?

RQ4: What is the effect of talent development as a mediator between leadership effectiveness and gender egalitarianism in higher education sector?

RQ5: What is the effect of perceived government support as a moderator between leadership effectiveness and gender egalitarianism in higher education sector?

LITERATURE REVIEW

In leadership, effectiveness is widely recognized (Sudha et al., 2016). Researchers offered up to 5,000 definitions of effective leadership (Bass & Stogdill, 1990a). A significant and broad definition of leadership effectiveness is the idea of a positive individual impact by one or more people who motivate others to achieve common goals in a way that pleases everyone (Hardey, 2019). According to Cooper and Nirenberg (2004), it involves overcoming changing obstacles to successfully connect with clients, employees, and organizational goals and forge solid, fruitful relationships. The leadership style is the primary factor influencing leadership effectiveness (Hur et al., 2011; Bruno & Lay, 2006). According to research, women leaders who possess exceptional leadership effectiveness demonstrate positive response-feedback, which includes identifying and categorizing exceptional welfare strategies and performances as opposed to subpar leadership functions (Hoyt & Blascovich, 2007). According to Glass and Cook (2018), companies with a female leader have shown more equitable outcomes than those with a symbolic female leader or those with gender inequity (managed by men). In multidimensional leadership classifications, transformational leadership outperforms transactional and laissez-faire leadership (Judge & Piccolo, 2004). According to a study by Haque et al. (2015), transformational leadership is an effective strategy female leaders use (Faizan et al., 2018). It is a well-established fact that women are naturally transformational leaders due to their thoughtfulness, transformation, collaboration, social demonstration, and people-orientedness (Appelbaum et al., 2003).

However, despite having these exceptional leadership capabilities, when we look at their presence in leadership positions across all 27 EU member states, only 13 percent of higher education institutions are run by women (Shaukat et al., 2021; Gorondutse et al., 2019). Current research has shown that women worldwide with leadership qualities make up only 26 percent of college and university heads, regardless of their qualifications and abilities (Szymanska & Rubin, 2018; Lapovsky, 2014; White, 2012). On a national level, however, women with superior leadership positions are at the bottom, at 3 percent, in Pakistan (ILO, 2015, 2020). Universities have a higher rate of enrolling women in most faculties except for specific professional degrees (Shaukat et al., 2021). More specifically, women experience difficulties in academia due to their gender and the attitudes and expectations around it (Asal, 2019). According to Yenilmez, the proportion of female academicians at the entry level is increasing. However, the majority of them are unable to reach the top, demonstrating that prejudice based on gender still exists in this field (Yenilmez, 2016). Songul Demir conducted the same thorough investigation, interviewing one hundred women in the academic field. The findings of her study revealed that women experience open gender discrimination daily, regardless of their title (Demir, 2018). The results support the previously proposed “funnel structure” of academic development, which holds that female faculty members advance to higher positions more slowly than male faculty members, who face less discrimination as they rise through the ranks of leadership (Baptist, 2017).

Similarly, it is difficult to reconcile the high attrition and rank stagnation rates among female faculty members with the low number of females in higher leadership positions (Shaukat et al., 2021). In the current era, women must be reasonably present in the workplace; even though most females do not enjoy gender-neutral work environments, this is encouraging for

the future. According to research, government support has a long-lasting impact on performance (Gorondutse et al., 2019). It is equally important to ensure that these women who obtain leadership positions use their authority to create gender-equal environments for everyone with an egalitarian viewpoint. The ultimate goal is to equip these women with the necessary resources and power to become egalitarian leaders who are aware of gender-driven issues and can implement desirable arrangements to prevent discrimination (Asal, 2019). Thus, following thorough literature reviews of (Farooq et al., 2020 Asal, 2019 Gorondutse et al., 2019 Rana, 2016 IRUM et al., 2015), perceived government backing is employed as a moderator here. It is suggested that efforts to maintain gender equality require these organizations' structures to be altered (Bencivenga & Drew, 2021). Talent development has been recognized as a critical component of institutional performance since McKinsey coined the phrase "War for Talent" at the beginning of the 1990s (Scullion & Collings, 2011).

In addition to the operations and dynamic management of higher education institutions, talent helps to boost rankings and earnings (Hazelkorn, 2017; Lynch, 2015). Talent provides a significant basis for institutions to gain a competitive edge (Shabane, 2017; Gateau & Simon, 2016; Daraei et al., 2014; Lawler, 2010; Jones, 2008). Consequently, numerous significant advantages exist for organizations that prioritize talent (Diezmann, 2018; Horseman, 2018; Hazelkorn, 2017; Refozar et al., 2017; Bradley, 2016; Lynch, 2015). For example, the ability of high-achieving employees is associated with university rankings and performance (Horseman, 2018; Hazelkorn, 2017; Bradley, 2016; Lynch, 2015); similarly, studies on gender equality and talent development have been conducted (Lahiri & Sharma, 2019); some studies on gender inclusion in academia and talent development have been conducted (Mohammed et al., 2020; Harun et al., 2019; Mousa & Ayoubi, 2019; Mokgojwa et al., 2018; Paisey & Paisey, 2016). Following a thorough review of the literature on all the variables, it can be concluded that there are several studies on the effectiveness of female leadership and gender equality in academia, followed by fewer on the role of government support and gender equality in academia (Farooq et al., 2020; Asal, 2019; Gorondutse et al., 2019; Rana, 2016; IRUM et al., 2015). Similarly, there have been studies on gender equality and talent development (Lahiri & Sharma, 2019) and gender parity in the higher education sector and talent development (Mohammed et al., 2020; Harun et al., 2019; Mousa & Ayoubi, 2019; Mokgojwa et al., 2018; Paisey & Paisey, 2016). However, no study has included leadership effectiveness, gender equality, perceived government support, and talent development; as a result, this is the first attempt to examine the relationship between these factors and the career advancement of female academicians in Pakistan.

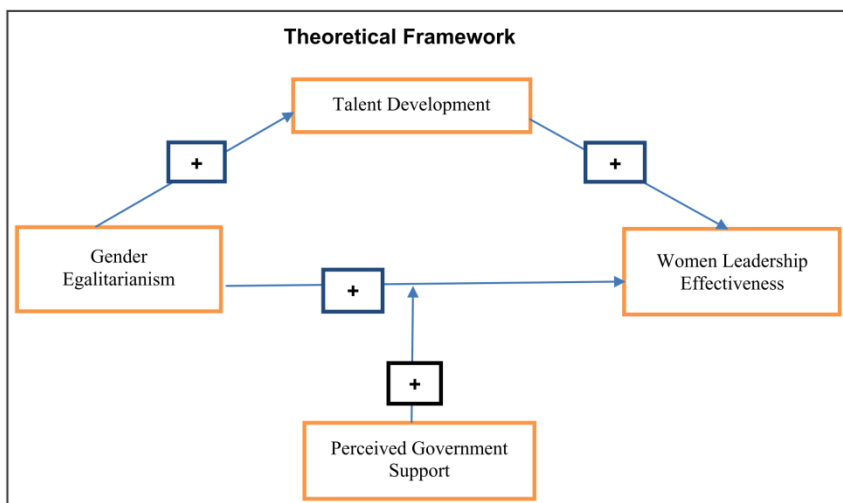
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

According to the role congruity theory, evaluating the competence of female leaders is based on their traditional role expectations, as opposed to male leaders who discriminate against women in leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Morrison et al., 1987). According to theory, a person is considered suitable for a function when certain aspects of that role align with the individual's stereotyped sociocultural group (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Across cultural boundaries, women are associated with common personality qualities like kindness and concern for others, whereas men are associated with agentic personality traits like aggression and combativeness (Bosak et al., 2018; Cuddy et al., 2015; Abele et al., 2008; Williams &

Best, 1990). According to role congruity theory, people possess mental images of specific qualities necessary for specific roles (Schock et al., 2019; Lord & Maher, 2002; Sarbin, 1968). The criteria (basis) determining whether being male or female is associated with being liked or hated are agency and communion (Yoder & Zipp, 2018). Using role congruity theory, this study aims to investigate gender equality by examining the causes of gender inequality stemming from social gender stereotypes and how they hinder women's leadership potential. Similarly, efforts are made to mitigate this gender disparity in the higher education industry through talent development and perceived government backing.

In summary, the current study aims to determine the impact of gender equality, which emphasizes that gender has no say in how work is distributed and should not influence how men and women should evaluate their tasks (Gheaus & Robeyns, 2011), on women's effectiveness as leaders. Effective leadership is the practice of persuading others to understand and comply with what should be done and how it should be done in a productive way, as well as a practice that encourages individual and group efforts to achieve shared goals (Nabih et al., 2016). In the current study, government assistance refers to any government support given to women in higher education institutions. In contrast, gender equality and women's leadership effectiveness are moderated by examining the significance of perceived government support, which includes financial, coaching, mentoring, and regulatory support (Rasha, 2014). Mediation is carried out through the use of talent development, which is defined as procedures and activities that include the deliberate attempts to identify talent needs that are especially important to the institution's ability to maintain a competitive edge over time and use women's skills for student success (Collings & Mellahi, 2009).

Figure 1



H1: There will be a direct effect of gender egalitarianism on woman leadership-effectiveness.

H2: There will be a significant effect of gender egalitarianism on talent development.

H3: There will be a strong effect of talent development on women leadership-effectiveness.

H4: Talent development will mediate the relationship between gender egalitarianism and woman leadership effectiveness.

H5: Perceived governmental support will moderate the relation between gender egalitarianism and woman leadership effectiveness.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The positivist philosophy used in this work includes surveying, observing, and conducting experiments to gather data (Quiñones et al., 1997; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2005). By its very nature, this study is cross-sectional, quantitative, and deductive. Purposive sampling is used to collect data from experienced and professional women to acquire accurate results, and a non-probability sampling technique is used for this research study (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Both online and structured questionnaires were used to collect the data. The HEC website was used to gather information about the female academicians in leadership positions at the public universities in Lahore, Rawalpindi, and Islamabad. The websites of each of these public universities were then consulted. Then, because of the pandemic, individuals are contacted in person and online. Women leaders from 30 public universities completed a total of 215 questionnaires. The data was assessed using Smart PLS-SEM in the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS), and conclusions were drawn to examine the suggested theories.

Following a thorough literature study, House et al. (2004) created the gender equality scale. The figures in Table 1 below show that the reliability was checked and found to be good. The scale used to measure leadership effectiveness was taken from (Al-kahtani et al., 2011). Cronbach's alpha value was significant at (0.92) for this variable. To evaluate the perceived government support scale (Al-Shihabi, 2008) and (Rasha, 2014) were adopted, and the analysis outcomes were significant with Cronbach's alpha value (0.779); all these were mentioned in (Gorondutse et al., 2019). The talent development scale was obtained from Al-Kerdawy (2016) and Chami-Malaeb and Garavan (2013) with a significant Cronbach's alpha value (0.894) and mentioned in (Mohammed et al., 2020). All the items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The demographic questions were employed to help us understand the details of the selected sample, which is provided in the subsequent part of the results.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The sample comprised 100% women to ascertain accurate results from experienced and knowledgeable women faculty. The educational level of this sample was a PhD. In contrast, they were categorized into multiple levels of leadership according to their designation, such as deans, 3.9 percent; HoDs, 20.6 percent; chairpersons, 22.3 percent; and 45.5 percent in charge of the department. While their age ranges from 40 to 60. Further details about the demographics are given below.

Table 1.

		Frequency	Percentage
Age	40-50	78	33.5%
	50-60	137	58.8%
Designations			
	Deans	09	3.9%
	HoDs	48	20.6%
	Chairpersons	52	22.3%
	In-charge	106	45.5%

Source: Authors' calculations on SPSS

Table 2

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
LE	215	3.5092	.58912	-.564	.166
GE	215	3.3795	.67806	-.013	.166
PGS	215	3.6857	.57925	-.057	.166
TD	215	4.4775	.82496	-.121	.166

GE=Gender Egalitarianism, LE= Leadership Effectiveness, PGS= Perceived Government Support, TD=Talent Development.

Table 2 exhibits that the standard deviation values of all variables lie near 1, implying that numeric lies around the mean or data point tends to be near the mean. The mean value of most of the variables ranges from 3.5, which shows that most respondents' responses either agree or somewhat disagree. The benchmark value of Skewness should range from -2 to +2; therefore, our collected data is in negative numbers, which implies that the data is skewed negatively. On the contrary, the benchmark value for kurtosis should range from -3 to +3, and they both depict the symmetry of data and explain whether data is normally distributed. In this case, most of the values range between 0.38 and -.202, which depicts the normality of data under this threshold.

Table 3

LE	GE	PGS	TD
LE	1	-	-
GE	.451**	1	-
PGS	.448**	.714**	1
TD	.542**	.496**	.489**

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

To measure the correlation SPSS was employed, and the Pearson's correlation method was used. The benchmark value should exist between -1 to +1. Table 3 above depicts that the correlation values in this research study are positive and significant.

Table 4

	Cronbach's Alpha	Roh A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
LE	0,745	0.761	0.832	0.502
GE	0.920	0.930	0.935	0.520
Moderation	0.893	1.000	0.833	0.218
PGS	0.779	0.773	0.852	0.540
TD	0.894	0.921	0.919	0.555

GE=Gender Egalitarianism, LE= Leadership Effectiveness, PGS= Perceived Government Support, TD=Talent Development.

The measurement model of reliability and validity is calculated by employing values of Cronbach's alpha and Composite reliability, it is calculated by Smart PLS, the benchmark value should range from 0.6 to 0.7 or higher considered good (Zalma et al., 2015). Whereas the threshold value for composite reliability should be 0.6 or higher (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). However, Table 4 demonstrates that the values of Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability ranges from 0.745 to 0.920 and 0.832 to 0.935 respectively, which establish that data is reliable. The value for variance should be 0.5 or above (Henseler et al., 2016) and in this study it ranges from to. 0.218 to 0.555. Convergent validity is measured by the outcomes of measurement model factor loadings, average variance extracted, and composite reliability and all the calculated values are within the acceptable range.

Table 5

	Beta value	P-value	T-Statistics
GE->LE	0.200	0.010	2.576
GE ->TD	0.642	0.0001	21.369
TD->	0.234	0.007	2.721
GE->TD->LE	0.150	0.006	2.750
GE->PGS->LE	0.184	0.152	1.434
PGS->LE	0.197	0.05	2.794

The threshold value of t-statistics should be 1.96 or higher according to the suggested criterion. In this study, all values are above 1.96 which implies that relationship among the variables is positive except for moderation, rest of the beta value lies between 2.576 to 21.369 which maintains that they have significant and direct relations. The benchmark value for P is 0.05 so that any value lower than 0.05 is significant and below in Table 6 all P values are lower than 0.05 which implies all these relationships are significant and positive except for moderation.

Table 6

Factor loadings are calculated in PLS-SEM and threshold criterion suggests that loadings of all constructs should be higher than 0.5 (Hair et al., 2007).

Constructs	Measurement Items	Factor Loadings
Gender Egalitarianism	GE 1	0.601
	GE 2	0.738
	GE 3	0.847
	GE 4	0.685
	GE 5	0.687
Leadership Effectiveness	LE1	0.804
	LE2	0.813
	LE3	0.792
	LE4	0.708
	LE5	0.845
	LE6	0.841
	LE7	0.767
	LE8	0.768
	LE 9	0.701
	LE10	0.633
	LE11	0.802
	LE12	0.724
	LE13	0.601
Perceived Government Support	LE17	0.615
	PGS1	0.798
	PGS2	0.749
	PGS3	0.754
	PGS4	0.807
	PGS6	0.634
Talent Development	TD1	0.835
	TD2	0.672
	TD3	0.894
	TD4	0.866
	TD5	0.888
	TD6	0.897
	TD8	0.648
	TD12	0.669
	TD13	0.601
	TD14	0.855
	TD15	0.648

According to the study's first finding, leadership effectiveness and gender equality are significantly and favorably correlated ($T=2.579$, $P=0.010$). These results also align with previous studies (Gazzaz, 2017; Alajmi and Ahmad, 2016). Additionally, this study examines

the substantial association between gender equality and talent development ($T=21.369$, $P=0.000$). According to these findings, the higher education sector should create training programs for skilled workers with the necessary expertise, provide enough training opportunities and career development programs for staff, and help women advance their careers. In the end, this will help to clear the path for gender equality in higher education (Mohammed et al., 2020). This study concludes that Talent Development has a significant relationship with Leadership Effectiveness ($T= 2.721$, $P= 0.007$). These empirical results are in line with Yap's (2016) argument that higher education institutions should provide career development opportunities to their highly qualified workforce in order to continuously develop them (Mohammed et al., 2020). Finally, the study's results show that Talent Development mediates the relationship between Gender Egalitarianism and Women Leadership Effectiveness, which has a positive and significant association ($T= 2.750$, $P= 0.006$). These findings are in line with those of Mohammed et al. (2019a), who found that high level leaderships provide talented personnel with a plethora of opportunities for effective training initiatives (Gorondutse et al., 2019). However, Perceived Government Support has a significant relationship with Leadership Effectiveness ($T= 2.794$, $P= 0.005$). Therefore, the importance of government support and leadership effectiveness is evident in the case of higher education institutions that have female employees in their scientific councils and many departments by providing incentives to gain the support of current governments and to boost the confidence of female leaders by involving them in scientific discussions and discourse that can help them become effective leaders (Gazaz, 2017; Kalafatoglu et al., 2017; Alajmi and Ahmad, 2016). In contrast, the study's final results indicate a negative and negligible relationship between perceived government support and women's leadership effectiveness ($T= 1.434$, $P= 0.152$). This is in accordance with other research on gender equality and government support, as well as the observation that government assistance cannot transcend the prevailing culture (Gorondutse et al., 2019).

CONCLUSION

Higher education institutions in Pakistan and their staff will benefit from this study as they anticipate and address the issue of gender inequality and its core cause, which is ingrained in cultural gender-driven role segregation. One of the study's notable findings, however, is that perceived government support was unable to moderate the relationship between gender equality and leadership effectiveness. This suggests that something is wrong with this relationship, as government support is unable to go beyond Pakistan's dominant culture. Through talent development, officials in higher education institutions should emphasize the importance of female leaders in enhancing their effectiveness as leaders.

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