

Link Between Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Effectiveness for Women Leaders in Saudi Higher Education Institutions

Lama Rashed Abdulaziz Al-Ghofaily

Assistant professor, Princess Nourah bint Abdulrahman University

Applied College, Department of Basic Sciences

lralthofaily@pnu.edu.sa

ABSTRACT: The landscape of leadership in Saudi Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) has been undergoing a significant transformation, within the role of emotional intelligence. This study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness within Saudi HEIs. The study aimed to identify the key factors linking emotional intelligence and leadership and to explore how they influence leadership outcomes in Saudi Arabia's higher education sector. An extensive literature review analyzed 42 studies on emotional intelligence, leadership effectiveness, and the Saudi higher education context. Through this method, these studies were synthesized to identify common themes, patterns, and insights. The analysis revealed that emotional intelligence significantly affects leadership effectiveness in Saudi HEIs. Key factors, such as self-awareness, empathy, interpersonal relationships, and adaptability, were essential in mediating this relationship. Moreover, the findings showed that institutions that prioritize emotional intelligence competencies, particularly in leadership roles, experience better organizational outcomes and higher staff morale. This study offers a nuanced understanding of the interplay between emotional intelligence and leadership within Saudi HEIs, a topic that, despite its relevance, has seen limited exploration in the existing literature. By focusing on the Saudi context, this research offers policymakers, educators, and institutional leaders valuable insights, underscoring the strategic importance of cultivating emotionally intelligent leadership in the nation's higher education sector.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, Women's leadership, Saudi higher educational institutions, Systematic literature review

1. Introduction

In modern-day institutions, two opposite paradigms, leadership and management, are considered important for influencing the success of the organisation (Shaturaev and Bekimbetova, 2021). These two paradigms are important in the education sector as well and are considered necessary parts of governance in higher education institutions (Shaturaev and Bekimbetova, 2021). However, it has also been identified that 'management' is often perceived as a less desirable characteristic, as it restricts efforts to enhance the functional and operational efficacy of institutions (Fertig and James, 2016). Leadership is seen as a more effective, inclusive, and collaborative approach that, by nature, focuses on developing shared goals, motivating others, and aligning the actions of leaders and followers to achieve high-quality teaching and learning (Post, 2017).

According to Black (2015), higher education leadership is conceived to promote a culture that supports the enhancement of the teaching and learning process and the achievement of the central aim of academic excellence. Emotional intelligence is associated with empathy, self-awareness, motivation, and emotion regulation (Lubbadeh, 2020), suggesting that it is an important trait in determining the effectiveness of leadership in higher education. Emotional intelligence is identified as the most significant element or trait of leaders who are passionate, dedicated, and enthusiastic about their roles and achieving their leadership goals (Parrish, 2015). Emotional intelligence can be defined as an individual's ability to control, regulate, and express their emotions effectively, and to regulate others' emotions through

Link Between Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Effectiveness for Women Leaders in Saudi Higher Education Institutions

Lama Rashed Abdulaziz Al-Ghofaily

encouragement, motivation, and enhanced self-awareness (Gilar-Corbi et al., 2018). Emotional intelligence among higher education leaders is an important competency that helps them understand their own strengths and weaknesses.

Alotaibi, Amin, and Winterton (2020) conducted a questionnaire-based survey to understand the link between emotional intelligence and leadership. They identified that emotional intelligence is significant for enhancing psychological empowerment among leaders, improving their relationships with others, and strengthening their practice and role. Castillo and Del Valle (2017) also reported that emotionally intelligent leaders are more committed to their work and seek to achieve common organizational goals collaboratively. Analyzing female leadership traits is significant because leadership is often associated with males and seen as part of masculinity. However, women are often considered more empathetic; they focus more on mentorship and teamwork and have higher self-control than men (Alshammari et al., 2020). Firstly, whether women leaders exhibit a higher level of emotional intelligence than their male counterparts do. Secondly, whether a higher level of emotional intelligence results in more effective leadership.

1.1 Research problem statement

In particular, the roles of women in society and higher education institutions have undergone significant socio-cultural change in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Abalkhail, 2017; Al Alhareth et al., 2015; Alghofaily, 2019; Alomair, 2015). While numerous studies have highlighted the rise of women in leadership positions in higher education, obstacles still stand in the way of reaching their full leadership potential (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017; Alotaibi et al., 2020). Across contexts and cultures, there is a connection between emotional intelligence and effective leadership (Chen & Guo, 2020; Castillo & Del Valle, 2017; Goleman, 2021). There may be a competency gap because it is unclear how emotional intelligence explicitly affects women in leadership positions in Saudi higher education institutions (Alshammari et al., 2020; Bin et al., 2021). There have been studies on women's leadership in Saudi Arabian higher education, but there is a dearth of information that captures the significant challenges women face in leadership positions (Abalkhail, 2017; Alghofaily, 2019; Alotaibi et al., 2020). The relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness has been established, but little is known about how emotional intelligence affects Saudi women leaders in higher education institutions (Alshammari et al., 2020; Gómez-Leal et al., 2022). Few studies have examined the relationship between emotional intelligence and effective leadership, particularly in the context of Saudi higher educational institutions and the prevalent gender dynamics (Issah, 2018; Lubbadah, 2020).

1.2 Importance of the study

By examining recent literature and identifying systemic, cultural, and personal barriers, this study seeks to understand the factors impeding women's competitiveness in leadership roles in Saudi higher education institutions. This study will close a knowledge gap by analyzing the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership and shedding light on its function and potential as a crucial tool for female leaders in Saudi Arabia's higher educational landscape. Establishing a connection between emotional intelligence and effective leadership will advance academic literature and provide Saudi Arabian institutions with helpful advice on improving leadership development and

Link Between Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Effectiveness for Women Leaders in Saudi Higher Education Institutions

Lama Rashed Abdulaziz Al-Ghofaily

training programs specifically designed for aspiring and current women leaders. Finally, the study designs the research objectives:

1. To identify the key challenges for women's leadership competitiveness in Saudi higher educational institutions.
2. To assess the role of emotional intelligence by women in Saudi higher educational institutions.
3. To see the link between emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness in Saudi higher educational institutions.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Current State of Female Leadership in Higher Education

The disparity between women and men in leadership positions can characterize the current labor market. In recent years, women have been able to make greater contributions to the labor market and occupy leadership or decision-making positions in various organizations. *Leadership* is the ability to direct and motivate others to complete specific tasks and achieve organizational goals. According to Scott (2018), despite major changes over the last few decades, women still need help gaining leadership positions across various fields, including higher education. A study by Rollock (2019) found that women remain underrepresented in the UK's education sector. This is mainly due to a lack of autonomy and flexibility, as well as high work pressures, which affect females' work-life balance (Rollock, 2019).

A study by O'Connor (2020) argued that even Western society remains male-dominated. For example, according to evidence, 86% of university heads and 76% of senior professors in Universities across the European Union are males. Similarly, Brower and James (2020) argued that leaders in higher education institutions in New Zealand are mainly male. Bönisch-Brednich and White (2021) also found that senior management and leadership positions in educational institutions in Australia and New Zealand are male-dominated, and that universities' strategic plans consider gender equality to be of lesser importance. Jones et al. (2018) argued that leadership positions in higher education institutions are powerful, with the responsibility for decision-making and policymaking. However, women in even developed countries like the USA face challenges in achieving leadership positions due to a lack of networking, opportunities to develop professional relationships, family responsibilities, and leadership development programs (Scott, 2018).

In recent years, the contribution of women in leadership positions in the private and public sectors of Saudi Arabia has been increasing (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017; Alghofaily, 2020). Saudi Arabia is considered one of the most gender-segregated societies. Saudi women have outperformed Saudi men in education, but until recently, this did not translate into a meaningful increase in their labor-market contributions. Till a few years ago, they were primarily restricted to the education and healthcare sectors, and only recently did the Saudi government open employment opportunities across all industry sectors to women (Alghofaily, 2020). Saudi women have performed exceptionally well in education and exhibited leadership skills (Al et al., 2015).

Abalkhail (2017) argued, however, that women's leadership in higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia is very challenging. Despite having better qualifications than their male counterparts, they are less likely to achieve leadership positions due to social, cultural, and institutional barriers. The literature lacks in-depth insight into

female leadership in higher education in Saudi Arabia. Saudi women can get an education and seek employment in gender-segregated institutions. However, their leadership roles and responsibilities remain unclear due to a lack of research (Elliott & DeFrank-Cole, 2018).

2.2 Characteristics of Female Leaders in Higher Education

There is a widespread perception that leadership positions are characterized by authoritative, masculine traits. Thus, females are denied or rejected leadership roles (Alghofaily, 2019). However, the literature indicates that females are more likely to use collaborative approaches and teamwork, display greater engagement with their followers, and focus more on effective communication and information sharing (Wille et al., 2018). With the changing context, senior leaders in the education sector are taking on an emerging role, as they are required to make efficient use of available resources and experience to transform the teaching and learning process (Black, 2015). Women in leadership positions are more likely to adopt the 'transformational leadership style, which is further associated with innovation, engagement, empathy, empowerment, and encouragement (Anderson et al., 2015). A study by Klatt, Eimler, and Krämer (2016) argued that male leaders are often task-oriented, while female leaders are people-oriented. This also means that males are more likely to focus on negotiation skills and ambition by employing transactional or authoritative leadership. In contrast, women focus more on communication skills, empathy, and emotions to support their followers (Klatt et al., 2016).

Studies have argued that despite being stereotyped or discriminated against for their feminist values and characteristics, the feminine qualities of female leaders are more significant in achieving better work coordination (Lambe & Maes, 2018). Klatt, Eimler, and Krämer (2016) also identified in their research that female leaders are considered warm, compassionate, and intelligent, making them person-oriented. Cahyati, Hariri, and Karwan (2021) noted that, despite being more compassionate, empathetic, and collaborative, female leaders face many social and cultural barriers that undermine their presence in leadership positions. Mayer, Oosthuizen, and Surtee (2017) conducted a study to assess emotional intelligence among female leaders in higher education institutions. The research findings indicate that emotional intelligence among women leaders makes them more skilled leaders, with higher-quality performance and greater accountability.

Alsubaie and Jones (2017) also found that female leaders in higher education are not only competent but also creative and innovative, and that they focus on improving individual skills. Female leadership in Saudi Arabia needs more support and encouragement to prepare leaders for effective mentorship so that other females may also excel in leadership roles in the future. Alotaibi (2020) argued that females in Saudi Arabia face various obstacles and are perceived as more emotional, sensitive, and weak, which leads them to not fit the leadership paradigm, which requires demonstrating "power and directiveness, and with task-based behaviors" (p. 168). However, it has been argued that people-based behavior displayed by female leaders is an essential symbol of emotional intelligence and democratic and collaborative leadership (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017). Thus, the main characteristics of female leaders are emotions, compassion, empathy, collaboration, and effective communication, which make them well-suited to leadership.

2.3 Link between Emotional Intelligence and Leadership

Emotional intelligence is a broad construct that includes emotional, social, personal, and survival dimensions of intelligence (Mayer et al., 2017). Secondly, it is also identified that emotional intelligence is mainly discussed in social and emotional constructs, while it is often isolated in terms of personal and survival dimensions (Chen & Guo, 2020). Maxwell and Riley (2017) state that the emotional intelligence of educational leaders is positively associated with effective teaching and learning strategies demonstrated within classrooms. Secondly, leaders who manage and regulate their emotions are more likely to exhibit better instructional leadership and to promote successful leadership (Parrish, 2015). Emotionally intelligent leaders are more resilient and better able to handle conflicts and manage their staff (Goleman, 2021). Leadership positions can be highly demanding and may lead to work pressure, stress, anxiety, chronic burnout, and a lack of motivation, which may result in poor performance (Berkovich & Eyal, 2017). However, leaders with a high level of emotional intelligence are self-aware of their own feelings and those of their followers. It helps them identify false emotions, understand the importance of expressing the right emotions, and develop a positive relationship with others, thus supporting effective leadership (Panait, 2017).

Leaders in Saudi Arabia must navigate complex cultural and organizational changes as part of the Vision 2030 reforms, making emotional intelligence mandatory. Alshammari et al. (2020) show how public sector leaders used emotional intelligence competencies, such as empathy and self-awareness, to overcome resistance to change. For example, Public Investment Fund (PIF) leaders engaged stakeholders by communicating openly, acknowledging concerns, and fostering trust. They aligned diverse teams with national goals through empathy, increasing collaboration, and decreasing resistance. This approach emphasizes how emotional intelligence helps leaders balance strategic vision with sociocultural sensitivities, resulting in the successful implementation of transformative policies (Alshammari et al., 2020). The Saudi healthcare sector's response to the pandemic demonstrated the importance of emotional intelligence in crisis leadership. Babadook and Almaleki (2022) investigated hospital administrators who used empathy and social skills to manage the stress of frontline workers. Leaders held regular check-ins, provided mental health resources, and openly acknowledged staff sacrifices to foster resilience. For example, a hospital director in Riyadh used active listening to tailor support systems and boost morale amid overwhelming demands. Such EI-driven practices maintained operational efficiency and increased trust in leadership, emphasizing the role of emotional intelligence in maintaining team cohesion during crises (Ahmed Aldawsari, 2020).

Issah (2018) argued that modern organizations and institutions undergo frequent change due to technological and infrastructure development. However, such changes could overwhelm the whole organization and affect everyone emotionally. Therefore, emotionally intelligent leaders will likely use their social skills and emotional capabilities to express themselves, communicate information effectively, and encourage people to cope with change meaningfully. Emotional intelligence is directly related to successful leadership (Issah, 2018). However, there is insufficient evidence on the different constructs of emotional intelligence and their association with female leadership.

Gómez-Leal et al. (2022) stated that one of the most significant elements of successful leadership is the leader's ability to fully connect with and engage followers

Link Between Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Effectiveness for Women Leaders in Saudi Higher Education Institutions

Lama Rashed Abdulaziz Al-Ghofaily

and to display empathy to achieve transformation. Emotionally intelligent leaders also manage their emotions and moods to adapt desired behavior and encourage desired skills and behavior in others (Gómez-Leal et al., 2022). Thus, emotional intelligence is directly associated with successful leadership. People with emotional intelligence also have social skills that make them influential leaders (Goleman, 2021).

2.4 *Link between Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Effectiveness of Higher Education Female Leaders in Saudi Arabia*

In recent years, significant and progressive changes in Saudi Arabia's social and political context have increased employment opportunities for women, reduced social and cultural barriers, and enhanced the leadership effectiveness and capacity of females (Alomair, 2015). Furthermore, it has been identified that females in the Kingdom are more likely than their male counterparts to attain higher education, making them best suited for leadership positions (Gajendran, 2020). Secondly, females employed in higher education institutions are more likely to exhibit transformational leadership behavior, making them more empathetic, engaged, committed, and inspirational than other females. Arvate, Galilea, and Todescat (2018) state that female leaders have a significant impact on their subordinate females.

According to Kattan et al. (2016), female leaders in Saudi Arabia focus on enhancing their skills and competencies to bring positive change, such as supporting other female staff members, developing professional networks and relationships, and promoting knowledge sharing and mentorship. Alotaibi (2020) states that female leaders in Saudi Arabia are more focused on a transformational leadership style, showing greater concern for people-oriented projects, supporting subordinates in achieving goals, and managing their feelings and emotions more effectively than male leaders. Parrish (2015) has already identified that emotional intelligence is a very important trait for leaders in higher education, as inspiring, guiding, and motivating others is an essential aspect of academic leadership in the modern era. Gorondutse et al. (2019) identified that, despite being more sensitive, empathetic, compassionate, and dedicated, female leaders in universities and higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia are not involved in decision-making.

Some evidence suggests that female leaders in Saudi Arabia may adopt masculine leadership traits to establish authority early in their careers. However, later, they are likely to shift to a more democratic and collaborative leadership style (Alsubaie & Jones, 2017). However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, female leaders in Saudi Arabian higher education displayed more emotionally intelligent leadership in order to psychologically empower their subordinate female staff members, manage the overwhelming emotions caused by the pandemic, encourage better information sharing, and make the digital classrooms a successful approach to teaching and learning (Bin et al., 2021). According to Coutet (2021), the crisis is the primary context that informs leaders' emotional intelligence and how they manage crises with their skills. Female leaders in Saudi Arabia displayed higher emotional skills, competencies, and abilities to manage resources, support staff and students, and make decisive decisions (Coutet, 2021). Such skills and competencies have made female leaders more successful than male leaders. The contribution of the academic staff is the primary determinant of the organizational outcomes in the education sector.

3. Research methodology

3.1 Systematic literature review

A systematic literature review provides a structured and comprehensive assessment of existing research on a specific topic, ensuring objectivity and transparency in the collection and evaluation of information (Tranfield et al., 2003). By conducting a systematic literature review, the study aims to provide a synthesized understanding of women's leadership in higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia, particularly regarding emotional intelligence.

3.2 Search strategy and databases

The initial search strategy used keywords such as "leadership," "Saudi Arabia," "women in higher education," and "emotional intelligence." Databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC were utilized, given their comprehensive coverage of academic literature in education and leadership (Kitchenham, 2004). The Publish and Perish software was further employed to refine and quantify the search results, ensuring robustness and reproducibility (Harzing, 2007).

3.3 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Studies were considered eligible for inclusion if they:

1. Addressed leadership in Saudi higher education institutions.
2. Included explicit discussions on women's leadership roles and challenges.
3. Were published in peer-reviewed journals.

Exclusion criteria comprised:

1. Studies that did not address women's leadership in Saudi Arabia.
2. Research does not focus on higher education settings.
3. Publications in lower-ranking or non-peer-reviewed journals to ensure quality and credibility (Gough et al., 2017).

3.4 Population and sampling

Initially, 231 studies on leadership in Saudi Arabia were identified using the Publish and Perish software. Many of these studies (187) were removed because they did not address women's leadership specifically in the Saudi context. Additionally, two more studies were excluded due to their publication in lower-ranked journals. This rigorous refinement process yielded a final sample of 42 high-quality studies for the SLR (Grant & Booth, 2009).

3.5 Thematic analysis

Upon collecting the relevant studies, a thematic analysis was employed to extract recurring patterns, concepts, and themes related to the research objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initial coding was conducted to categorize data, followed by a more detailed analysis to refine and consolidate themes. Themes were then critically assessed in relation to the research objectives:

1. Challenges for Women's Leadership Competitiveness.
2. Role of emotional intelligence.

Link Between Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Effectiveness for Women Leaders in Saudi Higher Education Institutions

Lama Rashed Abdulaziz Al-Ghofaily

3. The link between emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness.

By following this rigorous, systematic approach, the study ensures credibility, reliability, and thoroughness in its examination of women's leadership in Saudi higher education institutions.

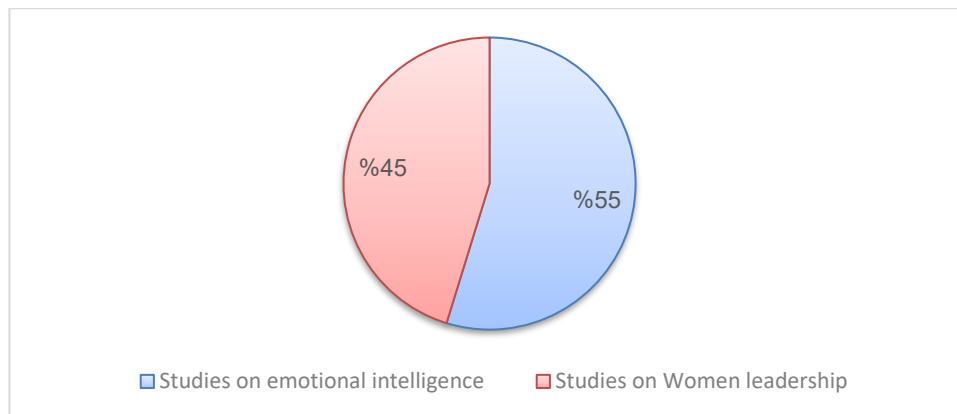
4. Results

4.1 Demographic information

Figure 1 emphasizes emotional intelligence and women's leadership in the literature review. Of the studies on the list, 23 of them focus on emotional intelligence, demonstrating the topic's growing importance in leadership, decision-making, and organizational culture. Additionally, 19 studies focus specifically on women in leadership, with a subset focusing on the unique challenges and dynamics faced by Saudi Arabian female leaders. This focus on women's leadership in Saudi Arabia highlights how society and organizations are changing, with a forward-thinking movement to acknowledge and understand the contributions, challenges, and potential of female leaders in traditionally male-dominated spheres. These themes are interconnected because emotional intelligence is a crucial leadership quality, and women are becoming more prominent in leadership positions in Saudi Arabia.

Figure 1

Number of studies



4.2 Key challenges for Women's leadership in Saudi higher educational institutions

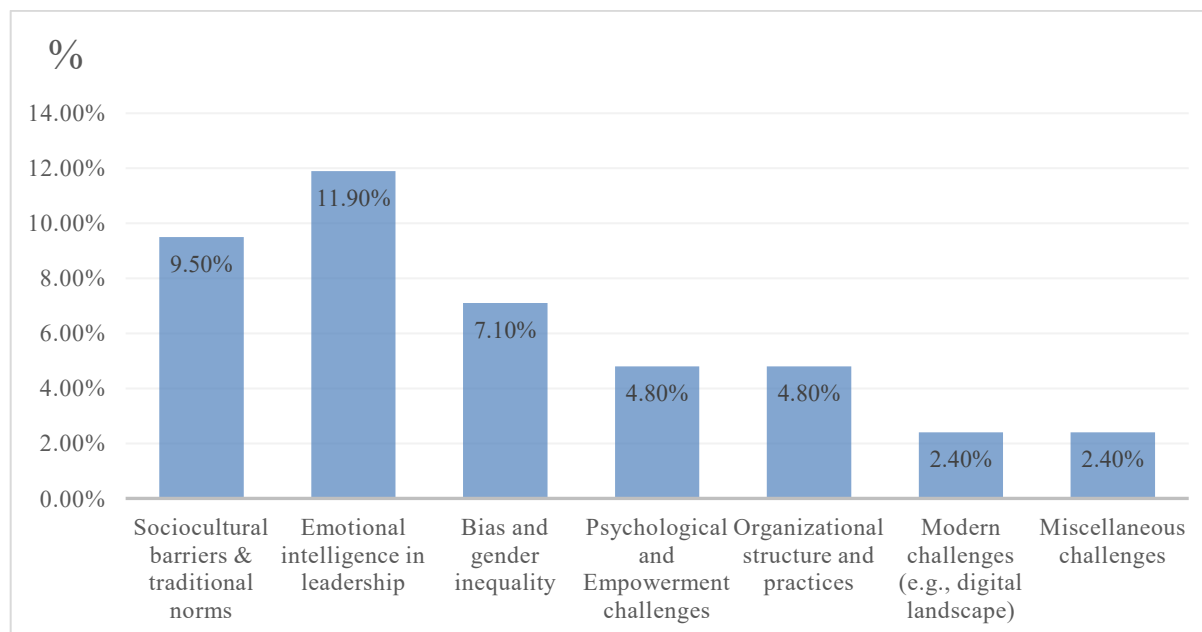
Table 1 and Figure 2 show that in Saudi Arabian higher educational institutions, women leaders face challenges that hinder their competitiveness and advancement. A significant challenge is the sociocultural barriers and traditional norms, constituting 9.5% of the studied literature. Given the conservative nature of Saudi society, women often encounter limitations based on cultural expectations and societal norms. Emotional intelligence in leadership, representing 11.9%, emerged as another dominant theme. This reflects a growing recognition of the importance of emotional intelligence in leadership roles and suggests that cultivating this competency can be a pivotal factor for women leaders in Saudi Arabia. Bias and gender inequality, mentioned in 7.1% of the studies, spotlight the profoundly ingrained biases that women often face, stemming from societal perceptions and systemic structures. Organizational structure and modern challenges, including adapting to the digital landscape, also surfaced as impediments, albeit to a lesser extent.

Link Between Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Effectiveness for Women Leaders in Saudi Higher Education Institutions

Lama Rashed Abdulaziz Al-Ghofaily

Figure 2

Key challenges for Women's leadership in Saudi higher educational institutions



Women's leadership in Saudi Arabian higher educational institutions is a multifaceted issue, influenced by societal norms, emotional intelligence competencies, and institutional biases, among other factors. Although there has been a shift towards empowering women in the Kingdom, as evidenced by Vision 2030, these challenges indicate that substantial work remains to ensure full inclusivity and equality. Addressing these challenges is not only paramount for advancing women in leadership roles but also for the holistic development of the educational sector in Saudi Arabia.

Table 1

Key challenges for Women's leadership in Saudi higher educational institutions

Key Challenges for Women's Leadership Competitiveness	Studies %ages	Sources
Sociocultural barriers & traditional norms	9.5%	Abalkhail, J.M. (2017); Al Alhareth, Y., et al. (2015); Alghofaily, L., (2019); Alomair, M.O. (2015); Alsubaie, A. and Jones, K. (2017); Elliott, J.D. and DeFrank-Cole, L. (2018); Kattan, M. M. et al. (2016); O'Connor, P. (2020); Rollock, N. (2019)
Emotional intelligence in leadership	11.9%	Alotaibi, S.M., et al. (2020); Alshammari, F., et al. (2020); Chen, J. and Guo, W. (2020); Gilar-Corbi, R., et al. (2018); Goleman, D. (2021); Gómez-Leal, R., et al. (2022); Issah, M. (2018); Lubbadah, T. (2020); Parrish, D.R. (2015)
Bias and gender inequality	7.1%	Anderson, A.J., et al. (2015); Arvate, P.R., et al. (2018); Bönisch-Brednich, B. and White, K. (2021); Brower, A. and James, A. (2020); Wille, B., et al. (2018)

Link Between Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Effectiveness for Women Leaders in Saudi Higher Education Institutions

Lama Rashed Abdulaziz Al-Ghofaily

Psychological and Empowerment challenges	4.8%	Alotaibi, F. T. (2020); Bin Bakr, M. and Alfayez, A. (2021); Gorondutse, A.H., et al. (2019); Maxwell, A. and Riley, P. (2017)
Organizational structure and practices	4.8%	Black, S.A. (2015); Cahyati, D., et al. (2021); Fertig, M.I.C.H.A.E.L. and James, C.H.R.I.S. (2016); Post, R. (2017)
Modern challenges (e.g., digital landscape)	2.4%	Coutet, K. (2021); Shaturaev, J. and Bekimbetova, G. (2021)
Miscellaneous challenges	2.4%	Klatt, J., et al. (2016); Lambe, N. and Maes, J.D. (2018); Scott, H.I.R. (2018)

4.3 Role of emotional intelligence by women leadership in Saudi higher educational institutions

In the ever-evolving landscape of Saudi higher HEIs, emotional intelligence emerges as a pivotal component underpinning women's leadership effectiveness (Table 2, Figure 3). As evidenced by the study percentages, approximately 9.5% of the examined literature asserts that emotional intelligence enhances leadership effectiveness (Alotaibi et al., 2020; Issah, 2018; Parrish, 2015). Leaders endowed with emotional intelligence are adept at discerning, managing, and responding to their emotions and those of others. This skill set enhances the leader's capacity to connect with subordinates, build trust, and make sound decisions—traits vital to success in Saudi HEIs.

Figure 3

Role of emotional intelligence by women leadership in Saudi higher educational institutions



The interconnectedness of emotional intelligence with other facets of organizational dynamics is also evident. About 4.8% of the sources (Goleman, 2021; Chen et al., 2020) recognize the role of emotional intelligence in fostering organizational adaptation. The rapidly changing dynamics of higher education, coupled with the socio-cultural transitions in Saudi Arabia, demand leaders who can grasp the

Link Between Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Effectiveness for Women Leaders in Saudi Higher Education Institutions

Lama Rashed Abdulaziz Al-Ghofaily

emotional undertones of their teams and adapt accordingly. Likewise, managing emotional labor and stress is another arena where emotional intelligence demonstrates its significance (Lubbadeh, 2020; Maxwell et al., 2017). The pressures inherent to leadership roles in HEIs require leaders to regulate their emotions, ensuring their well-being and smooth functioning.

Lastly, the importance of emotional intelligence in navigating cultural challenges, especially in a nuanced socio-cultural context like Saudi Arabia, cannot be overstated. Elliott and DeFrank-Cole (2018) underscore this aspect, emphasizing the value of emotional intelligence in deciphering and respecting cultural idiosyncrasies, which is quintessential for both foreign and local female leaders. Moreover, emotionally intelligent leaders often stand at the forefront of fostering inclusive work environments (Alshammari et al., 2020). Their inherent capacity to empathize and respond inclusively to diverse employees ensures a harmonious work environment, which is crucial to the advancement of Saudi HEIs in the global educational arena.

Table 2

Role of emotional intelligence by women leadership in Saudi higher educational institutions

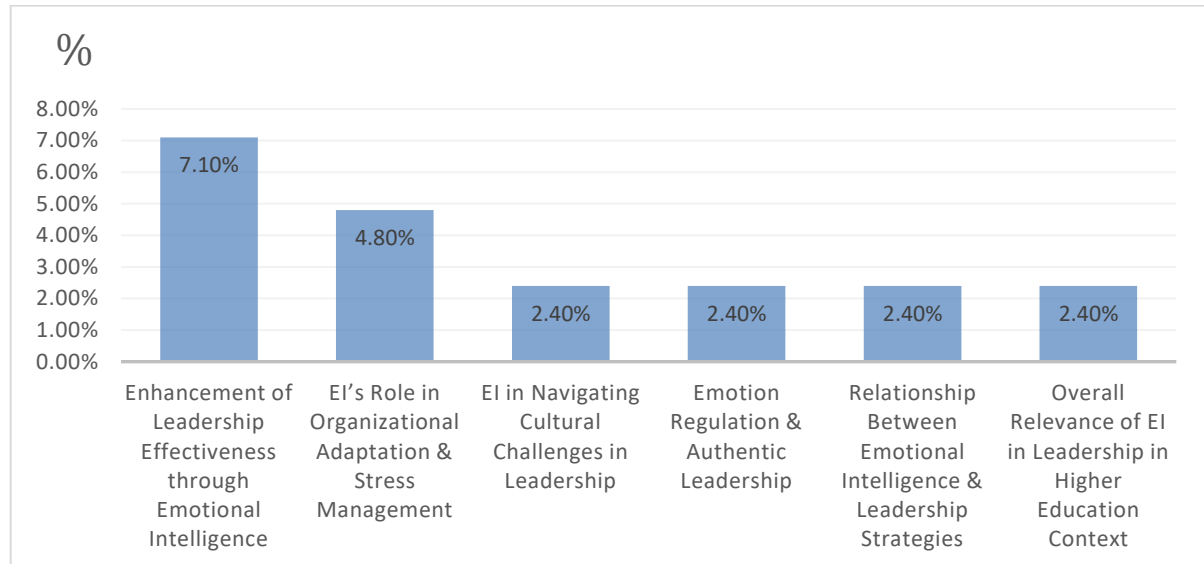
Role of Emotional Intelligence	Studies %ages (of 42)	Sources (APA Style)
Enhancing Leadership Effectiveness	9.5%	Alotaibi, S.M., Amin, M. & Winterton, J. (2020); Issah, M. (2018); Parrish, D.R. (2015)
Fostering Organizational Adaptation	4.8%	Goleman, D. (2021); Chen, J. & Guo, W. (2020)
Managing Emotional Labor and Stress	4.8%	Lubbadeh, T. (2020); Maxwell, A. & Riley, P. (2017)
Navigating Cultural Challenges	2.4%	Elliott, J.D. & DeFrank-Cole, L. (2018) (given the cultural challenges of working in Saudi Arabia and the need for emotional intelligence in navigating them)
Building Inclusive Work Environments	2.4%	Alshammari, F., Pasay-An, E., Gonzales, F. & Torres, S. (2020) (given that emotionally intelligent leaders may be more attuned to the needs and experiences of diverse employees, fostering a more inclusive work environment)
Enhancing Decision Making	2.4%	Gilar-Corbi, R., Pozo-Rico, T., Sánchez, B. & Castejón, J.L. (2018) (emotional intelligence can influence the quality and efficacy of decision-making processes in leadership roles)
Handling Change and Innovations	2.4%	Castillo, M.Á.S. & Del Valle, I.D. (2017) (given that emotionally intelligent leaders are often better equipped to handle change, understand the emotional responses of their teams to new initiatives, and can therefore implement new ideas or processes in a more effective manner)

4.4 Link between emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness in Saudi higher educational institutions

Table 3 and Figure 4 show that emotional intelligence and its relationship to leadership effectiveness in Saudi higher education institutions are evident in the literature. The studies underscore that leaders with heightened emotional intelligence exhibit enhanced leadership effectiveness, particularly in higher education settings. This is attributed to the competencies and skills embedded in emotional intelligence, such as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills. These competencies enable leaders to navigate complex academic and institutional dynamics, engage diverse staff and student bodies, and drive strategic initiatives with a human-centered approach.

Figure 4

Link between emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness in Saudi higher educational institutions



Further, the research emphasizes the pivotal role of emotional intelligence in organizational adaptation and stress management. Given the unique cultural nuances and evolving societal expectations in Saudi Arabia, the ability to understand and manage emotions becomes instrumental in crafting adaptable leadership strategies. Emotionally intelligent leaders understand their own emotional reactions and discern others' emotions, facilitating smoother organizational change and enhancing overall resilience. Additionally, with Saudi Arabia being at the crossroads of tradition and modernization, navigating cultural challenges is a notable concern for leaders. As evidenced by the studies, emotionally intelligent leaders are better equipped to handle such challenges, demonstrating flexibility, cultural sensitivity, and an inclusive mindset.

Emotional intelligence emerges as a cornerstone for leadership effectiveness in Saudi higher educational institutions. The multifaceted competencies within emotional intelligence equip leaders with the tools to lead with empathy, adaptability, and strategic acumen, all essential to the evolving landscape of higher education in Saudi Arabia. As institutions strive for excellence, innovation, and inclusivity, prioritizing the

Link Between Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Effectiveness for Women Leaders in Saudi Higher Education Institutions

Lama Rashed Abdulaziz Al-Ghofaily

development of emotional intelligence in their leadership ranks becomes imperative for future success.

Table 3.

Link between emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness in Saudi higher educational institutions

Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Effectiveness in Saudi Higher Educational Institutions	Studies %ages	Sources
Enhancement of Leadership Effectiveness through Emotional Intelligence	7.1%	Abalkhail, J.M. (2017); Alghofaily, L., (2019); Alotaibi, S.M., Amin, M. & Winterton, J. (2020); Alotaibi, F. T. (2020)
EI's Role in Organizational Adaptation & Stress Management	4.8%	Alshammari, F., Pasay-An, E., Gonzales, F. & Torres, S. (2020); Chen, J. & Guo, W. (2020); Lubbadah, T. (2020); Maxwell, A. & Riley, P. (2017)
EI in Navigating Cultural Challenges in Leadership	2.4%	Elliott, J.D. & DeFrank-Cole, L. (2018); Kattan, M. M., Heredero, C.D.P., Botella, J.L.M., and Margalina, V. M. (2016)
Emotion Regulation & Authentic Leadership	2.4%	Alshammari, F., Pasay-An, E., Gonzales, F. & Torres, S. (2020); Mayer, C.H., Oosthuizen, R.M. & Surtee, S. (2017)
Relationship Between Emotional Intelligence & Leadership Strategies	2.4%	Chen, J. & Guo, W. (2020); Gilar-Corbi, R., Pozo-Rico, T., Sánchez, B. & Castejón, J.L. (2018); Gómez-Leal, R., Holzer, A.A., Bradley, C., Fernández-Berrocal, P. & Patti, J. (2022)
Overall Relevance of EI in Leadership in Higher Education Context	2.4%	Parrish, D.R. (2015)

5. Implications and conclusion

5.1 Policy implications

Due to the strong correlation between emotional intelligence and effective leadership, Saudi educational institutions at the postsecondary level should make EI training an integral part of their leadership development programs. Training like this should not just be a one-time event but an ongoing process that adapts to the shifting dynamics of the education industry. The educational landscape in Saudi Arabia presents a unique set of challenges and demands, and institutions can work with emotional intelligence specialists to develop adapted curricula to meet them.

Assessing candidates' emotional intelligence should be incorporated into the selection process at Saudi Arabia's higher education institutions when seeking personnel for leadership roles. Institutions can ensure they recruit leaders who are not only academically competent but also emotionally equipped to handle the complexities of leadership by implementing the steps outlined in this section. This can be accomplished by utilizing emotional intelligence assessment tools, situational judgment tests designed to evaluate emotional responses, and structured interviews that emphasize emotional competencies.

Link Between Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Effectiveness for Women Leaders in Saudi Higher Education Institutions

Lama Rashed Abdulaziz Al-Ghofaily

Training in emotional intelligence should be sensitive to Saudi Arabia's cultural context, given its rich history and traditions. Institutions should strive for a balance between universally accepted emotional intelligence principles and those that resonate with the cultural nuances of the area in which they are located. This ensures that leaders are effective in their roles and culturally adept, which is essential for navigating the changing cultural dynamics and expectations in Saudi Arabia. Institutions should establish ongoing evaluation and feedback mechanisms centered on emotional intelligence to ensure that leaders remain effective in the roles to which they have been assigned. Institutions can identify areas for improvement and provide the necessary support by conducting regular assessments of their leaders' emotional competencies and reporting the results. This will not only improve leadership effectiveness but also foster a culture within the organization that values emotional well-being and human-centric leadership.

5.2 Managerial implications

The Saudi higher HEIs' emphasis on emotional intelligence suggests a shift away from a leadership model based solely on skills toward an EI-centric model for managers and decision-makers in these institutions. It is important to note that recognizing emotions in leadership does not lessen the significance of skills and expertise; rather, it supplements them. When it comes to their leadership approach, managers should prioritize open communication, empathy, and interpersonal relationships. Because of this, they can cultivate trust, improve team cohesion, and foster a positive working environment, all of which lead to increased job satisfaction, reduced employee turnover, and improved institutional performance.

Managers at Saudi higher education institutions should consider allocating resources to regular emotional intelligence training and workshops. Given the significant impact emotional intelligence has on leadership effectiveness, organizations need to equip their staff, particularly those in leadership roles, with the tools and techniques to harness their emotional competencies. This is especially important given the significant impact emotional intelligence has on leadership effectiveness. Managers should not view these training sessions as mere formalities; instead, they should be regarded as strategic investments with the potential to significantly improve the institution's overall performance and reputation.

The findings highlight the vital role of emotional well-being in effective leadership. Because of this, managers in Saudi higher education institutions should actively work to create an institutional culture that prioritizes the health and happiness of their staff. This includes providing resources for mental and emotional health and cultivating an environment in which emotions are acknowledged and emotional challenges are addressed constructively. Providing resources for mental and emotional health is just one component of this. Managers should lead by example, demonstrating emotional awareness and responsiveness, and ensuring that emotional intelligence becomes integral to the institution's ethos and day-to-day operations.

5.3 Limitations and future directions

The analysis primarily relied on studies focused on Saudi HEIs, which may only capture part of the spectrum of experiences and insights related to emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness within the broader Saudi academic context.

Link Between Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Effectiveness for Women Leaders in Saudi Higher Education Institutions

Lama Rashed Abdulaziz Al-Ghofaily

Additionally, cultural nuances, evolving socio-political dynamics, and unique institutional characteristics may influence the role of emotional intelligence in leadership, a topic that warrants deeper exploration in this review. Future research could benefit from comparative studies involving other Middle Eastern countries or a longitudinal approach to discern shifts over time. Delving into more granular data, such as specific emotional competencies or varying leadership roles, could offer a richer understanding and more actionable insights for Saudi HEIs.

5.4 Conclusion

The nexus between emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness in HEIs has emerged as a pivotal focus in academic research. From the literature analyzed, it is evident that emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in shaping leadership effectiveness, emphasizing its significance in managing teams, making strategic decisions, and navigating the nuanced challenges of the academic environment. Several key factors, including self-awareness, empathy, interpersonal relationships, and adaptability, underpin this relationship and act as catalysts that amplify leadership capabilities within HEIs.

Saudi HEIs, given their unique socio-cultural context, have their challenges and opportunities. The pivotal role of emotional intelligence in leadership indicates that institutions that prioritize cultivating emotional intelligence competencies at all levels, especially in leadership roles, stand to benefit in terms of organizational outcomes, staff morale, and overall institutional success. As the educational landscape in Saudi Arabia continues to evolve, with greater emphasis on inclusivity, innovation, and international collaboration, the importance of emotionally intelligent leaders cannot be overstated.

Finally, this study underscores the profound impact of emotional intelligence on leadership effectiveness within Saudi HEIs. As leadership in the academic world grows increasingly complex, navigating varied challenges from institutional dynamics to global pressures, emotional intelligence emerges as a vital tool for leaders. For the Saudi Arabian higher education sector, investing in the development of emotional intelligence could be a strategic move to ensure robust, resilient, and effective leadership in the future.

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**Link Between Emotional Intelligence and Leadership Effectiveness for Women Leaders in
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Lama Rashed Abdulaziz Al-Ghofaily

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Lama Rashed Abdulaziz Al-Ghofaily

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Lama Rashed Abdulaziz Al-Ghofaily

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