

**WOMEN LEADERSHIP AT HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDONESIA AND
MALAYSIA; A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON MUSLIM SOCIETY**

A Thesis

**Submitted to the Master's Study Program of Islamic Studies Faculty of
Islamic Studies in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of**

Master of Arts (M.A.)



by:

Alifia Zahratul Adha

01212210016

UNIVERSITAS ISLAM INTERNASIONAL INDONESIA

DEPOK

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ABSTRACT

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This study explores the leadership experiences of women in Indonesia and Malaysia at universities. As is currently being discussed, women's leadership is still below 30%, both in the government and education sectors, even though there are many governments and non-government programs that emphasize the importance of women's leadership and also about the rights of women who should also be able to lead, such as SDGS number 5 which socializes the importance of gender equality in various sectors. This phenomenon persists despite significant progress made in increasing women's participation in higher education. Here researchers explore the history, reasons and solutions for the lag behind women in leadership at universities in Muslim-majority countries, namely Indonesia and Malaysia. Using qualitative methods, researchers conducted literature studies and also interviewed several faculty deans from both Indonesia and Malaysia. And the glass ceiling theory explains that there are obstacles for women to advance to higher levels of office, so that it is difficult for women to become leaders. And in this research, researchers found that several factors with the most influential values, such as religious interpretation and patriarchy, are no longer strong barriers. The results of this research in interviews show that women in Indonesia and Malaysia do not have a mature readiness to lead and prioritize family in comparison. leadership itself. This is certainly caused by various factors such as the lack of leadership training for women. By acknowledging and addressing the cultural, religious, and institutional barriers that hinder women's leadership, this study proposes strategies for bridging the gender gap in senior academic leadership and promoting gender justice and equality in these contexts. Finally, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex factors that shape women's leadership in higher education and suggest practices that can help to break the glass ceiling and promote women's empowerment in these two countries.

Keywords: women leadership, Islamic higher education.

القيادة النسائية في التعليم العالي في إندونيسيا وماليزيا دراسة مقارنة في المجتمع الإسلامي

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ماجستير في دراسات الإسلامية

ملخص البحث

تتمثل فادها في هيلع صوصنم وه امك نيسنجا نيبه اواسملا قيقحتي ملعلما مازتلا لا نم مغرلا لعل يف تيميداكالا تيدايقلا بصانملا يف صفان لكشب تالشم ءاسنلا لزت ال ،(SDG 5) ءءحتملا مملال ءمادتمسلا زرحا يذلا رييكا مدقتلا مغر قر هاظلا اذهر متسيه ايزيلامو ايسينودنلا يف اميسلا ، ءملمسلا تيبلاغلا تاذ نادلبلا ريغ زجاوحن هجاوي ءاسنلا نأ لعل يف جاجزلا فقسلما تيرظن ريشة . لعلما مبلعلنا يف ءاسنلا ءكراشم ءدايز يف تيفاقنلا لماوعلا فاشكتسا لعل ءساردلا هذه فدهتو ، ايلعلا تيدايقلا بصانملا لعل مدقتلا نم نهعنمت ءيئرم ايزيلامو ايسينودنلا يف لعلما مبلعلنا قايس يف قر هاظلا هذه يف مهاست ي تلا ءينيدلاو

تادئاق تسد عم ءقمعلملا تلاباقملاو يبتكملا ثحبلما نيبه معجب ، يف عوذج هذى لعل ءنراقملا ءساردلا هذه دمتعت ليلقت يف امدقت ازرحا دقن يذلبلا لاكل نأ نيد يف هئنا ءساردلا فشكت . نيدلبلا لاكل يف لعلما مبلعلنا تاسسوم يف تابقن لاكلشي ي تاذلا كشلاو لخدلا يوبلا ماظنلا لازي لا ، تيدايقلا بصانملا يف ءاسنلاب ءطبترملا ءمصولا ءاسنلا ءدايقه ماما قرييكا

ملاسلا نأ دكوتو ، ءيئاسنلا ءدايقلا ليكشت يف سنجلاو ءفاقنلاو نيدلا نيبه دقعملا لعافنلا اضيا ءساردلا زربنو هيلع تصرف يف تلا ءيوبلا مبلعلناو تيفاقنلا تاريسفتلا لب ، ءاسنلا قوقحن م دحلا لا هسفن

يلعلما مبلعلنا تاسسوم يف ءلادعو ءيلومشر ثكا تيدايق تائيد ق لخل ءمهم تايعدا ءساردلا هذه جنائذن مضنت ءدايقلا لقرعت يف تلا اهتجالعمو ءيسسوملاو ءينيدلاو تيفاقنلا تابقعلاب فارءعلا ل لاخلنم . ايزيلامو ايسينودنلا يف ءلادعلا زيزعتو ايلعلا تيميداكالا ءدايقلا يف نيسنجا نيبه ءوجفلا دسل تايجيتار تسا ءساردلا هذه حرقت ، ءيئاسنلا لكشت يف تلا دقعملا لماوعلا قمعاً مهف يف ءساردلا هذه مهست ، اريخاً . تاقايسلا هذه يف نيسنجا نيبه ءواسملاو نيكمت زيزعتو ي جاجزلا فقسلما رسك يف دعاست نأ نكمي تاسرامم حرقتو ي لعلما مبلعلنا يف ءيئاسنلا ءدايقلا نيدلبلا نيه يف ءاسنلا

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of Study

Worldwide, the issue of women holding leadership roles, particularly at higher education, has attracted significant attention. In Indonesia and Malaysia, the intersection of religion, culture, and gender shapes women's leadership experiences in higher education. Although there has been significant advancement in recent decades, women continue to be inadequately represented in leadership positions across multiple industries. The underrepresentation of women in leadership roles not only perpetuates gender inequity but also deprives organisations of a range of diverse perspectives that can significantly improve decision-making and foster innovation¹. Within the context of higher education, it is of significance to have a significant presence of women in leadership positions in both academic and administrative roles. This is crucial in order to promote an inclusive academic environment that is capable of addressing to the goals of a varied student population².

1.2 Women Leadership in Indonesia and Malaysia

In Indonesia, educational inequality for women has been prevalent since the era of Dutch colonialism. Women were often excluded from attending schools and were expected to stay at home, dedicating their lives to family care. Even when they did attend schools, they still faced various forms of disparity, both in the educational opportunities provided and in extracurricular activities.³ Efforts to achieve gender equity to improve women's quality of life and ensure they have equal rights and opportunities have been undertaken. Although Indonesia has made significant

¹ Melnychenko, O., "GENDER INEQUALITY OF WOMEN IN EDUCATION OR WHY WOMEN ARE UNDERREPRESENTED IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS? | Continuing Professional Education: Theory and Practice," 2024, <http://npo.kubg.edu.ua/article/view/300427>.

² Pauline Mary Ross et al., "Understanding STEM Academics' Responses and Resilience to Educational Reform of Academic Roles in Higher Education," *International Journal of STEM Education* 9, no. 1 (January 28, 2022): 11, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40594-022-00327-1>.

³ Dyah Nawangsari, Aminullah Elhady, and Norodin Salam, "Women's Access to Islamic Higher Education," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 6, no. 2 (December 31, 2020): 193–204, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v6i2.9760>.

efforts to offer abundant possibilities for women to engage in higher education, there is still a prevalent gender imbalance in central positions within higher education institutions (HEIs), with males overwhelmingly occupying these roles.⁴ The disparity in gender representation in education is a longstanding problem. Within the higher education institutions in Indonesia, the leadership plays a crucial role. There are significantly fewer female managers, administrators, and rectors compared to their male counterparts in most universities.⁵

The landscape of women leadership in higher education reflects broader societal norms and religious influences. Historically, Indonesian society has been characterized by patriarchal values, where leadership roles have predominantly been occupied by men⁶. However, recent years have seen a gradual shift. Women are increasingly occupying leadership positions in higher education, driven by both governmental and non-governmental efforts to promote gender equality.⁷ Research conducted by scholar such as Arien emphasises the enduring obstacles that Indonesian women encounter, such as cultural prejudices and restricted opportunities for guidance and professional connections⁸. Throughout these difficulties, there are prominent examples of women in leadership positions who have made substantial contributions to their places and the wider academic community⁹.

⁴ Jullimursyida et al., "Gender Mapping in Higher Education Systems: A Case in Indonesia," *Journal of Business and Management Studies* 5, no. 1 (January 6, 2023): 30–37, <https://doi.org/10.32996/jbms.2023.5.1.4>.

⁵ Ribeh Muhammad, Nurul Fajaria, and Arini Hidayati, "Indication of Gender Parity in the Indonesian Higher Education Institution: A Literature Study," in *Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Language, Literature, Education and Culture, ICOLLEC 2021, 9-10 October 2021, Malang, Indonesia* (Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on Language, Literature, Education and Culture, ICOLLEC 2021, 9-10 October 2021, Malang, Indonesia, Malang, Indonesia: EAI, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.4108/eai.9-10-2021.2319685>.

⁶ Dini Cahyati, "Women's Leadership in Higher Education Barriers and Opportunities in Indonesia," *International Journal of Education* 17, September 24, 2021, 7, <https://doi.org/10.22230/IJEPL.2021V17N9A939>.

⁷ Muhammad Ashraf Fauzi et al., "Women Leadership in Higher Education: Past, Present and Future Trends," *Asian Education and Development Studies* 13, no. 2 (April 25, 2024): 117–33, <https://doi.org/10.1108/AEDS-11-2023-0168>.

⁸ Arien Arianti Gunawan et al., "Institutional Barriers and Facilitators of Sustainability for Indonesian Batik SMEs: A Policy Agenda," *Sustainability* 14, no. 14 (July 18, 2022): 8772, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14148772>.

⁹ Pam Nilan, "The 'Spirit of Education' in Indonesian *Pesantren*," *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 30, no. 2 (March 2009): 219–32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425690802700321>.

Malaysia and Indonesia have similar obstacles when it comes to women's leadership in higher education, which are shaped by cultural and religious conventions. The Malaysian government implemented several initiatives to promote gender equality, including the establishment of the National Advisory Council for Women (NACW) and efforts under the Ministry of Higher Education.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the proportion of women holding high-ranking positions in academia remains relatively small. Othman's research reveals that despite some progress, strong cultural biases and organisational obstacles persist, hindering the growth of women in academic leadership positions.¹¹

Proportion of Female Leadership in Higher Education in Indonesia and Malaysia

Despite extensive worldwide and local endeavours to achieve gender equality and promote women's participation in decision-making, there is a pressing need for greater female involvement in decision-making processes. The representation of women in leadership roles within higher education institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia is significantly inadequate. In 2022, the representation of women in the position of rector was just 10% in public universities and 15% in private universities in Indonesia¹². In Malaysia, the proportion of female vice-chancellors is under 10%¹³. These statistics highlight the substantial gender inequality in academic leadership in both countries. The lack of proportional representation of women in these positions emphasises the necessity for more efficient policies and activities that support and improve women's leadership in higher education.

The case for women in positions of leadership, specifically in the realm of higher education, is complex and has multiple aspects. Leadership teams that are diverse have been found to promote creative decision-making and improve the

¹⁰ Salmiwati Othman and Aida Hanim A. Hamid, "Exploring Women's Transformational Leadership Style And Competency: A Higher Education Malaysia Perspective," *Asian Journal of University Education* 19, no. 2 (April 30, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.24191/ajue.v19i2.22237>.

¹¹ Othman and A. Hamid.

¹² Makna Ani Marlia, "Rektor Perguruan Tinggi Negeri Di Indonesia Pada Tahun 2020" (Zenodo, July 22, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.5281/ZENODO.3955643>.

¹³ Sharifah Shahirah Syed Sheikh, "Women and Leadership in Malaysian Higher Education": Wacana Akademi Profesor," 2023.

overall effectiveness of an organisation¹⁴. Female leaders possess distinct viewpoints that can effectively adapt to the requirements of a varied student body and create a more comprehensive educational atmosphere¹⁵. Moreover, having women in leadership roles serves as a powerful example for young women aspiring to such positions, contributing to a culture that values and supports gender equality.¹⁶ Studies by Catalyst and McKinsey & Company have demonstrated that organizations with higher gender diversity in leadership roles tend to perform better financially and operationally.¹⁷

1.3 Influence of Islamic Texts, Social, and Cultural Factors

The influence of Islamic literature, as well as social and cultural influences, in developing the context of women's leadership in Indonesia and Malaysia is significant and cannot be ignored. Islamic teachings, when read in a progressive manner, endorse gender equality and the empowerment of women in leadership roles¹⁸. However, traditional interpretations have often reinforced patriarchal norms, limiting women's roles to subordinate positions.¹⁹ Cultural and social factors further compound these challenges, as deeply rooted gender stereotypes and biases continue to influence perceptions of women's capabilities as leaders.²⁰ Scholars like Nina Nurmila and Zainah Anwar²¹ argued for a re-interpretation of Islamic texts to align with contemporary understandings of gender equality, emphasizing that the

¹⁴ Nokwanda Jali, Sachin Suknunan, and Anrusha Bhana, "Challenges Impeding Women into Leadership Roles in a Student-Led Organization at a South African Higher Education Institution," *Problems and Perspectives in Management* 19, no. 4 (December 29, 2021): 508–18, [https://doi.org/10.21511/ppm.19\(4\).2021.41](https://doi.org/10.21511/ppm.19(4).2021.41).

¹⁵ Greeni Maheshwari, "A Review of Literature on Women's Leadership in Higher Education in Developed Countries and in Vietnam: Barriers and Enablers," *Educational Management Administration & Leadership* 51, no. 5 (September 2023): 1067–86, <https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432211021418>.

¹⁶ Maheshwari.

¹⁷ Joanna Barsh and Lareina Yee, "Unlocking the Full Potential of Women at Work," 2020, 8–9.

¹⁸ Sheila Jeffreys, *Man's Dominion*, 0 ed. (Routledge, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203802397>.

¹⁹ Amina Wadud, *Uniwersytet Adama Mickiewicza*, no. 08 (2013): 10.

²⁰ Jeffreys, *Man's Dominion*.

²¹ Abdussalam Muhammad Shukri and Musa Yusuf Owoyemi, "WOMEN AND THE FREEDOM OF REINTERPRETING THE HOLY TEXT: A STUDY OF SISTERS IN ISLAM AND THEIR REINTERPRETATION OF QUR'ANIC VERSES AND HADITH ON MARITAL ISSUES" 04, no. 02 (2015).

principles of justice and equity in Islam support the inclusion of women in all spheres of leadership.²²

The objective of this study is to analyse and reveal how complex of women's leadership in higher education in Indonesia and Malaysia using a comparative approach. This research aims to understand the different problems and opportunities faced by women in leadership positions within Muslim countries by analysing the interaction between religious and cultural factors. The results suggest that, despite progress on a global scale, women in these nations still encounter substantial obstacles that are deeply established in traditional customs and interpretations of Islamic texts. These interpretations frequently uphold patriarchal systems.

The lack of female representation in leadership roles within the higher education sector in Indonesia and Malaysia highlights the pressing necessity for more efficient policies and efforts. These figures show larger social problems and also emphasize certain areas. If the problem continues to be allowed to grow, but with efforts or programs to promote gender equality, there will be a way out. Having women in leadership positions is not only a matter of fairness, but also increases the effectiveness of institutions more broadly and provides a good example for future generations of female leaders. This study seeks to provide significant insights to the continuing discussion on gender equality by addressing the following research issues.

1.4 Research Questions

1. In what ways do women leaders in these two countries narrate their leadership journeys?
2. What are the key barriers that women leaders face in reaching top leadership positions in higher education institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia?
3. How do religious interpretation, cultural norms, and societal attitudes in Muslim Societies in Indonesia and Malaysia influence the experiences of women in

²² Nina Nurmila, "Proposing Feminist Intepretation of The Qur'an and Affirmative Policy to Suport Women Leadership In Indonesian State Islamic Higher Education," *Musāwa Jurnal Studi Gender Dan Islam* 19, no. 2 (March 10, 2021): 125–40, <https://doi.org/10.14421/musawa.2020.192.125-140>.

leadership positions in higher education institutions?

1.5 Research Objective

The main aim of this research is to achieve several important objectives. The main objective is to investigate and evaluate the impact of religious beliefs, cultural norms, and societal attitudes on women in leadership positions in higher education institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia. Gaining insight into how these elements influence the experiences of women leaders is critical to formulating successful approaches to advancing gender equality. This study aims to gain complete knowledge about the leadership paths of women leaders in both countries by examining their stories and the different challenges they face.

This research aims to identify and analyse the main barriers that prevent women from achieving senior leadership roles in higher education institutions. This study seeks to reveal the disparities and similarities in the difficulties experienced by women leaders in Indonesia and Malaysia by examining these obstacles. This comparative analysis will provide useful insights into specific cultural, theological, and institutional barriers that must be overcome to build more inclusive leadership environments in higher education. The aim of this research is to find specific strategies that support and encourage the development of women in leadership positions in the field of higher education. This research aims to contribute to the broader goal of realizing gender equality in academic leadership in Indonesia and Malaysia by answering predetermined research questions and objectives. The main goal is to improve the quality and effectiveness of educational institutions in these countries.

1.6 Literature Review

The idea of writing a study and connecting it to existing knowledge forms the fundamental basis of all academic research, irrespective of the field of study. Hence, it is imperative for all scholars to ensure meticulousness in prioritising this matter. That is why the literature review, as a research procedure, is more crucial than ever

before. A literature review is a comprehensive and methodical process of collecting and integrating previous research.²³

Florence L. Denmark's paper, "Women, Leadership, and Empowerment," offers a thorough examination of leadership research, specifically highlighting women's role. The article traces the development of leadership theories, starting from the traditional "Great Man" idea and progressing to contemporary contingency theories. Denmark emphasises the belated incorporation of gender as a factor in leadership studies and underscores that prior study has primarily concentrated on men²⁴.

Although the article refers to meta-analyses showing that women tend to be more democratic and participative, critiques of the article include its limited scope to the American context, reliance on secondary sources, and lack of in-depth discussion on practical strategies for empowering subordinates. Additionally, the article does not adequately address the underlying causes of stereotypes held by women against female leaders and fails to clarify the metrics for evaluating leadership effectiveness. By expanding the geographical scope, incorporating primary research, and exploring practical empowerment strategies, this article would provide a more comprehensive understanding of leadership dynamics and gender²⁵.

The article "Normative Islam, Prejudice, and Women Leaders: Why Do Arab Women Leaders Suffer?" by Tamer Koburtay and Tala Abuhussein delves into the difficulties encountered by female leaders in Arab nations, with a specific focus on Jordan. It sheds light on the clash between discriminatory customs towards women and the egalitarian principles of Islam. The study asserts that the Quran promotes gender equality, yet many prejudices against women stem from cultural and tribal practices, not Islamic teachings.²⁶

²³ Roy F. Baumeister and Mark R. Leary, "Writing Narrative Literature Reviews," *Review of General Psychology* 1, no. 3 (September 1997): 311–20, <https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.1.3.311>.

²⁴ Florence L. Denmark, "Women, Leadership, and Empowerment," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 17, no. 3 (September 1993): 343–56, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1993.tb00491.x>.

²⁵ Denmark.

²⁶ Tamer Koburtay and Tala Abuhussein, "Normative Islam, Prejudice and Women Leaders: Why Do Arab Women Leaders Suffer?," *Journal of Gender Studies* 30, no. 2 (February 17, 2021): 177–89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2020.1863195>.

The study employed a qualitative approach, including in-depth interviews with a sample of 14 female leaders. This strategy yielded a wealth of data regarding their individual experiences. The findings indicate that women in positions of leadership encounter substantial discrimination that is well ingrained in societal norms and stereotypes. However, this study is limited by its small sample size and the absence of involvement with Islamic experts. In addition, the paper fails to provide specific and practical suggestions on how the revised interpretations of the Quran can be put into practice within organisational and societal settings. To enhance the study's impact on the comprehension and advancement of gender equality in leadership within Arab countries, it would be beneficial to broaden the research's focus and incorporate practical solutions for reform²⁷.

In line with the discussion on women in the Islamic world, the article "Women's Education in the Muslim World" by David McClendon et al. provides a comprehensive analysis of educational attainment among women in Muslim-majority countries, using data from 151 countries. The study shows that economic and structural factors play a significant role in shaping educational outcomes, not just religion alone. The article also highlights significant variations between countries and notes substantial progress made by Muslim women, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa.²⁸

The article "Women in Leadership and the Bewildering Glass Ceiling" by Marie A. Chisholm-Burns et al. explores the persistent barriers women face in achieving leadership positions, particularly in the fields of pharmacy, healthcare, and academia. This article provides a comprehensive analysis of gender leadership gaps, identifying key barriers such as conscious and unconscious biases, lack of mentors, work-life balance challenges, and the "lean-out" phenomenon. It also highlights the significant benefits of female leadership, including improved organizational performance and financial outcomes, and offers practical strategic recommendations to address these barriers.²⁹ However, the article could be

²⁷ Koburtay and Abuhussein.

²⁸ Jali, Suknunan, and Bhana, "Challenges Impeding Women into Leadership Roles in a Student-Led Organization at a South African Higher Education Institution."

²⁹ Marie A. Chisholm-Burns et al., "Women in Leadership and the Bewildering Glass Ceiling," *American Journal of Health-System Pharmacy* 74, no. 5 (March 1, 2017): 312–24, <https://doi.org/10.2146/ajhp160930>.

enhanced by expanding its scope to other sectors, discussing intersectionality, incorporating qualitative insights from female leaders, considering the global context, and exploring the impact of organizational culture. In this way, the article would provide a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of women's leadership across various fields.

The article "Women's Leadership in Higher Education: Barriers and Opportunities in Indonesia" by Dini Cahyati and others explores how cultural beliefs and social expectations shape women's opportunities to become leaders in Indonesian universities. The article points out that the traditional view that men are better leaders poses a significant barrier for women, alongside family responsibilities and a lack of support from society. Although the article suggests that universities themselves do not directly prevent women from achieving leadership roles, the author believes that these institutions still play a part in maintaining these challenges because their policies and culture often reflect societal norms. This study serves as a good starting point for understanding these issues but could deepen the analysis on how universities can help break these patterns by actively promoting gender equality through specific programs and policies.³⁰ Overall, the article highlights the significant changes needed in societal attitudes and institutional practices to truly support women in leadership within higher education in Indonesia.

Next, in her article "Breaking Patriarchal Gender Stereotype," Nina Nurmila discusses the experience of a female rector at the Indonesian Institute of the Arts and Culture in Bandung, highlighting how she overcomes traditional gender roles that typically hinder women from holding leadership positions in Indonesia. Nurmila agrees that education and family support, such as the support the rector receives from her husband, can help break these stereotypes. However, the article could go deeper by discussing the broader changes needed beyond individual efforts and family support. This story shows that while personal success is inspiring, broader institutional and social changes are essential to enable more women to take

³⁰ Dini Cahyati, "Women's Leadership in Higher Education Barriers and Opportunities in Indonesia."

on leadership roles, not just in education but across all sectors in Indonesia.³¹ This approach would provide a more comprehensive picture of what is needed to challenge and change the deep-rooted patriarchal norms in Indonesian societies

In her article "Proposing Feminist Interpretation of The Qur'an and Affirmative Policy to Support Women Leadership in Indonesian State Islamic Higher Education," Nina Nurmila discusses how traditional interpretations of Islam in Indonesia often restrict women's roles, especially in leadership positions in education. Nurmila suggests that interpreting Islamic teachings from a feminist perspective can help enhance leadership opportunities for women in universities. The author agrees that reinterpreting religious texts can be a powerful step towards promoting gender equality. However, while Nurmila emphasizes the need for new policies to support women, more focus could be given to how these policies are practically implemented in universities to truly support female leaders.³² This approach would ensure that changes in interpretation also lead to real improvements in the opportunities available to women.

The article "Gender and Leadership in Public Higher Education in South Asia" by Md Asadul Islam, Dieu Hack-Polay, Mahfuzur Rahman, Amer Hamzah Jantan, Francesca Dal Mas, and Maria Kordowicz (2023) explores the barriers women face in achieving leadership roles in universities, focusing on Malaysia and Bangladesh. The study shows that cultural norms and social expectations significantly hinder women's leadership opportunities, especially in Bangladesh, where traditional views on gender roles are more pronounced. Although the study suggests that these cultural barriers are less severe in Malaysia, the authors believe that subtle cultural biases and institutional practices still limit women's leadership opportunities there.³³ This analysis emphasizes the need for policies that address

³¹ Nina Nurmila, "Breaking Patriarchal Gender Stereotype. Being A Female Rector of the Institut Seni Budaya Indonesia/ISBI Bandung, West Java, Indonesia," *Kawalu: Journal of Local Culture* 5, no. 2 (December 24, 2018): 23, <https://doi.org/10.32678/kawalu.v5i2.1885>.

³² Nurmila, "Proposing Feminist Interpretation of The Qur'an and Affirmative Policy to Support Women Leadership In Indonesian State Islamic Higher Education."

³³ Md Asadul Islam et al., "Gender and Leadership in Public Higher Education in South Asia: Examining the Individual, Socio-Cultural and Organizational Barriers to Female Inclusion," *Studies in Higher Education* 48, no. 8 (August 3, 2023): 1197–1215, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2023.2187771>.

both overt and subtle forms of discrimination, with changes necessary in both countries to truly open up leadership roles to women.

Next, the article "Women Leadership in Higher Learning Institutions: Malaysia's Challenging Path to SDG 5" by Rafidah Abd Karim and Ramlee Mustapha highlights how traditional cultural norms and religious beliefs in Malaysia create barriers for women in leadership roles within higher education. These norms often view men as natural leaders, making it harder for women to advance. Additionally, the challenge of balancing family responsibilities with career demands is a significant obstacle. While the authors agree that these issues are prevalent, they disagree with the perception that stereotypes about women's emotional and stress management remain significant barriers, as these perceptions are gradually changing.

The article "Career Mobility of High-Flying Women Academics: A Study at Selected Universities in Malaysia" by Maimunah Ismail and Roziah Mohd Rasdi also examines how cultural and religious beliefs in Malaysia affect women in higher education leadership. The authors state that traditional views see men as natural leaders, making it difficult for women to advance. They also note that family support is very important, with a supportive spouse and extended family helping women succeed. The authors agree that family support is key, but they believe that the article's authors overlook the fact that views on women's leadership are changing. People are starting to value women's collaborative and empathetic leadership styles more. The authors believe that this change is important and should be recognized. The article shows that with more leadership training and supportive policies, women can succeed in academic leadership roles, helping achieve gender equality as outlined in SDG 5.³⁴

The article "Women's Leadership in Higher Education: Status, Barriers, and Motivators" by Susan R. Madsen and Karen A. Longman provides an in-depth analysis of the status of women's leadership in higher education, the barriers they face, and the motivators that drive them. The article highlights that although women

³⁴ Maimunah Ismail and Roziah Mohd Rasdi, "Career Mobility of High-Flying Women Academics: A Study at Selected Universities in Malaysia," *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 26, no. 2 (November 2006): 155–71, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02188790600932111>.

have earned the majority of academic degrees since 2006, their representation in senior leadership roles remains low. Barriers such as structural biases, lack of mentors, and the "leaky pipeline" phenomenon are clearly identified, while the benefits of female leadership, such as improved organizational performance and innovation, are also highlighted. Practical strategic recommendations, such as mentorship programs and institutional policies to promote gender equality, are proposed to overcome these barriers.³⁵

In her article titled "Women and Leadership in Higher Education: Current Realities, Challenges, and Future Directions," Susan R. Madsen presents a thorough analysis of the current state of women's leadership in higher education. The article not only acknowledges the advancements that have been achieved, but also emphasises the obstacles that still need to be overcome. Madsen highlights several obstacles, including gender bias, challenges with work-life balance, and the "glass ceiling," which impede women's progress. Madsen underscores the significance of leadership development programmes in equipping women for leadership positions.³⁶ However, this article can be subject to criticism due to its inability to take a global perspective, insufficient investigation of intersectionality, excessive reliance on quantitative data without incorporating qualitative narratives, and absence of practical techniques for implementing leadership development programmes. This essay aims to enhance the understanding of women's leadership in higher education by broadening its global view, including qualitative insights, and offering more explicit practical advice.

1.6.1 Conclusion of the Literature Review

The scholarly literature on women's leadership in higher education emphasises the notable obstacles and difficulties that women encounter on a global scale, with distinct variations in the circumstances of Indonesia and Malaysia. Research consistently demonstrates a lack of proportional representation of women in top-level leadership roles within higher education organisations. The lack of

³⁵ Susan R. Madsen and Karen A. Longman, "Women's Leadership in Higher Education: Status, Barriers, and Motivators," *Journal of Higher Education Management* 35 (2020): 16–20.

³⁶ Susan R. Madsen, "Women and Leadership in Higher Education: Current Realities, Challenges, and Future Directions," *Advances in Developing Human Resources* 14, no. 2 (May 2012): 131–39, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422311436299>.

representation can be mostly attributed to systemic gender biases, cultural norms, and institutional practices that give preference to male leadership. The Glass Ceiling Theory is often cited to explain the intangible obstacles that hinder women from advancing into high-level leadership positions, even when they possess the necessary qualifications and experience.

Cultural norms and religious interpretations have a significant impact on the leadership landscape in Indonesia and Malaysia. Conventional understandings of Islamic scriptures and male-dominated cultural traditions frequently confine women to inferior positions, hence increasing barriers to their advancement. Studies suggest that women in these countries encounter supplementary obstacles, such as managing career obligations while meeting societal demands for family and caregiving responsibilities.

These difficulties are worsened by a scarcity of opportunities for leadership development, guidance from mentors, and professional connections. Prior research on women's leadership in Muslim-majority societies frequently highlights the necessity of employing a comprehensive strategy to tackle both structural and cultural obstacles. Nevertheless, there is a significant deficiency in the existing body of literature regarding comparative research that especially concentrates on Indonesia and Malaysia. These countries, although they have similar cultural and religious backgrounds, have unique historical, political, and social circumstances that impact women's leadership experiences in varying ways.

This research addresses the significant void in knowledge by conducting a comparative examination of women's leadership in higher education in Indonesia and Malaysia. By adopting a comparative approach, one can gain a more profound understanding of the parallels and disparities in the obstacles encountered by female leaders in these two contexts.

1.7 Conceptual Framework

1.7.1 Glass Ceiling

Glass Ceiling Theory is an important conceptual framework for understanding the barriers that hinder women's progress in achieving leadership positions, particularly in higher education institutions. To understand the concept of overcoming the glass

ceiling, it is necessary to understand the meaning of the term "glass ceiling". The term "glass ceiling" was coined by Marilyn Loden, a management consultant, in 1978. Glass ceiling refers to intangible barriers in companies and other organizations that make it difficult or even impossible for women to rise to higher positions³⁷. This theory refers to the invisible but enormous barriers that prevent women from reaching the highest levels of leadership, even though they have the necessary qualifications and experience. The glass ceiling metaphor highlights the often unnoticed barriers that impede women's progress in their professional careers.

The relevance of the Glass Ceiling Theory to this study is profound. In both Indonesia and Malaysia, cultural norms and traditional interpretations of religious texts have historically relegated women to subordinate roles. These societal attitudes significantly contribute to the creation and maintenance of the glass ceiling in higher education. According to Eagly and Carli (2007), the glass ceiling is perpetuated by systemic gender biases, discriminatory practices, and deeply ingrained cultural stereotypes that favor male leadership over female leadership.³⁸ In the context of higher education, the glass ceiling manifests in various forms, such as limited access to leadership development opportunities, mentorship, and professional networks for women. Research indicates that women in academia often face additional challenges, such as balancing professional responsibilities with societal expectations of family and caregiving roles (Acker, 2012).³⁹ These challenges are particularly pronounced in Muslim-majority societies, where cultural and religious norms can further constrain women's participation in leadership roles.⁴⁰

In Indonesia, the glass ceiling is seen in the insufficient representation of women in high-level academic and administrative roles. Notwithstanding official

³⁷ D. A. Cotter et al., "The Glass Ceiling Effect," *Social Forces* 80, no. 2 (December 1, 2001): 655–81, <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2001.0091>.

³⁸ "Through the Labyrinth: The Truth About How Women Become Leaders," *Gender in Management: An International Journal* 24, no. 1 (February 13, 2009): gm.2009.05324aae.001, <https://doi.org/10.1108/gm.2009.05324aae.001>.

³⁹ Joan Acker, "Gendered Organizations and Intersectionality: Problems and Possibilities," ed. Susan Sayce, *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal* 31, no. 3 (March 23, 2012): 214–24, <https://doi.org/10.1108/02610151211209072>.

⁴⁰ Tamer Koburtay, Tala Abuhusseini, and Yusuf M. Sidani, "Women Leadership, Culture, and Islam: Female Voices from Jordan," *Journal of Business Ethics* 183, no. 2 (March 2023): 347–63, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-022-05041-0>.

endeavours to advance gender equality, entrenched gender norms and societal expectations persistently impede women's advancement in their careers⁴¹. In Malaysia, despite notable progress in women's educational achievements, the representation of women in high-ranking leadership roles at universities remains disproportionately low⁴². The existence of these ongoing differences highlights the necessity to carefully investigate the glass ceiling phenomena in the context of higher education in these nations.

The Glass Ceiling Theory emphasizes the significance of tackling both structural and cultural obstacles to the progress of women. Structural barriers include organizational policies and practices that unintentionally disadvantage women, such as a lack of flexible work options or prejudiced recruitment and promotion procedures. However, cultural barriers include cultural attitudes and customs that perpetuate gender stereotypes and limit women's opportunities to take on leadership roles⁴³. To overcome these obstacles, a comprehensive strategy is needed, which includes implementing legislative reform, making organizational adjustments, and encouraging cultural transformation that promotes gender equality. Furthermore, the Glass Ceiling Theory offers a valuable perspective for examining the stories of women leaders in Indonesia and Malaysia. This study seeks to uncover the precise mechanisms of how the glass ceiling operates in higher education by analysing the experiences of individuals and the challenges they face. Gaining insight into these processes is critical to formulating successful approaches to removing barriers that prevent women from reaching top leadership positions.

Glass Ceiling Theory is relevant to this research because it provides an overarching framework for examining the barriers that impede women's advancement in leadership positions in higher education. This study aims to add to the ongoing discussion regarding gender equality and provide practical insights to encourage more inclusive and equitable environmental leadership in institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia.

⁴¹ Gunawan et al., "Institutional Barriers and Facilitators of Sustainability for Indonesian Batik SMEs."

⁴² Sharifah Shahirah Syed Sheikh, "Women and Leadership in Malaysian Higher Education": Wacana Akademi Profesor."

⁴³ Chisholm-Burns et al., "Women in Leadership and the Bewildering Glass Ceiling."

1.7.2 Islamic Perspective of Leadership

Leadership in the Islamic context can be characterized as the capacity to effectively advise and inspire others, based on the values and principles outlined in the Al-Quran and Al-Hadith, in order to accomplish shared objectives. This concept emphasizes the significance of cooperation and common principles in successful leadership. Amina (1999) argues that pre-modern and modern discourses, which presuppose the male as the normative human being, have historically restricted women from full participation in ethical, spiritual, social, and political constructs within Islamic thought. This has effectively reduced women from full humanity and moral agency (khalifah) to mere subjects. Khalifah, or Vicegerent of Allah on earth, as mentioned in the Quran (2:30), has traditionally been associated with Adam and, by extension, men, thus marginalizing women from leadership roles⁴⁴.

Wadud critiques these androcentric interpretations, asserting that narrowly applying Qur'anic guidelines to mirror the original community's literal practices does a disservice to the text. A distinct feature of leadership in Islam is its conceptualization as vicegerency, adding a religious dimension to leadership that is absent in secular theories.⁴⁵ This dimension emphasizes that leadership must be rooted in the teachings of the Qur'an and Hadith. As stated in the Qur'an, Al-Baqarah: 30, "And when your Lord said to the angels: 'Indeed, I will make upon the earth a successive authority.'" Furthermore, the Quran and the Sunnah do not explicitly prohibit women from holding leadership positions. Historical examples include Nusaybah bint Ka'ab, who fought alongside the Prophet Muhammad, and Aisha, his wife, who was a prominent leader and scholar. The restriction of women's leadership in certain contexts is more attributable to cultural and historical influences than to Islamic teachings themselves.⁴⁶

However, the Qur'an and Hadith provide a theological foundation for gender equality in leadership, explicitly supporting the pursuit of knowledge without gender discrimination and emphasizing the importance of learning for all Muslims,

⁴⁴ Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, [2nd ed.] (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁴⁵ Wadud.

⁴⁶ Rafia Zakaria, "Women and Islamic Militancy," *Dissent* 62, no. 1 (December 2015): 118–25, <https://doi.org/10.1353/dss.2015.0011>.

regardless of gender.⁴⁷ Exceptional female leaders in education, like Fatimah al-Fihri as the founder of Islamic university and Rahmah El Yunusiyah as the first founder of female madrasah in Indonesia, demonstrate the potential success of women in this field, standing as evidence of women's recognized roles as leaders and scholars in Islamic tradition.⁴⁸

1.8 Research Significance

The significance of this research lies in its potential to address the persistent issue of gender inequality in higher education leadership within the specific cultural and religious contexts of Indonesia and Malaysia. By focusing on these two countries, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how cultural norms, religious beliefs, and societal attitudes shape the experiences and opportunities for women leaders in higher education institutions. This research is appropriate and relevant, considering global efforts to increase gender equality and the increasing interest in the study of gender equality.

First, this research will provide current knowledge by providing an analysis of the challenges women face in achieving high-level leadership roles in higher education. This research will utilize the glass ceiling theory to identify and analyze structural and cultural barriers that hinder women's progress. Research into these barriers is critical in devising efficient methods and policies to advance gender equality in the leadership academy in the future. The findings obtained from this research will be of great benefit to legislators, educational administrators, and gender equality activists who seek to create a more comprehensive and encouraging environment for women in higher education.

Furthermore, this research will emphasize the various challenges and prospects faced by female leaders in cultures where the majority of the population is Muslim. Indonesia and Malaysia offer valuable environments for studying the

⁴⁷ Asma Barlas, *“Believing Women” in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur’ān*, 1st ed (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002).

⁴⁸ Fahira Fejzić-Čengić, “Fatima Al-Fihri Founder of the First World University,” *Studies in Media and Communication* 8, no. 2 (June 19, 2020): 14, <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v8i2.4903>.

impact of religious interpretations and cultural norms on women's leadership experiences. This study aims to explain the various manifestations and mechanisms of the glass ceiling in higher education environments by examining the narratives of women leaders in these countries. By centering on the actual experiences of women leaders, this research aims to increase our understanding of the interconnected elements that contribute to gender disparities. Therefore, it will contribute to a more comprehensive discussion regarding women's leadership in various cultural settings. In addition, I will try to highlight the various challenges and opportunities faced by women leaders in societies where the majority of the population is Muslim. Malaysia and Indonesia provide useful contexts for examining how cultural norms and religious interpretations influence women's experiences in leadership roles. Through analysis of the experiences of women leaders in various countries, this research seeks to provide an explanation of the various ways the glass ceiling is implemented in higher education environments. By focusing on the real-life experiences of women leaders, this research seeks to increase our understanding of the interrelated factors that lead to gender inequality. As a result, this discussion will encourage a more thorough discussion of women in leadership roles at universities. This research also aims to provide practical recommendations for encouraging a gender inclusive leadership culture in accordance with SDGs number 5 by analyzing women's challenges in these two countries.

1.9 Methods

This research used a largely qualitative methodology, with a focus on conducting a literature review and semi-structured interviews to collect detailed data. Library research involves a thorough examination of materials related to a particular theme, including primary and secondary sources, to collect comprehensive and detailed data ⁴⁹. The literature review includes scientific articles, books, and other related publications to build a theoretical and contextual foundation for this research. This approach allows for a comprehensive examination of the complex dynamics of

⁴⁹ Mary W. George, *The Elements of Library Research: What Every Student Needs to Know* (Princeton University Press, 2008), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400830411>.

religious, cultural, and institutional elements influencing women's leadership encounters in higher education in Indonesia and Malaysia.

Furthermore, the study contains primary data collecting by conducting semi-structured interviews, in addition to the literature review. This sort of interview enables the researcher to thoroughly investigate particular subjects while also allowing the freedom to inquire further for further information depending on the interviewee's answers⁵⁰.

The interviews will be carried out with six female leaders who occupy prominent roles in higher education institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia. The integration of a literature review and interviews will enhance the researcher's comprehension of the subject matter, allowing for the effective achievement of study objectives. The literature review will establish a comprehensive theoretical framework, while the interviews will provide detailed, firsthand narratives that enhance the analysis with practical viewpoints.

The table below contains the data of the interviewees :

No.	Name	Position	University	Country
1.	Siti Nurul Azkiyah	The Dean of Dirasat Islaiyah Faculty	UIN Jakarta	Indonesia
2.	Zilhadia	The Dean of Health Science Fac.	UIN Jakarta	Indonesia
3.	Jailh	The Director of Accounting Reseach Institute	UITM	Malaysia
4.	Haslina Binti Ibrahim	Deputy Dean of Islaic revealed	IIUM	Malaysia

⁵⁰ Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, Fifth edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

		knowledge ad huma sciences faculty		
5.	Suhailah	Dean of Education Fac.	IIUM	Malaysia
6.	Nina Nurmila	Dean of Education Faculty	UIII	Indonesia

For data analysis, all interviews will be recorded with consent and accurately transcribed. The training manuscript will undergo initial coding to identify important statements and statements related to the research questions. Thematic analysis will then group similar codes into key themes, providing insight into common challenges and difficulties. Data collected from library research will be analyzed to identify key themes and trends, which will be integrated with interview findings to create a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

1.9 Thesis Outlines

In the first chapter, I intend to present a brief introduction to the role of women in leadership positions in the context of higher education in Indonesia and Malaysia. I will emphasize the importance of women's leadership, and present statistics on women's leadership as chancellors in both Indonesia and Malaysia, using a comparative case study approach methodology using qualitative approaches such as library research and interviews. Finally, I will provide a comprehensive analysis of the literature, including historical background, theoretical framework, and a list of individuals interviewed.

The second chapter will examine historical and current patterns of women's involvement in higher education. what is leadership in the Islamic view. I will examine the influence of religion and culture on society's perception of women's education, especially viewpoints such as Maradi's that limit women from taking leadership positions. Additionally, I will analyse government policies and support systems designed to promote gender equality in education, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Ultimately, I will examine the organization and

systematization of higher education institutions and how this structure influences the prospects for women to assume leadership positions.

In the third chapter, I will answer the core research question by analysing how religious interpretations, cultural norms, and attitudes in Muslim societies in Indonesia and Malaysia shape women's experiences in leadership roles in higher education institutions. This chapter will include narratives from women leaders in both countries, describing their leadership journeys and the challenges they faced. This chapter will also identify and measure the main obstacles that women face in reaching top positions in higher education institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia. In the fourth and final chapter, I will discuss some of the strategies women leaders experience to overcome obstacles and achieve goals. higher positions in higher education.

In the final chapter, I summarize the findings from the previous chapters, with interesting conclusions about the impact of religious, cultural and social factors on women's leadership in higher education in Indonesia and Malaysia. Based on these insights, I will offer practical recommendations to promote gender equality and support women in overcoming barriers to leadership. This chapter will also suggest areas for future research to further explore and address the complexities of women's leadership in higher education in Muslim societies.

CHAPTER II

WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN HIGHER EDUCATION: RELIGIOUS, CULTURAL, AND INSTITUTIONAL INFLUENCES

This chapter provides an overview of the issues impacting women's leadership in higher education, particularly in Indonesia and Malaysia, both of which are Muslim-majority countries. This chapter aims to explore the combined impact of religious beliefs, cultural practices, and institutional frameworks on opportunities for women leaders in academia. First and foremost, it is important to establish the importance of women's leadership in higher education. Women have an important role in universities and higher education institutions, as they play an important role in creating an inclusive academic atmosphere.

Their existence not only encourages a variety of different points of view, but also promotes fairness between genders and justice in society, thereby improving the educational environment. Furthermore, this chapter explores the importance of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in promoting gender equality, with a particular focus on Goal 5. This study covers the extent to which Indonesia and Malaysia have incorporated these global ideals into their policies and practices to achieve these goals. encourage women's leadership roles, despite the obstacles they face. An in-depth analysis was carried out on the impact of religious interpretations, especially Islam, on gender norms and the availability of leadership positions for women. This chapter promotes a more liberal understanding of Islamic literature by interpreting conventional and contemporary interpretations.

Apart from that, this conversation also examines the cultural norms that apply in Indonesia and Malaysia, which determine societal expectations and influence women's responsibilities in both the private and public spheres. Existing conventions can inhibit or open opportunities for women to assume leadership roles in academic institutions, providing an important framework for understanding their encounters.

2.1 Definition and Significance of Women Leadership in Higher Education

Women's leadership in higher education refers to the role and influence of women in academic institutions, such as universities and colleges. This includes positions such as chancellor, dean, department head, and other important administrative roles. Leadership in this context includes the ability to support, influence and make strategic decisions that shape the direction and policies of educational institutions. The presence of women in these roles is critical to fostering a diverse and inclusive academic environment⁵¹. The importance of women's leadership in higher education cannot be exaggerated.

Firstly, it plays a role in promoting gender equality, which is not only a basic human right but also a crucial aspect of social justice. The inclusion of women in leadership positions guarantees a wider range of viewpoints in the decision-making process, resulting in more comprehensive and inclusive educational settings. Studies suggest that leadership teams with a variety of backgrounds and perspectives tend to excel in problem-solving and innovation⁵².

Additionally, women in positions of leadership act as exemplars and guides for female students and junior employees, fostering gender inclusivity across all tiers of academia. This level of visibility is essential for confronting and transforming cultural and institutional preconceptions around gender roles. Research has indicated that women are more inclined to pursue similar routes when they observe other women in positions of leadership. A study by highlights that female leaders in academia inspire other women to aspire to leadership roles, thereby creating a ripple effect that promotes gender equality throughout the institution.⁵³

⁵¹ Evans Magaisa et al., "Women In Higher Education Leadership Positions in Zimbabwe: Experiences, Challenges and Opportunities," *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* VII, no. IV (2023): 1267–74, <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRIS.2023.7505>.

⁵² Louise Morley, Madeline Berma, and Bahiyah Dato'Hj. Abdul Hamid, "Managing Modern Malaysia: Women in Higher Education Leadership," in *The Changing Role of Women in Higher Education*, ed. Heather Eggins (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2017), 137–54, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-42436-1_7.

⁵³ Mónica Del Carmen Meza-Mejía, Mónica Adriana Villarreal-García, and Claudia Fabiola Ortega-Barba, "Women and Leadership in Higher Education: A Systematic Review," *Social Sciences* 12, no. 10 (October 4, 2023): 555, <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12100555>.

Furthermore, the inclusion of women in leadership positions in higher education can lead to policy changes that support gender equity. Women leaders are often more attuned to issues such as work-life balance, harassment, and discrimination, and they can advocate for policies that address these challenges. A study by KerryAnn O'Meara and Nelly P. Stromquis (2015) found that female leaders are more likely to implement and support policies that promote gender equity and create a supportive environment for all staff and students.⁵⁴

In conclusion, the significance of women leadership in higher education extends beyond individual institutions. It plays a crucial role in advancing gender equality, enriching the decision-making process with diverse perspectives, and inspiring future generations of women leaders. Addressing the gender gap in leadership positions is essential for fostering an inclusive and equitable academic environment, ultimately benefiting the entire educational community.

2.2 The Importance of SDGs in Promoting Women Leadership Equality in Indonesia and Malaysia.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the United Nations in 2015, aim to address global challenges, including gender inequality. Goal 5 specifically targets achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. This essay explores the importance of SDGs in promoting women leadership equality in higher education within Indonesia and Malaysia, highlighting the progress, challenges, and impact of these goals on women's leadership roles in these Muslim-majority societies⁵⁵.

Indonesia and Malaysia have diverse cultural backgrounds that significantly influence gender roles. Historically, both countries have faced challenges in promoting gender equality due to deeply rooted patriarchal norms. However, the commitment to SDGs has provided a framework for addressing these issues. In Indonesia, gender equality has been a prominent issue since the time of RA Kartini, a national heroine who fought for women's rights in education⁵⁶. Similarly,

⁵⁴ KerryAnn O'Meara and Nelly P. Stromquist, "Faculty Peer Networks: Role and Relevance in Advancing Agency and Gender Equity," *Gender and Education* 27, no. 3 (April 16, 2015): 338–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2015.1027668>.

⁵⁵ Sustainable Development Goals in Indonesia: Voluntary National Review 2019. (2019). Ministry of National Development Planning/BAPPENAS.

⁵⁶ Junita Budi Rachman, Yanyan Mochamad Yani, and Sayitri Aditiany, "Human Security In The Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDGs 5) And Its Implementation In Indonesia," in

Malaysia has integrated gender equality into its national development plans, reflecting its commitment to the SDGs). Both Indonesia and Malaysia have made significant strides in promoting women leadership through the implementation of SDGs. Indonesia's efforts are reflected in the increase of its Gender Development Index (GDI), which has shown consistent improvement since 2017. Malaysia, on the other hand, has launched various initiatives to enhance women's participation in leadership roles, particularly in political and economic sectors. The inclusion of women in decision-making processes has been identified as a key factor in achieving sustainable development.⁵⁷

Despite progress, major challenges remain in achieving gender equality in leadership roles in both countries. In Indonesia, cultural stereotypes and societal norms continue to hinder women's advancement in leadership positions. In Malaysia, gender stereotypes and limited access to resources and opportunities pose major obstacles. These problems are exacerbated by persistent wage gaps and the limited availability of education and training opportunities for women⁵⁸. The adoption of SDGs has had a significant influence on advancing women's leadership in Indonesia and Malaysia. The SDGs have established a distinct structure and defined quantifiable objectives for achieving gender equality, prompting nations to adopt policies and initiatives focused on empowering women. Indonesia has experienced an increase in the number of women holding political posts, while Malaysia has made significant progress in enhancing women's involvement in the workforce. These advancements are essential for attaining the overarching objectives of sustainable development.

To advance gender equality in leadership positions, both Indonesia and Malaysia must confront the socio-cultural barriers that hinder women's progress. This includes advocating for gender-sensitive education, enacting laws that

Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Social and Political Development (ICOSOP 2017) (2nd International Conference on Social and Political Development (ICOSOP 2017), Medan, Indonesia: Atlantis Press, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.2991/icosop-17.2018.1>.

⁵⁷ Nik Athirah Nik Mahdi, Yudi Fernando, and Yousif Abdelbagi Abdalla, "Understanding The Sustainable Development Goals Concept: Malaysia Report and Trend," *Journal of Governance and Integrity* 5, no. 3 (January 1, 2023): 317–27, <https://doi.org/10.15282/jgi.5.3.2022.8938>.

⁵⁸ Nik Mahdi, Fernando, and Abdalla.

facilitate work-life balance, and ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities. Additionally, it is important to engage in ongoing monitoring and analysis of gender equality activities to determine progress and identify growth opportunities.

The SDGs are crucial in advancing gender equality in higher education in Indonesia and Malaysia, particularly in Muslim-majority communities where conventional norms and prejudices frequently constrain women's opportunities for leadership. Although there has been notable advancement, further endeavours are necessary to overcome obstacles and guarantee that women are afforded equal opportunity to lead and contribute to sustainable development. By tackling these concerns, both nations can attain enhanced gender parity and enable women to assume leadership positions in higher education, so fostering the general advancement and prosperity of their societies.

2.3 Muslim Interpretation of Islamic Texts as a Root of Patriarchal Attitudes

Discussions surrounding women's leadership have become a matter of debate among Islamic scholars. Various theological considerations in Islam are often cited to support the idea of gender equality. This section aims to provide a textual and contextual analysis of women's leadership in the public sphere. The report argues that a purely textual understanding of the Sunnah and the opinions of some Muslim scholars have been used to unfairly bar women from taking public leadership roles. However, contextual understanding reveals a different perspective, highlighting historical examples of female leadership in Islamic history, such as Aisha, al-Shifa, and Queen Balqis. Therefore, contextual understanding should be prioritized in discussions about women's leadership⁵⁹

Before the revelation of the Quran, many great civilizations such as Greek-Roman, Indian, and Chinese civilizations had already existed and developed.

⁵⁹ Noor Mohammad Osmani, Mohammad Omar Farooq, and Abu Umar Faruq Ahmad, "Women Empowerment and Leadership in Islam between Myth and Reality," in *Economic Empowerment of Women in the Islamic World*, by Toseef Azid and Jennifer L Ward-Batts (WORLD SCIENTIFIC, 2020), 39–70, https://doi.org/10.1142/9789811212154_0003.

Similarly, major religions like Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Zoroastrianism did not extensively discuss women's rights. In ancient Greek civilization, women were given freedom only to fulfill the needs and desires of men. Christianity, on the other hand, viewed women as instruments of the Devil. In the 6th century, a council was held to discuss whether women were human, concluding that women were created solely to serve men.⁶⁰ Islam, however, brought a unique moral message of humanity unparalleled by any other religion. It not only invited people to liberate themselves from human tyranny but also from polytheistic oppression to monotheistic worship. Therefore, Islam became an appropriate means to unite the mission and vision of equality between men and women.

Hadith, the sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad, have a profound impact on Muslim attitudes towards gender roles. A widely cited Hadith by Abu Bakrah states, "No nation will ever prosper if they appoint a woman to lead them". This Hadith has been interpreted by many scholars to mean that women are inherently unfit for leadership roles. The textual analysis of this Hadith suggests that it was context-specific, relating to the political situation in Persia at the time. However, its application has been generalized, contributing to a broad patriarchal stance that excludes women from leadership in many Muslim societies.⁶¹

The Quran, the central religious text of Islam, contains verses that have been interpreted to support male leadership. For example, Quran 4:34 states, "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means". This verse has often been cited to justify male dominance and the exclusion of women from leadership roles. However, contemporary scholars argue that the verse should be understood in its historical context, where men were primarily responsible for the economic support of the family. They argue that this does not inherently indicate

⁶⁰ Mary H. Moran, "Woman and 'Civilization': The Intersection of Gender and Prestige in Southeastern Liberia," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 22, no. 3 (January 1, 1988): 491–501, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00083968.1988.10804223>.

⁶¹ Ziyah Yusriana Asri and Indal Abror, "Hadith of Women Leadership in the Qira'ah Mubadalah Approach," *Jurnal Living Hadis* 6, no. 1 (June 21, 2021): 73, <https://doi.org/10.14421/livinghadis.2021.2900>.

women's incapacity to lead, but rather mirrors the socio-economic conditions of that era.⁶²

The historical analysis of Islamic writings frequently reflected the patriarchal practices present in the civilizations where they originated. During the era of Prophet Muhammad, social norms were predominantly patriarchal, with women largely limited to home responsibilities. The interpretations of Quranic texts and Hadiths from that period frequently reflect these traditions, so supporting the concept that leadership is exclusively reserved for males. Interpretations that center on women's physiological states, such as menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth, are employed to counter their potential for leadership⁶³.

However, these interpretations neglect to take into account the qualities and potential for leadership that women possess beyond their biological functions. In contrast to patriarchal views, Islamic history encompasses instances of women who have occupied prominent leadership positions. Aisha, the spouse of Prophet Muhammad, serves as a notable illustration. She possessed a high level of esteem as both an intellectual and a commander in the armed forces. Queen Balqis, also known as the Queen of Sheba, is described in the Quran as a sagacious and competent ruler who controlled her subjects with fairness. These examples illustrate that Islam does not fundamentally forbid women from holding leadership positions, but rather that patriarchal interpretations have overtaken these historical precedents.

Contemporary Islamic scholars and feminists support the re-examination of Islamic scriptures to promote gender equality. They contend that the fundamental nature of Islam is centred around justice and equality, and any interpretation that upholds gender inequity contradicts these principles. Contemporary academics reevaluate Quran 4:34 to highlight the importance of mutual assistance and protection rather than the superiority of males. Furthermore, they question the authenticity of Hadiths that are employed to marginalize women from positions of

⁶² Nurmila, "Proposing Feminist Interpretation of The Qur'an and Affirmative Policy to Support Women Leadership In Indonesian State Islamic Higher Education."

⁶³ M. Dede Rodliyana, "Reevaluating Gender Dynamics: A Critical Analysis of Misogynistic Narratives in Hadith Literature," *International Journal of Nusantara Islam* 11, no. 2 (December 23, 2023): 312–26, <https://doi.org/10.15575/ijni.v11i2.31219>.

authority, contending that these should be interpreted within their particular historical and cultural circumstances⁶⁴.

2.4 Modern Reinterpretations: Advocating for Gender Equality in Islam

Recently, there has been a notable trend towards reinterpreting Islamic literature to promote gender equality. This movement is spearheaded by intellectuals and advocates who contend that Islam, fundamentally, advocates for fairness, parity, and the respect for the inherent worth of every individual, irrespective of their gender. Modern Islamic research frequently highlights the fundamental values of fairness and parity that are present in the Quran. Yusuf Qaradhawi and Nasaruddin Umar, who are scholars, support the idea of reinterpreting Islam in a way that is consistent with its fundamental principles. They believe in fostering gender equality and encouraging women to take on leadership roles. These contemporary interpretations question conventional perspectives and offer theological justification for women's involvement in leadership positions.

Asma Barlas, in her work "Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an," critically questions the patriarchal interpretations of the Quran, making her a significant figure. Barlas contends that the Quran does not support the idea of male dominance and asserts that any interpretations suggesting otherwise are a product of historical and cultural factors rather than the actual content of the text. She advocates for an interpretation of the Quran that is devoid of patriarchal prejudices and that supports the ideals of fairness and equitable treatment.⁶⁵

The prominent Indonesian researcher, Syafiq Hasyim, makes a significant contribution to the discourse around women in Islam through his book. He carefully analyzes the talks about among researchers and clarifies the complexities encompassing women's parts in Islam, which are impacted by both religious writings and Islamic law. Hasyim accepts that the different conclusions among

⁶⁴ Nurmila, "Proposing Feminist Interpretation of The Qur'an and Affirmative Policy to Support Women Leadership In Indonesian State Islamic Higher Education."

⁶⁵ Barlas, "*Believing Women*" in *Islam*.

researchers almost women's parts are established in how they interpret the Quran and Hadith, which are formed by different components such as the social and social setting of the time, the move of Middle easterner society, and how dialect is utilized.⁶⁶

Malaysia's independence from British colonialism in 1957 marked a significant turning point, with the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) emerging as the dominant political force. Islam, then, became the official religion, profoundly influencing the lives of Malays. The Dakwah movement of the 1970s further strengthened the role of Islam, causing a redefinition of Malay identity and a shift towards a more patriarchal society.⁶⁷

In response to this patriarchal trend, a group of professional Muslim women began to challenge the status quo in the late 1980s. As a result, Sisters in Islam (SIS) was founded, with the aim of advocating for the rights of Muslim women within the context of Islam. By employing feminist hermeneutics, SIS aimed to rectify gender-biased interpretations of the Qur'an, which they claimed had resulted in the infringement of women's rights, such as the continuation of polygamy, unfair divorce regulations, and forced marriages⁶⁸. While there is limited writing on gender issues in Malaysian Muslim society, authors like Seed offer vital insights into the intricate nature of feminism and the women's movement in Malaysia. These contemporary reinterpretations underscore the fact that the message conveyed in the Quran promotes equality and justice. They provide a contextual comprehension of the texts that takes into account the historical and cultural circumstances in which they were revealed. This approach not only questions the male-dominated interpretations that have been prevalent in Islamic thought, but also enables women to assume leadership positions in other areas of life.

⁶⁶ Syafiq Hasyim, *Understanding Women in Islam: An Indonesian Perspective* (Jakarta, Indonesia: Solstice Pub, 2006).

⁶⁷ Rohana Ariffin, "Feminism in Malaysia," *Women's Studies International Forum* 22, no. 4 (July 1999): 417–23, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-5395\(99\)00039-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-5395(99)00039-4).

⁶⁸ Abdullah Saeed, *Interpreting the Qur'an*, 0 ed. (Routledge, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203016770>.

After sometime, traditional interpretations of patriarchal nature have constrained the opportunities for women to assume leadership positions. However, contemporary scholars and activists are actively promoting a reinterpretation of Islamic literature that fosters gender equality. Through the act of questioning conventional interpretations and highlighting the fundamental values of fairness and equitable treatment that are inherent in Islam, these individuals are creating opportunities for more female leadership within Muslim communities. This move not only adheres to the authentic principles of Islamic teachings but also tackles the urgent requirement for gender equality in the present day.

2.5 Cultural Norms in Indonesia and Malaysia That Influence Gender Roles

Women often have to continuously confront and challenge patriarchal structures in their cultural environment to gain more freedom and flexibility in their private and public roles. The cultural context, which is often patriarchal, strongly influences gender roles and expectations for women. The concept of patriarchy is critical to understanding gender equality as it highlights the deep rooted, pervasive and interconnected nature of women's subordination in the home, family and society ⁶⁹.

Cultural norms exert a substantial influence on the formation of gender roles in both Indonesia and Malaysia. Both nations possess intricate cultural terrains that influence the perception and implementation of gender norms. Indonesia boasts a vast array of cultural diversity, owing to its numerous ethnic groups, each with their distinct customs and traditions. The presence of a patriarchal system is apparent in multiple facets of everyday life and is strengthened by conventional understandings of Islam that prioritize male authority and female roles within the household. In his book, Syafiq Hasyim offers a thought-provoking critique of the historical portrayal of women, emphasizing its distinctiveness and contentious nature. According to him, women's history is defined by non-objectifying aspects and ongoing discussions about their social status. Conversely, historical narratives typically depict men as prominent characters, representing universal principles and

⁶⁹ Sylvia Walby, "From Private to Public Patriarchy," *Women's Studies International Forum* 13, no. 1-2 (January 1990): 91-104, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395\(90\)90076-A](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395(90)90076-A).

frequently benefiting from religious and socio-cultural frameworks that enhance their position⁷⁰.

The author emphasizes that this historical narrative, centred around males, has played a crucial role in molding societal norms and beliefs. It has perpetuated the belief that men are innately respected and influential in various historical and cultural settings. It is unsurprising that women have been obscured, confused, and marginalized in theological and historical interpretations. Due to its historical focus on males, it has consistently been centred around men. Particularly with regards to leadership. Malaysia, a nation characterized by a heterogeneous populace consisting of Malays, Chinese, Indians, and other Bumiputera communities, continues to be acknowledged as a patriarchal society. The social structure and moral values of patriarchal gender roles have been greatly influenced by patriarchal cultural standards, which originated with the introduction of Islam in the 13th century and were further reinforced during British colonial administration in the 19th century⁷¹. Although more women now work outside the home and some earn higher wages than their husbands, patriarchal beliefs remain strong in many Malaysian households. This is further reinforced by the country's diverse religious customs⁷². Despite the removal of formal and informal barriers to participation in civil society, such as in education, economics and politics, most women are still at a disadvantage. In 2023, Malaysia's Global Gender Gap index score was 0.68, where a score of 1 represents complete gender parity and a score of 0 represents complete gender disparity. This score indicates that Malaysia has closed 68% of its overall gender gap.⁷³

Despite this progress, Malaysia has one of the largest gender gaps in Southeast Asia, highlighting the significant work that remains to achieve full gender equality.

⁷⁰ Hasyim, *Understanding Women in Islam*.

⁷¹ Randi Salim et al., "The Role of Islam toward the Patriarchal Culture in Malay People," *Sociology and Anthropology* 5, no. 12 (December 2017): 1027–32, <https://doi.org/10.13189/sa.2017.051207>.

⁷² Salim et al.

⁷³ Statista Research Dept., "Global Gender Gap Score Malaysia 2013-2023," Statista, March 20, 2024, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/973001/global-gender-gap-score-malaysia/>.

2.6 Traditional Roles: Societal Expectations of Gender in Indonesia and Malaysia

In both Indonesia and Malaysia, traditional gender roles are clearly defined and culturally entrenched. These roles dictate that men are responsible for providing financial support, while women are expected to manage household duties and childcare. Such expectations are deeply rooted in historical practices and reinforced by religious teachings that promote patriarchal family structures.⁴

In Indonesia, societal expectations are largely shaped by the dominant Javanese culture, which values male leadership both within the family and the community. Women are often expected to be subservient to their husbands and focus on domestic responsibilities. This is evident in the cultural practices and rituals that celebrate male authority and female obedience⁷⁴. In 2023, Indonesia's Global Gender Gap index score was 0.7, on a scale where 1 represents absolute parity and 0 represents absolute imparity. This score places Indonesia at the 87th position out of 146 countries in the global gender gap rankings.⁷⁵

This ranking indicates that Indonesia falls within the mid-range globally regarding gender equality. Specifically, there are 86 countries with higher scores, reflecting better gender equality, and 59 countries with lower scores, indicating greater gender disparities. A score of 0.7 signifies that Indonesia has achieved a moderate level of progress toward gender equality but still faces considerable challenges.

Malaysia, with its diverse ethnic composition, also has strong societal expectations for gender roles. Among the Malay Muslim community, these roles are further reinforced by Islamic teachings that emphasize the man's role as the head of the household and the woman's role as the caretaker. This traditional view is echoed in public policies and educational systems that often prioritize male leadership.⁷⁶ The Chinese and Indian communities in Malaysia, while having

⁷⁴ Nurnaningsih Nurnaningsih, "Patriarchal Culture, Sexual Violence, and Legal Protection for Women in Indonesia," *Veteran Law Review* 6, no. SpecialIssues (April 18, 2023): 85–103, <https://doi.org/10.35586/velrev.v6iSpecialIssues.5758>.

⁷⁵ Mona Siahian, "Global Gender Gap Score Indonesia 2013-2023," *Statista* (blog), July 27, 2023, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/973044/global-gender-gap-score-indonesia/>.

⁷⁶ Othman and A. Hamid, "Exploring Women's Transformational Leadership Style And Competency."

slightly different cultural practices, also maintain traditional views on gender roles that place men in leadership positions and women in supportive domestic roles ⁷⁷.

While Indonesia and Malaysia share similarities in how cultural norms influence gender roles, there are notable differences in the degree of flexibility and the impact of these norms on women's leadership opportunities.

In Indonesia, the presence of diverse ethnic groups means that there is some variability in gender roles. Regions with matrilineal traditions, like the Minangkabau, offer more opportunities for women to assume leadership roles within the family and community. Nevertheless, these chances are frequently constrained to particular cultural contexts and may not necessarily result in more extensive societal transformations⁷⁸.

In contrast, Malaysia has a consistent approach to gender norms within its predominant Malay Muslim culture. The impact of Islamic teachings is more evident and systematically enforced throughout the nation, leading to stricter gender norms. The lack of diversity can restrict women's chances for leadership roles, both in the domestic realm and in the public domain⁷⁹.

Resistance to the promotion of gender equality and women's leadership in both countries is frequently encountered due to cultural and religious views. Nevertheless, there are current initiatives and advocacy endeavours focused on questioning these conventional standards and establishing more prospects for women. These endeavours are essential for tackling the profoundly entrenched cultural obstacles that restrict women's participation in leadership and decision-making.

⁷⁷ Salim et al., "The Role of Islam toward the Patriarchal Culture in Malay People."

⁷⁸ Lailatul Huda and Dwi Susanto, "Siti Walidah, Gender Equality and Modernist Islamic Women's Movement in Indonesia: A Critical History," *Islamica: Jurnal Studi Keislaman* 18, no. 1 (September 1, 2023): 28–49, <https://doi.org/10.15642/islamica.2023.18.1.28-49>.

⁷⁹ Nik Mahdi, Fernando, and Abdalla, "Understanding The Sustainable Development Goals Concept."

CHAPTER III

BARRIERS TO WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES

By conducting semi-structured interviews with eight leading female executives from higher education institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia, we discovered many obstacles that need to be addressed. The barriers mentioned in this context revolve around the experiences of female deans, highlighting the difficulties women face in their leadership positions in countries where the majority religion is Islam.

The main data for this research were obtained through library research and semi-structured interviews conducted with female leaders at higher education institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia. Participants included Siti Nurul Azkiyah, Dean of the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication at UIN Jakarta, Indonesia, and Zil Prize, Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences at the same university. From Malaysia, Jamaliah, Director of the Accounting Research Institute UiTM, and Haslina Binti Ibrahim, Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences IIUM also contributed their insights.

In addition, Suhaila, Dean of the Faculty of Education IIUM, Malaysia, and Nina Nurmila, Dean of the Faculty of Education UIII, Indonesia, also participated in this research. These distinguished fellows hold significant leadership roles within their respective institutions, providing comprehensive perspectives on research topics. The diversity of their positions and backgrounds provides an important perspective on their leadership experiences and the obstacles they face in the higher education sector in Muslim-majority countries. This research seeks to reveal the complexities and possibilities of women's leadership in higher education based on their own experiences. This chapter examines the important barriers that women face when assuming leadership positions in higher education institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia. By conducting comprehensive interviews with eight high-level female executives from these organizations, we have identified the barriers that hinder women's progress in achieving leadership roles. The experiences of these women explain the various challenges faced in countries where the majority of the population is Muslim.

A persistent theme is the presence of "boys clubs," a network centred on men and prominent in the upper echelons of university administration. Several interviewees emphasized this as a major obstacle to women's leadership. The point to be made is that men often hold senior jobs, regardless of women's qualifications and skills. Furthermore, it has been noted that women need to exert greater effort to gain an equal level of respect as their male counterparts. The existence of this "boys' club" not only hinders women's opportunities to attain high positions but also limits their capacity to exert significant influence on important choices.

Another big obstacle is the lack of self-confidence among women who want to take on leadership positions. This lack of self-confidence often hinders their progress in seeking a better position. Many competent women doubt their abilities and, as a result, refrain from assuming leadership positions. This lack of self-confidence is consistent with research showing that women often underestimate their abilities compared to men. Women leaders also face the difficulty of a "double bind," when they are asked to demonstrate both assertiveness and nurturing traits. Managing these conflicting expectations is a difficult task that often prevents women from achieving high-level leadership roles. Interviewees clarified that women have two criteria: they are expected to have strength without being too dominant, and empathy without being too emotional.

Additionally, there is a widespread perception that leadership is inherently linked to masculinity. This notion is deeply rooted in the cultural and institutional frameworks of Indonesia and Malaysia. Effective leadership is commonly linked to traditionally masculine attributes, such as assertiveness and decisiveness, as stated. This idea excludes or marginalizes women who may demonstrate leadership approaches that are more collaborative or sympathetic. Surprisingly, the interviews showed that religious interpretations, which were thought to be a major hindrance, are no longer a significant barrier to women's leadership in these countries. Religious teachings at specific organizations are understood in a manner that promotes gender equality, and there are no religious obstacles stopping women from taking on leadership positions. The transition has been shaped by the worldwide movement advocating for female equality, which

promotes more advanced understandings of Islamic teachings.

Overall, the interviews highlighted the significant obstacles encountered by women in leadership positions within higher education institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia. These issues include the impact of exclusive male networks, a lack of self-assurance, conflicting expectations, and the prevalence of masculine leadership models. Nevertheless, the progressive theological interpretations that endorse gender equality offer optimism. To overcome these obstacles, it is necessary to adopt a holistic strategy that encompasses policy reforms, leadership development initiatives, and the cultivation of an inclusive culture. Higher education institutions can foster a more equitable and efficient leadership environment for the academic community by advocating for gender equality and providing assistance to women in leadership positions.

3.1 The Boys Club Phenomenon

A prevalent occurrence throughout university hierarchies is the prevalence of males in the most authoritative positions, including the role of rector. Participants repeatedly recognized this issue as a major obstacle to women's leadership. A significant number of participants expressed that, despite their qualifications and experience, males continue to hold the majority of senior positions. This tendency engenders an atmosphere wherein women are compelled to do greater effort in order to substantiate their abilities and attain commensurate acknowledgment as their male counterparts⁸⁰.

In this context, women face significant challenges in accessing top leadership positions and influencing key decisions. This phenomenon is not unique to Indonesia and Malaysia, but rather reflects a broader global trend where women in leadership positions face similar challenges. Research has shown that the existence of male-dominated networks within higher education institutions creates structural barriers that impede women's career advancement and leadership opportunities.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Nina Nurmila, Interview, n.d.

⁸¹ Eagly, Alice H and Linda L. Carli, "Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership." *Harvard Business Review* 85" no. 9 (2007): 63–71.

The phenomenon of Male Dominance Networks exerts a profound influence on women's leadership in higher education institutions, perpetuating a culture of gender bias and discrimination that discourages women from aspiring to or remaining in leadership roles. This culture of exclusion can lead to a lack of diversity in decision-making processes, ultimately affecting the overall effectiveness and inclusivity of university governance. As seen in the article 'Changing the "Boys" Club' Rules: Experiences of Women in Senior Management in Higher Education', which explores the challenges and experiences of women in senior management positions in higher education institutions, there is an urgent need for organisations to adapt and change their culture to better support and empower women in leadership roles.⁸²

Furthermore, the phenomenon of male-dominated networks or men's clubs contributes to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes in the academic community. It reinforces the notion that leadership is inherently a male domain, thus discouraging younger female academics from seeking leadership positions, according to one interviewee who emphasised the importance of mentorship and support systems for ambitious female leaders.⁸³ These findings are in line with existing literature on gender disparities in higher education leadership. For example, Wendy O'Brien, Claire Hainlon, and Vasso Apostolopoulos discuss how male-dominated institutional networks and cultures create significant barriers for women seeking leadership positions in academia. In addition, they highlight that gendered organisational systems often confront women with diverse challenges in career and advancement.⁸⁴ Haslina stated :

“Addressing the challenges posed by the phenomenon of male dominance requires concerted effort on several levels. Initiatives such as leadership training programmes, mentorship opportunities, and gender sensitivity workshops can

⁸² Judith Bell and Bernard T. Harrison, eds., *Vision and Values in Managing Education: Successful Leadership Principles and Practice* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2018).

⁸³ Suhailah, Interview, n.d.

⁸⁴ Wendy O'Brien, Clare Hanlon, and Vasso Apostolopoulos, "Women as Leaders in Male-dominated Sectors: A Bifocal Analysis of Gendered Organizational Practices," *Gender, Work & Organization* 30, no. 6 (November 2023): 1867–84, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13019>.

empower women and equip them with the necessary skills and confidence to overcome such barriers. In addition, it is imperative to cultivate an institutional culture that values diversity and inclusivity.”⁸⁵

Encouraging male allies to advocate for gender equity and support their female colleagues is also crucial in breaking down the barriers created by the "boys' club". As noted in the article ‘Gaining Access to the “World's Largest Men's Club”': Women Leading UN Agencies’, despite having achieved breakthroughs in breaking the glass ceiling, women's upward mobility in organisations is often hindered by stereotypical perceptions of their traits, interests and abilities. As a result, their lateral movement is limited by preconceived notions of what roles they are deemed suitable for, as well as by biases about which women are deemed suitable for executive leadership positions.⁸⁶

The findings of this study highlight a significant challenge faced by women leaders in higher education institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia, namely the influence of extensive male dominance networks. These networks limit women's access to high leadership positions and hinder their ability to make meaningful changes in their institutions. Hence, for overcoming these obstacles, an integrated approach encompassing policy reforms, leadership development initiatives, and the cultivation of an inclusive institutional culture is needed⁸⁷ .

The phenomenon of male-dominated networks in higher education institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia is influenced by the unique cultural, religious and institutional contexts in each country. In Indonesia, traditional Javanese cultural norms and conservative interpretations of Islam reinforce male dominance in leadership roles. Women in Indonesian higher education institutions face significant challenges, including a lack of strong institutional support for gender equality and limited access to resources and networks.⁸⁸

Malaysia also has the same challenge, that high positions in universities are dominated by men, research conducted by saeeda shah shows that women still find

⁸⁵ Haslina, Interview, n.d.

⁸⁶ Kirsten Haack, “Gaining Access to the ‘World’s Largest Men’s Club’: Women Leading UN Agencies,” *Global Society* 28, no. 2 (April 3, 2014): 217–40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2014.887558>.

⁸⁷ Eagly, Alice H and Linda L. Carli, “Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership.” *Harvard Business Review* 85.”

⁸⁸ Nina Nurmila, Interview.

it difficult to reach high positions due to male dominance⁸⁹. Addressing male-dominated networks requires an approach that is tailored to the different contexts between Indonesia and Malaysia. Therefore, efforts should be made to promote comprehensive policies, supportive institutional frameworks, and a cultural shift towards inclusiveness in both countries⁹⁰.

3.2 Lack of Confidence

Women often face significant challenges in developing their careers, especially when they want to become leaders. One such barrier is a lack of confidence and awareness of their own abilities⁹¹. Therefore, it is important for women to develop their confidence and leadership abilities in order to compete with men in the world of work. Some of the factors that affect women's confidence in developing their careers are gender stereotypes that make women less capable of being leaders.⁹² which makes women less confident in taking on leadership roles. In addition, the lack of representation of women in leadership positions may also leave them lacking role models and mentors⁹³. Social pressure also makes women have to fulfil gender expectations, such as being a housewife and taking care of children, which can also affect their self-confidence.⁹⁴

To develop women's self-confidence, some strategies that can be applied are to increase awareness of their own abilities and strengths⁹⁵. Networking and finding mentors who can help them in their career development can also help increase self-confidence⁹⁶. Creating a culture that supports and values diversity, so that women can feel more confident in taking on leadership roles, can also help

⁸⁹ "Gender Equality Mainstreaming Gender across All Areas.," *United Nation Developing Program*, 2023, <https://www.undp.org/malaysia/gender-equality>.

⁹⁰ Haslina, Interview.

⁹¹ Ibarra, H and Obodaru, O, "Women and the Vision Thing," *Harvard Business Review*, 87(1), 2009, 62–70.

⁹² Nada K. Kakabadse et al., "Gender Diversity and Board Performance: Women's Experiences and Perspectives," *Human Resource Management* 54, no. 2 (March 2015): 265–81, <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21694>.

⁹³ Eagly, Alice H and Linda L. Carli, "Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership." *Harvard Business Review* 85."

⁹⁴ Kakabadse et al., "Gender Diversity and Board Performance."

⁹⁵ Charlan Nemeth and Joel Wachtler, "Creating the Perceptions of Consistency and Confidence: A Necessary Condition for Minority Influence," *Sociometry* 37, no. 4 (December 1974): 529, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2786425>.

⁹⁶ Petersen, T, Saporta, I, and Seidel, M. D. L, "Meritocracy and Social Networks," *American Journal of Sociology* 106(3) (n.d.): 763-816.

⁹⁷. Organisations can play a very important role in developing women's leadership. Some of the ways this can be done is by creating training and development programmes targeted at women ⁹⁸ . Building a culture that supports and values diversity can also help boost women's confidence (Pfeffer & Sutton, 1998). Increasing the representation of women in leadership positions, so that they can serve as role models and mentors for other women, can also help (Powell & Butterfield, 1994). One of the prominent barriers identified by the interviewees is a lack of confidence among women aspiring to leadership roles, particularly the position of rector.

This lack of confidence manifests in various ways, impacting their career progression and aspirations. Nurul Azkiya pointed out that :

“Many women, even though they have the right qualifications and experience, often doubt their abilities. This self-doubt stops them from going for higher leadership roles. This shows a big psychological obstacle where qualified women hold back because they don't believe in themselves. Research in organizational psychology supports this, showing that women tend to undervalue their skills compared to men. This self-doubt comes from societal conditioning and not seeing enough female role models in leadership, which makes women feel less capable than men.”⁹⁹

Interviews revealed a pervasive cultural expectation that leadership is a male domain, which significantly undermines women's confidence. This deeply embedded social norm reinforces gender stereotypes and is a major obstacle to women's advancement in leadership roles. Studies on gender and leadership consistently highlight how social expectations shape women's career ambitions, which are often reinforced by educational and professional environments that subtly or overtly privilege male leadership.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Melnychenko, O., “GENDER INEQUALITY OF WOMEN IN EDUCATION OR WHY WOMEN ARE UNDERREPRESENTED IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS? | Continuing Professional Education: Theory and Practice.”

⁹⁸ O'Meara and Stromquist, “Faculty Peer Networks.”

⁹⁹ Nurul Azkiyah, Interview, n.d.

¹⁰⁰ Nina Nurmila, Interview.

Women in academia often internalise these social expectations, leading to self-limitation. Despite excelling in their current roles, many hesitate to pursue top leadership positions due to these ingrained beliefs. This internalisation of social expectations results in a self-limiting mindset, a well-documented obstacle in leadership studies. Research shows that internalised gender roles and stereotypes significantly influence women's leadership aspirations and self-confidence.¹⁰¹

Suhailai from Malaysia has underscored the significance of mentorship and role models for women. A significant number of women have a dearth of mentors who can provide guidance and support to help them attain more senior positions, so intensifying their lack of self-assurance. The lack of mentorship is a significant obstacle. The mentoring literature highlights the importance of mentoring relationships for career advancement and the cultivation of self-assurance. Women may encounter difficulties in navigating the obstacles of leadership positions without mentors, which can further diminish their self-assurance¹⁰².

The lack of confidence among women who aspire to leadership positions in higher education is a multifaceted problem that is shaped by societal standards, cultural expectations, and institutional obstacles. This theme is consistent with findings from other studies, which suggest that women's self-perception and confidence levels are significant determinants in their career progression. In both Indonesia and Malaysia, traditional societal norms and cultural beliefs significantly impact women's confidence levels.

Historically, leadership has been perceived as a male prerogative in many Muslim societies. As noted by Jamaliah, the cultural expectation that men are natural leaders while women are followers contributes to women's lack of confidence in pursuing top leadership roles. This aligns with the findings of Eagly and Carli, who discuss how cultural stereotypes shape gender roles and expectations.¹⁰³ In Indonesia, the cultural backdrop plays a crucial role in shaping women's perceptions of their capabilities. Nina Nurmila's observation about self-doubt among qualified women underscores the internalization of these cultural

¹⁰¹ Nurul Azkiyah, Interview.

¹⁰² Suhailah, Interview.

¹⁰³ Eagly, Alice H and Linda L. Carli, "Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership." Harvard Business Review 85."

expectations. Research by Syed and Pio supports this, noting that cultural and religious narratives can profoundly influence women's self-efficacy and career aspirations¹⁰⁴. Additionally, the educational system in Indonesia often perpetuate traditional gender roles, which further undermine women's confidence.¹⁰⁵

In Malaysia, although there is a noticeable shift towards more inclusive leadership paradigms, the traditional view of men as leaders persists. Haslina's comment about self-imposed limitations reflects the broader societal expectations that influence women's self-confidence. Studies have shown that cultural shifts towards gender equality are gradual and require sustained efforts across generations¹⁰⁶. The lack of female mentors in higher education can contribute to a sense of isolation and self-doubt among aspiring women leaders.¹⁰⁷

Although barriers related to lack of self-confidence are similar in both countries, the extent and nature of these barriers differ. In Indonesia, the influence of deep-seated cultural norms appears more prominent, significantly affecting women's self-perception and self-confidence. Zilhada's insights¹⁰⁸ on social expectations in Indonesia highlight this issue. These findings are supported by studies on the impact of cultural norms on women's leadership in Southeast Asia.¹⁰⁹

In Malaysia, although traditional views persist, there is a gradual shift towards recognizing women's leadership potential. Research by Nik Mahdi shows that while there is progress, more needs to be done to create an enabling environment for women leaders.¹¹⁰

The lack of confidence among women in higher education leadership roles is a major barrier, shaped by societal norms, cultural expectations, and institutional

¹⁰⁴ Jawad Syed and Edwina Pio, "Veiled Diversity? Workplace Experiences of Muslim Women in Australia," *Asia Pacific Journal of Management* 27, no. 1 (March 2010): 115–37, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10490-009-9168-x>.

¹⁰⁵ Dzuriyatun Toyibah, "Gender Inequality in Academia: A Comparison of New Zealand and Indonesia," 2020.

¹⁰⁶ Morley, Berma, and Abdul Hamid, "Managing Modern Malaysia."

¹⁰⁷ Nik Mahdi, Fernando, and Abdalla, "Understanding The Sustainable Development Goals Concept."

¹⁰⁸ Zilhada, Interview, n.d.

¹⁰⁹ "Gender Differences in Leadership Style, Job Stress and Mental Health in Male - and Female - Dominated Industries - Gardiner - 1999 - Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology - Wiley Online Library," accessed July 5, 2024, <https://bpspsychub.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1348/096317999166699>.

¹¹⁰ Nik Mahdi, Fernando, and Abdalla, "Understanding The Sustainable Development Goals Concept."

practices. To address this issue, a multifaceted approach is needed, including mentorship, leadership training, institutional support, and cultural change.

3.3 Double Bind

One significant barrier identified by the interviews was the dilemma of the ‘double bind,’ where women leaders face contradictory expectations. Women are expected to demonstrate leadership qualities such as assertiveness and dominance, while at the same time having to be gentle and empathetic. The pressure to navigate these contradictory demands often prevents women from reaching top leadership positions..

This problem is strengthened by the observation that female leaders are often perceived as too aggressive if they demonstrate strong leadership, but are perceived as weak if they demonstrate empathy. This imposes additional stress on women as they are continually expected to adhere to contradictory standards.¹¹¹ This observation emphasizes the challenges that women have in balancing the qualities perceived crucial to leadership with societal expectations based on traditional gender roles. Research suggests that the double bind is a prevalent phenomenon experienced by women in positions of leadership, when they are consistently required to navigate contradictory expectations¹¹². Women in Malaysia frequently encounter conflicting societal expectations, as they are required to demonstrate resilience without appearing excessively authoritative, and compassion without being viewed as excessively emotional. This contradiction exemplifies the difficulties encountered by female leaders in striking a harmonious equilibrium between assertiveness and conventional feminine ideals. Extensive research regularly demonstrates that women are subjected to more severe scrutiny compared to men, hence intensifying the challenges they encounter in leadership positions¹¹³.

¹¹¹ Nina Nurmila, Interview.

¹¹² Chidinma Favour Chikwe, Nkechi Emmanuella Eneh, and Chidiogo Uzoamaka Akpuokwe, “Navigating the Double Bind: Strategies for Women Leaders in Overcoming Stereotypes and Leadership Biases,” *GSC Advanced Research and Reviews* 18, no. 3 (March 30, 2024): 159–72, <https://doi.org/10.30574/gscarr.2024.18.3.0103>.

¹¹³ Jamaliah, Interview, n.d.

This highlights the difficulties encountered by female leaders in striking a balance between being forceful and conforming to societal expectations of femininity. Studies have demonstrated that women are frequently subjected to more stringent evaluations compared to men, hence amplifying the challenges they encounter in positions of leadership¹¹⁴. The societal norm that associates leadership mostly with men intensifies the dual predicament that women encounter. This paradox gives rise to a situation that strengthens gender stereotypes, wherein women are seen as either excessively feeble or excessively assertive. Cultural standards exert a substantial influence on women's career aspirations and their aptitude for leadership, hence creating a demanding atmosphere for them. Studies on gender and leadership indicate that cultural norms significantly influence women's professional goals and their self-perception of their leadership skills¹¹⁵.

Haslina argued that women in academia often internalise contradicting expectations, resulting in self-imposed limitations. They may be successful in their current roles, but hesitate to seek top-level leadership positions for fear of facing setbacks. This internalisation of social expectations results in a self-limiting mindset, which is an obstacle that has been widely documented in leadership studies. ."¹¹⁶ Suhaila emphasised that mentorship and role models are crucial. Many women lack mentors who can guide and encourage them to face multiple dilemmas, thus exacerbating their lack of confidence. The absence of mentorship is a very important barrier. Mentoring relationships are essential for career development and confidence building. Without mentors, women may struggle to face the challenges of leadership roles. In Indonesia and Malaysia, traditional social norms and cultural beliefs strongly influence women's experience of the double dilemma. Historically, leadership has been seen as a male prerogative in many Muslim societies.¹¹⁷. The cultural expectation that men are natural leaders and women are followers contributes to the double dilemma women face.

¹¹⁴ Chidinma Favour Chikwe, Nkechi Emmanuella Eneh, and Chidiogo Uzoamaka Akpuokwe, "Navigating the Double Bind."

¹¹⁵ Ismail and Rasdi, "Career Mobility of High-Flying Women Academics."

¹¹⁶ Suhailah, Interview.

¹¹⁷ Emine Enise Yakar, "Women's Political Leadership: One Question and Two Divergent *Fatwās*," *Journal of Law and Religion* 37, no. 2 (May 2022): 332–62, <https://doi.org/10.1017/jlr.2022.15>.

This is in line with previous research findings, which show that cultural stereotypes shape gender roles and expectations. In Indonesia, the cultural background plays a key role in shaping women's perceptions of their capabilities and the double dilemma they experience. Conflicting expectations among qualified women emphasise the internalisation of these cultural expectations. Research suggests that cultural and religious narratives can strongly influence women's self-efficacy and career aspirations.¹¹⁸ In Malaysia, although there is a noticeable shift towards more inclusive leadership paradigms, the traditional view of men as leaders still persists.

The double bind faced by women in leadership positions in higher education is a major obstacle that is influenced by societal standards, cultural expectations, and institutional practices. To tackle this problem, a comprehensive strategy is needed that encompasses mentorship, leadership training, and institutional support. To promote gender equality in higher education, institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia can assist women in managing competing expectations and striving for higher leadership roles by following these techniques.

3.4 The Masculine Leadership Paradigm

Interviews with female leaders from higher education institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia uncovered a prevailing assumption that leadership is an innate characteristic associated with masculinity. This view is well ingrained in the cultural and institutional frameworks of both countries, shaping the definition and recognition of leadership attributes. The notion that leadership is inherently masculine and that femininity is incompatible with leadership responsibilities poses substantial obstacles for women who want to or currently occupy leadership positions.

The prevailing leadership paradigm is characterized by attributes commonly associated with masculinity, including aggressiveness, decisive decision-making, and emotional resilience. This paradigm frequently results in the marginalization of women who exhibit more collaborative or empathetic leadership approaches, which

¹¹⁸ Syed and Pio, "Veiled Diversity?"

are commonly linked to femininity¹¹⁹. Cultural norms and theological interpretations in Indonesia further strengthen the relationship between leadership and masculinity. Traditional cultures traditionally prioritize male authority and leadership, frequently assigning women to supporting or secondary positions. These cultural norms perpetuate a division of labour based on gender, in which men are perceived as innate leaders, while women are supposed to fulfil caregiving and supportive roles. Consequently, these cultural norms impose substantial obstacles for women to be regarded with credibility as leaders. Moreover, orthodox interpretations of Islamic literature in Indonesia frequently highlight the prominence of males in public and leadership positions, so supporting the perception that leadership is inherently masculine. The cultural and religious context in which female leaders operate necessitates a constant reaffirmation of their competence and authority in the face of doubt and opposition¹²⁰.

In Malaysia, while similar gendered perceptions of leadership exist, there is a growing recognition of the value of diverse leadership styles. Prof. Haslina from IIUM pointed out, "While there is still a belief that leadership is a masculine trait, there is also an increasing appreciation for the qualities women bring to leadership roles, such as empathy, collaboration, and ethical decision-making."¹²¹ In Indonesia, the association of leadership with masculinity is reinforced by cultural norms and religious interpretations. Traditional cultures, for example, place a high value on male authority and leadership, often relegating women to supporting or secondary roles. These cultural expectations reinforce a gendered division of labour, where men are seen as natural leaders, while women are expected to be caregivers and supporters. As a result, these cultural expectations create significant barriers for women to be taken seriously as leaders.

Addressing the gendered views of leadership needs a multi-faceted approach. Schools and universities must promote and value different leadership styles, recognizing that effective leadership can include traits beyond traditional masculinity. Leadership training courses must include education on gender biases

¹¹⁹ Jamaliah, Interview.

¹²⁰ Islam et al., "Gender and Leadership in Public Higher Education in South Asia."

¹²¹ Suhailah, Interview.

and promote the adoption of a broader spectrum of leadership attributes by individuals of all genders. To summarize, my research has revealed that the belief that leadership is essentially masculine and that femininity is incompatible with leadership positions poses substantial obstacles for women in higher education in Indonesia and Malaysia. This tendency is especially evident in Indonesia, where inflexible cultural and religious standards uphold traditional gender stereotypes¹²².

From an analytical standpoint, the continued existence of these prejudices has significant consequences for women who hold leadership positions in higher education. Women may experience pressure to conform to masculine characteristics in order to be perceived as credible, which can result in a sense of inauthenticity and exhaustion. On the other hand, acknowledging and questioning these preconceptions can lead to a leadership environment that is more inclusive and successful. I contend that by employing collaborative and empathic methodologies to showcase accomplished female leaders, we may effectively reframe traditional views of leadership and foster a more nuanced comprehension of various leadership styles. Moreover, my research indicates that colleges have a crucial role in advancing gender equality in leadership positions. Higher education institutions can foster more inclusive settings that prioritize work-life balance and promote gender equality by encouraging male leaders to become promoters for gender equality.

3.5 Changing Dynamics: Religious Interpretation and Women Leadership

My research focuses on examining the influence of religious interpretations, cultural norms, and societal attitudes in the Muslim countries of Indonesia and Malaysia on the experiences of women in leadership positions in higher education institutions. An unexpected finding from the interviews revealed that religious interpretation is no longer a major obstacle to women's leadership. It is important to note that these interviews were conducted with a limited group of female leaders who currently occupy important positions, so there is the potential for bias.

¹²² Zilhadia, Interview.

Contrary to the initial premise, the interview results show that conservative interpretations of Islam are no longer a major obstacle to women's leadership opportunities in higher education. These findings raise questions about the potential of changing and considering religious interpretations to promote gender equality and empower women¹²³.

It is important to recognize that the reinterpretation of Islamic texts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment can be seen as a way to challenge the male-dominated social systems and power hierarchies that have historically prevailed in Muslim culture. Within this framework, women's participation in leadership positions in higher education can be interpreted as a means of challenging systems of patriarchal authority and strengthening women's status in society. Additionally, research findings show that women's leadership opportunities in higher education are also influenced by other elements, including cultural, social, and political considerations. Therefore, it is critical to conduct in-depth and sophisticated analyses to understand the complex dynamics that influence women's experiences in leadership positions. The increasing appeal of religious interpretations that currently support women's leadership roles can be attributed to several elements, I discovered:

3.5.1 Global Movement for Gender Equality

Countries with a mostly Muslim population, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, have experienced significant effects from the global push for gender equality. Islam's fundamentals of justice and equality have been emphasised in more progressive readings of Islamic literature by academics and religious authorities because to this movement. These reinterpretations meet the demands of contemporary Muslim societies while still being compliant with international human rights standards. Different degrees of gender equality and women's rights are reflected in the constitutions of the nations with majorities of Muslims. While some nations are still developing, others have made more strides in integrating gender equality into their

¹²³ Haslina, Interview.

legal systems¹²⁴. I contend that the fight for gender parity in nations with a majority of Muslims is a complex, multilayered problem. On the other hand, gender equality and the questioning of traditional gender roles emerged from the progressive readings of Islamic teachings. However, there has been inconsistent application of laws and policies pertaining to gender equality, and conservative groups have frequently opposed these efforts.

I investigated the constitutional and legal frameworks of several nations with a majority of Muslims, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, as part of my research. It seems that even while these nations have made significant strides in codifying gender equality in their legal structures, there is still much to be done. For instance, despite the fact that gender equality is guaranteed by the Indonesian constitution, discrimination against women persists throughout the nation in domains like work and education. Similar to this, although women's rights are guaranteed by the constitution in Malaysia, women still face obstacles in areas like reproductive health and are underrepresented in politics. Goals that promote women's leadership are being made in addition to constitutional improvements. The goal of programmes such the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations, especially Goal 5, is to empower all women and girls and achieve gender equality. Both Malaysian and Indonesian national policies are influenced by this international framework, which promotes gender equality and women in leadership positions¹²⁵.

Policies that encourage women to take on leadership roles have been implemented with notable success in Malaysia and Indonesia. Institutions in Malaysia gain from organised initiatives like those run by the National Advisory Council for Women (NAICW). Through training and mentorship activities, these programmes assist female leaders and promote gender equality¹²⁶. On the other hand, INFID and Komnas Perempuan's women's leadership development

¹²⁴ Moamen Gouda and Niklas Potrafke, "Gender Equality in Muslim-Majority Countries," *Economic Systems* 40, no. 4 (December 2016): 683–98, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecosys.2016.04.002>.

¹²⁵ Budi Rachman, Mochamad Yani, and Aditiany, "Human Security In The Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDGs 5) And Its Implementation In Indonesia."

¹²⁶ Sanjuga Vas Dev et al., "The Federation of Malaysia," n.d.

programmes in Indonesia aim to strengthen women's leadership positions and provide a nurturing atmosphere for their personal and professional advancement¹²⁷.

3.5.2 Role of Education

Increased access to education for women has resulted in a more informed and empowered female population. Nina Nurmila emphasised that as more women pursue higher education, they are better equipped to advocate for a more just interpretation of Islamic teachings. Furthermore, she noted that the presence of educated women in leadership roles provides tangible examples of women's capabilities and success, thereby changing societal perceptions¹²⁸.

Women's rights organisations and gender advocacy groups in Indonesia and Malaysia have tirelessly promoted gender equality with religious scholars to support more progressive interpretations of Islamic texts. Such efforts have created a more supportive environment for women leaders by addressing and dismantling traditional barriers. A contemporary scholars such as Nasaruddin Umar¹²⁹, Nina Nurmila¹³⁰, Syafiq Hasyim¹³¹ and Zainah¹³² emphasise the role of contemporary Islamic thought in promoting gender justice, highlighting how the reinterpretation of Islamic texts has supported the advancement of women's rights in Muslim-majority societies.

Increased access to education for women has led to a more informed and empowered female populace. Prof. Nina Nurmila from UIII Indonesia emphasizes that as more women gain higher education, they are better equipped to advocate for more equitable interpretations of Islamic teachings. Furthermore, the presence of educated women in leadership roles provides tangible examples of female capability and success, thereby shifting societal perceptions¹³³. While religious interpretations no longer significantly hinder women's leadership who at high

¹²⁷ "Gender Equality Mainstreaming Gender across All Areas."

¹²⁸ Nina Nurmila, Interview.

¹²⁹ Amirudin Amirudin et al., "Re-Interpretation of Women's Position in Religious Texts: A Gender Humanistic Study," *AMCA Journal of Religion and Society* 2, no. 1 (April 5, 2022): 26–30,

<https://doi.org/10.51773/ajrs.v2i1.152>.

¹³⁰ Nurmila, "Proposing Feminist Interpretation of The Qur'an and Affirmative Policy to Support Women Leadership In Indonesian State Islamic Higher Education."

¹³¹ Hasyim, *Understanding Women in Islam*.

¹³² Muhammad Rikza Muqtada, "FEMINIST INTERPRETATIONS OF MISOGYNISTIC QUR'AN AND HADITH: STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING FEMINISM IN INDONESIA AND MALAYSIA" 23, no. 1 (2024).

¹³³ Nina Nurmila, Interview.

position, other studies found that the misinterpretation of religious texts still limited women's empowerment in Indonesian¹³⁴ and Malaysian Muslim discourse¹³⁵.

The selective interpretation of specific verses that emphasize women's subordination and ignore those that promote gender equality has contributed to the subordination of women. For example, Surah An-Nisa, Verse 34, which holds that men are the leaders of women, has been interpreted to justify male dominance.¹³⁶ So It is essential to recognize the historical roots of these inequalities and promote a more inclusive and egalitarian understanding of gender roles in Islam through reinterpretation and rational analysis of the texts. By identifying and challenging the misrepresentation of verses that support gender equality can help to promote a more inclusive and egalitarian understanding of gender roles in Islam.

¹³⁴ Erwati Aziz, Irwan Abdullah, and Zaenuddin H Prasojo, "Why Are Women Subordinated? The Misrepresentation of the Qur'an in Indonesian Discourse and Practice" 21, no. 6 (2020).

¹³⁵ Muqtada, "FEMINIST INTERPRETATIONS OF MISOGYNISTIC QUR'AN AND HADITH: STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING FEMINISM IN INDONESIA AND MALAYSIA."

¹³⁶ Amirudin et al., "Re-Interpretation of Women's Position in Religious Texts."

CHAPTER IV
RIISING TO THE TOP: STRATEGIES OF FEMALE ACADEMIC
LEADERS

The purpose of this study is to explore the perspectives of female leaders, which here I focus on female deans, regarding their experiences from the challenges they face to how they manage it all so that they become cool deans. Interviews with the female deans yielded five themes that highlighted their perspectives on their journeys to overcome the challenges they faced. They assessed the importance of family for female leaders and the role of those closest to them. Other findings also told the story of their partners who were very supportive in any form to keep them going in their careers. Almost all female deans said they only wanted to be dean if they were offered to become rector because being a mother, wife, professor and dean was already very tiring. In addition, and as a woman, of course competing with men is not an easy thing because everywhere men will more easily get promoted. So if indeed a woman wants to continue to be promoted, then she must work many times harder and more diligently.

There have been several previous studies that have said about the difficulty of being a woman who must have a professional role and also a role as a housewife. Such as studies conducted by Turnbull and Howe 2016¹³⁷, also Susan and Karen 2020¹³⁸, they argued that women have more challenges than men in leadership. however in this discussion, I will write their interesting stories to get through their problems.

Here are some key points I highlighted about how they overcame the challenges from my interviews: (a) Balancing career and household duties can be done by women with important support from close people.(b) Policies for promotion within

¹³⁷ Liza Howe-Walsh and Sarah Turnbull, "Barriers to Women Leaders in Academia: Tales from Science and Technology," *Studies in Higher Education* 41, no. 3 (March 3, 2016): 415–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2014.929102>.

¹³⁸ Susan R Madsen and Karen A Longman, "Women's Leadership in Higher Education: Status, Barriers, and Motivators," n.d.

institutions usually favour men.(c) Women should try harder to achieve leadership positions.I will explain some of the above points in more detail here.

4.1 Balancing Career and household duties

Douglas and Paul argued about the balance between career and work, for organizations, the interaction between work and family responsibilities impacts both individual and organizational performance. This includes the extent of flexibility in work arrangements and organizational initiatives aimed at helping employees effectively balance personal and professional demands.¹³⁹ The increased involvement of women in the global workforce has been a significant economic development in modern society. With more women joining the workforce, there have been notable shifts in family dynamics, particularly in the roles women play within both nuclear and extended family structures. Women now not only manage household duties but also contribute financially as breadwinners to support their families. Despite these changes, there seems to be a lack of advocacy for gender-inclusive policies and legislation, especially in workplaces.¹⁴⁰

This situation persists due to entrenched gender stereotypes and cultural norms, particularly prevalent in certain regions like Africa. Achieving a balance between work, family, and personal life remains a formidable challenge for many career women today. Traditionally, balancing work and non-work responsibilities involved dividing time equally between these roles, but this is often impractical for career-oriented women. The issue remains critical as societal expectations still lean towards men focusing primarily on career ambitions while women are expected to prioritize family responsibilities.¹⁴¹ Just a few decades ago, it was commonly accepted that women, once married, would primarily focus on raising children and managing the household. Today, the roles of women in society have evolved

¹³⁹ Douglas T. Hall, "Promoting Work/Family Balance: An Organization-Change Approach," *Organizational Dynamics* 18, no. 3 (December 1990): 5–18, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616\(90\)90060-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/0090-2616(90)90060-3).

¹⁴⁰ Paul Osterman, "Work/Family Programs and the Employment Relationship," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (December 1995): 681, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2393758>.

¹⁴¹ Wolfgang Mayrhofer et al., "The Influence of Family Responsibilities, Career Fields and Gender on Career Success: An Empirical Study," ed. Noreen Heraty, *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 23, no. 3 (March 28, 2008): 292–323, <https://doi.org/10.1108/02683940810861392>.

significantly. Jamaliah argues that although women take on leadership roles in the public sphere, they still fulfil their traditional roles as mothers and wives. Women are still responsible for childcare, preparing meals, organising school supplies, picking up and dropping off children, and most importantly, educating them during their growing years.¹⁴²

Zilhadia mentioned that the maternal instinct is undeniable. She recounts an incident when she had to work abroad, but because her son suddenly fell ill, she decided to return home immediately out of concern. She ended up buying a return ticket without hesitation, even though it meant losing her other ticket.¹⁴³ From their statements, I concluded that women are indeed very attached to their families, especially their husbands and children, not to mention the domestic responsibilities they consider as obligations. However, when I asked why they were able to persevere despite the heavy burden of domestic work, especially when they were also professors and held high administrative positions at the university, most respondents answered that they had a strong support system, namely their husbands and families.

Haslina's experience highlights the important role of partner support in women's educational and career advancement. Her husband's encouragement and support were instrumental in enabling Haslina to continue her higher education and pursue her career aspirations. This case illustrates how supportive partnerships can positively impact women's personal and professional development, and emphasises the importance of family support in achieving gender equality in education and the workforce. Such dynamics are critical to creating an enabling environment for women's empowerment and advancement.¹⁴⁴

Zilhadia's experience highlights the crucial role of spousal support in managing professional and family responsibilities. Her husband's understanding and willingness to take over childcare duties in the evenings allowed her to focus on work, even late at night. This scenario exemplifies how supportive marital

¹⁴² Jamaliah, Interview.

¹⁴³ Zilhadia, Interview.

¹⁴⁴ Haslina, Interview.

dynamics can reduce the double burden experienced by working mothers, allowing them to fulfil professional commitments while managing family responsibilities. This kind of supportive framework is crucial in promoting gender equality and empowering women to achieve their career goals.¹⁴⁵

An interesting fact that emerged was that all the female deans I interviewed stated that they had spouses who were very supportive, understanding and helpful in every way. Nina Nurmila pointed out that one of the factors that played an important role in her current achievements was the support of her husband. She stated that it would be very difficult for her, and certainly for other women too, if they had husbands who were not supportive of their careers¹⁴⁶.

Ultimately, the support of their wives and families is a crucial determinant of the success of female deans in attaining these posts. Research indicates that familial responsibilities continue to be a significant hindrance for women aspiring to advance their professional pursuits. Despite the growing participation of males in childcare and home tasks, women continue to bear the primary burden of domestic responsibilities. In her book "Through the Labyrinth: The Truth About How Women Become Leaders," Eagly (2007) asserts that despite men's increased involvement in household chores, women continue to face irregular working patterns, such as taking extended time off or working part-time, as a result of pregnancy or childcare responsibilities¹⁴⁷. When they were questioned about their preference towards hiring a nanny or babysitter, the majority of respondents indicated a preference for using daycare or coordinating childcare responsibilities with their spouse. This approach reflects a deliberate choice to maintain greater involvement in the care of their children while balancing professional and family obligations. The decision underscores the importance of shared household responsibilities and highlights the dynamics that develop in two-career households. This preference for daycare or shared childcare duties is in line with contemporary trends in work-life integration and the pursuit of gender equality in both professional and domestic realms.

¹⁴⁵ Zilhada, Interview; Nina Nurmila, Interview.

¹⁴⁶ Nina Nurmila, Interview.

¹⁴⁷ Eagly, Alice H and Linda L. Carli, "Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership." Harvard Business Review 85."

Upon analyzing the narratives of the individuals, it became evident that familial support plays a crucial role in facilitating career advancement, particularly in attaining esteemed positions such as professorships and administrative roles. The participants themselves acknowledged that the absence of such support would render it exceedingly challenging to achieve success in their respective fields. This observation underscores the significance of familial backing, as it can be a decisive factor in determining one's ability to ascend to leadership positions.

Conversely, numerous individuals who aspire to occupy prominent roles within academic institutions are often hindered by limited support structures, whether familial or economic in nature, thereby precluding them from realizing their ambitions.¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, extant research suggests that work-family conflicts can have deleterious effects on individuals' mental and physical well-being, as well as their overall job and life satisfaction. This, in turn, can have negative consequences for organizations, including decreased productivity and elevated turnover rates. Therefore, it is essential to recognize the importance of familial support in mitigating work-family conflicts and promoting career advancement, particularly in the context of academic institutions.¹⁴⁹

4.2 Policies for promotion within institutions usually favour men

Gender equality aims to achieve fairness between men and women in enjoying fundamental rights and receiving equal benefits in welfare and development.¹⁵⁰ The majority of evidence indicates that women are at a disadvantage, as they are less likely to be promoted compared to equally qualified male counterparts.¹⁵¹ Despite the many ways in which gender equality has been promoted, and the many changes that have improved for women, many are still left behind. So why does the gender

¹⁴⁸ Elaine D. Pulakos et al., "Examination of Race and Sex Effects on Performance Ratings," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 74, no. 5 (October 1989): 770–80, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.74.5.770>.

¹⁴⁹ Mayrhofer et al., "The Influence of Family Responsibilities, Career Fields and Gender on Career Success."

¹⁵⁰ Lori Kenschaft, Roger Clark, and Desiree Ciambro, *Gender Inequality in Our Changing World*, 0 ed. (Routledge, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315848648>.

¹⁵¹ Chow, Irene Hau Siu and Ronald B. Crawford., "Gender, Ethnic Diversity and Career Advancement in the Workplace: The Social Identity Perspective," *S.A.M. Advanced Management Journal*, 69, 2024, 22-39.

gap still continue to be discussed globally and locally, problems in the academic sector that are already clichéd in Bahas are still needed to be discussed because the gap is still wide. The assumption that these disparities reflect women's meritocratic shortcomings has been questioned.¹⁵²

Gender inequality in professional development is a widespread problem that has attracted a lot of attention lately. Even though they make up a significant percentage of the workforce, women are still underrepresented in senior leadership roles, especially in academia. It is important to look into the startling fact that there aren't many women in prestigious academic positions like full professorships and high-level administrative jobs like rectors. The data clearly indicates that men occupy a dominant majority of these roles, and women are clearly underrepresented in these the top positions. This begs basic concerns about what exactly prevents women from advancing in their careers and what makes men more likely to be promoted.

Whereas the higher the level of education of an individual, the higher his participation in the world of work, but in fact the data shows different results, although the number of diploma holders in urban areas is superior to women, the number of male participation in the world of work is far superior to female participation.¹⁵³

Table 4.1
Number of proffesor at UIN Jakarta

Position	Men	Women
Guru Besar 1050	43	4
Guru Besar 850	61	20
Lektor Kepala 700	41	18
Lektor Kepala 550	40	14
Lektor Kepala 400	66	47

¹⁵² Mathias W. Nielsen, "Limits to Meritocracy? Gender in Academic Recruitment and Promotion Processes," *Science and Public Policy* 43, no. 3 (June 2016): 386–99, <https://doi.org/10.1093/scipol/scv052>.

¹⁵³ Nurmila, "Proposing Feminist Intepretation of The Qur'an and Affirmative Policy to Suport Women Leadership In Indonesian State Islamic Higher Education."

Source : OKP data 2023

The data clearly shows that the number of female professors is much lower than their male counterparts across all ranks at UIN Jakarta. This indicates a significant gender disparity in higher academic. In fact, the higher the level of education of an individual, the higher his participation in the world of work, but in fact the data shows different results, although the number of diploma holders in urban areas is superior to women, the number of male participation in the world of work is far superior to female participation.¹⁵⁴

Table 4.2
Number of bachelor graduated in Indonesia

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Men	8.04	8.52	9	9.11	9.28
Women	8.27	8.99	9.53	9.88	10.06

Source : BPS 2021 (*Proporsi Penduduk Indonesia yang Memiliki Ijazah Perguruan Tinggi Menurut Jenis Kelamin*)

The data shows a clear and consistent trend of women surpassing men in obtaining higher education degrees in Indonesia from 2017 to 2021. This trend highlights significant progress in gender equality in education. Women's participation in the selection process for these roles remains lower than that of men, indicating the presence of systemic barriers. Although gender-neutral policies theoretically promote fairness, they may not fully address the underlying inequalities. Unintentional discrimination can arise from policies that inadvertently limit women's access to leadership positions. Structural barriers, such as the "glass ceiling," further hinder women from advancing to higher leadership roles despite their qualifications and aspirations.

There is an argument that policies ought to not just concentrate on improving women's involvement, but also on guaranteeing that individuals in leadership roles possess the attributes of an effective leader. Some individuals view the regulation mandating that political parties in Indonesia must include a minimum of 30 percent

¹⁵⁴ Im Halimatusa'diyah, *Orasi Ilmiah Pengukuhan Guru Bgesar*, 2023.

female candidates in the House of Representatives to be superfluous. They contend that the task of locating a sufficient number of politically inclined women to fulfil this quota is arduous, and they maintain that prioritizing the presence of competent leaders is more crucial than just augmenting the quantity of women in positions of authority.

Despite various efforts to promote gender equality and significant improvements for women, many still lag behind. The gender gap remains a persistent issue both globally and locally, particularly in the academic sector where the disparity is still wide. Research shows that the number of female students and graduates often exceeds that of males. However, when it comes to entering the workforce or administration, women are significantly underrepresented compared to men.

Data indicates that women often outperform men academically. In many universities, women achieve higher grades than men. Additionally, the number of female lecturers is substantial, sometimes even surpassing that of male lecturers. Despite this, very few women are selected as rectors or professors. This stark contrast is especially evident when examining data on professors and rectors, positions considered the pinnacle of one's career in both administrative and functional aspects. Several sources attribute this disparity to women's involvement in domestic activities. Other sources note that male professors often consistently serve on senates, which are responsible for promotions, and they tend to promote other men. In Malaysia, for instance, deans are selected based on voting by faculty members, where the selection is based on the candidates' quality. This system ensures that those with the best qualifications are chosen.

Another significant issue is the low representation of women in leadership positions within higher education institutions. After completing higher education or achieving academic success, women face substantial challenges in advancing their careers both within and outside academia¹⁵⁵. A March 2022 British Council report

¹⁵⁵ Melnychenko, O., "GENDER INEQUALITY OF WOMEN IN EDUCATION OR WHY WOMEN ARE UNDERREPRESENTED IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS? | Continuing Professional Education: Theory and Practice."

on Gender Equality in Higher Education: Maximising Impacts reveals that men's academic careers progress smoothly at all stages. In contrast, women's careers are only smooth or better at the early stages. As they advance to higher positions, the number of women significantly decreases compared to men.

The lack of representation of women in higher academic positions in Indonesia is a complex problem rooted in systemic bias, masculine institutional structures, and a lack of female role models. Although women are often academically accomplished and constitute a significant portion of the academic workforce, their advancement to senior positions is hindered by various barriers. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive reforms that promote gender equality, raise awareness about gender bias, and provide support for female academics. By doing so, we can create a more inclusive and equitable academic environment that benefits all members of the academic community.

Several deans noted that women often face significant challenges in balancing their academic and domestic responsibilities, due to a complex range of factors. The interaction between economic constraints and the availability of support systems can compound these difficulties. As Nina noted, the selection of a supportive partner can be an important determinant in a woman's ability to balance her professional and domestic obligations. This finding is consistent with existing literature, which indicates that the burden of household responsibilities can disproportionately affect women's career advancement¹⁵⁶. The absence of a supportive partner or inadequate social support networks may further exacerbate these challenges, limiting women's opportunities for professional growth and development.

4.3 Women should try harder to achieve leadership positions

Previous studies from Gorman and Julie¹⁵⁷, on a non-academic sample of U.S. workers revealed that women perceive they need to exert more effort at work

¹⁵⁶ Osterman, "Work/Family Programs and the Employment Relationship."

¹⁵⁷ Elizabeth H. Gorman and Julie A. Kmec, "We (Have to) Try Harder: Gender and Required Work Effort in Britain and the United States," *Gender & Society* 21, no. 6 (December 2007): 828–56, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243207309900>.

compared to men, even when accounting for individual and job-related factors. If women in academia, especially in STEM fields, feel they must work harder than their colleagues, regardless of their qualifications or personal responsibilities, they are likely to experience more stress and job dissatisfaction. This suggests that systemic issues and biases create an unequal work environment, making it harder for women to advance in their careers.

After conducting in-depth interviews with the deans, I observed a common thread of having very high morale and discipline. The fact that they have achieved the highly prestigious position of dean is a testament to their dedication and perseverance. The professors who hold high positions have demonstrated an exceptional work ethic, consistently putting in extra effort to achieve their goals.

Notably, several deans, including Nina Nurmila¹⁵⁸, Zilhadia¹⁵⁹, Suhailah¹⁶⁰, and Haslina¹⁶¹, attribute their success to their ability to effectively manage time and achieve targets. They credited discipline and time management skills as key factors in their achievements. Then some deans also stated that most women find it very difficult because it is difficult to balance between activities on campus and also domestic activities, perhaps due to various factors. Economy and support system are also the causes. Nina added that the key to becoming a woman who can balance between her career and household is to choose a supportive partner.¹⁶² If not, it will be difficult to achieve it. Another factor that I observed from various interviewees' responses is that the portrait of leadership is very identical to masculine, so being a woman sometimes has to be smart to adjust, where she can be gentle and where she can be assertive, some others also shared that sometimes negative comments can attack women when they are too gentle or too assertive. Some of these comments such as "women are fierce, or leaders are really soft, or really ambitious, so what do women want to be". I argue that being brave, speaking up, conveying ideas, being assertive is an amazing thing that they have

¹⁵⁸ Nina Nurmila, Interview.

¹⁵⁹ Zilhadia, Interview.

¹⁶⁰ Suhailah, Interview.

¹⁶¹ Haslina, Interview.

¹⁶² Nina Nurmila, Interview.

proven that women are capable of. They stepped out of their comfort zone and proved that ideas are needed and listened to. Because being a woman in a patriarchal culture, in previous research, women always have to obey their husbands, it is even very difficult for her to get her ideas and opinions across, that the glory of a woman is to always obey, not to express her opinion. In a patriarchal culture, women are not part of the decision-making process, so to become a leader, she has to break down long-held beliefs. But they have proved that women are capable, even if they have to work much harder than men to become part of the decision making.

4.4 Mentorship and Support Systems

The study highlights the importance of informal mentorship relationships in the career development of women leaders. The participants in the study reported having two or more significant mentors who provided support and guidance throughout their careers. For instance the dean at IIUM Haslina mentioned “ before I became in this position, I used to joined some mentorship program or a leadership training, and of course I have my mentors”¹⁶³

Mentorship and support systems are crucial in overcoming barriers that hinder women from ascending to and succeeding in leadership roles within higher education institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia. These systems provide guidance, encouragement, and professional development opportunities, essential for women navigating the male-dominated structures of academia. Mentorship programs significantly enhance leadership skills and self-confidence among women in academia. Study by Ahmad, Yasin, and Ghazali highlight that mentorship not only improves leadership capabilities but also fosters a sense of belonging and support among female academics in Malaysia.¹⁶⁴ Similarly, Wardatun, Haeri, and Nurjanah emphasize that mentorship is almost absent in many Indonesian institutions,

¹⁶³ Haslina, Interview.

¹⁶⁴ Mohammad Azuwadi Mohd Yasin, Yarina Ahmad, and Marni Ghazali, “WOMEN IN POWER AND DECISION MAKING: THEIR PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT IN ENHANCING THE UNIVERSITY’S GOOD GOVERNANCE” 20 (2024).

underscoring the need for structured mentoring systems to support women leaders.¹⁶⁵

For mentorship programs to be effective, they must be well-structured and consistently supported by the institution. According to a study Ahmad et al., successful mentorship in Malaysian co-operatives demonstrates the positive impact of connecting women with experienced mentors. The study suggests that such programs not only provide practical guidance but also help in building a supportive network, which is crucial for overcoming the challenges faced by women in leadership roles.¹⁶⁶The impact of mentorship programs is evident in several case studies. For instance, the implementation of a structured mentorship program in Indonesian universities has shown significant benefits. Haslina Ibrahim shared, "Mentorship has been instrumental in my career development, providing me with the guidance and confidence needed to navigate the challenges of leadership."¹⁶⁷ Prof. Nina Nurmila from UII Indonesia also emphasized the importance of having a mentor, stating that Having a mentor who comprehends the distinct problems encountered by women in academia is extremely useful in the pursuit of leadership within the academic realm. This enables women to cultivate their abilities and self-assurance, and acquire the necessary assistance to surmount the challenges they encounter¹⁶⁸.

The study conducted by Makrufi, A'isah, and Alam examines the advantages of project-based mentorship programs in higher education institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia. These programs have been found to improve both learning outcomes and the ability of female leaders to manage their socio-emotional well-being. This method has proven to be successful in equipping women with practical experience and ongoing assistance, enabling them to assume leadership

¹⁶⁵ Atun Wardatun, Shahla Haeri, and Siti Nurjanah, "FEMALE LEADERS CREATING STEPPING LADDERS: Exercising Strategic Agency in Religiously Affiliated Universities of Indonesia and the USA," *Al-Ahwal: Jurnal Hukum Keluarga Islam* 16, no. 2 (December 30, 2023): 232, <https://doi.org/10.14421/ahwal.2023.16203>.

¹⁶⁶ Yasin, Ahmad, and Ghazali, "WOMEN IN POWER AND DECISION MAKING: THEIR PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT IN ENHANCING THE UNIVERSITY'S GOOD GOVERNANCE."

¹⁶⁷ Haslina, Interview.

¹⁶⁸ Nina Nurmila, Interview.

positions Mentorship and support systems play a crucial role in encouraging women to surmount the obstacles to leadership in higher education. Mentorship and support systems are crucial in empowering women to overcome the barriers to leadership in higher education. By implementing structured and sustained mentorship programs, institutions can provide the necessary support and guidance to help women leaders thrive. This, in turn, contributes to a more inclusive and effective leadership landscape in academia.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This study provides an analysis of women's leadership in higher education in Muslim societies in Indonesia and Malaysia, exploring the experiences of women leaders related to patriarchal culture and the influence of religious interpretations. This research reveals several important insights regarding the development of gender roles and the challenges women face in occupying leadership positions in both countries.

One of the most significant findings from this research is the reduction in patriarchal stigma related to women's leadership in higher education. In both Indonesia and Malaysia, there has been a gradual but significant shift towards greater acceptance of women in leadership roles, reflecting broader societal changes and more progressive attitudes towards gender inclusivity. This positive development is especially visible in higher education, where institutions are beginning to recognize the importance of women's contributions to academic leadership. However, despite progress in reducing the stigma of patriarchy, these conclusions also highlight that women in leadership roles may still feel unprepared, especially due to the challenges of balancing career and household responsibilities. In many cases, female leaders are expected to excel professionally and also fulfil traditional roles within the family, such as caregiving and managing household tasks. These dual expectations can create significant pressure, giving rise to women feeling unprepared to lead.

The results of my interviews showed that women leaders continue to face great challenges, especially in balancing their career needs with traditional household responsibilities. The persistence of these challenges shows that although society's stigma against women may be changing, structural and cultural barriers remain entrenched.

The role of religion, particularly Islam, in shaping gender norms and leadership opportunities is another important aspect of this research. The researchers' findings show that they argue that Islam, in essence, advocates justice and gender equality. The real problem lies in the cultural interpretation of Islamic texts, which have historically been influenced by patriarchal norms. This interpretation often reinforces patriarchal gender roles thereby limiting women's leadership opportunities. These findings demonstrate the need to reinterpret Islamic teachings in a way that is aligned with contemporary understandings of gender equality, particularly in the context of educational leadership. I believe that a review of Islamic teachings, in line with contemporary understandings of gender equality, is essential, especially in the field of educational leadership.

Comparative analysis between Malaysia and Indonesia shows different approaches to promoting gender equality in higher education. In Malaysia, the approach adopted is largely top-down, driven by government policies influenced by Islamic principles and the country's Malay identity. This intended strategy has contributed to some progress but also maintained alignment with traditional values that could hinder gender equality. In contrast, Indonesia has witnessed the emergence of a bottom-up movement in which activists and grassroots organizations play an

important role in advocating for women's leadership. These movements play an important role in challenging existing norms and encouraging systemic change in society. The differences between these two approaches highlight the diversity of strategies used in Muslim societies to address gender inequality and underscore the importance of both top-down and bottom-up efforts in creating a more inclusive environment for women leaders.

Leadership in higher education in Indonesia and Malaysia. Although research results show significant progress in reducing gender-based stigma, women leaders continue to face structural and cultural challenges that hinder their full participation in leadership academies. These findings highlight the need for a different understanding of the interplay between religion, culture, and gender in shaping leadership opportunities. Moving forward, it is critical to continue advocating for policies and actions that support women in leadership roles, ensuring that progress made in gender equality can be maintained and expanded in both countries.

According to the leaders of both countries, understanding religion, customs, culture and societal attitudes do not always play a big role in determining the success of women in leadership. However, if women can overcome these challenges effectively with determination and receive support from the government, family and community, the goal of achieving SDGS goal 5 which focuses on women's leadership can be achieved. that efforts to achieve gender equality in leadership positions in higher education are still ongoing. The experiences of women leaders in Indonesia and Malaysia offer perspective and teaching. Their ability to bounce back and their tactics for overcoming obstacles serve as a guide to creating an

equitable and inclusive academic environment. This study highlights the importance of implementing broad legislative changes, encouraging program development leadership, driving cultural transformation, and building strong network support.

By continuing to strive to overcome this specific problem, I believe that SDGS 5 researchers in Indonesia and Malaysia will likely be achieved. Ultimately, these women's stories stand as a testament to their unwavering determination and capacity to effect profound change. Their narratives are a source of motivation and encouragement, inspiring other women that progress is possible and that efforts to achieve gender equality are worthwhile endeavors.

In conclusion, this research highlights the ongoing evolution of women's leadership in higher education in Indonesia and Malaysia. Despite significant progress in reducing gender-based stigma, women leaders continue to face structural and cultural challenges that hinder their full participation in leadership academies. The research findings highlight the need for a different understanding of the interplay between religion, culture, and gender in shaping leadership opportunities. Going forward, it is important to continue to advocate for policies and actions that support women in leadership roles, researchers argue that the progress made in gender equality can be maintained and developed in both countries.

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