



Women in Leadership: Exploring Potential and Challenges in the Islamic Context

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Abstract: *Women's leadership role has increasingly garnered attention in various global contexts. More Muslim women are actively seeking leadership roles across diverse fields. However, they face challenges related to traditional perceptions and gender stereotypes. This research aims to delve deeper into factors such as religious knowledge, emotional intelligence, and experiences of Muslim women in navigating challenges within the context of Islamic leadership. The study employs a mixed-methods approach. Data collection involves interviews and surveys. Qualitative data from interviews are analyzed using thematic text analysis, while quantitative data from surveys are processed using statistical software and descriptive statistical analysis. The research reveals several significant findings concerning the potential, challenges, and aspirations of Muslim women in leadership. Out of 127 respondents, 63% expressed strong confidence in the leadership qualities of Muslim women. Religious knowledge, emotional intelligence, and multitasking abilities are identified as primary strengths supporting them in leadership roles. However, 47% of respondents perceive barriers stemming from traditional interpretations of religious teachings that limit women's roles. Additionally, 56% of respondents express positive hopes regarding the development of women's roles in Islamic leadership in the future. These findings highlight the substantial potential of Muslim women in leadership while also indicating challenges that need to be addressed to maximize their roles.*

Keywords: *Islam, Leadership, Woman*

Abstrak: Peran perempuan dalam kepemimpinan telah menjadi sorotan yang semakin tajam dalam berbagai konteks global. Semakin banyak perempuan Muslim yang mencari peran aktif dalam kepemimpinan di berbagai bidang. Namun, terdapat tantangan-tantangan yang berkaitan dengan persepsi tradisional dan stereotip gender yang menjadi hambatan. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk menyelidiki secara lebih mendalam faktor-faktor seperti pengetahuan agama, kecerdasan emosional, dan pengalaman perempuan Muslim dalam menghadapi tantangan dalam konteks kepemimpinan Islam. Penelitian ini menerapkan pendekatan campuran. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui wawancara dan survey. Data kualitatif dari wawancara dianalisis dengan menggunakan pendekatan analisis teks tematik. Sedangkan data kuantitatif dari survei diolah menggunakan perangkat lunak statistik dan analisis statistik deskriptif. Penelitian ini mengungkap beberapa temuan penting terkait potensi, tantangan, dan harapan perempuan Muslim dalam kepemimpinan. Dari 127 responden, 63% menyatakan keyakinan tinggi akan kualitas kepemimpinan perempuan Muslim. Pengetahuan agama, kecerdasan emosional, dan kemampuan multitasking diidentifikasi sebagai kekuatan utama yang mendukung mereka dalam peran kepemimpinan. Namun, 47% responden merasakan adanya hambatan yang bersumber dari interpretasi tradisional terhadap ajaran agama yang membatasi peran perempuan. Selain itu, 56% responden menyampaikan harapan positif terkait perkembangan peran perempuan dalam kepemimpinan Islam di masa depan. Temuan ini menyoroti potensi besar perempuan Muslim dalam kepemimpinan sekaligus menunjukkan adanya tantangan yang perlu diatasi untuk memaksimalkan peran mereka.

Kata Kunci: Islam, Kepemimpinan, Perempuan



Introduction

Women's roles in leadership have increasingly come under sharp focus across various global contexts. Internationally, there is a growing push to expand opportunities for women to assume more significant leadership roles, aiming for greater gender equality and promoting inclusive development (Mukherjee, 2015). According to UN Women, 26 countries have 28 women serving as Heads of State and Government, with 22.8% of women representing cabinet members heading ministries (*Facts and Figures*, 2023). In the business realm, a report from the McKinsey Global Institute indicates that women occupy only about 15% of C-level executive positions in Fortune 500 companies (Marshall, 2021).

Meanwhile, within the context of Islam, despite historical records of women's leadership, such as Khadijah, the wife of Prophet Muhammad, and Aisha, a prominent scholar, significant barriers still exist. In Islam, the world's second-largest religion by followers, the role of women in leadership remains a subject of deep debate (Shah, 2020).

Research by Koburtay and Abuhussein (2023) notes that several predominantly Muslim countries still have laws or policies hindering women from attaining leadership positions, such as bans on the presidency or conditions restricting women's political participation. Although tradition and religious interpretations have shaped perceptions and practices concerning women in Muslim societies, social, cultural, and economic changes have allowed Muslim women to participate more prominently in leadership roles (Haq, 2013). More Muslim women are actively seeking leadership roles in various fields, including politics, business, education, and civil society (Abadi et al., 2022). However, despite significant progress, challenges related to traditional perceptions, gender stereotypes, and cultural and structural limitations continue to hinder Muslim women from fully realizing their leadership potential (Bako & Syed, 2018).

Previous studies have outlined various challenges and opportunities Muslim women face in achieving leadership positions within the Islamic context. For example, Thompson's (2015) research underscores the importance of women's leadership in Arab countries, highlighting social constraints and policies that restrict women's mobility in the public sphere as significant barriers. Additionally, Fathimatuz Zuhro's study (2021) emphasizes the role of Muslim women in leadership in Indonesia, noting challenges related to gender stereotypes and the lack of supportive gender equality policies. Abalkhail's research (2017) indicates that religious education is crucial in preparing Muslim women for leadership roles, though it does not delve into more specific individual factors influencing women's participation in leadership.

Table 1
Previous Research

Author	Research Focus	Conclusion	Limitation
Thompson	Role of women in leadership in Arab countries	Social constraints and policies limit women's mobility in the public sphere.	Does not delve into individual factors affecting women's participation in leadership
Fathimatuz Zuhro	Role of Muslim women in leadership in Indonesia	Challenges include gender stereotypes and a lack of policies supporting gender equality.	Does not explore other factors affecting women's ability to achieve leadership positions
Abalkhail	Importance of religious education in preparing Muslim women for leadership	Religious education provides a strong foundation for Muslim women's leadership roles	Does not delve into more specific individual factors affecting women's participation in leadership

This study aims to fill this gap by investigating more deeply factors such as religious knowledge, emotional intelligence, and the experiences of Muslim women in facing challenges

within the context of Islamic leadership. Thus, this research is expected to provide a new contribution to understanding the potential and barriers of Muslim women in Islamic leadership and offer deeper insights into policies and practices that support women's participation in leadership domains.

Therefore, studies on the potential, challenges, and aspirations of Muslim women in the context of Islamic leadership are crucial for understanding the dynamics involved and for providing a foundation for more effective actions to support women's participation in leadership.

Method

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative methods (Vebrianto et al., 2020). This approach was chosen to gain a holistic and in-depth understanding of the potential and challenges faced by Muslim women in leadership positions. Data collection involves interviews and surveys. In-depth interviews are conducted with women in leadership positions across various sectors such as education, business, and community organizations. The interviews focus on their experiences in reaching leadership positions, barriers, and perceptions of gender roles within Islam. Surveys are conducted to gather quantitative data on women's participation in leadership, educational levels, salaries, and societal perceptions.

3.1 Research Subjects

The research subjects are women holding leadership positions in various sectors within the Muslim community. Inclusion criteria involve women with significant leadership experience representing diverse backgrounds, including educational levels, sectors of employment, and career stages. Selecting women in leadership positions within the Islamic context aligns to investigate how religious teachings influence women's roles and experiences in leadership.

3.2 Data Analysis

Qualitative data from interviews are analyzed using thematic text analysis (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Key themes, patterns, and variations in women's experiences in leadership are identified and described. Meanwhile, quantitative data from surveys are processed using statistical software. Descriptive statistical analysis is used to identify trends, comparisons, and relationships among variables such as education levels, salaries, and participation in leadership.

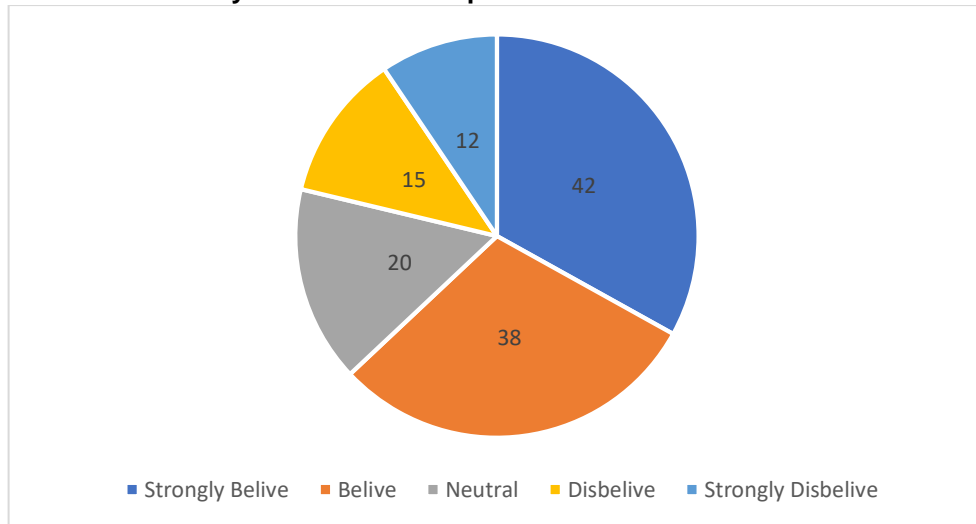
Qualitative and quantitative findings are integrated to provide a comprehensive picture of women's potential and challenges in leadership within the Islamic context. Qualitative findings may support or clarify patterns identified quantitatively and vice versa. By combining qualitative and quantitative methods, this research aims to significantly contribute to understanding women's roles in leadership, relating them to Islamic values, and identifying steps towards better gender equality in this context.

Results and Discussion

4.1 Potential of Muslim Women in Leadership

In this study, the focus on the potential of Muslim women in leadership yielded exciting findings. Data from 127 respondents indicated that Muslim women are identified as having significant potential to play leadership roles, with a majority of respondents expressing confidence in the leadership qualities of this group.

Figure 1
Survey on the Leadership Potential of Muslim Women



The data above results from a survey on the extent to which respondents believe in the potential of Muslim women in leadership. The survey results show that out of 127 respondents, 33% expressed strong confidence in the leadership potential of Muslim women, 30% expressed confidence, 16% were neutral, 12% expressed a lack of confidence, and 9% expressed a strong lack of confidence. Therefore, 63% of respondents expressed confidence in the significant leadership qualities of Muslim women, indicating optimism regarding their potential contributions across various sectors.

Findings from this study provide a positive outlook on perceptions of the leadership potential of Muslim women. Most of the 127 respondents expressed high confidence in the substantial potential of Muslim women in leadership roles. This reflects the broad acceptance of Muslim women as leaders with significant qualities. Further analysis revealed that respondents identified leadership qualities, including integrity, communication skills, and wisdom in decision-making. These qualities align with findings in the literature indicating that influential leaders possess strong moral values, good communication abilities, and wisdom in decision-making (Mercader et al., 2021).

These results consistently support the concept that religious values, in this case Islam, can be a source of strength in shaping the leadership qualities of Muslim women (Tranby & Zulkowski, 2012). A deep understanding of Islamic teachings can provide a solid moral foundation, helping Muslim women fulfill leadership roles with integrity and wisdom.

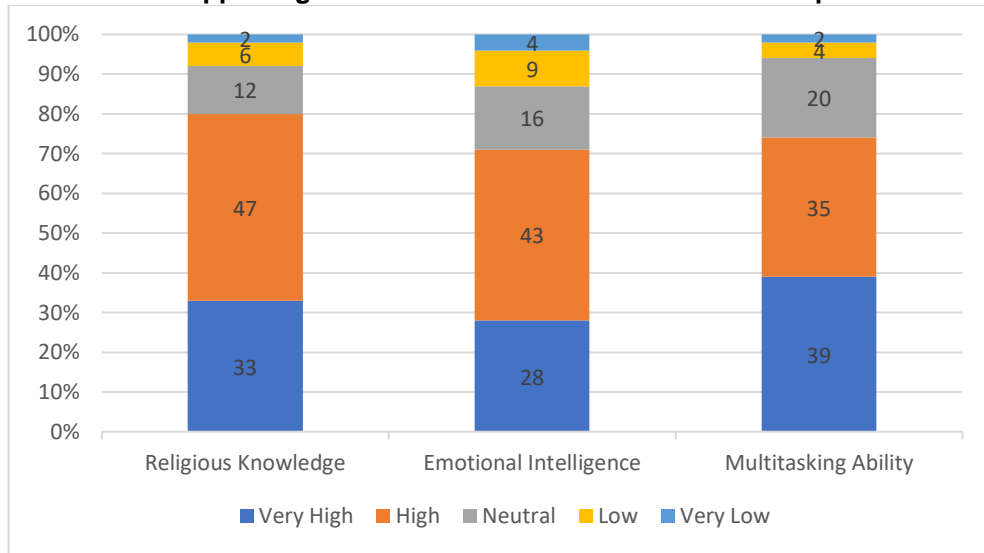
However, it should be noted that a small portion of respondents (21%) expressed disbelief in Muslim women's leadership potential. This suggests varying societal perspectives regarding the role of Muslim women in leadership, possibly related to cultural factors, religious interpretations, or other factors that need further exploration.

Therefore, this study contributes to the literature on Muslim women's leadership by highlighting high confidence in their potential. Nevertheless, further research is needed to deepen understanding of the factors influencing these perceptions and how Muslim women can overcome challenges that may arise in achieving higher leadership positions.

4.2 Key Supporting Factors in Muslim Women's Leadership

The research findings indicate several key factors that support Muslim women's leadership potential. An in-depth analysis of these factors provides a broader understanding of how Muslim women navigate leadership responsibilities and create positive impacts in their workplaces or organizations.

Figure 2
Supporting Factors for Muslim Women's Leadership



The data analysis reveals that many respondents perceive religious knowledge, emotional intelligence, and multitasking ability as key factors strengthening the leadership potential of Muslim women. These findings are consistent with literature emphasizing the importance of a holistic approach to leadership (Dhiman, 2022), where understanding of religious values and emotional intelligence are integrated into decision-making processes (Hess & Bacigalupo, 2011).

Religious knowledge is crucial in helping Muslim women fulfill leadership tasks. A total of 80% of respondents acknowledge that a deep understanding of Islamic values provides a strong ethical foundation for decision-making. Literature confirms that religious knowledge can provide moral and ethical guidance in decision-making processes (Jahn Kassim & Alias, 2016). Therefore, Muslim women's confidence and belief in religious values can enhance the quality of their leadership.

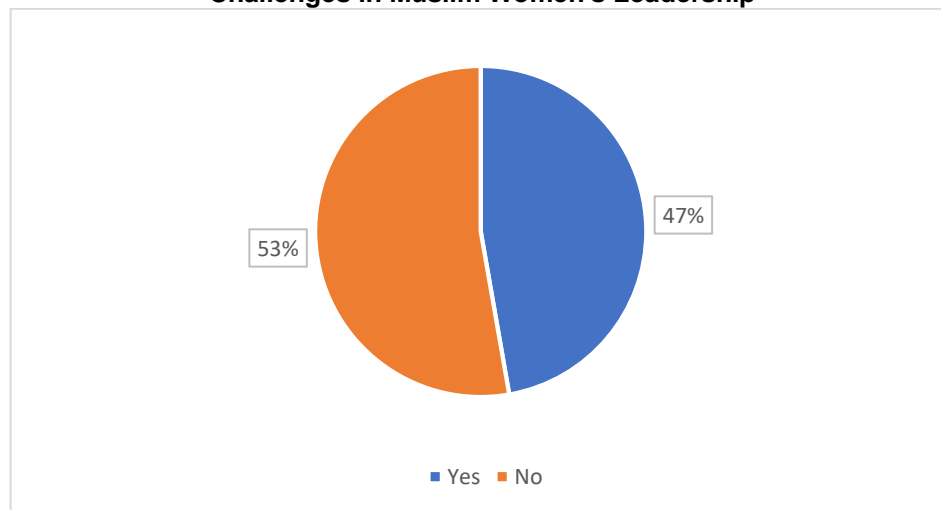
Emotional intelligence, as the ability to understand and manage emotions, is a significant factor in creating positive interpersonal relationships in the context of Muslim women's leadership. A total of 71% of respondents recognize the importance of this role. Previous research has shown that emotional intelligence can enhance communication and collaboration skills, helping to create a healthy and productive work environment (Ana, 2023).

Multitasking ability also emerges as a strength that facilitates Muslim women in tackling the complexity of leadership tasks. A total of 74% of respondents acknowledge the importance of this ability. In management literature, multitasking is considered a critical skill for influential leaders, particularly in managing various responsibilities simultaneously (Carrier et al., 2015). This ability helps Muslim women optimize time and resources for their leadership duties.

These findings have significant implications for the development of Muslim women's leadership. Training and development programs can focus on strengthening religious knowledge, enhancing emotional intelligence, and improving multitasking skills. Additionally, further studies can explore the relationship between these factors and long-term leadership success indicators, such as organizational goal achievement and team member satisfaction.

4.3 Challenges Based on Religious Teachings

Figure 3
Challenges in Muslim Women's Leadership



The research findings indicate that, despite the significant potential for Muslim women in leadership, 47% of respondents perceive barriers or challenges stemming from traditional interpretations of Islamic religious teachings. These challenges include societal views perpetuating gender stereotypes, which can influence perceptions and opportunities for women striving to attain leadership positions.

Scholarly literature provides a foundation for understanding the complexity of these challenges. Previous research highlights that traditional interpretations of religious teachings often reinforce patriarchal structures and limit women's roles in various aspects of life, including leadership contexts (Abalkhail, 2017). Gender stereotypes ingrained in society can create detrimental expectations for women pursuing leadership positions, narrowing their scope and presenting obstacles in their career development (Heilman, 2012).

These challenges underscore the importance of deconstructing restrictive views that confine women within the framework of religious teachings. Education and advocacy are key instruments to enhance understanding of inclusive Islamic teachings supporting gender equality. Society must understand that Islam fundamentally advocates justice and equality among its followers, irrespective of gender (Hyder, 2021).

This discussion reflects the need for reforming religious interpretations to fully support Muslim women in realizing their leadership potential. Collaborative efforts among religious communities, governments, and civil society organizations can create an environment that supports and expands leadership opportunities for Muslim women while upholding the fundamental values of religious teachings.

4.4 Perspectives on Gender Equality

The research findings indicate varied perspectives on gender equality in workplaces or organizations among respondents. According to the survey results regarding the question "Is there gender equality in your workplace/organization?", 64% expressed their belief that gender equality exists, painting a positive picture but highlighting that a small portion of respondents may still be skeptical or identify inequalities.

It's important to note that perceptions of gender equality can be influenced by various factors, including cultural, social, and organizational contexts (Schneid et al., 2015). Understanding that most respondents perceive equality positively indicates efforts towards gender inclusivity in workplaces or organizations. Support from colleagues, supervisors, and organization members, acknowledged by 82% of those perceiving equality, reflects a pivotal role in creating an environment supportive of gender equality.

Numerous studies have emphasized the importance of social support and inclusive work environments in the literature as key factors in achieving gender equality. Research by Shinbrot et al. (2019), underscores that collective support and recognition of women's

contributions in the workplace can enhance the effectiveness of women's leadership. Additionally, studies by Warren et al. (2019), highlight that an organizational culture supporting gender equality can enhance well-being and individual productivity in the workplace.

These findings underscore the need to sustain and enhance efforts supporting gender equality in the workplace. Involving colleagues, supervisors, and organization members in gender equality initiatives can have significant positive impacts. Furthermore, expanding awareness and education on gender equality in the workplace can be a strategic step to reinforce positive perceptions and minimize existing inequalities (Grantham et al., 2021).

Moreover, these findings indicate that engaging and supporting women in leadership roles can be crucial in creating a more inclusive work environment (Meng & Neill, 2021). Greater support from management and the implementation of progressive gender equality policies can be practical steps towards achieving equality goals in the workplace.

4.5 Hopes and Aspirations.

The survey results indicate that 56% of total respondents express positive hopes and aspirations regarding the future development of women's roles in Islamic leadership. These optimistic hopes and aspirations include expectations for increased participation of women in decision-making within Islamic institutions and aspirations to create a generation of strong and integrity-driven Muslim women leaders. This reflects optimism and a strong encouragement to strengthen women's roles across various sectors. Analysis of these findings provides insights into the changing positive perceptions of women's roles in leadership, particularly within the context of Islamic values.

Furthermore, these findings align with literature highlighting a paradigm shift towards women in leadership within the Muslim world. According to studies by Koburtay (2023), social transformations and more inclusive interpretations of Islamic teachings have provided a platform for women to take on more significant roles in leadership. Respondents' optimistic hopes and aspirations also reflect cultural shifts and evolving religious understandings that support women's participation in leadership arenas.

Literature also indicates that when women engage in leadership, it can positively impact organizational efficiency, gender balance, and community empowerment (Valduga et al., 2023). Therefore, optimistic hopes for women's roles in Islamic leadership can be seen as a drive towards achieving gender equality, enriching leadership perspectives, and enhancing the well-being of Muslim communities.

In this context, the research results create a platform to consider policy implications and actions that support the development of women's roles in Islamic leadership. Steps such as supporting education and training for women in leadership, designing inclusive policies, and promoting gender equality in workplaces and communities can be crucial steps in demonstrating commitment to increasingly robust roles for women in leadership (Kossek et al., 2017).

Thus, these optimistic hopes and aspirations can be considered drivers towards positive transformation in the paradigm of Islamic leadership, providing a solid foundation for creating a fairer and more inclusive society.

Conclusion

This study reveals several significant findings regarding Muslim women's potential, challenges, and aspirations in leadership within Islam. The findings indicate that Muslim women have significant potential in leadership, with 63% of respondents expressing high confidence in their leadership qualities. Religious knowledge, emotional intelligence, and multitasking abilities were identified as key strengths supporting Muslim women's leadership roles. Additionally, there is optimism among respondents about the future development of women's roles in Islamic leadership, with 56% of respondents expressing positive expectations. The contribution of this study to the field lies in its emphasis on individual factors supporting Muslim women's leadership, which have been underexplored in the literature. This research provides new insights into how religious knowledge, emotional intelligence, and multitasking abilities can enhance Muslim women's leadership roles.

However, the study's limitations include a limited sample that does not cover a wide geographical variation. For future research, expanding the sample scope and exploring more

complex cultural and structural factors that influence women's participation in leadership is recommended.

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Author Contribution Statement

MFI was responsible for the research design, data collection and analysis, and the initial drafting of the article. N provided guidance and critical input in the research design, data analysis, and the revision and refinement of the draft article. MH contributed to the article's framework, editing, and revision, while TSN offered essential perspectives and contributions to the interpretation of the research findings. All authors participated in the final approval of this article before submission.

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