



10.5281/zenodo.16680478

Vol. 08 Issue 06 June - 2025

Manuscript ID: #02022

Gendered Dimensions of Academic Leadership: Evidence from State Universities and Colleges

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Abstract

This study examines gender representation and leadership role distribution among academic leaders in selected State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in Region VIII, Philippines. Grounded in Social Role Theory and Gendered Organizational Theory, it employs a descriptive quantitative research design to examine proportional representation and functional role assignments based on gender. The study purposively sampled 48 academic administrators comprising vice presidents, deans, and directors from SUCs located in Leyte and Biliran provinces. Data was gathered through a structured survey instrument, validated by field experts, and analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically frequency and percentage distributions. Findings indicate a near-equal gender representation (52.08% male, 47.92% female), but with evident disparities in leadership functions. Males predominantly occupy administrative and research-extension-production (REP) domains, whereas females are more represented in academic functions. These patterns suggest the persistence of structural and cultural barriers that limit women's access to strategic leadership positions. The study underscores the importance of institutionalizing gender-responsive leadership development initiatives, operationalizing equal opportunity frameworks, and creating mentorship pathways to support the advancement of women in academic leadership. By contextualizing gender dynamics within the regional higher education governance structure, the study contributes to the discourse on inclusive leadership and offers evidence-based recommendations for policy and practice reform. Implications are directed toward institutional stakeholders seeking to enhance gender equity and governance capacity within Philippine higher education institutions.

Keywords: Gender equity, Academic leadership, State universities, Higher education governance, Philippines, Educational administration

How to cite: TUGONON, L. R. M., & ADLAWAN, J. P. (2025). Gendered Dimensions of Academic Leadership: Evidence from State Universities and Colleges. *GPH-International Journal of Educational Research*, 8(6), 43-54. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16680478>



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I. INTRODUCTION

The role of leadership in higher education institutions (HEIs) is increasingly being examined through the lens of gender equity and inclusivity. In the Philippines, as in many other countries, the democratization of academic governance has become an aspirational goal, with institutions striving to embody principles of equal opportunity, representation, and participation. Despite notable progress in women's participation in academia, gender-based disparities in leadership roles remain a persistent concern. While women make up a substantial proportion of the academic workforce in the Philippines, their representation diminishes significantly at the upper levels of academic administration—such as deanships, vice presidencies, and university presidencies (Commission on Higher Education [CHED], 2020).

This underrepresentation suggests the existence of systemic challenges that inhibit the advancement of women in leadership positions. According to Banaag (2021), this phenomenon reflects deeper institutional and societal barriers that limit women's upward mobility within higher education. These barriers are frequently rooted in cultural expectations, gender stereotypes, and organizational practices that privilege traditionally male-associated leadership traits.

Santos (2019) has further emphasized the persistent influence of gender norms, noting that women leaders in Philippine state universities often confront biased perceptions that question their legitimacy and effectiveness in leadership roles. These stereotypes continue to shape institutional cultures and evaluative practices, reinforcing the notion that leadership is inherently masculine. As a result, gender disparities not only constrain the career development of female academics but also affect the quality and inclusiveness of governance in HEIs.]

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted and, in many cases, exacerbated these gendered challenges. In their study on women academic leaders during the shift to online and hybrid education, Manimtim and Perez (2021) found that while women demonstrated strong emotional intelligence, collaborative leadership, and effective crisis management, they simultaneously faced increased institutional pressures, workload imbalances, and a lack of structural support. These challenges, amplified by remote leadership responsibilities, underscored the systemic limitations women leaders encounter, particularly during periods of institutional upheaval.

Research by Solon et al. (2023) at Jose Rizal Memorial State University illustrated that inclusive leadership development programs led to improvements in teaching and community engagement outcomes across genders. However, the same initiatives had limited impact on research productivity among female faculty, suggesting persistent institutional constraints that continue to disadvantage women in research-related aspects of academic leadership.

Alberto (2023) offers a compelling contribution to the discourse by tracing the leadership journeys of women who ascended to presidential positions in Philippine SUCs.

She identified a leadership archetype among these women—termed the **LEADER** model (Love, Equity, Action, Direction, Empowerment, Reform)—which encapsulates the inclusive and transformative approaches often adopted by women leaders. Despite structural and resource-based limitations, these leaders navigated institutional spaces with a values-driven leadership style that prioritized equity, participation, and systemic reform.

The role of institutional awareness and internal leadership development also features prominently in gender equity discussions. Rodriguez, Tan, and Buenvenida (2021), in their assessment of university administrative councils, revealed that leadership creativity and cognitive readiness were associated with higher levels of gender equity awareness. However, their study also indicated that existing Gender and Development (GAD) programs within universities lacked both continuity and depth, rendering them insufficient to drive lasting institutional change.

Local case studies further enrich this discourse. For instance, Tahil and Purcia (2022–2023) examined the leadership practices of female school heads in Samar, Region VIII. They reported high levels of collaborative planning and inclusive management, although persistent challenges such as communication barriers and stakeholder engagement hesitancy remained. Meanwhile, Manalo (2024) explored the experiences of women leaders in private HEIs in Cavite and highlighted their strong people management and team-building capabilities. Nevertheless, many struggled to balance professional responsibilities with personal obligations, a challenge that continues to impede the full realization of gender equity in leadership. She recommended targeted management development programs that directly address these gender-specific pressures.

Despite the growing body of literature on gender and leadership in Philippine higher education, a significant research gap remains in the context of Region VIII—particularly in SUCs located in Leyte and Biliran. National-level studies offer valuable frameworks and highlight recurring themes, yet these insights must be localized to capture the unique cultural, institutional, and socio-political conditions that shape gendered leadership experiences in Eastern Visayas. This study addresses that gap by examining the representation of men and women in leadership roles and analyzing the contextual factors that influence the leadership trajectories of women in SUCs across Region VIII. In doing so, it contributes to the broader discourse on gender equity in academic leadership and offers evidence-based recommendations for more inclusive leadership development strategies in Philippine higher education.

I. 2. Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by **Social Role Theory** and **Gendered Organizational Theory**, which together offer a comprehensive lens for understanding the gendered nature of academic leadership.

Social Role Theory (Eagly & Wood, 2012) posits that cultural norms and societal expectations shape the roles deemed appropriate for men and women. These expectations, internalized over time, influence individuals' occupational preferences, leadership behaviors, and perceptions of authority. In the context of higher education, such roles often align leadership with traits traditionally associated with masculinity—assertiveness, decisiveness, and authority—while relegating communal traits such as empathy and collaboration, often associated with women, to subordinate or supportive roles.

Gendered Organizational Theory (Acker, 1990) extends this perspective by arguing that institutions themselves are gendered in structure and function. From recruitment and promotion processes to performance evaluation and leadership development, organizational practices are embedded with norms that reflect and reinforce gender hierarchies. These embedded structures often marginalize women's leadership potential, even in institutions that publicly promote gender equality.

These theoretical frameworks contextualize the structural and cultural barriers that women in academia face, particularly in public universities where bureaucratic traditions and hierarchical governance further entrench patriarchal norms. They also help explain why, despite demonstrated competence and increasing participation in academic roles, women remain underrepresented in strategic decision-making positions.

This study thus aims to fill a critical gap by examining the representation, challenges, and opportunities experienced by academic leaders—particularly women—in selected SUCs in Region VIII. It seeks to inform institutional strategies that foster equitable leadership and contribute to the broader discourse on gender inclusivity in Philippine higher education.

Objective of the Study

This study aims to:

1. Determine the proportional representation of male and female academic leaders in SUCs in Region VIII.
2. Analyze their current functions based on gender.
3. Propose recommendations to support the advancement of women in academic leadership.

Methodology

The study was conducted in selected State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) located in the provinces of **Leyte and Biliran**, Philippines. These institutions were chosen based on their geographical relevance and accessibility. The target population comprised **key academic administrators**, specifically **vice presidents, deans, and directors**, representing various levels of institutional leadership.

All eligible administrators within the participating SUCs were invited to take part in the study. Participation was voluntary, and **informed consent** was obtained from all respondents, in adherence to ethical research standards.

Research Design

This study adopted a **descriptive quantitative research design** to examine gender representation in leadership positions within SUCs in Region VIII. The descriptive approach was appropriate for providing a clear picture of existing conditions without manipulating variables.

Sample and Data Collection

A total of **48 academic leaders** participated in the study, consisting of **25 males (52.08%)** and **23 females (47.92%)**. The sample was selected purposively to ensure representation across various functional and administrative units.

Data were collected through a **structured survey questionnaire**, which was developed based on related literature and expert consultation. The survey gathered demographic information, including gender and position, along with relevant data on leadership roles.

Data Analysis

Collected data were **tallied, computed, and tabulated** using **descriptive statistical methods**, specifically **frequency and percentage distribution**. These tools were employed to determine the proportional representation of male and female leaders and their distribution across functional areas.

Descriptive statistics provided a straightforward means of summarizing the respondents' profiles and enabled an analysis of gender distribution trends within the selected institutions.

Ethical Considerations

This study strictly followed ethical research guidelines. Participation was **voluntary**, and respondents were informed of the purpose, scope, and confidentiality of the research. The **anonymity** of participants was maintained throughout the data collection and reporting process.

Limitations

The primary limitation of this study lies in its **geographical scope**, which was limited to the provinces of Leyte and Biliran. As such, the findings may not be generalizable to all SUCs in the Philippines. Additionally, the use of only descriptive statistics limits deeper inferential analysis of underlying causes and relationships. Future research is encouraged to expand the geographic coverage and incorporate mixed or inferential methods to deepen understanding.

Results and Discussions

Table 1. Proportional Representation as to Gender.

This section discusses the proportion of male and female respondents involved in the study.

Table 1. Profile of the Respondents on Gender

	Frequency	Percent
Male	25	52.08
Female	23	47.92
Total	48	100.0

Table 1 reveals a slightly skewed gender distribution among respondents, with males comprising 52.08% and females 47.92%. This disparity may be attributed to several interconnected factors rooted in cultural norms and societal structures within the Philippine context.

Firstly, traditional gender roles and expectations may influence participation in leadership roles and certain professions. This is supported by Balcerzyk, D. et al. (2024) in their research. They highlighted that women could fulfil themselves in the organization, succeeding in leadership positions with adequate competence and knowledge. However, there are still quite a few barriers they still must overcome. Cultural norms often associate specific roles or professions with one gender more than the other, leading to uneven representation.

Secondly, workforce participation rates reflect broader societal attitudes towards gender and work. In addition, leadership is not a tangible creation, but rather a social image shaped by the prism of culture, tradition, and ideals rooted and translated into cognitive patterns (Kurek, 2022).

Factors such as access to education and employment opportunities, societal expectations, and family responsibilities are likely to contribute to this disparity.

Thirdly, the data highlight potential gender inequities. Unequal access to resources, social and economic opportunities, and decision-making power within appointing authorities may all play a role. Underlying cultural norms and values regarding gender equality, family dynamics, and social roles further shape these inequities.

Finally, the possibility of bias or discrimination cannot be ignored. Research by Bowen (2024) highlighted that women are faced with significant hinderances to their leadership paths because of sexual harassment, hiring practices, and work-personal conflicts; not for a lack of skills or experience.

A closer examination of systemic barriers and cultural attitudes is needed to fully understand the extent of their influence on gender disparities in education, employment, and leadership.

In conclusion, the observed gender imbalance in the data offers valuable insights into the complex interplay of cultural dynamics, gender norms, and societal structures within the Philippines. Further investigation is warranted to fully elucidate the underlying factors and their implications for both individuals and society.

Table 2. Current Functions of Academic Leaders in terms of Gender.

Demographic Profile (n = 47)	Function/Area			Total
	Administrative	Academic	REP	
Gender				
Male	3 (6.4%)	13 (27.7%)	9 (19.1%)	25 (53.2%)
Female	1 (2.1%)	15 (31.9%)	6 (12.8%)	22 (46.8%)

Table 2 presents the distribution of academic leadership roles in State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in Region VIII based on gender and functional area. The data is categorized into three major functional domains: **Administrative, Academic, Research, Extension, and Production (REP)**. A total of 47 respondents were analyzed, comprising 25 males (53.2%) and 22 females (46.8%). The results offer insights into the gender dynamics within various functional domains of academic leadership.

Administrative Function

In the administrative domain, only 4 out of 47 respondents held administrative positions. Of these, 3 were male (6.4%) and only 1 was female (2.1%). This stark difference illustrates a **gender imbalance** in higher-level institutional management roles. Administrative functions often involve executive responsibilities such as policy implementation, resource allocation, and organizational decision-making. The low number of women in these positions reflects **limited access to power structures**, suggesting that females may face barriers to entering or advancing in these roles.

This finding supports previous research asserting that institutional practices and implicit biases may hinder women’s participation in top-level decision-making roles (Santos, 2019). It also reinforces the idea that traditional views still associate leadership authority with male characteristics, contributing to the underrepresentation of women in administrative domains.

Academic Function

In contrast, the academic area showed **greater female representation**. Of the respondents assigned to academic functions, 15 were female (31.9%) while 13 were male

(27.7%). This suggests that **women are slightly more visible in teaching and curriculum-related leadership roles**, such as department chairs, program heads, or instructional coordinators.

This trend is consistent with prior literature indicating that while women in academia are often well-represented in instructional roles, they are less visible in strategic or executive positions (CHED, 2020; Alberto, 2023). Although encouraging, this concentration in academic roles does not always translate to influence over broader institutional governance, which often resides in administrative or research leadership.

Research, Extension, and Production (REP) Function

In the domain of research, extension, and production (REP), males again outnumbered females, with 9 male respondents (19.1%) compared to 6 female respondents (12.8%). REP functions are integral to knowledge creation, community impact, and institutional growth, and leadership in this area often influences funding, partnerships, and academic prestige.

The gender gap in REP leadership indicates that **women may be underrepresented in scholarly and community development functions**, areas that could otherwise serve as strong pathways for academic recognition and career progression. The disparity may stem from a combination of factors such as unequal access to research grants, heavier teaching loads for female faculty, or a lack of mentorship in technical or science-driven projects (Manimtim & Perez, 2021).

Overall, Gender Representation

In total, male respondents accounted for 53.2% of all leadership roles, while females comprised 46.8%. While this suggests a near-balanced gender distribution at face value, deeper analysis reveals that **men are disproportionately represented in strategic areas (administrative and REP)**, while **women are primarily clustered in academic functions**. This pattern points to a persistent gendered structure within SUCs where leadership influence and access to institutional power remain unequal.

Such disparities reflect what Banaag (2021) described as the “leaky pipeline” in women’s academic careers, where women are present in early and mid-level positions but decline in number as leadership levels increase. Though there are shifts in perspectives regarding women's capabilities in leadership, structural and cultural barriers continue to affect their upward mobility (Takizawa et al., 2022).

Based on the findings, the researcher proposed the following to support the advancement of women in leadership.

Establish a clear mentorship program.

The state universities and colleges should come up with a formal mentorship program in all areas, such as academic, administrative, research, and extension. Very important to connect women with experienced leaders in these areas to enable them to be familiar and

acquainted with the specific tasks and functions aligned to these areas. The guidance, advice, and actual exposure to these types of functions and roles are crucial to the development of leadership skills and abilities.

Equal opportunity policies should be in place.

In state universities and colleges, EOP should be integrated into the policies and manuals of the institution. While it is true that there are manuals incorporating the EOP, nonetheless, it is nonetheless bereft of application. The equal opportunity policy lacks practical application and remains an unenforced guideline. In an organization, the culture of trust and confidence takes precedence over the EOP. This should not be the case.

Conclusion /Recommendations

The data reveal a nuanced gender distribution in academic leadership within Region VIII SUCs. While women show a stronger presence in academic functions, they remain underrepresented in administrative and research-based leadership roles. These patterns reflect enduring structural and cultural challenges that must be addressed through proactive policy-making, mentorship, and institutional reform. Empowering more women to lead in all domains of academic governance is essential not only for achieving gender equity but also for enhancing the overall effectiveness, inclusivity, and resilience of higher education institutions in the Philippines.

Based on data, the disparity may have been influenced by cultural norms and societal structures in the Philippines. Traditional gender roles affect participation in leadership and specific professions, with research by Balcerzyk et al. (2024) noting that while women can succeed in leadership roles, they face significant barriers. Broader societal attitudes and expectations, along with access to education and family responsibilities, further contribute to this disparity. Additionally, the data reveal gender inequities in access to resources and decision-making power, as well as biases and discrimination that hinder women's leadership paths, as highlighted by Bowen (2024). A thorough investigation of these systemic barriers and cultural attitudes is essential to understand their impact on gender disparities in education, employment, and leadership.

Other findings reveal a notable gender disparity in academic leadership roles within state universities and colleges in region 8. Female leaders occupy 31.9% of academic positions compared to 27.7% for males, yet men dominate key administrative and research roles, highlighting ongoing barriers to women's progression in leadership.

Despite evolving societal views that increasingly recognize women's effectiveness as leaders, balanced representation in leadership remains a concern. To address these disparities, it is imperative to explore the underlying factors contributing to gender-based differences in leadership representation. These may include institutional biases, limited access to mentorship and professional development, or socio-cultural expectations placed on women. The formulation and implementation of gender-responsive policies are recommended to

promote equal opportunities and empower more women to assume leadership roles. Fostering a more inclusive and supportive academic environment will not only advance gender equity but also enrich leadership with diverse perspectives and approaches.

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