

From Campus Learning to Leadership Aspiration: The Role of Higher Education and Experiential Learning in Shaping Women Leaders in Indonesia

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Abstract: - As women's participation in higher education is increasing, their representation in leadership positions is still limited, especially in Indonesia. This study examines how educational design, including classroom pedagogy, co-curricular engagement, and experiential learning, can shape female students' leadership aspirations. This qualitative study is based on Social Cognitive Career Theory and Transformational Learning Theory. The analysis applied a systematic thematic coding procedure, supported by code-frequency mapping, theme co-occurrence analysis, and researcher triangulation, in order to strengthen the transparency and rigor of the analysis. The findings show that gender-inclusive learning climates, active learning methods such as discussions and presentations, and micro-leadership roles within group assignments can improve leadership self-efficacy and identity formation. Co-curricular and experiential learning opportunities can serve as mastery experiences, which can strengthen confidence and relational leadership skills. However, cultural expectations and family norms still influence how women translate their educational experiences into leadership ambitions. This study highlights the role of higher education and also digital and interactive learning environments as spaces that can support inclusive leadership development in non-Western contexts.

Key-Words: - Female leadership aspiration, Higher education, E-learning environments, Digital collaborative learning, Leadership identity development, University, Gender-inclusive learning

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1 Introduction

In higher education, students have opportunities to build such skills as resilience, teamwork, and organizing within a team in order to become a good leader. The ability to do these things is increasingly sought after in the workplace [1]. Student leadership and involvement in student groups, clubs, and other extracurricular activities positively impact leadership identity and work-readiness. This means that higher education institutions can serve as a space for self-development and build future leaders [2].

The role of higher education institutions in women's empowerment and preparation for leadership is also significant. Although the percentages of women in tertiary education continue to rise worldwide, it is still low in senior leadership roles [3]. In comparison, in Western countries, men still have four times the chance of having a higher position in higher education institutions than women, with percentages between 19-28%, while in some parts of Asia it is still 6%. Because of this divide, universities become the site where women build the confidence, networks, and leadership identity required to overcome structural barriers.

The effect of higher education institutions on the shaping of women's leadership can be understood based on Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT), which consists of three elements, namely self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and environmental support, in the formation of career aspirations and leadership [4]. Improved confidence of women in taking up leadership roles through the support of role models, supportive networks, and leadership opportunities. Despite high academic performance, however, structural obstacles and stereotypes persist, which can undermine their self-efficacy and leadership identity [5].

The second is the Transformative Learning theory, which focuses on the transformative nature of reflection and experience-based learning and its impact on changing self-perception and leadership identity [6]. Programs that provide women with leadership experiences, coaching, and mentoring can build their abilities, while also providing an opportunity to reflect and challenge the internalized gender norms [7]. In this regard, the university can be a location for facilitating the transformative process and help women to begin to envision themselves as leaders.

The Intersectionality Theory also demonstrates that the leadership development of women can't be comprehended solely from a gender perspective. There can be links between social class, ethnicity, religion, and family roles in terms of women's experiences of opportunities and barriers [8]. Thus, what female students experience and what leadership opportunities they have can vary by the different aspects of their identity. These can be addressed by the university's policies and structures, and by its guidance, which is culturally sensitive. This can be used to assist the empowerment of women from a variety of backgrounds to achieve their leadership goals.

In the university environment, some mechanisms that can support the leadership development of women include involvement in extracurricular and co-curricular activities, mentoring, and also the presence of role models. These activities can strengthen leadership identity and self-efficacy, and at the same time help women to imagine themselves in leadership positions [2]. Mentoring is also important because it can help female leaders to face the academic environment that is still dominated by men [9]. Besides that, mentoring among women can strengthen the sense of belonging and help maintain the participation of women in fields that are traditionally dominated by men, such as STEM [10].

Experience-based and transformative learning can further strengthen the empowerment of women in

leadership. A leadership program that integrates the gender perspective, training, coaching, and a support network can increase psychological empowerment, leadership self-efficacy, and also leadership identity [7]. That program can also help young women face various barriers that are related to gender [11].

From the policy side, national strategies also start to recognize the role of universities in encouraging gender equality in leadership. As an example, the higher education policy of Malaysia relates the representation of women in senior academic positions to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on Gender Equality [3]. This shows that the role of universities is not only related to the preparation of students to enter the world of work, but can also contribute to social change and more inclusive leadership.

Even though research about women's leadership keeps developing, most of the literature still focuses on structural barriers such as gender bias, stereotypes, and the glass ceiling phenomenon (the invisible barrier to career advancement). Less attention is given to the role of education in encouraging leadership aspirations, and also to how educational experiences can develop women's agency, self-efficacy, and confidence [12]. This gap becomes important in the Indonesian context because universities can shape leadership aspirations through various initiatives that are suitable for the cultural context. However, empirical research about those practices is still limited [13].

Another limitation is seen in the geographical context of the literature. Most of the studies are conducted in the Western context, while the non-Western environment can have different conditions because of cultural expectations, religious norms, and family responsibilities [14], [15]. In Indonesia, socio-cultural beliefs about the domestic role of women can still influence the participation of women in education and leadership. However, studies that examine how those norms are related to women's leadership aspirations are still limited [16].

Methodologically, the existing research is also still dominated by quantitative approaches, especially large-scale surveys and statistical modeling. Even though this approach can show the relationship between education and leadership outcomes, this method may not fully capture the subjective experiences of women during their education [17]. This limitation becomes relevant in the Indonesian context because existing studies still rarely explore the experiences and perspectives of female students or female academics directly [18]. Relatedly, the literature tends to concentrate on higher education and executive training, overlooking formative educational stages such as primary and secondary schooling,

informal learning environments, and early exposure to leadership opportunities. These formative experiences are critical in shaping long-term leadership orientations [19], yet little is known about their impact in Indonesia, particularly in rural areas and Islamic-based educational institutions [18].

Besides that, the intersectionality perspective has not been widely developed in this area. Many studies still position gender as the single dimension of analysis. They do not consider how social class, ethnicity, religion, marital status, or caregiving responsibility can interact with educational opportunity in shaping leadership aspiration [8], [20]. This issue becomes more relevant in the Indonesian context, which holds a wide cultural and socio-economic diversity. Women's leadership experience can be shaped by several aspects of their identity at the same time. However, systematic studies on how these intersecting factors affect the role of education in developing leadership are still limited in the current literature [18]. Accordingly, [16] states that efforts to close this gap can produce a deeper understanding of women's leadership development that is more sensitive to the cultural context. This can also contribute to the global debate and to the development of strategies that are suitable for the Asian context.

Universities are positioned as a space for leadership development and at the same time as an environment that is shaped by gender-based expectations. For that reason, this study needs to examine how educational experience forms women's leadership aspirations. This is not only through access to skills and opportunities. It is also through the process of personal meaning-making, cultural negotiation, and identity development.

Research Questions:

1. How do female university students perceive the role of their educational experiences in shaping leadership aspirations?
2. In what ways do co-curricular and experiential learning opportunities within universities foster or hinder women's leadership identity and self-efficacy?
3. How do cultural norms and family expectations interact with university experiences to influence female students' leadership ambitions in the Indonesian context?
- 6 What forms of mentorship, role models, and institutional support do women identify as enabling or constraining their leadership aspirations?

4. How do intersecting identities (e.g., class, religion, marital status) shape women's interpretation of their university experiences and their vision of future leadership?

This study adds to the existing literature on women's leadership aspirations. The focus is placed on the capacity of education to build agency, confidence, and leadership identity. Many previous studies tend to concentrate on structural barriers such as stereotypes and the glass ceiling. This study instead views the university as a space of transformation. This space can shape women's aspirations through academic activities, co-curricular involvement, and mentoring programs. This research uses a qualitative design to respond to the need for a more interpretive approach to understanding how women make sense of their own educational experience. But in the current literature, the field is still dominated by large-scale quantitative studies [17]. Besides that, this research broadens the application of Social Cognitive Career Theory [4] and Role Congruity Theory [12] in the Indonesian context, which has not been widely examined. Within that context, cultural norms about the role of women can be linked with the higher education experience. This can influence how aspiration and leadership are developed.

From a practical side, this research gives input for universities, policymakers, and educators who want to support the leadership of women. The results can inform the design of gender-inclusive leadership programs, mentoring schemes, and institutional policies. Such programs can strengthen the confidence of women students. They can also respond to cultural and organizational barriers at the same time. This contribution is becoming more meaningful as higher education institutions begin to be seen as an important actor in the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 (Gender Equality). By this, the study can offer a more complete framework that combines several theoretical perspectives with an analysis that considers the Indonesian context. This framework can explain how the university not only plays a role in the delivery of knowledge, but can also support the development of inclusive and sustainable leadership.

To make the logic of the analysis clearer, this study has put forth a conceptual flow between educational experience, leadership self-efficacy, leadership identity, sociocultural factors, and leadership aspiration.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Congruity Theory of Prejudice Toward Female Leaders

The Role Congruity Theory also suggests that women are not only hindered in leadership due to ability, but also due to social expectations that have been deeply rooted [12]. Collectively, leadership is still thought to require assertiveness, dominance, and a straightforward decision-making style, whereas women have been more associated with empathy, cooperation, and caring. When these two types of expectations are in opposition, it generates a situation that can be described as “role incongruity,” as discussed by [12]. Consequently, women are judged less appropriate to take leadership positions, and even when they do assume leadership, their behavior is judged more severely than that of men with equivalent behavior.

This theoretical lens is particularly applicable to the context of the university in influencing leadership aspirations as a key focus. The university may decide to reinforce this traditional notion of leadership that is based on competition and individual success, or it can instead work to question this notion and embrace a collaborative and inclusive leadership vision. The university must not continue to reinforce its narrow and more specifically masculine definition of leadership or face a reduction in the spirit of its younger women with aspirations of becoming leaders.

Women's leadership in academia, which is clearly visible, has an important position in this. The perception of incongruity between gender roles and leadership is lowered when females see women in the roles of professors, deans, and/or student organization leaders. These are actual examples that help to make a powerful signal that women can do well in leadership, without sacrificing the traits traditionally associated with femininity.

At the same time, this theory reminds us that the university is not a neutral space. The culture and practices within it can perpetuate role incongruity if that institution fails to critically examine various gender assumptions related to authority. Integrating leadership education that emphasizes communal and agentic attributes (those that are action- and achievement-oriented) can help to disempower stereotypes and also recognize and foster women's leadership aspirations

2.2 Expectation States Theory

The Expectation States Theory gives another point of view to understand the barriers to the leadership aspirations of women. This theory argues that social categories (e.g., gender) can be associated with beliefs regarding status and how competence is perceived in relation to group interactions [21]. For a man to be considered a leader is more acceptable, even if his performance is at the same level or is less than that of

women. This can lead to a disadvantage for women in leadership roles due to gender-based beliefs. Accordingly, [22] finds that the status beliefs of gender may directly impact judgments of women in the leadership domain.

The theory is of significance to the university for providing an important understanding of how that expectation can manifest in the daily academic activities. Students are expected to practice and demonstrate leadership skills in group projects, student groups, and classroom discussions. But in those times, expectations may be more implicit, leading to increased authority (or perceived competence) for male students over female students. This can occur despite an equal or higher contribution from female students. This can make it less likely that female students will seek to take on leadership positions. This can also exacerbate the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles in the long-term.

This process is also subtle and needs to be attended to. Women students may begin to believe that they are not capable over the course of time, and internalize that belief. They also might steer clear of places where their competence or authority is ever called into question. Thus, the ET can be used to understand why women may lack leadership aspirations. This reluctance doesn't always indicate that women are not able to lead. It can also occur because they frequently find themselves in situations where their ability is not valued in the same manner as men. At the institutional level, universities can take several steps to reduce these dynamics. Promote structured participation, make the leadership opportunity selection process transparent, and facilitate lecturers to provide an equal opportunity to speak, which in turn can challenge gender-based status expectations. In this way, the university can contribute to the transformation of the recognition of competence in the academic sphere. This can give a wider space for women to view themselves as capable leaders and, at the same time, to be recognized by others as legitimate leaders.

2.3 Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

Although the theory discussed here is more stereotype- and expectation-based, the Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) [4] is more concerned with the internal processes that affect career aspirations. SCCT has a few important components that were drawn from the social cognitive model [23] namely self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals. Self-efficacy refers to the belief of a person in their ability to successfully carry out certain tasks. Outcome expectations are related to what the person expects to occur as a consequence of

his or her actions, and the goal is what the person wants to accomplish. These elements are used to help explain the development and pursuit of a career.

SCCT is applicable in higher education to the understanding of women's leadership aspirations. Academic experience, which includes access to guidance from lecturers and supportive feedback and engagement with student groups, can be a learning experience for females. The experiences they have can make them confident or less confident in their leadership ability. Support and seeing a successful role model can boost women's confidence to assume leadership roles. This can also enhance their future desire to lead. Conversely, when their leadership aspirations are not supported or even discouraged, they lose confidence in their abilities, and this reduces self-efficacy.

The setting around a person is also important to SCCT. The university can provide leadership development opportunities, mentoring, scholarship opportunities, and opportunities to participate in student organizations. However, the university can also be a barrier because of gender bias or the presence of fewer women in leadership positions within the institution. These circumstances may affect how girls perceive their competencies and also the chances they have. So, this theory can be applied to make sense of the ways in which the university setting can facilitate support and diminish barriers for women.

Recently, the use of SCCT has also been extended to include the role of optimism, persistence, and contextual support in career development [24]. All these can be significant for women who wish to pursue a career in a field with low representation of women. A positive role model and supportive environment can help to nurture women's aspirations. Leadership is where SCCT could apply to explain how educational experiences affect women's confidence, decisions, and aspirations in engaging in leadership.

2.4 Role of Higher Education in Developing Leadership Aspiration

Higher education institutions are not only responsible for providing educational content, but they also influence the self-perception and future possibilities of young women. Students are exposed to new ideas, communities, and leadership positions in campus life that they may never have been exposed to before. The university is one of the first places where many women begin to cultivate their sense of agency, defy cultural norms, and establish their identity as leaders. Higher education, besides being a source of knowledge, can also bring a positive change as women engage in negotiations of gender norms, gain in self-efficacy, and find multiple new possibilities in

leadership, as revealed by various studies, both in the global and Indonesian context [5], [3], [18].

Women's leadership self-efficacy is developed through daily academic and co-curricular experiences, both planned and spontaneous. According to the Social Cognitive Career Theory [4], confidence can be gained through mastery experiences, social persuasion, and a supportive environment. Women who participate as leaders in student organizations, coordinate events on campus, or receive positive feedback from lecturers can obtain experiences of success that strengthen their belief in their ability to lead. That experience is in line with the factors that shape self-efficacy that are explained by [23] and shows why campus life can become an environment that supports the development of self-efficacy. However, if the contribution of a woman is not valued or there is a gender bias, even a small one, in the classroom or in group work, that can cause her confidence to decrease [17]. Therefore, the climate of the university, whether it is inclusive or still hierarchical, can influence the extent to which young women feel supported to have the aspiration to occupy leadership positions.

By being visible, the university can influence aspirations. When women are involved in roles like the rector, dean, lecturer, or leader of a students' organization, there is a real example to look to that women can hold leadership posts. The Role Congruity Theory [12] describes how the perception of incongruity between gender and leadership can be lessened when female students observe women who are effective leaders. This is increasingly important in an environment like the one in Indonesia, where cultural norms still tend to influence perceptions of leadership as a domain that is more suited to men [16]. Exposing students to female leaders who have achieved success in their careers can help to shift their perception of possible career paths open to them, as well as minimize the self-doubt that could prevent them.

In addition to the experience and visibility, it is the role of the community that women have throughout their university experience. They can gain support in their leadership journey from mentorship and supportive relationships such as with lecturers, senior students, or alumni. Research [9] indicates that mentorship can boost women's confidence, career direction, and persistence. That connection can also help women to frame the challenge as a learning and growing process, rather than as an inability on their part. The context of Indonesia is a society where women's expectations and culture may affect their aspirations to lead; networks within the university can provide an alternative perspective that validates

women's capacity and opportunity to lead [13]. This is in line with the Sustainable Female Leadership Framework (SFLR), which places institutional support and networks as important elements in developing leadership aspirations.

The impact of higher education can also be to make women more introspective about themselves and their surroundings. Courses on gender, leadership, or social change, or service-learning projects, can elicit questions from students about the things that women can or should do. Courses dealing with gender, leadership, or social change can stimulate questions from students regarding what women are or should be allowed to do; service-learning projects and experiential learning activities can elicit questions from students. According to Transformative Learning Theory [6] the process of critical reflection can be useful for a person to reconstruct the perception of himself or herself and the sense of identity. Gender aspect and coaching and reflective practice-based programs have been found to help women develop a leadership identity and psychological empowerment, which can consequently contribute to women's leadership aspirations [7].

In the Indonesian context, the university can also play a role as an intermediary between cultural values and the new experiences that women obtain during higher education. Women often enter higher education with various expectations about family responsibilities, religious values, and their role in society. In the campus environment, they then meet diverse perspectives and experiences that can encourage them to review those various "cultural scripts". The intersectionality perspective also shows that gender does not stand alone, but interacts with social class, religion, ethnicity, and marital status in shaping women's leadership experiences [8]. Therefore, universities that recognize this diversity of identity and provide inclusive leadership opportunities can open wider opportunities for women from various backgrounds.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative design to explore how the university influences the leadership aspirations of female students. The qualitative approach is chosen because the phenomenon being studied, which is leadership aspiration, is closely related to personal experiences, social context, and cultural meaning. A quantitative survey may be able to capture general patterns, but it is less able to describe deeply how

women interpret their educational experiences. The qualitative design allows the researcher to obtain richer and more contextual insights about these experiences, which cannot be understood only through numbers. This is in line with the purpose of the research, which is not to test a hypothesis that has been determined before, but to obtain a deeper understanding of the role of higher education in shaping the leadership journey of women.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The population of this research consists of female undergraduate students enrolled in Indonesian universities, as they are at a formative stage of identity development and career aspiration. Given the interpretive nature of the study, a purposive sampling strategy will be used to select participants who can provide relevant insights. Criteria will include female students who are actively engaged in academic, co-curricular, or leadership activities on campus. According to [25], purposive sampling is appropriate in exploratory studies where depth and relevance of information are more important than representativeness. The sample size of 30 participants was considered sufficient because thematic saturation was reached, where additional interviews no longer yielded new insights [26].

3.3 Data Collection

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews. The interview guide covered educational experiences, leadership identity, self-efficacy, cultural and family expectations, mentorship, role models, and institutional support. Interviews lasted approximately 45 - 60 minutes and were conducted either face-to-face or online, depending on participants' availability.

3.4 Data Analysis

Following the guidelines of [27], the thematic analysis followed six stages: familiarization with interview transcripts, generation of initial codes, grouping codes into candidate themes, reviewing themes against the data, defining and naming themes, and producing the final interpretation. Initial codes were generated inductively from repeated patterns in participants' narratives and then compared with theoretical constructs from SCCT, Transformational Learning Theory, Role Congruity Theory, and Intersectionality Theory.

The NVivo software can be used to help with the organization and coding of the data, but the interpretation still depends on the researcher. [26] emphasizes that qualitative analysis is iterative and reflexive, which requires the researcher to move back and forth between the data and the theory to build

meaning. To increase credibility, at least two researchers independently review a part of the transcript and compare the coding results. Differences of opinion in the coding process are discussed until a consensus is reached. This approach ensures that the findings appear inductively, but are still based on an established theoretical framework, such as SCCT, Role Congruity Theory, and SFLR.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The ethical approval number 228/VRRTT/XI/2025 was obtained from the university research ethics committee before the data collection began. Participation in this research is fully voluntary, without coercion or negative consequences for those who do not participate. Written consent (informed consent) will be obtained from all participants before the interview is conducted. The participants will be informed about their right to withdraw from the research at any stage without being given a sanction. Data protection will be maintained by anonymizing the transcript and giving a pseudonym to the participant. All the recordings and transcripts will be kept safely in a digital folder that is protected by a password and can only be accessed by the researcher. No information that can reveal the identity of the participant will be included in the research results. This research will comply with the principle of confidentiality, respect, and responsible use of the data. These protection steps are in line with the best practices that are recommended in the ethics of qualitative research [26].

4 Result

4.1 Respondent Information

The study involved 30 female undergraduate respondents (Table 1). All participants were actively enrolled in university programs at the time of data collection. The majority of respondents came from and/or lived in urban areas, especially Jakarta and Bekasi, as many as 20 respondents (67%), while some others came from cities outside Greater Jakarta such as Denpasar (Bali), Banjarbaru (South Kalimantan), and several other areas outside Java, as many as 10 respondents (33%), then migrated to study at BINUS. Socioeconomically, respondent families are generally in the middle category of 20 respondents (67%) and upper middle class (33%), with parents who have good economic conditions, emphasizing the importance of higher education, and supporting girls' independence and career development, including in terms of leadership and organizational participation.

Table 1. Participants Demographics

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	30	100%
Area of origin/residence	Jakarta/Bekasi/urban	20	67%
Area of origin/residence	Outside Greater Jakarta	10	33%

Source: created by the authors

4.2 RQ1. How do female students view the role of their educational experience in shaping leadership aspirations?

Three themes can be classified (Table 2).

Theme 1: Equality Climate builds permission to “dream”. Students describe how the university treats female and male students as equal. According to respondents, this equality is evidenced in University messages and daily class interactions. It is mentioned in statements from respondents such as “student feels that she is being treated equally and receiving the motivating “indirect messages” that females could lead and be a leader (with females holding leadership positions in the university).”

Theme 2: Active Learning (Discussion and Presentation session) builds confidence and voices. Academic experiences that encourage speaking up, presentations, and participation in discussions in various academic activities are repeatedly mentioned as linked to self-confidence as an early foundation for leadership aspiration. This is mentioned by statements from respondents such as “frequent presentation assignments and opportunities for discussion improve our self-confidence”

Theme 3: “Micro Leadership” in group assignments in building leadership identity. Leadership is not only considered as a big project or big role, but as starting, coordinating, and leading a small group. These activities are considered to support students in seeing themselves and practicing leadership. It is mentioned in statements from respondents such as “awareness of leadership is built in classes with taking initiative and participating in group assignments and makes me realize that I was able to lead”.

Table 2. Representative Verbatim Quotations of RQ1

Theme	Representative Verbatim Quotation	Interpretation
Equality climate	"I am being treated equally"	Shows that equal treatment creates psychological permission for women to aspire to leadership.
Active learning	"Frequent presentation assignments and opportunity for discussion improve our self-confidence"	Demonstrates how classroom participation strengthens confidence and voice.
Micro-leadership	"Awareness of leadership is built in classes with taking initiative and participating in group assignments, and makes me realize that I was able to lead"	Shows how small group tasks become early leadership experiences.

Source: created by the authors

4.3 RQ2. In what ways do co-curricular learning opportunities and experiential learning foster or hinder women's leadership identity and self-efficacy?

Five themes can be classified.

Theme 1: Co-curricular pathways are used strategically to "build a leadership portfolio". Some students deliberately sort organizational roles → competitions → internships to gather skills, networks, and legitimacy. This is mentioned in statements from respondents such as "Explicit planning based on semesters (organizational focus → competitions → internships) and seeking leadership tasks early on"

Theme 2: The moment "Leadership role first" triggers a leap in efficacy (trials → success → confidence). Students explain that being able to step up despite being inexperienced, then receiving positive feedback that reinforces self-efficacy. This is mentioned in a statement from a respondent, such as "took on the role of coordinator with no prior experience and received a 'positive review'."

Theme 3: Experiential learning of developing relational leadership (listening, teamwork, shared leadership). Projects, presentations, and discussions are framed as learning in listening, coordinating diverse opinions and ideas, and negotiating decisions since leadership is a collaborative practice rather than dominance and authority. This is mentioned by statements from respondents such as "leadership learns as 'not just one person leads', but everyone can

lead; emphasis on listening and finding a middle ground" and "competition strengthens teamwork, critical thinking, communication in disputes".

Theme 4: Structured experiential programs (camps, simulations, internships) expand identities to become "global/real-world leaders". Activities such as leadership camps and internships are formatted as transformative tools in building a global mindset, adaptability, and "I can be a leader." It is mentioned by statement from respondent such as "leadership camps that focus on simulation/discussion of social cases/projects; Skills acquired include communication, problem-solving, adaptability, global mindset" and "internships trigger self-recognition ('I am capable') and transformation in leadership identity".

Theme 5: Inhibition mechanisms: age/seniority dynamics can reduce efficacy (leading older peers). Students face a real barrier that arises when a student leads a project that involves a teammate older or more senior than himself, resulting in insecurity. These barriers are lessened when coaching support reframes leadership as trainable. It is mentioned by statement from respondent such as "feeling 'incapable' of leading older members; Reassurance coaches help develop leadership skills".

4.4 RQ3. How do cultural norms and family expectations interact with university experiences to influence female student leadership ambitions in the Indonesian context?

Three themes can be classified.

Theme 1: Patriarchal "role congruence" script limits the legitimacy of women's leadership. Respondents repeatedly depict Indonesian culture as a strong patriarchal culture. It is expected that men will lead and women nurture. This cultural barrier is also strongly present even when equality activities are practiced on campus. This is mentioned by statements from respondents such as "Patriarchy... The male head of the family... Women as nurturing," leadership is still dominated by men" and "Stigma against women who prioritize career over marriage ('why work... instead of marriage... in the kitchen'), especially in small areas with stronger customs".

Theme 2: Family rules operate as "mobility and safety control", shaping access to leadership opportunities. Family expectations can directly limit female participation (e.g., organizational involvement, travel, international opportunities), which leads to limitations in the accumulation of leadership learning and the development process. This is mentioned by statements from respondents such as

“the family gives more permissions/access to the brother; Participants face conflict when joining an organization because the family considers him or her incapable; and “the family prohibits female students from studying abroad unless accompanied by a family member; Being alone abroad as Single women is considered unsafe”.

Theme 3: Interaction effect: campus may feel "gender equal", but family/culture can still keep an eye on choices. Some students say the professional/campus setting is increasingly egalitarian; however, family point of view still gives old-fashioned opinions. This is mentioned by statements from respondents such as “Mentors/clients at work treat everyone equally, but family and extended family still convey that career for males, and females just get married”

4.5 RQ4. What forms of mentorship, role models and institutional support do women identify as enabling or limiting their leadership aspirations?

The four themes found are as follows:

Theme 1: Lack of formal mentoring is common

Many participants reported no formal mentoring/coaching programs, but described mentoring through internships, thesis proctoring, or learning experiences. It is mentioned in statements from respondents such as “mentoring/coaching “never” in the context of university leadership” and “mentoring especially during thesis and internship; Improved skills (communication, research, reporting).

Thema 2: Role models are institutional (female leaders on campus) and intimate (mother/father, family women).

Participants referred to role models as (a) visible female leaders (e.g., rector/dean), and (b) family members who exemplify competence and independence. This is mentioned in statements from respondents, such as “The campus has women in strategic positions (e.g., chancellors), increasing the confidence that women can lead and create impact”.

Theme 3: What a "good leader" looks like: integrity, empathy, courage; but also "dominance" as a gender expectation

Students value empathy and integrity but also voice that women may need to appear "dominant" to be seen as leaders, which hints at the constraints shaped by gender norms. It is mentioned by statements from respondents such as “To be [a leader] we have to be dominant (not in a bad way)”.

Theme 4: Desired institutional support: women-focused programs, structured mentoring, and representation

Students directly recommend institutional interventions: women-specific support structures, more visible female role models, and structured mentoring. It is mentioned in statements from respondents, such as “emphasis on representation + alumni network that brings women CEOs/founders for talks to inspire and prepare students”.

4.6 RQ5. How do intersecting identities (e.g., class, religion, marital status) shape women's interpretation of their university experiences and their vision of future leadership?

Based on respondents' answers, 4 themes can be classified. The four themes are as follows:

Theme 1: Marital status expectations create a "double standard" and a career gatekeeper

Marriage/childbearing expectations shape how women anticipate being evaluated, especially off campus (e.g., recruitment). This affects how they envision the future leadership trajectory. This is mentioned in statements from respondents such as “workplace asks women about plans to get married/have children; affect the chances of acceptance”.

Theme 2: Religious/norm adherence frames "acceptable ambition"

Religious and social norms emerged as a filter through which families evaluated women's leadership involvement; support may depend on perceived moral conformity. It is mentioned by a statement from a respondent, such as “Family support depends on not violating social and religious norms”.

Theme 3: Geographical/urban-rural cultural intensity intersects with women's choices

Participants compared more conservative norms in smaller areas/countryside (stronger customs) with more open norms in cities (e.g., Jakarta). These shape perceived leadership feasibility and social risk ambition. It is mentioned by statements from respondents such as “stronger stigma in smaller areas; Urban areas are described as more open-minded” and “Rural women are seen as having less freedom than urban women to become leaders/managers/directors”.

Theme 4: Family position/gender in the family intersects with access ("brother gets permission")

Being a daughter (vs. a son) in a patriarchal family structure shapes access to mobility and leadership opportunities (permits, travel, organizational involvement). It is mentioned by a statement from a respondent, such as “the brother received more

access/permissions; Participants face restrictions and conflicts when joining the organization.

4.7 Discussion

From the results of this study, it can be concluded that Indonesian higher education institutions can have a role in forming female student leadership aspirations that is important and complex. This discovery suggests that the university contributes to the growth of self-efficacy and leadership identity through a gender equal classroom culture, active learning pedagogies, and also leadership roles in co-curricular activities. Based on Social Cognitive Career Theory [4], the experience of mastery, feedback from teachers, and exposure to leadership positions can reinforce students' confidence in their leadership ability. Students' confidence in their leadership ability can also be reinforced by the experience of mastery, supportive feedback, and exposure to leadership positions, according to the Social Cognitive Career Theory. The experience-based learning activities, such as leadership in organizations and internships, can also contribute to the change of the leadership identity that is consistent with Transformational Learning Theory [28].

Meanwhile, education is not the only thing that influences leadership aspirations. The meanings and expectations of culture and family continue to shape women's understanding and paths to leadership. Conforming to the Role Congruity Theory [12], the participants reported a continuous tension between their leadership ambitions and their expectations with regard to gender roles (marriage, domestic roles, and authority). The Intersectionality Theory [8] also suggests that other factors, like religion, geographical background, marriage expectations, and family hierarchy, can be interrelated and contribute to varying leadership experiences. Thus, leadership development could be considered as a negotiation between institutional supports and sociocultural challenges.

5 Conclusion

The theoretical contribution of this study is to use a theory of SCCT, Role Congruity Theory, and Transformational Learning Theory in the context of Indonesia. The discovery indicates that the university is not a neutral or innocent place, but can be a leader in the development and utilization of leadership opportunities. The use of the intersectionality perspective also gives a deeper understanding of how various aspects of identity can influence leadership aspirations in the non-Western context. From a

practical perspective, this study has revealed that the university should go beyond informal support and begin to offer more formal leadership support for female students. This support may be in the form of a formal mentoring program, women's leadership programs, experience-sharing sessions with alumni who may be able to act as role models, leadership camps, and/or inclusive classroom learning practices. Those are the practices that can help attain equality in group work and presentations. The university can also engage with the family and society in raising awareness, as the expectations of society and the family still play a role in women's access to leadership opportunities. In the non-Western context, where aspirations for leadership are shaped not only by personal beliefs, but also by acceptance and support from the social and cultural context, such a program is important.

This research has some limitations. The sample of the research is mostly concentrated in urban and middle-class contexts, so the findings of the research may not be able to be generalized widely to the rural population or groups with more diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The cross-sectional qualitative design that is used in this research only captures perceptions at one point in time and cannot show how those aspirations develop or are realized in leadership achievements in the long term. Future research can use a longitudinal design or a mixed-method approach to examine how educational experiences influence actual career outcomes. A comparative study that includes various types of institutions and regions can also give a deeper understanding of contextual variations. Besides that, the exploration of other intersectional dimensions, such as ethnicity and socio-economic status, can give a more comprehensive picture of women's leadership development in Indonesia.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) utilized artificial intelligence (AI) technologies solely for the purpose of linguistic refinement and grammatical correction. Following the application of these tools, the author(s) comprehensively reviewed, verified, and edited the resulting text. The author(s) maintain full accountability and responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and final content of the publication.

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