

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN ACADEMICIAN AT SENIOR
ADMINISTRATIVE POSITIONS IN AN IRANIAN UNIVERSITY

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PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN ACADEMICIAN AT SENIOR
ADMINISTRATIVE POSITIONS IN IRANIAN UNIVERSITY

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to all professional women in management, who have given courage and strength to women are aspired to get through the challenges on the pathway to management

Hope it comes a day women and men are kept at the equal distance to management opportunities

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First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to ALLAH S.W.T for guiding me throughout my lifetime. My sincere appreciation goes to each member of my family for their daily prayers, love, caring, supports, encouragements, and patience for my parting.

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ABSTRACT

Although women's access to higher education either as students, staffs, and academic members are increasing worldwide, women senior academic administrative positions continue to be underrepresented. Women who are inspired to be senior administrators still encounter numerous challenges to acquire these positions. Literature review revealed that most studies on enhancing women's participation in senior administrative positions were only focused in developed countries thus the findings may not be applicable to other countries due to several factors such as culture. Therefore, it was vital to study and understand the experiences of Iranian women academicians in senior administrative positions within Iranian cultural context. Specifically, the objectives of this study were to explore opportunities and challenges faced by women administrators in attaining their positions and how they utilized strategies and available resources to overcome the challenges. A qualitative approach using case study design based on the epistemology of social constructivism was applied to explore how women academician navigated their career path to senior academic administrative positions at one Iranian university. Data for this study were gathered from documents, interviews and open-ended questions. Twenty female academicians who are senior administrators at one Iranian university were selected as respondents. The data were analyzed with Nvivo 10 software based on thematic analysis. The researcher endeavored to discover themes which described the real meaning of the respondents' experiences and perspectives. The findings according to the themes and subthemes were written by grouping similar views. Many of the challenges and opportunities which the women administrators experienced resonate with existing literature from all over the world. Yet, the findings of this study disclosed the distinctive influence of socio-cultural values in the local context on opportunities and challenges faced by the female senior administrators. In addition, their unique strategies and available resources to overcome the challenges they encountered were also highlighted in the findings. The data indicated the evidence of three components; firstly, a strong role of family unit among Iranian women as they embrace their traditionally domestic prescribed roles and their participation in the public spheres; secondly, the organizational masculine culture affects women's equal access to senior administrative positions and thirdly, women strong reliance on personal qualities and attributes in pursuing administration positions and professional goals in public spheres. Based on the findings, a conceptual framework for the participation of women academicians in senior academic administrative positions in Iranian universities was proposed.

ABSTRAK

Walaupun penglibatan wanita dalam pendidikan tinggi sama ada sebagai pelajar, staf, dan ahli akademik semakin meningkat di seluruh dunia, jawatan pentadbiran kanan akademik dalam kalangan wanita semakin kurang diwakili. Wanita yang memegang jawatan pentadbiran kanan masih menghadapi pelbagai cabaran untuk memperoleh jawatan-jawatan tersebut. Tinjauan literatur menunjukkan bahawa kebanyakan kajian ke arah meningkatkan penyertaan wanita dalam jawatan pentadbiran kanan hanya tertumpu di negara-negara maju sahaja, justeru dapatan tersebut tidak sesuai diaplikasikan negara-negara lain disebabkan oleh beberapa faktor seperti budaya. Oleh itu, adalah penting di untuk mengkaji dan memahami pengalaman ahli akademik wanita Iran yang memegang jawatan pentadbiran kanan di dalam konteks budaya Iran. Secara khususnya, objektif kajian ini adalah untuk meneroka peluang dan cabaran yang dihadapi oleh pentadbir wanita dalam memperolehi kedudukan mereka dan bagaimana mereka menggunakan strategi dan sumber yang ada untuk mengatasi cabaran. Pendekatan kualitatif menggunakan reka bentuk kajian kes berdasarkan epistemologi konstruktivisme sosial telah digunakan untuk meneroka bagaimana ahli akademik wanita merancang laluan kerjaya mereka ke jawatan kanan pentadbiran akademik di sebuah universiti di Iran. Data untuk kajian ini dikumpulkan dari dokumen-dokumen, temu bual dan soalan terbuka. Dua puluh ahli akademik wanita yang berjawatan Pentadbir Kanan di sebuah universiti di Iran dipilih sebagai responden. Data tersebut dianalisis dengan menggunakan perisian NVivo 10 berdasarkan analisis tematik. Penyelidik telah berusaha untuk mencari tema yang menggambarkan makna sebenar pengalaman dan perspektif responden. Hasil kajian adalah berdasarkan tema dan subtema yang ditulis dengan mengumpulkan pandangan yang sama. Banyak cabaran dan peluang yang dihadapi oleh pentadbir wanita mempunyai persamaan dengan literatur sedia ada dari seluruh dunia. Namun, hasil kajian ini mendedahkan terdapat pengaruh tersendiri nilai-nilai sosio-budaya dalam konteks tempatan mengenai peluang dan cabaran yang dihadapi oleh pentadbir kanan wanita. Di samping itu, strategi yang unik dan sumber yang ada untuk mengatasi cabaran yang dihadapi juga telah diketengahkan di dalam penemuan. Data menunjukkan terdapat tiga komponen; pertama, peranan kuat unit keluarga dalam kalangan wanita Iran kerana mereka mengamalkan peranan domestik secara tradisional dan penyertaan mereka dalam sektor awam; kedua, budaya organisasi maskulin yang memberi kesan kesamarataan dalam kalangan wanita untuk jawatan pentadbiran kanan dan ketiga, pergantungan yang kuat oleh wanita kepada kualiti-kualiti peribadi dan sifat-sifat dalam mengejar jawatan pentadbiran dan matlamat profesional dalam sektor awam. Berdasarkan hasil kajian ini, satu rangka kerja konsep bagi penyertaan ahli akademik wanita yang memegang jawatan pentadbiran akademik kanan di universiti Iran telah dicadangkan.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Higher Education system is recognized universally as the key to sustainable social development. Therefore, women's educational status as students, professors, and administrators has become the standard for determining the level of development and civilization of a society because women's social status is one of the key indicators of sustainable social development as women have been in lower positions throughout history (Oakley, 2000b; Acker, 2006; Yang, 2008). Thus, support for the goal of social parity in higher education system must be fundamental (Mellor, 2010; Lie and Malik, 2014).

Over the previous century, issues concerning women's development in social spheres especially in education have received wide-ranging action by United Nations and its particular organizations. The principle of equality of women and men was first documented in 1945 in the "United Nations Charter", and later in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Also, various conferences at the global level, including the Cairo Conference on Population and Development (1994), the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), and the World Summit for Social development

(1995) have documented the need for gender equality and improvement in the situation of women in public spheres. Thus, supposed equal status to women and men is the law in most societies, as is it only right that both genders can contribute in decision making over issues affecting them (Group, World Bank, 2012).

However, the justification for developing women's participation in higher education especially in senior administrative positions of universities is based on gender equality (Group, World Bank, 2012). However, women are now accounted for in higher positions of higher education all over the world more than ever before (UNICEF, 2013). As in most universities and academic institutes in the world women are allowed to move into leadership positions once held only by men, but statistics which are supposed to show an increase in the number of women in higher position of higher education indicate that the number of women professors in higher education is still low. Statistics showed that in 30 European countries less than 21 percent of professors are female, while 47 percent of PhD graduates are female. In all societies the same pattern may be observed (Ledin et al., 2010). This condition is not restricted to higher education; similar patterns were also found in political and business areas (Helfat et al., 2006). Consequently, today women continue to be underrepresented in higher positions especially in higher executive level (Eagly and Sczesny, 2009). Although the number of female's participating as employees has increased considerably in the second half of twentieth century in all over the world (Jones, 2013), they are generally found in lower organizational positions or they work in 'flat' careers as teaching professionals and health care. However, even in developed countries there is a lag in the participation of women in senior administrative positions (Wajcman, 2013). However, despite establishing equality and legal rights for women, women still are afflicted by multi-faceted discrimination in occupying high ranking positions in societies (Hosseini, 2008; Li, 2014; Morley, 2014).

In Iran, “The National Center for Education Statistics” (2012) remarked in its reports that over the past three decades, Iranian women have made considerable educational progress. The big gap between educational levels of men and women that was evident in the early 1970’s has substantially disappeared for the younger people. Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iranian female high school graduates have further opportunities to pursue their education at the higher education level in fields benefiting their abilities and talents because various educational barriers facing girls have been removed (Rezai- Rashti and Moghadam, 2011). In addition, since the 1990’s girls are more likely than men to continue their education. The number of women as staff at universities has also grown significantly during this period of time. In addition, the number of women academicians professionally involved in higher education as faculty member has increased noticeably (Paivandi, 2012). However, few women academicians are accounted as senior executive administrators (Ministry of Science, Research and Technonlogy, 2015). Thus, gender inequality still in Iranian higher education exists.

The rate of women’s presentation in higher education has become a crucial phenomenon that has captured the attention of researchers and academics as they try to clarify contradictory policy developments as reflected in the unexpected consequences of increased women’s access to higher education and the current low representation of women in administrative positions of higher education (Reza-Rashti and James, 2009; Rezai-Rashti, 2011). There is a big gap between what the law allows and what occurs in reality, especially in representation of women in higher administrative positions (Paivandi, 2012).

This study is aimed explore and understand the situation of women academicians in senior administrative positions and factors which facilitate or hinder as well as strategies women apply to be successful in administrative positions. This is one way of helping to retain and develop qualified women academicians in senior administrative positions in Iranian universities.

1.2 Background of Problem

Literature addresses evidence that women's participation as students and employees in higher education has increased worldwide (Iranian National Center for Education Statistics, 2012; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2012). At the beginning of the nineteenth century in the United States, women entered higher education as students, but at first, enrollment of women was mostly in vocational colleges (Thelin, 2011). Women's share of registration in almost all fields of study in the United States increased in the 1930's (Nidiffer and Bashaw, 2001). Since early 2000, the number of women students has continued to increase, and surpassed men student and comprised nearly 50 percent of all students in undergraduate and graduate levels of higher education in many European and Asian countries (UNESCO, 2012).

The aforementioned promising figures, unfortunately, do not reflect women's contribution as lecturers and administrators in higher education in the world. According to UNESCO (2012) in the field of higher education worldwide, it can be said that a 5 to 1 ratio of men to women in middle administration and senior administration is 20 to 1. However, women in higher education administrative positions have failed to achieve equality with men. The worldwide trend in 2012 demonstrates that in only a few countries, such as Kazakhstan and Belarus, is women's share of teaching positions in higher education more than 50 percent. In the United States, women teachers in higher education in 2010 comprised 46 percent of the total, which was somewhat higher than other developed countries in Europe. For example, in the United Kingdom in 2010, only 42 percent of women held teaching positions in higher education (UNESCO, 2012).

Gender inequality tends to be much wider in senior administrative positions in higher education. When faculty members who are women fill less than 50 percent of the

total instructional positions, the number of women who are in senior administrative positions is more likely to be lower (Altbach, 2007). For instance, in the United States, women still do not have prominent administrative positions in prestigious academic institutions (Madsen, 2012). Female academicians likely hold administrative roles in less selective academic institutions (Dominici, Fried, and Zeger, 2009) and their salary is also less than male administrators (Murniati, 2012). Also, in Middle East the female share of university academic positions both as faculty members and administrators continues to be lower than men (Paivandi, 2012).

In 1996, California accepted “Proposition 209”, which prohibited governmental academic institutions from considering ethnicity and gender in the appointing practices. Proposition 209 documented a setback for the equality movement, according to Glazer-Raymo (2007), who asserted gender equality to be fiction, especially within academic administration and in the professoriate. Glazer-Raymo (2007) contested the generally held beliefs that men and women are now equal. In the United States, proponents of women equality have a tendency to ignore all of cultural, structural, and attitudinal constraints that women in higher education face in order to enhance their career positions. Glazer-Raymo (2007) further explained that some policies such as affirmative action whose purpose is to improve gender equality have led to discrimination against women. She noted that in the United States, affirmative action was created in the 1960’s; however, this policy has been under attack because opponents of affirmative action declared such policies can benefit women but they are discriminatory against men.

Over time, studies have considered to investigate the persistence of gender inequality in leadership positions in universities through various theories and lenses. Some scholars have investigated this issue by using organizational perspectives (Johnsrud and Heck, 1998; Brink, Benschop and Jansen, 2010), cultural perspectives (Noe, 1988; Lee, 2001; Ramanan et al., 2006; Mann, 2012), multiple perspectives (Luke

et al., 1997; Luke, 1998a, 1998b; Oplatka, 2006; Lam, 2009; Orser et al., 2012; Nguyen, 2013).

One of the weaknesses in previous studies on women in management positions is that researchers have used a male-oriented lens and male norms to investigate women's contribution in leadership positions, thus, their researches were more likely to ignore women's own perspectives (Chliwniak, 2007). However, recently some scholars on women in academic administrative positions have attempted to focus on women's own stories. Scholars such as (Eagly, 2007; Glazer-Raymo, 2007; Madsen, 2008; Wajcman, 2013; Morley, 2014) and some others are prominent scholars who tried to present more balanced insights on the gender inequality in top administrative positions. These researches have considered women's stories in their own experiences in academic administrative position, thus allowing further accurate understanding of women's struggle in academic administrative positions in higher education.

While some scholars have looked deeply at factors that impede women from participation in academic senior administrative positions, a review of the studies on the factors facilitating women's advancement in higher management positions worldwide shows only a few scholars have attempted to investigate a variety of factors that enable women to attain senior administrative position in higher education (Luke, 1998a, 1997; Beck, 2003; Lam, 2006; Ballenger, 2010).

In addition, most studies on women's career mobility into senior administrative positions focus on women administrators in higher education of developed countries (Booth et al., 2003; Aycan, 2004a; Bornstein, 2007; Allan et al., 2010; Akroyd et al., 2011; Akpinar-Sposito, 2013a). Few existing researches have attempted to investigate the experiences of women in senior administrative positions in universities in the less developed countries. Also, most of them tend to refer only on the challenges (Oakley,

2000a; Oplatka, 2006; Hutchings, Dawn Metcalfe, and Cooper, 2010; Orser et al., 2012; Nguyen, 2013; Ullah and Skelton, 2013).

However, issues of gender equality still remain in higher education institutions. The more likely explanation for this fact could be that gender equality issues have not received complete attention in most institutions. However, fewer scholars in recent years have explored the challenges and opportunities for women's participation in academic administrative positions in higher education institutions. Researches often have not considered all factors that affect women's advancement in senior administrative positions in higher education. These studies investigated the perceptions of matters concerning the possible challenges to women's career's development, including poor ladder climbing, gender roles, responsibility of family, lack of cultural capital, lack of mentoring and networking, and male dominated workplace (Luke et al.,1997; Oplatka, 2006; Hossini, 2008; Morley, 2009; Kim, 2011; Li, 2014; Nguyen, 2013). Therefore, it is needed to discover how some women in higher education can develop a career path to higher administrative positions.

1.3 Rationale for the Study

Similar to most parts of the world, Iranian female students in higher education has been raising more rapidly for the last three decades (Ministry of science, Research and Technology, 2015). According to "The National Center for Education Statistics" from the 1990's to 2012, women's enrollment in higher education has grown significantly. More than 60 percent of students admitted at the undergraduate levels were women. The number of women staff at universities almost doubled during this same period, with women accounting for 50 percent of staff in low positions. In addition, the number of women professionally involved in higher education in faculty positions has increased

noticeably to 25 percent; however, women accounted for less than 5 percent compared to 95 percent for men in senior administrative positions (The National Center for Education Statistics, 2012; Ministry of science, Research and Technology, 2015).

The Special Report on the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran notes that increasing the numbers of women as students and staff in higher education is not the answer to obtaining gender equality. While women by the development of university education have a great educational achievement, it does not show that gender inequality has disappeared, because women still comprise a low percentage of participation in higher executive positions. Women still continue to be subject to discriminatory practices that hold them back from equal access to all the academia opportunities in higher education (Council, 2012). Although from a legal Islamic point of view, in Iran, men and women are equal (Hosseini, 2008).

The researcher further investigated the issue of women's participation in senior administrative positions through document analysis to find out the positions of women administrators compared to men (Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, 2015). The statistical finding of women academicians in the content of this study is summarized in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Distribution of Full Time Women Academicians According to Their Rank in Governmental Universities, 2014-2015

Ranks	Percentages of women
Professor	8.2
Associate professor	26.4
Assistant professor	43.4
Instructors	35.8
Total	25.3

(For more information please refer to Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, 2015)

Table 1.1 shows that women as academic members hold 25.3 percent of the lecturer positions in universities. The large number of women as associate professors and as assistant professors obviously shows that there are many women who are qualified and deserve to be selected in senior academic administrative positions.

To date, Ministry of Science, Research and Technology does not provide information on women's contribution of administrative positions in universities in Iran. Acquiring full information of women in administrative positions was very difficult. However, some information was provided in the web sites of some universities. Table below shows the number of women in top administrative positions in six governmental universities in capital city of Iran.

Table 1. 2: Demonstrates the Distribution of Women at Top Administrative Position in Selected Universities of Higher Education in 2014- 2015.

Universities	President		Vice-President		Dean		Vice-Dean	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Tehran	1	-	7	-	21	-	58	5
Tarbiat Modarres	1	-	6	-	7	-	18	3
Shahied Beheshti	1	-	7	-	12	-	30	6
Allame Tabatabaei	1	-	7	-	14	-	39	9
Amir Kabir	1	-	5	-	8	-	19	5
Sharif	1	-	6	-	12	-	17	9

(For more information please refer to: <http://www.ut.ac.ir/en/contents/Overview.html>)

Table 1.2 shows that women academicians were not able to secure administrative positions higher than Vice of College, School, although some of them have positions as Vice of College, Vice of School. On the other hand, women academicians were occupied only in junior positions in the academic ladder. These figures are likely to be same in other governmental universities. Analysis of the obtained data and information revealed that although women could get junior positions in the university, they occupied a smaller percentage of the senior positions. Thus, universities are faced with a shortage

of woman administrators because women in decision-making positions are still minimal; it produces and maintains differential academia status for women and for men and women are often excluded from the senior academic administrative status (Hossieni, 2008; Paivandi, 2012).

Iran as an Islamic society, portray a person as a Muslim, and this Muslim Person is characterized as believing in God, pious, honest, loyal and devoted to Islamic government, knowledgeable, modest and so on (Mehran, 1989). At the same time, the gender stratification in social life, including education, came to be the policy of the government. This was legitimized by the government's interpretation that women had a complementary status in Islam. Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iranian female high school graduates have further opportunities to pursue their education at the higher education level in fields benefiting their abilities and talents because various educational barriers facing girls have been removed (Rezai- Rashti and Moghadam, 2011).

On the other hand, in practices traditional ideas about the ideal roles for women are maintained. Strong ideological and cultural sanction supports to those traditional familial divisions and societal presumption on the appropriate roles for both genders means that deviations from the norms are commonly deemed as unacceptable and punishable (Rezai- Rashti and Moghadam, 2011). In Iran, gender role traditionalism presents in family and public spheres even greater challenges for women's working (Hossini, 2008). For example, historically, most men had plenty of freedom and no or fewer household responsibilities than women and men are born to a superior role. This path is still followed in family unit and public spheres. However, despite establishing equality and legal rights for women, there is a big gap between what the Islamic law allows and what occurs in reality, especially in representation of women in higher administrative positions (Paivandi, 2012). Therefore, pragmatic solutions are considered necessary to get better gender equality in higher education especially in administration levels (Moghadam, 2003; Hossieni, 2008; Rezai-Rashti, 2011).

The Iranian higher education established Center for Women's Studies in the University to conduct a wide range of researches on women status in Iran. Unfortunately, some national policies and socio-cultural challenges do not improve gender equity in higher education. In addition, Centers of Women's Studies has not helped to examine the gender issues in universities in general and administrative status in particular (Hossieni, 2008).

Previous studies on women focused on the number of challenges which keep women out of senior managerial positions in organizations (Safiri, 2006; Shavarini, 2006; Tavakol, 2007; Saleh, 2008; Hossieni, 2008, Rezai-Rashti, 2011). There is insufficient data on the actual factors affecting women's development in academic administrative positions and not enough explaining how, because the previous studies focus only on challenges in qualitative approach (Safiri, 2006; Hossieni, 2008). Therefore, a more balanced perspective in qualitative approach is pivotal to understanding the situation of women academicians in senior administrative positions in universities.

An extensive search in academic literature in Iran found that there is a scarcity of empirical research examining women in management, especially in universities (Hosseni, 2008). Also, these few studies show that researches on women's participation in administrative positions have focused on quantitative research approach (Safiri, 2006; Hossieni, 2008). In contrast, quantitative research provides limited analysis of women's aspirations, their understanding of this increasing participation, and the changes of gender relations. Because quantitative research design does not allow researchers to investigate personal experiences of women and quantitative approach could not examine women, contexts, and settings as a whole instead of examining them as isolated variables, qualitative research can enable researcher to develop insights, understanding,

and concepts from the data rather than only collecting data to assess hypotheses, preconceived theories or models (Silverman, 2011).

This situation raises some important questions about the status of women academicians in senior administrative positions: Why there are only a few women academicians in senior administrative positions? What factors impede women academicians to achieve senior administrative positions, and what factors motivated women academicians who are already in academic senior administrative positions? Therefore, it is essential to explore women's participation in senior administrative positions in Iranian universities.

1.4 Statement of Problem

Women's participation in higher education institutes has been given more attention by the Islamic Republic of Iran. Changes in legislation of greater equality in higher education have led to a considerable increase in women's share as students in higher education (Rezai-Rashti, 2011). However, women are underrepresented in senior administrative positions despite higher their participation in higher education institutions and their investment in human capital. Statistics indicate that women in Iranian universities in senior administration positions represent less than 5 percent, compared to 95 percent for men (The National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Women have aspiration, higher qualification, and academic experience to be effective and successful in administration, but they often face other challenges due to society's perception, organizational policies and family issues (Hossieni, 2008; Morley, 2014). The possible explanation for this situation could be that gender issues have not received due attention in universities. However, the justification for developing women's participation in higher education especially in senior administrative positions of universities is based on

gender equality (Group, World Bank, 2012). The Iranian higher education established Center for Women's Studies in the University to conduct a wide range of researches on women status in Iran. Unfortunately, Centers of Women's Studies has not helped to examine the gender issues in universities in general and administrative status in particular (Hossieni, 2008). This issue in universities affects the progress in improving the legal environment for promoting gender equality (Li, 2014).

These paradoxes require investigation to address the ongoing waste of leadership talent which arises from and is persisted by the current underrepresentation of women across senior administrative positions. While a few quantitative researchers have in recent years began to document barriers of women's participation in management positions in Iran (Safiri, 2006; Hossieni, 2008), such quantitative studies have not focused on the actual and multifaceted factors that affect women's participation in administrative positions in universities. Therefore, it is necessary to continue advancing research related to challenges, opportunities, and strategies in a qualitative basis, because it allows a complex, detailed understanding of the issue. If a few women academicians achieve senior administrative positions in universities, it is necessary to gain knowledge as to how these few women have become administrators, the challenges and opportunities that existed and how the challenges were overcome.

Understanding the challenges and opportunities for women in senior administrative positions in university is essential not only in terms of achieving gender equality, but also for human capital development and administrative development as a whole within universities (Madsen, 2012). Therefore, for the sustainable development of Iran, women need to be seen as equal to men and given the opportunity to obtain equal management positions,

1.5 Objectives of the Study

The Main objective of this research was to gain knowledge of about women's participation at senior administrative positions in an Iranian university. More especially, the objectives of this research are follows:

1. To explore the challenges faced by women academicians at senior administrative positions in an Iranian university.
2. To explore the opportunities of participation for women academicians at senior administrative positions in an Iranian university.
3. To identify the strategies women academicians employed to achieve senior position in an Iranian university.
4. To propose a framework for participation of women academicians at senior administrative positions in an Iranian university.

1.6 Research Questions

According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005), qualitative studies normally involve one main research question comprised of sub research questions. To achieve the objectives of this study, following main question and sub questions guided this study.

Main question: How is the participation of women academicians at senior administrative positions in an Iranian University? This overarching question initially comes with the following sub-questions:

RQ1. What are the challenges faced by women academicians at senior administrative positions in an Iranian University?

RQ2. What are the opportunities of participation for women academicians at senior administrative positions in an Iranian University?

RQ3. What strategies did women academicians at senior administrative position employ to achieve their current position in an Iranian University?

Each sub-question was completed by some protocol questions that permitted the researcher to acquire valuable information from participants.

1.7 Significance

Supposed equal status to women and men is the law in most societies, as is it only right that both genders can contribute in decision making over issues affecting them (Group, World Bank, 2012). Thus, the poor participation of women in public spheres especially in management positions can be negatively related to the wellbeing of the society (Acker, 2006). Hence, targeting women can be a powerful strategy for growing the efficiency and productivity of the society. According to Walsh (1996), universities have a pivotal role in countries and the consequences of low representation of women in leadership positions have a wider and more critical resonance for issues of social justice, equality, and participation in public spheres. Some studies have been concluded that explore women's situation in administrative position in universities, and further researches are needed which investigate the universities socio-cultural landscape and to identify the means by which gender role expectations continue to make and maintain challenges for women as they seek to become women academicians in senior academic administrative positions (Kim, 2011). Thus, as the study is underscored by social role theory and feminist theory, the research seeks to modify the feminist perspective with a clear sense of how gender is discriminated by cultural gender roles expectations, to change the lived experience of women academicians as opposed to men academicians in academia.

Therefore, how women academicians perceive the challenges and opportunities in senior administrative positions in universities allow for the following interested groups to benefit:

1. Academic and administrator women will have greater ability to distinguish individual, cultural, and structural challenges and opportunities for senior administrative positions in order to better overcome challenges
2. Administrator women in senior positions will achieve a better ability to counter common cultural, structural, and personal opportunities and challenges perceived and experienced by women academicians in these positions.
3. College female students may have the opportunity to benefit from the research results as well. Specifically, women administrators who have responsibility to female students may have a better ability to work effectively with female students.
4. The implications from the gained knowledge of this study may enable policy makers and scholars in higher education to design progressive programs and aimed policies could improve women's participation in university administration and better meet the needs of the universities in administrative positions.

Moreover, the outcomes of this study will contribute to the body of literature on women in leadership in developing countries in general, and in Iran in particular. In addition to adding new knowledge, it may be a catalyst for further research on this subject. It will also give some recommendations for future researches regarding the advancement of knowledge related to opportunities and challenges of women's career development in order to better understand gender issues and posit appropriate recommendations to overcome them.

1.8 Scope of the Study

The overall focus of this qualitative case study research was on women's experiences and perceptions of challenges, opportunities and strategies women academicians applied to be successful at senior administrative positions in their university. Academician women in senior administrative positions from all colleges and faculties were participating in the study. Participants were selected by purposive sampling.

1.9 Background of Case Profile

The following profile presents the background of the University as case in this study. It was established first as a theological college. After that the curriculum included literature, mathematics, medicine, astronomy, chemistry, biology, and physics. During the new era, changed from a theological structure to a more academic structure of higher education and it became known as College. It was the first engineering college in its modern structure which was established near to two centuries ago. Engineering, industrial and medical sciences were among the programs taught at the new colleges. The first lecturers of the Colleges were from Austria. It was turned into an official state-run university. Therefore, this University of is the oldest governmental modern university (Tavakol, 2007).

Based on statistics of higher education in Iran, This University as comprehensive university focuses on all levels of higher education. It has 15 colleges. There are more than 1400 faculty members, including 400 at senior administrators of whom 40 are

women and the rest are men in academic administrative positions. There are more than 16000 undergraduate students, 17500 postgraduate students, about 4300 PhD students (Moeini, 2013).

1.10 Operational Definitions of Terms

Throughout the research, a number of key terms will be used interchangeably. Therefore, in this part, operational definitions of intended key terms are presented in order to minimize misinterpretation and misunderstanding of them.

Women Participation: Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development. This right is the foundation of the ideal of equal participation in decision-making among women and men. This right argues that since women know their situation best, they should participate equally with men to have their perspective effectively incorporated at all levels of decision-making (Acker, 1987). In this study, the term ‘women participation’ is used to refer to the condition of equal opportunity to women to contribute in senior administrative positions in universities. It implies qualitative and quantitative participation of women academicians

Senior Administrative position: For the purpose of this study refers to senior academic administrator of universities in organizational chart that are in supervisory positions. Faculty members as academicians involved in senior administrator are defined as President, Vice President, Principal Director of institutes, Dean of Colleges, Deans of Faculties, Vice of Colleges and Faculties, Head of Research Center, Principal Director of Central Library, and Heads of Departments or any position that is included as part of

the President's Executive Council or Senior Administrative Cabinet on any given campus of university.

Gender: There are differences between the terms gender and sex. Sex, male and female, is a biological term, while gender describes a cultural expression, such as man and woman (Evans et al., 2010). Posit that gender identity is rooted in childhood and discussed gender identity in terms of a binaries and continuums. In this study, gender term refers to the cultural and social prescription of female and male personality (Eagly, 2013)The researcher acknowledged that the terms female and woman have been intermingled in the literature reviewed and were also intermingled within this study.

Gender equality: Gender equality is defined as the equal opportunity that women and men has to pursue desired employment options for which they are qualified, and are promoted in a similar occupational setting on their professional accomplishments.

Opportunities: Experiences, practices, events and personal factors that contribute to the ascension of women academicians to senior administrative positions.

Challenges: Experiences, practices, events, and personal factors that can prevent or hinder ascension of women academicians to senior administrative positions.

Strategies: For the purpose of this study, this term is used to refer to means and ways that can be applied by women to progress both qualitative and quantitative participation in senior administrative position.

1.11 Conceptual Framework

Maxwell (2012) considers the conceptual framework of a study as an essential part of the research design, a structure of conceptions, assumptions, expectations, perspectives, and theories which informs and supports a research. Maxwell mentions the metaphor of the coat closet in which he envisions coat hooks instead of the different concepts upon which data will hang in order to make clear important relationships. In the current research three key hooks are applied as concepts designed to assist our understanding of how organizational, individual, and socio-cultural factors as challenges, opportunities and strategies have shaped the women's participation into senior administrative positions in Iranian higher education.

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the Gender-Organizational system perspective, feminist theory and social role theory. The conceptual framework is also derived from the statement of problem and the purpose of study research.

This framework is used to address and analyze the influences of different multifaceted factors and conditions that pose challenges, opportunities as well as strategies for women's participation into senior administrative positions in Iranian universities. Consequently, equality for women's participation in managerial positions may be attained through balancing the many factors by society, the individual factors, and organizational practices. This framework asserts that analysis of each level alone will be inadequate to realize the presentation of women in managerial positions (Adler and zraeli, 1994). However, the three mentioned factors are divided for the purpose of illustration and clarification. It is crucial to keep in mind the connection between personal, organizational and cultural dimensions, and how cultural and organizational dimensions influence personal actions and how personal actions changes culture and organization. The conceptual framework of this study is shown in figure 1.1.

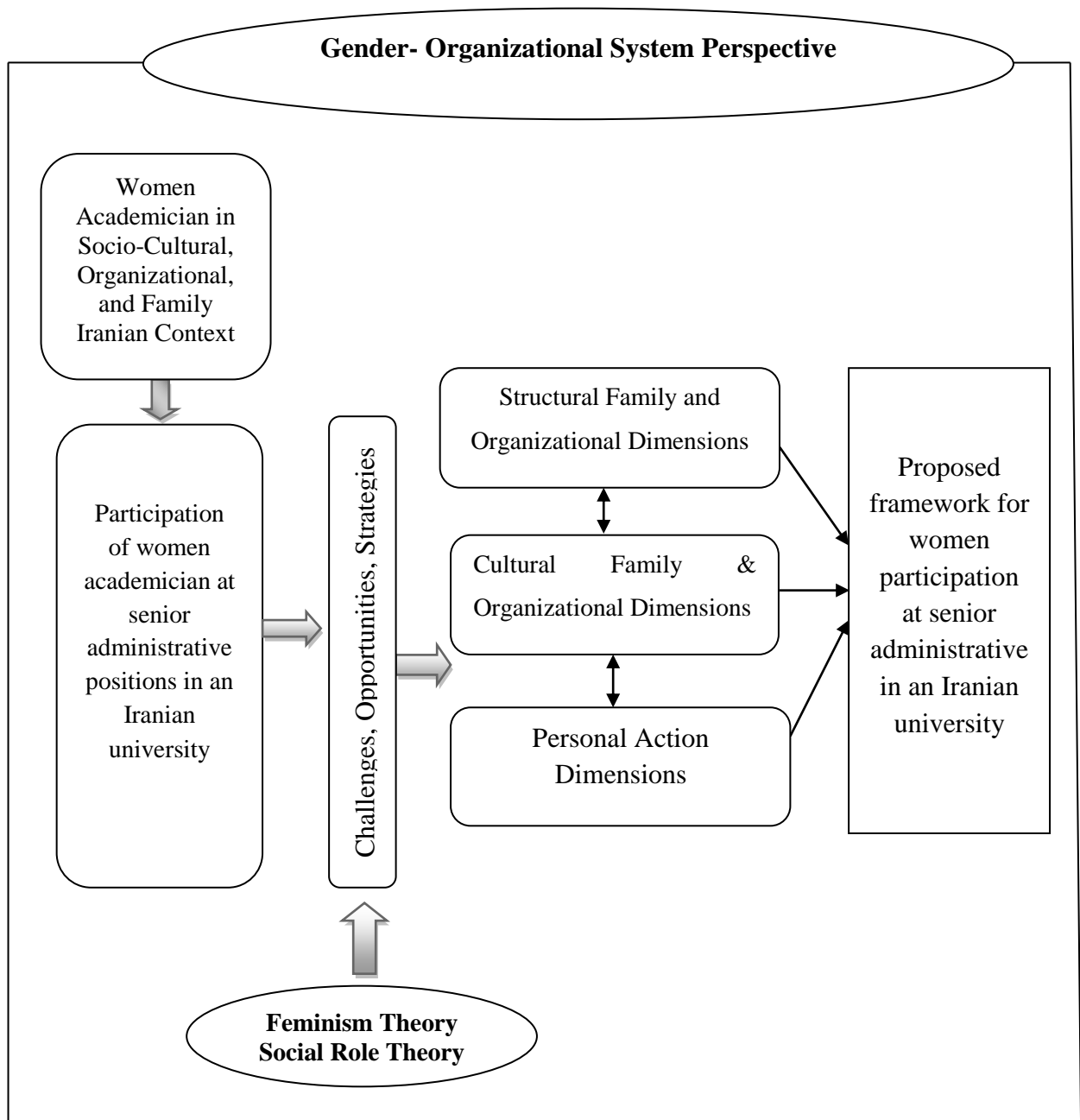


Figure 1.1 Conceptual Research Framework

1.12 Summary

This chapter has covered the outline of the research study. It began with related background of the problem in Iran and all over the world. Previous studies have shown the persistence of gender inequality in academic administrative positions in developed countries and in the less developed countries. Although the number of female students in higher education has improved in the second half of twentieth century, women's participation in senior administration does not show significant progress. Scholars discussed several external or internal factors which hinder or facilitate women academicians from moving up into senior administrative positions.

The existing literature on women's participation in administration of higher education has focused mostly in North American, European and a few south Asian countries. To date, little research has been published on women's experience in administrative positions in higher education of Middle East countries, including Iran. Therefore, this study focuses on understanding the interplay of factors that account for women's participation at administrative positions in Iranian universities.

Next chapter presents the existing literature on women's participation in leadership positions, particularly in administration of higher education to present seminal researches conducted on the issue under investigation, what areas are broadly explored, and what areas still need to be explored.

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