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METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL**<http://mentaljournal-jspu.uz/index.php/mesmj/index>**INSTITUTIONAL FOUNDATIONS OF WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP AND SELF-
REALIZATION IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM OF NEW UZBEKISTAN****Makhsuda Ergasheva***Associate Professor**Department of Fundamentals of Spirituality and Legal Education**Jizzakh State Pedagogical University**e-mail: maxsudaergasheva67@gmail.com**Jizzakh, Uzbekistan***ABOUT ARTICLE**

Key words: women's leadership; self-realization; higher education; New Uzbekistan; gender equality; institutional foundations; socio-philosophical analysis; human capital; managerial culture.

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Abstract: This article examines the institutional foundations of women's leadership and self-realization in the higher education system of New Uzbekistan. It considers the socio-philosophical, legal, organizational-managerial and educational mechanisms that expand women's participation in the academic, scientific, managerial and public life of higher education institutions. Particular attention is paid to the relationship between gender equality, human capital, social justice and the modernization of higher education. It is argued that women's leadership in higher education is not only an indicator of the democratization of society but also an important factor of sustainable development, innovative renewal and the formation of a new managerial culture. The article analyzes state strategies, national programmes and institutional practices aimed at supporting women, increasing their social and political activity, and creating conditions for professional and personal self-realization.

Introduction. Under the conditions of building New Uzbekistan, the problem of expanding women's opportunities in public, political, economic, scientific and educational spheres has acquired particular relevance. Women's leadership today is regarded not only as a

matter of social justice but also as a crucial resource for the modernization of society. Within the higher education system this problem is of special importance, since it is universities that shape the intellectual elite, scientific potential, human resource pool and value orientations of future society.

Women's leadership in higher education manifests itself in several interrelated directions: women's participation in the management of educational institutions, departments, faculties, research centres and research projects; their activity in research, innovation, international cooperation and academic mobility; the self-realization of female students, master's and doctoral students, and young researchers as future specialists and agents of social development; and the formation, within the university environment, of a culture of equal opportunity, respect for human dignity and non-discrimination.

The relevance of the topic is determined by the fact that in New Uzbekistan the issues of supporting women and ensuring gender equality have acquired the status of one of the priority areas of state policy. Equal rights and opportunities for women and men are guaranteed by law [1], and mechanisms for protecting women from harassment and violence have likewise been established [2]. In 2022 the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan issued a Decree "On Measures to Further Accelerate Systemic Support for the Family and Women" [3], while a year earlier the Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality in the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030 had been approved, providing a long-term institutional framework for ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men [4].

National priorities in this sphere are also enshrined at the level of the overarching socio-economic development strategy: the "Uzbekistan – 2030" Strategy set the task of increasing the share of women in leadership positions to 30 percent through the continuation of gender-equality policy and the enhancement of women's socio-political activity [5]. It should be noted that in February 2026 the performance targets of the "Uzbekistan – 2030" Strategy were updated by a separate presidential decree [6], which confirms the dynamic nature of the national strategic framework and the need to verify its current version when preparing subsequent scholarly publications.

The purpose of this article is to reveal the institutional foundations of women's leadership and self-realization in the higher education system of New Uzbekistan, to determine their socio-philosophical significance, and to outline the main directions for further improvement.

To achieve this purpose, the following tasks are addressed: to clarify the essence of the concepts of "women's leadership" and "self-realization" in the context of higher education; to

analyze the legal and organizational mechanisms for supporting women; to determine the role of the university environment in shaping women's leadership qualities; and to identify existing problems and propose evidence-based recommendations for developing women's leadership in higher education.

The methodological basis of the study comprises general scientific methods of analysis and synthesis, together with institutional and socio-philosophical approaches; the empirical basis is formed by the current legal acts of the Republic of Uzbekistan [1–6], materials of state bodies [7–9], and international analytical sources [10, 11], which is consistent with the internationally accepted interpretation of gender equality in higher education as a factor of sustainable development [10, 11].

Materials and methodology

1. Women's Leadership and Self-Realization as Socio-Philosophical Categories

Women's leadership represents a socially significant form of women's activity aimed at decision-making, the organization of joint activity, influence on the development of social institutions, and participation in the management of social processes. In a socio-philosophical sense, leadership is not reducible to holding a formal position. It includes the capacity of the subject to recognize social needs, take responsibility, propose new ideas, unite people and participate in transforming social reality.

Self-realization, in turn, denotes the process of unfolding a person's personal, intellectual, professional and spiritual potential. For women within the higher education system, self-realization is manifested in obtaining a quality education, participating in research, professional growth, academic recognition, developing managerial competencies, public activity, and achieving a balance between personal, family and professional life.

An organic relationship exists between women's leadership and self-realization. Leadership becomes the outcome of a high level of personal self-realization, while self-realization, in turn, requires a favourable institutional environment. Where a society offers equal opportunities, legal guarantees, educational support, social protection and a fair system of career advancement, women are able to realize their abilities to the full. Where, on the contrary, the institutional environment restricts women's access to resources, managerial positions or scientific careers, self-realization becomes difficult to achieve.

From a philosophical standpoint, the problem of women's leadership is linked to the broader categories of freedom, justice, equality, dignity and social responsibility. Woman as a subject of social development should be regarded not merely as an object of social protection but as an active participant in modernization processes. Such an approach is particularly

important for higher education, since the university is a space for shaping a free, responsible and creative personality.

2. Legal Foundations for Supporting Women in New Uzbekistan

The institutional foundation of women's leadership begins with the legal framework. In recent years the Republic of Uzbekistan has developed a system of legal, strategic and organizational mechanisms aimed at protecting women's rights, increasing their activity and ensuring equal opportunities.

The basic act in this sphere is the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan of 2 September 2019 No. ZRU-562 “On Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men”, which regulates relations in the sphere of ensuring equal rights and opportunities and establishes liability for direct and indirect discrimination on grounds of sex [1]. A related Law of 2 September 2019 No. ZRU-561 “On the Protection of Women from Harassment and Violence” is aimed at protecting women from all forms of harassment and violence in marriage, in the workplace, in educational institutions and in other spheres [2].

Of major importance is the Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality in the Republic of Uzbekistan until 2030, approved by Resolution of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PS-297-IV of 28 May 2021 [4]. The document is aimed at creating conditions for equal participation of women and men in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the country and is of particular significance for higher education, since universities are one of the key institutions shaping gender culture, professional competencies and leadership potential.

An essential place is occupied by the Presidential Decree of 7 March 2022 No. UP-87 “On Measures to Further Accelerate Systemic Support for the Family and Women”. The document identifies such priority directions as protecting women's rights and legitimate interests, increasing their economic, social and political activity, supporting women in need of social protection, strengthening the institution of the family, and preventing offences among women [3]. For the higher education system this decree is important because it shapes a nationwide policy of support for women and sets institutional benchmarks for educational organizations.

The “Uzbekistan – 2030” Strategy likewise enshrined the need to continue gender-equality policy and increase women's socio-political activity, including the task of raising the share of women in leadership positions to 30 percent [5]. This provision has a direct bearing on higher education, where women should be represented not only as lecturers and researchers but also as heads of departments, deans, vice-rectors, rectors, and leaders of research projects and public councils. As noted above, the performance targets of this Strategy

were updated in 2026 [6], which requires researchers to regularly verify the legal framework against its current version.

Additional significance is held by documents relating to ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men and to protecting women from harassment and violence. Official state resources emphasize that mechanisms are in place aimed at improving the system for protecting women's rights and legitimate interests [9]. These norms create the legal foundation for a safe, fair and supportive educational environment.

Thus, the legal framework of New Uzbekistan creates a foundation for the development of women's leadership in higher education. However, the effectiveness of legal norms depends on the extent to which they are implemented at the level of individual universities, departments, scientific schools and managerial practices.

3. The Institutional Environment of Higher Education as a Space for Women's Self-Realization

Higher education is the most important social institution ensuring the professional formation of the individual, the development of scientific thinking, the shaping of civic responsibility, and the training of managerial personnel. In this sense, the university environment functions not only as an educational but also as a socio-cultural space in which models of leadership and self-realization are formed.

The institutional environment of higher education comprises several components. The first is organizational-managerial: women's opportunity to participate in university governance, hold administrative positions, and join academic councils, expert commissions, scientific councils and working groups. The second is academic: women's access to teaching, research, publication activity, grants, internships and professional development programmes. The third is socio-psychological: the presence, within the university, of an atmosphere of respect, support, mentorship and recognition of women's professional potential. The fourth is value-educational: the formation, among students and academic staff, of a culture of gender equality, civic responsibility and social justice.

Within the higher education system of New Uzbekistan, women's self-realization acquires particular significance in connection with the expansion of girls' access to higher education, and the development of science, digital technologies, entrepreneurship and international cooperation. At the same time, institutional support should not be episodic but systemic: career support, leadership schools, mentorship, support for young scholars, prevention of discrimination, social protection of student-mothers and female academic staff, and transparent mechanisms of career advancement.

The university is capable not merely of reflecting existing social relations but of transforming them. It can become a space for shaping a new model of women's leadership based on professionalism, responsibility, scholarly competence, moral maturity and social activity. It is precisely for this reason that the development of women's leadership in higher education is of strategic significance for society as a whole.

4. Organizational and Managerial Mechanisms for Developing Women's Leadership

One of the key directions in the institutional provision of women's leadership is the creation of organizational and managerial mechanisms that promote women's advancement in academic and administrative careers. Such mechanisms should be aimed at eliminating the formal and informal barriers that limit women's participation in decision-making.

These mechanisms include the formation of a talent pool of women leaders, managerial training programmes, leadership schools, the development of mentorship, support for women's participation in competitions for leadership positions, and ensuring transparency of appointment and promotion procedures. It is important that women's advancement be based not on formal criteria but on professional competencies, scientific achievements, managerial abilities and public activity.

In recent years Uzbekistan has consistently strengthened its institutional approach to gender-equality issues. Thus, the Senate of the Oliy Majlis regularly reviews the fulfilment of tasks set out in the comprehensive programmes for implementing the Strategy for Achieving Gender Equality until 2030, and approves further measures for its implementation [7]. This demonstrates that gender policy is treated not as a one-off initiative but as a long-term process requiring monitoring, evaluation and continuous improvement.

The introduction of gender auditing in state bodies and organizations is of particular importance. According to available data, the methodology for conducting gender audits has been adopted in a new edition, and on this basis an audit was carried out, in particular, at the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation [7]. For higher education institutions, this direction is of fundamental importance, since gender auditing makes it possible to identify real problems: insufficient representation of women in leadership positions, uneven distribution of opportunities, hidden forms of discrimination, and limited access to research resources or managerial positions.

Organizational and managerial mechanisms must also take into account the specifics of women's academic careers. Many women combine professional activity with family responsibilities, which requires flexible and equitable solutions: support for academic mobility, accounting for the period of maternity in the assessment of research productivity, creating

conditions for remote participation in scientific events, and developing childcare rooms and social services within universities.

Results and discussion. Women's leadership in higher education is impossible without the development of women's scientific and educational potential. Self-realization in the academic environment presupposes women's participation in research activity, the training of research personnel, publications, innovative projects, international conferences, grants and scientific schools.

Scientific and educational mechanisms of support for women should include several directions: expanding the participation of female students and young researchers in research clubs, start-up projects, grant competitions and international programmes; developing mentorship, whereby experienced female lecturers and scholars help young women build academic careers; and forming a culture of scientific recognition in which women's achievements become visible within the university and public environment.

The development of women's digital competencies is of particular importance. Under conditions of the digitalization of higher education, proficiency in information technologies, digital platforms, artificial-intelligence tools, analytical instruments and online communication is becoming an important condition for professional growth. According to official data, the level of digital skills among women with higher education is significantly higher than among women without higher education [9]. This confirms that higher education plays a key role in narrowing the gender digital divide and expanding women's opportunities in the innovation economy.

In addition, it is necessary to stimulate women's participation in STEM fields, engineering, information technology, natural sciences and innovative entrepreneurship. Within the higher education system such measures may include dedicated educational programmes, scientific competitions for girls, laboratory schools, internships, project-based learning and cooperation with international organizations.

Women's self-realization in higher education should be understood not merely as obtaining a diploma but as a process of forming an active personality capable of scientific thinking, managerial decision-making, social responsibility and professional leadership.

Socio-Psychological Barriers to Women's Leadership in Higher Education

Despite the existence of regulatory and institutional conditions, the development of women's leadership in higher education faces a number of socio-psychological barriers. These may be related to traditional stereotypes, women's insufficient confidence in their own leadership abilities, limited access to informal managerial networks, an uneven distribution of family responsibilities, and a lack of role models.

One of the most persistent barriers remains the stereotypical view of leadership as a predominantly male domain. In the academic environment this may be expressed in women being perceived as good performers, teachers or mentors, but not always regarded as potential leaders, strategists, reformers or managers. Such stereotypes can limit women's own career expectations and influence management's personnel decisions.

Another barrier is associated with the so-called “glass ceiling” – informal constraints that impede women's advancement to top managerial positions. Formally, women may have equal rights, but in practice they may face unequal access to resources, recommendations, leadership positions and prestigious research projects.

The problem of combining professional and family roles is also of considerable importance. In traditional society, a woman is often assigned the greater share of family and child-rearing duties, which can reduce her opportunities to take part in business trips, international internships, scientific conferences or long-term managerial projects. Institutional policy in higher education must therefore take into account not only formal indicators but also the real-life circumstances of women.

Overcoming these barriers requires the development of socio-psychological support, career counselling, mentorship, leadership training, confidence-building programmes, and public recognition of women's achievements. It is important to foster, within universities, a culture in which women's leadership is regarded not as an exception but as a natural part of academic and managerial life.

The Role of State Policy in Shaping Women's Leadership Potential

State policy in New Uzbekistan plays a key role in creating conditions for the development of women's leadership. It provides the legal framework, strategic goals, institutional mechanisms and public legitimization of women's activity.

Presidential Decree No. UP-87 identifies as one of its priority directions the enhancement of women's economic, social and political activity [3]. This approach is of great importance for higher education, since universities train personnel for all spheres of public life. When active, educated and socially responsible women are formed within the university environment, they subsequently become leaders in public administration, science, business, culture, the social sphere and civil society.

The “Uzbekistan – 2030” Strategy set the task of increasing the share of women in leadership positions to 30 percent [5] (with the performance targets subsequently updated in 2026 [6]). Achieving this goal requires the systematic training of women leaders specifically

within higher education: universities should become platforms for identifying, supporting and promoting talented female students, young scholars and academic staff.

International cooperation is also an important direction of state policy. According to data from the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation of the Republic of Uzbekistan, UN Women has expressed its readiness to assist in implementing the gender-equality strategy and the national programme for increasing women's activity in all spheres of the country's economic, political and social life [8]. Such cooperation opens up opportunities for introducing international experience, developing educational programmes, supporting innovation and strengthening the institutional capacity of universities.

State policy in this sphere should be oriented not only towards quantitative indicators but also towards qualitative change: the formation of a new managerial culture, the development of fair procedures, recognition of women's professionalism, support for academic freedom, and the creation of conditions for harmonious self-realization.

The University as an Institution for Shaping a Culture of Gender Equality

A higher education institution is not only a place for the transmission of knowledge but also an institution of socialization. It is at the university that young people internalize the norms of professional ethics, civic responsibility, interpersonal respect and social interaction. The university therefore plays an important role in shaping a culture of gender equality.

A culture of gender equality in higher education presupposes that women and men have equal access to education, research activity, managerial positions, public activity and professional growth. It also presupposes the prevention of discrimination, respect for the dignity of every individual, prevention of harassment, and the creation of a safe educational environment.

Building such a culture requires incorporating gender issues into curricula, educational work, research and the activities of student organizations. It is important to hold scientific conferences, round tables, training sessions, discussions and awareness-raising events devoted to equal opportunity, women's leadership, family culture, the prevention of violence and social responsibility.

Work with female students is of particular importance: the university should help them see prospects for professional growth, participate in public life, develop leadership qualities, and master skills of public speaking, project management, scientific analysis and teamwork. At the same time, it is important to cultivate among male students a respectful attitude towards women's leadership and an understanding of the principles of equality and partnership.

Thus, the university environment can become the most important mechanism for changing public consciousness. Through education, science and upbringing, higher education shapes a new generation of citizens for whom women's leadership is a natural value of a modern democratic society.

Prospects for the Development of Women's Leadership in Higher Education

Prospects for the development of women's leadership in the higher education of New Uzbekistan are linked to the further improvement of institutional mechanisms.

First, it is necessary to develop and implement, in every higher education institution, internal programmes to support women's leadership, including the training of women leaders, mentorship, career support, monitoring of gender balance, support for research activity, and prevention of discrimination.

Second, a system of gender auditing should be developed within universities that assesses not only the number of women among students and academic staff, but also their representation in leadership positions, participation in research projects, access to grants and international programmes, working conditions, and opportunities for professional advancement.

Third, it is necessary to strengthen the role of women in scientific management by increasing the number of women among the heads of research laboratories, dissertation councils, research centres, expert commissions and editorial boards of scientific journals.

Fourth, it is important to develop women's mentorship. Experienced female scholars and leaders can serve as role models for female students and young academic staff, which contributes to the transfer of professional experience, the strengthening of confidence, the formation of academic identity, and the expansion of career opportunities.

Fifth, international cooperation in the field of women's leadership should be expanded: the participation of Uzbekistan's universities in international projects, academic-mobility programmes, grants and research networks will allow women to gain new knowledge, develop professional connections and increase their competitiveness.

Sixth, attention should be paid to women's digital self-realization: under conditions of the digital transformation of higher education, women should actively participate in the development of online courses, digital educational platforms, scientific databases, start-ups and innovative projects.

Conclusion. The institutional foundations of women's leadership and self-realization in the higher education system of New Uzbekistan constitute a complex, multi-level system that includes legal, organizational-managerial, scientific-educational, socio-psychological and

value-based mechanisms. Their development is an important condition for the modernization of higher education, the strengthening of human capital, and the formation of a just society.

Women's leadership in higher education should not be regarded merely as a matter of women's representation in leadership positions. It has a deeper socio-philosophical significance as an indicator of the degree of openness of a society, the maturity of its institutions, the level of social justice, and its capacity to make use of the intellectual potential of all citizens.

New Uzbekistan is creating important conditions for the development of women's leadership: strategic documents have been approved [1–6], national programmes are being implemented [7], legislation is being improved, gender-auditing mechanisms are being introduced, and international cooperation is expanding [8]. At the same time, further work is required to translate these conditions into a sustainable university practice.

For the further development of women's leadership in higher education, it is advisable to: implement university programmes to support women leaders; develop mentorship and a talent pool; ensure transparency in career advancement; conduct regular gender audits; support women in science and innovation; create a safe and equitable educational environment; and expand digital and international opportunities for women.

Thus, women's leadership and self-realization in higher education are among the most important factors in the development of New Uzbekistan. The broader the institutional opportunities for women within the university environment, the higher the intellectual, scientific, social and moral potential of society will be.

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