

Chapter 10

Women's Transition From K–12 to Higher Education Leadership: A Social Cognitive Theory Framework

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores women's transitions from K-12 to higher education leadership through Bandura's social cognitive theory, introducing the Women's Leadership Transition Model. Despite women representing 72% of K-12 educators, they hold only 30.4% of superintendent positions in major U.S. school districts and 23.8% of university president roles. The study examines how self-efficacy, environment, and personal behaviors influence successful transitions. Through case studies and research, findings highlight the importance of mentorship programs, institutional support, and professional development in enhancing women's advancement. The model addresses how personal characteristics, environmental factors, and behavioral elements interact, providing practical recommendations for institutions to create equitable pathways and inclusive cultures that support women's leadership progression in education.

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines women's transitions from K–12 to higher education (HE) leadership through the lens of Bandura's social cognitive theory (SCT) and the Women's Leadership Transition Model. Following an overview of current gender disparities in educational leadership, the chapter explores three interconnected components: self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986), environmental factors, and personal attitudes and behaviors. The discussion addresses unique challenges faced by women during this transition, including systemic barriers and the need for support structures (Hanson, 2020; Madsen et al., 2020). The chapter integrates statistical evidence, personal narratives, and research-based best practices to provide a comprehensive framework for understanding and supporting women's leadership transitions in education, while examining institutional factors that influence success (Suleman & Nelson, 2022).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the experiences of women transitioning from K-12 educational leadership to higher education administration through the lens of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory. This analysis aims to explore how self-efficacy, environmental influences, and behavioral adaptations interact to shape women's leadership transitions. The chapter also seeks to identify systemic barriers, skill development strategies, and institutional practices that either facilitate or hinder successful transitions. The chapter elucidates how women administrators achieve successful transitions from K–12 to HE leadership roles by examining key theoretical, practical, and systemic elements (DeYoung, 2000; Firmin, 2008). The scope encompasses women's transitions in educational administration, focusing on three interconnected components: self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986), mentorship (Hirschi et al., 2019), and institutional culture Thomas (2020). These elements create a framework for understanding their transition pathways while addressing gender-based barriers. Additionally, by integrating theoretical perspectives with real-world case studies, this chapter provides actionable recommendations for aspiring women leaders, institutional stakeholders, and policymakers to enhance the representation and success of women in higher education leadership roles.

Recommended Research Approach

This chapter adopts a qualitative, theory-driven approach that synthesizes existing research, theoretical models, and case study analysis. The methodology includes:

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