

The Transformation of Women's Leadership through an Emotional Intelligence Approach in the Era of Social and Digital Disruption: A Literature Study in Gorontalo

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Abstract

This study examines the transformation of women's leadership through an emotional intelligence (EI) approach amid the era of social and digital disruption, with a specific focus on Gorontalo Province, Indonesia. Using a systematic literature review method applied to 28 scholarly sources drawn from the Scopus, Google Scholar, and SINTA databases (2015–2024), the study finds that EI, encompassing self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, constitutes a strategically significant competency for enhancing the effectiveness of women's leadership. Within the Gorontalo context, structural barriers rooted in patriarchal culture, low representation in executive positions, and a persistent digital literacy gap emerge as the principal challenges. Nevertheless, women leaders who master EI competencies prove better able to navigate environmental change adaptively and innovatively. The findings show that empathy and social skills are the dimensions most consistently identified within the community-based leadership model prevalent in Gorontalo, while self-regulation remains the most demanding dimension amid rapid and unpredictable digital disruption. The study further documents a persistent leadership gap, reflected in only 18.2 percent female representation in the provincial legislature and an uneven distribution of women across civil-service managerial positions, concentrated in technical-administrative rather than strategic-executive roles. This research contributes to the development of a contextual, EI-based leadership model for Gorontalo, proposing a culturally responsive framework that integrates local wisdom values with structured competency development. The study underscores the need for further empirical research using primary data from Gorontalo to validate the proposed conceptual model and to inform evidence-based policy recommendations for regional stakeholders.

Keywords: women's leadership; emotional intelligence; digital disruption; Gorontalo; leadership transformation



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INTRODUCTION

Women's leadership in the global context is undergoing a significant paradigm shift alongside the acceleration of digital disruption and unpredictable social change. Recent research shows that organizations with higher representation of women in leadership positions tend to demonstrate better performance, higher innovation, and a more inclusive work culture (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Catalyst, 2020). Nevertheless, women continue to face a range of structural and cultural barriers that limit their access to strategic leadership positions, particularly in regions with a strong patriarchal culture such as Gorontalo.

In the Indonesian context, a survey by the Central Statistics Agency (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2023) shows that women occupy only around 27.4 percent of managerial positions across all levels, with even lower representation in Eastern Indonesia, including Gorontalo. The advance of digital technology, shifting workforce demographics, and global social crises further underscore the urgency of developing adaptive leadership grounded in emotional competence (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013; Northouse, 2021). It is precisely here that the concept of emotional intelligence (EI) finds its relevance as both a theoretical and practical framework for the transformation of women's leadership.

The central problem facing women in leadership in Gorontalo is multidimensional. First, there is a clear representation gap: data from the Gorontalo Provincial Legislature (DPRD) show that women held only 18.2 percent of seats in the 2019–2024 period (KPU Gorontalo, 2019). Second, cultural barriers rooted in patriarchal norms remain embedded in Gorontalo's social structure, frequently confining women to domestic roles and limiting their participation in public life (Umar, 2019). Third, the wave of digital disruption creates new competency demands that are not always accessible to women, particularly those in rural and semi-urban areas.

In general, the solutions proposed by scholars to address this problem include strengthening affirmative policy, building capacity through leadership training programs, and structural change in recruitment systems in both the public and private sectors (Hidayat & Wahyuni, 2021; Putri, 2022). Women's empowerment programs implemented by the Gorontalo Provincial Government through the Department of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (DP3A) have shown positive results, although they have not yet fully addressed the deeper transformative needs related to emotional competence in leadership.

At a more specific level, emotional intelligence has been empirically shown to be a strong predictor of leadership effectiveness. Goleman (1995, 2001) identified five dimensions of emotional intelligence, self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills, which collectively shape a leader's capacity to manage both the self and interpersonal relationships effectively. Mayer, Roberts, and Barsade (2008) further reinforced this argument by showing that individuals with high EI are able to navigate ambiguous situations more adaptively, a capacity highly relevant to the context of digital disruption.

In the specific context of women's leadership, a number of studies show that women on average score higher in EI than men, particularly on the dimensions of empathy and social awareness (Mandell & Pherwani, 2003; Bar-On, 2006). This finding opens a strategic opportunity to leverage women's comparative advantage in EI as a foundation for leadership transformation. In Indonesia, research by Hidayat and Wahyuni (2021) on women officials in the public sector in Sulawesi found a significant positive correlation between EI competence and the effectiveness of decision-making during organizational crises.

A review of prior literature reveals that although research on EI and women's leadership has developed considerably at the global level, a significant research gap remains in the local context of Gorontalo. Most existing studies focus on major urban contexts such as Jakarta, Surabaya, or Makassar, with little attention paid to regions such as Gorontalo, which possess distinct socio-cultural characteristics, demographic patterns, and levels of digital literacy (Syarif, Kusuma, & Prasetyo, 2020; Putri, 2022). Research examining the interaction between EI, women's leadership, and digital disruption within a single integrated analytical framework also remains very limited.

Based on this gap, the present study aims to: (1) identify the role of emotional intelligence in the transformation of women's leadership in Gorontalo; (2) analyze the specific challenges faced by women leaders in Gorontalo in the era of social and digital disruption; and (3) formulate a conceptual model for contextual, EI-based leadership development in Gorontalo. The novelty of this research lies in its integration of a local Gorontalo perspective into the analysis of EI and women's leadership, which is expected to help fill the existing literature gap and provide evidence-based recommendations for regional policymakers.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a systematic literature review approach, following the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol. Literature searches were conducted across the Scopus, Google Scholar, and SINTA academic databases for the period 2015–2024, using combinations of the keywords "women's leadership," "emotional intelligence," "digital disruption," and "Gorontalo," together with their English-language equivalents.

From an initial pool of 312 sources identified at the first stage, an inclusion and exclusion process was applied based on criteria of topical relevance, methodological quality, and availability of full text. Studies that explicitly addressed the Gorontalo context, or Eastern Indonesian regions with comparable socio-cultural characteristics, were prioritized. Following a multi-stage selection process, 28 sources met the criteria for in-depth analysis, comprising 12 internationally reputable journal articles, 9 nationally accredited (SINTA 1–2) journal articles, 4 theoretical reference books, and 3 official policy reports.

Table 1. Literature Selection Flow (Adapted from PRISMA, 2020)

Stage	Number of Sources
Identified	312
After duplicate removal	≈190
Passed abstract screening	≈95
Passed eligibility assessment	≈45
Final sources analyzed	28

Analysis was conducted using narrative synthesis and thematic analysis techniques, in which each source was coded according to the main themes emerging in relation to EI, women's leadership, and the Gorontalo context. The validity of the analysis was strengthened through source triangulation, comparing findings across different types of literature (empirical, theoretical, and policy-based). A literature analysis matrix was systematically compiled to facilitate the identification of patterns, consistencies, and contradictions across sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of Women's Leadership in Gorontalo

Based on the literature synthesis, women's leadership in Gorontalo displays a pattern of representation still far from gender parity. Political data show that the proportion of women in the regional legislature reaches only 18.2 percent, below the 30 percent minimum representation threshold mandated by Law No. 7 of 2017 (KPU Gorontalo, 2019). In the public sector, although representation in managerial civil-service (ASN) positions shows a higher figure (31.4%), uneven distribution persists, with women more

concentrated in technical-administrative rather than strategic-executive positions (BKD Gorontalo, 2023).

Table 2. Key Indicators of Women's Leadership in Gorontalo

Indicator	Value	Source
Representation in DPRD (2019–2024)	18.2%	KPU Gorontalo, 2019
Women in managerial ASN positions	31.4%	BKD Gorontalo, 2023
Women's digital literacy	54.7%	APJII Index, 2023
Sources analyzed	28	Systematic literature study

Across sectors, women's representation in 2023 is estimated at approximately 18% in the provincial legislature (DPRD), 31% in managerial ASN positions, 22% in department-head (Kepala Dinas) roles, 14% in village-head (Kepala Desa/Kampung) positions, and 28% in the private sector, all remaining below the 30% parity threshold in most categories except managerial ASN and the private sector.

Dimensions of Emotional Intelligence and Their Relevance

Synthesis of the 28 literature sources shows that Goleman's (1995, 2001) five EI dimensions carry differing degrees of relevance within the context of women's leadership in Gorontalo. Empathy and social skills emerge as the most dominant dimensions identified in studies related to community-based leadership, a model of leadership that is common in Gorontalo. Self-regulation, meanwhile, is the most challenging dimension in the context of digital disruption, given the rapid and unpredictable pace of change (Bar-On, 2006; Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008).

Table 3. Goleman's (1995) Five EI Dimensions in Women's Leadership in Gorontalo

No.	EI Dimension	Relevance in the Gorontalo Context
1	Self-Awareness	Recognizing one's emotions and personal strengths as a leader
2	Self-Regulation	Managing impulses and emotions in disruption-related crisis situations
3	Motivation	Intrinsic drive to continuously innovate and develop
4	Empathy	Understanding the needs of team members and the local community
5	Social Skills	Building networks, negotiating, and engaging in cross-cultural collaboration in Gorontalo

An estimated dimensional profile (scored 0–100) derived from the literature synthesis places empathy and social skills highest (around 80–85), followed by self-awareness (around 75) and motivation (around 65), with self-regulation scoring lowest (around 55), reflecting its status as the most demanding dimension for women leaders navigating digital-era disruption.

Literature Analysis: Key Themes and Findings

A literature analysis matrix summarizing the main sources among the 28 sources analyzed, covering research focus, method, context, and relevance to this study's topic, is presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Main Literature Analysis Matrix

Author & Year	Research Focus	Method	Context	Relevance
Goleman (2001)	EI model & transformational leadership	Quantitative	Global	High
Eagly & Carli (2007)	Gender barriers in leadership	Meta-analysis	US/Europe	High
Mandell & Pherwani (2003)	Gender-based EI differences	Quantitative	US corporate	High
Bar-On (2006)	EQ-i: EI model & measurement	Psychometric	Global	High
Mayer et al. (2008)	EI as a mental ability	Experimental	Global	High
Hidayat & Wahyuni (2021)	EI of women officials, Sulawesi	Quantitative	Sulawesi	High
Umar (2019)	Patriarchy & women's participation, Gorontalo	Qualitative	Gorontalo	High
Putri (2022)	Digital women's leadership, Eastern Indonesia	Mixed-methods	Sulawesi/Gorontalo	High
Syarif et al. (2020)	Digital disruption & women leaders	Qualitative	Indonesia	Moderate
Northouse (2021)	Contemporary leadership theory	Theoretical review	Global	Moderate
Catalyst (2020)	Women in business leadership	Survey	Global	Moderate
Goleman et al. (2013)	Primal leadership & EI	Theoretical review	Global	Moderate
BPS (2023)	Indonesia gender statistics	Census/survey	Indonesia	Moderate
KPU Gorontalo (2019)	Women's political representation	Official data	Gorontalo	High
BKD Gorontalo (2023)	Distribution of women ASN	Official data	Gorontalo	High

Patterns of Challenges and EI Strategies

Analysis of theme frequency across the 28 sources shows several recurring barriers to strengthening women's leadership capacity, ranging from cultural and social factors to structural limitations. Patriarchal cultural barriers emerge as the most dominant theme by frequency, followed in descending order by the digital literacy gap, low political representation, network limitations, domestic role conflict, and, least frequently, insufficient mentoring.

Patriarchal cultural barriers stand out as the leading challenge for women in obtaining equal leadership space. The literature describes how social constructions that position men as the dominant actors in decision-making frequently restrict women's access to strategic positions, whether in organizations, bureaucracy, or the political sphere. This condition also contributes to stereotypes portraying women's leadership style as less assertive than men's.

The digital literacy gap ranks second in frequency. This indicates that digital transformation presents a new challenge for women, particularly in mastering technology, accessing information, and adapting to digitally based work systems. In the context of modern leadership, digital literacy is a critical aspect because it is directly linked to communication effectiveness, decision-making, and organizational innovation.

The next recurring theme is low political representation of women, which remains widely discussed in the literature. Limited representation of women in political institutions and strategic organizational positions indicates that opportunities for women to engage in public policy processes remain constrained, a factor shaped not only by the political system but also by social culture, party support, and limited access to political resources.

In addition, limited networks and domestic role conflict also emerge as significant challenges. Limited networks indicate that women continue to face obstacles in building professional relationships, accessing collaboration, and receiving organizational support, while domestic role conflict reflects the double burden women face in balancing family responsibilities and professional demands, a condition that frequently affects career consistency and opportunities for advancement into leadership positions.

The theme with the lowest frequency is insufficient mentoring. Although ranked lowest, this aspect remains an important concern in the literature, since the absence of mentors or supportive role models can hinder the development of capacity, self-confidence, and leadership experience among women. Various studies therefore emphasize the importance of mentoring programs, training, and network strengthening as strategies for improving the quality of women's leadership in the modern era.

Overall, these findings show that challenges to women's leadership are not merely individual in nature but are also shaped by social structure, culture, and technological development. This underscores that strengthening EI-based women's leadership requires a comprehensive approach encompassing self-capacity development, organizational support, strengthened digital literacy, and a more inclusive, gender-equitable cultural shift.

EI as an Adaptive Competency in the Era of Disruption

The findings of this literature synthesis reinforce the argument that emotional intelligence is not merely a personal attribute but a leadership competency that can be systematically developed and trained (Goleman, 2001). In the context of digital disruption currently affecting Gorontalo, marked by rapidly increasing yet uneven internet penetration, women leaders with high EI, particularly in the dimensions of self-regulation and adaptability, prove better able to manage uncertainty and build their teams' capacity (Syarif, Kusuma, & Prasetyo, 2020). This is consistent with the findings of Mayer, Roberts, and Barsade (2008), who state that individuals with high EI display superior adaptive capacity when confronting complex environmental change.

Within the specific context of Gorontalo, the patriarchal cultural barriers identified by Umar (2019) do not necessarily weaken women's leadership. On the contrary, women who are able to leverage their empathy and social-skills competencies have succeeded in building strong social capital through a community-based leadership approach, a model that is culturally more acceptable within Gorontalo society, which remains deeply rooted in values of mutual cooperation (gotong royong) and kinship.

Representation Gap and Empowerment Strategies

The low representation of women in strategic positions in Gorontalo reflects a systemic problem that cannot be resolved through individual intervention alone. Eagly and Carli (2007) describe this phenomenon as a "leadership labyrinth," a barrier that does not present itself as a single wall but as a series of layered obstacles including gender stereotypes, exclusive informal networks, and biased recruitment patterns. In the Gorontalo context, these layered barriers are compounded by limited access to formal leadership education for women outside the provincial capital.

Nevertheless, data from BKD Gorontalo (2023) show an upward trend in women's representation in managerial ASN positions, suggesting that affirmative policies implemented by the regional government are beginning to show positive impact. Putri (2022) adds that digitally based women's mentoring programs, now being developed in Sulawesi and Gorontalo, have the potential to accelerate this process, particularly when integrated with structured EI competency training.

A Conceptual Model: EI-Transformative in the Gorontalo Context

Based on the literature synthesis, this study formulates an EI-Transformative conceptual model describing how the five EI dimensions interact with contextual factors in Gorontalo, including local cultural values (huyula, mohulia), digital infrastructure, and gender policy, to produce effective and transformative women's leadership. The model proposes that EI development interventions should be culturally responsive, that is, integrating Gorontalo's local wisdom values into women's leadership training curricula.

The trend in publications on EI and women's leadership indexed across the databases searched shows a generally upward trajectory from 2015 to 2024, rising from a low base in the mid-2010s to a peak around 2023 before a slight decline in 2024, indicating growing but still relatively recent scholarly attention to this intersection of topics.

Implications for Local Policy

These findings carry significant policy implications for the Gorontalo Provincial Government. Existing women's leadership development programs need to be strengthened with a structured EI component, including training in self-awareness and emotion regulation, facilitation of cross-sector networks for women leaders, and the integration of digital technology into EI-based learning. Catalyst (2020) confirms that organizations that proactively invest resources in developing the EI of their women leaders show a 20–30 percent increase in organizational performance over the medium term.

CONCLUSION

This study successfully identifies emotional intelligence as a strategic competency that plays a central role in the transformation of women's leadership in Gorontalo amid the era of social and digital disruption. Synthesis of 28 literature sources shows that barriers to women's leadership in Gorontalo are multidimensional, encompassing structural, cultural, and digital dimensions that require a comprehensive and integrated policy response. Goleman's (1995) five EI dimensions prove relevant and adaptable to the local Gorontalo context, with particular emphasis on the dimensions of empathy and social skills, which align closely with local wisdom values. This research contributes to the development of a contextual theoretical framework for EI-based women's leadership and affirms the need for further empirical research using primary data from Gorontalo to validate the proposed conceptual model. Culturally responsive EI training programs, consistent affirmative policy, and strengthened digital infrastructure stand out as the principal recommendations for stakeholders in Gorontalo.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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