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Deconstructing The Figures Of Vashti And Esther Within The Framework Of Dayak Ma'anyan Women's Leadership In Padju Epat, East Barito, As A Model For Women's Leadership Education

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Abstract

This study aims to deconstruct the figures of Vashti and Esther within the framework of Dayak Ma'anyan women's leadership in Padju Epat, East Barito, and to examine their relevance as a model for women's leadership education. The study employs a qualitative and contextual approach by integrating feminist biblical interpretation, Indigenous women's leadership theory, local wisdom, and culturally responsive leadership education. The analysis focuses on women's agency, resistance, strategic negotiation, cultural identity, customary authority, community participation, and transformative leadership. The findings indicate that Vashti and Esther represent complementary forms of women's agency: Vashti embodies principled resistance, dignity, courage, and the ability to challenge unjust authority, while Esther represents strategic negotiation, communication, resilience, and collective advocacy. When these dimensions are placed in dialogue with Dayak Ma'anyan women's leadership, leadership emerges as a culturally embedded practice involving customary knowledge, community responsibility, cultural preservation, participation, and social transformation. The study further demonstrates that women's leadership education can be strengthened by integrating biblical narratives with Indigenous cultural knowledge rather than applying universalized leadership models detached from local contexts. The proposed model emphasizes ethical courage, strategic leadership, cultural identity, participatory decision-making, critical consciousness, communication, and community-

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oriented transformation. This study contributes to the development of a culturally responsive framework for women's leadership education that empowers women to negotiate patriarchal structures, preserve cultural identity, exercise ethical agency, and contribute to the sustainable transformation of their communities. The study recommends further empirical and participatory research to validate and develop the proposed model within Dayak Ma'anyan communities and other Indigenous contexts.

Keywords: Vashti, Esther, Dayak Ma'anyan, Women's Leadership, Indigenous Leadership, Leadership Education.

INTRODUCTION

Women's leadership has increasingly become an important subject in discussions of social transformation, education, cultural preservation, and community development. Contemporary scholarship demonstrates that women's leadership should not be understood merely through formal positions of authority but also through women's capacity to negotiate power, preserve community values, make decisions, and influence collective life. In educational contexts, women leaders can challenge gendered assumptions while simultaneously creating spaces in which leadership is learned as a social and cultural practice (Dahlvig & Longman, 2020). Research on women leaders in education similarly shows that women's leadership identities are constructed through personal experiences, social expectations, institutional structures, and narratives about what constitutes legitimate leadership (Cordeiro et al., 2020). These perspectives are particularly relevant when leadership is examined within indigenous communities, where authority is often embedded in customary law, collective memory, cultural values, and community relationships rather than solely in formal bureaucratic institutions. Lestari et al. (2021) emphasize that local wisdom can function as social capital for women leaders because cultural values and community norms influence how leadership is understood, practiced, and accepted. Thus, studying women's leadership through culturally grounded frameworks provides an opportunity to move beyond universalized or predominantly Western models of leadership and to recognize indigenous women as active producers of leadership knowledge.

This perspective is highly significant in understanding the Dayak Ma'anyan community of Padju Epat, East Barito, Central Kalimantan, where customary institutions and collective cultural memory have historically provided distinctive spaces for women's participation in social and political life. Recent scholarship on Dayak communities indicates that indigenous women continue

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to encounter gender inequalities in access to decision-making, despite their substantial contributions to family, economic, cultural, and community life (Niko, 2020). In the Dayak Ma'anyan context specifically, women's roles are also closely connected with customary practices and religious-cultural traditions, demonstrating that gender cannot be separated from the broader cultural system within which leadership is exercised (Pilakoannu, 2020). Research on Dayak Ma'anyan customary governance further demonstrates that adat constitutes an important source of authority, incorporating principles of leadership, deliberation, social organization, and collective responsibility (Hadi, 2021). These characteristics make Padju Epat an important cultural setting for examining how women's leadership can emerge from indigenous knowledge systems and how such leadership can contribute to contemporary leadership education.

Within this cultural framework, the biblical figures of Vashti and Esther offer a productive comparative lens for reconsidering women's leadership. Vashti and Esther are frequently presented as contrasting female figures in the Book of Esther: Vashti is commonly associated with refusal, resistance, dignity, and the rejection of patriarchal authority, whereas Esther is often interpreted through courage, strategic action, negotiation, sacrifice, and advocacy for her people. Contemporary biblical scholarship cautions against reducing these figures to a simplistic opposition between a "rebellious" woman and an "obedient" woman. A recent Bosadi reading of Vashti and Esther demonstrates that both figures can provide meaningful resources for thinking about women's agency, resistance, wisdom, identity, and survival within patriarchal structures (Mofokeng, 2021). Likewise, contemporary Christian leadership scholarship places Esther among biblical examples through which women's leadership can be examined in relation to courage, influence, responsibility, and service (Ertel et al., 2024). Such interpretations suggest that women's leadership may take multiple forms: direct resistance, strategic negotiation, relational influence, moral courage, and collective advocacy. Therefore, Vashti and Esther should not simply be treated as opposing models but can be deconstructed as complementary representations of women's agency under different conditions of power.

The relevance of this biblical framework becomes stronger when it is placed in dialogue with Dayak Ma'anyan women's leadership. Rather than imposing biblical models directly onto indigenous culture, this study seeks to create a dialogical space in which the figures of Vashti and Esther are critically interpreted alongside the cultural experiences and leadership traditions of Ma'anyan women. This approach recognizes that leadership is culturally situated and that indigenous women may possess forms of authority that are overlooked when leadership is defined only through formal political or organizational positions. Contemporary research on women's

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leadership based on local wisdom emphasizes that effective leadership is influenced by cultural adaptation, community expectations, local norms, and the ability to respond to the needs of the people (Lestari et al., 2021). Similarly, research on indigenous leadership shows that cultural values, collective responsibility, and community-based practices remain important resources for sustaining leadership identities amid social change.

The educational dimension of this study is equally important because leadership education should not merely transfer abstract theories of leadership but should help learners recognize leadership possibilities within their own cultural histories. Women's leadership development requires attention to structural barriers, social expectations, leadership identities, and opportunities for participation (Manimtim & Perez, 2021). In indigenous contexts, education can therefore become a mechanism for recovering cultural narratives that have been marginalized, reinterpretating traditional gender roles, and developing leadership competencies that remain connected to local identity. Recent research on the integration of Dayak culture into women's leadership in elementary education indicates that women leaders can serve as important agents in connecting cultural preservation with educational innovation and institutional development (Handayani et al., 2025). This finding reinforces the importance of integrating indigenous cultural knowledge into leadership education rather than treating culture as merely supplementary material.

Against this background, the present study aims to deconstruct the figures of Vashti and Esther within the framework of Dayak Ma'anyan women's leadership in Padju Epat, East Barito, and to formulate their relevance as a model for women's leadership education. The study is grounded in the assumption that leadership education becomes more meaningful when it connects biblical narratives, indigenous knowledge, gender awareness, cultural identity, and lived experiences of women. The study therefore does not seek to determine whether Vashti or Esther represents the "better" woman leader. Instead, it examines the leadership values, forms of agency, strategies of resistance and negotiation, and moral dimensions represented by both figures and explores how these can be placed in dialogue with Dayak Ma'anyan cultural leadership. Such an approach responds to contemporary concerns about gender equality while respecting the specificity of indigenous cultural contexts. It also contributes to the development of a culturally responsive model of women's leadership education in which women are encouraged to understand leadership not simply as occupying authority but as exercising courage, wisdom, responsibility, negotiation, cultural commitment, and transformative agency. In this sense, the dialogue between Vashti, Esther, and Dayak Ma'anyan women can provide a

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theoretically and culturally grounded foundation for educating future women leaders who are capable of navigating patriarchal structures while remaining rooted in community values and collective well-being. Recent studies on women's leadership and indigenous cultural contexts support the importance of developing such contextualized approaches rather than relying on gender-neutral or culturally detached leadership frameworks (Niko, 2020; Lestari et al., 2021; Mulya & Sakhiyya, 2021; Manimtim & Perez, 2021).

Women's Leadership, Indigenous Culture, and Local Wisdom.

Women's leadership can be understood as a socially and culturally constructed process through which women exercise influence, make decisions, negotiate power, mobilize communities, and contribute to collective transformation. Contemporary scholarship increasingly rejects the assumption that leadership is inherently associated with masculine characteristics or formal institutional authority. Instead, women's leadership is recognized as multidimensional and shaped by social structures, cultural expectations, historical experiences, and community values. Ryan (2020) argues that Indigenous women's leadership must be understood through the intersection of gender, indigeneity, social position, and historical circumstances because Indigenous women experience leadership differently from women situated in dominant social groups. Indigenous women's leadership therefore cannot be adequately explained through universal leadership theories that disregard cultural context. Prescott (2020) similarly demonstrates that Native women's leadership is deeply connected to community and culture, emphasizing that Indigenous women historically possessed complementary leadership responsibilities and continue to reclaim sociopolitical influence through community advocacy, education, cultural preservation, and activism. These perspectives provide an important theoretical foundation for understanding Dayak Ma'anyan women's leadership in Padju Epat because leadership within an indigenous community may operate through cultural authority, social relationships, customary knowledge, and collective responsibility rather than merely through formal organizational positions.

Lestari et al. (2021) explain that women's leadership based on local wisdom is influenced by cultural values, community traditions, social expectations, and the capacity of women to negotiate patriarchal structures. Local wisdom can therefore function as a source of legitimacy for women leaders because leadership is considered meaningful when it is consistent with community values. Msila (2021) further develops this perspective through indigenous feminism, arguing that women's empowerment should not simply reproduce Eurocentric feminist

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assumptions but should recognize indigenous philosophies, collective values, and culturally specific understandings of justice and leadership. In this framework, women's leadership is not necessarily based on individual achievement or competition but can emphasize relationality, solidarity, responsibility, social justice, and community well-being. Santamaria et al. (2022) likewise propose culturally grounded approaches to leadership development for Indigenous and women-of-color leaders, emphasizing that leadership knowledge must accommodate intersecting cultural, ethnic, gender, linguistic, and socioeconomic experiences. Such a perspective is particularly useful for analyzing Dayak Ma'anyan women because it positions culture not as a background variable but as an active component in the construction of leadership identity. Women's leadership is also shaped by the interaction between culture, religion, and gender norms. Koburtay et al. (2023) demonstrate that women leaders negotiate religious and cultural expectations while simultaneously constructing leadership identities that are compatible with their understanding of faith and social responsibility. This finding indicates that cultural and religious values do not necessarily function only as barriers to women's leadership; they can also become resources through which women justify, negotiate, and strengthen their leadership positions. Mubaraka et al. (2024) similarly show that women's leadership in Indonesia and Malaysia can be characterized by cultural wisdom and egalitarian principles, demonstrating that women leaders may integrate local cultural values into organizational leadership while promoting equality and inclusion. Yanti (2024) further emphasizes that women's leadership communication in Indonesia is influenced by patriarchal structures and social expectations, making communication an important mechanism through which women establish legitimacy, negotiate authority, and exercise influence. Daryono (2024) adds that collaborative interaction represents an important dimension of women's leadership because women leaders can build cooperation, organizational justice, communication, and collective performance through participatory practices. The theoretical concept of indigenous women's leadership consequently requires attention to agency and structural constraints simultaneously. Indigenous women may demonstrate leadership through formal authority, but they may also lead through cultural transmission, family networks, community organization, customary practices, education, and social advocacy.

Rohe et al. (2022) demonstrate that women's participation can range from nominal involvement to active and interactive participation in decision-making, with the highest level involving meaningful influence and leadership power. This participation framework is relevant to Dayak Ma'anyan women because it allows leadership to be examined not only through whether

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women occupy official positions but also through the extent to which women participate in decision-making and influence community outcomes. Khairunnas et al. (2022), in their study of Acehnese women's leadership, similarly demonstrate that women's leadership is embedded within historically constructed gender paradigms, patriarchal expectations, political structures, and local social identities. Therefore, women's leadership in Padju Epat can theoretically be approached as a dynamic process involving cultural legitimacy, agency, negotiation, participation, and collective responsibility. Based on these theoretical perspectives, Dayak Ma'anyan women's leadership can be conceptualized as culturally embedded leadership that combines agency with communal responsibility.

The concept recognizes women as active actors who interpret cultural traditions, negotiate patriarchal expectations, preserve indigenous knowledge, and participate in community decision-making. This theoretical position is important for the present study because it prevents Dayak Ma'anyan women from being represented merely as recipients of leadership education. Instead, they are understood as producers and transmitters of leadership knowledge. Consequently, leadership education based on Dayak Ma'anyan cultural experience should incorporate local wisdom, indigenous identity, gender awareness, participatory decision-making, communication, cultural preservation, and community-oriented responsibility. Such a framework provides a foundation for placing the biblical narratives of Vashti and Esther into dialogue with indigenous women's lived leadership experiences rather than treating biblical leadership models as universal or culturally detached prescriptions. The theoretical synthesis therefore establishes that effective women's leadership education should be culturally responsive, agency-oriented, participatory, and attentive to the historical and social structures that shape women's opportunities to lead.

Vashti, Esther, Biblical Women's Agency, and Leadership Education

The theoretical interpretation of Vashti and Esther requires a critical understanding of women's agency within patriarchal social structures. The Book of Esther presents two prominent female figures whose experiences demonstrate different strategies for responding to male-dominated systems of authority. Vashti is introduced as a queen who refuses the king's command to appear before his guests, while Esther subsequently becomes queen and strategically uses her position to protect her people from destruction. Contemporary feminist biblical interpretation challenges the tendency to categorize Vashti as simply rebellious and Esther as merely obedient. Kondemo (2021), through a Bosadi reading, argues that both Vashti and Esther can function as biblical role models for women because they demonstrate different strategies for negotiating

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patriarchal circumstances. Vashti represents refusal, self-definition, and resistance to objectification, while Esther demonstrates strategic negotiation, courage, and the ability to employ institutional access for collective purposes. The theoretical significance of this interpretation lies in the recognition that women's agency can take multiple forms. Agency does not always require direct confrontation; it may also involve negotiation, strategic silence, relational influence, timing, persuasion, and the use of existing structures to achieve transformative objectives. Vashti's leadership can consequently be conceptualized through the theory of resistance and autonomous agency. Her refusal can be interpreted as an assertion of dignity in a context in which women are subjected to male authority and public objectification. Rather than viewing resistance as disobedience without purpose, feminist interpretation can understand resistance as a form of leadership when it protects personal dignity, challenges unjust expectations, and establishes boundaries.

Esther, in contrast, demonstrates strategic agency. Her leadership emerges gradually as she acquires information, assesses risks, communicates with Mordecai, approaches the king, organizes a series of banquets, and ultimately exposes Haman's plan. The contrast between the two women illustrates that leadership can occur through different strategies according to context. Vashti's action is immediate and oppositional, whereas Esther's action is gradual, relational, strategic, and politically calculated. Kondemo (2021) therefore provides an important foundation for understanding the two figures as complementary rather than contradictory. The significance of their stories for women's leadership education lies precisely in the possibility of teaching learners that effective leadership is context-dependent and that women may exercise agency through resistance as well as negotiation. The concept of biblical women's agency can also be connected to contextual hermeneutics. Instead of interpreting biblical narratives solely according to their ancient social setting, contextual approaches invite readers to place biblical experiences in dialogue with contemporary realities. This method is particularly important when biblical narratives are used in women's leadership education because learners may otherwise internalize patriarchal interpretations of biblical women.

Kondemo's (2021) Bosadi approach demonstrates how biblical interpretation can engage the experiences of marginalized women and identify liberating dimensions within texts that emerged from patriarchal contexts. Such an approach creates space for women to reinterpret biblical narratives from their own cultural and social locations. The figures of Vashti and Esther therefore become not merely historical or religious characters but interpretive resources for discussing dignity, courage, negotiation, resistance, identity, responsibility, and social

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transformation. This contextual orientation is highly relevant to the Dayak Ma'anyan context because the meaning of leadership should emerge through dialogue between biblical narratives and local cultural experiences rather than through a one-directional transfer of biblical norms. The concept of women's leadership education further strengthens this theoretical framework. Leadership education should develop more than technical competencies; it should cultivate critical consciousness, ethical judgment, self-confidence, communication, decision-making, and the ability to understand power relations.

Santamaria et al. (2022) argue that leadership development for Indigenous and women-of-color populations requires culturally grounded frameworks that recognize intersecting identities and experiences. This principle can be applied to biblical leadership education by ensuring that women are encouraged to critically examine the social structures surrounding biblical narratives rather than simply imitate particular characters. Ryan (2020) similarly demonstrates that Indigenous women's leadership must be understood through intersectionality because gender interacts with cultural identity, history, and social structures. Consequently, teaching Vashti and Esther within an indigenous context should allow learners to identify similarities and differences between biblical women's experiences and their own cultural realities. The educational value of Vashti and Esther can also be understood through the concept of culturally responsive leadership education. Mubaraka et al. (2024) demonstrate that women's leadership can be strengthened when cultural wisdom becomes an important foundation of leadership practice. Lestari et al. (2021) similarly emphasize that local wisdom provides an important foundation for understanding women's leadership because leadership is inseparable from cultural values and community expectations. In the context of Padju Epat, this means that Vashti and Esther should not be taught as isolated biblical personalities but should be interpreted alongside Dayak Ma'anyan concepts of women's social roles, customary responsibility, community participation, and cultural preservation. Such a comparative approach can encourage learners to recognize multiple forms of leadership while developing critical awareness of gendered power relations. It also allows leadership education to become a process of cultural dialogue in which biblical knowledge and indigenous knowledge mutually illuminate one another. The theoretical relationship between Vashti, Esther, and Dayak Ma'anyan women's leadership can therefore be formulated through three interconnected concepts: agency, contextuality, and transformation. First, agency refers to women's capacity to make meaningful choices and act within or against structures of power. Vashti illustrates agency through principled refusal, while Esther illustrates agency through strategic negotiation. Second, contextuality emphasizes that leadership strategies

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are shaped by culture, social structure, historical circumstances, and available resources. Third, transformation refers to the ability of women's leadership to produce consequences beyond individual interests and contribute to collective well-being. These concepts correspond with broader research on Indigenous women's leadership, which emphasizes community, culture, solidarity, and collective responsibility (Prescott, 2020; Maracle et al., 2020). They also correspond with research showing that women leaders can use collaborative communication, cultural wisdom, and participatory practices to transform organizational and community environments (Yanti, 2024; Daryono, 2024). Thus, Vashti and Esther can provide complementary pedagogical models: Vashti encourages learners to develop courage, dignity, boundaries, and critical resistance, while Esther encourages strategic thinking, communication, negotiation, courage, and responsibility for others. When these dimensions are integrated with Dayak Ma'anyan cultural values, women's leadership education can move beyond the binary of obedience versus rebellion and instead present leadership as a complex process of ethical agency, cultural identity, strategic action, and collective transformation.

DISCUSSION

Deconstructing Vashti and Esther: Women's Agency, Resistance, and Strategic Leadership

The figures of Vashti and Esther can be theoretically analyzed through the concept of women's agency, particularly agency exercised within patriarchal structures. Rather than interpreting Vashti merely as a disobedient wife and Esther merely as an obedient queen, a critical reading reveals two different but complementary forms of women's leadership. Kondemo (2021) argues that Vashti and Esther can both function as role models because they employ different strategies for navigating patriarchal power. Vashti's refusal constitutes an act of resistance because she refuses to allow herself to become an object of male authority and public display. Her action demonstrates that leadership may begin with the ability to establish boundaries and defend personal dignity. Esther, by contrast, exercises agency through strategic negotiation, patience, communication, and calculated intervention. Her leadership does not initially challenge the political structure directly; instead, she works within that structure to achieve a collective objective. This distinction is important because it demonstrates that women's agency should not be measured only through overt resistance. Agency may also appear through strategic adaptation and the intelligent use of existing institutional resources. Such an interpretation is consistent with contemporary feminist scholarship emphasizing that women can challenge gender ideology through both direct resistance and strategic forms of negotiation (Chaudhary & Dutt, 2022).

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From the perspective of resistance theory, Vashti represents a particularly significant form of leadership because her "no" challenges the assumption that authority automatically legitimizes the demands of those who possess power. Her refusal exposes the unequal gender relations embedded in the royal system. Contemporary feminist biblical interpretation recognizes resistance as an important manifestation of female agency because women who resist oppressive structures move from being passive subjects toward becoming active agents (Claassens, 2023). The significance of Vashti therefore lies not in whether her action produces an immediate institutional transformation, but in her ability to refuse participation in a system that violates her dignity. This interpretation is strengthened by research on Indigenous women, which demonstrates that patriarchal structures have historically restricted women's authority while Indigenous women have simultaneously developed strategies for reclaiming power and leadership (Baskin, 2020). Maracle et al. (2020) similarly show that Indigenous women's leadership can involve the articulation, preservation, and transmission of cultural knowledge, demonstrating that resistance and leadership can be expressed through cultural continuity as well as political confrontation.

Esther represents a different dimension of agency, namely strategic and transformational leadership. Her leadership develops through her ability to read the political environment, recognize danger, communicate with others, manage relationships, and choose an appropriate moment for action. Rather than directly confronting the king from the beginning, Esther carefully constructs a strategy that eventually enables her to influence the highest level of political authority. This form of leadership demonstrates that strategic negotiation can become a powerful form of resistance within restrictive environments. Contemporary studies of women leaders show that women frequently negotiate institutional and cultural constraints by combining interpersonal relationships, communication, resilience, and strategic decision-making (Yanti, 2024; Mubaraka et al., 2024). Esther's leadership can therefore be interpreted as transformational because her actions extend beyond personal survival and become directed toward protecting her wider community. Her leadership demonstrates that women's agency becomes more significant when personal authority is connected to collective responsibility.

The comparison between Vashti and Esther becomes particularly relevant when placed within the framework of Dayak Ma'anyan women's leadership. Indigenous women's leadership should be understood through cultural context rather than through standardized leadership models derived from dominant societies. Ryan (2020) emphasizes that Indigenous women encounter intersecting challenges involving gender, culture, social structures, and historical

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marginalization. At the same time, Indigenous women possess cultural and social resources that can strengthen their leadership identities. Hannah (2020), for example, demonstrates that women leaders within the Indigenous Osing community in Indonesia utilize social, cultural, and economic capital to exercise community leadership. Similarly, Lestari et al. (2021) explain that local wisdom can provide a foundation for women's leadership because leadership legitimacy is closely related to community values and cultural expectations. These findings suggest that Dayak Ma'anyan women's leadership should not be evaluated solely according to formal positions but also through participation in decision-making, cultural preservation, social relationships, and community responsibility.

The theoretical synthesis indicates that Vashti and Esther provide complementary leadership paradigms rather than competing models. Vashti represents principled resistance, self-determination, dignity, and the courage to reject inappropriate authority, while Esther represents strategic negotiation, communication, resilience, and collective advocacy. Both forms of agency are relevant to Dayak Ma'anyan women because culturally grounded leadership may require women to preserve identity while simultaneously negotiating changing social structures. Research on women's leadership based on local wisdom demonstrates that cultural values can support egalitarian and participatory forms of leadership (Lestari et al., 2021; Sukmawan et al., 2024). Therefore, the deconstruction of Vashti and Esther should not result in a binary classification of "resistant" versus "obedient" women. Instead, their figures can be reconstructed as two interconnected dimensions of leadership: the courage to resist injustice and the wisdom to negotiate strategically. Within Dayak Ma'anyan women's leadership in Padju Epat, these dimensions can become important foundations for developing leadership education that emphasizes agency, cultural identity, ethical decision-making, strategic communication, community responsibility, and transformative action.

Dayak Ma'anyan Women's Leadership in Padju Epat: Cultural Wisdom, Customary Authority, and Community Participation

Dayak Ma'anyan women's leadership in Padju Epat, East Barito, can be understood as a culturally embedded form of leadership in which authority, identity, social responsibility, and community participation are closely interconnected. Leadership in an indigenous community cannot be adequately measured through formal organizational positions alone because influence may also be exercised through customary knowledge, family relationships, cultural practices, community deliberation, and the preservation of collective identity. Ryan (2020) explains that

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Indigenous women's leadership is shaped by intersecting dimensions of gender, cultural identity, historical experience, and social structures. This perspective is important for understanding Dayak Ma'anyan women because their leadership practices are situated within a particular cultural system that provides meanings concerning responsibility, social relationships, and community well-being. Prescott (2020) similarly emphasizes that Native women's leadership develops through community and culture, demonstrating that cultural continuity can itself become a significant source of leadership authority. Therefore, Dayak Ma'anyan women should not be positioned merely as beneficiaries of leadership development but as cultural actors who possess knowledge and practices that can contribute to the construction of locally relevant leadership models.

The concept of cultural wisdom provides an important theoretical foundation for analyzing leadership among Dayak Ma'anyan women. Local wisdom includes values, traditions, customary knowledge, social norms, and collective experiences transmitted between generations. Lestari et al. (2021) argue that women's leadership based on local wisdom is strongly influenced by cultural values and community expectations. Leadership becomes legitimate when leaders demonstrate their capacity to preserve and apply values that are recognized by the community. Mubaraka et al. (2024) similarly demonstrate that cultural wisdom can support egalitarian forms of women's leadership in Indonesia and Malaysia. Their findings indicate that women leaders can combine cultural traditions with principles of equality, participation, and institutional transformation. In the Dayak Ma'anyan context, this theoretical perspective allows customary values to be interpreted not as static traditions but as living resources that can strengthen women's leadership. Cultural wisdom may provide women with moral legitimacy, social recognition, and a framework for making decisions that consider collective interests rather than individual achievement.

Customary authority is another important dimension of Dayak Ma'anyan women's leadership. Indigenous leadership frequently operates through systems of customary law and social recognition that differ from modern bureaucratic structures. Maracle et al. (2020) demonstrate that Indigenous women can exercise leadership by carrying, articulating, and transmitting Indigenous knowledge within their communities. Such leadership is significant because cultural knowledge provides continuity between past generations and contemporary social realities. Baskin (2020) further explains that Indigenous women's roles are often connected with traditional teachings, community responsibilities, and cultural systems, although colonial and patriarchal processes have disrupted some traditional forms of women's authority. Consequently, understanding Dayak Ma'anyan women's leadership requires attention to both cultural continuity

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and structural change. Women may simultaneously preserve customary values and reinterpret them in response to contemporary educational, economic, political, and social circumstances. Leadership therefore becomes a process of cultural negotiation in which women maintain important traditions while adapting them to changing community needs.

Community participation represents another central characteristic of culturally grounded women's leadership. Women's leadership becomes meaningful when women have opportunities to participate in deliberation, decision-making, problem-solving, and collective action. Rohe et al. (2022) demonstrate that women's participation in community-based resource management can range from passive involvement to active participation and meaningful decision-making authority. This distinction is useful for analyzing Dayak Ma'anyan women because the presence of women in community activities does not necessarily indicate genuine leadership. Genuine participation requires the ability to influence decisions and contribute to outcomes. Hannah (2020), in research on Indigenous women leaders in the Osing community of East Java, shows that women can mobilize social, cultural, and economic capital to strengthen their leadership within indigenous communities. This finding illustrates that women's leadership may be relational and community-oriented, relying on networks, cultural knowledge, trust, and social capital rather than solely on formal authority.

The intersection between gender and cultural identity is particularly important in understanding women's leadership in Padju Epat. Indigenous women may experience patriarchal expectations while simultaneously carrying significant responsibilities for cultural reproduction and community continuity. Khairunnas et al. (2022) demonstrate that women's leadership can be influenced by historically constructed gender paradigms, patriarchal structures, and local social identities. At the same time, women can negotiate these structures through education, communication, participation, and community engagement. Yanti (2024) emphasizes that communication is an important instrument through which Indonesian women leaders establish legitimacy and negotiate authority within gendered environments. This perspective can be applied to Dayak Ma'anyan women because leadership may involve the ability to communicate cultural values, negotiate decisions, build consensus, and maintain relationships among community members. Consequently, communication should be understood as an important leadership practice rather than merely an interpersonal skill.

The analysis also demonstrates that Dayak Ma'anyan women's leadership has a strong collective and transformative dimension. Rather than emphasizing individual status, culturally grounded leadership tends to prioritize community welfare, cultural preservation, social harmony,

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and intergenerational continuity. Santamaria et al. (2022) argue that leadership development for Indigenous women should recognize culturally specific knowledge, community relationships, and intersecting identities. This perspective supports a leadership model in which women are encouraged to exercise authority while remaining accountable to their communities. In relation to the figures of Vashti and Esther, Dayak Ma'anyan women's leadership provides a cultural framework for interpreting resistance and strategic negotiation. Vashti's courage to establish boundaries can be connected with women's ability to defend dignity and cultural values, while Esther's strategic leadership can be related to women's capacity to negotiate within existing social structures for collective purposes. Thus, Dayak Ma'anyan women's leadership in Padju Epat demonstrates that women's agency can be expressed through cultural preservation, customary participation, strategic communication, community decision-making, and collective responsibility. This synthesis provides an important foundation for developing women's leadership education that is not detached from indigenous identity but instead uses Dayak Ma'anyan cultural wisdom as a source of leadership knowledge, thereby creating a model that combines agency, cultural legitimacy, participation, ethical responsibility, and transformative community leadership..

Integrating Vashti, Esther, and Dayak Ma'anyan Leadership into Women's Leadership Education

The integration of Vashti, Esther, and Dayak Ma'anyan women's leadership provides a culturally responsive foundation for developing women's leadership education. Leadership education should not merely transmit universal concepts of authority, management, or organizational effectiveness but should encourage learners to understand leadership through culture, identity, ethics, agency, and lived experience. Santamaria et al. (2022) emphasize that leadership development for Indigenous women should recognize culturally specific knowledge and intersecting identities because leadership practices are shaped by social, cultural, and historical contexts. Similarly, Ryan (2020) argues that Indigenous women's leadership needs to be understood through intersectionality because gender cannot be separated from cultural identity and structural conditions. Within this framework, the figures of Vashti and Esther can be interpreted as complementary pedagogical resources. Vashti represents the courage to resist inappropriate authority and defend dignity, while Esther represents strategic negotiation, communication, courage, and collective responsibility. When these biblical values are placed in dialogue with Dayak Ma'anyan cultural wisdom, leadership education can become a process of critical reflection in which women learn to recognize their agency while remaining connected to community values.

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The first dimension of the proposed educational model is agency and courage. Vashti provides an important example of principled resistance because her refusal demonstrates that leadership can involve saying no to practices that violate dignity and personal boundaries. Kondemo (2021) argues that Vashti can be understood as a biblical role model whose action represents resistance within a patriarchal structure. From an educational perspective, this interpretation can encourage women to develop self-confidence, critical consciousness, and the capacity to recognize unjust power relations. Women's leadership education should therefore teach learners that leadership does not always mean compliance with established authority. Instead, ethical leadership sometimes requires questioning dominant expectations and defending values considered important for human dignity. Chaudhary and Dutt (2022) demonstrate that women leaders can become agents of change by challenging gender ideologies and negotiating alternative understandings of women's roles. Thus, Vashti can be transformed from a figure traditionally associated with disobedience into a pedagogical representation of ethical resistance, self-determination, and leadership courage.

The second dimension is strategic leadership and negotiation, represented particularly by Esther. Unlike Vashti, Esther operates within the existing political structure and uses her position strategically to protect her people. Her leadership demonstrates the importance of timing, communication, emotional intelligence, relationship-building, risk assessment, and strategic decision-making. These qualities are highly relevant to contemporary women's leadership education because women frequently need to negotiate complex institutional and social environments. Yanti (2024) demonstrates that communication is an important instrument through which women leaders establish legitimacy and negotiate authority within gendered political environments. Mubaraka et al. (2024) further demonstrate that women leaders can combine cultural wisdom with egalitarian leadership practices, suggesting that strategic leadership does not require abandoning cultural identity. In an educational model based on Esther, women can therefore be trained to understand power structures, identify opportunities for influence, communicate persuasively, assess risks, and use available resources responsibly. Esther's leadership consequently illustrates that strategic negotiation can become a transformative form of agency rather than a passive accommodation of patriarchal authority.

The third dimension concerns cultural identity and local wisdom. Integrating Dayak Ma'anyan leadership into the interpretation of Vashti and Esther prevents leadership education from becoming culturally detached. Lestari et al. (2021) argue that local wisdom provides an important foundation for women's leadership because cultural values influence how authority,

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responsibility, and social legitimacy are understood. Prescott (2020) similarly emphasizes the importance of community and culture in developing Native women's leadership. In the Dayak Ma'anyan context, cultural knowledge can serve as a source of leadership identity and legitimacy. Women's leadership education should therefore incorporate customary values, community traditions, indigenous knowledge, collective responsibility, and cultural preservation. Maracle et al. (2020) demonstrate that Indigenous women can exercise leadership through the preservation and transmission of Indigenous knowledge, indicating that cultural continuity itself can become a form of leadership. This perspective is important because it allows Dayak Ma'anyan women to recognize their cultural heritage as a leadership resource rather than viewing leadership only through external models.

The fourth dimension is participatory and community-oriented leadership. The leadership of Esther is directed beyond personal interests toward the protection of her people, while Indigenous women's leadership frequently emphasizes community well-being and collective responsibility. Rohe et al. (2022) demonstrate that meaningful women's participation requires more than physical presence; women need opportunities to influence decision-making and collective outcomes. Hannah (2020) similarly shows that Indigenous women can mobilize social, cultural, and economic capital to strengthen community leadership. Therefore, women's leadership education in Padju Epat should develop competencies related to deliberation, consensus-building, collaboration, community advocacy, and social responsibility. Learners should understand leadership as a relational process in which personal capabilities are used to address collective needs. This orientation also helps move leadership education away from individualistic models toward community-based and culturally responsive leadership.

The fifth dimension is transformative and ethical leadership. The integration of Vashti, Esther, and Dayak Ma'anyan cultural values provides an opportunity to formulate leadership education around ethical responsibility. Vashti's resistance demonstrates the importance of integrity and personal dignity, Esther demonstrates courage and strategic responsibility, while Dayak Ma'anyan cultural leadership contributes values of communal responsibility and cultural continuity. These dimensions can be integrated into a leadership framework emphasizing ethical judgment, courage, cultural awareness, strategic communication, participation, and social transformation. Baskin (2020) demonstrates that Indigenous women's leadership must be understood in relation to traditional teachings and the effects of colonial and patriarchal structures. This implies that leadership education should develop critical awareness of historical inequalities while empowering women to reinterpret cultural traditions constructively.

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Khairunnas et al. (2022) similarly show that women's leadership is shaped by gender paradigms, social structures, and local identities. Consequently, leadership education must equip women to negotiate structural constraints while maintaining cultural authenticity.

The resulting model can therefore be conceptualized as culturally grounded transformative women's leadership education, consisting of interconnected competencies: ethical resistance inspired by Vashti, strategic negotiation inspired by Esther, cultural identity derived from Dayak Ma'anyan wisdom, participatory decision-making, community responsibility, critical consciousness, communication, and transformative action. Rather than presenting Vashti and Esther as opposite models of female behavior, the educational model interprets them as complementary dimensions of leadership. Vashti teaches learners when and why resistance may be necessary, whereas Esther demonstrates how strategic negotiation can produce collective transformation. Dayak Ma'anyan cultural wisdom provides the contextual foundation through which these biblical values can be interpreted and applied. Such integration can produce a leadership education model that is neither exclusively biblical nor exclusively indigenous but dialogical, contextual, and transformative. In this model, women are encouraged to become leaders who possess courage without recklessness, strategic ability without manipulation, cultural identity without exclusion, and authority without abandoning collective responsibility. The ultimate goal is to prepare women who can exercise leadership ethically while contributing to the preservation, development, and transformation of their communities.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that deconstructing the figures of Vashti and Esther within the framework of Dayak Ma'anyan women's leadership provides a meaningful foundation for developing a culturally responsive model of women's leadership education. Vashti represents principled resistance, courage, dignity, and the ability to establish boundaries against unjust authority, while Esther represents strategic negotiation, communication, resilience, courage, and collective responsibility. These two forms of agency demonstrate that women's leadership cannot be reduced to either resistance or conformity but should be understood as a dynamic capacity to respond strategically and ethically to different social and cultural contexts. When these biblical leadership values are placed in dialogue with Dayak Ma'anyan cultural wisdom in Padju Epat, East Barito, women's leadership emerges as a culturally embedded practice involving customary knowledge, community participation, cultural preservation, collective responsibility, and social transformation. The synthesis of Vashti, Esther, and Dayak Ma'anyan women's leadership

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consequently offers an educational framework emphasizing agency, ethical courage, strategic communication, cultural identity, participatory decision-making, critical consciousness, and community-oriented transformation. Such a model can strengthen women's capacity to navigate patriarchal structures while maintaining cultural authenticity and responsibility toward their communities. Therefore, women's leadership education should not merely reproduce universal or externally imposed leadership theories but should integrate biblical narratives, indigenous knowledge, local wisdom, and women's lived experiences to develop leaders who are courageous in confronting injustice, strategic in negotiating power, ethically responsible in decision-making, and committed to the preservation and transformation of their communities.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future research should further investigate how the leadership values represented by Vashti and Esther can be integrated with the lived experiences, customary practices, and cultural wisdom of Dayak Ma'anyan women in Padju Epat, East Barito. Future studies could employ ethnographic, phenomenological, participatory, and mixed-method approaches to explore how women exercise agency, negotiate patriarchal structures, participate in customary decision-making, preserve cultural identity, and contribute to community transformation. Further research should also examine the perspectives of different generations of Dayak Ma'anyan women to identify changes and continuities in women's leadership across social, religious, educational, economic, and cultural contexts. In addition, comparative studies involving other Dayak communities and Indigenous women in Indonesia could determine which leadership characteristics are culturally specific and which can be developed into broader models of Indigenous women's leadership education. Future educational research should develop and empirically test a culturally grounded leadership education model that integrates Vashti's principled resistance, Esther's strategic negotiation, and Dayak Ma'anyan values of communal responsibility, cultural preservation, participation, and collective well-being. Such research could evaluate the model's effectiveness in strengthening women's confidence, critical consciousness, communication skills, ethical decision-making, leadership participation, and transformative capacity. Ultimately, future directions should emphasize collaboration with Dayak Ma'anyan communities so that leadership education is developed through participatory processes, respects Indigenous knowledge and cultural ownership, and contributes meaningfully to the empowerment of women and the sustainable development of the community.

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