

Female in Leadership Roles: The Experience of Female School Principals from Two Secondary Schools in South Sumatra

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Abstract

In the Indonesian school contexts, the female elementary and secondary school teachers outnumber their male counterparts. However, it is a different story when it comes to school leadership. Therefore, investigating school leadership from the point of view of female school principals is worth doing and this was the aim of this present study. Involving two female secondary school principals as the main participants of study, this present study investigated the participants' experience of the challenges as school principals and what strategies and recommendation the participants had to overcome the challenges. The data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and were analysed by using thematic analysis. The results of this study showed that the challenges of the participants encountered in leadership position were subtle discrimination in the form of negative perception before carrying out the roles as principals, resistance from senior staff, family views on career, balance between work and family, obstacle from family, adapting ICT in education, and age-related barriers to technology. To responds to the challenges, the participants did the mentorship and networking program, clear vision and communication, having dialogue about career goals and family responsibilities, setting clear boundaries expectations, involving family in decisions making, provide ongoing ICT training for educators, mentorship programs for technology integration. The findings of this present study contribute to the field of female leadership in education by providing information about what the Indonesian female school principals in leadership position and as a school leader.

Keywords

Indonesian female school principals, school principalship, leadership challenges

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Introduction

Teaching is a profession that has been dominated by female. In Indonesia, for example, the data from Based on data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) for 2022 show that the total number of teachers at the elementary-high school level is more than 2 million people, of which the number of female teachers is around 1,340,504 teachers or equivalent to 64.88% and male teachers are 725,757 representing a total of 35.12% of teachers. This fact is in accordance with the report by Margary et al. (2021) who underlines that most school instructors, regardless of the educational level, are women. Margary et al. (2021) also stated that the highest proportion of female teachers (70 percent) is at the elementary education level. The availability of adequate female teachers is not balanced by their presence in the position of principal. In fact, the number of female principals continues to decline as the level of education increases. This shows that there is an adequate supply of female instructors at all levels of education, regardless of whether the school is managed by the government, a state school, or a private school managed by the community or a private business entity.

To frame this issue theoretically, gender role theory and social role theory provide a foundational understanding of why gender disparities persist in leadership positions. According to gender role theory, societal expectations and norms prescribe certain behaviours and characteristics to men and women. In many cultures, leadership is often associated with traditionally "masculine" qualities, such as assertiveness, decisiveness, and authority (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This perception can create biases that influence hiring and promotion practices, leading to fewer women in leadership positions despite having the necessary skills and qualifications. However, Margary et al (2021) reported that the representation of female as school principals was less than 50 percent. In other words, although the availability of female teachers was sufficient to proportionally occupy the position of school principal, the position of school principals at all levels of education in schools was dominated by male teachers. Education Partnership - Performance Oversight and Monitoring (EP POM) (2016) also reported that the higher the education level, the smaller the percentage of female school principals. This is in lined with Powell (2011) who stated that the phenomenon encourages social perception that male has the potential to become superior leaders, while female is inferior and lack these skills because of their "softer" nature.

Man and woman have different leadership philosophies, but this does not imply that one is more effective than the other. Man may view leadership as leading while female may view it as facilitating, which may account for some of the disparity. Acaroglu and Turan (2017) state that men associated with assertive and results-oriented traits, while women are associated with collaborative and relationship-oriented traits. According to Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011), in education, women in educational administration prioritize instructional leadership, focusing on unique student characteristics, curriculum strategies, and goals. With more experience and degrees, they value curriculum and instruction. They prefer a facilitative leadership style, allowing others to contribute. Women interact more frequently with instructors, students, parents, community members, colleagues, and superiors due to their focus on relationships.

Despite the significant potential and global contributions of females, the growing gender imbalance puts them in disadvantageous situations (Hoyt & Burnette, 2013). There is ongoing debate on the suitability of females for leadership roles. Even in traditional societies, there is persistent opposition to females assuming leadership posts. They believe that the performance of females is not equivalent to that of males due to the male's role as the leader of the household. In Indonesia, gender inequality remains a challenge. The Indonesian government has done some effort to narrow the gender inequality. For example, by issuing the Law Number 7 of 1984, concerning the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Female, the Presidential Instruction Number 9 of 2000, concerning Gender Equality in National Development which mandate all the Indonesian Ministries to carry out gender equality in order to carry out planning, preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national development policies and programs, and the Regulation Number 5 of 2014, concerning the guidelines for implementing gender and child data systems.

The fact that men outnumber women in school principal positions, despite the majority of teachers across all educational levels in Indonesia being female, has prompted investigations into the underlying causes. Studies indicate that cultural expectations and family dynamics play a critical role in this gender disparity. For example, Margaret et al. (2022) found that cultural factors, especially those related to family unit dynamics, present a significant barrier to women aspiring to become principals. These barriers include diverse gender standards, cultural traditions, and theological beliefs that exert considerable influence over women's career decisions.

Supporting this perspective, Arar and Oplatka (2016) highlight how patriarchal norms in certain communities discourage women from pursuing leadership roles by associating these positions with traditionally masculine qualities. Such societal conditioning often fosters self-doubt in women regarding their leadership potential, further widening the gender gap in school principalship. Gaus (2011) added that married female educators often require their husband's consent to pursue a principal position, a condition that directly impacts their domestic role obligations. These household expectations also contribute to a lack of self-assurance among women in pursuing leadership roles. Furthermore, female civil servants frequently hesitate to seek job promotions due to home responsibilities, which further limits their participation in leadership and exacerbates the gender disparity in school principalship.

Another study conducted by Airin (2010), who investigated the challenges faced by an Indonesian female school principal stated that female school principals in Indonesia confront considerable challenges to leadership positions due to strongly rooted cultural preconceptions that judge them unsuitable for leadership, which is exacerbated by women's lower levels of education than men. These difficulties are exacerbated by cultural pressures that reduce women's self-confidence and self-esteem. Furthermore, a lack of professional supervision and direction, combined with the difficult task of reconciling professional responsibilities with traditional family roles, compels many women to choose between job progress and family obligations. These variables contribute to gender discrepancies in educational leadership.

Regardless of gender, principal leadership plays a very important role in managing schools as educational units that organize learning processes for students. Principals play a major role in developing school culture for professional development (Mthanti & Msiza, 2023). Principals lead training programs, seminars, and workshops. Education is believed to

be able to prepare and engineer the direction of human development in the future. The performance of a principal is very important for its progress. Principals must have characteristics such as creating relationships with staff, parents, and students, conveying a shared vision and goals, promoting leadership that shares power, creating a sense of collectivity, collaboration, understanding, and teacher development, and having personality traits.

This present research was conducted with the aim of finding out the experience of Indonesian female senior high school principals. Specifically, this present research investigated the challenges faced by the participants in leadership position and the strategies that they implement to overcome obstacles, ensuring their effectiveness and success in educational leadership.

Methodology

Research design and participants

This study used a qualitative methodology. Creswell (2012) described that, qualitative research was typically used to establish the importance of the central idea and to explore the problem and develop an understanding of small individuals in social problem. Then, the narrative method was used in this study. According to Creswell (2012), narrative inquiry was a qualitative research method in which the narratives themselves served as the raw data. The term "narrative" referred to either the event being investigated, such as a narrative of sickness, or the method employed in a study, such as the methods of analyzing stories recounted by participants (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). This study employed narrative as a method. As a method, it began with the experiences reflected in a person's told and lived stories.

This study was conducted at a junior and a senior high school in Palembang, South Sumatera. The main respondents of this research were 2 female principals from each school who were graduates of English education study program. In addition, this present research also involved one vice principal of academic affairs and curriculum and an English teacher from both schools. The aim of having the vice school principals and the English teachers was to get the information in relation to elaborate the information gained from the interview with the two school principals. These data from the vice principals and teachers were helpful for determining the accuracy or falsity of the principal's statements regarding events that occurred at the school. In Minister of Education Regulation Number 15 (2018) Regarding Fulfilling the Workload of Teachers, Principals, and School Supervisors, it was stated that the vice principal of the school was an additional task attached to the implementation of the main tasks in accordance with the teacher's workload.

Data collection and analysis

In qualitative research, data collection approach included interview, documentation, observation, and audiovisual materials analysis (Creswell, 2012). Data of this research was obtained from interview. Interview was one of the most important sources in qualitative research to get deep insights about how people experienced, felt, and interpreted the social

world (Creswell, 2012). The researcher used semi-structured interviews for this investigation. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to collect detailed narratives while providing the flexibility to probe deeper into specific areas of interest (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The most significant benefit was that the interviewer could prepare a group of questions in advance while remaining free to change their sequence or method of preparation. In this research, semi-structured interviews were used to extract information and get their in-depth perspectives on the subject. During the interview, the participants were two female principals. Before doing the interview, the researcher sent the consent letter that was signed by the participants. The reason why the writer used interview was because the information obtained from the participants was more detailed. Moreover, using interview technique could avoid getting limited information which only consisted of yes/no answers. During the interview session, the researcher asked the open-ended questions to the participants. Then after obtaining information from the interview with the principal, it was followed by an interview with the teacher and vice principal. The interview session was recorded by using the audio recorder or handphone in order to avoid any information left when transcribing.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data from the interview. According to Braun and Clarke (2012), thematic analysis was a technique for methodically discovering, organizing, and gaining insight into meaning patterns (themes) across a dataset. By concentrating on meaning across a dataset, thematic analysis enabled the researcher to comprehend collective or shared meanings and experiences. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), there were six processes involved in the thematic analysis of data: familiarize yourself with the data, develop initial codes, search for themes, review themes, define and label themes, and write the report/manuscript. This strategy was therefore a means of detecting commonalities in the manner in which a topic was discussed or written about and making meaning of these commonalities.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the data in this study, the researcher did the member-checking to the participants by showing the transcription data so they could confirm that the result was clear and true as what they had answered. According to Patton (2002), giving the transcription of the interview to participants was to clarify and could help the researcher find something which did not make sense in the interview result. In this study, the interview result was given to the two female principals who were the research participants. The participants also gave feedback by correcting and even giving more data and information.

Findings and Discussion

After conducting a thematic analysis of the data, the researchers discovered several findings regarding the female school principals' challenges and strategies in leadership position.

The challenges encountered by female school principals

The first objective of this research is to investigate the female school principals' challenges in leadership position. The researchers classified the findings into several themes and codes. Table 1 summarizes the themes and codes identified in this research.

Table 1. *The female school principals' challenges*

Themes	Codes
Gender Perceptions in Leadership	subtle discrimination resistance from senior staff
Family and Social Support	family views on career balance between work and family obstacles from family
Technology Issues	adapting ICT in education age related barriers to technology

Gender perceptions in leadership

The first challenges that faced by female school principals were gender perceptions in leadership roles. Based on the interviews with two female principals, the main difficulties identified include subtle discrimination and resistance from senior staff. The main participant 1 shared that her decisions were often questioned and required more thorough explanations to gain approval from others. The main participant 1 remarked, *"I often have to provide detailed justifications for my decisions to ensure everyone understands the reasoning behind them."* Similarly, the main participant 2 highlighted the resistance encountered when introducing new policies, particularly those perceived as innovative. The main participant 2 stated, *"There are times when I face challenges in trying to implement new policies. It takes extra effort to convince certain individuals of my objectives."* These experiences underscore how female leaders often face heightened expectations to demonstrate their legitimacy and competence.

Despite these challenges, the interviews also shed light on the notion that gender is not necessarily a major barrier to effective leadership. Several participants emphasized that leadership success is determined more by individual skills and competencies than by gender. The main participant 1 noted, *"Female leadership is not a significant obstacle. Success depends on the individual's ability to deliver satisfactory performance, not on their gender."* The main participant 2, who emphasized the importance of respect for one another, reflected this view, stated, *"In my opinion, I feel respected, but I always remind everyone that we should respect each other."* These reflections suggest that while societal expectations may create additional hurdles, individual talent and performance remain key drivers of leadership success.

Additionally, the educational and professional journeys of the participants played a significant role in shaping their leadership capabilities. The main participant 1, for instance, began the career as an assistant teacher at the same school she now leads, gradually advancing through roles such as student council advisor and vice principal before becoming principal.

The main participant 2, on the other hand, had over two decades of experience as an educator before assuming the role of principal in her current institution. Both participants emphasized the importance of lifelong learning and a commitment to self-improvement, with the main participant 1 noting, *"Higher education qualifications and digital literacy can be mastered if you continuously strive to learn and develop yourself."* These diverse experiences provided them with the practical knowledge and confidence needed to navigate leadership challenges, including navigating resistance and addressing gender-based stereotypes.

The findings suggest that while gender bias and resistance remain obstacles, the principals' extensive experience and demonstrated competence have allowed them to overcome these challenges. This aligns with Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), which posits that gender bias in leadership arises from the perceived incongruity between traditional gender roles and leadership expectations. However, as the participants' narratives reveal, when female leaders showcase their capabilities through consistent performance and effective decision-making, these biases can be mitigated. Furthermore, the participants' emphasis on mutual respect and collaboration highlights the importance of fostering a supportive school environment, where leadership is recognized based on merit rather than societal perceptions of gender.

Family and social support

Family support plays an important role in the success of female school principals, but it often comes with significant challenges. While a supportive family can provide motivation and encouragement, balancing professional and personal responsibilities remains a major challenge. The main participant 1 explained how managing both roles can be demanding, stating, *"As a mother and a school principal, I have to manage my time efficiently. I always try to spend enough time with my family even though being a principal is very demanding."* Similarly, the main participant 2 shared that while her family is supportive, they initially worried about her ability to maintain a balance between work and home. According to the main participant 2, *"At first, my parents were worried I might struggle to balance my responsibilities, but they fully support my decision to become a principal, always reminding me to take care of my health."* These statements show the constant pressure female principals face to meet both professional and family expectations, which often leads to stress and conflict.

Social norms make these challenges even harder, as traditional expectations often place women in the primary caregiving role. This creates extra pressure for female principals, who must balance societal expectations with their professional responsibilities. According to Setyaningrum (2023), women in leadership roles often experience more role conflict because society tends to prioritize their family responsibilities over their professional roles. The main participant 1 shared how this dual role affects her daily life, explaining that time management is key to ensuring family responsibilities are not overshadowed by professional demands. Similarly, the main participant 2 acknowledged the overlapping pressures of work and family, noting that societal expectations often increase the weight of these responsibilities. These challenges highlight how difficult it is for female principals to balance leadership duties with the expectation to prioritize family roles.

In addition, societal perceptions continue to shape the experiences of female school principals, adding more complexity to their leadership roles. The traditional view of women as primary caregivers still exists, creating an implicit expectation that family responsibilities should take priority over professional ambitions. As Ely and Meyerson (2021) note, societal biases often result in additional emotional and mental burdens for female leaders, forcing them to juggle work and family demands while trying to challenge traditional gender norms. Both main participants highlighted the mental and emotional strain caused by these overlapping demands, showing that societal and family expectations remain significant challenges for women in leadership roles.

Technology issues

The last challenges that faced by the female principals were the integration of technology in education has become a critical aspect of modern teaching practices. As mandated by Government Regulation Number 74 of 2009, educators are required to be proficient in Information and Communication Technology (ICT). However, many instructional staff, particularly older educators, face difficulties in adapting to these new requirements. Venkatesh et al. (2012) revealed that on technology acceptance, suggest that older generations often encounter more barriers to adopting new technologies due to lack of familiarity, perceived complexity, and resistance to change. This challenge is particularly evident in schools where senior teachers struggle with tasks such as digital report card processing and implementing computer-based learning tools. The main participant 1 shared her experience dealing with these difficulties, explaining, *"Many senior teachers find it hard to adjust to using software for report cards. They still prefer manual methods, which delays the process and creates additional workloads for administrative staff."* Similarly, the main participant 2 noted resistance when introducing new media, stating, *"We provided computer-based tools for teaching, but some senior teachers found it challenging to integrate them into their lesson plans. They often revert to traditional approaches because it feels more familiar to them."*

These difficulties are not limited to technical skills but extend to mental and emotional barriers. Senior educators often express frustration and anxiety when faced with unfamiliar platforms, which can impact their confidence and willingness to engage with new methods. The main participant 2 highlighted this issue, saying, *"some of the teachers express their stress when asked to use technology. They worry about making mistakes or not being able to keep up with younger colleagues."* Such sentiments reflect the broader generational gap in technology adoption, where the pace of innovation often outstrips the ability of some staff members to adapt. Moreover, societal and institutional expectations to modernize teaching methods place additional pressure on senior teachers. The main participant 1 stated *"With all the talk about digital transformation, some of our senior staff feel left behind. They want to contribute but struggle to keep up with the demands of integrating technology."*

These findings align with Venkatesh et al. (2012), which highlight that perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness are significant determinants of technology adoption. For senior educators, the perceived complexity of new tools and fear of failure often act as major deterrents. This resistance is compounded by the fact that many senior teachers were trained during an era where digital tools were not integral to education. As noted by Ertmer and

Ottenbreit-Leftwich (2013), internal factors such as beliefs, confidence, and attitudes toward technology play a critical role in determining how willing educators are to integrate ICT into their practices. Additionally, the generational gap in technology proficiency creates a visible divide among teaching staff. Younger teachers, who are often more familiar with digital tools, adapt quickly to new platforms, while older teachers struggle to keep pace. This divide is not only technical but also cultural, as younger teachers tend to view technology as an enabler of innovation, while senior teachers may perceive it as a disruptive challenge to their established methods. With government regulations emphasizing digital transformation, schools are increasingly expected to meet ICT standards. However, these expectations often overlook the practical realities faced by senior teachers, who require additional time, resources, and support to adapt. The emotional strain and anxiety reported by participants underscore the need for a deeper understanding of the barriers faced by senior teachers in technology adoption.

The general development of educational technology integration may be affected if schools fail to address these issues, which could lead to a lack of ICT proficiency among employees. Technology has a lot of potential for changing education, but real change will still require human interaction, especially when it comes to senior teacher' struggles.

The female school principals' strategies in dealing with the challenges

The second objective of this research is to explore the strategies that they implement to overcome obstacles, ensuring their effectiveness and success in educational leadership. Table 2 summarizes the themes and codes identified in this research.

Table 2. *The female school principals' strategies in dealing with the challenges*

Themes	Codes
Developing inclusive and skilled leadership	mentorship and networking program clear vision and communication
Persuasive communication	having dialogue about career goals and family responsibilities setting clear boundaries expectations involving family in decisions making
Overcoming barriers to technology integration in school	provide ongoing ICT training for educators mentorship programs for technology integration

Developing Inclusive and Skilled Leadership

To address the challenges faced in their leadership roles, female school principals employ strategies that focus on fostering inclusive and skilled leadership. One key approach involves implementing mentorship and networking programs. By connecting with experienced mentors and participating in professional networks, the main participant 1 has gained valuable

guidance, advice, and opportunities to share best practices. The main participant 1 highlighted the benefits of mentorship, stating, *"I've learned a lot from experienced mentors who have guided me through difficult decisions. Networking with other school principals also helps me see how others solve similar challenges."* Similarly, the main participant 2 emphasized the importance of building connections, noting, *"Through mentorship programs, I've developed new strategies for managing my staff. Networking also gives me access to ideas that help me foster a more inclusive school culture."* These mentorship and networking efforts not only strengthen leadership capacity but also promote inclusivity by incorporating diverse perspectives into decision-making processes.

Another crucial strategy is maintaining a clear vision and communication within the school. Female principals recognize that setting a well-defined vision provides a sense of direction for the entire school community, helping staff align their efforts with shared goals. Transparent communication ensures that expectations are understood, and staff members feel included in decision-making processes. The main participant 1 explained, *"I make it a point to hold regular meetings with my staff to clarify our goals and address any challenges they face. It helps everyone stay on the same page."* Meanwhile, the main participant 2 shared, *"Clear communication is key. When staff understand the vision and why decisions are made, it fosters trust and collaboration."* This approach creates an environment of openness, inclusivity, and shared accountability, enabling principals to lead effectively.

Empowering younger teachers is another important strategy adopted by female school principals to address technology-related challenges. The main participant 2 explained, *"We encourage younger, tech-savvy teachers to assist senior staff in integrating technology into their teaching methods and using applications effectively. This peer collaboration helps bridge the gap between generations and fosters mutual learning."* Similarly, the main participant 1 shared how involving younger teachers has made a significant difference, stating, *"Our younger staff members are more familiar with digital tools, so we've asked them to mentor senior teachers. This approach has helped senior staff feel more supported and confident in adopting technology."* This strategy not only facilitates the adoption of technology but also strengthens collaboration among staff members, creating a more cohesive and supportive school environment.

Finally, setting clear goals and maintaining a disciplined approach is a key strategy for effective leadership. This includes the ability to prioritize tasks to prevent feeling overwhelmed by simultaneous responsibilities. The main participant 1 shared, *"Leadership is about clarity. Setting priorities and being disciplined with tasks has helped me manage my time and energy more effectively."* The strategies employed by the main participant 1 and the main participant 2 align with theories of transformational leadership, which emphasize inspiring and motivating teams through a shared vision and fostering collaboration (Bass & Riggio, 2014). Furthermore, Yip and Kram (2017) highlight that mentorship and developmental networks are vital for leaders, especially women, to navigate complex organizational environments. These findings also resonate with Ely et al. (2011), who emphasize the role of collaboration and adaptability as essential traits for women in leadership.

By employing these strategies, the main participant 1 and the main participant 2 are able to navigate challenges effectively, foster inclusivity, and create a positive environment that empowers both staff and students.

Persuasive communication

One of the significant strategies employed by female school principals to address challenges related to family and social support is *persuasive communication*. This approach allows principals to navigate the often-complex intersection between work and family responsibilities by fostering understanding and cooperation through open dialogue and clear boundary-setting. Engaging in dialogue about career goals and family responsibilities plays a crucial role in creating mutual support systems. This aligns with the idea of transformational leadership, which emphasizes effective communication and relationship-building to inspire and align stakeholders (Bass & Riggio, 2014). The main participant 1 highlighted the importance of this strategy, stated that *"I always try to talk with my family members about what I aim to achieve in my career and how they can support me. It's about finding a balance that works for everyone."* Clear communication of professional objectives is ensured by this strategy, which also fosters mutual respect and understanding among family members.

In addition to open dialogue, setting clear boundaries and expectations is essential in managing competing demands between work and family life. Clark (2013) Work-Life Border Theory supports this perspective, asserting that maintaining defined boundaries helps individuals navigate their dual roles more effectively. As the main participant 2 state *"I make it clear to my family when I need to focus on school matters, and I also set specific times to dedicate to them. It's about respecting both roles and making sure that neither feels neglected."* This practice allows principals to meet institutional demands without compromising personal commitments, demonstrating their ability to balance leadership responsibilities with personal priorities. These strategies reflect how female principals use persuasive communication to foster mutual understanding and navigate the challenges of family and social support. This is consistent with Ely et al. (2011) findings that women leaders often rely on emotional intelligence and relational skills to overcome systemic barriers and social expectations.

Overall, these approaches illustrate how female school principals use inclusive and human-centered leadership styles to address family and social support challenges. By prioritizing dialogue, setting clear expectations, and fostering trust, they not only alleviate potential conflicts but also serve as models for sustainable leadership practices that integrate both professional and personal dimensions effectively.

Overcoming Barriers to Technology Integration in School

Female school principals implement various strategies to address challenges in integrating technology into schools. These strategies focus on equipping educators with the necessary skills through ongoing ICT training and mentorship programs designed to support the effective use of technology in teaching. Providing ongoing ICT training is an essential step to ensure that teachers are confident and capable of using technology in their classrooms. The training goes beyond simply teaching technical skills—it emphasizes how technology can improve the quality of teaching and enhance learning outcomes. The main participant 1 explained: *"At first, many teachers were unsure about using technology, but through regular training and hands-on practice, they started feeling more comfortable. The training focuses on showing how technology can*

make teaching better and more effective. It's not about forcing them to use tools they're unfamiliar with but helping them see the benefits for both themselves and the students." This ongoing training creates an environment where teachers feel supported in developing new skills and adapting to the evolving demands of education. By offering consistent opportunities for learning, school principals enable teachers to explore technology's potential at their own pace, which builds confidence and reduces resistance to change.

Mentorship programs provide an additional layer of support by fostering peer collaboration and personalized guidance. These programs pair teachers who are experienced with technology with those who need more support, creating a culture of learning and teamwork. The main participant 2 shared her perspective on this strategy, *"We started a mentorship program to help teachers who were hesitant about using technology. Experienced teachers became mentors for those less confident. This way, the mentees could ask questions, practice new skills, and get immediate support. It made them feel less overwhelmed and more willing to try new things."* Such mentorship programs not only improve technical skills but also strengthen relationships among educators. Teachers feel less isolated in their struggles and more motivated to integrate technology into their teaching practices.

These strategies highlight the proactive role of school principals in addressing barriers to technology integration. By prioritizing training and mentorship, principals help create a supportive environment where teachers can embrace technological innovations. This strategy aligns with Fullan (2014) concept of change leadership, which emphasizes building capacity, collaboration, and adaptability as critical components of successful school transformation. Furthermore, Ertmer and Ottenbreit (2013) argue that professional development and mentorship are crucial in bridging the gap between knowledge and practice, enabling teachers to move beyond initial hesitations and embrace technology as a tool for enhancing learning.

In summary, female school principals demonstrate the importance of strategic leadership in overcoming barriers to technology integration. By providing ongoing ICT training and mentorship programs, they foster a culture of growth, collaboration, and adaptability. These efforts not only empower teachers to use technology effectively but also ensure that schools are prepared to meet the demands of modern education.

Conclusions and Implications

This study found three main challenges faced by female school principals in leadership roles. First, gender perceptions in leadership created barriers, such as subtle discrimination and resistance from senior staff. Second, balancing professional responsibilities with family and social expectations posed challenges, as societal norms often added pressure. Third, technology integration in education was a significant issue, especially for senior staff who struggled to adapt to ICT requirements and faced generational gaps in digital skills. Despite these challenges, the study also highlighted several strategies used by female principals to overcome them. These strategies included mentorship and networking programs, clear communication and vision, involving family in decision-making, setting clear boundaries, providing ongoing ICT training, and encouraging younger teachers to assist senior colleagues with technology.

Disclosure Statement

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