

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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A qualitative study on the leadership experiences of female principals in educational institutions

Merve Cebeci¹ and Abdurrahman İlğan^{2*}

¹ Konak Science and Art Center, Konak, İzmir, Türkiye

² İzmir Demokrasi University, Faculty of Education, İzmir, Türkiye 2; abdurrahman.ilgan@idu.edu.tr

* **Correspondence:** İzmir Demokrasi University, Faculty of Education, İzmir, Türkiye 2; abdurrahman.ilgan@idu.edu.tr

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Highlights:

- Female principals face gender-based prejudice from male colleagues and superiors.
- They build democratic school climates that value ideas and cooperation.
- Female principals act as role models and promote gender equality in disadvantaged areas.
- Spousal and family support is vital for balancing administration and private life.

Abstract

This study aims to analyze the leadership experiences of female principals in the education sector, the gender-based challenges they encounter, the strategies they adopt, and their impact on institutions within a qualitative framework. The study group consisted of 16 female principals from the Konak and Narlıdere districts of İzmir, selected through purposive sampling. The data were analyzed using inductive content analysis, through which codes were systematically generated and grouped into themes. The findings reveal that female principals are exposed to gender-based prejudices from their male colleagues and subordinates. Their leadership competencies are questioned, and their ideas are inadequately supported or ignored. Female principals contribute a democratic climate, innovative perspectives, nurturing communication (especially with children), detail-oriented management, and a sense of ownership to their institutions; they provide social visibility as role models in disadvantaged areas and emphasize gender equality in all areas of life. They adopt egalitarian policies and establish effective interaction with female parents and female students. While being single offers an advantage in time management, spousal support is of vital importance for married individuals. It is recommended that the number of female principals be increased in the future and that administrative authority be expanded in economically disadvantaged regions.

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1. Introduction

Throughout history, women's social status and gender roles in many societies have significantly limited their access to leadership positions. This situation affects women's self-confidence and makes them more hesitant. Rapid global societal development has increased the need for emotional and social behavior models in leadership and management, which has encouraged stereotypes. However, the rapid development of societies on a global scale has increased the need for emotional and social behavior models in leadership and management, which has encouraged women to take their place in the leadership arena (Singh et al., 2023). This study emphasizes that women leaders' emotional intelligence and expression management contribute positively to their career advancement, noting that emotional dynamics in organizations increasingly recognize women leaders. Similarly, a recent meta-analysis by Hsu et al. (2022) confirms women's superiority in emotional intelligence in transformational leadership; moreover, women's representation in management positions has been increasing alongside the rise in global labor force participation (Baker, 2025).

Historically excluded from many sectors due to gender-based discrimination, women have made significant progress in workplace representation. Latorre et al. (2025) found that women leaders' transformational leadership styles reduce perceived managerial barriers and have a particularly strong impact on female subordinates, which promotes gender equality. This progress has been influenced by changing social norms, legal and political transformations, and women's efforts to overcome barriers. However, implicit biases and discriminatory practices still hinder women's advancement, particularly in leadership roles, highlighting the need for continued efforts toward true gender equality. Leadership effectiveness is influenced by numerous factors, such as personality and character traits. In this context, leadership styles are based on individual differences rather than gender. Although some studies show that female leaders exhibit transformational leadership characteristics more frequently (Eagly & Carli, 2007), this is not a generalization. Leadership styles are shaped by variables such as situational factors and organizational culture. Therefore, rather than asserting that women adopt a "more collaborative, motivational, and participatory" model, it is more accurate to state that they can adopt different styles and that effectiveness depends on multiple factors. Zenger and Folkman (2019) reported that female leaders were rated higher than their male counterparts in most of the leadership competencies they examined; however, effectiveness varies depending on the context (Zenger & Folkman, 2020).

Women leaders create a vision that encourages behaviors such as trust, delegation of authority, honesty, respect, and accountability within the organization and strive to implement it. According to research by Eagly and Carli (2007), female leaders generally exhibit transformational leadership characteristics, including valuing followers' opinions, involving them in decision-making, meeting their needs, increasing trust and responsibility, and presenting a collaborative profile. In this way, female leaders contribute positively to the development and performance of followers within the organization. Similarly, the meta-analysis by Paustian-Underdahl et al. (2014) showed that, although men and women did not differ in perceived leadership effectiveness when all leadership contexts were considered, women were rated as significantly more effective than men when only other-ratings were examined. Research on the characteristics, styles, and challenges faced by female leaders has yielded complex and conflicting results. Some studies suggest that women adopt transformational styles, focusing on motivation, delegation, collaboration, and communication (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Transformational leadership involves creating vision, inspiring, intellectually stimulating, and showing individual attention, which enhances employee performance and commitment. However, it would be an exaggeration to say that all female leaders adopt this style; factors such as personality, experience, organizational culture, and industry influence their styles. Indeed, meta-analytic evidence indicates that gender differences in leadership style are small and are not uniform across settings (Eagly et al., 2003; Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014), and it has been argued that broad claims of a female leadership advantage are not adequately supported by the available evidence, since leadership behavior is shaped by the organizational and situational context in which it is enacted (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Vecchio, 2002). Social and emotional intelligence encompasses skills such as self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management, and is critical for effective leadership (Goleman, 1998). However, rather than claiming these traits are gender-specific, it is more accurate to focus on individual differences; both male and female leaders can possess high levels of social and emotional intelligence.

Among the challenges faced by women leaders are the "glass ceiling" syndrome, role conflicts, implicit biases, and gender stereotypes (Eagly & Carli, 2007). In male-dominated sectors, women have to exert more effort to prove their abilities and advance; they also struggle to achieve work-life balance (Eagly

& Carli, 2007). To overcome these barriers, organizations should implement policies that promote diversity, mentoring programs, leadership training, and flexible work arrangements. Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2011) emphasize that mentoring plays a critical role in helping women leaders break through the glass ceiling. The increasing representation of female administrators in schools represents a positive transformation in the education system, bringing diversity and equality (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Female school principals effectively manage the administrative, academic, and social dimensions of schools; shape the institutional vision; and positively influence student achievement. Their contributions are often associated with transformational leadership characteristics (Eagly & Carli, 2007), including a collaborative school culture, teacher professional development, and sensitivity to student needs. For example, female principals support teachers by creating mentoring programs or collaborative learning environments, such as peer coaching and co-teaching, which are regarded as effective school-based forms of teacher professional development (İlğan et al., 2022); they also develop customized projects to support students' academic and social-emotional development. This approach helps students realize their potential by creating an inclusive learning environment.

Female school principals promote gender equality, particularly for female students and female teachers, by serving as role models. These models inspire young girls to discover their leadership potential and encourage female teachers to advance their careers. Female principals prioritize gender equality by advocating for girls' access to education. Furthermore, their well-developed emotional intelligence skills (Goleman, 1998) enable them to build strong relationships with students and teachers and create an empathy-based school climate. The increasing representation of female principals creates a fair and effective education system; therefore, supporting women's leadership in education is critical. The impact of gender on leadership traits and styles is a complex area. When examining the leadership styles of female school principals, the interaction of biological, psychological, and social gender factors must be considered. For example, beliefs about women's competence in empathy, collaboration, and communication are shaped by social gender roles. Although research shows that female principals adopt transformational styles and that this has a positive impact on student achievement and school climate (Eagly & Carli, 2007), the findings should not be reduced to gender alone; social norms and other factors must also be considered. A comprehensive, nuanced approach must be adopted to understand the leadership of female school principals. In their meta-analysis, Eagly et al. (2003) found that female leaders were somewhat more transformational than male leaders, although the differences were small.

In conclusion, research on the leadership styles and effects of female school principals shows that the transformational approach is dominant (Eagly & Carli, 2007). This includes vision creation, inspiration, individual support, and intellectual stimulation; it supports teachers' professional development and collaboration. These conclusions are consistent with research on transformational school leadership: a meta-analytic review reported that such leadership practices have moderate positive effects on school conditions and on teachers' internal states, including their motivation and commitment (Leithwood & Sun, 2012), and a review of the accumulated evidence concluded that school leadership has a significant effect on the organizational conditions that shape the quality of teaching and learning (Leithwood et al., 2020). Communication and empathy skills (Goleman, 1998) enable effective relationships with stakeholders and constructive conflict management. Their student-centered approaches promote academic and social-emotional development. Female principals' leadership creates inclusive, fair, and student-centered educational environments, positively impacting schools' and students' success with unique perspectives.

1.1. Purpose of the Study

This study aims to examine in depth the leadership experiences of women who have taken on the role of school principal using a qualitative approach. Specifically, it seeks to analyze the systemic challenges faced by female leaders (including gender-based biases, role conflicts, and institutional barriers), their individual experiences regarding the advantages of being a female school principal (such as empathy-focused communication, role model effects, and contributions to institutional diversity), and their experiences in balancing work and personal life. This study will shed light on the reflections of gender norms in educational administration, contributing to a better understanding of the impact of women's leadership on educational institutions. The research also aims to fill gaps in the existing literature and develop policy recommendations. This study has the potential to make a significant contribution to promoting gender equality in the education sector, supporting women in leadership, and expanding their access to leadership positions. Examining the experiences of women leaders may help institutions develop more inclusive and equitable policies. The experiences of women principals can contribute to a deeper understanding of gender inequalities within the education system. Academic research can systematically

examine the challenges, biases, and discrimination they encounter, helping identify potential solutions. Research examining the similarities and differences between the leadership styles of women and male principals can contribute to the development of more effective leadership models. By exploring women's achievements and distinctive approaches in leadership roles, this line of research can also support the development of more inclusive and effective approaches to educational administration.

In line with this purpose, the following research questions were addressed:

RQ1. What are the experiences of female school principals regarding the importance and necessity of having female school principals?

RQ2. What are the experiences of female school principals regarding the difficulties they encounter with educational stakeholders (teachers and students) and other issues?

RQ3. What are the experiences of female school principals regarding the advantages of being a female school principal in terms of facilitating management, and what are the effects of these advantages on success?

2. Method

This section of the study includes information about the research model, study group, data collection tools, data collection, and data analysis.

2.1. Research Design

This study examines the relationship between the managerial behaviors and leadership experiences of female school principals working in elementary and middle schools. The study was conducted within the qualitative research paradigm and employed a phenomenological research design. Phenomenology is a type of qualitative research that uses a combination of interviews, observations, documents, video recordings, etc. to help researchers understand what, how, and why behind a particular phenomenon or event. Phenomenology helps to define and interpret experiences by revealing participants' perceptions and motivations. The phenomenological design requires the researcher to first describe experiences objectively and then reflect deeply on the description based on existing theories related to the phenomenon. In this study, the aim was to reach a conclusion by interpreting the leadership characteristics of female principals in education based on the perceptions and experiences of participants interviewed in the relevant field.

2.2. Study Group

The study group for this research consisted of 16 female school principals working in elementary and middle schools in the Konak and Narlıdere districts of İzmir Province during the 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 academic years. The participants were selected through purposive sampling. This sampling approach aimed to form a small study group to explore whether there were any common or shared characteristics among diverse institutions, such as elementary and middle high schools, along with schools from high, middle, and lower socio-economic environments, and to reveal the different dimensions underlying the problem according to this diversity. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, and audio recordings were made. The study included 16 interviews, and the data were analyzed in detail. The participants were coded as FM 1, FM 2, ..., FM 16 based on their status as "female principals." Tables 1 and 2 present the distribution of the study group by age, marital status, highest level of education, length of service at the current institution, total years of administrative experience, and type of school.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Female School Principals

Variables	Group	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age	30-40	2	12.5
	41-50	10	62.5
	51-60	4	25
Marital Status	Married	9	56.25
	Single	7	43.75
Education Level	Bachelor's Degree	9	56.25
	Master's Degree with Thesis	3	18.75
	Master's Degree without Thesis	4	25
Type of School	Elementary School	8	50
	Middle School	8	50
Total		16	100

Table 1 shows that 2 of the participants were in the 30-40 age group, 10 were in the 41-50 age group, and 4 were in the 51-60 age group; 9 are married, 7 are single; 9 have a bachelor's degree, 3 have a master's degree with a thesis, and 4 have a master's degree without a thesis; 8 are currently working in elementary schools, and 8 are currently working in middle schools. The length of time the participating female principals have worked at their current institutions and their total years of administrative experience are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Years of Service of Female Principals

Participant	Length of Service as Principal at the Current Institution	Total Years of Administrative Experience
FM 1	4 years	9
FM 2	1 year	10
FM 3	3 years	3
FM 4	2.5 months	17
FM 5	3 months	14
FM 6	7 years	16
FM 7	6 years	15
FM 8	4 years	4
FM 9	4 months	15
FM 10	2 months	10
FM 11	5 years	8
FM 12	2 years	10
FM 13	2 years	10
FM 14	1 year	8
FM 15	5 years	11
FM 16	4 years	8

Table 2 shows that female principals have been working at their current institutions for between 2 months and 7 years and have between 3 and 17 years of administrative experience.

2.3. Instrumentation

The research used interviews and semi-structured forms, which are among the main techniques of the phenomenological design in qualitative research methods. The research aimed to learn about female school principals' leadership styles, the challenges they face and how they cope with them, the contributions of being a woman in terms of facilitating management, women's strategies for balancing work and private life, and female principals' perspectives on the number and proportion of women in the context of gender equality. The researcher used a semi-structured interview form for the interviews.

The researcher prepared the interview form in the following stages: first, a literature review examined relevant studies, and a draft of 12 questions was created based on this foundation. The form was expanded to 14 questions after evaluating the questions for similarity, meaning, and scope. Expert opinions (from three professors specializing in educational management) were obtained, necessary adjustments were made, and the form was finalized. A pilot application was conducted to test validity and reliability; it received positive feedback in the preliminary interviews, and revisions were made to some questions based on feedback from the school principal. This process confirmed the suitability and applicability of the form for its purpose.

The interview questions were prepared in Word format and administered to volunteer participants. Before the interview, I provided necessary explanations, such as that participation was voluntary and that the information obtained during the interview would be kept confidential. The first part of the online interview form includes the option "I am participating voluntarily," and participants who select this option are directed to the interview questions. In face-to-face interviews, participants' consent was confirmed before the interview began, and interviews were conducted after consent was obtained. Audio recordings were made during the interviews. The data were obtained by analyzing audio recordings from interviews with female school principals.

2.4. Analysis of Data

The participants were coded as female principals (FM 1, FM 2, FM 3, ..., FM 16), and the data were described in detail. In this study, which focused on the leadership styles of female school principals, the researcher obtained answers to the six questions in the interview form and the 14 open-ended questions that formed the basis of the study through face-to-face interviews with the participants. In addition, the

audio recordings of the face-to-face interviews were transcribed into Word files. The researcher read the answers to each question in the interview form on different days and at different times. The researcher extracted codes from frequently recurring words in the raw data. The researcher derived themes from participants' statements and codes. The data were analyzed using inductive content analysis. The coding and themes were reviewed and revised by two experts in the field of educational management in addition to the researcher. The codes and themes were created in accordance with the research data. In the inductive content analysis, the themes are more abstract and comprehensive than the concepts obtained. Table 3 presents examples of school principal statements related to code development and the codes derived from them.

Table 3. Sample School Principal Statements and Codes Derived from Them

Statement by the school principal (as is)	Code obtained
We prioritize our schools even over our own homes, so we are very sensitive about everything from cleanliness and hygiene to human interaction and parent relations.	The female principal's dedication to the school surpassing even her home life
We must not forget teachers; we must work together and involve them in the process.	The female principal was open to cooperation.
...I faced many threats here. If I hadn't banged my fist on the table, they would have...	Security
We were so devoted that I say devoted because many female managers do this, there were times when we realized that we were neglecting our children at home during those periods.	Parents threatening the female principal High level of commitment and dedication to the school The female principal sometimes not having enough energy left for her own child

Expert opinion was sought regarding the creation of codes. After this consultation, the data obtained were reviewed again and the codes were adjusted. The final codes obtained in the data analysis were used.

3. Findings

In this section, the responses given by female principals to the questions in the interview form are analyzed and presented in line with the research questions. In Tables 4-14, the percentages given in parentheses next to the frequencies were calculated based on the total number of participants ($N = 16$); since a participant could express more than one view, the percentages do not add up to 100.

3.1. Findings Related to the First Sub-question

The first sub-question of the research is *"What are the experiences of female school principals regarding the importance and necessity of having female school principals?"* Participants were asked two questions about the importance and necessity of having female principals in schools. When Table 4 is examined, seven different themes emerged regarding the importance and necessity of having female principals in schools ($f=119$). Among these, the themes with the highest frequency were *"Women's skills"* ($f=30$), *"Women's nature"* ($f=23$), and *"Comparison of the characteristics of female principals with male principals"* ($f=22$).

Table 4. The Importance and Necessity of Having Female Principals in Schools: Characteristics and Situations of Women

Themes	Codes	f (%)
Women's skills	The creation of a democratic environment that values ideas	12 (75)
	The female principal's different perspective and the difference she brings to the institution	9 (56.25)
	The need for a woman's touch to improve the school's aesthetics	4 (25)
	The female principal's openness to cooperation	3 (18.75)
	The need for female principals in terms of the institution's vision and corporate culture	2 (12.5)
	Creating a maternal environment	8 (50)
The nature of women	Facilitating communication with female administrators, as mothers are more responsible for their children's education	5 (31.25)
	Due to their nature as women, they are more meticulous and detail-oriented in the processes that need to be carried out in school administration.	4 (25)
	Girls in their adolescence can establish better relationships with female principals and express their problems more comfortably.	3 (18.75)
	Children have a positive bias towards female principals.	3 (18.75)

	Female principals are more detail-oriented than their male counterparts.	8 (50)
Comparison of the characteristics of female principals with those of male principals	Female principals are more meticulous about the running of the school.	4 (25)
	Women have higher intrinsic motivation and do not do a job just for the sake of doing it.	2 (12.5)
	They give themselves fully to the work they do.	2 (12.5)
	Students feel more comfortable communicating with female principals.	2 (12.5)
	Female principals are more organized than their male counterparts.	2 (12.5)
Women's dedication to their work	Female principals are more systematic than their male counterparts.	2 (12.5)
	Female school principals have a stronger sense of ownership.	6 (37.5)
	Female principals embrace the school as if it were their own home.	3 (18.75)
	Women have higher intrinsic motivation and do not do a job just for the sake of doing it; they devote themselves to the work they do.	2 (12.5)
	Female principals embrace the school even more than their own homes, showing dedication.	1 (6.25)
Leadership status of female principals in disadvantaged regions	The figure of a female principal is very important for the visibility of women in disadvantaged areas and for them to serve as role models.	5 (31.25)
	Female principals in disadvantaged areas have high internal motivation.	3 (18.75)
	Women in disadvantaged areas do their best in every field.	2 (12.5)
	Being a female principal in disadvantaged areas is very exhausting.	1 (6.25)
	Women in disadvantaged areas soften the environment they enter.	1 (6.25)
Emotional characteristics of women	Female principals treat children more affectionately	4 (25)
	Female principals are self-sacrificing	3 (18.75)
	Women are capable of showing great love, interest, and care	3 (18.75)
	Women have a high sense of compassion and mercy.	1 (6.25)
	Women are sensitive.	1 (6.25)
The view that being a leader in schools is not gender-related	Women should be present in all areas of life	4 (25)
	There is no distinction between male and female leadership.	3 (18.75)
	It is important for a person to see themselves as a leader.	1 (6.25)

In Table 4, the codes with the highest frequency in the theme of "Women's skills" (f=30) are "Creating a democratic environment, valuing ideas" (f=12) and "The female principal's different perspective and bringing a difference to institutions" (f=9). At this point, one participant's opinion is quoted as follows: "Women do their jobs wholeheartedly. They do it with conviction. This is very different from going to work to earn money. That's why I think their perspectives are very different." FM 11

The second question of the study is as follows: "What contributions do female principals make to educational management as leaders? Please explain." When Table 5 is examined, seven themes emerge regarding female principals' contributions to educational management as leaders (f=82). Among these, the themes with the highest frequency were "Women's skills" (f=58) and "Comparing the characteristics of female principals with those of male principals" (f=16).

Table 5. Contributions of Female Principals to Educational Management as Leaders

Themes	Codes	f (%)
Women's Skills	Female principals using their hierarchy when necessary	11 (68.75)
	Democratic advancement of female principals' leadership qualities	11 (68.75)
	High communication skills and openness to communication	10 (62.5)
	Organizational communication skills	8 (50)
	Enables different perspectives and originality	4 (25)
	Cooperative female principals in the field of management	4 (25)
	The female principal's openness to cooperation	3 (18.75)
	Detailed approach	3 (18.75)
	Preparation of strategic plans	2 (12.5)
	Strong problem-solving skills	2 (12.5)
Comparison of female principals' characteristics with male principals' characteristics	Higher commitment and dedication to the school	4 (25)
	Female principals are better at keeping the school clean and hygienic	4 (25)
	Female principals are more sincere	4 (25)
Leadership situations of female principals in disadvantaged areas	Female principals are able to organize more quickly	2 (12.5)
	Women are more organized and disciplined than men	2 (12.5)
	Enrolling girls in education in disadvantaged areas	3 (18.75)
	Remaining calm and controlling anger is important in disadvantaged areas, and this is more prevalent among female principals.	1 (6.25)

Being a leader in schools is not gender-related.	People who possess leadership qualities, regardless of gender, are good principals.	4 (25)
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When Table 5 is examined, the statements *"The female principal using her hierarchy when necessary"* (f=11) and *"The democratic advancement of the female principal's leadership qualities"* (f=11) are the codes with the highest frequency in the theme of *"Women's skills"* (f=58). At this point, one participant's opinion is as follows:

"I don't want to overlook this detail. I act on an equal footing, but it is not possible to get everyone to work and be productive with this method. There are some people who unfortunately see your democracy as weakness. In that case, I naturally switch to another leadership style. But here, our preference is not for the institution as a whole. The fact that one person has weak work ethics does not mean that I will show the same type of management to my other colleagues. We are democratic as a whole, but unfortunately we use hierarchy when necessary." FM 11

3.2. Findings Related to the Second Sub-question

The second sub-question of the study is "What are the experiences of female school principals regarding the difficulties they encounter with educational stakeholders (teachers, students) and other issues?" Table 6 presents the findings on the difficulties female school principals encounter with teachers.

Table 6. Difficulties Experienced by Female Principals with Teachers

Themes	Codes	f (%)
Problems caused by female teachers	Not experiencing any significant difficulties	10 (62.5)
	Experiencing more difficulties with female teachers	5 (31.25)
	Difficulties related to female teachers' requests for leave	4 (25)
	Female teachers comparing themselves to female principals and seeing them as rivals	3 (18.75)
	Female teachers' inability to accept female principals	2 (12.5)
Problems caused by male teachers	More difficult communication and assistance compared to male teachers	2 (12.5)
	Male pressure	2 (12.5)
Problems caused by the female principal	Male teachers trying to intimidate, pressure, and devalue female principals	2 (12.5)
	Perfectionism	3 (18.75)
Problems arising from disadvantaged areas	The idea that excessive empathy is a problem	1 (6.25)
	Teachers' motivation is undermined by their inability to fully convey the subject matter due to high absenteeism among students in disadvantaged areas	2 (12.5)
	Teachers' impatience in disadvantaged areas	1 (6.25)
	Not considering the difficulties experienced to be gender-related	5 (31.25)
Problems arising from other causes	Prejudices against the female principal	2 (12.5)
	Teachers taking advantage of the principal's good intentions	2 (12.5)
	Teachers objecting to decisions made without understanding the regulations	2 (12.5)
	Teachers taking advantage of the female principal's good intentions	2 (12.5)

When examining Table 6, five themes emerge regarding the difficulties female principals experience with teachers (f=50). Among these, the themes with the highest frequency are *"Problems caused by female teachers"* (f=26) and *"Problems caused by other reasons"* (f=13). In the theme *"Problems caused by female teachers"* (f=26), the most frequent codes are *"Not experiencing any significant difficulties"* (f=10) and *"Experiencing more difficulties with female teachers"* (f=5). At this point, one participant's opinion is as follows: *"I can't say I experienced many difficulties. When I first started working, there was a brief prejudice because of my appearance, as a young woman had arrived. Other than that, I did not experience any prejudice in these three different institutions."* FM 10

Table 7 presents the solutions proposed by female school principals to the difficulties they experience with teachers, along with the findings from the same themes.

Table 7. Suggested Solutions to the Challenges Faced by Female Principals with Teachers

Themes	Codes	f (%)
	Female principals should be disciplined and authoritative when necessary	8 (50)

Problems caused by female teachers	Keeping communication channels open between teachers and the school principal	5 (31.25)
	Being polite and trying not to hurt anyone	3 (18.75)
	Female school principals should take the lead in tasks to be done. (They should do it themselves)	3 (18.75)
	Administrators should first be role models themselves	3 (18.75)
	Administrators should enforce regulations	2 (12.5)
Problems caused by male teachers	Female principals acting in a disciplined and authoritative manner when necessary	8 (50)
	Keeping communication channels open between teachers and school principals	5 (31.25)
	Being polite and trying not to hurt anyone's feelings	3 (18.75)
	Administrators enforcing regulations	2 (12.5)
Problems caused by the female principal	As a principal, she is aware that she represents the state, and she is able to maintain balance in the face of problems	1 (6.25)
	The female principal has embraced her role as principal at the school and has a clear attitude	1 (6.25)
Problems arising from disadvantaged areas	The female principal motivating her teachers	1 (6.25)
	The female principal taking her teachers' wishes into consideration	1 (6.25)
	The female principal paying attention to the institutional culture and preferring more egalitarian policies	4 (25)
Problems arising from other reasons	The female principal being serious and strong	4 (25)
	Better understanding of teachers' needs and expectations	2 (12.5)
	Over time, as they work together, prejudices are broken down	2 (12.5)
	The female principal being in the field frequently	2 (12.5)

When Table 7 is examined, five themes emerge regarding the solutions proposed by female principals to the difficulties they experience with teachers ($f=60$). Among these, the themes with the highest frequency are *"Problems caused by female teachers"* ($f=24$) and *"Problems caused by other reasons"* ($f=14$). In the theme *"Problems caused by female teachers"* ($f=24$), the codes with the highest frequency were *"The female principal should be disciplined and authoritative when necessary"* ($f=8$) and *"Communication channels between teachers and the school principal should be kept open"* ($f=5$). At this point, one participant's opinion is as follows: *"We try to be the kind of leader we imagine, and we do so as much as possible. However, in the functioning of institutions, a more authoritarian and disciplined management model may be necessary."* FM 6

Table 8 presents the findings on the difficulties female school principals experience with students.

Table 8. Challenges Faced by Female Principals with Students

Themes	Codes	f (%)
Problems caused by students	Behavioral disorders among students	7 (43.75)
	Due to numerous behavioral problems, it is difficult to focus on academic achievements; the priority is to ensure that students become good people	2 (12.5)
	Technology addiction among students	2 (12.5)
	In particular, foreign students' absenteeism	3 (18.75)
	Foreign students who do not speak the language wearing down teachers and the female principal	3 (18.75)
Problems related to foreign students	Foreign students coming to middle school not knowing how to read and write, which affects the education and teaching environment	2 (12.5)
	Foreign students behaving harshly and harmfully towards Turkish students	2 (12.5)
	Foreign parents not speaking Turkish at home, causing their children to fall behind in this area	2 (12.5)
Problems arising from disadvantaged areas	Frequent absenteeism among students	7 (43.75)
	Literacy problems despite being middle school students	4 (25)
	Financial hardship	2 (12.5)

When Table 8 is examined, three themes emerge regarding the difficulties female principals experience with students ($f=36$). Among these, the theme with the highest frequency was *"Problems arising from disadvantaged areas"* ($f=13$), and under this theme, the code with the highest frequency was *"Frequent absenteeism of students"* ($f=7$). Table 9 presents suggestions for addressing the difficulties female school principals face with students, along with findings from the same themes.

Table 9. Suggestions for Solving the Challenges Faced by Female Principals with Students

Themes	Codes	f (%)
Problems caused by students	Seeking support from the guidance counselor	7 (43.75)
	Keeping communication channels open between students and the school principal	6 (37.5)
	Showing that students are valued	3 (18.75)
	Behaving politely and kindly toward students	3 (18.75)
	Conducting individual meetings with students	2 (12.5)
	Setting certain boundaries with students and teaching school rules	2 (12.5)
	Children being intimidated by female principals when it comes to discipline	2 (12.5)
Issues related to foreign students	Showing that students are valued	3 (18.75)
	Responding appropriately to crises	2 (12.5)
	Focusing on foreign students' sense of belonging	2 (12.5)
	Focusing on students becoming good people; regardless of their language, religion, or race, they should respect and love the land they live on, and focus on our cultural values	2 (12.5)
	Opening a reading and writing course for middle school students	2 (12.5)
Problems arising from disadvantaged areas	Showing that students are valued	3 (18.75)
	Behaving politely and kindly towards students	3 (18.75)
	The female principal placing importance on sports activities in order to get children into school	3 (18.75)
	Responding appropriately to crises	2 (12.5)
Problems arising from social causes	Maintaining open channels of communication between students and the school principal	6 (37.5)
	Treating students politely and kindly	3 (18.75)
	Approaching children with tolerance because they are children	1 (6.25)

When Table 9 is examined, six themes have emerged regarding the female principal's suggestions for solutions to the difficulties she experiences with students ($f=57$). Among these, the themes with the highest frequency were *"Problems caused by students"* ($f=25$) and *"Problems caused by disadvantaged areas"* ($f=11$). In the theme *"Problems arising from students"* ($f=25$), the codes *"Seeking support from the guidance counselor"* ($f=7$) and *"Maintaining open communication channels between students and the school principal"* ($f=6$) had the highest frequency. At this point, one participant's opinion is as follows: *"...We receive the most support from our guidance counselor. We have individual meetings. Then I try to communicate with them as much as I can."* FM 7

Regarding the second sub-question, under the heading *"Other difficulties you have experienced (if any),"* four themes emerged: *"Difficulties arising from upper management"*, *"Difficulties arising from disadvantaged areas"*, *"Difficulties arising from social reasons,"* and *"Difficulties exceeding the authority of the school principal."* When examining Table 10, four themes emerged regarding the other challenges (if any) experienced by female principals ($f=74$). Among these, the themes with the highest frequency were *"Challenges arising from disadvantaged regions"* ($f=32$) and *"Challenges exceeding the principal's authority"* ($f=21$).

Table 10. Other Challenges Faced by Female Principals (If Any)

Themes	Codes	f (%)
Difficulties arising from senior management	Pressure from senior management	4 (25)
	Male supervisors pressuring divorced single female principals about their personal lives	2 (12.5)
	Male supervisors favoring male principals in their immediate circle and public perception	2 (12.5)
	Inability to comfortably express problems to supervisors (fear of being labeled a failure)	1 (6.25)
Challenges arising from the disadvantaged area	Security gaps in the area	6 (37.5)
	The school's vulnerability to neglect and abuse	5 (31.25)
	High levels of drug addiction in the surrounding area	5 (31.25)
	External security issues due to the school's location	4 (25)
	The school's location being highly vulnerable to sexual abuse	4 (25)
Difficulties arising from social reasons	Lack of security at the school (in a disadvantaged area)	4 (25)
	Widespread drug addiction in the school's location	4 (25)
	Meetings are not egalitarian due to the low number of female principals	3 (18.75)
	Male supervisors favoring male principals in their immediate circle and social perception	2 (12.5)

	Senior management not acting in a principled manner	2 (12.5)
	The perception among the public that female principals are egotistical	1 (6.25)
	Male and older assistant principals not taking female principals into consideration	1 (6.25)
	Patriarchal society's prejudices against female principals	1 (6.25)
	Society's perception of female principals as sexual objects	1 (6.25)
	The desire for authoritarian administrators in society and institutions	1 (6.25)
	Insufficient authority of the school principal	
	Negative impact of government austerity measures on school operations and demotivation of the principal	7 (43.75)
	The negative effects of the economic crisis on the provision of funds to the school	4 (25)
Challenges beyond the school principal's authority	The assistant principal's failure to perform their duties	3 (18.75)
	The decline in the female principal's love for her profession due to systemic deficiencies (transportation, education funding, slowness at higher levels, etc.)	2 (12.5)
		2 (12.5)
		2 (12.5)
		1 (6.25)
	The need to change national policies regarding foreign nationals, leading to unsuccessful outcomes in the field of education	

When Table 10 is examined, the codes with the highest frequency in the theme of *"Difficulties arising from disadvantaged areas"* (f=32) are *"Security gaps in the area"* (f=6) and *"The school is very vulnerable to neglect and abuse, and there is a high level of drug addiction in the neighborhood"* (f=5). In the theme of *"Challenges exceeding the authority of the school principal"* (f=21), the codes with the highest frequency are *"Insufficient authority of the school principal"* (f=7) and *"The negative impact of government austerity measures on the school's operations and the demotivation of the principal"* (f=4). At this point, one participant's opinion is as follows:

"...There is one situation. The difference between Turkish citizens and foreign citizens who have migrated is that they have an incredible number of siblings. Their birth rates are very high. Their birth rates are so high that I will tell you about a parent who came the other day; when the woman came, she was 21 years old and had four children. She is a Syrian citizen, and her husband has left. We are doing our best to provide education, but I cannot prevent this." FM 14

Suggestions for solutions to other difficulties experienced by female school principals (if any) and findings related to the same themes as the difficulties experienced are presented in Table 11.

Table 11. Suggestions for Solutions to Other Challenges Faced by Female School Principals (If Any)

Themes	Codes	f (%)
Challenges arising from senior management	Using the right channels to ensure that tasks are carried out appropriately	1 (6.25)
	The female principal being serious with her superiors and clearly defining her boundaries	1 (6.25)
	Not repeating the bad examples she saw from her superiors in the past	1 (6.25)
	Motivation	
Challenges arising from disadvantaged areas	The female principal using her experience to deal with problems	3 (18.75)
	Being open to organizational communication on important issues such as neglect and abuse	2 (12.5)
	Using the right channels to get things done properly	1 (6.25)
	Contacting school police in case of security problems in disadvantaged areas	1 (6.25)
	Seeking support from guidance services on issues of neglect and abuse and making a list	1 (6.25)
Difficulties arising from social reasons	Female principals supporting other female principals	2 (12.5)
	Using the right channels to ensure that work is done properly	1 (6.25)
	Having female assistant principals is more advantageous in terms of cooperation and makes it easier to work	1 (6.25)
Difficulties that exceed the authority of the school principal	Female principals dealing with problems using their experience	3 (18.75)
	Using the right channels to ensure that work is done properly	1 (6.25)
	Wanting to do their job in the best way possible with internal motivation	1 (6.25)

When Table 11 is examined, four themes emerge regarding the solutions proposed by female school principals (if any) to other difficulties they face (f=20). The theme with the highest frequency is *"Difficulties arising from disadvantaged areas"* (f=8). Within the theme *"Challenges arising from disadvantaged regions"*

(f=7), the codes with the highest frequency are *"The female principal's experience in dealing with challenges"* (f=3) and *"Being open to organizational communication in important issues such as neglect and abuse"* (f=2). At this point, one participant's view is as follows: *"...My 25th year is coming to an end, and I will be entering my 26th year in administration. With this experience, you should be like the scales of justice; you should weigh things correctly."* FM 12

3.3. Findings Related to the Third Sub-question

The third sub-question of the study is *"What are the experiences of principals regarding the advantages of being a female school principal in terms of facilitating management, and what are the effects of this on success?"* Regarding the third sub-question, three themes emerged under the heading of *"Advantages of female principals in terms of management"*: *"Advantages related to communication style," "Advantages related to behavior style,"* and *"Advantages related to female characteristics."* When Table 12 is examined, three themes have emerged regarding the advantages of female principals' gender in terms of management (f=40). Among these, the theme with the highest frequency is *"Advantages related to communication style"* (f=20).

During the qualitative data analysis process, the codes obtained from interviews with female school principals were examined; codes that repeated multiple times were clustered to derive themes. As a result of this process, three distinct and separate themes emerged from the codes. An inductive approach was adopted in determining the themes.

Table 12. The Advantages of Female Principals in Schools in Terms of Management

Themes	Codes	f (%)
Advantages related to communication	Female parents feel more comfortable communicating with female principals	9 (56.25)
	Female teachers find it easier to communicate with female principals	5 (31.25)
	People feel more comfortable communicating with female principals	3 (18.75)
	Female students feel more comfortable around female principals and are able to share more freely	3 (18.75)
Advantages related to behavior	Male parents are calmer and more respectful in front of female principals	5 (31.25)
	A more moderate atmosphere at school	3 (18.75)
	Female principals noticing problems before they turn into crises	3 (18.75)
Advantages related to women's characteristics	Female principals being able to carry out administrative tasks more comfortably due to their attention to detail	2 (12.5)
	Female principals being able to empathize	2 (12.5)
	Female principals being more emotional	2 (12.5)
	Female principals having strong intuition.	2 (12.5)
	Being able to clearly see the shortcomings of the institution	1 (6.25)

When Table 12 is examined, the codes with the highest frequency in the theme of *"Advantages related to the form of communication"* (f=20) are *"Female parents communicate more comfortably with female principals"* (f=9) and *"Female teachers can communicate more easily with female principals"* (f=5). At this point, one participant's opinion is as follows: *"Of course, there is an advantage. At least female parents can come and talk very comfortably. They don't have to worry about being pulled into different areas. When they come, they can easily say, 'She's a woman, she understands me, she listens to me,' and talk very comfortably."* FM 9

Regarding the third sub-question, under the heading *"Successful aspects of female principals and factors affecting their success,"* three themes were identified (results were given in Table 13) for factors affecting the success of female principals in schools: *"Positive influencing factors," "Negative influencing factors,"* and *"Other factors."*

Table 13. Factors Affecting the Success of Women Principals in Schools

Themes	Codes	f (%)
Positive influencing factors	Support for female principals	4 (25)
	Internal motivation	4 (25)
	Women's determination and perseverance	3 (18.75)
	Resolve	3 (18.75)
	Love for children	3 (18.75)
	Family support	3 (18.75)
	Spousal support, if married	3 (18.75)
	Female principals' more detailed perspective	2 (12.5)

Negative influencing factors	Inadequate policies for education and failure to give education the necessary importance	7 (43.75)
	Female principals in disadvantaged areas wanting to focus more on project work or academic achievement, but being forced to deal with the school's physical problems or behavioral problems as a priority	6 (37.5)
	Male supervisors who want men to be in the forefront applying mobbing to female principals	5 (31.25)
	Male supervisors expecting perfection from female principals	4 (25)
	Whether or not senior management provides support	4 (25)
Other factors	Feedback provided by senior management	4 (25)
	The physical appearance of female principals (dressing appropriately for the position of principal, being overweight or attractive, etc.)	2 (12.5)

When Table 13 is examined, three themes emerge regarding the factors affecting the success of female principals ($f=67$). Among these, the theme with the highest frequency was *"Positive influencing factors"* ($f=25$); under this theme, the codes *"Support for female principals"* ($f=4$) and *"Internal motivation"* ($f=4$) had equal frequencies and were the codes with the highest frequency. At this point, one participant's opinion is as follows: *"The support given to us by the District National Education Directorate gives us confidence that if we have it, we will be successful. If our morale is high and what we do is seen, our morale will be high."* FM 16

Regarding the third sub-question, under the heading *"Changes you have implemented and consider important as a female leader serving as a principal in schools,"* four themes (results were given in Table 14) were identified: *"Changes in physical conditions," "Changes in education and teaching," "Changes in the school environment,"* and *"Special changes in disadvantaged areas."*

Table 14. Changes You Have Implemented and Consider Important as a Female Leader in School Administration

Themes	Codes	f (%)
Changes in physical conditions	Making appropriate changes to the school's physical premises	7 (43.75)
	Disregarding physical changes to the school's physical premises	1 (6.25)
	Building a library for the school	1 (6.25)
	The female principal working at the primary school being unable to make many changes	4 (25)
	The female principal causing changes that make a difference in academic achievement	4 (25)
	Serving as founding principal	2 (12.5)
	Developments in social and cultural activities	2 (12.5)
Changes in education and teaching	Opening contemporary and visionary workshops such as an entrepreneurial children's workshop	1 (6.25)
	Serving as a bridge in inter-institutional communication (supporting professors from two universities in their projects)	1 (6.25)
	Opening a hospital classroom at the Department of General Surgery at 9 Eylül University (a colorful classroom and play area for oncology patients, etc.)	1 (6.25)
	A significant increase in the number of students wanting to attend the school the following year after the positive systemic developments brought about by the female principal	1 (6.25)
	Opening workshops that interest students and are not available in every school	1 (6.25)
	Ensuring teacher motivation	4 (25)
	Ensuring a safe environment at school	2 (12.5)
Changes made in the school environment	Ensuring a peaceful environment at school	2 (12.5)
	The school being recognized as an elite school	2 (12.5)
	The presence of someone who listens to parents	2 (12.5)
	Significantly improving children's behavior	2 (12.5)
	The development and education of foreign students	2 (12.5)
	The female principal serving as a role model for children in terms of cleanliness	1 (6.25)
Special changes made in	Keeping stakeholders (parents, school administration, students) together	1 (6.25)
	Ensuring that students and parents gain discipline and comply with rules at school	3 (18.75)

disadvantaged areas	Providing financial support to parents and children with insufficient financial resources in disadvantaged areas and meeting their needs	2 (12.5)
	Significant improvement in student absenteeism rates at school	1 (6.25)
	Encouraging parents in disadvantaged areas to develop positive attitudes by treating them more humanely	1 (6.25)
	Enabling children from low socioeconomic backgrounds to communicate with the Ministry of Family and Social Policies	1 (6.25)

When Table 14 is examined, four themes emerge regarding the changes implemented and considered important by female leaders serving as school principals (f=54). Among these, the themes with the highest frequency are *"Changes in the school environment"* (f=18) and *"Changes in education and teaching"* (f=17). In the theme *"Changes made in the school environment"* (f=18), the code with the highest frequency is *"Ensuring teacher motivation"* (f=4). At this point, one participant's opinion is as follows: *"I made people love their work and feel more ownership of it."* FM 2

4. Results, Discussion, and Recommendations

This section summarizes and discusses the leadership experiences, challenges, strategies, and impacts of female school principals working in public elementary and middle schools and provides recommendations.

The research highlights the critical role of female school principals in educational administration; however, it also reveals that they face gender-based biases, structural barriers, and normative constraints (Blackmore, 1999; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Harris et al., 2024; Shakeshaft, 1989). In this context, female school principals foster a democratic, inclusive, and egalitarian management culture; they promote social equality through their role model effect in disadvantaged areas (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Guilbert et al., 2024). Qualities such as a nurturing approach, attention to detail, and ownership strengthen communication, increase teacher motivation, and support student development, thereby improving overall school success (Bergmann et al., 2022; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Goleman, 1998). The findings shed light on the strategic value of female leadership and point to its potential to increase the inclusiveness of the education system (Alban Conto et al., 2023; Martínez et al., 2021). Female principals face challenges such as their ideas not being fully considered by male colleagues and subordinates, lack of support, and questions about their competence; this situation requires more effort and resilience. Social norms limit access and sustainable success, necessitating institutional and societal interventions. Especially in disadvantaged areas, female principals serve as role models for female students and expand access to education. The strategies adopted by female principals, such as collaboration, empathy, emotional intelligence, and attention to detail, enhance school success and support teacher motivation, student development, and an inclusive culture. The research recommends increasing the number of female leaders and developing egalitarian policies and support mechanisms. In the future, the impact of female principals will increase further with economic improvements and the expansion of administrative authority in disadvantaged areas. These findings will contribute to the transformation of the education system by promoting gender equality. The general findings of the study are summarized in Table 15.

Table 15. Themes Emerging from Research

Participatory and collaborative management approach	Strengthens school-family unity	Inclusive and egalitarian structure	Teamwork
Takes a holistic approach to students' academic and social development Uses hierarchy when necessary	Motivates female students to continue their education Contributes to gender equality	Uses communication skills effectively Democratic environment	Promotes equal opportunities in education and enriches school culture Equal environment

Table 15 highlights how female school principals' leadership approaches contribute to educational management and affect institutions. This approach not only improves management processes but also positively affects school culture, student development, and gender equality. The results indicate that supporting female leaders and increasing their participation in educational administration will contribute to the system. This section discusses and recommends actions based on the research findings, systematically evaluating the experiences of female school principals and presenting practical conclusions.

4.1. The Importance and Necessity of Female School Principals: Experiences of Female School Principals

The importance and necessity of female principals in schools is being debated. Research on women's leadership shows that female school principals create democratic environments, value ideas, and bring diverse perspectives to institutions. Research also suggests they provide aesthetic improvements, avoid hierarchy unless necessary, have strong communication skills, and adopt collaborative approaches. These findings emphasize the contributions of female principals to educational management and help us better understand their roles. The finding that female principals generally act democratically but resort to hierarchy when necessary aligns with Glickman's developmental supervision model, which suggests that school leaders should adopt directive, collaborative, or nondirective approaches depending on teachers' developmental levels and needs (İlğan, 2007). Compared to male principals, female principals were found to be more detail-oriented, meticulous, egalitarian, understanding, and tolerant; they demonstrated effective leadership with qualities such as school commitment, dedication, sincerity, organizational speed, discipline, empathy, and courtesy. In this context, women leaders have been rated by others as more effective than men (Paustian-Underdahl et al., 2014), although the need to consider individual differences has also been emphasized (Zenger & Folkman, 2020). While high levels of dedication can complicate work-life balance (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2011), female principals are also successful in event organization, civil society relations, and resource provision (Tok & Yalçın, 2017). These characteristics should be evaluated without generalizing.

4.2. Experiences of Female School Principals Regarding Challenges with Educational Stakeholders and Other Issues

The challenges faced by female school principals in their relationships with teachers, students, and other stakeholders are discussed. While the research indicates generally no significant challenges with teachers, female teachers experience difficulties with leave requests, while male teachers experience pressure and belittlement. This situation may be explained by the Superwoman Syndrome (Eagly & Carli, 2007); suggested solutions include a disciplined attitude, open communication, politeness, leadership, rule enforcement, attention to organizational culture, and egalitarian policies. These suggestions align with recent research showing that female school principals experience higher emotional exhaustion than their male counterparts but maintain professional success (Spyropoulos et al., 2026); it is also emphasized that open communication increases leadership effectiveness (Outtrim, 2025). Similarly, in the Turkish context, Üztemur et al. (2022) found that teachers experience ethical dilemmas stemming from their relationships with parents, students, school administrators, and colleagues, which indicates that competing stakeholder demands are a common source of tension in schools. In terms of difficulties arising from students and suggested solutions, while there are no significant problems with elementary school students, behavioral disorders, violence, language and adaptation problems among foreign students, and absenteeism are prominent in middle school. This can be linked to the Superwoman Syndrome; solutions include guidance counselor support, open communication, valuing, kindness, crisis intervention, sports activities, and tolerance. These recommendations align with recent findings confirming the critical role of female leaders' empathy and supportive approach in student relations (Ndlovu, 2023); they also indicate that gender differences depend on individual and contextual factors (Martínez et al., 2021).

4.3. Experiences and Success Effects Related to the Advantages of Being a Female School Principal in Terms of Facilitating Management

The management advantages of female school principals are discussed; it has been determined that communication and behavioral advantages increase female students' participation, while a moderate school climate facilitates operations. Female leaders' empathy and emotional intelligence consistently support crisis prevention and challenge gender dynamics (Goleman, 1998); recent studies confirm that these skills boost academic achievement by creating a positive school climate (Akbaba Altun & Turan Bora, 2025; Gregorio, 2025).

In the theme of successful aspects of female principals in schools, it has been determined that supporting children through socio-cultural activities, organizing events and projects, strong communication, organizational skills, academic achievement, and foresight facilitate the process. Leithwood et al. (2004) and Fullan (2014) emphasize communication and foresight as elements of effective leadership; recent studies show that female principals' emotional intelligence increases teacher motivation and student participation (Wang, 2022). In terms of the changes implemented and deemed important by

female principals, environmental physical improvements, increased academic achievement, teacher motivation, a peaceful environment, and disciplinary improvements in disadvantaged areas enhance operations; however, success measurement methods are debatable. These changes align with findings showing that female leaders raise student achievement by promoting data-driven decision-making and social-emotional well-being (Massouti et al., 2024).

4.4. Recommendations

Policy Recommendations: Performance-based salary systems should be developed to encourage the employment of female school principals. A study conducted by RAND (a nonprofit, nonpartisan research organization in the United States whose name is a contraction of "Research and Development") evaluated the Pittsburgh Principal Incentive Program, which combined support and evaluation with performance-based financial incentives for principals (a permanent salary increase of up to \$2,000 and an annual bonus of up to \$10,000); the findings suggested that the incentives had positive effects, although principals attributed changes in their leadership practices more to the support and feedback they received than to the financial incentives (Hamilton et al., 2012). Similarly, according to the Teaching Profession Playbook (2024) report, these approaches improve gender balance in educational leadership.

Cultural Change Recommendations: Gender equality and implicit bias training should be made mandatory in educational leadership programs. Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu (TÜİK, 2022) data and World Economic Forum (2020) reports confirm that such training accelerates the rise of female leaders and transforms social norms.

Academic Recommendations: Empirical studies focusing on transformational leadership should be increased; the superior performance of women leaders in this style should be prioritized as it positively affects the school climate (Fryer, 2011). Family-friendly policies (flexible working, care support) should be researched in detail; these policies reduce women's work-family role conflict by 25-30% (Education Resource Strategies, 2023; Harris, Jones, & Baba, 2024). Gender-based pay gaps and their relationship to performance should be examined; the 15-20% pay gap observed in the education sector reduces leadership motivation (Guilbert et al., 2024; Martínez et al., 2021).

Statement of Researchers

Researchers' contribution rate statement: MC: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data collection, Analyzing, Writing – original draft. AI: Project administration, Resources, Writing – reviewing & editing, revisions.

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Author Biographies

Merve Cebeci, was a mathematics teacher at a middle school. She has been working at the 'Science and Art Center', where gifted students take courses outside of school hours, for many years. Merve Cebeci graduated from the Women's Studies master's program at Izmir Democracy University. Merve Cebeci pursued her academic studies on women's leadership, and the challenges women face in the education sector, and is currently preparing for her doctoral program.

Second Author:

Abdurrahman İlğan, PhD, is a professor in department of educational sciences in Izmir Demokrasi University College of Education, Turkey. His research interests include educational administration, instructional supervision, teacher professional development, instructional leadership, research methods in education, and educational statistics. Dr İlğan published some books and many international and national research papers about leadership, woman studies, leadership training, professional development of teachers and authored some chapters in edited books.

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