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# Women's Leadership in School Education: Barriers and Opportunities in Karachi, Sindh

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**Abstract:**   School education is the basic foundation for shaping the holistic education of children. This qualitative study investigates Women's Leadership in School Education in Karachi, focusing on barriers and opportunities for female principals in Government Primary Schools. Utilizing a constructivist qualitative approach with a phenomenological design, data was collected through interviews and document analysis. Thematic analysis of the data revealed a multifaceted landscape: persistent gender discrimination and harassment, the challenge of work-life balance, cultural norms impacting diversity promotion, and gender stereotypes shaping experiences. The study underscores the importance of raising awareness about girls' education and its transformative potential, driven by a shared belief in empowerment through education. It highlights the resilience and dedication of women principals advocating for change and recognizing girls' education as a catalyst for societal transformation. In response, the study recommends providing equitable resources and support structures to enable female educational leaders to champion social justice and overcome barriers, ultimately promoting equal educational opportunities for all.

**Key Words:**  Women's Leadership, School Education, Barriers and Opportunities

## Introduction

Education is considered a pivotal program that shapes and guides human development in the future (Riski et al., 2021). It is an essential aspect of civilized human development, surpassing the mere transfer of knowledge. In this respect, primary education serves as the foundation for higher levels of education. Effective management is crucial for primary schools, as it impacts all aspects of their functioning. All over the world, the significance of the principal's role has directed the focus of school reforms to be shifted from physical elements to the indispensability of teachers' development (Muller et al., 2009). Teaching faculty is the true lifeline of any educational institution, and it applies to primary education to its maximum depth. They are the transformers of philosophy into real-time skills and expertise. However, without a leader at any workplace, the efficacy of human resources can be greatly minimised, rendering the entire system ineffective and unappreciated. Therefore, each educational institute, no matter how small it may be, is staffed with a leader in the shape of a President, Vice Chancellor, Rector, Principal, Headmaster/Mistress and so forth.

The principal is the leader of the school, who is accountable for academic activities, school administration, staff development, and infrastructure utilization and maintenance; he/she is tasked with the important role of improving the education quality as a whole. Therefore, it is crucial to strategize efforts to enhance education quality, particularly in Government primary schools, with reference to the leadership role (Nadeak & Juwita, 2020).

In addressing the principal's performance, there is a need to challenge preconceived notions about women in leadership positions, including school principals. Despite the stereotypes and assumptions about

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women's decision-making abilities, it is essential to recognize that personal qualities and leadership skills are not determined solely by gender. However, women still face various challenges in bureaucratic culture, which often hinders their advancement, especially in educational decision-making. This is evident from the underrepresentation of women in structural and functional roles, both at strategic and operational levels (Kurniawati, 2020).

## Statement of the Problem

Principals' leadership role is interpreted and defined by teachers, and these behaviours are believed to have a significant impact on teachers' engagement with students and, in turn, student performance (Sebastian et al., 2014). Situational leadership theory suggests that leaders have the opportunity to adopt styles that positively influence effective practices, role models, and high expectations in order to foster improvement across schools (Blase & Blase, 1999).

In the realm of education, there exists a knowledge gap regarding women-focused leadership styles as women principals in government schools. This study seeks to address this gap by identifying the hurdles and exploring the opportunities by examining themes such as socio-economic issues, cultural and social barriers and family support.

Women's leadership in school education is persistently underrepresented, creating a significant and concerning disparity in educational leadership roles. Despite considerable progress towards gender equality in various domains, including education, a pronounced gender gap persists in leadership positions within schools, such as school principals. This persistent gender disparity in educational leadership constitutes a multifaceted and critical issue that demands thorough examination and dedicated investigation (Brunner & Grogan, 2005).

The importance of women's leadership in enhancing students' learning outcomes has been widely recognized by researchers in recent years (Fullan, 2009).

## Research Objectives

- To explore the barriers that women face in leadership positions as a principal/head mistress of government primary school in school education in Karachi, Sindh.
- To explore the opportunities that exists for women to overcome these barriers in school education at government primary school in Karachi, Sindh.

## Review of Literature

Leadership is a dynamic and intricate phenomenon that encompasses the art of influencing, motivating, guiding, and inspiring others toward a shared vision or lofty goal. It stands unwaveringly anchored in ethical principles, ever-adapting to the ever-shifting tides of circumstance.

Leadership studies began in the late nineteenth century, with a focus on men in history who were seen as creators of opportunities and leaders of significant accomplishments that the general public aspired to achieve. Carlyle, in 1840, proposed that these exceptional qualities were a divine gift bestowed upon "Great Men," suggesting that leadership was an innate trait predominantly associated with men; in contrast, Spencer, in 1898, challenged Carlyle's views by asserting that leaders were products of their environment rather than born with inherent greatness (Cherry, 2018).

Despite that, women have held leadership positions in rare instances throughout history. It is the culmination of social norms and influences that have created a culture in which women in leadership positions are a rational and achievable goal. The women's rights movement played a crucial role in this transformation, granting women the right to vote and the opportunity to be their own elected leaders (Belle, 2017).

Women serving as principals face multiple layers of deprivation in their schools and community settings (Faulkner, 2015). Faulkner (2015) examines women with regard to principal experiences from two perspectives: authority and power struggles, as well as the manifestation of deeply ingrained cultural

norms and patriarchy, are all present. These characteristics, she finds, have a negative influence on the execution of principal-ship for women leaders in traditional communities.

Shah (2016) emphasizes that discourses and practices in male-dominated and patriarchal societies pose challenges to women's leadership development; he identifies several barriers to women's leadership in Pakistan, including patriarchal cultural practices, power dynamics, the perception of women as the centre of family honour (Izzat), and the belief in segregating men and women in routine activities.

The prevailing norms and values in Pakistani families contribute to gender stereotypes, where sons are encouraged to be assertive and pursue higher education, while daughters are expected to conform to more subdued roles, like teaching (Siddiqui, 2014; Rareiya, 2010). These cultural norms not only shape the conceptualization and practices of leadership but also influence societal expectations of leaders.

In societies like Pakistan, which are patriarchal and adhere to deep-rooted cultural traditions, women's leadership positions become more demanding, especially when they work in remote and poverty-stricken areas (Sanders & Harvey, 2002). Women experience reduced power compared to men in such societies, where access to education is relatively recent, and traditional norms discourage women from working outside their homes (Siddiqui, 2014). These lived experiences of women in leadership positions provide significant insights into the intersection of school leadership, gender, and societal dynamics.

The literature on women's leadership career models highlights the complexities and challenges that women encounter in leadership roles, particularly in patriarchal and traditional societies. Understanding these challenges and the lived experiences of women leaders is crucial for promoting gender equity and enhancing the effectiveness of women in leadership positions.

It is crucial to emphasize that prosperity and sustainable growth cannot be achieved solely by educating males; it is equally important to include females in education at all levels. In the 21st century, female education has been recognized as a key factor in enhancing child schooling and contributing to the GDP and individual incomes. Khaliq et al. (2017) highlighted the significance of women's participation in the economic growth of the country. Abohamidi and Chidmi (2013) highlighted the significance of education for females, as it empowers them and enables them to support their families.

However, in developing countries like Pakistan, females face numerous barriers in the education sector. Irum and Bhatti (2015) studied the challenges faced by women in higher educational institutions in Sindh, a heavily populated province. The study focused on the status of women in higher-level institutions and concluded that educational facilities should be provided to females in rural areas. The study recommended that, overall, promoting female education is essential for a country's progress, and efforts should be made to overcome barriers and provide educational opportunities to females in order to harness their potential for national development (Irum & Bhatti, 2015).

Parveen (2008) conducted a study on the role of female education in national development, emphasizing the importance of education in the economic progress of any nation. The research highlighted the various challenges faced by women in Pakistan in accessing education. The study concluded that improving the educational status of females in Pakistan is essential for overall national development.

Shaukat and Pell (2015) explored the social and personal issues faced by women in higher education. The study recommended enhancing the socio-cultural environment and improving educational standards for female education to bring about positive changes across all sectors.

Farrulsaqlain (2016) examined strategies to improve girls' education in Pakistan and proposed changes in educational structure through improved policies and modern technology. The study emphasized the need for better management of educational issues related to girls. The conclusion stressed the importance of enhancing the economic environment for girls' education in Pakistan through increased community participation, simplified budgeting procedures, training of administrators, incentives for teachers and ensuring an effective monitoring system.

Taib (2014) studied the social factors affecting female entrepreneurs, emphasizing that women play a key role in the country's economic growth. The research highlighted the necessity of considering females as essential contributors to progress for a nation to move forward effectively.

Sonowal (2013) conducted a study on the educational status of females belonging to villages, highlighting their lack of education in subjects like economics, science, and sociology. The research shed light on the insufficient facilities for education and the lack of basic communication skills among rural females.

Irum, Bhatti and Munshi (2015) investigated the barriers faced by women in Sindh and used chi-square analysis to identify discouragement and harassment as significant demotivating factors for girls pursuing higher education.

Maqsood, Maqsood and Raza (2012) found in their research that gender inequality was a major hurdle to women's participation in education and that Islamic culture encouraged women to persuade their parents about this in order to obtain higher education.

Bangura, Priscilla, Mambo and Alice (2023) investigated the determinants of women's education and highlighted domestic responsibilities, skills-related issues, and cultural factors as the main barriers to women's education.

Odomore (2015) examined the barriers faced by men in obtaining education in developing countries while emphasizing the struggles faced by females around the world in pursuing education. The research discussed the benefits of women's education in the overall development of economies, with a focus on countries such as Pakistan, Nepal, China, South Africa and Nigeria, which exemplify the challenges faced in developing regions. Issues like poverty, menstruation, child marriage, and conflicts were identified as additional hurdles to female education, with welfare organizations working to improve the female education ratio.

Murthly (2017) addressed the issue of women's empowerment, which has been a topic of contemplation and discussion globally over the last few decades. Women's education has been given utmost priority in government plans and programs, and the study emphasized the significant role women play in the economy of Pakistan, contributing to the overall progress of the nation.

Bartman (2015) explored the challenges faced by women in education and proposed strategies to support women's education, particularly the role of American and African Women in higher education.

Tabassum, N., & Nayak, B. S. (2021) examined barriers faced by women in reaching leadership positions in academic dentistry. The study showed the progress made by women in the last 50 years despite the conventional stereotype of women confined to household duties in South Asia.

Shafique, Anwar and Akbar (2010) explored issues faced by women in the education sector. They emphasized the important role of education in the development of any economy and sought to identify the specific challenges faced by working women in the education field. The study revealed that many families, particularly parents, support their daughters' education. However, married women encounter more obstacles compared to unmarried women in pursuing education. The study concluded that women's education in Bahawalpur is relatively satisfactory.

Madara and Cherotich (2016) explored the gender-related challenges faced by female students in engineering education, which is a universal phenomenon in technical courses. The study aimed to identify the barriers hindering female students from achieving their fullest potential. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were employed, including the use of a questionnaire administered to undergraduate female students. The study's results indicated several obstacles for female students pursuing engineering education.

## Theoretical Background of the Study
### Situational Leadership Model (Life Cycle Theory of Leadership)

The Situational Leadership Model, originally known as the "Life Cycle Theory of Leadership," was developed by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard in 1969. This leadership theory emphasizes the importance of leaders adapting their leadership style to particular circumstances and the readiness or maturity level of their followers or team members. The core concept of this model is that there is no universal or one-size-fits-all leadership approach that works in all situations. Instead, effective leaders should be flexible

in their leadership behaviours, tailoring their actions to match the specific needs and development stages of their followers.

In the context of women's leadership, the Situational Leadership Model has significant relevance. School leaders, such as principals and administrators, often deal with a diverse group of students, teachers, and staff members, each with unique needs, abilities, and levels of readiness.

The Situational Leadership Model is highly applicable to school leadership because it aligns with the diverse and dynamic nature of educational settings. By tailoring their leadership behaviours to the readiness levels of students and staff, school leaders can create a more supportive and effective learning environment, ultimately enhancing the overall success of the school community.

Further, it suggests that leaders have the opportunity to adopt styles that positively influence effective practices, role models, and high expectations in order to foster improvement across schools (Blase & Blasé, 1999).

Situational leadership plays a crucial role in helping schools realize their vision, mission, goals, and objectives through well-planned and gradual programs (Sunaengsih et al., 2019).

Waruwu (2021) highlights that a principal's narrative and diction reflect their characteristics, and effective communication involves using adaptable language that encourages every school member to actively contribute to the school's progress. Consequently, the principal's communication skills serve as a valuable tool for driving school advancement.

According to the annual report of the School Education and Literacy Department (SELD), 2018, the School Education and Literacy Department (SELD) Sindh has introduced multidimensional multi-level reforms for improving the performance of the principal school teachers and refining general learning outcomes. The SELD Sindh has introduced concrete reforms by expanding access to education to isolated parts of recruitment of skilled teachers and headmasters/headmistresses for improving the overall teaching-learning environment at schools.

The advancement of science and technology has transformed the mindset of communities, creating a disparity between the educational and teaching programs offered and the evolving needs of society (Baharun, 2018). Consequently, educational institutions face the challenge of incorporating insightful and dynamic thinking to produce high-quality graduates. To navigate the era of globalization successfully, schools, as educational leaders, must exhibit high performance, a strong leadership spirit, and a broad vision. The effectiveness of the principal plays a vital role in determining a school's progress, and the proper utilization of management functions can enhance school performance (Ekosiswoyo, 2016).

Leadership styles of school leaders classified as transactional, transformative, or passive-avoidant affect school performance and, ultimately, student performance intended to be understood. Through their decisions and actions, effective school leaders create environments that enhance or diminish school effectiveness. This ability is enhanced by evidence of effective management practices and consistent teacher-centred decision-making, which ultimately leads to improved student learning (Demir and Kamile, 2008). Thus, improving teacher competence is closely related to leadership styles experienced by principals who support teachers' professional growth and development (Barnett, Craven and Marsh, 2005).

The issue of gender inequality and its impact on access to education has been a subject of interest for scholars and policymakers. Gender segregation, which encompasses the practices and attitudes towards women, as well as the equitable distribution of resources and the exercise of fundamental rights, is crucial for analyzing gender disparities (AAUW, 2016). This imbalance is most prevalent in developing nations, where women often face significant challenges in enjoying their full human rights.

Promoting equal opportunities for girls in education is essential for their economic progress and breaking the cycle of poverty. Female education contributes to awareness against early marriages and empowers women to earn income for their households, which, in turn, positively affects their families and the country's economic growth. Quality learning can only be achieved when there are equal academic opportunities for men and women, but the deeply rooted nature of patriarchy in Pakistani society continues to present hurdles for girls in accessing education (AAUW, 2016).

## Research Methodology and Research Method

This study is exploratory in nature. The methodology used for this study is the qualitative approach/methodology. The present study is conducted using the phenomenology method. The main purpose of this study was to explore women's leadership in School education, barriers and opportunities in Karachi by following a constructivist research approach.

All principals/headmistresses currently working at Government primary Schools in Karachi, Pakistan, were the population of this research study. In-depth semi-structured interviews were the tool, conducted with 14 principals/headmistresses from Government primary schools in Karachi, with prior permission through consent form through purposive sampling technique for baseline study. Each semi-structured interview focused on the experiences of each participant. In this process, the researcher has facilitated each interview by utilizing semi-structured protocols and data analyzed through thematic analysis. Themes, sub-themes, and codes were generated from the collected raw data. The whole data at the initial stage is examined very carefully to classify likenesses and unlikeness in the concepts.

## Thematic Analysis

After thoroughly examining interviews and their corresponding transcripts, a clear pattern emerged within the narratives provided by the participants. These narratives shed light on common themes that played a significant role in classifying the reported barriers and opportunities for women in performing their role as woman leaders in school education and the prospects they encountered throughout their journeys towards becoming principals of government primary schools. This also encompassed their personal growth in leadership capabilities.

The identified themes encompassed various aspects, including socio-cultural barriers, the delicate balance between personal and professional life, adherence to cultural norms, and the promotion of educational innovation. Additionally, the themes also encompassed challenges related to gender stereotypes and the fostering of empowerment identifiable in both the objectives delineating barriers and those highlighting opportunities. This suggests that these themes possess the potential to yield contrasting outcomes depending on the specific context. The recognition of these themes, along with their underlying subcategories, elucidates how they contribute to the creation of obstacles or advantageous circumstances. Lastly, these themes highlighted the importance of advocating for inclusivity and the establishment of safe learning environments.

## Socio-Cultural Barriers

### Figure 1

*Theme one, categories and codes*
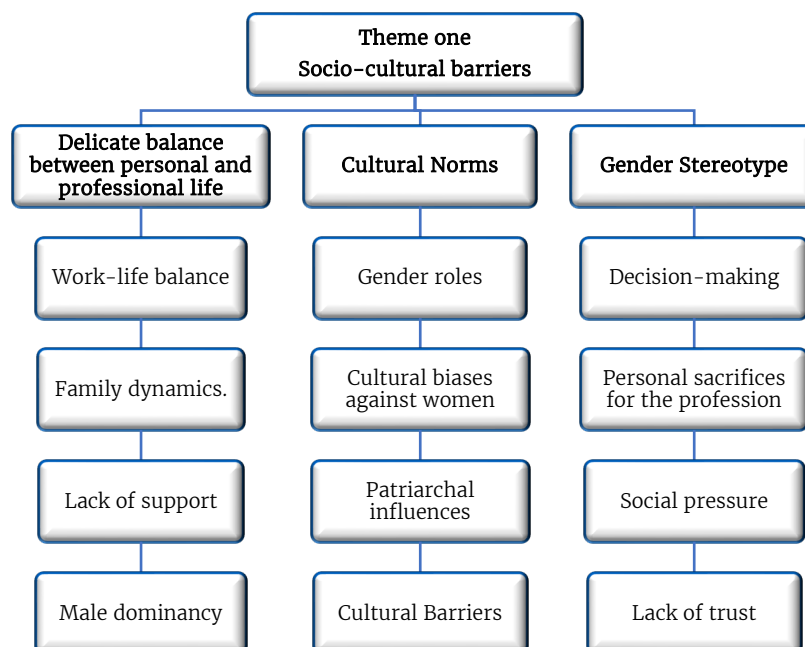
Socio-cultural barriers refer to obstacles or challenges that individuals or groups face because of social and cultural factors, which can drastically restrict their opportunities, choices, and access to resources. These barriers can affect different aspects of individual life, including professional, personal, and psychological.

It is disheartening to learn that women principals feel obligated to validate their qualifications and abilities more rigorously than their male counterparts, even when possessing comparable credentials. Another layer to the complexity of the issue, shedding light on the gender-based disparities, relates to how assertiveness is perceived. The pervasive doubts raised about female leadership capabilities are based on stereotypes such as being "too emotional" or "soft", further compounds the challenges they face. These voices call for an urgent shift in perspective and action.

Women principals' desire to set a precedent for their own daughters and their students by combating gender biases and promoting leadership opportunities without constraints is a call to action for all educators and parents. The emphasis on inclusivity, mentorship, and growth opportunities as means to address the gender disparity at higher administrative levels reflects a practical approach to fostering change within the education system. Finally, a plea for recognizing individuals based on their merits rather than adhering to gender-based generalizations encapsulates the essence of the transformation needed in the educational leadership landscape.

The theme of sociocultural barriers is divided into three sub-themes/categories: –

## Delicate Balance Between Personal and Professional Life.

In an organizational setting, keeping a balance between personal and professional lives is important for the overall welfare and long-term success of employees. This drastically applies to women principals/head-mistresses.

The insights shared by the respondents offer a poignant glimpse into the intricate challenges of achieving work-life balance as women leaders in the context of school education. Straddling the demands of traditional expectations and contemporary educational needs, managing personal and professional realms, and navigating the complex interplay between family commitments and school responsibilities all emerge as common struggles.

All respondents shared that finding the right balance had been a continuous struggle. The constant professional demands of running a school often make it challenging to dedicate enough time to their family and personal interests. They dubbed it a journey of trial and error. One major hurdle they mentioned was the unexpected nature of crises that arise in a school setting, often requiring immediate attention and disrupting personal plans. A significant hurdle was feeling guilty when they could not be present for their family plans due to work commitments. Balancing this guilt while fulfilling professional responsibilities was an ongoing challenge for all of them. The respondents collectively underscored the value of effective prioritization, delegation, and time management in maintaining equilibrium. The consensus around the ongoing nature of this challenge reflected a shared experience of continuous adaptation and growth. The unforeseen crises inherent to the educational landscape, which demand immediate attention, pose a significant obstacle to achieving this balance. Importantly, the emotional toll is highlighted through the pervasive feeling of guilt when professional commitments compromise family presence. Balancing work and life remains an ongoing journey, influenced by evolving dynamics, unforeseen demands, and the imperative to preserve one's well-being amid the demands of educational leadership.

## Cultural Norms

Cultural norms may be defined as the shared, socially accepted behaviours, beliefs, customs, and values existing in a particular society. These norms guide how people within that society may behave in particular circumstances. They act as unwritten laws.

The viewpoints shared by women principals of Government Primary schools shed light on the intricate challenges of navigating cultural norms and expectations while leading in the realm of education. The common theme revolves around striking a delicate balance between preserving cultural values and promoting a progressive, inclusive learning environment.

The challenges encompass various aspects, such as co-education, religious expectations, dress codes, and interactions with male colleagues and parents. Respondents acknowledge the complexity of ensuring a safe and respectful environment for all students while adhering to cultural and religious sensitivities. They emphasize the need for continuous vigilance and open communication to address potential clashes and create awareness about gender-based rights and harassment.

Balancing religious and cultural values within a secular educational framework emerges as another multifaceted challenge. The respondents highlight the intricacy of integrating these values while maintaining an inclusive atmosphere. The clash between religious observances and academic schedules further underscores the complexity of aligning these aspects.

The challenge of being a role model for young female students while respecting traditional gender roles is evident. Convincing stakeholders that female principals bring valuable perspectives to education challenges deeply ingrained biases.

These insights shade a nuanced picture of the constant negotiation that women principals undertake to create an educational environment that honours cultural norms while advancing progressive values. This delicate balancing act underscores the need for adaptive leadership, clear communication, and a commitment to fostering a harmonious coexistence of cultural, religious, and educational principles.

## Gender Stereotype

Gender stereotypes are a lump sum of generalized beliefs or assumptions about the attributes, roles, behaviours, and characteristics in a particular society that are usually connected to individuals on the basis of their gender identity. These stereotypes frequently generalize and emphasize traditional societal expectations and norms associated with masculinity and femininity. Gender stereotypes can have a detrimental effect since they can cause discrimination disparity and limit individuals' prospects and choices on the basis of their gender identity.

It is crucial to highlight women leaders from diverse fields and cultures, showcasing their achievements and breaking down biases. Educational departments should adopt transparent policies that promote gender equity in leadership. Quotas or targets for women in leadership roles can be effective in addressing the imbalance. Cultivating an inclusive school culture starts from the top. They underscore the importance of addressing these issues for the betterment of the education system and society as a whole.

## Supportive Organizational Policies and Practices
## Figure 2
*Theme two, categories and codes*
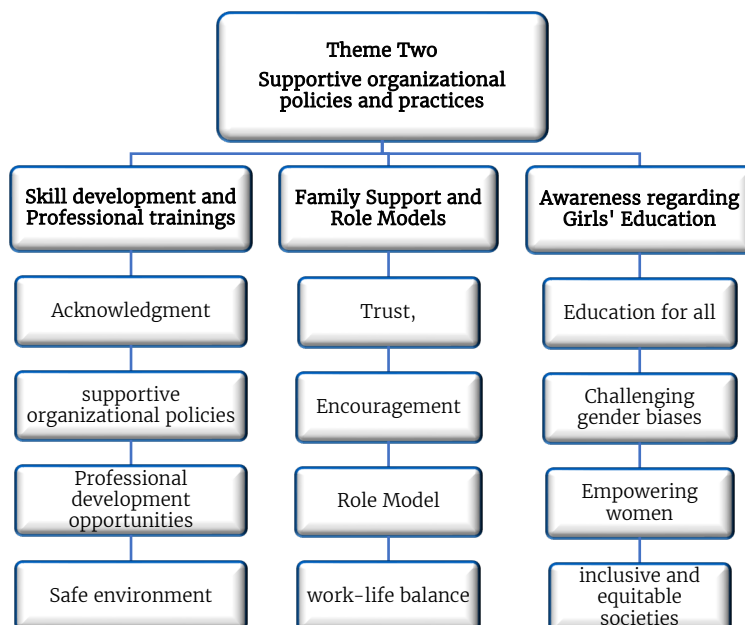
Supportive organizational policies and practices are initiatives and guidelines that organizations put in place to create a positive and nurturing work environment for their employees. These policies and practices aim to promote employee well-being, job satisfaction, work-life balance, and overall productivity. They are vital for constructing a healthy, fruitful, and inclusive work environment. They help employees feel valued, motivated, and satisfied in their jobs.

The respondents highlighted the positive influence of government policies on parental leave and childcare. Acknowledging and accommodating the dual responsibilities of being a principal and a parent has provided a sense of relief and peace of mind. This support allows women principals to engage fully in their roles while also being present for their families when needed. The commitment to transparent performance evaluations by the organization stands out as a driving force for professional growth. Clear evaluation criteria and regular feedback sessions empower principals to understand their strengths and areas for improvement. This, in turn, enables continuous development of leadership skills, contributing to the overall success of the school.

The experiences of these respondents underscore the significance of supportive organizational policies in creating an environment where women principals can thrive. These policies not only alleviate challenges but also empower women to lead effectively, foster growth, and contribute meaningfully to the education sector.

## Skill Development and Professional Trainings

Skill development and professional development are essential components of personal and career growth. They involve acquiring and enhancing the knowledge, abilities, and expertise necessary to excel in one's chosen field. The women principals of Government Primary schools shared their views while asking questions regarding the significance of leadership skill development and professional training in the context of fostering effective educational leadership in school education, the pivotal role of leadership skill development and professional training in fostering effective educational leadership within the realm of school education in all level.

The training empowers them to align with the latest educational policies, innovative teaching methods, and effective management practices. This synergy between school leadership and government initiatives paves the way for transformative education. As principals, they are the conduits for translating policy into action. Professional training supported by the government equips us with the tools needed to implement reforms effectively. This synchronization ensures that educational leadership is in harmony with the larger vision, benefitting students, teachers, and the community.

The Sindh Government's commitment to ensuring merit-based selection of principals/headmasters/headmistresses and teachers within the Education Department is a crucial step towards enhancing the quality of education. By prioritizing meritocracy in the selection process, this approach fosters a culture of transparency, fairness, and competence in educational leadership, ultimately benefiting students, teachers, and the overall educational landscape.

The viewpoints of women principals underscored the immense importance of leadership skill development and professional training in fostering effective educational leadership within the realm of school education.

Respondents unanimously agreed that leadership skill development and professional training form the bedrock of effective educational leadership. They recognize their pivotal roles in shaping students' experiences and staff growth. Continuous improvement of leadership skills through training not only equips them to tackle challenges but also inspires a culture of lifelong learning, motivating teachers and students to embrace growth and innovation. The training equips them to align with educational policies, innovative teaching methods, and effective management practices. This collaboration between school leadership and government initiatives fosters transformative education, benefiting students, teachers, and the community.

The Sindh Government's emphasis on merit-based selection for principals and teachers is regarded as a pivotal step toward improving education quality. Prioritizing meritocracy in the selection process

cultivates transparency, fairness, and competence in educational leadership. This approach ultimately has a positive impact on students, teachers, and the overall educational landscape.

## Family Support and Role Models

Family support and role models play significant roles in an individual's personal development, well-being, and overall success. A role model is someone who inspires and serves as an example for others to emulate. Respondents replied to the question regarding family support and role models for other female students and their family members and whether having a supportive family has been a crucial pillar in this journey as a female principal. Their understanding of the demands of the job and their willingness to share responsibilities at home have allowed us to focus on our role. Our family serves as a constant source of encouragement, reminding us of the value we bring to the school community.

The detailed responses from the respondents shed light on the profound significance of family support and role models in the journey of female principals. These narratives collectively underscore the pivotal role that a supportive family and strong role models play in empowering women to excel in leadership roles within the educational context. The majority of the respondents express gratitude for the unwavering support they receive from their families. Additionally, the encouragement and understanding extended by their families become a driving force that motivates them to overcome challenges and excel in their responsibilities as principals. This not only contributes to their personal growth but also enhances their leadership capabilities, enabling them to lead their schools effectively.

These narratives emphasized that family support and the presence of positive role models create a conducive environment for female principals to thrive in their roles. This support not only empowers them to overcome challenges but also serves as an example for female students and their families, encouraging them to break barriers, pursue leadership roles, and strive for a balance between personal and professional aspirations.

## Awareness Regarding Girls' Education

Awareness regarding female education is crucial for promoting gender equality, empowering women, and achieving social and economic development. Views of respondents highlight the critical importance of raising awareness about girls' education. Through various initiatives and campaigns, schools and communities can work together to break down barriers, challenge stereotypes, and foster a supportive environment that empowers girls to excel and contribute to society.

Certainly, there are detailed views from women principals of Government primary schools regarding the significance of raising awareness about girls' education: All Respondents shared their views that raising awareness about girls' education was a pivotal endeavour. It was not just about ensuring equal access; it was about dismantling barriers that hinder girls from realizing their full potential. By highlighting the transformative impact of education on girls' lives, female school managers inspire families and communities to invest in their future. When a society gives birth that values and supports girls' education, it lays the foundation for stronger families, empowered women, and sustainable progress. Educated girls become educated women who contribute meaningfully to their families, communities, and the nation. By showcasing success stories and celebrating the achievements of girls in various fields, females can challenge stereotypes and encourage parents to view education as a priority for their daughters. It is about creating a ripple effect that breaks generational cycles of inequality.

The detailed views shared by respondents highlighted the critical importance of raising awareness about girls' education. These educators unanimously recognize that such efforts go beyond ensuring equal access to education; they are about dismantling barriers that have historically hindered girls from realizing their full potential. By showcasing the transformative impact of education on girls' lives, they collectively underscore the significance of inspiring families and communities to invest in the future of girls.

By addressing misconceptions and fostering dialogue, we ignite change at the grassroots level, encouraging families to view girls' education as an investment, not a burden. By emphasizing that education is a right, not a privilege, we inspire parents to invest in their daughters' futures, fostering a

generation of educated women who lead and empower. The perspectives shared reveal a shared belief in the power of education to empower girls and create lasting positive change.

Furthermore, the educators acknowledge the significance of challenging stereotypes and misconceptions surrounding girls' education. By showcasing success stories and celebrating the achievements of girls in various fields, they aim to break generational cycles of inequality. They emphasized that the ripple effect of such efforts extends beyond the classroom, creating a positive impact on families, communities, and society as a whole.

## Discussion

The existing research on women's leadership in government primary school education continues to exert significant influence, as evidenced by the research conducted by different researchers, Malik (2016) and Ekosiswoyo (2016). Faulkner, (2015) and Nath's (2008).

This study further illuminates the intricate dynamics surrounding these scripts and sheds light on lesser-known nuanced effects. While the expectations for women as principals to maintain a professional appearance, be nurturing, build relationships, and lead collaboratively persist, the study reveals the multifaceted challenges they face.

The thematic analysis offers a comprehensive and insightful exploration into the experiences, challenges, and opportunities confronted by women in leadership positions within the government primary school education sector. The narratives reveal a complex web of themes that provide valuable insights into the multifaceted nature of women's roles as principals. These narratives shed light on the barriers these women encounter and the strategies they employ to surmount these obstacles.

They stand as a clarion call for systemic transformation, urging the challenge and transcendence of deeply ingrained norms, biases, and stereotypes. The emotional toll and the significance of external support systems are emphasized. Additionally, the theme elucidates the intricate dance between cultural norms and progressive values, along with the pervasive impact of gender stereotypes that women principals continually confront. A collective effort is underscored to address these issues and forge a more equitable and inclusive educational landscape.

Crucially, the study underscores the pivotal role of family support and positive role models in women's leadership journeys. Understanding partners, encouraging families, and strong role models are identified as influential factors that empower women to excel in their roles while maintaining a harmonious equilibrium between personal and professional obligations. Furthermore, the theme of "Awareness regarding girls' education" highlights the imperative to champion girls' education through initiatives that challenge stereotypes and engage communities. This not only fosters educational progress but contributes to broader societal advancement.

This study contributes valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on gender parity, leadership, and education. It underscores the necessity of fostering environments that nurture the growth of women as educational leaders, and it amplifies their voices and experiences as a potent force for positive change. Overall, this thematic analysis is a significant contribution to the understanding of women's roles in educational leadership, emphasizing the importance of collective efforts to pave the way for inclusive and equitable educational landscapes.

## Recommendations
### Systemic Transformation

Educational institutions and policymakers should prioritize addressing sociocultural barriers by challenging stereotypes and promoting inclusivity. Efforts to provide emotional support and work-life balance for women in leadership roles should be enhanced, recognizing the toll such roles can take on personal lives.

### Supportive Organizational Policies

Educational institutions should implement and enforce clear policies that support women in leadership

positions. This includes providing opportunities for professional development, acknowledging the dual roles of women as principals and parents, and ensuring transparent performance evaluations.

## Family Support and Role Models

Encouraging family support and positive role models is crucial. Organizations can facilitate mentorship programs and support networks for women leaders. Partners, families, and role models should be encouraged to actively participate in the career growth of women in educational leadership.

## Awareness Regarding Girls' Education

The government should promote initiatives that challenge gender stereotypes and engage communities in championing girls' education. This not only benefits educational progress but also contributes to broader societal advancement.

## Collaborative Efforts

The importance of collective efforts should be recognized in achieving gender parity in educational leadership. Collaboration among educational institutions, government bodies, NGOs, and communities is essential for creating inclusive and equitable educational landscapes.

This study serves as a significant contribution to the ongoing discourse on gender parity, leadership, and education. It underscores the need for nurturing environments that empower women as educational leaders and amplify their voices as agents of positive change. The references to earlier research lend academic rigour to the study, emphasizing its contextual relevance. By implementing these recommendations, we can take meaningful steps towards creating a more inclusive and equitable educational system that benefits everyone.

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