Leadership Goals: The Experiences of Female Teachers Transitioning from Classroom Teacher to School Head

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Abstract: This study explored the lived experiences of female educators as they transitioned from classroom teaching to school headship, with a focus on the challenges they encountered, the coping strategies they employed, and the insights they gained throughout their journey. The study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with 10 female school heads who had transitioned into their roles within the last two years. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, and thematic analysis was used to interpret the data. Findings revealed five major challenges: subtle and overt gender expectations, increased workload and time commitment, limited formal preparation, difficulty adjusting to administrative tasks, and resistance from colleagues or the school community. Coping mechanisms included building credibility through performance, setting work-life boundaries, seeking external training, improving time management, and fostering collaboration. From these experiences, participants gained insights highlighting the importance of continuous growth, strong support systems, resilience, emotional balance, and breaking gender norms. Supportive leadership environments are essential to nurturing and retaining competent female leaders.

How to Cite: Lyca B. Madanlo; Remigilda Gallardo (2025) Leadership Goals: The Experiences of Female Teachers Transitioning from Classroom Teacher to School Head. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 10(6), 908-912. https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25jun792

I. INTRODUCTION

Leadership greatly influences teaching and learning quality. Studying leadership aspirations among female teachers—who often connect administration and classrooms—helps reveal how they prepare for bigger leadership roles. This understanding can guide policies and practices to support their development and advancement as educational leaders.

Globally, female teachers aspiring to higher leadership positions faced numerous challenges. Persistent gender disparities meant women were often underrepresented despite their qualifications, and cultural and organizational barriers like limited professional development and mentorship hindered their progress. In some countries, hierarchical systems and accountability pressures created unsupportive environments, while workload and stress discouraged teachers from seeking leadership roles. In the Philippines, centralized education systems, financial constraints, and limited training opportunities further restricted advancement. Locally, geographic and economic factors, along with a lack of mentorship, made accessing leadership development even more difficult. Despite these obstacles, exploring the experiences and preparation of aspiring female leaders aimed

to inform policies and practices to better support their leadership growth.

This study explored the experiences of female teachers in Davao City as they prepared for leadership roles, aiming to uncover how schools could better support their growth. The insights gained were intended to benefit the Department of Education, school leaders, teachers, students, and future researchers by addressing the challenges these teachers faced and enhancing educational leadership development.

To thoroughly investigate the leadership aspirations of female teachers in Davao City, it is essential to address key areas that influence their journey towards higher leadership roles. This study sought to explore the challenges these teachers encounter, the coping mechanisms they employ to overcome these challenges, and the insights they gain from their experiences. The research aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors that shape their leadership aspirations and preparation practices.

➤ *Specifically, the Following Questions Guided the Conduct of the Study:*
- What are the challenges faced by female teachers in transitioning from classroom teacher to school head?

- What coping mechanisms of female teachers in transitioning from classroom teacher to school head?
- What insights do female teachers gain from their experiences by female teachers in transitioning from classroom teacher to school head?

The literature review on the transition from classroom teacher to school head highlights the importance of effective preparation through practical experience, mentorship, and leadership training. It identifies common challenges such as managing increased administrative duties and balancing leadership roles. Support systems like mentoring and a positive school culture are crucial for building confidence and success. Personal traits like resilience and adaptability also play a key role, emphasizing the need for comprehensive support and targeted training to ensure a smooth transition.

This study draws on three key leadership theories to understand female leadership and the transition from teacher to school head. Radical Feminist Leadership focuses on challenging patriarchal systems by promoting inclusivity, equity, and social justice, empowering women to use their strengths to overcome barriers. Transformational Leadership Theory emphasizes inspiring and motivating others through vision and personal qualities, offering a framework for new school heads to lead change and improvement effectively. Social Learning Theory highlights the importance of learning leadership skills through observation, mentorship, and social interaction, explaining how aspiring leaders develop their capabilities by modeling experienced leaders.

II. METHOD

This study used a qualitative phenomenological design to explore educators' experiences transitioning from classroom teachers to school heads. Phenomenology was chosen for its focus on understanding individuals lived experiences from their own perspectives, allowing for an in-depth examination of the personal and contextual factors involved in the transition. This approach helped uncover how new school heads perceive and navigate challenges and support during their role change, providing rich, detailed insights into their professional development.

This study is grounded in four key philosophical assumptions: ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology. Ontologically, it adopts a constructivist view, recognizing that the transition from classroom teacher to school head is subjective and shaped by individual perceptions and social contexts. Epistemologically, it follows interpretivism, focusing on understanding knowledge through the meanings participants assign to their experiences. Axiologically, the study acknowledges the influence of researcher values and emphasizes ethical considerations to respect participants' perspectives. Methodologically, it uses qualitative approaches—specifically in-depth interviews and thematic analysis—to deeply explore participants lived experiences and the meanings they create during their transition.

The researcher's qualitative assumption is that understanding the transition from classroom teacher to school head requires exploring individuals' subjective experiences and personal stories. This aligns with the qualitative paradigm, which views knowledge as constructed through social interactions and interpretations. The study focused on capturing the rich, nuanced perspectives of new school heads through in-depth interviews, recognizing that their experiences are diverse and shaped by unique contexts.

The study selected 10 newly appointed school heads who transitioned from classroom teaching within the last two years to gain in-depth insights. Five participants were interviewed individually, and five took part in focus group discussions to capture diverse perspectives. Purposive sampling was used, selecting participants based on their current role, recent transition experience, and location within the targeted educational district.

This study used a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions as the main tool to gather qualitative data on female leadership experiences in education. The guide allowed for in-depth discussions, encouraging participants to share personal stories and insights freely while ensuring key topics like gender dynamics and institutional culture were addressed.

The researcher used in-depth interviews, guided by semi-structured, open-ended questions, to explore the personal experiences of 10 newly appointed school heads regarding their transition process. This qualitative method allowed for detailed, one-on-one conversations and provided flexibility to explore emerging insights more deeply.

The researcher followed a systematic process to analyze the data and understand participants' experiences. This began with transcribing the interviews verbatim, followed by repeated readings to familiarize with the content. The data were then coded using both inductive and deductive approaches, identifying key concepts and categories. These codes were grouped into broader themes through axial coding, revealing patterns and relationships. Thematic analysis was conducted to refine and validate the themes. Finally, the researcher interpreted the themes in relation to the research questions and theoretical framework, offering a deep understanding of the participants' experiences.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study identified several challenges faced by female teachers transitioning into school leadership roles. Participants reported experiencing both subtle and overt gender biases that led to their leadership capabilities being questioned, especially in male-dominated environments. They also struggled with the increased workload and time demands of administrative roles, which conflicted with personal and family responsibilities. A lack of formal leadership training and mentorship further complicated the transition, leaving many to manage on their own. Additionally, adjusting to bureaucratic tasks proved difficult,

and some faced resistance or lack of support from colleagues and the school community.

Female educators managed their transition to school leadership by employing various coping strategies. They built credibility through consistent performance and visibility to earn trust, and established clear work-life boundaries to manage personal and professional demands. In response to limited leadership training, they pursued external development opportunities like courses and seminars. To handle administrative tasks, they enhanced their organizational and time management skills. Additionally, they fostered open communication and collaboration to address resistance from colleagues and build supportive relationships within their school communities.

Through their transition from classroom teacher to school head, female educators gained valuable insights that shaped their leadership identity. They realized that leadership demands continuous personal and professional growth, supported by mentors, peer networks, and family. Confidence, they found, develops through experience and resilience. They also learned the importance of balancing empathy with authority to lead effectively. Ultimately, they affirmed that leadership should be defined by competence and vision—not by gender.

The study revealed five key challenges faced by female teachers transitioning to school leadership: gender bias, increased workload, lack of formal training and support, difficulty with administrative tasks, and resistance from colleagues. To address these, participants used strategies such as building credibility through performance, setting work-life boundaries, seeking professional development, improving organizational skills, and promoting open communication to foster collaboration.

From their experiences, participants gained insights that shaped their leadership identity. They recognized that leadership requires continuous learning and that support from mentors, peers, and family is vital. Confidence grew through experience and resilience, and they learned to balance empathy with authority. Most importantly, they affirmed that leadership should be defined by competence and vision, not gender.

The study highlighted the pressing need for structured, gender-sensitive leadership development programs to support female teachers transitioning into school leadership roles. Key challenges such as gender bias, heavy workloads, and lack of formal preparation reveal gaps in current systems. To address these, the Department of Education and school divisions should implement targeted capacity-building initiatives that reflect the unique experiences of female leaders. Additionally, fostering an inclusive school culture that normalizes and respects female leadership is essential in reducing resistance and dismantling gender-based stereotypes.

Participants' coping strategies show that while female school heads are resourceful and proactive, they often face these challenges without adequate institutional support. This underscores the need to establish structured support systems, including mentorship, peer coaching, and time management training, as part of the leadership pipeline. Their reflections also point to the importance of continuous learning, experience-based growth, and collaboration in shaping effective leadership. These insights should inform the development of leadership programs and policies that affirm women's potential and create environments where female educators are empowered to succeed.

The Department of Education should implement inclusive and gender-responsive leadership programs with mentorship and training to prepare aspiring female school heads, while strengthening policies that promote gender equity in leadership roles. Current leaders must support and mentor female teachers, encouraging their professional growth and leadership opportunities. Schools should showcase strong female role models to inspire students, especially girls, and future research should examine the long-term effects and diverse factors influencing female leadership to improve educational leadership development.

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