A Study of the Glass Ceiling Syndrome in Schools from the Perspective of Gender Roles

Fikriye Esra Perihan [1] , Ayşegül ATALAY[2]

Abstract

Gender roles that shape social life are also deeply embedded in organizational structures, including educational institutions. Despite the increasing number of female teachers in schools, women remain significantly underrepresented in managerial positions, indicating the persistence of the glass ceiling syndrome in educational organizations. This study explores the glass ceiling syndrome in schools from the perspective of gender roles, aiming to reveal the underlying barriers that limit women's access to school leadership positions. Adopting a qualitative research design, the study was conducted using a case study approach. The study group consisted of 8 teachers, as well as 8 administrators working in primary and secondary schools located in the central districts of Van province in Türkiye. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using content analysis. The findings indicate that female teachers encounter more glass ceiling barriers than their male counterparts. These barriers are primarily associated with socially constructed gender roles, particularly the dual expectations placed on women regarding family and professional responsibilities. Participants emphasized that leadership is often socially associated with masculinity, while women are perceived as emotionally fragile and less suitable for managerial roles. Male-dominated organizational cultures, societal prejudices against female leadership, and the internalization of traditional gender roles further reinforce these invisible barriers. The study concludes that the persistence of the glass ceiling in schools cannot be explained solely by individual preferences or competencies but is largely shaped by deeply rooted gender norms and organizational expectations. By highlighting the invisible and socially constructed nature of these barriers, this study contributes to the literature on gender, leadership, and educational administration.

Keywords: Glass ceiling syndrome, gender roles, female teachers, school management, career development

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[1] Teacher, Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, Van, Türkiye, fkryesr@gmail.com ORCID: 0009-0002-4267-3265
[2] Corresponding author: Ass. Prof. Dr., Van Yüzüncü Yıl University, Türkiye, atalay.aysgl@gmail.com, ORCID: 0000-0003-3079-801X

45

Introduction

Gender differences are a natural aspect of human existence; however, gender roles are socially constructed patterns that individuals acquire through socialization processes. These roles shape expectations regarding appropriate behaviors, responsibilities, and career paths for women and men, influencing both private and professional life. In many societies, women and men are expected to conform to distinct gender roles, which often position men in the public sphere and women in domestic and caregiving roles (Saraç, 2013). Such socially constructed expectations play a significant role in reproducing gender-based inequalities, particularly in career advancement and leadership positions.

Gender awareness within social and organizational contexts reveals persistent forms of gender discrimination that negatively affect women's career development (Kadık Akdaş, 2022). Although legal frameworks promoting gender equality exist, informal norms and cultural expectations continue to shape professional trajectories. One of the most visible outcomes of this process is women's limited access to senior management positions, despite their increasing participation in the workforce. This phenomenon, widely discussed in the literature as the *glass ceiling syndrome*, refers to invisible and informal barriers that restrict women's upward mobility within organizational hierarchies (Wirth, 2001).

In the education sector, this paradox becomes particularly striking. According to the National Education Statistics (MEB, 2025), the number of female teachers in Türkiye significantly exceeds that of male teachers. Teaching is widely perceived as a female-dominated profession; however, school leadership positions remain predominantly occupied by men. This contradiction highlights that numerical representation alone does not translate into equal access to decision-making and leadership roles. Previous studies suggest that women encounter structural, organizational, and cultural barriers after reaching a certain stage in their careers, which prevents them from advancing to senior management positions (Kirişçi & Can, 2020; Özyer & Orhan, 2012).

The glass ceiling syndrome is commonly defined as a set of invisible, artificial, and often informal barriers that prevent women from advancing to higher managerial positions, regardless of their qualifications and competencies (US Federal Glass Ceiling Commission Report, 1995). These barriers are sustained through gender stereotypes, male-dominated organizational cultures, and societal expectations that associate leadership with masculinity and authority. In educational organizations, such expectations are further reinforced by traditional views that link women primarily to caregiving roles and emotional labor, while managerial authority is socially constructed as a male attribute.

Despite the growing body of research on the glass ceiling phenomenon, studies focusing specifically on schools remain limited, particularly those examining the issue through the lens of gender roles. Schools are often perceived as meritocratic and egalitarian institutions; however, the persistence of male-dominated leadership structures challenges this assumption. Understanding how gender roles operate within educational settings is crucial, as schools play a central role in reproducing or transforming societal norms and values.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine the glass ceiling syndrome in schools from the perspective of gender roles and to explore the invisible barriers that limit women's access to managerial positions. By drawing on the views of teachers and administrators, this study aims to reveal how socially constructed gender expectations influence women's career development in educational organizations. In line with this purpose, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding female teachers and female administrators in schools?

2. What factors contribute to the low number of female administrators in schools?

3. Why are female teachers less likely to pursue school management positions?

4. What invisible factors hinder women's advancement in school leadership?

5. What strategies can be implemented to overcome career development barriers for female teachers and to break the glass ceiling in schools?

Gender Roles and the Glass Ceiling Syndrome

Gender refers to socially constructed roles, behaviors, and expectations attributed to women and men within a given society. Unlike biological sex, gender roles are shaped by cultural norms, traditions, and socialization processes and vary across societies and historical contexts (Saraç, 2013). These roles influence individuals' participation in education, employment, and leadership, often reproducing inequalities between women and men. In many societies, women are primarily associated with domestic responsibilities and caregiving roles, whereas men are expected to participate in paid labor and assume leadership positions (Bozdemir & Özcan, 2011). Such gendered expectations play a decisive role in shaping career trajectories and access to managerial positions.

One of the most persistent manifestations of gender inequality in organizational life is the *glass ceiling syndrome*. The concept was first introduced by Hymowitz and Schellhardt in 1986 to describe the invisible barriers that prevent women from advancing to senior management positions despite having the necessary qualifications and experience (Dreher, 2003). In management literature, the glass ceiling is defined as a set of informal, artificial, and often invisible barriers that restrict women's upward mobility within organizational hierarchies (Wirth, 2001). The US Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) emphasizes that these barriers persist regardless of women's performance, education, or competence.

A review of the literature reveals that the glass ceiling syndrome is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by individual, organizational, and societal factors. Aytaç (2002) defines the glass ceiling as the obstruction of women's career development through the systematic disregard of their competencies and achievements. Similarly, Gül and Oktay (2009) conceptualize the glass ceiling as a perception that limits women's access to managerial positions in both public and private sectors. Özcan (2023) further emphasizes that the glass ceiling operates through implicit assumptions regarding who is considered "appropriate" for leadership roles, reinforcing gender-based inequalities.

Several scholars argue that gender stereotypes and patriarchal organizational cultures play a central role in sustaining the glass ceiling. According to Özyer and Orhan (2012), gender-based expectations position men as natural leaders while portraying women as emotionally fragile and less capable of handling managerial responsibilities. These perceptions legitimize inequality and contribute to the normalization of male-dominated leadership structures. Usluer (2000) highlights that managerial roles are socially constructed as male occupations, which leads to resistance against female authority and limits women's participation in decision-making processes.

The literature also identifies different categories of glass ceiling barriers. İpçioğlu et al. (2018) classify these barriers as invisible, difficult to overcome, and rooted in sexist attitudes rather than objective performance criteria. Şiyve (2004) distinguishes between self-imposed barriers, such as women's fear of failure and concerns about work–family balance, and external barriers arising from organizational practices and societal prejudices. Öztürk (2011) notes that women may internalize traditional gender roles, which can result in reduced self-confidence and reluctance to pursue leadership positions.

In the context of educational organizations, the glass ceiling syndrome presents a paradoxical structure. Although teaching is widely regarded as a female-dominated profession, school management positions remain predominantly occupied by men (Kirişçi & Can, 2020). Kılıç and Çakıcı (2016) argue that gender-based organizational cultures within the Ministry of National Education contribute to a stronger perception of the glass ceiling among educators compared to other public sectors. Tüzel (2014) similarly reports that female educators encounter significant career barriers rooted in societal expectations, domestic responsibilities, and lack of institutional support.

Research consistently shows that women's underrepresentation in educational leadership cannot be explained solely by individual preferences or competencies. Instead, deeply embedded gender norms, male-dominated power structures, and the unequal distribution of domestic labor function as invisible barriers that restrict women's career advancement (Örücü et al., 2007; Boydak Özan, 2009). The literature further emphasizes that the absence of female role models in leadership positions reinforces these barriers by limiting women's leadership aspirations and perpetuating gendered assumptions about management.

47

In recent studies, scholars have increasingly focused on strategies to overcome the glass ceiling syndrome. Knutson and Schmidgall (1999) emphasize the importance of legislative measures, organizational policies promoting gender equality, mentoring programs for women, and institutional support mechanisms such as flexible working arrangements. However, despite these recommendations, the persistence of the glass ceiling in educational organizations suggests that structural reforms alone are insufficient unless accompanied by a transformation of societal gender norms and organizational cultures.

Theoretical Framework: Gender Roles and the Glass Ceiling in Educational Organizations

The glass ceiling syndrome in educational organizations can be better understood through theoretical perspectives that explain how gender roles shape leadership perceptions and career opportunities. Among these perspectives, Social Role Theory and Role Congruity Theory provide a strong conceptual framework for analyzing women's underrepresentation in school management positions.

Social Role Theory posits that gender differences in behavior and occupational roles emerge from socially constructed expectations assigned to women and men (Eagly, 1987). According to this theory, women are primarily associated with communal roles, such as caregiving, nurturing, and emotional support, whereas men are linked to agentic roles characterized by authority, assertiveness, and leadership. As a result, leadership positions are socially perceived as more compatible with masculine traits. In educational settings, this role differentiation contributes to the perception that managerial roles are more suitable for men, while women are expected to prioritize family responsibilities and emotional labor. These socially constructed expectations limit women's leadership aspirations and reinforce the persistence of the glass ceiling syndrome in schools (Eagly & Wood, 2012).

Building on Social Role Theory, Role Congruity Theory explains the prejudice that arises when there is a perceived mismatch between gender role expectations and leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). According to this perspective, women who seek leadership positions may face negative evaluations not because of a lack of competence, but because leadership traits such as decisiveness, authority, and risk-taking are viewed as incongruent with traditional feminine roles. In school contexts, female administrators may be perceived as either insufficiently authoritative or overly emotional, regardless of their professional qualifications. This double bind places women in a disadvantaged position and contributes to the reproduction of invisible barriers in career advancement.

The glass ceiling theory further emphasizes that these barriers are not always explicit or institutionalized but operate through informal organizational practices, cultural norms, and implicit biases. In schools, male-dominated leadership models, limited access to informal networks, and the normalization of gendered expectations regarding work–family balance function as invisible mechanisms that restrict women's access to managerial positions. These barriers are often normalized within organizational culture, making them difficult to recognize and challenge (Wirth, 2001; US Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995).

From a broader sociological perspective, educational organizations play a critical role in the reproduction of social norms and power relations. Schools do not merely reflect societal gender roles but also contribute to their reinforcement through everyday practices and leadership structures. This perspective suggests that the persistence of the glass ceiling in schools is not only an organizational issue but also a reflection of deeply rooted societal gender norms that associate authority and leadership with masculinity. Taken together, these theoretical perspectives provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how gender roles, leadership expectations, and organizational cultures interact to sustain the glass ceiling syndrome in educational organizations. This framework guides the interpretation of the findings in the present study by linking participants' experiences and perceptions to broader social and organizational processes.

The theoretical perspectives discussed above highlight that the glass ceiling syndrome in educational organizations is not merely an individual phenomenon but a complex structure shaped by gender roles, leadership expectations, and organizational cultures. Social Role Theory and Role Congruity Theory emphasize how deeply internalized gender norms influence perceptions of leadership suitability, while glass ceiling theory draws attention to the invisible and informal barriers embedded within institutional practices. In order to understand how these theoretical mechanisms operate in real school settings, it is essential to examine the lived experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of

48

teachers and administrators. Given the socially constructed and context-dependent nature of gender roles and leadership perceptions, a qualitative research design was considered the most appropriate approach for this study. Accordingly, the present research adopts a qualitative case study method to explore how the glass ceiling syndrome manifests itself in schools from the perspective of gender roles.

Method

Research Model

This study, which aims to examine the glass ceiling syndrome in schools from the perspective of gender roles, utilizes the case study technique from qualitative research methods. It was decided to apply the case study approach in this study because it aims to examine female employees in schools from the perspective of the glass ceiling syndrome and to conduct an in-depth analysis of the circumstances and phenomena related to this syndrome. In this study, which examines women's access to managerial positions in relation to gender roles in schools, it is assumed that 'information about phenomena can be obtained by intensively examining a single case or situation' (Fidel, 1984).

Data Collection Tool

A semi-structured interview form developed by researchers through a literature review was used as a data collection tool in the study. Following the literature review, two separate expert opinions were obtained for the semi-structured interview form. The semi-structured interview form took its final shape after a pilot application with a teacher. The interview form consisted of two sections: the first section contained questions determining the demographic characteristics of the participants in the study; the second section contained eight open-ended questions aimed at examining the glass ceiling syndrome in schools in terms of gender roles.

Study Group

The study group for the research consists of 4 female and 4 male teachers working in 4 primary schools and 5 secondary schools in the central districts of Van Province (Edremit, İpekyolu, Tuşba) during the 2024-2025 academic year, selected through purposive sampling; and 4 female and 4 male administrators. In order to obtain detailed information about gender roles, the aim was to reach an equal number of participants from both teachers and administrators. Data saturation was achieved in the study, which included a total of 16 participants. Meriam (2013) states that when to end data collection depends on the theoretical and practical nature of the study. Accordingly, it is suggested that a very small increase in information relative to the effort expended to gather it can be used as a criterion for saturation (Meriam, 2013). Charmaz (2006) states that if the researcher finds the data sufficient, it is not appropriate to mention a specific sample size in the collection of qualitative data. Therefore, the number of participants determined at the beginning of the research was consistent with the saturation of the information obtained at the end of the research, and the number of participants remained unchanged. Before the interviews, participants were provided with information about the purpose of the research and it was explained that the data would only be used for scientific purposes. The distribution of participants forming the study group according to various variables (gender, age, seniority, and marital status, and educational status, school level, worked at) is given in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic information about participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Educational Status	Seniority	School Level	Field
FT1	Female	38	Single	bachelor's degree	13	Primary School	Classroom Teacher
FT2	Female	46	Married	bachelor's degree	22	Primary School	Classroom Teacher
FT3	Female	30	Single	bachelor's degree	5	Secondary School	Turkish
FT4	Female	47	Single	bachelor's degree	35	Secondary	Technology

49

						School	and Design
FA1	Female	48	Married	Master's Degree	25	Primary School	Classroom Teacher
FA2	Female	50	Married	bachelor's degree	35	Primary School	Classroom Teacher
FA3	Female	46	Married	bachelor's degree	24	Secondary School	Social Studies
FA4	Female	54	Married	bachelor's degree	30	Secondary School	Mathematics
MT1	Male	33	Married	bachelor's degree	11	Primary School	Special Education
MT2	Male	49	Married	bachelor's degree	24	Primary School	Classroom Teacher
MT3	Male	41	Married	Master's Degree	16	Secondary School	Science
MT4	Male	45	Married	bachelor's degree	11	Secondary School	Turkish
MA1	Male	48	Married	Master's Degree	23	Primary School	Classroom Teacher
MA2	Male	53	Married	bachelor's degree	31	Primary School	Classroom Teacher
MA3	Male	36	Married	Master's Degree	13	Secondary School	Social Studies

Data Analysis/Validity and Reliability

The research data were analyzed and evaluated using content analysis. The written interview data obtained from the study group were coded, and codes with similar meanings were grouped together to form themes and sub-themes, and the data were tabulated. To increase the reliability of the study, detailed information about the research process and participants was provided, and direct quotations were included to support the findings and illustrate the codes. After the interview findings were transcribed, they were sent to the participants via email, and feedback was obtained regarding the accuracy of the information. Furthermore, care has been taken to use a non-directive, neutral language during the interviews. Teachers and managers participating in the study were assigned numbered names. Female teachers were designated as FT1, FT2, etc. (female teacher 1, female teacher 2); male teachers were coded as MT1, MT2, etc. (male teacher 1, male teacher 2); female administrators were coded as FA1, FA2, etc. (female administrator 1, female administrator 2); male administrators were coded as MA1, MA2, etc. (male administrator 1, male administrator 2).

Findings

This section of the study presents the findings obtained from the analysis of the data collected through the interviews.

Findings Regarding the Characteristics Female Teachers Must Possess to Become Managers

This section presents findings based on participants' views regarding the characteristics expected of women in leadership roles. The findings are categorized under personal and professional characteristics, and the codes assigned to participants' views are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Characteristics female teachers must possess to become managers
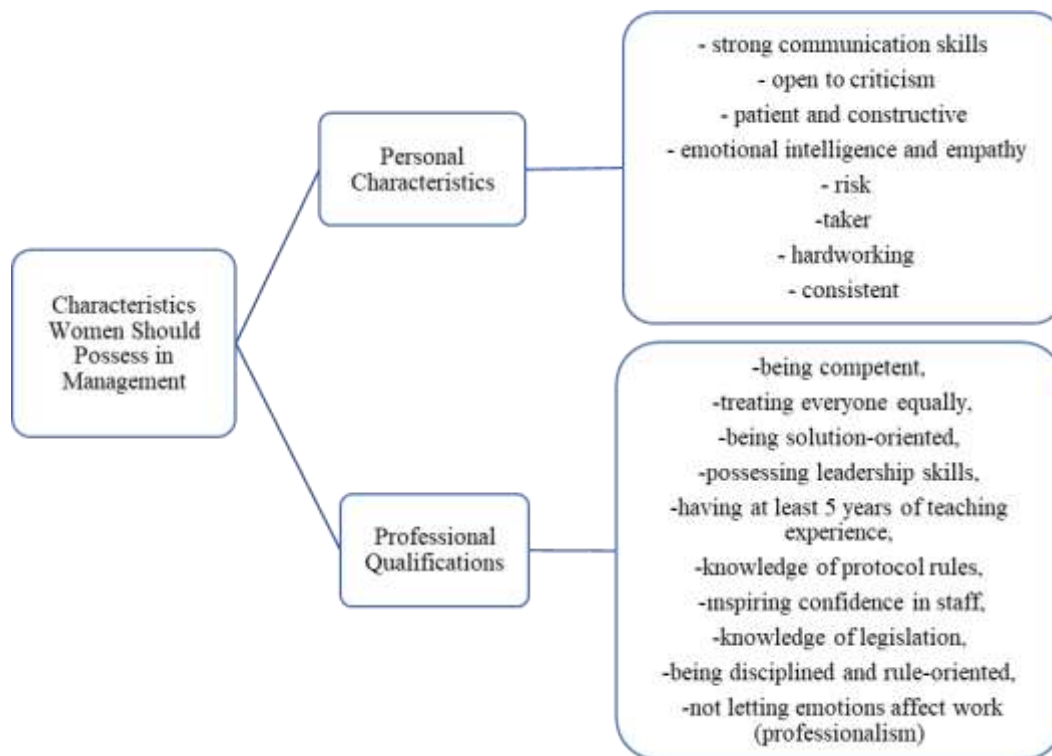
Direct quotations obtained from participants regarding the codes in Figure 1 are as follows:

Teachers should be unifying among students, parents and fellow administrators, and should be patient and constructive in difficult situations. They should know how to delegate their authority to their colleagues in management and be able to inspire confidence in their staff." *(MA2)*

Most importantly, they must have acquired communication, emotional intelligence and empathy skills. They must also be able to achieve a work-life balance between their professional and family lives.(FT4)

They must be tolerant, fair and sensible. They must know the regulations and rules, be flexible when appropriate, and have the ability to take risks when making decisions. (MT4)

Participants generally stated that female teachers should possess good communication skills to become managers and should act in a clear and consistent manner when making decisions, rather than acting emotionally. They also emphasized that female teachers should possess leadership qualities, adopt a solution-oriented approach to problems, and have teaching experience.

Findings Regarding the Low Number of Female Managers

The reasons for the low number of female managers, according to participants, are presented in Figure 2. Participants' responses were categorized under the themes of personal reasons, organizational reasons and societal reasons.

Figure 2

Reasons for the low number of female managers

51
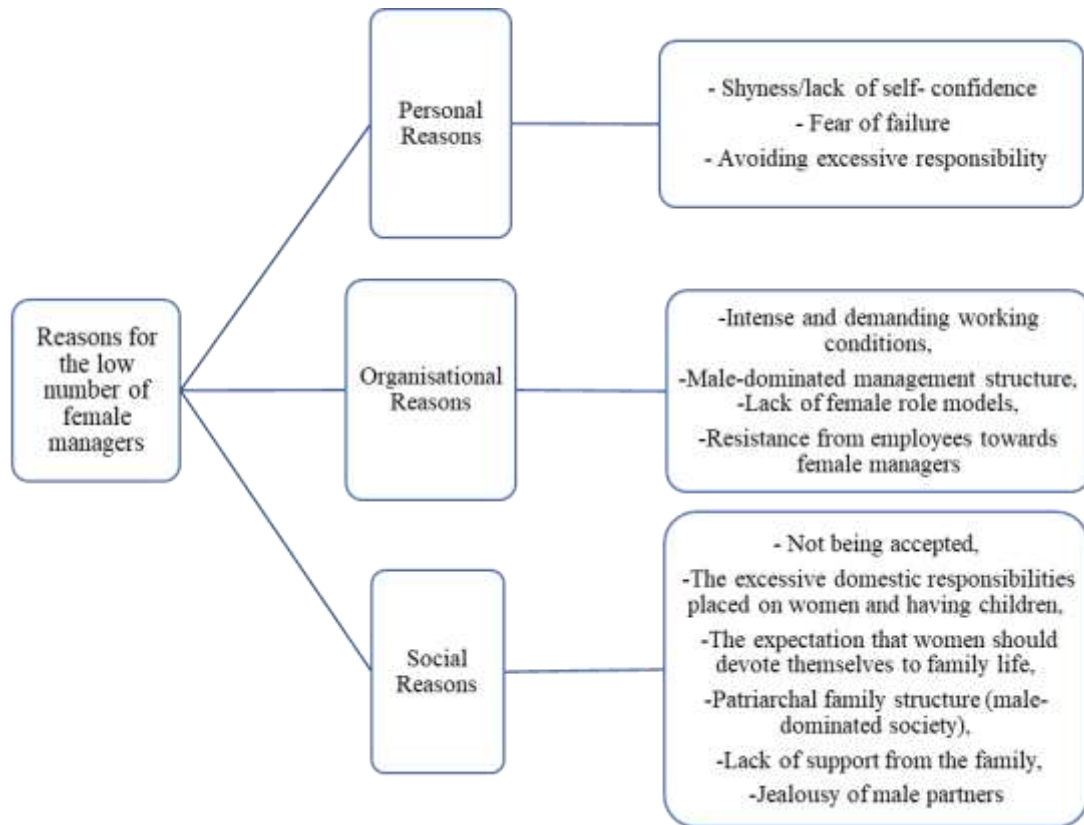
The codes shown in Figure 2 are supported by the following direct quotations obtained from participants:

> *Social roles, women prioritizing family and domestic roles, women's fear of failing at work, men's lack of confidence in female managers' ability to succeed at work."(MA1).*

> *Roles assigned to women by society, such as motherhood and housework, which require extra effort outside working hours, reduce the rate of applications for management positions. Unfortunately, management is still seen as a man's job, even by women. This prevents them from applying for management positions. (MA2)*

> *Devoting themselves more to family life, societal pressure (statements such as 'you are a woman, take care of your home'). The low number of female managers diminishing other women's confidence in themselves and the lack of managers they can look up to as role models. (FT3)*
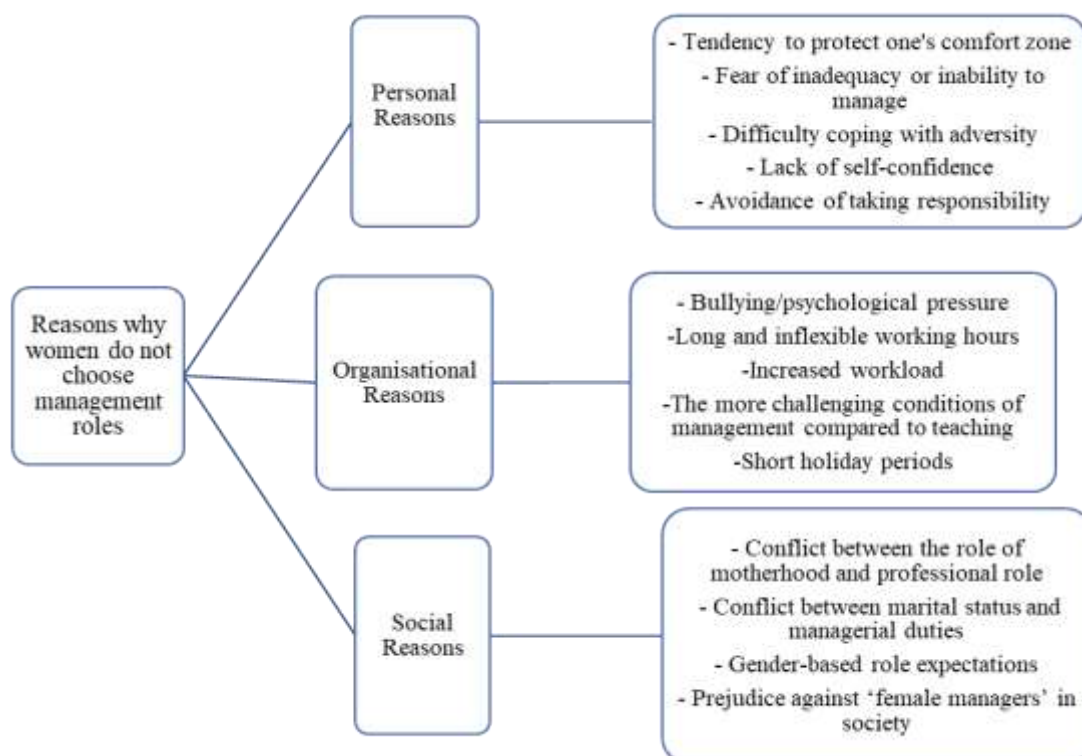
Participants stated that the low number of female managers in schools stems from the low number of women applying for management positions. The reason for this is that women do not want to neglect their assigned role of motherhood. Maternal roles give rise to the idea that women cannot adequately fulfil managerial duties. The reluctance of some male managers and employees to work with female managers also contributes to the low number of female managers.

Findings Regarding Female Teachers' Reluctance to Pursue School Management Positions

The reasons why female teachers are less likely to choose management positions are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Reasons why female teachers are less likely to choose school management positions

52

Personal Reasons
- Tendency to protect one's comfort zone
- Fear of inadequacy or inability to manage
- Difficulty coping with adversity
- Lack of self-confidence
- Avoidance of taking responsibility

Reasons why women do not choose management roles

Organisational Reasons
- Bullying/psychological pressure
- Long and inflexible working hours
- Increased workload
- The more challenging conditions of management compared to teaching
- Short holiday periods

Social Reasons
- Conflict between the role of motherhood and professional role
- Conflict between marital status and managerial duties
- Gender-based role expectations
- Prejudice against 'female managers' in society

The participants' responses have been categorized under the themes of personal reasons, organizational reasons and societal reasons. Direct quotations supporting the findings obtained are as follows:

> *The excessive responsibilities at home, the scarcity of holiday periods in management roles, and the unfavorable conditions of management (excessive responsibilities and the lack of material and moral compensation for labor).* (FA2)

> *Not wanting to deal with children, family and responsibilities. (FA4)*

> *They don't want to disturb the peace. No matter how much of a businesswoman a woman is, it is thought that her priority is being a housewife and mother. They don't choose it because they think they won't be able to manage everything, or they are forced to think that way. (FT2)*

According to participants' views, the most important reason why female teachers are less likely to choose management positions is motherhood, which is the most important of the social gender roles. Because they devote themselves to home life and their children, taking on a management role would mean neglecting their social responsibilities. At the same time, the fact that school management requires longer working hours, shorter holidays, greater responsibility, time and skill causes female teachers to be less inclined to choose school management.

Findings on Invisible Factors in Schools that Hinder Women's Advancement

Findings regarding factors that are not visible in schools but hinder women 'advancement, based on participants' views, are presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Invisible factors in schools that hinder women's advancement
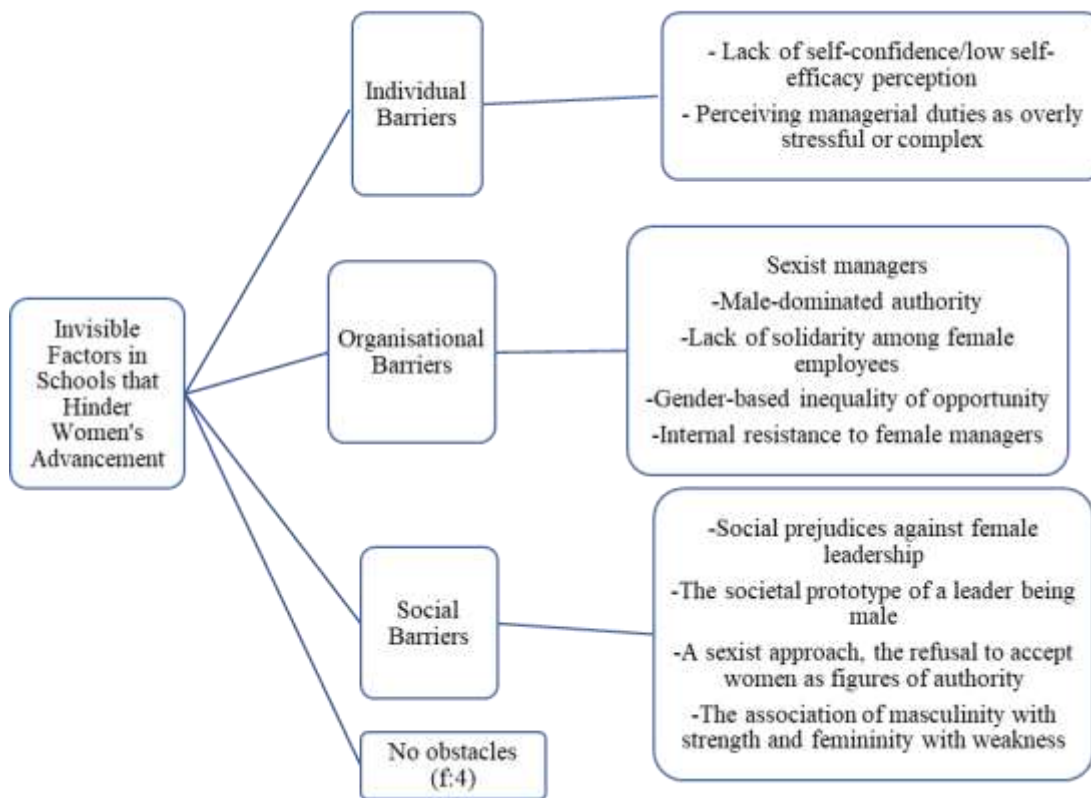
The findings obtained from participants have been categorized under the themes of individual barriers, organizational barriers, societal barriers, and no barriers. Direct quotations supporting these findings are as follows:

> I don't think so. Women can rise to any position if they want to. (MT1)

> I have not witnessed any situations or events that created obstacles at the school where I previously worked or where I currently work. (MT2)

> People want to see more men in management positions. Patriarchal society and traditions also play a role in this. (FA1)

> Female managers are not taken seriously in society (especially by male parents). (FA2)

Although invisible in schools, the fact that women are women and mothers is one of the main factors hindering their advancement, as highlighted in the participants' responses. Sexist managers, teachers and parents who do not want to work with female teachers contribute to these obstacles. Some responses to the questions indicated that women face no obstacles whatsoever. Some participants stated that there are no factors that could hinder advancement and female teachers can hold any management position for as long as they wish.

Findings Regarding the Organization's Perspectives on Female Teachers and Female Managers

Findings regarding the perspective on female teachers and female administrators in schools are presented in Figure 5.

Figure 5

General perspective on female teachers and female administrators in schools

54
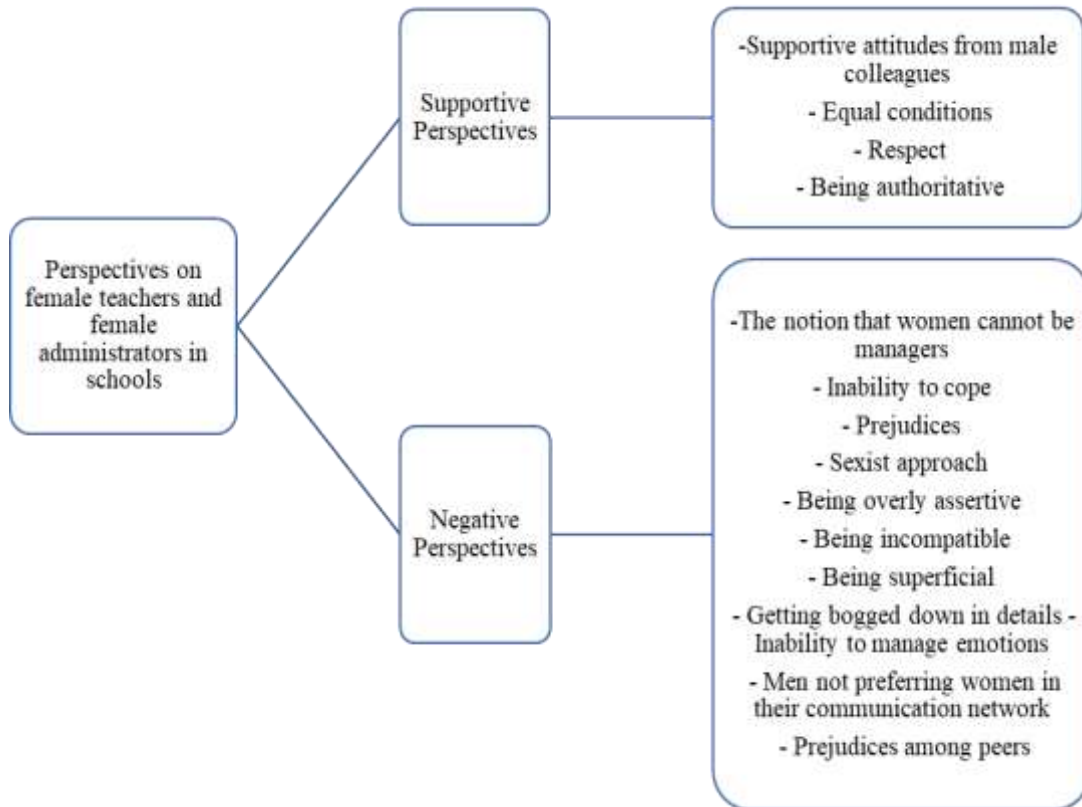
The views obtained from participants have been categorized under the themes of supportive perspectives and negative perspectives. Some direct quotations supporting the themes are as follows:

Having worked at our school for many years, I have never encountered a negative attitude. In fact, male teachers and administrators have been even more helpful in this regard, as women have greater responsibilities in social life. (FT1)

I observe that the perspective towards female teachers is very positive, but I cannot say the same for the perspective towards female administrators. Prejudices, sexist approaches, envy, and previous positive and negative experiences and life events are influential. (MT2)

*It is very well received at this time. Especially in schools with female students. (FA4)*

When examining the school's perspectives on female teachers and administrators, the prevailing view is that there are generally no issues with female teachers and female administrators. They also stated that the presence of female administrators in schools with female students is viewed positively by students and parents. Some participants stated that female administrators and teachers bring their emotions into the process, and that some female teachers exhibit many negative attitudes when they become administrators.

Findings Regarding the Desire to Work with Female Managers

Findings regarding participants' views on whether they would like to have female managers or administrators in schools are presented in Figure 6.

Figure 6

Situations where working with female managers is desired

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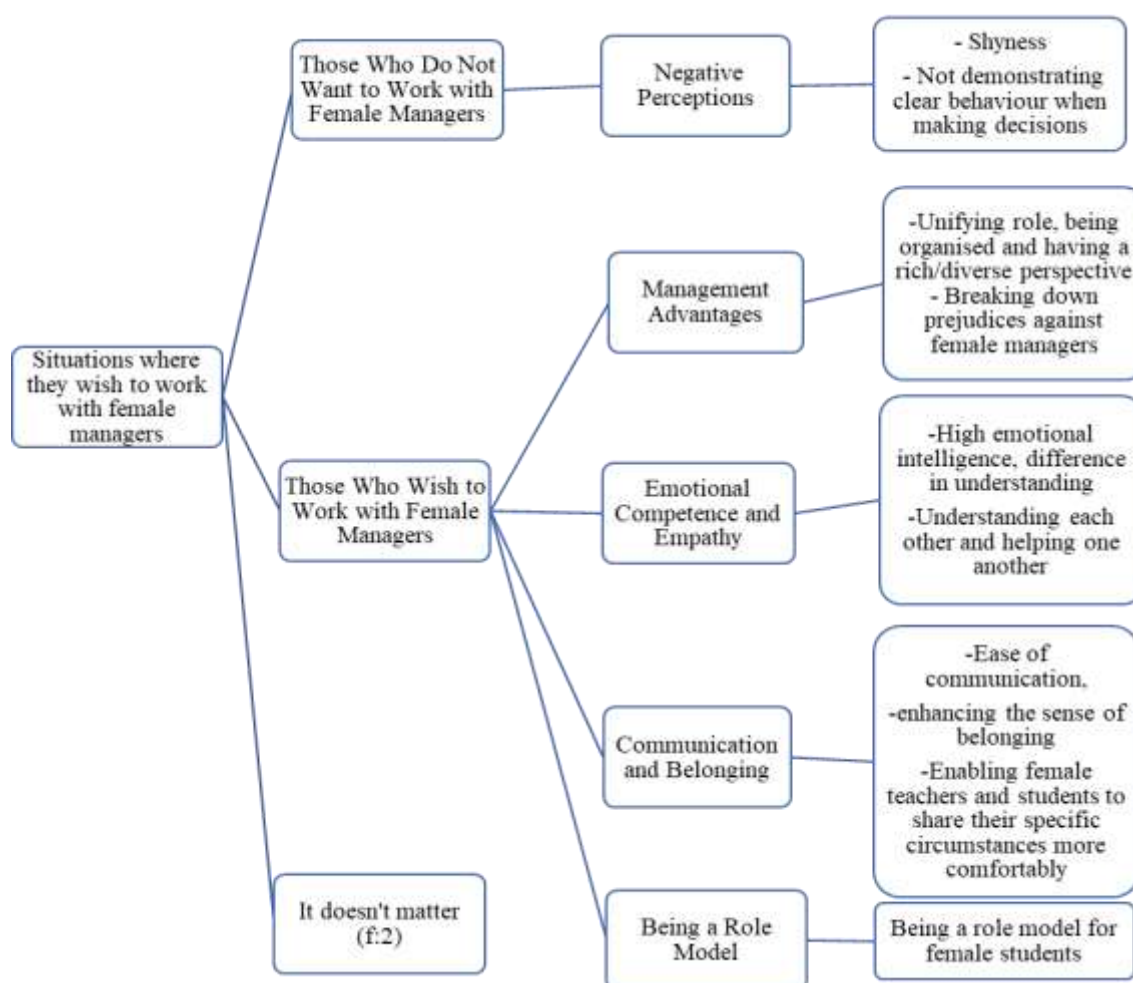
The views obtained from participants were categorized under the themes of "I want to work with female managers" and "I do not want to work with female managers"; sub-themes included negative perceptions, emotional competence and empathy, communication and belonging, role modelling, and managerial advantages. Some direct quotes supporting the themes are as follows:

> I would like that. Because female teachers tend not to share many things with male administrators. Similarly, female students are able to establish healthier relationships with female administrators." (MA1)

> No. They are acting hesitantly and not demonstrating clear behavior when it comes to decision-making. (MA3)

> It makes no difference to me. Whether they are a woman or a man is not important. If they know their job well and are competent, it makes no difference whether they are a woman or a man. (MT4)

Nearly all participants in the study stated that they would like to work with female managers. The main reason for this is the view that female students and female teachers would be able to communicate comfortably with each other in their specific situations. At the same time, participants stated that female managers are in an important position in terms of being role models for female students. However, some participants also believe that women are shy and cannot easily enter every environment, that inconsistencies occur in the decision-making process, and that they are unable to take a clear stance.

Findings Regarding Whether There Is a Difference between the Opportunities Encountered by Male Teachers and Administrators in Their Careers and the Opportunities Encountered by Women

Findings from participants' views on whether there is a difference between the opportunities encountered by male teachers or administrators in their careers and those encountered by women are presented in Figure 7.

Figure 7

Comparison of opportunities encountered by male teachers and administrators with those encountered by women
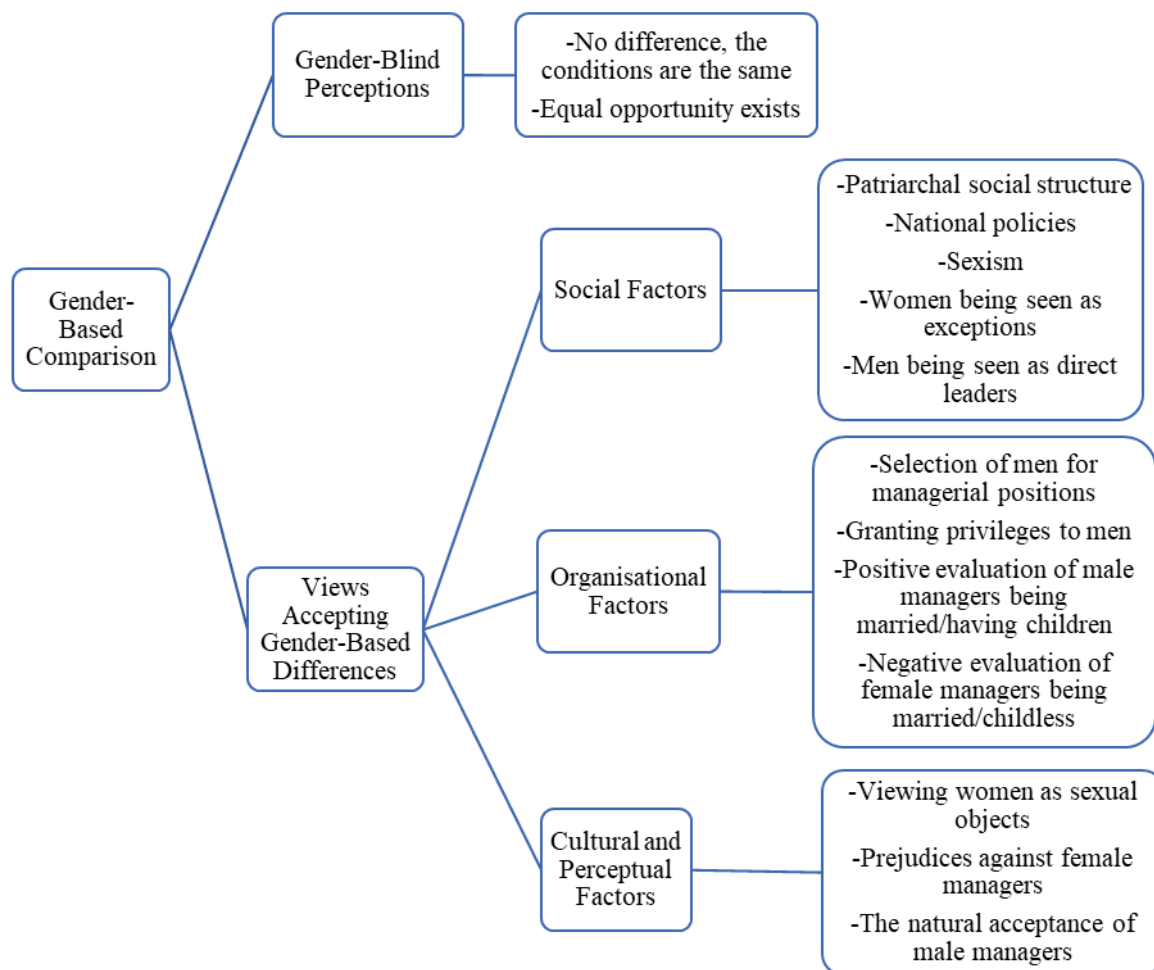
The findings obtained have been categorized under the themes of views that do not recognise gender-based differences and views that accept gender-based differences; and under the sub-themes of social factors, organizational factors, and cultural factors. Some direct quotations obtained regarding the themes are as follows:

> *I think men are treated more favorably.* (MT4)

> *I don't think there's any difference. Anyone who wants to be a manager, whether they're a woman or a man, benefits from the same conditions.* (MT1)

> *Women are more disadvantaged than men. National policies prevent this. There is pressure within the family from men.* (MT3)

The responses to the research question generally indicate that male teachers and administrators encounter more opportunities than female teachers. It can be argued that the patriarchal social structure and gender roles are responsible for men being offered more opportunities. Furthermore,

57

the responses to the questions indicate that male teachers and administrators are better at capitalizing on the opportunities that arise, while female teachers miss out on these opportunities or are unable to capitalize on them due to gender roles.

Findings Regarding Recommendations for Overcoming Career Development Barriers for Female Teachers (Breaking the Glass Ceiling Syndrome)

Information on what can be done to overcome career development barriers for female teachers (breaking the glass ceiling syndrome), based on participant views, is presented in Figure 8.

Figure 8

Recommendations for overcoming career development barriers (breaking the glass ceiling syndrome) for female teachers
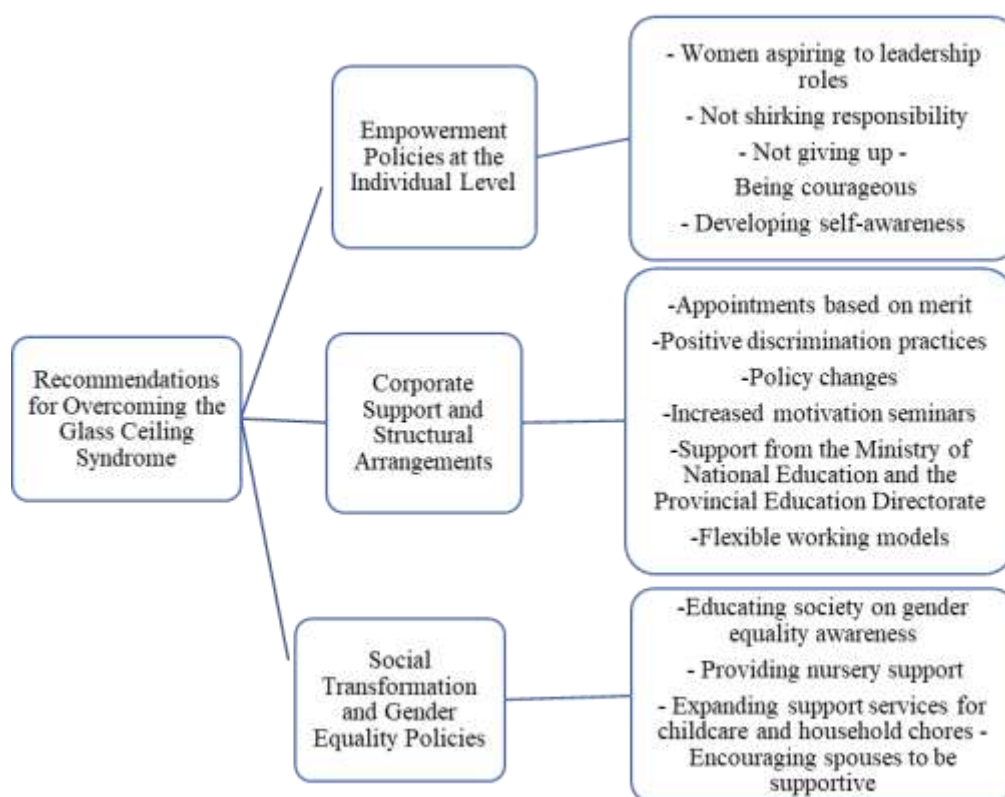
Participants' responses were categorized under themes such as individual empowerment strategies, institutional support and structural reforms, social transformation, and gender equality policies. Some direct quotes supporting these themes are as follows:

Men need to be made aware of this issue. The only obstacle facing women is male ego. (FT2)

Women may need a little encouragement to become managers. If women with children are given support for childcare, they may be more willing to pursue career development. (FT3)

When gender equality is achieved, this path will open up directly. (FT4)

School principals and provincial/district national education directorates should encourage female teachers to apply for management positions. Flexible working arrangements and nursery support could be provided to help with family responsibilities. Unless the childcare and

58

domestic responsibilities of female teachers are alleviated, it will be very difficult to attract women to management positions. (MA2)

Participants stated that in order to overcome barriers to career development for female teachers (breaking the glass ceiling syndrome), they should first receive support in their roles as mothers and homemakers. According to participants, the biggest glass ceiling barrier is female teachers becoming mothers. They also stated that having the support of spouses, the Ministry of National Education and national education directorates undertaking initiatives to encourage female teachers in their career development, and having flexible working conditions would help women overcome glass ceiling barriers.

Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

According to the research findings, while some male managers argued that there were no career barriers, almost all female participants stated that there were career barriers. Participants stated that motherhood, a social gender role, was the primary barrier to career development for female teachers. Women's desire to care for their homes and families outside of working hours causes them to avoid managerial positions that entail more duties and responsibilities. At the same time, it was understood that some women lack confidence in their managerial skills because management requires knowledge, skills and experience. This finding is supported by the study by Örücü et al. (2007); indeed, the researchers stated in their study that women are caught between their family and work responsibilities and that this situation hinders their careers. When examining women's views on the characteristics expected of them in leadership roles, personal characteristics such as empathy, patience, and constructiveness stand out, while professional characteristics such as being disciplined and rule-oriented, not letting emotions influence work (professionalism), and knowing the regulations are emphasized. It is noteworthy that these prominent characteristics are particularly attributed by male participants. These findings in the study are consistent with many studies in the field. For example, Hryniewicz and Vianna (2018) revealed in their studies that there are expectations that women in management have significantly different and quantitatively greater qualities and competencies than men. Accordingly, characteristics such as empathy, constructiveness and politeness have been attributed more to female managers. Similarly, Baker (2014) also suggests that patterns and expectations regarding women's leadership characteristics differ according to gender.

Despite evidence in the literature that women can be highly effective employees, women still fail to attain senior leadership positions compared to their male counterparts (Baker, 2014; Surawicz, 2016; Carbajal, 2018). This study also examined the reasons for this problem, revealing issues that can be categorized into three themes: personal, organizational, and societal reasons. Personal reasons include women's shyness/lack of self-confidence, fear of failure, and avoidance of excessive responsibility, while organizational reasons include resistance to female managers within the institution, male-dominated management teams, and intense and difficult working conditions. The most frequently cited reasons by female participants include not receiving support from their own families, excessive domestic responsibilities, lack of female role models, and spouses' jealousy and expectation that women devote themselves to family life. Surawicz (2016) also highlighted most of these social reasons in her study and stated that most women quit management positions due to these reasons even if they started out in them.

When examining the reasons why women are underrepresented in management positions, it is observed that this situation is partly the result of their own necessary choices. For example, reasons such as mobbing/psychological pressure, gender-based role expectations, the development of prejudices, concerns about maintaining work-life balance, and anxiety about not being able to fulfil the role of motherhood alongside an increasing workload naturally cause women to not want management positions. However, alongside these reasons, personal reasons such as fear of not being able to manage or feeling inadequate, lack of self-confidence, difficulty coping with negativity and the desire to avoid responsibility have also been cited. Hoobler et al. (2011) also examined the reasons why women are less likely to be found in senior management positions in their studies and explained the situation with similar findings. According to researchers, women being burdened with family responsibilities and generally being evaluated in this context leads to prejudice against them for management positions. Bismark et al. (2015), on the other hand, explain this situation by stating that women are not taken seriously as managers. It is claimed that this situation both fosters a perception

59

of inadequacy in women themselves and supports the presence of dominant managers early on in the organization.

When examining the invisible factors that hinder women's advancement in schools (the glass ceiling syndrome), three distinct areas emerge. Some participants suggested that women do not choose management roles due to reasons such as self-confidence issues, feelings of inadequacy, and perceiving management as stressful and complex, viewing this situation more as individual barriers. However, as Bismark and others (2015) also suggest, underlying this situation may be the organizational structure not seriously considering women for managerial positions and the development of an institutional culture based on this long-standing understanding. This attitude and approach may indirectly cause female employees to exhibit withdrawal behavior in preferring management.

Another factor hindering female teachers from reaching management positions is experienced at the organizational level. The existence of male-dominated authority, managers being sexist, internal resistance to female managers within the organization, and even a lack of solidarity among women themselves are factors that contribute to this situation. A review of the literature reveals that there are many studies supporting these invisible barriers that arise in an organizational context (Nyoni & He, 2019; Cook & Glass, 2014; Seo et al., 2017; Macarie & Creta, 2008). One of the barriers to female teachers becoming managers is entrenched perceptions at the societal level. Accordingly, elements such as the association of men with power and therefore management, and women with powerlessness; the male prototype of a manager in society; and social prejudice towards female leadership emerge as fundamental invisible barriers in the social context. This societal approach is also observed to permeate the structure of educational organizations. The study also found participants who claimed that female teachers did not encounter any visible or invisible barriers to reaching managerial positions; however, it is noteworthy that the majority of these participants were male.

While most participants indicated that they might be willing to work with female managers, it has been revealed that various differences can arise when gender-based comparisons are made in career processes. Accordingly, the patriarchal structure of society and the perception that men are more suitable for managerial positions has created opportunities that are easier for male teachers to access, while being challenging for female teachers. The positive evaluation of married men with children for management roles and the development of prejudices against female managers also contribute to gender-based differences. It is clear that most of these differences are to the detriment of women and that gender-based approaches exist in appointments to management positions.

The findings of this study indicate that the glass ceiling syndrome continues to exist in schools despite the high proportion of women in the teaching profession. While several male participants argued that women face no significant barriers in career advancement, most female participants emphasized the presence of both visible and invisible obstacles. This divergence in perceptions reflects gendered awareness of inequality and supports recent studies suggesting that men are often less likely to recognize structural disadvantages experienced by women in leadership pathways (Cook & Glass, 2019; Morley, 2020).

In line with Social Role Theory, the findings reveal that traditional gender roles—particularly expectations related to motherhood, domestic responsibilities, and emotional labor—are perceived as the primary barriers preventing women from pursuing school management positions. Women are expected to fulfill communal roles, whereas leadership positions are associated with agentic traits such as authority, decisiveness, and assertiveness. Similar results have been reported in recent international studies indicating that leadership in educational institutions continues to be constructed as a predominantly masculine domain (OECD, 2020; Morley, 2020).

The findings also strongly support Role Congruity Theory, which explains the prejudice faced by women when leadership roles are perceived as incompatible with feminine gender roles. Participants' views suggesting that female administrators are overly emotional, insufficiently authoritative, or indecisive illustrate the "double bind" experienced by women leaders. Recent research confirms that women in leadership are evaluated more critically than men and are penalized both for conforming to and deviating from gender role expectations (Hryniewicz & Vianna, 2018; Eagly & Heilman, 2016).

60

From an organizational perspective, the findings align with glass ceiling theory, emphasizing that barriers to women's advancement are often informal, implicit, and embedded in organizational culture rather than formal regulations. Male-dominated leadership networks, lack of mentoring opportunities, resistance to female authority, and limited institutional support for work–family balance function as invisible mechanisms that sustain inequality in school management. Recent institutional analyses similarly highlight that organizational norms and power structures continue to restrict women's access to top leadership positions, even in sectors where women are numerically dominant (Cook & Glass, 2019).

At the societal level, the findings demonstrate that patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes remain influential in shaping leadership perceptions within schools. In line with the social reproduction perspective, educational institutions not only reflect existing gender norms but also actively reproduce them through leadership practices and organizational hierarchies. Recent policy-oriented reports emphasize that without deliberate cultural and structural transformation, educational systems are likely to perpetuate gender inequality in leadership (UNESCO, 2021).

Participants recommend that women strive to develop self-awareness individually, be courageous, and be willing to challenge societal perceptions in order to overcome the glass ceiling syndrome in educational organisations. At the organisational level, recommendations have been developed such as implementing positive discrimination for women, adopting flexible working models, and securing support from the Ministry of National Education (MEB) and the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (MEM). At the policy level, national education policies should incorporate gender-responsive leadership strategies, including monitoring mechanisms and accountability frameworks to ensure equal representation in school management. International policy frameworks highlight that achieving gender equality in educational leadership requires long-term, systemic transformation rather than isolated interventions (UNESCO, 2021). Future research may benefit from mixed-methods designs, cross-cultural comparisons, or longitudinal studies to further examine how gender roles and organizational cultu Disclosure Statements

Contribution rate statement of the researchers:

Both authors contributed equally to this study.

Conflict of interest statement:

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CRediT Authorship Contribution Statement

Fikriye Esra Perihan, Ayşegül Atalay: Conceptualization, methodology, data collection, data analysis, writing – review & editing.res interact over time in shaping leadership trajectories in education.

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61

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63