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International Journal of Psychology and Educational Studies

ISSN: 2148-9378



# Leadership Characteristics of Female School Principals According to Female Teachers

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article History

Received 27.12.2020

Received in revised form  
17.05.2021

Accepted 30.09.2021

Article Type: Research  
Article

## ABSTRACT

Although the number of female teachers in schools is higher, this is not evident when looking at leadership levels. Various studies have examined this situation. In this study, the perspectives of female teachers working in private schools who are gradually raising their educational levels are discussed in depth about female head teachers. For this purpose, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 37 female teachers working in private schools in the Anatolian part of Istanbul. The data were analysed using content analysis, one of the qualitative analysis methods. As a result of the research, three main themes were found among the characteristics of female leaders, the competencies of female leaders, and the impact on the work environment. Under the theme of characteristics of female leaders, there are five categories: being selfish, forming problematic working relationships, being detail-obsessed, being jealous, acting emotionally; under the theme of competencies of female leaders: they lead well, their leadership skills are weak, they cannot be fair and impartial, they are not solution-oriented. The theme of the impact of female leaders on the work environment is a chaotic environment; communication is important, supportive environment.

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Keywords:

Female teachers, Female managers, Career Barriers, Characteristics of Female Managers

## 1. Introduction

Despite national efforts to equalize the proportion of women in senior positions, there are still prejudices about the perception of female leaders in educational institutions. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) also point out that many types of research encounter limited audiences. Female leaders are also sparsely represented in schools, especially at the secondary level (Blackmore, 2002; Coleman, 2000; Lee et al., 1993; Moorosi, 2010; Pont et al., 2008). As students age, the percentage of female leaders in school administration decreases (Coleman, 2002). In addition, female principals have the least longevity in their positions compared to male principals at all school levels (Fuller & Young, 2009). Coleman (2000) and Lee et al. (1993), especially male teachers, are uncomfortable with female leadership, and Lee et al. (1993) found that according to the gender of administrators, not only men but also women have prejudices. Moreover, women tend to be recruited for leadership positions and promoted at relatively older ages, although they have more experience and education than men (Grogan and Shakeshaft 2011; Roser et al., 2009). Along with all these difficulties, the idea that women have problematic relationships in the workplace has spread throughout management literature and formed the basis of research into the queen bee syndrome (Staines et al., 1974). A similar concept was not created for the male employees, as their conflicts and rivalries, identical to the queen bee syndrome, are considered normal. Female leaders are often criticized for subordinates' prejudices (Bratton et al., 2004; Grogan 2014). Gender stereotyping occurs implicitly; while individuals succumb to stereotypes during latent measures, they report non-stereotypes (Latu et al., 2011; Rudman & Glick, 2001). For example, the ideal woman has concern for the welfare of others and displays behaviors aimed at being kind, cooperative, helpful,

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**Citation:** Mert, P. (2021) Leadership characteristics of female school principals according to female teachers. *International Journal of Psychology and Educational Studies*, 8(4), 166-176. <https://dx.doi.org/10.52380/ijpes.2021.8.4.356>

sympathetic, gentle, and nurturing. Meanwhile, the ideal man is self-interested, competitive, independent, and dominant (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Prentice & Carranza, 2002).

However, despite all these prejudices, studies show that female leaders have more instructional leadership than male leaders (Hallinger et al., 2016; Shaked et al., 2018). Also, female leaders have more transformational leadership than male leaders (Barbuto et al., 2007; Hyde, 2005). According to Eagly and her colleagues (1992), female principals adopted more participatory, democratic, task-focused leadership styles than their male counterparts. Besides, women develop emotional relationships with others and tend to be much more empathetic than men (Shaked et al., 2018). On the other hand, when it comes to school leadership, there is a general belief that equity issues for women are no longer a problem (Coleman 2005, 16). This may be because, as Lieberman (1988) notes, most research in educational administration is conducted from the male perspective. Indeed, in the twenty-first century, women are still underrepresented in educational leadership positions, and their small share of leadership positions in schools has not changed significantly in recent decades (Kruger, 2008; Marczynski and Gates 2013). As women began to climb the ladder in their organizations, balancing their family life with leadership roles has become a problem (Naidoo and Perumal, 2014). One of the concepts that express all these career barriers for women is the glass ceiling syndrome. According to Wirth (2001), invisible obstacles fueled by prejudices that prevent women from reaching senior management positions are called glass ceiling syndrome. Women who manage to break the glass ceiling face many challenges in leadership and develop a range of qualifications and skills to deal with these challenges (Smith, 2008).

Having a small number of female managers in the education sector is a global problem, and this problem is also present in Turkey. The rate of female school principals in Turkey is 5.3 (Ministry of National Education, 2020), and the World Economic Forum's 2020 Global Gender Gap Report ranked Turkey 130th out of 153 countries (World Economic Forum, 2020). Researchers in Turkey put forward various reasons for the lack of representation of female teachers in senior positions. Can (2008) found that the patriarchal administrative structure and traditional structures in Turkey have not changed in favor of female administrators. Bingol et al. (2011), Tanrisevdi (2016), Orbay (2018) revealed that female teachers could not participate in social networks at schools, and this situation negatively affects their careers. On the other hand, Izgar (2001), Mert, and Levent (2020) stated that women teachers have difficulty allocating time to their jobs due to family responsibilities and burdens.

While Coleman (2003) found that school leadership is identified with men, Smith (2011) found that there are negative biases about women's leadership. Even when female leaders are successful, they may be at risk of negative evaluation. These prejudices are sometimes created by their colleagues and sometimes by male or female employees. This study offers the opportunity to portray female school principals through the eyes of female teachers. The reason for applying the research on private school teachers is that private schools gain more importance in the Turkish education system due to the spread of foreign language education, technological developments, artistic and sports activities, according to parents' opinions of parents (Kulaksızoğlu et al., 2013). In addition, Mert and Levent (2020) revealed in their research that female teachers working in private schools have more motivation to be administrators than female teachers working in public schools. Since the number of private schools in Istanbul is high, this study aimed to reveal teachers' opinions working in private schools in Istanbul. Therefore, the leadership characteristics of female school principals were analyzed from the point of view of female teachers working in private schools. This study is significant in that it provides a detailed perspective by looking at the characteristics of female administrators from the perspective of female teachers.

## **2. Methodology**

In the method part of the study, explanations were made under the headings of the research model, study group, data collection, and analysis.

### **2.1. Research Model**

The qualitative research method was used in this study. Qualitative research is an interrogative, interpretive method that strives to understand the shape of the problem in its natural setting (Klenke, 2016). In addition, the phenomenology model was used, as the situation discussed was to reveal the existing thoughts of female

teachers working in private schools about female school principals. Phenomenology focuses on events and experiences that we are aware of but do not have in-depth knowledge of (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013).

## 2.2 Study group

This study used the purposeful sampling method because the most suitable participants and experienced ones were sought for the study (Neuman, 2014). Also, criterion sampling, one of the purposeful sampling methods, was used (Patton, 2005). In the criterion sampling method, the criteria are set by the researcher before the study for the purpose of the research (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). In this direction, care was taken to select teachers with seniority of five years or more.. The data were collected by interview technique from female teachers working in private schools on the Anatolian side of Istanbul in the 2020-2021 academic year. The interview technique determines how individuals make sense of and evaluate their encounters (Greasley & Ashworth, 2007). Descriptive information for the study group is given in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Demographics of the participants

	Age	School Level	Seniority	Marital status	Managerial experience	The gender of the principal in the school where you work	The gender of vice-principal in the school where you work
P1	30	High School	8	Married	No	Man	Woman
P2	32	High School	8	Married	No	Man	Woman
P3	45	High School	20	Single	No	Man	Man and Woman
P4	27	Middle School	5	Single	No	Man	Woman
P5	32	Primary School	5	Single	No	Man	Woman
P6	30	Middle School	7	Married	No	Man	Man
P7	30	Middle School	6	Married	2 years	Man	Woman
P8	30	Middle School	6	Single	No	Man	Woman
P9	38	High School	16	Married	No	Man	Man and Woman
P10	36	Primary School	13	Single	No	Man	Man
P11	31	Primary School	5	Married	No	Man	Woman
P12	28	Primary School	5	Married	No	Woman	Man
P13	45	Primary School	8	Married	1 year	Woman	Woman
P14	50	Primary School	19	Single	15 years	Woman	Woman
P15	29	Middle School	6	Single	No	Man	Woman
P16	32	Middle School	10	Single	No	Man	Man
P17	26	High School	5	Married	No	Man	Man
P18	26	Pre-school	5	Single	No	Woman	Man and Woman
P19	39	Middle School	7	Single	No	Man	Man and Woman
P20	35	High School	10	Married	No	Woman	Man
P21	27	High School	5	Married	No	Man	Man and Woman
P22	28	High School	5	Married	No	Man	Man and Woman
P23	29	High School	5	Single	No	Man	Man
P24	29	Middle School	8	Single	No	Man	Man
P25	27	High School	5	Single	No	Man	Man
P26	31	High School	11	Married	No	Man	Man
P27	36	High School	5	Married	No	Woman	Man
P28	32	High School	9	Single	No	Man	Man
P29	26	High School	5	Single	No	Man	Man
P30	33	Pre-school	14	Married	2 years	Man	Man
P31	38	Pre-school	10	Single	No	Man	Man
P32	25	High School	5	Married	No	Man	Man
P33	30	Middle School	5	Single	No	Woman	Woman
P34	42	Middle School	15	Single	No	Man	Man
P35	26	Middle School	5	Single	No	Man	Man
P36	29	Middle School	5	Married	No	Man	Man
P37	39	Pre-school	16	Single	No	Man	Man

This study is significant in that it provides a detailed perspective by looking at the characteristics of female administrators from the perspective of female teachers.

### 2.3 Data Collection

A semi-structured interview form was created by scanning the studies on women's career barriers and the leadership characteristics of female school principals and taking expert opinions. Care was taken to ensure that the questions prepared in the interview form were open-ended. The interviews were held online due to the Covid 19 pandemic measures. The interviews lasted about 45-50 minutes. Participants expressed more than one opinion in some questions.

### 2.4 Analysis of Data

The data were evaluated by content analysis. In content analysis, data with similar elements are organized and interpreted in a way that the reader can understand under certain concepts and themes (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). This is a kind of coding process (Babbie, 2006). In this research, the raw data from the interviews were first read repeatedly and the codes were identified. Themes were formed from the codes. Credibility and transferability are very important in qualitative research (Erlandson et al., 1993). For this purpose, a brief summary of the participants' statements was made at the end of the interviews and confirmation was obtained regarding the accuracy of their statements.

For this research to be conducted ethically, the identities of the female teachers were kept confidential and codes such as P1, P2. In addition, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested strategies in qualitative research used to ensure the validity and reliability of the study by trying to reflect the research process. These strategies are; diversity, expert review, consistency, and external audit. The studies carried out in this context are summarized below.

*Diversification:* One of the main strategies to increase the reliability of research results is diversification. Yıldırım and Şimşek (2013) state that collecting data from different samples with different methods and thus preventing the mixing of biases or misunderstandings in the results are the basic principles of diversity. In the research, data were collected from different schools in the region to ensure the diversity of the study group.

*Expert Review :* Involving other experts in the same study. Thus, harmony between experts in the steps of data collection, data analysis and obtaining the results will ensure that the study will be accepted by others (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). In this sense, the research data were coded by two different experts. The research data was obtained from Pınar Mert and Sait Volkan Mert. *Consistency:* All findings are presented without comment to increase the consistency of the research. In addition, the collected data were coded separately by the researcher and an expert, and the consistency/consistency between the coders was calculated by comparing the coding made.

*External audit:* According to Creswell (2016), information must be made available for audit for research to be approved. For all stages of this study to be ideal for an external audit, the teacher's written and online scenario forms were evaluated in the computer environment. The fact that the data analysis and research reporting was carried out in the computer environment facilitated the storage and verifiability of the data.

## 3. Findings

### *Characteristics of Female Managers*

There are five categories under the theme of the characteristics of female managers. These are; being egoistic (9 people), establishing problematic work relationships (5 people), being detailer (7 people), being jealous (7 people), acting emotionally (5 people). These are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Characteristics of Female Managers, Themes, Categories and Sample Opinions

1	Categories	Number of Views	Sample Opinions
Characteristics of Female Managers	Being egoistic	9	<p>P.22: Yes, this is crucial. It is not easy to work with female managers. When they involve their ego and emotions, they move away from professionalism.</p> <p>P.33: Women can show weaknesses in terms of management. They have a high ego, I know them, and they have an honest and insensitive attitude.</p> <p>P.4: Female managers have a higher ego. Women who are not justiciable and conscientious should not be managers.</p>
	Establishing problematic work relationships	5	<p>P.27: We can say that in a male-dominated society, women marginalize each other. They display a harsher and authoritarian attitude towards all the people they rule, including their gender.</p> <p>P.8: Female managers develop more problematic work relationships while working with their fellows.</p>
	Being detailer	7	<p>P.2: It is easier to work with male managers because female managers are very detail-oriented. Male managers do not interfere with unnecessary details.</p> <p>P.28: I think women are more detail-oriented. They are better at looking at problems from a different perspective. They are good at analytical intelligence.</p>
	Being jealous	7	<p>P.39: Gossip, quarrels, jealousy, and opinion games take place with more women managers.</p> <p>P.30: Male managers do not have feelings of jealousy, but women have.</p>
	Acting emotionally	5	<p>P.19: I think they will be good stewards as long as they do not act emotionally. But because of their nature, they will act out of their emotions, so women cannot be rulers..</p> <p>P.36: Female managers view events more emotionally, male managers more realistic.</p> <p>P.12: Most women reflect this to their subordinates because they have difficulty controlling their emotions. This can cause trouble from time to time.</p>

**Competencies of Female Managers**

There are four categories in the competence theme of female managers. These can be listed as they lead well (7 people), their managerial skills are weak (5 people), they cannot be fair and impartial (7 people), they are not solution-oriented (6 people). These are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Competence Theme of Female Managers, Categories and Sample Opinions

Themes	Categories	Number of Views	Sample Opinions
Competencies of Female Manager	They lead well	7	<p>P.13: Considering the prejudices and pressures they face, I think their excellent crisis management skills can explain their ability to be so successful. We can say that women are cut out for this job.</p> <p>P.15: They are productive, solution-oriented, and able to look in detail from different angles. As long as they reflect these features correctly, positive results emerge.</p>
	Their managerial skills are weak	5	<p>P.33: I have seen that women are not very skilled in administration, act out of their emotions, and are not very good at justice, law, and understanding.</p> <p>P.23: I think it is difficult for women to be administrators because they tend to magnify and perpetuate problems. They show a harsher and more authoritarian attitude towards all people they govern, including both sexes.</p> <p>P.8: Female managers develop more problematic business relationships while working with their fellows.</p>
	They cannot be fair and impartial	7	<p>P.10: ...but the male manager is often neutral</p> <p>P.33: Men can be more fair, impartial, and understanding. Women may show weakness in terms of management</p>

		P.36: I prefer men to be managers. Since women are evaluating emotionally, they cannot make an impartial observation.
		P.37: I think they are not open to criticism. Their disadvantages are that they act emotionally, make quick decisions, and cannot be objective.
They are not solution oriented	6	P.34: Instead of solving problems, acting as if they have solved them and continuing by making their own decisions negatively affects. P.17: Since they manage within the framework of rules, they have difficulties finding solutions in situations where there is a rule gap.

### *The Effects of Female Managers on the Work Environment*

There are three categories under the theme of the effect of female managers on the working environment. These are a chaotic environment (9), communication is important (4), and a supportive environment (6). These are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4.** *The Effects of Female Managers on the work environment, Categories and Sample Opinions*

Themes	Categories	Number of Views	Sample Opinions
The Effects of Female Managers on the Work Environment	Chaotic Environment	9	P.18: It can lead to one manager undermining the other or causing chaos by taking on more tasks in the team.P.18: It may cause a manager to undermine the other or cause chaos by taking P.33: Chaos, arrogance, and egos become an environment where they fight. It becomes a witchcauldron. A male manager is a must. It becomes a witchcauldron. A male manager is a must.
	Communication is important.	4	P.16: It has professional and robust communication with each other P.20: Their harmony and energies with each other are vital and affect positively. P.23: Female managers strengthen communication
	Supportive environment	6	P.8: Female school principals support you like a friend or a sister. P.14: My female school principal tries to empathize and supports me. It is a very nice approach that he chooses the language he uses and appreciates me. P.24: My female school principal is supportive and appreciative. She encourages and stands behind female teachers more, but I do not support her making this positive discrimination.

## **4. Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations**

This study aims to examine the characteristics of female principals according to female teachers working in private schools. The results presented are discussed in this context. The participants see female managers as selfish, weak in establishing business relationships, detail-oriented, jealous, and emotionally motivated leaders. Similarly, Yücedağ and Günbayı (2016), Bayrak and Mohan (2001) stated that women managers experience problems due to their emotional stance. In the study of Can (2008), it was concluded that female managers are emotional in their jobs. At this point, Korkmaz and Moraloğlu (2010) stated that women are emotional because women's responsibilities are heavy. These responsibilities wear them out, so they have more difficulty controlling their emotions. Again, in the same study, female managers were emotional, sensitive, fragile, and moderate; male managers are expressed as authoritarian, more rational. In addition, male managers can make more aggressive, bold, and fast radical decisions (Çelikten and Yeni, 2004; Korkmaz and Moraloğlu, 2010).

However, Tok and Yalçın (2017) revealed that female school principals are not emotional. Heller (1982; cited in Arıkan, 1999) also states that there are stereotypes about women being very emotional and unable to keep their emotions under control. As a result of this research, an opinion has emerged that women act emotionally. However, the reason for this situation may be due to the prejudices that exist in society and are transmitted by social groups to each other. It may also be related to the fact that the feelings of female principals in the institutions in which they work override their professional management skills. On the other hand, it is also important at this point to show whether the situation of women's emotions hindering their professionalism occurs only when they are managers and whether female employees working in critical positions in different sectors have problems controlling their emotions or not. Participants stated that female managers had good

leadership, their managerial skills were weak, they could not be fair and impartial, and they were not solution-oriented. The participants whose opinions were consulted in Tok and Yalçın's (2017) think that female managers do not have a broad vision, and they cannot evaluate the events with limited leadership and managerial characteristics from a multi-dimensional and detailed perspective. In the study of Yücedağ and Günbayı (2016), female managers stated that they did not see themselves as good leaders. In Can's (2008) study, it is dominant that female managers do not have decision-making capacity, which is one of the characteristics that a leader should have. On the other hand, some researches have revealed that female managers can demonstrate more flexible and democratic attitudes and adopt a more organized, meticulous, measured, serious, and detailed understanding in their work (Çelikten & Yeni, 2004; Korkmaz & Moraloğlu, 2010). The results of this study revealed different approaches together. In addition to the participants who think that female managers are good leaders, some female teachers stated that female principals' managerial skills are weak. This result also suggests that female leaders are not generally negative among their female followers, which also suggests that the quality of leader-follower relationships may be strongly influenced by followers' mental constructs of leadership and that their effects may diminish over time as a result of positive interactions. Participants described the working environment of female managers as chaotic, strong in communication, and supportive. Researchers stated that female school principals attach great importance to communication and human relations in the working environment (Baştuğ & Çelik, 2011; Baytun & Özerem, 2013; Çelikten, 2004; Eagly et al., 1992; Growe and Montgomery, 2001). In addition, they could create a versatile communication network at school (Çelikesir-Ünal, 2015), they were more successful ineffective communication (Karcı, 2012), and they provide an environment where the psychological needs of the employees are met (Özdil-Sağ, 2010).

On the other hand, male employees who do not want to work with a female manager may experience conflicts (Çelikesir & Ünal, 2010; Korkmaz & Moraloğlu, 2010; Özdemir & Yaylacı, 2005). Because, as Hutchinson (2002) states, the perception that leaders should be men is seen as one of the most common obstacles faced by women who want to become school principals. Therefore, this perception can create conflicts. In addition, female managers who focus on communication also experience several problems caused by frequent and intense communication (Köse & Uzun, 2017; Sezer, 2006). In this study, the effect of mainly female principals on the school environment was defined as positive. This result may show that although employees have conflicts with female principals, female principals can also cope with conflicts at school.

Research reveals that there is no difference between the success of male and female school principals in management (Boydak Özan & Akpınar, 2002; Tok & Yalçın, 2017). However, in this study, the participants mainly emphasized the weaknesses of female school principals in leadership. Also in Çelikten's (2005) study, the participating female teachers indicated that it is more difficult to work with female principals. On the other hand, Mostafa (2005), Cortis and Cassar (2005) found that female teachers have more positive attitudes towards female administrators. These independent results for different groups show that, contrary to existing stereotypes, female teachers should avoid general preconceptions about female school principals. Not all female and male principals have the same characteristics. It is essential to examine the behavior of the leader without putting gender-related factors in focus. At the same time, school principals must be consistent in the decisions they make and implement. Must demonstrate leadership with a professional approach. This research examined the behaviors of female school principals from the point of view of female teachers working in private schools and presented different views on this issue. However, the study group only includes private schools in Istanbul. Future research could therefore be conducted in other types of schools or focus on principals' stereotypes of age and professional seniority, apart from gender, and to what extent these stereotypes predict teachers' performance.

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