



Female Leaders in Lebanese Private Schools: Perceptions, Barriers, and Leadership Characteristics

John Issa

Faculty of Education,
Middle East University, Jdeidet El Metn, Lebanon

Nibal Hariri

Faculty of Education,
Middle East University, Jdeidet El Metn, Lebanon

ABSTRACT

Globally females are underrepresented in leadership positions. In academic settings, despite the majority of teachers being females, there is no equal representation between the two genders when it comes to leadership. The trend remains that females teach and males manage. This is discriminatory and unfair, especially when female leaders have an advantage over male leaders in school settings. If females are more effective in academic leadership positions, why aren't they provided with equal leadership opportunities? This paper uncovers the perceptions surrounding female leaders and their ability to lead, the barriers that forbid females from advancing to leadership positions, and the predominant leadership characteristics viewed in each gender. By surveying female and male teachers from Lebanese private schools in the district of Mount Lebanon, this paper indicates that female leaders are surrounded with positive perceptions, but are, however, prevented from advancing to leadership positions by several challenges. The two most prominent barriers to female leadership are found to be related to organizational discrimination, and societal pressures. Moreover, the predominant leadership characteristics visible in each gender are confirmed by this study. Similar to studies about the situation of female leaders in other Arab countries, this research reveals a growing acceptance for female leaders in Lebanese private schools, despite the presence of challenging barriers. By uncovering the current situation of Lebanese female leaders in private schools, this study helps pave the path for much needed solutions in terms of gender equality and equity.

Keywords: female, leadership, education, representation, barriers, discrimination, equality, gender.

INTRODUCTION

Women in the Arab world daily fight for their rights to equal treatment and representation. Despite all their efforts, they remain victims of unfair regimes and laws that favor men over women. The Global Gender Gap report for the year 2020 revealed that Arab countries were nowhere near closing the gender gap and attaining equality (World Economic Forum [WEF], 2020). In this report, all Arab countries held places at the lower half of the list with low scores. Although some Arab countries do better than others, the results showed that none of them has

succeeded yet. In all those countries, Arab women remain unable to keep up with their male counterparts.

Among the Arab countries was Lebanon with an alarmingly low score. It ranked 145 out of the 153 countries on the list, which placed it eight countries away from being the lowest ranked country with a score slightly above Saudi Arabia, Iran, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen (WEF, 2020). This raised major questions regarding the reasons for this huge gender gap, and the barriers that stood against women's equality in Lebanon.

A report on women's education in Lebanon showed that females were not at a disadvantage (El-Khaled, Novas, Gazquez, Garcia, & Manzano-Agugliaro, 2016). In terms of enrollment in school, the number of female and male students was equal. Beyond that, female students outnumbered male students in the secondary level, and in both private and public universities. This indicated that women were not deprived of their rights to education in Lebanon, nor were they academically outperformed by males. In fact, educated women with varying degrees and skills existed, and could make for great job candidates. This made it hard to explain why so few of them work, and indicated that there were other barriers, not necessarily related to levels of education, which denied them access to jobs.

According to the World Bank, only 26% of women participated in the labor market in Lebanon (Muller & Wai-Poi, 2020). The report stated that those 26% are the ones who were able to pass through the four stages of attaining a job as a woman "getting ready, entering and remaining, getting married, and having a child" (para. 4). It showed that at each stage women were filtered through a system that preferred younger, higher educated, and unmarried women. This discrimination against women lowered their chances at employment and showed that women candidates may not be chosen solely for their skills and competencies, for their age and marital status. While this confirmed how hard it is for women in Lebanon to obtain a job, it also implied that it might be even harder for them to obtain jobs in leadership positions.

A study about female leaders in Lebanon found that the number of women in leadership positions had increased (Hejasi, Haddad, Hamdar, Massoud, & Farha, 2013). While this might be a good sign, the study went on to explain that those women were required to perform exceptionally better than their male equivalents to be accepted, and that regardless of their hard work, Lebanese women in leadership positions could not escape being compared to men. These findings suggested that female leaders in Lebanon continuously had to fight for their positions and their worthiness to keep their jobs. It also suggested that employees still believed that males should hold leadership positions, even if they accepted and worked under a female superior. This unfortunately strengthened the predominant claim that only men are fit to lead, and that leadership required masculine skills (Graves, 2018).

Male dominance in leadership positions holds a strong record throughout history (American Council on Education, 2017; Mason, 2013). Unfortunately, this has led to the persistent and recurrent underrepresentation of women becoming a global trend. In 2019, only 29% of women were found to hold senior leadership positions globally, which was very low compared to men, despite it being the highest level ever recorded (Women in Management, 2020). For instance, in the United States, although women made up 47% of the workforce, and they were

the main or sole earners in 40% of households (Breadwinner Moms, 2013), only 21% of them held senior leadership positions (Serafin, 2013).

This was also the case for Arab women. In the MENA region, women were still an underutilized economic resource. Even though they made up 49% of the general population in the region, their involvement in the labor market, and in positions of leadership was lower (OECD, 2019). In fact, the MENA region held the lowest rate in any world region with only 20% of their women enrolled in the labor market (Roudi-Fahimi & Moghadam, 2003).

Although women's educational achievement witnessed a fast rise with the number of females participating in higher education having tripled globally between 1995 and 2018 (UNESCO, 2021), their low participation in the labor market persisted. This means that for some women, the increase of their education level, did not necessarily lead to the increase of their participation in the labor market, or in leadership positions. This was especially true for many Arab women who did not lag in terms of skills or degrees, but were still unwelcomed in the workforce (Jalbout, 2015).

Despite the support of women's rights, the majority in many Arab societies advocated restricting women's roles in society (Robbins & Thomas, 2018). Arab men were in general less supportive of women's rights, and more confining in their expectations of women's responsibilities. Consequently, efforts to enhance women's equality should go beyond providing equal rights, and instead focus on attitudinal reforms regarding the role's women should play in society. Arab women's fair representation and success in the job market does not solely rest on the presence of equal access, equal opportunities, equal rights, or fair laws. Some Arab countries like Lebanon for example, have laws that protect and support women's equal rights, but are nowhere near gender equality. Instead, women need positive perceptions, and cultural acceptance. They need growth in how society views them, and the kind of attitudes it holds towards them and the roles they are allowed to claim in society. In most cases, the problem is not with females' lack of education, nor with the lack of laws that protect their rights, but with the lack of acceptance from society.

Historically, the problem of women's underrepresentation in school leadership positions has been a persistent one. While females make up the majority of the teaching force, few of them eventually claim leadership positions (Dotzler, 1993; Hoff, Menard & Tuell, 2006; Harrison, 2014; Diez Gutierrez, 2016), and the trend remains that females teach, and males lead. Likewise, in Lebanon, women candidates in leadership are surpassed and overlooked, which leads to their underrepresentation in the workplace, and especially in leadership positions (Sidahmed, 2014).

Therefore, the following research questions will help us better understand this dilemma and provide us with the necessary data to suggest solutions: 1) What are the teachers' perceptions of female leaders in academic settings?, 2) What are the barriers that cause female underrepresentation in academic leadership positions?, 3) What are the predominant leadership characteristics that can be viewed in each gender? and 4) Is there any correlational effect between teacher's perceptions, gender-based barriers, and leadership characteristics?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Feminism: A Call for Gender Equality

Feminism is the support of women's political, social, and economic rights on an equal footing with men (Boushey, 2009). It is a political, cultural, and economic movement that advocates for women's legal equality and protection, and is centered on philosophical, political, and sociological theories that deal with gender inequality. Feminists all over the world have varying purposes, objectives, and causes based on their culture, educational background, time, intentions, and so on, but most of them strive for the same goal: equal opportunity and equal rights for women (Boushey, 2009).

The history of feminism is divided into three waves, each with distinct aims and goals that are influenced by prior successes (Flexner & Fitzpatrick, 1996). The first wave of feminism started in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and it focused on addressing legal inequities, particularly in relation to women's suffrage. The second wave, which lasted from 1960 until 1980, advocated for women's legal and social rights, as well as issues such as cultural inequities, gender sensitization, and an emphasis on women's responsibilities in society. And lastly, the third wave of feminism, spanned from 1990 to our present time. This specific wave was characterized by a broader viewpoint and was regarded as a continuation of the second wave, while addressing its perceived faults and problems. The distinct feminist views of this wave are:

1. **Radical feminism:** Radical feminists argue that regardless of ethnicity, societal/economic class, or educational background, patriarchy is the primary source of female oppression in society (Muhr, 2011). Thus, this view is primarily concerned with ending violence against women and ending women's societal subordination because of male aggression.
2. **Cultural feminism:** For cultural feminists, the biological differences between men and women have produced female cultures and male cultures, which impacted both women's and men's social conduct (Goodman, 2010). For example, cultural feminists see nurturing and caring as distinguishing characteristics of female culture, and aggressiveness and rivalry as characteristics of masculine culture. Thus, they call for the acknowledgment of women's labor as economically and socially viable, and for the workplace to be more accessible to female culture.
3. **Liberal feminism:** In contrast to cultural feminism, liberal feminists hold that differences in social conduct is related to the individual's environment and circumstances rather than his/her biological composition. Liberal feminists call for providing opportunities that eventually lead to gender equality between men and women (Muhr, 2011).
4. **Anarchist feminism:** Anarchist feminists believe that patriarchy's domination is the outcome of societal hierarchy. When it comes to gender problems, their main goal is to resist any government that promotes this hierarchy and social strata (Goodman, 2010).
5. **Eco feminism:** Eco feminists believe that women and the environment are linked because both can produce nurturing and sustaining life (Goodman, 2010). They believe that men in positions of authority may take advantage of women and the environment, because they perceive them as defenseless and docile. Thus, their main goal is to eliminate gender inequality through protecting and honoring women and the environment.
6. **Post-colonial feminism:** The marginalization of non-white, non-Western women in post-colonial nations, according to post-colonial feminists, was a result of the racial and

economic subjugation they experienced during colonization. Post-colonial feminists oppose radical and liberal feminism as well as the modernization and empowerment of women in their nations and think that gender equality can be accomplished through their own traditional methods (Crowley, 1991).

7. Social (Marxist) feminism: For social/Marxist feminists, achieving gender equality takes place when all other types of discrimination, such as racial, religious, and economic discrimination, are addressed in society (Coleman, 2003).
8. Womanism: Womanism began in the United States by women from African, Hispanic, and Asian ethnicities who believe that women are still oppressed not only by men, but by a racist culture as well (Sarta, 2000).
9. Post-modern feminism: The post-modern feminist movement claims that there is no clear biological or social definition of gender, and that many other kinds of individuality (such as ethnicity, color, and sexuality) define each woman differently (Beasley, 2005).

All those views and movements related to feminism have helped women progress and reach where they are today. The feminist movement is worth mentioning in this study given its huge impact in terms of culture and legislation. It has helped shift viewpoints throughout history and still affects us and our current societies today. However, even though great progress has been made in raising global awareness on gender problems, the fight for the implementation of more laws that promote gender equality is a must. Women deserve to be provided with more equal opportunities and positive attitudes to grow, develop, and advance.

Leadership: Definition and Importance

Leadership is a complex activity. In fact, defining the term leadership is a dilemma. According to a study, researchers tend to define leadership in a manner relative to their individual views and interests (Rosari, 2019). This means that most definitions are subjective in the sense that they highlight what each author considers a crucial aspect of leadership. For example, based on his/her experience, one author might view leadership as an act of power over others, while another author might view it as an act of support towards others. In addition to that, the practices associated with leadership change over time and in each culture (Vecchio, 2007). This means that what was viewed as good leadership a decade ago might not apply today, or that the leadership practices accepted in Lebanon for instance, might be condemned elsewhere. This explains why there are several valid definitions for the term, and why it is hard to agree on a universal one.

Cambridge dictionary defines leadership as “the job of being in control of a group, country, or situation.” A simple definition like this one is unfortunately incomplete, as it merely focuses on the dominant-subservient nature of leadership and does not capture its true complexity. Leadership however, is so much more than that. Napoleon Bonaparte said, “A leader is a dealer in hope” (Napoleon Bonaparte Quotes, n.d.). His definition implied that leadership was not about controlling people, nor leading them blindly. Instead, he viewed motivation, encouragement, and inspiration as crucial elements when it comes to leadership. Similarly, for Cuban (1998), leaders influence their followers’ goals, motivation, and actions, so that they can inspire and lead by example. Abed Malik & Azmat (2019) suggested that leadership focuses on motivating people, shifting goals as the needs change, and creating bonds with individuals that surpassed the formal ones. In turn, their definition stressed the importance of embracing change as opposed to fixation, and the leaders’ ability to shift and adapt goals wisely. Bernard

Bass also wrote of similar leadership traits (as cited in Abed Malik & Azmat, 2019, p.19). For him, leadership was inspiring people and cultivating their willingness to follow, with his concern being that people followed by choice, not by force. In contrast, Prentice (1961) viewed leadership from a different perspective. According to him, "the man who successfully marshals his human collaborators to achieve particular ends is a leader. A great leader is one who can do so day after day, and year after year, in a wide variety of circumstances" (p. 102). This meant that for him, success and consistency were the most crucial traits of leadership. However, his definition stressed both notions negatively, and implied that a leader can never experience failure or else that leader is unfit to lead.

Despite the varying aspects of leadership, and the absence of an inclusive definition for the term, it is evident that the act of leadership is of grave importance. "Most organizations agree nowadays that effective leadership is one of the most important contributors to the overall organizational performance and development" (Simiyu, 2015, p. 18). Effective leaders are significantly influential, and their success reflects on the organization as a whole. Several studies show the importance of leadership and how it is directly related to organizational performance (Ibrahim & Daniel, 2019; Ebrahimi, Moosavi, & Chirani, 2016; Madanchian, Hussein, Noordin, & Taherdoost, 2016). Employee dedication and inspiration, personal sacrifice, and the will to increase performance levels are all fostered by effective leadership (Lowe et al, as cited in Cakir & Adiguzel, 2020). Moreover, an effective leader serves as a role model, and can shape his/her employees' attitudes and beliefs, after gaining their trust and helping them successfully accomplish goals (Grint, as cited in Hao & Yazdanifard, 2015). In contrast, in the absence of leadership, employees' efforts and abilities will not be well organized which will eventually result in low or no productivity (Meraku, 2017). This means that it is not enough to group individuals together, ask them to work toward a common goal, and expect higher productivity if they are left unorganized and unmanaged.

Educational institutions, like any other organization, also require leadership. They, however, require a specific type of leadership called *academic leadership*, which is different from the general term in the sense that it concerns an academic setting (Sathye, 2004; Saroyan, Getahun, & Gebre, 2011). This type of leadership influences both the instruction and the learning process and is therefore, crucial to the success of any academic institution (Saroyan, Getahun, & Gebre, 2011; Shahmandi, Silong, Ismail, Bin Abu Samah, & Othman, 2011; Wilson, 2011;). According to a study, the academic leaders of top-ranking universities in the United States are supportive leaders (Gonzalez & Sutton, 2013). They are called supportive academic leaders because they can use their resources to improve and serve the needs of their faculty, they are keen on achieving and advancing the institution's mission, and they are good communicators who are able to elicit trust from their faculty members. Likewise, in another study conducted in Saudi Arabia, female department chairs in higher education identified several important characteristics attributed with effective leadership practices like time management, problem solving, people skills, and both theoretical and practical knowledge of leadership theories (Gonaim & Peters, 2017).

In addition to the leadership characteristics and skills, a huge part of the leader's success depends on the leadership style the person adopts (Mitonga-Monga, Coetzee, & Cilliers, 2011, Al Rahbi, Khalid, & Khan, 2017; Al Khajeh, 2018; Rahman, 2018; Akparep, Jengre, & Mogre, 2019). In 1939, social psychologist Kurt Lewin identified three main styles of leadership:

democratic, autocratic, and laissez-faire (Leadership & Performance Partners, 2019). In one study concerning the effects of each leadership style on academic achievement conducted in secondary schools in Punjab, results showed that autocratic leadership caused stress and led to a decrease in academic achievement, while democratic leadership fostered an effective environment and led to an increase in academic achievement, and laissez-faire leadership caused confusion and lowered accountability, which led to a decrease in academic achievement (Dahar, Faize, Niwaz, Hussian & Zaman, 2010).

Researchers have extensively studied and observed each leadership style which eventually led to the emergence of new and more specific ones: transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and situational leadership (Cherry, 2021). Out of all the leadership styles, most studies argue that transformational leadership is the most effective one (Moradi Korejan & Shahbazi, 2016; Alqatawenh, 2018; Susilo, 2018). The transformational leadership theory was initially introduced by Burns in 1978, and later expanded by Bass in 1985 (White, 2018). Bass and Riggio (as cited in Okinyi, Kwaba, & Nyabuto, 2015) state that:

Transformational leaders are those who stimulate and inspire followers to both achieve extraordinary outcomes, and in the process, develop their own leadership capacity. Transformational leaders help followers grow and develop into leaders by responding to individual followers' needs by empowering them and by aligning the objectives and goals of the individual followers, the leader, the group, and the larger organization. (p. 105)

Due to its several benefits, and its success across different fields, the transformational leadership theory has become the most favored leadership theory especially when used in the field of education (Jovanovic & Ciric, 2016). In one study, the author proposes transformational leadership to be the ideal leadership theory in school settings especially when there are existing pressures on those schools for higher achievement and school improvements. According to him, transformational leadership emphasizes training employees to learn new things, constructing and strengthening new organizational norms, developing new meaning and ways of thinking, and helping leaders break existing norms that reshape school culture (Simsek, 2013). Moreover, transformational principals are valued by teachers and are seen as inspiring role models (Allen, Grigsby, & Peters, 2015). When administrators demonstrate transformational leadership, especially when it takes the form of individualized concern, teachers feel more satisfied about their school surroundings, which in turn helps the fostering of a cooperative and trustworthy relationship between teachers and principals (Hausermman & Stick, 2013).

A Brief History of Working Women:

The treatment of women in the education sector paralleled what happened in the working sector, where females were not provided equal opportunities. Around the end of the 18th century, boys in colonial America attended *dame schools* which were established in the kitchens of elderly women and aimed to prepare boys to enter town schools (Madigan, 2009). Girls on the other hand, attended dame schools, but were not allowed further education. They were denied access into town schools up until the 19th century. In later years, when public secondary schools became coeducational, boys and girls were still not allowed equal opportunities in their education. Despite the growth of women's roles in society, females were funneled into four

vocational categories up until the mid-1960s: secretarial, nursing, teaching, or motherhood (Sadker & Sadker, as cited in Madigan, 2009). Higher education also followed a similar trend. For example, Harvard College was founded in 1636, but exclusively accepted white males from important families. The case remained as such for 300 years, until the 19th century, when women won the battle for admission to America's universities (Carlton, 2021).

Likewise, in terms of work, throughout history, women and men had very different gender expectations. Between the 16th and 19th centuries, the kind of work that women did varied between housework, tailoring, baking, gardening, in-keeping and even being midwives (Lambert, 2021; Byrne, 2008). Even though few females had the chance to attend dame schools, the general perception was that women were intellectually inferior and docile, because they were mostly governed by their emotions. However, sparks of rebellion could be sensed during the 18th century, where some women dressed and disguised as men to access different work opportunities. Later in the 20th century, the number of working women increased as a result of increased education, and the emergence of new technologies that demanded desk jobs, often handled by females. The most significant increase of women in the labor force was recorded in the early 90s reaching 74% compared to 93% for males (Yellen, 2020).

Today, in the 21st century, views regarding working women and gender roles have drastically changed in large parts of the world. Women play a far greater part regarding the economy and their role in society. In fact, studies show an increasing number of homes in the United States depending on the mother as a breadwinner or a co-breadwinner (Boushey & Farrell, 2013). However, regardless of this progress, 21st century working women have not yet reached gender equality. Women continue to shoulder a greater share of family caregiving responsibilities, and because the barriers they face in the workplace and at home keep growing, their economic wellbeing keeps on being threatened over the course of their lives (Boushey & Farrell, 2013). According to Verma & Mulani (2018), some challenges facing working women in the 21st century are gender discrimination, work-home balance, harassment (mental and physical), and the lack of personal time.

Even though the number of women in leadership positions has increased dramatically over the last decade, organizations remain male-dominated. This tendency persists, even though most of the research and anecdotal evidence suggests that the most successful businesses are the ones that will continue to develop the skills and promote the contributions of their female employees (Hewlett & Luce, 2005).

Gender and Leadership:

Most prejudice against female leaders stems from the role-congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This theory states that people tend to reject female leaders because the qualities they associate with females are inconsistent with the qualities they associate with a successful leader. For example, female leaders are looked down on for valuing tasks like building relationships and strengthening involvement. However, leadership tasks such as making decisions, assigning roles, allocating resources, and formulating strategies are all considered male strengths (Atwater, Brett, Waldman, DiMare, & Hayden, 2004). As a result of these perceptions, males, specifically masculinity, remains to be directly associated with leadership (Keohane 2007, as cited in Dahlivig & Longman, 2010; Dennis & Kunkel, 2004; Yeagley, Subich, & Tokar, 2010). In other words, males as opposed to females, are born into the advantage of

becoming leaders and are brought up to expect it. Men believe that when there aren't enough job vacancies, they have more right to a job than women, and that compared to women, they are better political leaders and business executives (Kiser, 2015).

This contradicts with other studies that put women at an advantage over men when it comes to leadership styles. Surprisingly, the preference for male leadership remains even though females tend to display more effective leadership styles (Eagly, 2007). A study by Bernard Bass found that compared to men, women are more transformational in their style (Bass & Avolio, 1994). Similarly, Dahlivig and Longman (2010) stated that, "studies of leadership style have shown that women are more effective than men in transformational leadership" (p.240). This evidence leads us to believe that women leaders are not only needed to achieve organizational success, but they are also more likely to succeed than men.

In one study conducted in South Africa, Generation Z business undergraduates were surveyed for their perceptions on gender and leadership. The author chose to survey Generation Z respondents because they represented the future leaders in South Africa, and their opinion may set the new trend. The results showed that both females and males believed that good leaders required more feminine traits as opposed to masculine ones (Bornman, 2019).

Moreover, in one large-scale study conducted in the United States, a 360-degree assessment instrument was used to assess leaders' relational and task-oriented behaviors. The study included respondents from different ethnic backgrounds who worked in several fields. According to the results, employees working under female leaders rated them higher than male leaders on nine out of the ten relational leadership behaviors: communication, teamwork, empowerment, creating trust, coaching, change facilitation, participation, recognition, and approachability. Similarly, employees also rated female leaders higher than males on nine out of the ten task-oriented skills: setting goals, planning, and organizing, technical competence, establishing performance standards, direct communication, strategizing, employee evaluation, resourcefulness, and decisiveness (Pfaff, Boatwright, Potthoff, Finan, Ulrey & Huber, 2013).

The results showed that for the relational leadership behaviors, female leaders rated themselves higher than male leaders on only seven dimensions, and for the task-oriented skills, female leaders rate themselves higher on only five dimensions. Such studies proved the gender stereotype of women being more advantaged in relational and interpersonal skills (feminine skills) and less advantaged in goal or task-oriented skills (masculine skills) wrong. It showed that females possess the needed balance of skills to successfully perform leadership tasks. More importantly, it further stressed that when provided with the opportunity, female leaders were able to outperform male leaders in most of those leadership tasks. According to an examination of thousands of 360-degree assessments, women outperform males on 17 of the 19 qualities that distinguish outstanding leaders from mediocre or weak ones (Zenger & Folkman, 2019). Women score higher than men on leadership qualities like taking initiative, bold leadership, resilience, inspiring and motivating others, and innovation.

Similarly, in terms of academic leadership, female principals outperform their male counterparts on skills like adaptability and selecting the suitable leadership behavior (Krumm & Gates, as cited in Funk & Polnick, 2005). As academic leaders, "women spend more time interacting with teachers and students, and more time in discussion about the academic

program of the school, viewing their job more from the perspective of master-teacher or educational leader than from a managerial-industrial perspective” (Shakeshaft, as cited in Dotzler, 1993, p. 26). Additionally, female academic leaders have more transformational leadership qualities than males, and less transactional and laissez-faire qualities (Suranga Silva & Mendis, 2017).

Perceptions towards Female Leaders:

Perceptions surrounding female leaders vary according to culture, context and other factors. Elsesser and Lever (2011) conducted a large-scale study in the United States, and asked participants to state their gender preference for leadership. When asked to justify why they preferred female leaders, female participants stated reasons like compassion, understanding, competence, better chemistry, and positive previous experiences with female bosses. Conversely when the male participants were asked why they preferred female leaders, they stated reasons like female managers being sexier, prettier, more attractive, gullible, and easier to manipulate than men. Such results confirm that some men view themselves superior to women, even when those women exceeded them in rank.

Another study conducted on Turkish participants showed that both females and males had negative attitudes towards female managers, and that women surprisingly showed more negative attitudes than men (Güney, Gohar, Akıncı & Akıncı, 2006). In that same study, the researchers compared those responses with ones collected from Pakistani participants where both women and men showed favorable attitudes towards women leaders. These findings were attributed to the present culture of both countries that in turn influenced the participants’ feelings.

In another large-scale study conducted in Malaysia, the findings suggested that although females have more positive attitudes towards female leaders than males, most participants agreed that female leaders were as effective as male leaders (Hilal, 2015). Similar findings were also found from a study conducted in Bangladesh (Islam & Nasira, 2016) where the general attitude towards women leadership was found to be positive.

In the Arab World, perceptions regarding female leaders are not very different from other countries. Arab females have more positive attitudes regarding female leaders as opposed to males (Abdullah, as cited in Omair, 2008). Due to this gender bias, Arab women find themselves restricted to traditional roles. In Kuwait and UAE, studies show growing positive perceptions regarding female leaders, unlike other countries like Egypt where strong negative feelings persist towards all women who work, and especially women in leadership (Omair, 2008).

In Saudi Arabia, both women and men believe that women lack leadership skills and abilities (Hodges, 2017). Saudi women are discriminated against in organizational practices and are discouraged from advancement and development. In their bringing up, they are suppressed by cultural pressures that view them second to men, which affects their participation in leadership roles and positions.

In a study conducted in Jordan regarding gender roles, female participants were found in favor of women’s participation in both the public and the economic spheres (Shteixe, 2015), while males stuck to their traditional views that favored female inferiority. Fortunately, the same

study also found that younger Jordanian participants exhibited more progressive attitudes towards female advancement, which signals promising progress towards gender equality in the years to come.

In Syria, women are still struggling to participate in the labor market (Freedom House, 2010). They are held back by an extremely patriarchal legal system and culture. The cultural norms demand that women must ask for their husbands' permission before accepting a job or even applying for one. Moreover, the legal system does not give women the freedom of choice when it comes to career options since some professions are forbidden to women by law.

In Lebanon, little progress has been made towards gender equality and women empowerment (Avis, 2017). After the country's independence in 1943, Lebanese women were granted the right to vote in 1953, making Lebanon one of the first Arab countries to grant political rights to women. According to research, "Lebanon is among the Arab countries that have allowed women to assume functions and responsibilities outside the traditional mother-home roles. This is due to several reasons, many of which are peculiar to Lebanon" (Sidani, as cited in Jamali, Sidani, & Safieddine, 2005, p.584). However, despite these progressive activities, and the Lebanese legal system being liberal compared to other Arab countries, it is surprising why gender equality remains unattainable.

Furthermore, in terms of Lebanese women in leadership positions, another study found that women who wish to participate in leadership must mimic masculine characteristics if they hope to succeed (Kiwan, Farah, Annan, & Jaber, 2016). Thus, in fear of coming off as too weak or incompetent, some Lebanese women take on masculine traits to harvest male acceptance. However, the women respondents in that same study stated that they preferred having male leaders, because women who choose to discard their femininity are often judged harder. If Lebanese women leaders cannot succeed if they display feminine traits, and they cannot be accepted if they display masculine traits, what other options do they have?

These findings show that the negative attitudes towards women and their participation in leadership positions is a global trend. Even though some countries have more favorable attitudes towards female leaders, gender bias and discrimination are always present.

Barriers to Female Leadership:

Barriers to female leaders in education are like the same ones present in all other fields (Hufstedler, as cited in Litmanovitz, 2010). For example, in the United States, the lack of models, demanding domestic responsibilities, stereotyping, lack of mentors, and the lack of support from home are all potential reasons for the underrepresentation of female leaders in many professions including education (Litmanovitz, 2010). According to female administrators, becoming a leader is a challenging process (Hoff, Menard, & Tuell, 2006). They agree that in terms of access to leadership, the majority of them have no prior intentions of becoming leaders but somehow find themselves in front of an opportunity or are pressed into it, that most of them move up the scale within the same district instead of making inter-district moves, and that they take their time in preparing and in making sure their home responsibilities do not suffer because of the new job. Moreover, in terms of barriers upon entering, they agree that female administrators are not easily assimilated and accepted within the organization like their male

counterparts. This was due to the lack of support structures, having to adopt male traits to be accepted, and the presence of a male dominated network in educational administration.

Similarly, female school principals are often underrepresented because of factors like stereotyping, the existing culture and traditions, some women's low level of education, the claim that women have low confidence and self-esteem, and the lack of female mentors (Airin, 2010). Female leaders feel that the opportunities presented to them are far less than those presented to their male colleagues, and that if they were to be presented with an opportunity, they would have to work harder than any man to get the job (Yadav & Lata, 2018). Furthermore, females who wish to advance into leadership or succeed in doing so often face rejection from their male colleagues (Agyeiwaa & Attom, 2018). They are not supported, nor treated with respect. The ill feelings that stem out of the male claim of superiority obscures their ability to truly see and recognize female potential. As a result, female leaders often feel that they are alone, left out, and unappreciated which also explains why some of them turn down leadership roles, or are hesitant to accept them.

According to Mathipa & Tsoka (2001), there are several barriers that forbid women from advancing to leadership positions when it comes to education. For them, all those barriers are a product of the false assumptions that surround women and their ability to lead. Women more than men are associated with poor self-image, lack of assertiveness, less career orientation, low-confidence, discrimination, and demotion. All those perceptions play a role in how other people view female leaders as well as in how female leaders view themselves. While women are oppressed in a male-dominated society, some of them also reinforce oppression by the expectations and preconceived notions about their duties. Their self-perceptions are often negative, which makes them accomplices in women's oppression in general (Skenjana, as cited in Msila, 2013).

In one study conducted in Lebanon, the authors classified the barriers to female leadership into three categories (Jamali, Sidani, & Safieddine, 2005). To collect their findings, the authors interviewed 52 female managers across different fields. According to their responses, the barriers were (1) the socio-cultural environment being heavily patriarchal, (2) the corporate environment viewing women at a disadvantage because of their domestic duties, and (3) the structural environment denying women equal job-related opportunities. Conversely in another study, the results found that Lebanese female managers were satisfied with their current career advancements, were not discriminated against because of their gender, were not constrained by organizational practices, did not feel isolated because of their gender, and that their male co-workers and superiors were comfortable working with them despite their gender (Al-Shawi & Aldahwi, 2013). In this study, the only factor that was perceived to be more important than gender in terms of recruitment and promotion was the use of *wasta*, being connected to someone who facilitates your advancement.

Lebanese female managers contend that the barriers that impede women's professional advancement in Lebanese organizations are related to the organizational structures and policies. Out of 411 Lebanese female managers, 61.1% believed males had more professional development chances than women, and 60.8% wished they had more chances for professional development. They stressed the significance of discriminatory and gender-centered barriers in the company, regardless of the women's management position, and they agreed on the need for

a more supportive corporate culture that prioritized promoting the best candidates based on their qualifications and performance rather than their gender (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2010).

According to Haidar (2018), the number of Lebanese women employed in higher education is still very low. There is no fair representation between women and men holding top managerial positions. The study findings suggested that Lebanese women who seek leadership positions must put forth double the effort to be acknowledged. More importantly, in terms of whether or not the presence of female leaders affected the success of Lebanese institutions, the study confirmed that “the presence of women is a competitive advantage for the educational sector” (p. 9). All these findings mentioned above confirm the presence of strong barriers that hinder women’s chances of advancement into leadership positions, and most of which seem to be associated with gender discrimination and gender inequality.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology section of this research, as well as the instrument used to collect the needed data help understand the perceptions, barriers, and leadership characteristics of academic female leaders. The study uses a survey adopted from Hejasi et al. (2013), which was adapted to suit the current purpose of this research.

Research Design

This study uses a quantitative cross-sectional research design. The research questions along with the survey aim to explore three areas: perceptions, barriers, and leadership characteristics. According to Alreck and Settle (2004), perceptions are key factors in research because they aid in predicting patterns and trends, which help in clarifying where things are headed. The study also sets out to explore the prominent barriers to female leadership, because they help predict future remedies to this issue. Moreover, comparing the leadership characteristics between females and males will hopefully help highlight the leadership strengths of both genders.

Furthermore, a cross-sectional research design is used in this study, which helps examine data from a group of people at a single point in time, and does not involve manipulating variables (Cherry, 2019).

The study also uses a descriptive research design method, which is best used to characterize a population, circumstance, or phenomena in a methodical and precise manner. Descriptive research can provide answers to questions like what, where, when, and how (McCombes, 2019).

Population and Sample

A convenience sample of n=92 Lebanese private school teachers completed the survey, although a much larger sample was targeted. Several obstacles arose during the data collection period and resulted in the retrieval of a smaller sample, while at the same time, Covid-19 restrictions limited participants to private schools in the area of Mount-Lebanon.

The targeted schools were contacted and asked to participate by phone and/or email. The respondents received and answered the survey through two means: an online link, or a hard copy. The targeted private schools were all co-educational schools, and were chosen regardless

of the school size, number of students in each school, their educational system, the type of program/curriculum used in the school, and the socio-economic status of the students.

The total sample was comprised of both female and male teachers who differed in age, years of experience, academic qualifications, and academic training. Additionally, due to the diverse population of the chosen areas, the sample included respondents from different religious backgrounds.

Instrumentation

Permission was secured to use this survey, which was originally developed by Hejasi, Haddad, Hamdar, Massoud, and Farha (2013). The original survey has three sections respectively, women in managerial positions, behaviors and attitudes towards female leadership, and demographics. It also includes an open-ended question following the last section. The original survey focuses on Lebanese women in leadership positions across several fields and professions not only in schools, the attitudes of employees towards female leaders, and the probable reasons behind those attitudes.

However, this study uses an adapted form of the survey and has four sections respectively: 1) Demographics (gender, age, highest academic degree, and years of teaching experience), 2) teachers' perceptions of female leaders, 3) barriers that prevent females from advancing to leadership positions, and 4) the predominant leadership characteristics visible in each gender, and does not include an open-ended question. It will focus specifically on Lebanese academic female leaders in private schools: how they are viewed by their teachers, the barriers they face causing their underrepresentation, and the leadership characteristics that teachers view in each gender. In this study, the academic leaders represent school principals, heads of departments, supervisors, and coordinators.

Sections two, three, and four use a Likert-type scale derived from 5 scales. The 5-point Likert scale will have three cut-off points as follows:

- Two or below ($x \leq 2$) = Disagree
- Above two or below four ($2 < x < 4$) = Neutral
- Four or above ($x \geq 4$) = Agree

Descriptive statistics were extracted after entering the data using SPSS (Statistical Program for the Social Sciences) version 20. Further tests conducted were T-tests and ANOVA to check for interrelations between the variables in this study.

Ethical Considerations

All types of research-related communication were conducted with honesty and transparency. Participants were not subjected to any harm, and their names and personal information remained confidential and were not used for purposes beyond this study. For the participating schools, consent was obtained via email and their identity was kept anonymous. Furthermore, the respondents were contacted by their schools, and were given free choice to complete the survey. All 92 surveys were retrieved from teachers who willingly volunteered to participate in this study. Moreover, the data was presented in aggregate values rather than individual cases in the report, and the findings will be presented to the schools at the end of the study.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This part of the research presents a thorough analysis of the data retrieved from the survey, which will be used to answer the initial research questions.

Demographics

After surveying several teachers across different private schools in the area of Mount-Lebanon, 92 completed the survey. As shown in Table 1, among the 92 teachers that volunteered to participate in this survey, 64 were females and 28 were males. This difference in the number of female and male respondents was due to the already existing difference in the number of female and male teachers working at those schools. In general, female teachers outnumber male teachers in Lebanese schools.

This gender imbalance found in Lebanese private schools was consistent with global trends. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in the United States, for the school year 2017-2018, female teachers made up 76% of public-school teachers, whereas males made up 24% (2021). Similarly, in Finland, for the year 2016, women made up 80% of pre-primary teachers, class teachers, and full-time teachers, but made up less than half of the principals (Paronen & Lappi, 2018).

Table 1: Gender of the respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Males	28	30.4
Females	64	69.6
Total	92	100.0

In terms of the respondents' age, the largest age segment of the respondents (39%) was between the ages of 30 to 39, and the smallest age segment (11%) was above 50. According to Figure 1, the remaining age brackets had a very close similarity in numbers (24% ages 20-29: 26% ages 40-49).

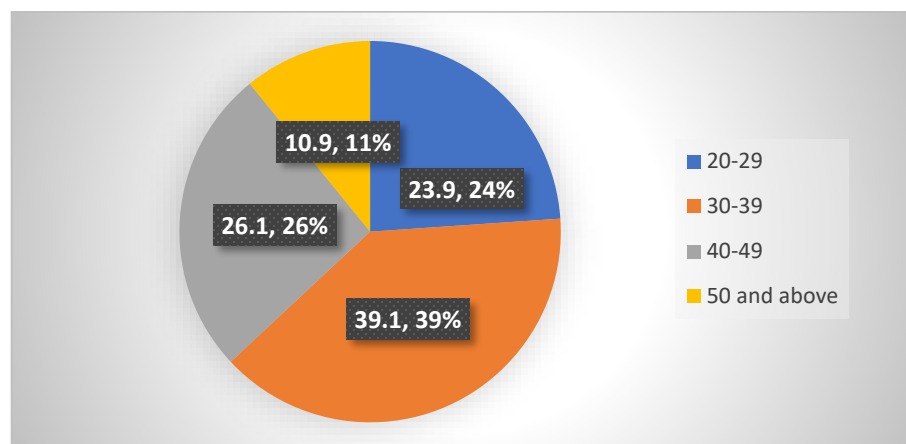


Figure 1: Respondents' Age

In terms of highest academic degree, the majority of the respondents (72%) had a bachelor's degree, 25% had a master's degree, 2% were high school graduates, and only 1% had a

Doctorate degree. Table 2 highlights how the respondents were categorized based on their academic degrees.

Table 2: Respondents' highest academic degree

	Frequency	Percent
High school graduate	2	2.2
Bachelor's degree	66	71.7
Master's degree	23	25.0
Doctorate degree	1	1.1
Total	92	100.0

Lastly, in terms of the respondents' years of teaching experience, most of the respondents (59%) had 10 and above years of teaching experience. Only 15% of the respondents were novice teachers with one to five years of teaching experience. The remaining 26% had between five and ten years of teaching experience. These results are highlighted in Table 3.

Table 3: Respondents' years of teaching experience

	Frequency	Percent
1-5 years	14	15.2
5-10 years	24	26.1
10 and above	54	58.7
Total	92	100.0

Overall, in terms of demographics, the 92 respondents consisted of mostly female teachers. The largest age segment of the respondents was between 30 and 39 years old and most of them had bachelor degrees, while most of them had 10 and above years of teaching experience.

Teachers' Perceptions of Female Leaders

Regarding teachers' perceptions towards female leaders in Lebanese private schools, the results as shown in Figure 2, contend that most respondents agreed that female leaders influence and motivate them professionally (39%). This means that female academic leaders in Lebanon are perceived to be influential and professionally motivating by their teachers. Such results are significant especially when recent studies contended otherwise.

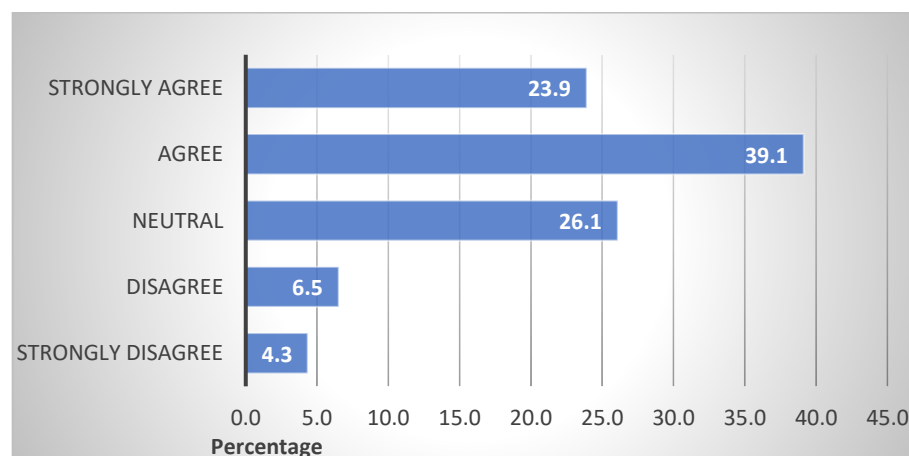


Figure 2: Female leaders' influence and motivation

According to Masry-Herzallah & Arar (2019), teachers' motivation is partially dictated by the degree of autonomy they are allotted by their school leader. Based on their results, male leaders were found to be more motivating than female leaders because they allowed teachers more freedom and flexibility. Male leaders were found to intervene less in their teacher's day-to-day activities, and to care more about product than process. However, the opposite was true when it came to female leaders who made the effort of following up on daily tasks and allotting more care to the learning process than the result.

While the teachers targeted in their study found the habit of following up on daily work and intervening repeatedly unmotivating, other teachers in different settings like the ones in this study may have found it comforting and supportive. Behaviors like caring more about the process rather than the end product, may be what distinguished the female leaders in the private schools targeted by this study. Compared to males, females might also have a longer experience in teaching before becoming leaders, which might explain why they are particular in looking for certain details.

Most of the respondents also agreed that female leaders are intelligent, competent, and skillful (43%); female leaders are powerful and independent (48%); female leaders show great drive and initiative in leadership positions (52%); and females acquire innate leadership traits and characteristics (49%). This means that female leaders in academic settings in Lebanon are perceived by their teachers to be intelligent, competent, skillful, powerful, independent, and driven. Moreover, the teachers perceive female leaders in academic settings as leaders who possess innate leadership traits and characteristics.

Studies contend that compared to males, females tend to display more effective leadership styles (Eagly, 2007). In addition to that, more feminine traits are required to make good leaders as opposed to masculine ones (Bornman, 2019). This conveys that although masculine skills have long been associated with leadership, females acquire skills and traits unique to them that may be similarly associated with good leadership. Those unique skills are thus noticed and appreciated by the teachers working under female leaders in Lebanon.

Additionally, based on the results of the retrieved data, most respondents agreed that female leaders balanced fairly between their home life and their work (41%). As highlighted in Table 3, these findings are nevertheless worth exploring, since they defy the common trend that places women at a disadvantage in leadership due to their home or maternal responsibilities. Women struggle to strike a work-life balance because of the professional pressures they confront daily, like the long working hours, the lack of supervisory support, the work overload, and the lack of clear policies (Tasnim, Hossain, & Enam, 2017). Moreover, Lebanese women often find taking up roles in leadership challenging and overbearing due to the dual responsibilities they have, and the absence of community or family support in such a patriarchal society (Kiwani, Farah, Annan, & Jaber, 2016).

This means that working Lebanese females, not just female leaders, continuously struggle to achieve the right balance between their home life and their work life. Unlike males, their struggle may place them at a disadvantage when it comes to their professional opportunities and advancements. Based on that, the teachers working under academic female leaders in

Lebanon who were targeted by this study may have perceived their female superiors as having the right balance in their lives because of several factors. One factor might be that they have underestimated the impact of work and familial challenges on female leaders' lives which made them disregard this barrier. Another factor might be that they may have truly witnessed a great deal of balance from their female superiors that made them think this way. Furthermore, a third factor might be that female leaders in private schools do not face overbearing work or professional challenges that make them struggle. For example, a study mentioned that Lebanese female managers were satisfied with their current career advancements, were not discriminated against because of their gender, were not constrained by organizational practices, and did not feel isolated because of their gender (Al-Shawi & Aldahwi, 2013).

Table 4: Responses to female leaders' balance between home and work

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	3	3.3
Disagree	6	6.5
Neutral	21	22.8
Agree	38	41.3
Strongly agree	24	26.1
Total	92	100.0

In addition to that, the findings suggest that most respondents agreed that female leaders are feminine and unselfish (37%). These results, highlighted in Figure 3, are also surprising because they are different from the views cited in the literature review. According to a study conducted in Lebanon, women who wish to participate in leadership must mimic masculine characteristics if they hope to succeed (Kiwani, Farah, Annan, & Jaber, 2016). They must engage in behaviors that are "more assertive, more aggressive, and less emotional" if they wish to fit in (p.19). For that, many Lebanese female leaders discard their femininity and adopt masculine traits in hopes of being accepted.

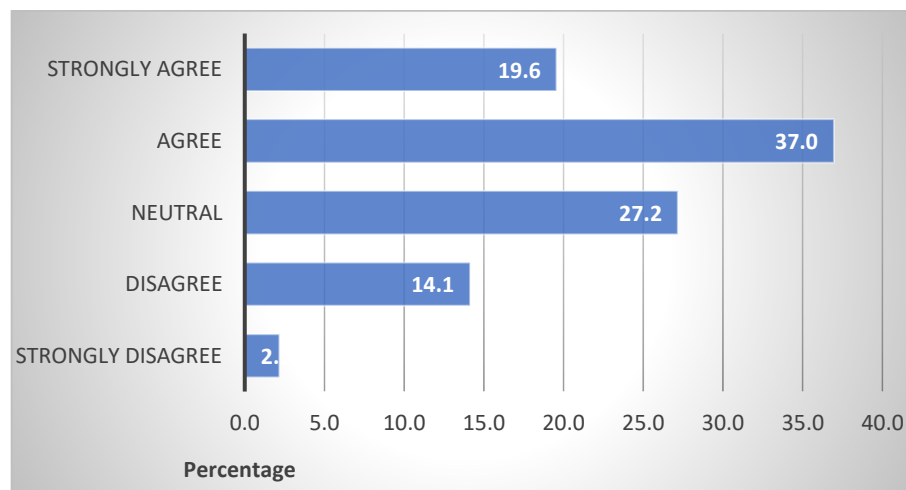


Figure 3: Female leaders being feminine and unselfish

However, based on the results, most of the participants in this study may not have experienced this with their female leaders. This might suggest a growing acceptance and support for

feminine traits in leadership implying that academic female leaders in Lebanon may no longer feel intimidated or embarrassed to come off as being too weak because of their femininity.

According to Figure 4, in terms of respondents' perceptions towards female leaders, while most respondents (39%) strongly disagreed that the gender of their school leader (principal, coordinator, supervisor, etc.) mattered to them, differences in responses were found between subgroups.

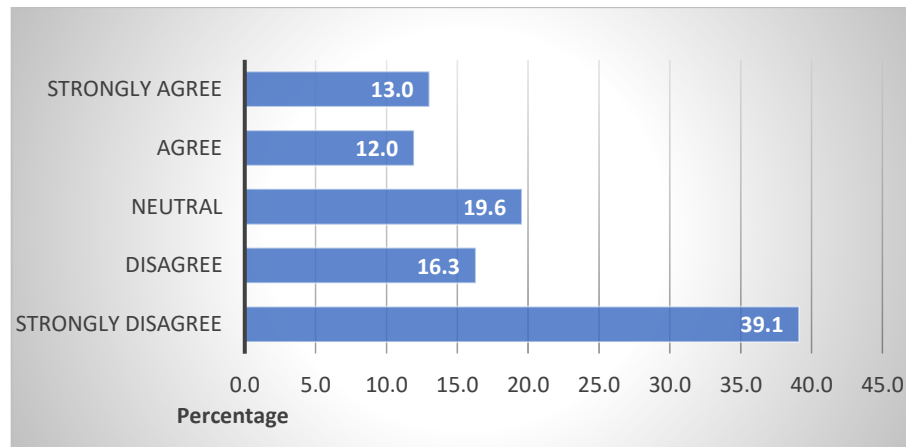


Figure 4: Concern about gender of school leader

While in terms of age, respondents ages 20 to 29, and ages 30 to 39 disagreed that the gender of their school leader mattered to them ($M=2.18 < 2.5$; $M=2.39 < 2.5$) whereas respondents ages 40 to 49 felt neutral ($M=2.5$), and respondents ages 50 and above agreed ($M=3 > 2.5$). This difference in opinion shows that unlike young and adult teachers, senior teachers (age 50 and above) care about the gender of their school leaders.

According to research, senior employees often feel discriminated against because of their age, which makes working with younger colleagues, or under younger leaders uncomfortable in some cases (Rockwood, 2018). This might explain why some senior employees may have particular opinions when it comes to the age, gender, and characteristics of their employer. For example, some senior male teachers might find it uncomfortable working for a younger female leader, and vice-versa.

Moreover, these results show that the younger generation are more tolerant and less sensitive than the older one towards issues that have to do with gender and gender-appropriate responsibilities. The new generation is obviously brought up differently, which might explain this growing positive mentality towards females, which is consistent with many studies referred to in the literature review. For example, in a study conducted in Jordan, the author found that younger Jordanian participants exhibited more progressive attitudes towards female advancement (Shteixe, 2015). As such, the results of this study might suggest that attitudes towards females and female leaders in Lebanon are shifting and becoming more favorable with time.

In terms of gender, males agreed that the gender of their school leader mattered to them ($M=2.93 > 2.5$), whereas females disagreed ($M=2.22 < 2.5$). These findings suggested that unlike

female teachers, male teachers care about the gender of their school leader. This is also consistent with research mentioned in the literature review.

Males tend to prefer male leaders because they believe that when there aren't enough job vacancies, they are more entitled to jobs than women, and that compared to women, they make better leaders (Kiser, 2015). Moreover, in the cases where males tend to prefer female leaders, they do so for reasons beyond female leaders' effectiveness, but that instead concern them being sexier, prettier, more attractive, gullible, and easier to manipulate than men (Elsesser & Lever, 2011). In both cases, the findings suggested that unlike female teachers, male teachers preferred working under a specific gender because either of them might be in their favor.

In terms of respondents' academic degrees, respondents with high school degrees agreed that the gender of their school leader mattered to them ($M=3.5>2.5$), respondents with BA degrees felt neutral ($M=2.47$), respondents with MA degrees disagreed ($M=2.13<2.5$) and respondents with PhD degrees strongly agreed ($M=5>2.5$). While these results were not sufficient to be generalized due to the small sample size (only one respondent had a PhD degree, and only two were high school graduates), they appear to have suggested that while high school graduates and PhD graduates care about the gender of their school leader, Bachelor's and Master's graduates do not. The case might be as such since respondents with BA and MA degrees felt that they had the needed qualifications and skills to work under any leader, whether male or female. Thus, they do not feel intimidated working under a specific gender, nor did they feel that they must favor one over the other because it might provide them with a certain advantage.

In terms of participants' years of teaching experience, those who had one to five years of teaching experience, and five to 10 years of teaching experience both disagreed that the gender of their school leader mattered to them ($M=2.07<2.5$; $M=2.25<2.5$), while those with 10 and more years of experience agreed ($M=2.61>2.5$). These findings suggested that, unlike young and less experienced teachers, older and more experienced teachers care about the gender of their school leader. This might be the case because those teachers have already experienced working under either a male or a female leader or both. Thus, their experiences might explain why they had developed a preference for a specific gender.

Overall, the data retrieved from this section of the survey highlighted the situation of female leaders in Lebanese private schools in terms of how their teachers perceived them. Based on the findings, female leaders were believed to influence and motivate their employees professionally, and to balance fairly between their home lives and their work. Moreover, the teachers perceived academic female leaders to be intelligent, competent, skillful, feminine, unselfish, powerful, and independent. They also believed that female leaders in academic settings showed great drive and initiative in leadership positions, and that they possessed innate leadership traits and characteristics. Lastly, most of the teachers targeted by this survey expressed that the gender of their school leader did not matter to them.

Barriers that Prevent Females from Advancing to Leadership Positions

Regarding the barriers that prevent females from advancing to leadership positions in Lebanese private schools, the results showed that most respondents agreed that more females should be occupying leadership positions at their schools (40%). As can be seen in Figure 5, these findings suggested that those schools did not have enough female leaders and recognized

the need for them, which is consistent with the overall claim of this study being that females are unfortunately underrepresented in leadership. Another explanation may be that the teachers targeted in this study have worked under female leaders whom they valued which is why they encouraged further female advancement. In both cases, these results were extremely pleasing because they indicated that the need for female leaders is being recognized and encouraged in Lebanese private schools.

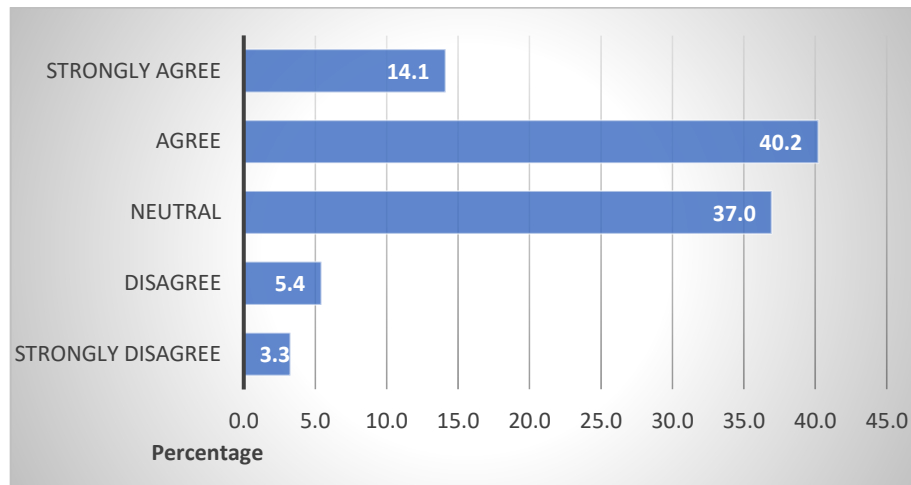


Figure 5: Need for more females in leadership positions

Moreover, based on the data, respondents agreed that females had enough moral support and encouragement to advance at their schools (37%); gender discrimination in school practices prevented females from advancing to leadership positions (34%); and cultural or societal pressures prevented females from advancing to leadership positions (49%). However, these results raised several questions because of their contradicting nature. While teachers believed that female leaders in private schools were supported and encouraged, they also believed that discriminatory gender practices and cultural/societal pressures prevented their advancement. In this case, most of the respondents in this study may have interpreted the statement regarding females having enough moral support and encouragement inaccurately. Instead of interpreting the presence or absence of moral encouragement and support in terms of their school practices, their school's unique culture, and the like, they interpreted the statement more personally. They might have confirmed the presence of female support and encouragement in their schools because they themselves felt that they morally supported and encouraged females, not necessarily their schools in general.

According to the results, most respondents disagreed that females' multiple roles (wife, mother, employee, etc.) prevented them from advancing to leadership positions (48%); females' lack of capabilities and leadership skills prevented them from advancing to leadership positions (36%); females' lack of academic knowledge prevented them from advancing to leadership positions (36%); and females' lack of training and expertise prevented them from advancing to leadership positions (35%).

Based on these findings, teachers did not regard females' multiple roles to be a barrier when it came to their advancement. This was consistent with the findings from the first section of the survey, where most respondents agreed that female leaders balanced fairly between their

home life and their work. Moreover, teachers did not regard lack of capabilities and leadership skills, lack of academic knowledge, or lack of training and expertise as potential barriers to females' advancement into leadership positions. This was also consistent with research cited in this study.

In Lebanon, female students outnumbered male students at the secondary level, and in both private and public universities (El-Khaled, Novas, Gazquez, Garcia, & Manzano-Agugliaro, 2016). Similarly, global studies show that women's educational achievement has witnessed a fast rise with the number of females participating in higher education having tripled between 1995 and 2018 (UNESCO, 2021). This suggests that females are not at a disadvantage when it comes to their academic knowledge and degrees.

Furthermore, in terms of leadership skills, capabilities, and expertise, research contends that women outperform males on 17 of the 19 qualities that distinguish outstanding leaders from mediocre or weak ones (Zenger & Folkman, 2019). They score higher than men on leadership qualities like taking initiative, bold leadership, resilience, inspiring and motivating others, and innovation. Additionally, female principals outperform their male counterparts on skills like adaptability and selecting the suitable leadership behavior (Krumm & Gates, as cited in Funk & Polnick, 2005). Thus, the findings of this study confirm that teachers working in private schools are aware that their female leaders are qualified and skilled in their positions.

However, while 29% of the respondents agreed that their schools had laws that ensured equal hiring and promotion opportunities for both females and males, Table 5 shows that the rest of the respondents had contrasting opinions. Out of the 92 respondents, 27 agreed that their schools had fair hiring and promotion laws, 25 strongly agreed, 25 disagreed, 3 strongly disagreed, and 12 felt neutral.

Table 5: Teachers' responses on equal hiring and promotion laws and policies

Responses	Frequency	Percent
Strongly disagree	3	3.3
Disagree	25	27.2
Neutral	12	13.0
Agree	27	29.3
Strongly agree	25	27.2
Total	92	100.0

These results show that even though most respondents claimed equal hiring and promotion opportunities at their schools, which meant that their school policies did not act as a barrier to female advancement, another noticeable part of the sample felt differently. While these results were not surprising because policies regarding hiring and promotion opportunities for females and males may be different across schools, they did however suggest that these policies were still a cause of concern and may still in fact serve as barriers for female advancement in certain Lebanese private schools. According to a study cited in the literature review, Lebanese female managers believed that the barriers that impede women's professional advancement in Lebanese organizations were directly related to the organizational structures and policies (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2010).

Similarly, when it comes to the respondents' opinions regarding whether or not females and males occupying the same position were paid equally at their schools, the results showed contrasting opinions. As shown in Figure 6, out of the 92 respondents, 29% strongly agreed that females and males occupying the same position were paid equally, whereas another 29% disagreed.

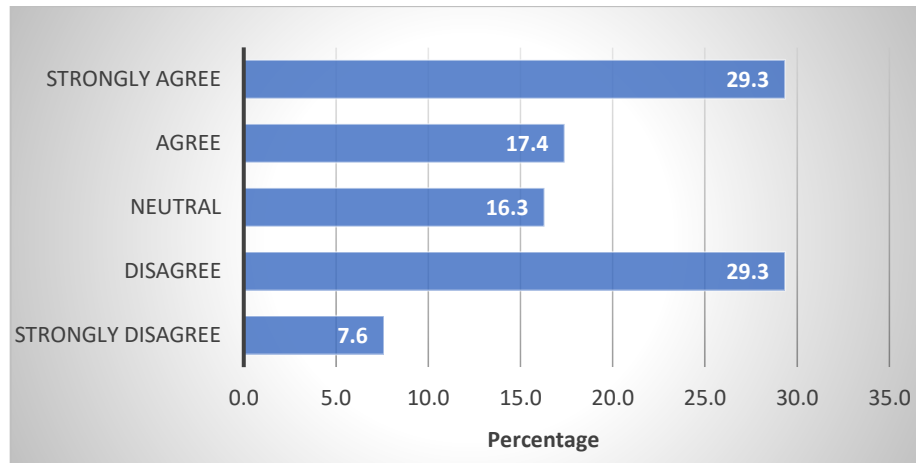


Figure 6: Equal pay among females and males in the same position

These results showed that unequal pay among female and male teachers served as a barrier to females' advancement in some Lebanese private schools. Beyond the official salary rate, private schools have the freedom of increasing a teacher's salary based on whatever reasons they deemed fitting. It was unfortunate however to discover that some schools abused this advantage and chose to increase teachers' salaries because of their gender, instead of their skills and qualifications. According to research, in general, a Lebanese female is paid around 71 percent of what a male is paid (Dah, Abosedra & Dahbourah, 2010). Although women possess a greater level of education in the Lebanese labor market, and although education and income have a positive correlation, females are still paid much less than their male counterparts.

Overall, the data retrieved from this section of the survey highlights the situation of female leaders in Lebanese private schools in terms of the barriers that forbade them from advancing into leadership positions. According to the findings, teachers believed that more academic female leaders should be occupying leadership positions at their schools, and that female leaders had the needed moral support and encouragement to advance at their schools. In addition to that, teachers believed that while their schools had equal hiring and promotion opportunities for both females and males, they did not agree that their schools provided equal pay for both genders. Instead, the number of teachers who strongly agreed on the presence of equal pay was equal to the number of teachers who disagreed.

Moreover, in terms of specific barriers, teachers believed that females' multiple roles were not barriers to their advancement, whereas gender discrimination in school practices, and cultural pressures were in fact barriers. Similarly, the findings suggested that teachers believed that females did not lack leadership skills, the needed academic knowledge, or the needed experience to lead, which meant that they were not considered barriers in those school settings.

Predominant Leadership Characteristics Visible in each Gender

Regarding the predominant leadership characteristics that were visible in each gender, most respondents agreed that females and males occupying the same leadership positions differed in their leadership behavior (54%). As indicated in Figure 7, these results were consistent with several studies that confirmed the presence of differences between females' and males' traits and styles.

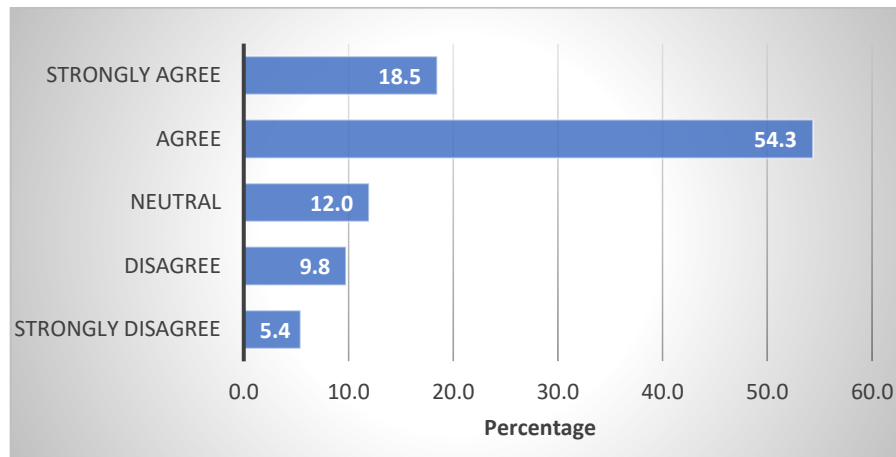


Figure 7: Differences in leadership behavior between females and males

Generally, females have an advantage over males when it comes to motivating people, communicating effectively, offering feedback, and setting high expectations. Whereas males have an advantage over females when it comes to strategizing, delegating, and persuading (Radu, Deaconu, & Frasinianu, 2017). In terms of leadership, females were rated higher on traits like communication, teamwork, empowerment, creating trust, coaching, change facilitation, participation, recognition, and approachability (Pfaff, Boatwright, Potthoff, Finan, Ulrey & Huber, 2013). Similarly, in terms of academic leadership, females were rated higher than male academic leaders, and were considered to have more transformational leadership qualities, and less transactional and laissez-faire qualities (Suranga Silva & Mendis, 2017).

According to research, women were strongly associated with being emotional, affectionate, talkative, patient, and creative; whereas, men were strongly associated with being aggressive and courageous (Newport, 2001). This was confirmed by the findings of this study where the majority of the respondents agreed that female leaders were more affectionate and compassionate than male leaders (47%); and female leaders were better listeners and communicators than male leaders (51%).

Similarly, recent studies contended that men were more likely to be linked to rationality, while women were more likely to be linked to emotionality (Pavco-Giaccis, Little, Stanley, & Dunham, 2019). This was also confirmed by the results of this study where most respondents agreed that female leaders tended to think in a more affectionate manner (50%); and male leaders tended to think in a more logical manner (50%). Also, respondents agreed that female leaders tended to convey their work requests in an indirect manner (43%); and male leaders tended to convey their work requests in a direct manner (49%).

In addition to that, studies claimed that one of the most prominent differences between the two genders was that they each viewed the purpose of conversation differently. As such, men used language to establish power and obtain practical objectives, whereas women utilized speech to build social connections and create relationships (Merchant, 2012). This was also confirmed by the results of this study.

Based on the results, the majority of the respondents agreed that female leaders tended to make decisions cooperatively by consulting with other colleagues and teachers (52%); female leaders prioritized building friendship-based relationships with their teachers (48%); and female leaders viewed themselves equal to others (46%).

Additionally, most of the respondents agreed that male leaders were more opinionated and serious than female leaders (31%); male leaders tended to make decisions individually without consulting other colleagues and teachers (40%); male leaders prioritized building power-based relationships with their teachers (43%); and male leaders viewed themselves superior to others (39%).

Overall, the majority of respondents agreed that compared to male leaders, female leaders were more affectionate and compassionate, were better listeners and communicators, tended to make decisions cooperatively, prioritized building friendship-based relationships with their teachers, viewed themselves equal to others, tended to convey their work requests indirectly, and thought in a more affectionate manner. As academic leaders, “women spend more time interacting with teachers and students, and more time in discussion about the academic program of the school, viewing their job more from the perspective of master-teacher or educational leader than from a managerial –industrial perspective” (Shakeshaft, as cited in Dotzler, 1993, p.26).

Thus, based on these gender differences in leadership behaviors, the results strengthen why the need exists for more females in academic leadership positions. The results showed that females’ unique characteristics in leadership were recognized, valued, and appreciated by the teachers working with them, which could in turn make them more effective and successful in leadership positions.

Analysis of Significance

In terms of the demographic variable Gender, the ANOVA test indicated that the means for all subscales for all variables tested were not significantly different between males and females (all $p > 0.05$). For the demographic variable Age, the ANOVA test indicated that the means for all subscales for all variables tested were not significantly different between age subgroups (all $p > 0.05$). Similarly, for the demographic variable Highest Academic Degree, the ANOVA test indicated that the means for all subscales for all variables tested were not significantly different for all academic degree subgroups (all $p > 0.05$). And lastly, for the demographic variable Years of Teaching Experience, the ANOVA test also indicated that the means for all subscales for all variables tested were not significantly different for all years of teaching experience subgroups (all $p > 0.05$).

The ANOVA test shows that the mean difference in mean levels is not statistically significant (All $p > 0.05$). ANOVA tests on differences in means between: Age, Gender, Highest Academic

Degree, and Years of Teaching Experience for all variables and their sub-scales indicated that all 2-tailed tests for all the variables considered were not significant at the 0.05 level. According to the results, none of the demographic variables: Gender, Age, Highest Academic Degree and Years of Teaching Experience have any effect on the teachers' responses in terms of perceptions, barriers, and leadership characteristics.

Correlation Effect between Teacher's Perceptions, Barriers, and Leadership Behavior:

As indicated in Table 5, a further investigation of the data revealed that correlational significance was not found for most variables since the P-value was higher than 0.05. A correlational significance was however found between two statements: The first statement in section two (SEC2AVG), and the first statement of section four (SEC4AVG). For these two statements, the significance levels were lower than 0.001 thus proving the presence of a significance between them.

The Pearson correlation effect was 0.369 which indicates a medium high direct correlation between these variables. This in turn means that a relation does exist between the two factors: The gender of my school leader matters to me, and females and males occupying the same leadership positions differ in their leadership behavior. Thus, an increase in one factor will lead to an increase in the other factor and vice versa.

Most respondents who believed that the gender of their school leader did not matter to them, also believed that females and males differ in their leadership behaviors. These results suggest that while teachers believed that female and male leaders exhibit different leadership behaviors and styles, they also believed that both are effective and needed because they did not prefer one over the other. Female leaders in Lebanese private schools are thus appreciated and their unique leadership style is recognized, however, they are not favored over male leaders. Both genders have equal chances of being accepted as academic leaders by their teachers.

Table 6: Correlation Matrix by Total Sample

		SEC2AVG	SEC3AVG	SEC4AVG
SEC2AVG	Pearson correlation	1	.079	.369
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.456	.000
	N	92	92	92
SEC3AVG	Pearson correlation	.079	1	-.107
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.456		.310
	N	92	92	92
SEC4AVG	Pearson correlation	.369	-.107	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.310	
	N	92	92	92

Implications for Female Leaders:

The purpose of this study was to highlight the issue of female leaders in terms of their underrepresentation in academic leadership positions. As such, the study aimed to explore how female leaders were perceived by their teachers, the possible barriers that hindered females from advancing to academic leadership positions, and the leadership characteristics viewed in both genders when occupying leadership positions. The results of this study conducted in

Lebanese private schools in the areas of Baabda and Mount-Lebanon revealed several important implications for female leaders in academic settings.

First, in terms of perceptions towards female leaders, the results showed that unlike past research that stressed a preference for male leaders (Kiwani, Farah, Annan, & Jaber, 2016), both genders had an equal opportunity to be favored and accepted by teachers. Moreover, perceptions surrounding female leaders included them being influential, professionally motivating, intelligent, competent, skillful, feminine, unselfish, powerful, and independent. In addition to that, the teachers believed that their female superiors balanced fairly between their home lives and their work, showed great drive and initiative in leadership positions, and acquired innate leadership traits and characteristics.

These results implied the presence of positive perceptions towards female leaders from both male and female teachers. They suggested that females who wish to participate or advance into academic leadership positions today had a greater chance of being accepted and appreciated for their unique skills. It also showed that females were believed to be fit for leadership, despite of their maternal and home responsibilities.

Second, in terms of the barriers that obscured females from advancing to academic leadership positions, the results showed that the teachers believed that there was a need for more academic female leaders at their schools. This suggested that they recognized and valued their female leaders. However, despite the call for more female leaders, and their support, female leaders were thought to face a number of challenging barriers that might have caused their underrepresentation.

The confirmed barriers of this study were all associated with organizational discrimination, and societal/cultural pressures. On the other hand, issues that had to do with females' lack of leadership knowledge, skills, or abilities, or females' multiple roles, were not considered barriers at all.

Organizational discrimination was seen in terms of the lack of equal hiring and promotion opportunities between females and males, and the lack of equal pay for both genders occupying the same positions in some schools. This showed that some school policies and practices did not reinforce gender equality, and that unconscious bias towards females was still present. Females who wish to advance professionally might thus feel unsupported or unprotected by their schools' policies or practices.

Moreover, cultural and societal pressures were seen as a prominent barrier to female leadership. Although the responses from the vast majority in section one of the survey showed positive perceptions towards females and female leadership, teachers still believed that societal pressures hindered female leadership. It was also contended that female leaders were supported and encouraged in their immediate environments, which contradicts with why the teachers still regarded importance to societal and cultural pressures. These results might suggest that while most teachers accepted and encouraged female leaders, other parties whether school officials, their families, or the general public, did not. Thus, females and female leaders might still face social and cultural rejections or pressures because of their decision to lead.

Lastly, in terms of the predominant leadership characteristics that were viewed in each gender, the findings established by this study showed that teachers acknowledged and recognized the differences in female and male behaviors. Although the results did not suggest which gender was favored based on their leadership behaviors, they did confirm the strengths that each gender was believed to convey in leadership. Thus, this confirmation of the contradicting behaviors between both genders helped highlight the need for both styles.

Based on their experiences, teachers believed that female leaders were more affectionate and compassionate, better listeners and communicators, thought in a more affectionate manner, and conveyed their work requests in an indirect manner. Moreover, female leaders were believed to make decisions cooperatively, prioritize building friendship-based relationships, and view themselves equal to others.

The comparison between feminine and masculine behaviors in association with leadership helped highlight the need for more female leaders and their unique behaviors in leadership. Female leaders were thought to be needed, not because their behaviors were better, rather because their behaviors balanced with male behaviors would more likely produce successful outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are few recommendations that could be extracted from the results of this study:

1. while hiring, school officials should overcome previous misconceptions about females in leadership positions, and provide them with encouragement, support and empowerment;
2. school officials should be intentional on applying fair and transparent policies regarding the hiring, remuneration and promotion of females and males in leadership positions; and
3. school officials need to acknowledge that there are differences between leadership styles of females and males and thus, encourage benefiting from both strengths for the welfare of the school.

CONCLUSION

By surveying teachers in Lebanese private schools, this study was able to highlight the current situation of academic female leaders. Positive perceptions were found to be associated with females occupying leadership positions. Additionally, several prominent barriers were found to cause females' underrepresentation in leadership, which were mostly related to discriminatory organizational practices, and cultural and societal pressures. Moreover, the study confirmed the contradicting leadership behaviors displayed by females and male in leadership roles. Although, the results did not reveal which characteristics were more favored by teachers, the results were enough to show that both female and male characteristics were needed.

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APPENDIX

Female Leaders in Lebanese Private Schools: Perceptions and Barriers

Dear respondent, in an effort to discover the understood perceptions surrounding female leaders in Lebanese private schools, you are kindly requested to complete the following questionnaire. Your cooperation to evaluate the statements in this questionnaire will be greatly appreciated. Your identity and response will remain confidential, and results will only be used for academic research purposes. I value your opinion and feedback on this study, and I thank you for your participation.

Section One: Demographics

1. Specify your age _____
2. Select your gender
 - a) Female
 - b) Male
3. Specify your highest academic degree _____
4. Select the number of years that match your teaching experience
 - a) 1-5 years
 - b) 5-10 years
 - c) 10 and above

Section Two: Teachers' Perceptions of Female Leaders

Evaluate the following statements

(1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5= strongly agree)

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
a) The gender of my school leader (principal, coordinator, supervisor, etc.) matters to me.					
b) Female leaders influence and motivate me professionally.					
c) Female leaders are intelligent, competent, and skillful.					
d) Female leaders balance fairly between their home life and their work.					
e) Female leaders are feminine and unselfish.					
f) Female leaders are powerful and independent.					
g) Female leaders show great drive and initiative in leadership positions.					
h) Females acquire innate leadership traits and characteristics.					

Section Three: Gender-based Barriers that Prevent Females from Advancing to Leadership Positions

Evaluate the following statements

(1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5= strongly agree)

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
a) More females should be occupying leadership positions at my school.					
b) Females have enough moral encouragement and support to advance at my school.					
c) My school has laws that ensure equal hiring and promotion opportunities for both females and males.					
d) Females and males occupying the same position are paid equally at my school.					
e) Females' multiple roles (wife, mother, employee, etc.) prevent them from advancing to leadership positions.					
f) Gender discrimination in school practices prevent females from advancing to leadership positions.					
g) Cultural or societal pressures prevent females from advancing to leadership positions.					
h) Females' lack of capabilities and leadership skills prevent them from advancing to leadership positions.					

i) Females' lack of academic knowledge prevents them from advancing to leadership positions.					
j) Female's lack of training and experience prevent them from advancing to leadership positions.					

Section Four: Predominant Leadership Characteristics Visible in Each Gender

Evaluate the following statements

(1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5= strongly agree)

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
a) Females and males occupying the same leadership position differ in their leadership behavior.					
b) Male leaders are more opinionated and serious than female leaders.					
c) Female leaders are more affective and compassionate than male leaders.					
d) Male leaders tend to make decisions individually without consulting with other colleagues and teachers.					
e) Female leaders tend to make decisions cooperatively by consulting with other colleagues and teachers.					
f) Female leaders are better listeners and communicators than male leaders.					
g) Male leaders prioritize building power-based relationships with their teachers.					
h) Female leaders prioritize building friendship-based relationships with their teachers.					
i) Male leaders view themselves superior to others.					
j) Female leaders view themselves equal to others.					
k) Male leaders tend to convey their work requests in a direct manner.					
l) Female leaders tend to convey their work requests in an indirect manner.					
m) Male leaders tend to think in a more logical manner.					
n) Female leaders tend to think in a more affectionate manner.					

Female Leaders in Lebanese Private Schools: Perceptions and Barriers

Dear respondent, in an effort to discover the understood perceptions surrounding female leaders in Lebanese private schools, you are kindly requested to complete the following questionnaire. Your cooperation to evaluate the statements in this questionnaire will be greatly appreciated. Your identity and response will remain confidential, and results will only be used for academic research purposes.

I value your opinion and feedback on this study, and I thank you for your participation.

Section One: Demographics

5. Specify your age _____
6. Select your gender
 - c) Female
 - d) Male
7. Specify your highest academic degree _____
8. Select the number of years that match your teaching experience
 - d) 1-5 years
 - e) 5-10 years
 - f) 10 and above

Section Two: Teachers' Perceptions of Female Leaders

Evaluate the following statements

(1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5= strongly agree)

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
a) The gender of my school leader (principal, coordinator, supervisor, etc.) matters to me.					
b) Female leaders influence and motivate me professionally.					
c) Female leaders are intelligent, competent, and skillful.					
d) Female leaders balance fairly between their home life and their work.					
e) Female leaders are feminine and unselfish.					
f) Female leaders are powerful and independent.					
g) Female leaders show great drive and initiative in leadership positions.					
h) Females acquire innate leadership traits and characteristics.					

Section Three: Gender-based Barriers that Prevent Females from Advancing to Leadership Positions

Evaluate the following statements

(1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5= strongly agree)

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
a) More females should be occupying leadership positions at my school.					
b) Females have enough moral encouragement and support to advance at my school.					
c) My school has laws that ensure equal hiring and promotion opportunities for both females and males.					
d) Females and males occupying the same position are paid equally at my school.					
e) Females' multiple roles (wife, mother, employee, etc.) prevent them from advancing to leadership positions.					
f) Gender discrimination in school practices prevent females from advancing to leadership positions.					
g) Cultural or societal pressures prevent females from advancing to leadership positions.					
h) Females' lack of capabilities and leadership skills prevent them from advancing to leadership positions.					
i) Females' lack of academic knowledge prevents them from advancing to leadership positions.					
j) Female's lack of training and experience prevent them from advancing to leadership positions.					

Section Four: Predominant Leadership Characteristics Visible in Each Gender

Evaluate the following statements

(1= strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5= strongly agree)

Statement	1	2	3	4	5
Females and males occupying the same leadership position differ in their leadership behavior.					
Male leaders are more opinionated and serious than female leaders.					
Female leaders are more affective and compassionate than male leaders.					
Male leaders tend to make decisions individually without consulting with other colleagues and teachers.					
Female leaders tend to make decisions cooperatively by consulting with other colleagues and teachers.					
Female leaders are better listeners and communicators than male leaders.					
Male leaders prioritize building power-based relationships with their teachers.					
Female leaders prioritize building friendship-based relationships with their teachers.					
Male leaders view themselves superior to others.					
Female leaders view themselves equal to others.					
Male leaders tend to convey their work requests in a direct manner.					
Female leaders tend to convey their work requests in an indirect manner.					
Male leaders tend to think in a more logical manner.					
Female leaders tend to think in a more affectionate manner.					