



SOCIAL VALUES AND FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN  
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Dissertation Manuscript

Submitted to Unicaf University in Zambia  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Doctorate of Education (EdD)

By Jody Belcon

December 2025

Approval of the Thesis

SOCIAL VALUES AND FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN  
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

This Thesis by Jody Belcon has been approved by the committee members below, who recommend it be accepted by the faculty of Unicaf University in Zambia, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

Doctorate of Education (EdD)

Thesis Committee:

Dr Ernest Ampadu, supervisor

Dr Nathan Musonda, chair

Dr Patricia Ananga, external examiner

Dr Helen Adebola, internal examiner

## Abstract

SOCIAL VALUES AND FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE FEMALE PARTICIPATION IN  
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Jody Belcon

Unicaf University in Zambia

This study investigates the social values and systemic factors influencing female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. Despite women constituting the majority of the teaching workforce, they remain significantly underrepresented in senior leadership roles within the education sector. The purpose of the study is to examine how gendered social values, institutional practices, and intersecting personal and contextual factors shape access to and progression within educational leadership. The study was guided by three research questions examining (1) social values influencing female leadership participation, (2) factors contributing to inequality and underrepresentation, and (3) strategies to promote greater gender equity in leadership. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed. The population consisted of educators working in government and government-assisted schools in Trinidad and Tobago. A purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample of 33 male and female educators across two school contexts. Data were collected using a semi-structured survey questionnaire administered online. The instrument included both closed-ended and open-ended items designed to capture leadership perceptions, experiences, and institutional conditions. Instrument validity and reliability were supported through expert review and pilot testing procedures to ensure clarity, contextual relevance, and consistency. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential testing, including independent-samples t-tests, while qualitative responses were examined using inductive thematic analysis.

This integrated analytical approach enabled identification of broad statistical patterns alongside deeper insight into participants' lived experiences and interpretations. Findings indicate that while gender equity policies exist within the education system, their practical impact is limited by inconsistent implementation, persistent gender stereotypes, and structural constraints. Key barriers include culturally embedded caregiving expectations, gendered perceptions of leadership suitability, uneven access to mentorship and sponsorship, and organizational practices that privilege linear, uninterrupted career pathways. Results also show that leadership participation is shaped by the combined effects of social values, family responsibilities, organizational structures, and individual self-efficacy. The study concludes that gender-inclusive leadership frameworks can strengthen institutional effectiveness and decision-making in education. It recommends the adoption of gender-responsive leadership development programs, formalized mentorship and sponsorship structures, family-supportive workplace policies, and stronger accountability mechanisms to support equitable leadership pathways. By providing context-specific empirical evidence, the study contributes to Caribbean scholarship on gender and educational leadership and offers practical guidance for policymakers and educational stakeholders seeking to advance inclusive leadership systems.

## Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and has not been submitted to any previous application for a degree, in whole or in part. Unless stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

### AI Acknowledgment

I acknowledge using Grammarly (<https://app.grammarly.com/>) to improve the correctness, clarity, engagement, delivery, and style of all chapters of my thesis. This action was completed on 14.02.2026.

I acknowledge that Chat GBT (<https://chat.openai.com/>) was used to check the validity of my statistical analysis. This action was completed on 14.04.2025.

The prompts used included: Was this analysis done correctly? Does the data support the analysis's result?

### Copyright Page

I confirm that I retain the intellectual property and copyright of the thesis submitted. I also allow Unicaf University in Zambia to produce and disseminate the contributions of the thesis in all media forms known or to come as per the Creative Commons BY Licence (CC BY).

## Dedication

I offer heartfelt thanks to the extraordinary individuals who have significantly shaped both my academic path and personal growth. This doctoral thesis is dedicated to them with deep appreciation.

First and foremost, I extend my sincere gratitude to my family. Their constant support, endless encouragement, and unconditional love have been the cornerstone of my perseverance during this demanding academic journey. Their sacrifices, patience, and steadfast belief in me have been instrumental in reaching this important milestone.

A special place in this dedication is reserved for my academic advisor; his guidance, mentorship, and scholarly insights have been indispensable. The countless hours spent discussing ideas, refining methodologies, and navigating the intricacies of academia have left an indelible mark on my intellectual development. I am grateful not only for his expertise but also for the genuine interest he took in my success.

To my friends and colleagues who have been companions on this academic odyssey, thank you for the camaraderie, shared challenges, and collective triumphs. Your presence, encouragement, and intellectual exchanges have enriched my experience and broadened my perspective.

This thesis is dedicated to all educators and researchers who believe in the transformative power of knowledge. It stands as a testament to the collective efforts of those who champion the pursuit of understanding, push the boundaries of human knowledge, and strive for excellence in both academic and personal endeavors.

## Acknowledgments

I wish to sincerely thank all the individuals and institutions whose contributions made this thesis possible. To begin, I am deeply appreciative of the educators and professionals who participated in the survey. Your candid reflections and shared experiences offered invaluable perspectives on the complexities of gender inequality in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. This research would not have been possible without your voices.

I am especially grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Ernest Ampadu, for his guidance, academic expertise, and consistent support throughout the research process. His thoughtful feedback, critical insight, and encouragement were instrumental in shaping the direction, clarity, and depth of this study. I also extend my appreciation to other academic mentors and advisors whose contributions and scholarly guidance strengthened this work.

To my family and friends, thank you for your unwavering support, understanding, and patience throughout this journey. Your belief in me provided strength during the most demanding phases of this project.

Lastly, I dedicate this thesis to all individuals committed to achieving equity in educational leadership. May this work serve as a meaningful contribution to the ongoing conversations and actions aimed at creating more inclusive, representative, and just educational systems.

## Table of Contents

<i>List of Tables</i> .....	<i>xiv</i>
<i>List of Figures</i> .....	<i>xv</i>
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Statement of the Problem</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Purpose of the study, Research Aims and Objectives</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Nature and Significance of the Study</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>Research Questions</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE</b> .....	<b>29</b>
<b>Conceptual Framework</b> .....	<b>32</b>
<b>Gender as a Determinant of Educational Leadership Access</b> .....	<b>34</b>
<b>Theoretical Clarification: From Sen’s Typologies to the Conceptual Framework</b> .....	<b>36</b>
<b>Moderating Factors: A Multidimensional Approach</b> .....	<b>39</b>
<b>The Context for Inequality in Educational Leadership in Trinidad and Tobago</b> .....	<b>44</b>
<b>Theoretical Assessments</b> .....	<b>46</b>
<b>Inequality in Educational Leadership in Trinidad and Tobago</b> .....	<b>62</b>
<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>72</b>
<b>The Moderating Impacts of Individual Factors on the Relationship Between Gender and Attainment of Educational Leadership Roles</b> .....	<b>75</b>
<b>The Moderating Impact of Family-Related Factors on the Relationship Between Gender and Attainment of Educational Leadership in Trinidad and Tobago</b> .....	<b>88</b>
<b>Theoretical Assessments</b> .....	<b>88</b>
<b>Implications</b> .....	<b>100</b>

Evidence in Trinidad and Tobago .....	102
<b>The Moderating Impacts of Organizational Factors on the Relationship between Gender and the Attainment of Educational Leadership .....</b>	<b>107</b>
Theoretical Assessments .....	107
Implications .....	115
Evidence in Trinidad and Tobago .....	117
Summary.....	121
<b>The Moderating Impacts of Cultural Factors on the Relationship between Gender and the Attainment of Educational Leadership .....</b>	<b>123</b>
Theoretical Assessments .....	124
Evidence in Trinidad and Tobago .....	139
Summary.....	144
<b>Constructs of Career Development.....</b>	<b>146</b>
Focus.....	148
Intent .....	149
Family Support.....	150
Summary .....	152
<b><i>CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD.....</i></b>	<b><i>157</i></b>
<b>Research Approach and Design .....</b>	<b>161</b>
<b>Population and Sample of the Research Study .....</b>	<b>171</b>
<b>Materials/Instrumentation of the Research Tools .....</b>	<b>176</b>
Questionnaire for Teachers.....	180
Alignment with Local Context .....	183
<b>Operational Definition of Variables.....</b>	<b>184</b>
Independent Variable .....	186

Dependent Variable .....	187
Control Variable .....	188
<b>Study Procedures and Ethical Assurance.....</b>	<b>189</b>
Informed Consent .....	190
Confidentiality .....	191
Self-determination.....	192
Right to Withdraw .....	193
Avoid Using Deceptive Practices.....	194
<b>Data Collection and Analysis.....</b>	<b>195</b>
Summary .....	201
<b><i>CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS</i>.....</b>	<b>205</b>
Trustworthiness of Data.....	209
Reliability and Validity of Data.....	217
Results.....	225
Teacher Survey Results .....	225
RQ1: What social values influence female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago?.....	241
RQ2: What factors lead to inequality and underrepresentation of women in the educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago?.....	253
RQ3: What strategies could help increase female participation and achieve gender equality in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago?.....	267
Evaluation of Findings .....	280
Evaluation of RQ1: Gender and Access to Leadership .....	287
Evaluation of RQ2: Inequality and Underrepresentation Factors .....	296
Evaluation of RQ3: Strategies and Participant-Suggested Solutions .....	304

Synthesis of Theoretical Alignment .....	314
Gaps and Contradictions .....	321
Comparative Alignment and Challenges Between Findings and Literature .....	327
Summary .....	331
<b><i>CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION</i></b> .....	<b>336</b>
<b>Implications</b> .....	<b>338</b>
<b>Recommendations for Application</b> .....	<b>365</b>
<b>Recommendations for Future Research</b> .....	<b>386</b>
<b>Conclusions</b> .....	<b>409</b>
<b><i>REFERENCES</i></b> .....	<b>426</b>
<b><i>APPENDICES</i></b> .....	<b>455</b>
<b>Appendix A: Ethics Decision</b> .....	<b>455</b>
<b>Appendix B: Gatekeeper Letter</b> .....	<b>457</b>
<b>Appendix C: Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Education Permissions</b> .....	<b>458</b>
<b>Appendix D: Informed Consent Form</b> .....	<b>459</b>
<b>Appendix E: Survey for Teachers and Parents</b> .....	<b>460</b>

## List of Tables

<b>Table 1</b> .....	183
<b>Table 2</b> .....	225
<b>Table 3</b> .....	244
<b>Table 4</b> .....	254

## List of Figures

<b>Figure 1</b> .....	33
<b>Figure 2</b> .....	230
<b>Figure 3</b> .....	234
<b>Figure 4</b> .....	242

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Female participation in educational leadership continues to be shaped by deeply embedded social values and systemic factors, making gender inequality in leadership a persistent global challenge (Acker, 1990; Blackmore, 2017; Heilman et al., 2023). In this study, social values refer to culturally embedded norms and shared beliefs about gender roles, authority, and professional suitability that shape expectations and behaviour within institutions. Female participation in educational leadership refers to women's access to, representation in, and experience of formal leadership and decision-making roles within educational institutions. Educational leadership refers to positions involving institutional authority, governance responsibility, and strategic decision-making in schools and education systems. In this study, systemic factors are used as an umbrella term that includes structural, institutional, and organizational conditions that shape leadership access and progression. Despite decades of advocacy for gender equality and the numerical dominance of women within the teaching profession, leadership positions in education remain disproportionately occupied by men (Torrance et al., 2016; Washington & Gounko, 2024). This imbalance reflects broader structural and cultural forces, including institutional bias, patriarchal organisational norms, and socially constructed expectations of leadership that privilege masculine traits and behaviours (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015; Torrance et al., 2016).

Within the Caribbean context, and particularly in Trinidad and Tobago, these global patterns assume distinct historical and sociocultural dimensions. Women constitute the majority of the teaching workforce, yet remain underrepresented in senior educational leadership roles, especially in positions associated with authority, decision-making, and prestige (Washington & Gounko, 2024; Momsen, 1993; Blank, 2013). This paradox highlights that leadership inequality is not solely the result of policy gaps or individual choice but is deeply rooted in cultural norms,

institutional practices, and historical legacies that continue to shape leadership pathways (Washington & Gounko, 2024; Bautista et al., 2022).

Trinidad and Tobago's post-colonial history has played a significant role in constructing rigid gender hierarchies and organisational structures that persist within contemporary educational systems (Washington & Gounko, 2024; Acker, 2006; Ridgeway, 2011). Colonial administrative models reinforced male dominance in authority and leadership, while women were socially positioned within nurturing and caregiving roles. These inherited norms continue to influence how leadership is perceived, who is deemed suitable for leadership, and how professional advancement is structured within the education sector (Washington & Gounko, 2024). As a result, women's leadership is often more accepted in roles aligned with care, pastoral responsibility, or single-sex institutions, while men dominate positions associated with power, prestige, and strategic governance (Bautista et al., 2022).

Although recent data indicate that women hold a substantial proportion of school leadership positions, this representation is uneven (Bautista et al., 2022). Women leaders are frequently concentrated in less prestigious schools or roles with limited decision-making authority, while men are more likely to occupy senior positions within elite institutions and national policy structures. This vertical and horizontal segregation reflects enduring gendered assumptions about leadership competence and authority, reinforcing the perception that leadership remains a predominantly male domain (Blackmore, 2017).

While legislative and policy frameworks at both regional and international levels promote gender equality, cultural resistance often undermines their effectiveness (O'Connor & Irvine, 2020). In Trinidad and Tobago, patriarchal social values continue to position women as primary caregivers, shaping expectations about their availability, ambition, and suitability for leadership

roles (Washington & Gounko, 2024). These expectations create structural disadvantages for women seeking leadership, particularly when leadership roles demand long working hours, high visibility, and uninterrupted career trajectories (Kossek & Lee, 2021; Chung & Van der Horst, 2017). The Organization of American States (OAS) (2024) and Bautista et al. (2022) confirm that gender inequality in leadership within Trinidad and Tobago is not only prevalent but structurally reinforced through cultural norms, institutional practices, and informal power networks.

The underrepresentation of women in educational leadership is therefore not merely a numerical concern but a matter of social justice, institutional effectiveness, and educational equity. Research consistently demonstrates that women leaders often employ inclusive, collaborative, and participatory leadership styles that contribute to improved school culture, accountability, and student outcomes (Leithwood, 2021; Offermann & Foley, 2020). When women's leadership potential is constrained, educational systems are deprived of diverse perspectives essential for innovation, responsiveness, and sustainable development.

Furthermore, studies indicate that increased female representation in decision-making roles correlates with more equitable resource allocation, improved organisational transparency, and stronger stakeholder engagement (Post & Byron, 2014). In a national context where education plays a central role in social and economic development, understanding and addressing barriers to female leadership is therefore both a moral imperative and a strategic necessity.

Despite growing international discourse on gender-responsive leadership and equity-focused policy reform, research that critically examines the sociocultural dimensions of leadership inequality within the Caribbean remains limited (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Hancock, 2016). Existing literature often prioritises institutional or policy explanations while underexploring how social values, cultural expectations, and intersecting identities shape women's leadership experiences. In

Trinidad and Tobago, women navigating leadership pathways frequently face a “double bind,” balancing professional expectations with deeply entrenched caregiving roles, while also negotiating race- and class-based inequities that further complicate access to leadership (Harquail, 2008; Heilman et al., 2023; Jean-Marie et al., 2009).

This study addresses this gap by examining the social values and systemic factors that influence female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. Using a survey-based methodology, it explores how cultural expectations, institutional practices, and professional experiences interact to shape women’s leadership trajectories. By foregrounding educators’ perceptions and lived experiences, the study provides contextually grounded insights into the mechanisms that sustain gender inequality within educational leadership structures.

As Trinidad and Tobago seeks to modernise its education system and align with global commitments such as Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality, addressing leadership inequity becomes increasingly urgent. Educational leadership plays a critical role in shaping school culture, implementing policy, and driving institutional change. Understanding how gendered social values influence leadership access is therefore essential for developing inclusive leadership frameworks that reflect local realities.

Ultimately, this study connects global debates on gender and leadership with the specific sociocultural context of Trinidad and Tobago. By integrating theory, empirical evidence, and educator perspectives, it contributes to regional scholarship while offering practical insights for policy reform, leadership development, and institutional transformation. In doing so, it seeks to support the creation of more equitable, inclusive, and effective educational leadership structures within the Caribbean context.

### **Problem Statement**

Despite the numerical dominance of women within the teaching workforce, their participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago remains uneven. Leadership roles associated with institutional authority, governance, and strategic decision-making continue to be disproportionately occupied by men. This disparity suggests that leadership inequality is shaped not only by institutional policies but also by deeply embedded social values, cultural expectations, and systemic factors that influence perceptions of leadership suitability and access to leadership opportunities.

### **Research Questions**

Guided by this problem, this study examines the social values and systemic factors that influence female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do social values influence perceptions of women's suitability for educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago?
2. What systemic factors within educational institutions shape women's access to and progression in leadership roles?
3. What barriers and enabling strategies do educators identify as influencing female participation in educational leadership?

### **Scope of the Study**

The scope of this study is limited to educators working within a government and a government-assisted school in Trinidad and Tobago. Using a survey-based methodology, the research focuses on leadership positions involving institutional authority, governance responsibility, and strategic decision-making. The study examines educators' perceptions and

experiences in order to explore how cultural expectations, institutional practices, and professional pathways interact to shape women's leadership trajectories within the national education system.

### **Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study lies in generating context-specific empirical evidence on the sociocultural and systemic factors influencing female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. By examining how social values and systemic factors interact to shape leadership opportunities, the research contributes to regional scholarship on gender and leadership while offering insights for policy reform, leadership development, and institutional practice. In a national context where education plays a central role in social and economic development, addressing leadership inequity is essential for creating inclusive educational systems and strengthening institutional effectiveness.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Gender inequality in educational leadership remains a persistent and multidimensional challenge in Trinidad and Tobago, despite sustained policy reform and increasing international advocacy for gender equity. Although women constitute the majority of the teaching workforce at both primary and secondary levels, their representation in senior leadership and decision-making positions remains disproportionately low. This disparity highlights a critical disconnect between women's numerical dominance in teaching and their limited access to leadership roles, suggesting the presence of deeper sociocultural and institutional barriers that extend beyond formal qualifications or experience (Heilman et al., 2023).

Within the Caribbean context, and particularly in Trinidad and Tobago, gendered leadership patterns are shaped by historical, cultural, and institutional legacies. Traditional social values,

rooted in colonial histories and patriarchal norms, continue to associate caregiving, nurturance, and domestic responsibility with women, while leadership, authority, and decision-making are more commonly aligned with men (Washington & Gounko, 2024; Acker, 2006; Ridgeway, 2011). These norms contribute to vertical occupational segregation within the education sector, whereby women are more likely to occupy classroom teaching and middle-management roles but remain unevenly represented in senior leadership positions at school, district, and ministry levels. Official Ministry of Education statistics show that the teaching workforce is overwhelmingly female, with women comprising approximately 82 percent of primary teachers and 72 percent of secondary teachers, demonstrating strong gender concentration at the instructional level (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago et al., 2022).

However, this level of workforce dominance does not translate proportionally into leadership and governance roles. For example, although women constitute the majority of educators within the school system, recent estimates indicate that women hold approximately 55.2 percent of secondary school principal positions compared to 44.7 percent held by men, suggesting a leadership distribution gap between workforce participation and senior leadership attainment (Washington & Gounko, 2024). When compared with women's representation within the teaching workforce, this indicates an underrepresentation of roughly 17–27 percentage points in leadership positions relative to their presence in the profession. This pattern reflects broader gender disparities observed across leadership structures in Trinidad and Tobago, where women remain underrepresented in national decision-making roles despite forming the majority of the population (Washington & Gounko, 2024; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004).

Women aspiring to leadership roles frequently encounter what has been described as a “double bind,” wherein they are expected to demonstrate traditionally feminine traits such as

empathy and collaboration while simultaneously conforming to leadership norms historically associated with masculinity, including assertiveness and authority (Heilman et al., 2023; Kray et al., 2025). Navigating these contradictory expectations often undermines women's perceived legitimacy as leaders and constrains their career progression. Over time, these pressures contribute to professional fatigue, diminished leadership aspirations, and withdrawal from leadership pathways.

Gender inequality in educational leadership is further reinforced by institutional practices and structural conditions. Cultural expectations that prioritize women's familial and caregiving responsibilities over professional advancement are frequently embedded within organizational norms, promotion practices, and informal leadership networks. As a result, women often experience unequal access to mentorship, leadership development opportunities, and professional sponsorship, even when they possess comparable qualifications to their male counterparts (Kossek & Lee, 2021; Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). For those women who do attain leadership roles, gendered power relations may continue to marginalize their voices within decision-making processes, limiting their influence and reinforcing institutional hierarchies.

Although Trinidad and Tobago have enacted legal frameworks that affirm gender equality in employment and civil life, there remains a notable gap between policy commitments and lived experiences within the education sector. As noted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2010; O'Connor & Irvine, 2020), gender inequality in leadership is less a function of legal exclusion and more a reflection of entrenched sociocultural norms and institutional practices that reproduce patriarchal models of authority. Legal protections alone have proven insufficient to disrupt long-standing beliefs about gender and leadership, particularly within governance structures that remain male-dominated.

The continued underrepresentation of women in educational leadership has broader implications for educational quality, equity, and institutional effectiveness. Research suggests that inclusive leadership practices, often associated with collaborative and equity-oriented leadership approaches, can enhance school climate, staff engagement, and student outcomes (Torrance et al., 2016; Offermann & Foley, 2020). When women's perspectives are excluded from leadership spaces, educational institutions risk limiting their capacity to respond effectively to diverse stakeholder needs and to promote inclusive, socially responsive schooling environments.

Despite growing international evidence supporting strategies such as mentorship programs, leadership development initiatives, and gender-responsive policies, their implementation within Trinidad and Tobago remains uneven and fragmented (Kossek & Lee, 2021; O'Connor & Irvine, 2020). There is no cohesive, system-wide framework to ensure consistent adoption, monitoring, or evaluation of gender equity initiatives across schools and educational institutions. Moreover, empirical research that systematically examines how social values, institutional structures, and gendered perceptions interact to shape leadership access within the national education context remains limited.

This study addresses this gap by investigating the social values and systemic factors that influence female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. Using a survey-based approach that integrates quantitative and qualitative data, the research examines how gendered expectations, cultural norms, and organizational practices shape leadership aspirations, access, and experiences among educators. By capturing both measurable trends and lived experiences, the study seeks to generate context-specific evidence capable of informing policy reform, leadership development, and institutional change.

Without such inquiry, efforts to advance gender equity in educational leadership risk remaining superficial and ineffective. A failure to address the underlying social and institutional drivers of inequality may perpetuate cycles of exclusion that limit women's leadership potential and weaken the education system's capacity for inclusive governance. This study therefore responds to an urgent need for empirically grounded, contextually informed research that can support more equitable and sustainable leadership pathways for women in Trinidad and Tobago's education sector.

## **Purpose of the study, Research Aims and Objectives**

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine the social values and systemic factors that influence female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago through a survey-based research design. The study investigates how sociocultural expectations, institutional structures, and professional dynamics interact to shape women's access to, progression within, and experiences of leadership roles in the education sector. While global research has consistently documented gender disparities in leadership, this study seeks to generate localized, empirical evidence that captures how these disparities are produced and sustained within the specific social, cultural, and institutional context of Trinidad and Tobago (Kray et al., 2025).

By centering the perceptions and lived experiences of educators, the study aims to explore how gender norms, leadership stereotypes, and organizational practices influence women's leadership trajectories. In doing so, it examines both external systemic factors, such as access to mentorship, leadership development opportunities, and institutional support mechanisms, as well as internalized social expectations that may shape women's self-efficacy, leadership aspirations,

and career decision-making. This dual focus allows for a more comprehensive understanding of leadership participation as both a structural and sociocultural phenomenon.

The study is grounded in the recognition that leadership inequity in education extends beyond numerical representation and reflects deeper cultural and institutional dynamics. In Trinidad and Tobago, where women comprise the majority of the teaching workforce, their continued underrepresentation in senior leadership positions raises critical questions about access, inclusion, and opportunity within educational institutions. Through the administration of a semi-structured survey to educators across different school contexts, the research seeks to identify patterns, perceptions, and experiences that contribute to this persistent gender gap.

Importantly, the study aims to produce findings that are directly relevant to educational leadership policy and practice in Trinidad and Tobago. The results are intended to inform policymakers, school leaders, and teacher education institutions that are engaged in developing gender-inclusive leadership pathways. By linking empirical findings to practical implications, the study seeks to support evidence-based decision-making and the design of leadership development initiatives that are responsive to local realities.

The study also contributes to existing theoretical frameworks that connect gender equity in leadership with organizational effectiveness and school improvement (Torrance et al., 2016; Offermann & Foley, 2020). Rather than merely documenting the existence of gender disparities, the research seeks to analyze their origins, manifestations, and implications within educational leadership contexts. The use of a survey method that integrates quantitative and qualitative data strengthens the analytical depth of the study, allowing for the identification of broad trends alongside nuanced insights into individual experiences.

While much of the existing literature emphasizes institutional barriers to women's leadership, fewer studies have examined the role of sociocultural values within post-colonial Caribbean education systems. This study addresses that gap by explicitly examining how macro-level cultural influences intersect with micro-level professional experiences (Collins & Bilge, 2020). By amplifying the voices of educators, particularly women, the research acknowledges their agency and positions them as key contributors to the identification of inclusive and contextually appropriate leadership strategies.

In alignment with international commitments such as Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality, this study recognizes educational leadership as a critical lever for institutional change. Given the central role of school leaders in shaping organizational culture, policy implementation, and educational outcomes, addressing gender disparities in leadership is integral to strengthening the effectiveness and equity of the education system as a whole.

### **Research Aims and Objectives**

The primary aim of this study is to critically examine the social values and systemic factors that shape, constrain, or support female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. In particular, the study seeks to investigate the persistent inequality and underrepresentation of women in leadership roles within the education sector, despite women comprising the majority of the teaching workforce. By examining these dynamics, the research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how leadership structures can be transformed to promote equity and effectiveness within the national education system (Torrance et al., 2016).

To achieve this aim, the study is guided by the following research objectives:

1. Examine the extent of gender inequality and underrepresentation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago

- a. Identify disparities between the proportion of women employed in teaching positions and their representation in formal educational leadership roles, particularly within secondary and tertiary education contexts.
  - b. Investigate the extent to which prevailing social values and systemic factors, including caregiving responsibilities, influence patterns of underrepresentation among women in leadership (Kossek & Lee, 2021; Chung & Van der Horst, 2017).
2. Analyse the factors contributing to gender inequality and barriers to leadership for female educators.
    - a. Explore systemic and organisational factors that sustain male dominance in educational leadership despite the feminisation of the teaching profession.
    - b. Examine how cultural norms, gender stereotypes, institutional practices, and access to professional development opportunities shape women's leadership aspirations and career progression (Leithwood, 2021; Heilman et al., 2023; Kray et al., 2025).
3. Explore strategies for promoting gender equity in educational leadership
    - a. Identify and evaluate potential strategies for addressing gender inequality, including leadership development programmes, structured mentorship initiatives, and policy-based interventions such as gender-responsive leadership frameworks or representation targets (O'Connor & Irvine, 2020; Kossek & Lee, 2021).
    - b. Examine how increased female representation in educational leadership may contribute to improved organisational culture, leadership diversity, and

educational outcomes within Trinidad and Tobago (Offermann & Foley, 2020; Post & Byron, 2014).

These objectives guide the study's data collection, analysis, and interpretation, ensuring coherence between the research questions, conceptual framework, and methodological design. They are intentionally structured to move from description to explanation to application, enabling the study to both illuminate existing disparities and propose contextually grounded strategies for reform. Through achieving these objectives, the research seeks to support the development of a more equitable and inclusive educational leadership landscape in Trinidad and Tobago while contributing to regional and international scholarship on gender, leadership, and systemic transformation.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions in this study were formulated to guide a systematic and critical investigation into the social values and systemic factors that shape female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. They are directly aligned with the study's problem statement, purpose, and research objectives, and are grounded in the conceptual framework that positions leadership inequality as the product of intersecting sociocultural and structural influences.

Given the complex and multidimensional nature of gender inequality in leadership, the research questions are deliberately exploratory rather than confirmatory. They are designed to move beyond surface-level descriptions of representation and instead examine the underlying values, perceptions, and institutional practices that influence women's access to leadership roles. This approach allows the study to capture both measurable patterns and nuanced experiential data, consistent with the survey-based design integrating quantitative and qualitative elements.

The research questions reflect the sociocultural specificity of the Trinidad and Tobago context. Existing scholarship highlights how traditional gender norms, caregiving expectations, and post-colonial institutional structures continue to shape leadership pathways within Caribbean societies (Smith et al., n.d.; Washington & Gounko, 2024; Bautista et al., 2022). By foregrounding these contextual factors, the questions enable an analysis that is locally grounded rather than reliant on assumptions derived from external or Global North leadership models.

In line with best practice in mixed-methods and survey research, the questions are framed to avoid binary or yes/no responses. Instead, they encourage reflection, variation, and depth, allowing participants to articulate both shared patterns and individual experiences. The structure of the questionnaire, combining Likert-scale items with open-ended prompts, was intentionally designed to support these questions and facilitate triangulation across data types.

The research questions are sequenced logically to reflect the analytical progression of the study. The first question focuses on identifying the social values that influence leadership participation, the second examines the structural and systemic factors contributing to inequality, and the third explores strategies for addressing these barriers. This progression mirrors the study's objectives and supports a coherent flow from diagnosis to explanation and, ultimately, to action-oriented recommendations.

The guiding research questions for this study are:

- RQ1: What social values influence female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago?
- RQ2: What factors lead to inequality and underrepresentation of women in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago?

- RQ3: What strategies could promote greater gender equality and enhance female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago?

Collectively, these questions provide a clear analytical framework for the study. They are fully aligned with the conceptual framework, which situates female leadership participation as the dependent variable, gender as the central explanatory lens, and social values and systemic factors as key moderating influences. Addressing these questions enables the study to illuminate not only what disparities exist, but why they persist and how they may be addressed within the local education system.

In addition, the research questions were designed to support triangulation between primary survey data and secondary documentary sources, including Ministry of Education reports and national policy documents. This layered approach strengthens the credibility of the findings by situating individual perceptions within broader systemic and policy contexts.

In summary, the research questions function as the analytical anchor of the study. They structure data collection, guide analysis across chapters, and ensure that the findings directly address the core issues of gender, leadership, and sociocultural influence in Trinidad and Tobago's education system. Through these questions, the study aims to advance both scholarly understanding and practical policy responses to gender inequality in educational leadership.

## **Conceptual Framework (Brief Overview)**

### **Conceptual Framework of the Study**

This study is guided by a conceptual framework that explains how gendered participation in educational leadership is shaped not by individual deficit, but by the interaction of social values, institutional structures, and lived experiences within a specific sociocultural context. The

framework positions gender as the central independent variable, female participation in educational leadership as the dependent variable, and social, familial, and organizational factors as key moderating influences that shape access, progression, and sustainability within leadership pathways.

Rather than assuming a direct causal relationship between gender and leadership outcomes, the framework adopts a moderation-based approach, recognising that gender operates through embedded cultural norms, institutional practices, and social expectations. This approach reflects contemporary feminist and sociological perspectives that conceptualise inequality as structurally produced rather than individually chosen. Within the context of Trinidad and Tobago, where women constitute the majority of the teaching workforce yet remain underrepresented in senior leadership roles, this framework enables a nuanced analysis of how gendered patterns of leadership access are constructed, maintained, and potentially disrupted.

### **Gender as the Independent Variable**

In this study, gender is conceptualised as a socially constructed and culturally mediated variable, rather than a purely biological category. Drawing on feminist theory and gendered organization theory (Acker, 1990), gender is understood as a set of expectations, norms, and meanings that influence how individuals are perceived, evaluated, and positioned within professional hierarchies. These expectations shape leadership norms by privileging particular traits, behaviours, and career trajectories that are historically associated with masculinity, such as uninterrupted career progression, availability for extended work hours, and authoritative leadership styles.

Within educational institutions in Trinidad and Tobago, gender operates as a structuring force that influences who is encouraged to lead, who is deemed suitable for leadership, and whose

leadership styles are legitimised. Although women dominate classroom teaching roles, leadership remains disproportionately male at senior levels, indicating that gender functions not as a neutral characteristic but as a determinant of professional opportunity (Begeny et al., 2020). In this framework, gender initiates the process through which social values and systemic factors interact to influence leadership participation.

### **Female Participation in Educational Leadership as the Dependent Variable**

The dependent variable in this framework is female participation in educational leadership, conceptualised as a multidimensional construct rather than a simple measure of representation (Acker, 2006). Participation encompasses not only women's numerical presence in leadership positions but also their access to leadership pathways, visibility within decision-making structures, eligibility for promotion, and ability to sustain leadership roles over time.

This framing acknowledges that leadership participation is shaped by both structural access and subjective experience. Women may possess the qualifications and experience required for leadership yet remain excluded from advancement due to biased promotion practices, lack of mentorship, or organizational cultures that undervalue their leadership styles (Heilman et al., 2023). Participation is therefore influenced by whether women are encouraged to apply for leadership roles, supported during leadership preparation, and recognised as legitimate leaders once appointed.

By focusing on participation rather than attainment alone, the framework captures both aspirational and experiential dimensions of leadership. It allows the study to examine why some women disengage from leadership pathways, why others remain stalled at entry-level positions, and how institutional contexts shape these outcomes differently across educational settings.

### **Moderating Variables: Cultural, Family-Related, Organizational, and Individual Influences**

Central to this conceptual framework is the identification of moderating variables that shape the relationship between gender and leadership participation. These moderators do not operate independently but interact dynamically to reinforce or mitigate gendered leadership outcomes.

### **Social and Cultural Values**

Social values constitute a primary moderating influence within the framework. In Trinidad and Tobago, deeply rooted cultural norms continue to associate leadership with masculine authority while positioning women as primary caregivers and emotional labourers. These values influence how leadership is perceived, who is encouraged to lead, and how women evaluate their own leadership aspirations.

Cultural expectations regarding respectability, motherhood, and availability moderate women's leadership participation by shaping both external evaluations and internalised self-perceptions. Women may self-select out of leadership pathways due to anticipated role conflict, fear of social judgment, or perceptions that leadership demands are incompatible with culturally prescribed responsibilities. These values also influence how leadership ambition is interpreted, with assertiveness in women sometimes viewed negatively in contrast to similar behaviour in men.

### **Family Responsibilities and Support Structures**

Family expectations function as a second key moderating variable. In contexts where caregiving is gendered, women disproportionately bear responsibility for domestic labour, childrearing, and elder care. These responsibilities shape women's capacity to engage in leadership preparation, attend professional development opportunities, and assume roles that demand extended time commitments.

The framework recognises that family influence is not uniformly restrictive. Supportive family structures can enhance leadership participation by providing emotional encouragement and practical assistance. However, where institutional leadership models assume uninterrupted availability and linear career progression, family responsibilities become a structural barrier rather than a personal choice. The interaction between family expectations and rigid organizational norms is therefore critical in understanding why women's leadership participation is uneven and fragile.

### **Organizational Culture and Institutional Structures**

Organizational culture represents the third major moderating influence within the framework. Educational institutions are conceptualised as gendered organisations, where seemingly neutral practices such as promotion criteria, leadership selection processes, and professional networking opportunities are embedded with gendered assumptions.

Institutional practices that privilege informal networks, subjective assessments of "leadership presence," and linear career trajectories disproportionately advantage men while disadvantaging women whose careers may include interruptions or non-traditional pathways. Male-dominated leadership cultures further reinforce exclusion by limiting access to mentorship, sponsorship, and decision-making spaces that are essential for advancement.

Within this framework, organizational culture moderates gendered leadership outcomes by determining which forms of leadership are recognized and rewarded. Institutions that value collaborative, relational leadership styles may offer more inclusive pathways, while those adhering to traditional hierarchical models perpetuate inequality.

### **Individual Influences**

Individual influences represent the internal factors that shape women's leadership aspirations and engagement, including leadership self-efficacy, confidence, career ambition, and

internalised gender norms. These influences affect how women perceive their suitability for leadership roles and their willingness to pursue advancement opportunities. Research indicates that women are more likely to underestimate their leadership readiness, even when they possess comparable qualifications and experience to their male counterparts (Harquail, 2008). In the context of Trinidad and Tobago, cultural expectations surrounding modesty, caregiving, and gender-appropriate behaviour can further shape women's self-perceptions, influencing how leadership ambition is expressed or restrained.

Within the conceptual framework, individual influences function as a moderating factor shaped by social values, family expectations, and organisational practices rather than as an isolated cause of leadership inequality. Limited encouragement, restricted access to mentorship, and repeated exposure to gendered leadership norms can weaken leadership self-efficacy over time, reducing women's likelihood of applying for senior roles. Conversely, supportive institutional cultures, visible female role models, and leadership development opportunities can strengthen confidence and sustain leadership aspiration. Recognising individual influences within the framework ensures that women's leadership decisions are understood as responses to structural and cultural conditions, reinforcing the need for interventions that address both systemic barriers and their internalised effects.

### **Interaction and Cumulative Effects**

A defining feature of the conceptual framework is its emphasis on interaction and cumulative impact. Gender does not operate in isolation; rather, its influence on leadership participation is intensified or mitigated through the convergence of social values, family expectations, organizational structures, and individual influences. These moderators operate

simultaneously, producing layered and reinforcing barriers that accumulate across women's career trajectories.

For example, a female teacher may possess the qualifications and experience required for leadership, yet internalised gender norms and reduced leadership self-efficacy (individual influences), combined with cultural expectations surrounding caregiving and limited institutional flexibility, may collectively restrict her leadership progression. Exclusion from informal professional networks can further compound these effects. This interactional perspective aligns with intersectional theory, which recognises that inequality is produced through overlapping social, cultural, institutional, and psychological systems rather than through single variables operating independently (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Hancock, 2016).

### **Framework Alignment with the Study Design**

This conceptual framework directly informs the study's research questions, survey design, and analytical approach. Survey items were developed to capture perceptions related to leadership intent, self-efficacy, institutional support, family responsibilities, and gender norms, allowing the study to examine how moderating factors shape leadership participation.

The framework also supports the use of a mixed survey design, where quantitative data identify patterns of perception and participation, while qualitative responses provide explanatory depth. By foregrounding moderation rather than causation, the framework ensures that findings are interpreted within the appropriate sociocultural and institutional context.

### **Summary**

In summary, the conceptual framework positions gender as a socially constructed independent variable whose influence on female participation in educational leadership is moderated by social values, family expectations, organizational structures, and individual

influences. This framework enables a holistic examination of leadership inequality in Trinidad and Tobago by recognising that women's leadership outcomes are shaped not by individual choice alone, but by the interaction of personal beliefs and aspirations with broader cultural norms and institutional practices. It provides the theoretical foundation upon which the study's research questions, methodology, and analysis are built, ensuring coherence across the thesis and offering a robust lens for understanding gendered leadership dynamics in education.

## **Nature and Significance of the Study**

### **Nature of the Study**

This study adopts a survey-based explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to examine the social values and systemic factors influencing female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. The design integrates quantitative and qualitative data within a single research instrument, enabling the identification of measurable patterns alongside a deeper exploration of participants' perceptions and lived experiences. This approach is particularly appropriate for investigating gendered leadership dynamics, which are shaped by both observable trends and socially embedded meanings.

Primary data were collected through a semi-structured questionnaire administered to a purposive sample of 33 male and female teachers drawn from government and government-assisted schools. The questionnaire included a combination of closed-ended items, such as Likert-scale and categorical questions, and open-ended prompts that allowed participants to elaborate on their experiences, beliefs, and perceptions regarding leadership, gender roles, and institutional practices. This structure enabled initial quantitative patterns to be examined and subsequently

interpreted through qualitative responses, consistent with the explanatory sequential logic underpinning the study (Huylers & McGill, 2019; Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017).

The questionnaire was distributed electronically using online platforms to enhance accessibility, minimise logistical constraints, and support participant anonymity. Digital administration also facilitated participation across different school contexts without disrupting professional responsibilities, thereby supporting ethical and practical considerations in data collection.

To situate the primary data within the broader national context, secondary data were consulted from authoritative sources, including Ministry of Education records and publicly available education sector reports. These sources provided contextual information on teacher demographics, school types, and leadership structures within Trinidad and Tobago. Although secondary data were not subjected to independent statistical analysis, they were used to contextualise findings and support the interpretation of trends identified within the primary dataset.

Data analysis followed a dual analytical pathway. Quantitative data were analysed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS to generate descriptive statistics and conduct inferential testing, including independent samples t-tests, to explore patterns and differences in leadership perceptions across gender and school type. Qualitative responses were analysed using an inductive thematic approach, allowing key themes related to social values, gender norms, institutional barriers, and leadership aspirations to emerge directly from participants' narratives.

This integrated analytical strategy enabled the study to move beyond surface-level description and examine how social values and systemic factors interact to shape leadership trajectories. By combining numerical trends with contextualised accounts, the research provides a

nuanced and empirically grounded understanding of gendered leadership participation within the Trinidad and Tobago education system.

Overall, this methodological design aligns closely with the study's conceptual framework and revised thesis title by foregrounding the influence of social values, institutional arrangements, and individual perceptions, rather than focusing solely on representation or policy presence. The nature of the study, therefore, supports a holistic examination of female participation in educational leadership that is methodologically coherent, contextually responsive, and theoretically informed.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it addresses a persistent and underexamined problem within Trinidad and Tobago's education system: the continued underrepresentation of women in educational leadership despite their numerical dominance within the teaching profession. National data indicate that women constitute approximately 71.7% of secondary and 81.5% of primary school teachers, yet remain disproportionately absent from senior leadership and policy-making roles within schools and the wider education system (Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago et al., 2022; Washington & Gounko, 2024). This imbalance highlights the presence of structural and sociocultural constraints that extend beyond issues of access or qualification and point instead to deeper inequalities in representation, authority, and decision-making power.

Scholars have consistently argued that gender inequality in education is not solely a matter of workforce participation but one of leadership distribution and institutional influence (Torrance et al., 2016; Madsen & Andrade, 2018). Dominant social values often position women as caregivers and supporters rather than leaders, reinforcing expectations aligned with nurturing and emotional labour while marginalising women from strategic, managerial, and policy-oriented roles. In Trinidad and Tobago, these gendered expectations are intensified by post-colonial social

structures and enduring patriarchal norms that shape both public and private life, including educational institutions (Washington & Gounko, 2024; Smith et al., n.d.).

The relevance of this research is further underscored by national and regional assessments of gender inequality. OAS (2024) identifies gender inequity as a continuing social concern in Trinidad and Tobago, noting that women and girls remain disproportionately affected by power imbalances across institutional contexts. While legislative protections related to employment equity, civil rights, and parental authority exist (OECD, 2010), these frameworks have not translated into equitable leadership outcomes. As Conrad (1999) argues, legal reform alone is insufficient to dismantle entrenched social norms; instead, culturally responsive and system-level interventions are required to challenge deeply embedded values and practices.

This study is particularly significant because it foregrounds the lived experiences and perceptions of educators operating within these structures. By capturing how women interpret, negotiate, and respond to gendered expectations within their professional environments, the research provides empirical evidence of the “double bind” frequently reported by female educators, whereby they are expected to fulfil traditional caregiving roles while simultaneously demonstrating leadership ambition and professional commitment (Washington & Gounko, 2024). This contradiction undermines women’s credibility as leaders and restricts their progression within leadership pipelines.

From a scholarly perspective, the study makes an important contribution to Caribbean-focused research on gender and educational leadership. While international literature has examined gendered leadership extensively within Western and Global North contexts, region-specific studies grounded in Caribbean sociocultural and post-colonial realities remain limited. By situating leadership inequality within the historical, cultural, and institutional context of Trinidad and

Tobago, this research fills a critical gap and challenges the tendency to generalise women's leadership experiences across disparate regions without sufficient contextual sensitivity.

The practical significance of the study is equally substantial. The findings offer evidence-based insights that can inform leadership development policy, institutional practice, and professional training within the education sector. Specifically, the research has implications for the design of gender-responsive leadership programs, structured mentorship and sponsorship initiatives, transparent promotion pathways, and succession planning frameworks that address both structural and cultural barriers to women's advancement (Braun et al., 2017).

Moreover, the study aligns directly with national and international development priorities. Enhancing women's representation in educational leadership supports the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Goal 4 (Quality Education). Research indicates that women's leadership contributes to more inclusive school cultures, improved organisational effectiveness, and positive student outcomes (Blackmore, 2017). Addressing leadership inequity is therefore not only an ethical imperative but a strategic necessity for strengthening educational systems in Trinidad and Tobago.

Finally, this research challenges dominant assumptions about leadership suitability and competence. By evidencing the leadership capacities women bring to educational contexts, including collaboration, adaptability, and equity-oriented practice, the study contributes to the re-conceptualisation of leadership beyond traditional hierarchical and masculinised models (Leithwood, 2021). In doing so, it supports the development of leadership frameworks that are more representative, just, and responsive to contemporary educational challenges.

In summary, the significance of this study lies in its theoretical, empirical, and practical contributions. It advances understanding of how social values and systemic structures constrain

female leadership, amplifies the voices of educators within the Trinidad and Tobago context, and provides a foundation for policy and institutional reform aimed at achieving meaningful gender equity in educational leadership.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE

This literature review examines the social values and systemic factors that influence female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago, with particular attention to systemic barriers, lived gendered experiences, and culturally embedded inequalities. The purpose of the review is to establish a robust theoretical and contextual foundation that informs the development of the study's conceptual framework and empirical design. Despite women's numerical dominance within the teaching workforce, their underrepresentation in educational leadership positions has been widely documented both globally and regionally. Reports and studies, including those from the Center for Global Development, Shaked et al. (2018), and Torrance et al. (2016), demonstrate that although women constitute the majority of educators at both primary and secondary levels, they remain significantly underrepresented in senior and policy-making roles. This leadership gap reflects not only restricted professional mobility but also limits women's influence over decision-making and policy development within education systems.

This challenge is not unique to Trinidad and Tobago. Shava et al. (2019), supported by Washington and Gounko (2024), emphasises that women's limited presence in educational leadership reflects a broader global pattern characterised by persistent glass ceiling barriers. These barriers, often invisible yet deeply entrenched, restrict qualified women's progression into senior leadership across multiple sectors. Leadership continues to be socially constructed as a masculine domain in many societies, resulting in women encountering resistance, stereotyping, and institutional bias when pursuing leadership roles (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). Within the Caribbean context, including Trinidad and Tobago, these dynamics are intensified by colonial legacies, patriarchal cultural norms, and gendered expectations that shape professional roles and advancement opportunities, even where women possess equivalent or superior credentials.

Empirical evidence from the Caribbean and Latin America further illustrates that women's underrepresentation in leadership is embedded within broader systemic inequalities in public administration and governance. Regional reports on public sector leadership indicate that while women have made notable gains in education and public service employment, their participation in decision-making and executive leadership remains constrained. These constraints are frequently reproduced through both formal policies and informal organisational practices that normalise male leadership dominance. As a result, gender imbalance at the leadership level limits inclusive governance and restricts the development of education policies responsive to the needs of female educators and students.

Several theoretical frameworks inform this literature review. One foundational influence is Amartya Sen's (2001) typologies of gender inequality, including professional inequality, natality inequality, and opportunity inequality. Sen's framework illustrates that gender-based disparities are multidimensional, systemic, and mutually reinforcing. His work supports the argument that leadership inequality is rooted in enduring social and institutional structures rather than individual deficit. However, while Sen's theory provides essential conceptual grounding, it is not adopted as the primary analytical model in this study. Instead, it informs the broader understanding of inequality that underpins a more applied and context-sensitive framework.

The conceptual framework guiding this research positions gender as the independent variable and access to educational leadership as the dependent variable. This relationship is conceptualised as indirect and non-linear, moderated by four interrelated factors: individual, family-related, organisational, and cultural influences. These moderating variables reflect the lived realities of female educators and the multiple forces shaping career development and leadership access. Individual factors include self-efficacy, motivation, and educational attainment. Family-

related factors encompass caregiving responsibilities and support systems. Organisational factors relate to recruitment practices, mentorship availability, and leadership development structures. Cultural factors, including societal expectations, religious beliefs, and patriarchal ideologies, influence perceptions of leadership legitimacy.

The glass ceiling theory, gender socialisation theory, and gendered organisational structure theory collectively inform this framework. This study draws primarily on feminist theory, gendered organization theory (Acker, 1990), and Sen's gender inequality typologies (2001), while additional sociological perspectives are used as supporting lenses rather than core explanatory frameworks. Together, these perspectives provide a multidimensional explanation of how gendered experiences interact with systemic barriers to constrain leadership access. Unlike single-lens models, such as Acker's gendered organisation theory, which focuses primarily on institutional structure, this study's framework intentionally integrates individual and sociocultural dimensions. This holistic approach enables a more nuanced examination of leadership access within the specific context of Trinidad and Tobago.

The literature review also identifies strategies proposed to address women's underrepresentation in educational leadership. These include mentorship and sponsorship programmes, the implementation of gender-responsive policies, and the adoption of transformational leadership models that value collaboration, emotional intelligence, and inclusivity. Such strategies are grounded in international best practice and supported by regional evidence, offering pathways toward more equitable leadership systems.

A wide range of scholarly sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, institutional reports, and academic texts, were accessed using databases such as ERIC, JSTOR, EBSCO, SCOPUS, ProQuest, and Google Scholar. Keywords included "educational leadership in Trinidad

and Tobago,” “women in educational leadership,” “gender inequality in education,” and “glass ceiling in education.” While the review prioritised literature from the last five years to ensure contemporary relevance, seminal works such as Sen (2001) were included to provide theoretical depth and continuity.

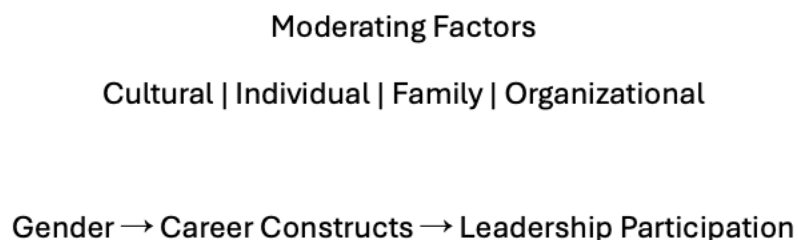
In summary, this literature review establishes a critical foundation for the present study by integrating global and local perspectives on the social values and systemic factors influencing female participation in educational leadership. It demonstrates that gender inequality in leadership emerges through moderated pathways shaped by individual, familial, organisational, and cultural forces. By identifying theoretical gaps and context-specific dynamics, the review justifies the need for empirical investigation into how these factors currently operate within Trinidad and Tobago’s education system and how more equitable leadership pathways may be developed.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This conceptual framework is grounded in a multidimensional understanding of how gender interacts with social values and systemic factors to influence female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. The framework positions gender as the independent variable and access to educational leadership as the dependent variable. This relationship is not direct but is conditioned by a set of interrelated moderating factors: cultural, family-related, organizational, and individual influences. These moderators do not function as independent predictors of leadership attainment; rather, they shape the conditions under which gendered inequalities are produced, reinforced, or constrained within the education system.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual framework illustrating the relationship between gender and female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago*



Source: Author's conceptual framework derived from the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

The framework is informed by the recognition that gender inequality in leadership emerges through socially embedded processes rather than isolated personal or institutional factors. Cultural norms, particularly those rooted in post-colonial histories and patriarchal value systems, shape dominant assumptions about authority and leadership suitability (Heilman, 2012; Blackmore, 2017). These cultural expectations influence family-level dynamics, including caregiving responsibilities, time demands, and socially sanctioned gender roles within households. Together, these broader forces shape organizational practices such as promotion procedures, mentorship availability, and informal gatekeeping within educational institutions. At the individual level, these layered influences affect self-efficacy, leadership aspiration, and confidence, shaping how female educators interpret and navigate leadership opportunities.

The ordering of the moderators within the conceptual framework reflects levels of social embeddedness rather than a rigid causal sequence. Cultural and family factors operate at the macro and meso levels, establishing normative expectations that filter into organizational structures and, ultimately, individual experiences. This layered design emphasizes that individual agency is exercised within constraints that are socially and institutionally produced. As such, the framework

does not imply that individual factors are the root cause of leadership inequality, but rather that they are shaped by broader cultural, familial, and organizational conditions.

This people-centered framework is grounded in the lived experiences of educators and aligns with the interpretive orientation of the study. By foregrounding moderated pathways, the framework provides an analytic structure for examining how social values and systemic factors interact to shape women's access to leadership, rather than attributing inequality to individual choice or capability alone. This approach is particularly suited to the Trinidad and Tobago context, where historical legacies, cultural norms, and organizational practices intersect to influence leadership trajectories in complex ways.

### **Gender as a Determinant of Educational Leadership Access**

This study proposes that gender remains a significant determinant of access to educational leadership positions, not as a standalone causal force, but as a structuring condition whose effects are mediated through social, familial, organizational, and individual contexts. Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen's seminal work, *The Many Faces of Gender Inequality*, provides an important theoretical lens for understanding how gender-based disparities are produced and sustained across professional domains. Sen (2001) identifies multiple, intersecting forms of inequality, including professional inequality, natality inequality, fundamental facility inequality, and opportunity inequality. Among these, professional inequality is most directly relevant to this study, as it refers to systematic barriers that limit women's access to leadership and advancement despite comparable qualifications.

In the context of Trinidad and Tobago, professional inequality in education cannot be understood in isolation from broader social structures. Sen's framework illustrates how gender-based disadvantages are embedded within cultural norms, institutional arrangements, and

historical patterns of exclusion. These insights support the central premise of this study: that women's underrepresentation in educational leadership reflects not individual deficiency, but the cumulative effects of socially produced constraints that operate across multiple levels (Heilman et al, 2023).

Empirical studies across the Caribbean reinforce this interpretation. Research by Francis (n.d.), Shaked et al. (2018), Castaño et al. (2019), and Gilfillan-Farrell (n.d.) demonstrates that female educators in Trinidad and Tobago encounter persistent resistance in advancing to leadership roles. These barriers include limited access to mentorship, gender-biased promotion practices, and organizational cultures that subtly privilege male-coded leadership traits. Although women are numerically dominant within the teaching workforce, leadership remains structurally masculinized, reinforcing a pattern in which gender continues to shape opportunity (Oplatka, 2006).

Global scholarship further confirms that this pattern is not unique to Trinidad and Tobago. Studies by Kim and Shin (2017), Shava et al. (2019), Hallinger (2019), and Martínez et al. (2021) show that education systems worldwide reproduce a gendered hierarchy in which teaching is feminized while leadership is masculinized. These findings support the argument that gender operates as a powerful determinant of leadership access, but one whose influence is filtered through institutional practices and social expectations rather than expressed as a direct causal relationship.

While Sen's typologies provide a robust explanation of the forms and persistence of gender inequality, they do not offer a mechanism for examining how these inequalities operate within specific professional pathways, such as educational leadership. For this reason, Sen's framework is not adopted as the conceptual model for this study. Instead, it informs the theoretical foundation by justifying the need to examine moderated pathways through which gender inequality is

experienced and reproduced. The conceptual framework developed in this study builds on this foundation by explicitly identifying the social and structural conditions that shape how gender influences access to leadership roles.

Taken together, this literature establishes that gender remains a central determinant of educational leadership access, but its effects are neither uniform nor inevitable. Rather, gendered outcomes emerge through interactions between social values, family expectations, organizational practices, and individual perceptions. This understanding provides the basis for examining leadership inequality in Trinidad and Tobago as a structurally embedded and socially mediated phenomenon, rather than as a consequence of individual aspiration or merit alone.

### **Theoretical Clarification: From Sen's Typologies to the Conceptual Framework**

Amartya Sen's seminal work, *The Many Faces of Gender Inequality* (2001), provides critical theoretical grounding for understanding the layered nature of gender-based disparities in professional sectors, including education. His typologies of inequality, such as professional inequality, natality inequality, fundamental facility inequality, and unique opportunity inequality, are used in this study to illustrate the breadth and depth of the inequities women face. These concepts are particularly relevant in Trinidad and Tobago, where women dominate the teaching workforce yet remain underrepresented in educational leadership roles. Sen's framework supports the argument that systemic inequality is perpetuated by cultural, institutional, and structural forces, aligning closely with the broader research problem explored in this study. Accordingly, Sen's theory plays an important role in establishing the theoretical foundation and justifying the examination of gender inequality in access to leadership.

However, while Sen's theory explains the existence and forms of gender inequality, it does not provide a detailed structure for analysing the pathways through which these inequalities

influence leadership access within education. For this reason, Sen's typologies are not adopted as the conceptual framework for this study. Instead, the framework guiding this research is a moderated model that positions gender as the independent variable and access to educational leadership as the dependent variable. This relationship is shaped by four interrelated moderating factors: individual, family-related, organizational, and cultural influences. These moderators reflect how lived experiences and social values intersect to constrain or enable leadership participation among female educators. The framework is people-centered and grounded in lived experience, offering a comprehensive and contextually appropriate approach to understanding gender disparities in leadership. In this way, Sen's theory informs the theoretical background of the study without serving as the operational structure of the conceptual model.

To deepen understanding of how gendered inequalities are produced and sustained, it is also useful to consider additional theoretical perspectives. One of the most relevant is gender socialization theory, which suggests that individuals internalize societal norms regarding gender roles from an early age through interactions with family, school, media, and religious institutions (Carter, 2014; Collins & Bilge, 2020; Hoominfar, 2021). These norms shape beliefs about what individuals can or should aspire to as adults. As Solbes-Canales et al. (2020) argue, early socialization processes generate expectations about what is considered "appropriate" for women and men, including in professional and leadership contexts. For women, internalizing these expectations may result in perceiving leadership as a domain not designed for them or believing that higher standards must be met to be regarded as competent.

Closely related to this is social stratification theory, which examines how social hierarchies based on gender, class, or race influence access to power and opportunity. In patriarchal societies, women have historically been positioned as subordinate to men, a pattern that has translated into

institutional arrangements limiting women's upward mobility (Danaj, 2016; Cerrato & Cifre, 2018). Sen (2001) conceptualizes this as natality inequality, whereby societal preference for males results in greater investment in boys and men, often at the expense of girls and women. These preferences are not merely cultural artifacts; they manifest in workplace practices, political representation, and leadership selection processes.

Historical evidence further reinforces this pattern of exclusion. Between 1809 and 1973, women were legally denied access to basic civil rights in many parts of the world, including the right to vote, own property, and receive equal pay (McLemore, 2021). Although substantial legal progress has since been made, these historical disadvantages continue to echo within contemporary institutional norms and decision-making structures. As such, the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership roles today is not accidental; it reflects the cumulative effects of social conditioning, institutional bias, and policy inertia.

Structural functionalism offers another explanatory lens, positing that early divisions of labour assigned men to external, physical roles and women to domestic responsibilities (Levitt, 2019). Over time, these functional distinctions evolved into rigid gender norms that persist even when no longer socially necessary. The Second World War temporarily disrupted these arrangements, as women entered the workforce in large numbers to support wartime economies. However, many women were subsequently displaced from these roles in the post-war period, reinforcing pre-existing gender hierarchies (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015).

Complementing this perspective, conflict theory provides a critical explanation for the persistence of inequality by arguing that dominant groups maintain power by restricting access to resources and leadership opportunities for others (O'Neil et al., 2017). Within education systems, this can be observed in practices such as biased recruitment criteria, limited sponsorship, and

resistance to inclusive leadership development initiatives. These mechanisms help preserve existing hierarchies while appearing neutral or merit-based.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives demonstrate that gender is not merely a biological distinction but a socially constructed category that shapes access to leadership in both visible and invisible ways. In the Trinidad and Tobago education system, women's access to leadership is influenced by gender through overt discrimination, internalized beliefs, institutional practices, and deeply embedded cultural norms.

In summary, the relationship between gender and access to educational leadership is complex and structurally embedded. Although women in Trinidad and Tobago have made important gains in education, they continue to encounter barriers rooted in historical inequality, social expectations, and institutional resistance. Understanding these dynamics is essential for informing policies and interventions aimed at promoting equitable access to leadership within the education sector.

### **Moderating Factors: A Multidimensional Approach**

The literature reviewed in this study indicates that gender alone does not wholly determine access to educational leadership positions. Rather, the relationship between gender and leadership access is moderated by a range of interrelated factors operating across both micro- and macro-environmental contexts. These include personal beliefs, family dynamics, institutional structures, and broader cultural ideologies. In this study, moderation refers to the ways in which these factors condition how gendered expectations are experienced, interpreted, and enacted within leadership pathways, rather than functioning as independent or direct determinants of leadership attainment.

The glass ceiling theory provides an important conceptual lens for understanding how women encounter barriers when attempting to ascend to leadership roles, particularly within

education systems (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). The theory posits that women are systematically obstructed from reaching senior positions despite possessing qualifications and experience comparable to those of their male counterparts. This perspective is especially relevant in the context of Trinidad and Tobago's education system, where women constitute the majority of teachers at both primary and secondary levels yet remain underrepresented in senior management and policy-making roles.

Jeanette Morris's landmark study, *Women and Educational Management in Trinidad and Tobago* (1993), illustrates how cultural expectations and gendered socialization shape women's leadership trajectories. Morris found that leadership roles were often perceived as male-designated, resulting in many female educators self-selecting out of promotion processes. These internalized beliefs, shaped by longstanding social values, represent a critical individual-level manifestation of broader cultural and organizational constraints, reinforcing gendered patterns of leadership exclusion.

Subsequent research by Victor and Shamila (2018) corroborates the presence of multiple, interacting challenges affecting women's advancement within corporate and educational hierarchies. Their findings suggest that the relationship between gender and career progression is mediated through a complex configuration of moderating variables rather than a single barrier. When the glass ceiling theory is considered alongside theories of gendered organizational structures, it becomes evident that leadership barriers are often subtle, implicit, and normalized, yet nonetheless pervasive. Britton (2000) explains that organizational practices which appear neutral may, in practice, sustain male-centric norms that systematically disadvantage women.

From these intersecting theoretical perspectives, four key moderating factors emerge: individual, family-related, organizational, and cultural influences. These factors form the

foundation of the conceptual framework guiding this study. The framework positions gender as the independent variable influencing access to educational leadership, the dependent variable, while explicitly recognizing that this relationship is not direct, but shaped through the interaction of the four moderators.

Individual factors refer to internal characteristics such as self-efficacy, motivation, self-perception, and educational attainment. These attributes are deeply influenced by gender socialization processes in which girls may be encouraged to adopt passive or nurturing roles, while boys are more often socialized toward ambition and leadership (Victor & Shamila, 2018; Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018). As a result, female teachers may underestimate their leadership potential or hesitate to pursue senior roles, even when objectively qualified (Kray et al., 2025).

Family-related factors include caregiving responsibilities, household labor, and the availability of spousal or extended family support. Research by Žnidaršič and Bernik (2021) and Karya et al. (2021) demonstrates that work–life balance pressures frequently discourage women from seeking leadership positions, particularly when such roles demand long hours, mobility, or relocation. These expectations are often socially normalized and internalized, leading women to prioritize family responsibilities over professional advancement, thereby moderating their engagement with leadership pathways.

Organizational factors encompass promotion policies, recruitment practices, leadership development opportunities, and access to mentorship. Victor and Shamila (2018) argue that many institutional systems within the Caribbean do not actively support women’s advancement into leadership. Organizational cultures that privilege competitive, hierarchical leadership styles may implicitly reward behaviors traditionally associated with masculinity, marginalizing women who adopt collaborative or transformational approaches.

Cultural factors represent the most pervasive moderating influence, encompassing societal norms, religious values, patriarchal ideologies, and gender stereotypes. O'Connor (n.d.) and Victor and Shamila (2018) note that such beliefs strongly shape perceptions of who is considered a “natural” leader. In many Caribbean societies, leadership remains closely associated with masculinity, placing an additional burden on women who must simultaneously demonstrate competence and challenge entrenched stereotypes to gain legitimacy.

The cumulative effect of these four moderators helps explain why female teachers, despite their numerical dominance within the profession, remain underrepresented in senior leadership positions. These factors do not operate in isolation but interact in mutually reinforcing ways, creating a multilayered system of constraint that is difficult to overcome without coordinated structural and cultural change.

Within this framework, career development is conceptualized as the process through which educators prepare for, seek, and attain leadership roles. This process is shaped by individual intention, institutional engagement, and the degree of family and social support available. The model emphasizes that career progression is not solely a function of qualifications or professional merit but is also significantly conditioned by social expectations and structural support systems.

Joan Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organizations offers an important, though narrower, lens for understanding how inequality persists within professional settings. Acker identifies four mechanisms through which organizations become gendered: the division of labor, gendered symbols and language, interpersonal interactions, and identity construction. These processes demonstrate how gender becomes embedded within organizational structures, often to the detriment of women, for example, through expectations that women display nurturing behaviors while men are associated with authority and leadership legitimacy.

While Acker's framework is valuable for illuminating organizational dynamics, this study adopts a broader, more inclusive conceptual approach. The people-centered framework used here integrates organizational processes alongside personal, familial, and cultural dimensions, reflecting more accurately the lived experiences of educators in Trinidad and Tobago. Acker's organizational focus, though significant, does not fully capture the external sociocultural forces that shape leadership access.

Overall, the conceptual framework acknowledges that access to educational leadership is shaped by gender, but that this relationship is complex, contextual, and moderated by an interlocking set of factors rooted in both personal experience and structural arrangements. The framework underscores the need for multidimensional strategies to dismantle leadership barriers, ranging from mentorship and inclusive human resource policies to broader societal shifts in how leadership is defined and valued.

The conceptual framework also serves as an operational guide for the empirical design of this study. The four moderating factors identified in the framework, individual, family-related, organizational, and cultural influences directly informed the development of the survey instrument and the analytical categories used to interpret the findings. Individual factors were examined through items measuring leadership aspiration, perceived leadership capability, and willingness to pursue leadership positions. Family-related factors were explored through questions addressing caregiving responsibilities, work-family balance expectations, and the perceived level of family support for career advancement. Organizational factors were investigated through items relating to mentorship access, leadership development opportunities, promotion transparency, and institutional leadership culture. Cultural influences were examined through questions addressing gender norms, leadership stereotypes, and broader societal expectations regarding leadership

suitability. By structuring the survey instrument around these four dimensions, the study ensures that the conceptual framework directly informs both data collection and analysis. This alignment strengthens the analytical coherence of the research by linking theoretical constructs to measurable indicators of leadership participation (Punch & Oancea, 2014).

This framework is particularly relevant to the Trinidad and Tobago context, where female educators navigate a dynamic interplay of personal ambition, family obligations, organizational constraints, and cultural expectations. By explicitly mapping gender as the independent variable and leadership access as the dependent variable, the framework makes visible the often-invisible constraints placed on women and provides a coherent analytical structure for examining leadership inequality. It also opens space for future research to explore which interventions are most effective at each moderating level, individual, familial, organizational, and cultural, in order to support sustained and equitable change within the education system.

### **The Context for Inequality in Educational Leadership in Trinidad and Tobago**

Teachers' access to leadership roles is not determined by gender alone, but by the ways in which gender intersects with broader sociocultural and institutional forces. Male and female teachers often experience differing levels of encouragement, support, and opportunity shaped by early socialization, traditional gender roles, and prevailing expectations both within and beyond the school system (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). For example, female teachers may encounter internalized self-doubt, disproportionate domestic responsibilities, or exclusion from informal professional networks, all of which can reduce their visibility and limit their mobility within educational leadership pathways.

This section is divided into two parts. The first examines the existence and extent of inequality in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. Drawing on empirical studies and available statistical reports, it explores patterns of representation, career advancement, and participation in decision-making roles. Although women constitute the numerical majority within the teaching profession, evidence consistently shows that they remain underrepresented in senior leadership and policy-level positions within the education system (Ryan & Haslam, 2005).

The second part of the section situates this inequality within established gender-related theoretical perspectives. These include gender socialization theory, glass ceiling theory, and gendered organization theory, which collectively explain how societal norms, organizational practices, and individual beliefs interact to sustain structural inequality. Amartya Sen's (2001) typology of gender inequality further informs this discussion, particularly his concepts of professional and opportunity inequality. While Sen's framework is not adopted as the primary conceptual model for this study, it reinforces the argument that gender inequality is multidimensional and deeply embedded within both institutional arrangements and cultural systems.

Overall, this section establishes the theoretical and empirical context for the study's focus on the social values and factors influencing female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. It highlights how patterns of gender representation are shaped by workplace culture, social norms, and institutional expectations, and it foregrounds the mechanisms through which leadership disparities persist. By clarifying this context, the study creates a foundation for examining how gendered inequalities are reproduced and for identifying more equitable approaches to leadership development within the national education system.

## **Theoretical Assessments**

This section examines female underrepresentation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago through the lens of selected theoretical perspectives. Its purpose is to explain the social values and systemic factors that shape access to leadership roles and influence women educators in particular. The discussion provides a theoretical foundation for understanding female participation in educational leadership, with specific attention to sociocultural dimensions such as gender norms, stereotypes, discrimination, and institutional barriers. The theoretical perspectives informing the conceptual framework highlight how culturally embedded beliefs and norms surrounding gender roles influence perceptions of leadership suitability. Within this context, the limited representation of women in leadership roles is understood to result from deeply rooted societal expectations and systemic patterns that continue to constrain female advancement within the education sector.

### **Understanding Gender as a Social Construct**

The concept of gender plays a foundational role in understanding inequality in educational leadership. The World Health Organization (2022) defines gender as the socially constructed characteristics of women and men, including the norms, roles, and relationships that shape interactions between these groups. This construct differs from sex, which refers to biological and physiological characteristics. Gender is also distinct from gender identity, which describes a person's deeply held sense of their own gender and may or may not align with the sex assigned at birth (Jacobson & Joel, 2019).

As a social construct, gender shapes expectations regarding how individuals are expected to behave, present themselves, and interact within society. These expectations are learned from an early age and reinforced through institutions such as the family, schools, religious organizations,

and the media (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). Gender roles refer to the behaviors and responsibilities considered appropriate for men and women within a particular social context. These socially constructed roles influence perceptions of suitability for professional roles, including leadership positions within education systems.

Although formal academic debate around gender gained prominence in the mid-twentieth century, gendered roles have existed for centuries, with roots in pre-industrial societies. Ester Boserup (1970) and later Giuliano (2017) argued that the emergence of gender roles was closely linked to technological developments in agriculture. Men, perceived as physically stronger, were typically assigned to plowing and other forms of heavy labor, while women were assigned domestic responsibilities and lighter agricultural tasks. While initially shaped by practical considerations, these divisions of labor gradually evolved into enduring social norms regarding appropriate roles for men and women.

As societies developed, these roles became increasingly institutionalized, continuing to influence women's participation in public and professional life. Importantly, the gendered division of labor established patterns that underpin persistent inequalities, including limited access to leadership roles. In contemporary contexts, these historically rooted norms continue to shape how women are perceived in leadership capacities, often rendering their leadership potential less visible or undervalued.

Understanding gender as a socially constructed rather than biologically determined phenomenon is therefore essential for examining the barriers women face in attaining educational leadership positions. This perspective helps explain why, despite possessing comparable or higher qualifications, women remain underrepresented in senior educational management and leadership roles.

### **Historical Origins of Gender Roles: Boserup's Hypothesis**

The historical development of gender roles, particularly within the labour market, can be effectively traced through the hypothesis proposed by Ester Boserup in 1970. Boserup linked the emergence of gendered divisions of labour to technological advancements in agriculture, particularly the shift from shifting cultivation, which relied on hoes and sticks, to plough cultivation. This technological transition altered patterns of labour demand and task allocation, favouring physical strength, which, according to prevailing biological assumptions at the time, advantaged men (Giuliano, 2017).

As plough technology was perceived as more capital-intensive and physically demanding, men increasingly became the primary agricultural labourers, while women were gradually excluded from fieldwork and more closely associated with domestic roles. This process marked an early structural separation between productive and reproductive labour, planting the foundations of what are now recognised as gender roles. Over time, these divisions were no longer understood as functional responses to agricultural conditions but became entrenched cultural norms that reinforced the association of authority, productivity, and public participation with men (Sorgner, 2021).

Empirical support for Boserup's hypothesis is provided by Alesina et al. (2013), who analysed data from the Ethnographic Atlas, covering 1,256 preindustrial ethnic groups worldwide, including societies within the Caribbean region. Their findings indicate that societies with a historical reliance on plough cultivation exhibit stronger endorsement of male breadwinner norms and higher levels of gender inequality in contemporary labour markets.

This historical context is significant for understanding gender inequality in educational leadership. Although modern societies have largely transitioned away from agrarian economies,

the ideological residues of plough-based gender roles continue to influence social expectations and institutional practices. These inherited norms shape perceptions of leadership as a predominantly masculine domain, thereby constraining women's advancement into senior decision-making roles within education (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004).

While biological differences between men and women exist, they do not justify the social construction of gender roles that assign leadership potential on the basis of sex. Rather, such roles were shaped by specific historical conditions and subsequently reinforced through long-term processes of socialization. Recognising the historical origins of these gendered assumptions is therefore essential to understanding and challenging their continued influence on contemporary educational leadership structures.

### **Structural Functionalism and Gender Norms**

The persistence of socially constructed gender roles and their transmission across generations can be critically examined through the lens of structural functionalism. As one of the dominant sociological theories used to explain social behaviour, structural functionalism views society as a complex system composed of interdependent parts that function together to promote social stability and order (Levitt, 2019; Starnski & Son Hing, 2015). Within this framework, gender roles are understood as functional arrangements developed to maintain societal cohesion through a complementary division of labour.

According to this theory, traditional gender roles emerged to ensure efficiency and survival in early human societies. Men assumed responsibilities requiring physical strength, such as hunting, defence, and resource provision, while women undertook domestic duties and child rearing, enabling population stability and social reproduction (Scarborough & Risman, 2018; Giele, 2006). Although these roles initially served practical purposes, they gradually became rigid social

expectations, reinforcing hierarchical gender relations. Over time, these expectations became deeply embedded within cultural and institutional practices.

Structural functionalists argue that for a society to function effectively, each group must perform designated roles that contribute to systemic stability. Women's roles, though often positioned as subordinate, were therefore framed as essential complements to men's contributions. This theoretical position has been widely critiqued, however, for normalising inequality by portraying traditional gender roles as necessary, natural, and resistant to change.

Esther Boserup's hypothesis provides an important historical underpinning to this perspective. The shift toward plough based agriculture favoured male participation in economic production and contributed to the gradual exclusion of women from productive labour (Giuliano, 2017). Structural functionalism helps explain how this exclusion became socially legitimised, transmitted across generations through institutions such as the family, religion, and education.

Global historical events further illustrate structural functionalist dynamics. During the Second World War, women in many countries, including those in the Caribbean, entered roles traditionally occupied by men, working in factories, farms, and defence industries while men were engaged in combat (Carpenter, 2006; Santana, 2016). This period temporarily disrupted established gender norms and demonstrated women's capacity for public and professional leadership roles.

Following the war, however, many societies experienced what structural functionalists would interpret as a return to equilibrium. Women were frequently expected to relinquish wartime roles and resume domestic responsibilities, reinforcing pre-war gender norms. Despite evidence of women's competence in male-dominated domains, cultural and institutional pressures facilitated the restoration of traditional divisions of labour (Ruiz & Gluck, 1988; Barger, 2013).

Some scholars describe this transitional period as one of “feminine masculinity,” in which women adopted traditionally masculine roles while retaining aspects of femininity (Knaff, 2013). These experiences contributed to an emerging consciousness among women regarding their leadership potential, laying the groundwork for subsequent feminist movements and gender equality advocacy.

Although structural functionalism offers a useful framework for understanding how gender roles were historically justified and maintained, its emphasis on social order has been criticized for legitimising patriarchal structures and resisting change. In the context of educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago, these inherited norms continue to influence leadership perceptions, recruitment practices, and opportunity distribution. Leadership is often implicitly associated with masculine traits, discouraging women from pursuing or being considered for senior roles.

Contemporary educational institutions continue to reflect assumptions rooted in structural functionalist thinking, particularly in societies where tradition strongly shapes policy and practice. Leadership traits frequently emphasised in school administration, such as assertiveness, authority, and decisiveness, align with historically masculine-coded behaviours. This alignment reinforces gendered expectations, positioning men as natural leaders while women are more commonly associated with nurturing or supportive roles (Harquail, 2008).

In Trinidad and Tobago, as in many Caribbean societies, educational systems have been shaped by colonial legacies that reinforced British patriarchal norms (Reddock & Bobb-Smith, 2008). These legacies privileged male leadership within both curriculum structures and administrative hierarchies. Despite progressive advances toward gender equality, the residual influence of these systems persists, shaping formal policy and informal expectations within schools.

Structural functionalism also helps explain how gender roles are reproduced through social institutions such as families and schools. For example, the hidden curriculum may implicitly encourage boys toward leadership and technical fields while steering girls toward caregiving or supportive professions. Teachers themselves, shaped by their own socialisation, may unconsciously reproduce these expectations in classroom interactions and guidance practices.

The mass media further reinforces these patterns. In Trinidad and Tobago, representations of male and female educators in textbooks and media often mirror traditional gender norms, portraying male principals as standard and female educators as classroom teachers. Such representations contribute to the normalisation of male leadership and the marginalization of women in authority positions.

Despite its explanatory value, structural functionalism alone is insufficient for capturing the complexity of contemporary gender relations. Critics argue that the theory underemphasizes power, agency, and resistance. In practice, many women actively challenge and negotiate traditional gender expectations, seeking leadership roles despite structural barriers.

In light of these limitations, structural functionalism is best applied as a historical and sociological lens rather than as a justification for gender inequality. Its use in contemporary gender research must be complemented by more critical perspectives that seek not only to explain but also to transform inequitable structures.

Overall, while structural functionalism explains how gender roles were historically constructed and sustained, it also underscores the necessity of social change. Educational institutions in Trinidad and Tobago must critically interrogate inherited norms and adopt more inclusive conceptions of leadership in order to dismantle persistent gender barriers and promote equitable access to leadership roles.

### **Conflict Theory: Competition, Power, and Gender Inequality**

Conflict theory provides a critical lens for analysing gender inequality as a persistent struggle for power and access to resources within societal structures. Rooted in the materialist conception of history, this theory holds that dominant groups maintain their privileged positions by systematically limiting others' access to power and opportunity. In the context of educational leadership, conflict theory suggests that gender-based inequality is not incidental but structurally embedded, operating through institutional mechanisms that prioritise male dominance and marginalise female participation.

According to Gough et al. (2008), conflict theory is grounded in the idea that social structures are shaped by competition between groups for limited resources, including education, employment, and leadership positions. Within this framework, society is viewed as inherently unequal, with power concentrated among those who historically controlled productive resources, most often men in patriarchal societies. Leadership inequality within education is therefore understood as an outcome of sustained power preservation rather than merit-based differentiation, reflecting deliberate efforts to maintain male hegemony.

In the case of Trinidad and Tobago, gender-based competition over leadership access can be traced to long-standing colonial and patriarchal legacies that prioritised male authority in both public and private spheres. During the colonial period, formal leadership roles in government and education were almost exclusively reserved for men. Although women have since gained broader access to education and employment, these historical exclusions continue to shape contemporary institutional arrangements. As Milkman et al. (1987) highlights, even when women entered the labour force in significant numbers, particularly during periods of national or global crisis, such as the World Wars, their participation was often framed as temporary or supplementary. Following

these periods, women were frequently expected to return to domestic roles, while men reasserted control over professional and leadership spaces.

This pattern of exclusion and resistance is consistent with conflict theory's explanation of cyclical struggles between dominant and subordinate groups. Even where women demonstrate equivalent or superior qualifications, male-dominated institutions may resist their advancement in order to protect established hierarchies. This dynamic remains visible in the contemporary Caribbean context. As Kaufman and Taniguchi (2019) observe, institutional cultures across the region frequently reproduce social values that position men as "natural" leaders while relegating women to supportive or secondary roles.

Conflict theory also draws attention to the role of ideology in legitimising inequality. Patriarchal norms are sustained not solely through coercive power but through cultural narratives that frame men as more authoritative, rational, or emotionally suited to leadership. Such narratives normalise exclusion and reduce its visibility, discouraging women from pursuing leadership roles and shaping selection processes in ways that favour men. In Trinidad and Tobago, these ideologies are embedded in recruitment and promotion practices, access to mentorship, and informal professional networks that often advantage male educators.

Importantly, conflict theory also accounts for resistance to inequality, highlighting how subordinate groups challenge dominant power structures through collective action, advocacy, and institutional reform. Feminist movements that gained momentum during the twentieth century contested prevailing narratives and demanded women's inclusion in leadership and governance. However, as Stamarski & Son Hing (2015) note, such challenges often provoke backlash as dominant groups mobilise to protect existing advantages. Within educational institutions, this

resistance may take the form of scepticism toward women in senior leadership, opposition to equity-based policies, or limited institutional support for work-life balance.

Trinidad and Tobago's experience reflects these dynamics. While legislative reforms and educational policies have advanced gender equality, institutional inertia continues to restrict women's progression into leadership roles. Male teachers remain disproportionately represented in senior leadership positions despite women forming the majority of the teaching workforce. Research by Washington and Gounko (2024) and Joseph et al. (2016) indicates that female educators frequently encounter resistance when seeking leadership roles, both from colleagues and from organisational systems that reproduce existing power relations. These findings reinforce the conflict theory perspective that gender inequality in educational leadership is a systemic issue rather than a consequence of individual choice or capability.

Furthermore, conflict theory illuminates how power imbalances are maintained through subtle and often invisible practices, including gatekeeping, patronage, and sponsorship bias. These mechanisms regulate access to leadership pathways, ensuring that opportunities remain concentrated among those already in positions of influence, typically men.

In summary, conflict theory frames gender inequality in educational leadership as part of a broader struggle for power, access, and control. It emphasises the deliberate and systemic nature of exclusion, demonstrating how historical legacies, institutional cultures, and ideological frameworks operate together to marginalise women. This perspective provides a critical foundation for understanding why female educators in Trinidad and Tobago continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions despite sustained progress in education and employment.

### **Symbolic Interactionism: Meaning-Making and Stereotypes**

Symbolic interactionism offers a powerful lens through which to examine how gender-based stereotypes develop, persist, and shape behaviour, particularly in the context of leadership and professional advancement. This theoretical perspective posits that individuals derive meaning from social interactions and that these meanings influence self-concept, decision making, and social roles (Gussak, 2008). Individuals, therefore, interpret the social world and their own positions within it through shared symbolic meanings that are produced and reinforced through interaction.

When applied to gender and educational leadership, symbolic interactionism suggests that beliefs about who “naturally” belongs in leadership roles are not biologically determined but socially constructed through repeated interpersonal and cultural exchanges. Over time, individuals internalise these meanings and reproduce them, often unconsciously. For example, when leadership is symbolically associated with assertiveness, authority, and rationality traits traditionally coded as masculine, women may be perceived as less suitable leaders regardless of their qualifications or performance (Heilman, 2012). Conversely, attributes such as empathy, collaboration, and emotional intelligence, frequently associated with femininity, may be undervalued in leadership assessments, reinforcing a gendered divide.

In educational settings, this symbolic construction of leadership is particularly influential. Teachers, students, administrators, and policymakers all participate in ongoing meaning-making processes that shape perceptions of leadership suitability. Gussak (2008) emphasises that these social cues are not static but are continuously learned, reinforced, and transmitted across generations. As a result, leadership pathways are shaped not only by formal credentials and experience but also by the informal narratives and expectations circulating within educational institutions and communities.

Within the Trinidad and Tobago context, symbolic interactionism helps explain why women, despite constituting the majority of the teaching workforce, remain underrepresented in senior leadership roles. Cultural meanings attached to female educators often emphasise caregiving, nurturing, and support roles, which are viewed as valuable yet secondary. Leadership, by contrast, continues to be symbolically linked to masculinity, authority, and decision-making, making it more readily associated with male educators. These symbolic interpretations influence how women are evaluated by others and how they perceive themselves, shaping self-efficacy, confidence, and willingness to pursue leadership positions.

The influence of symbolic meanings is evident in both formal and informal professional contexts. Hiring panels may unconsciously associate leadership potential with behaviours that align with masculine norms, even when such criteria are not explicitly stated. Similarly, mentorship and sponsorship opportunities may be extended more readily to individuals who conform to dominant leadership prototypes, thereby reinforcing existing gender hierarchies. These symbolic processes extend beyond the workplace into family socialisation, religious teachings, media representations, and educational curricula, all of which contribute to the formation of shared expectations about gender and leadership.

A concrete illustration of these dynamics can be found in a 2000 memorandum to the President of Trinidad and Tobago authored by former Senator Dr. Daphne Phillips. In this document, Phillips described how highly qualified women were frequently overlooked for leadership and decision-making roles in favour of less qualified male counterparts. She attributed this pattern largely to persistent stereotypes about women's leadership capacity, reflecting precisely the kinds of symbolic meanings emphasised within symbolic interactionist theory.

International research further supports this perspective. A report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2014) highlights how gender stereotyping at the societal level shapes perceptions of women's competence, particularly in leadership, technical, and decision-making roles. These socially constructed meanings contribute to biased recruitment and evaluation processes, in which women are often held to higher standards and their actions interpreted more critically.

The Chamorro-Premuzic and Gallop (2020) similarly notes that symbolic meanings influence not only institutional practices but also women's internal narratives. When leadership is consistently associated with men, women may internalise beliefs that they are less competent or must exert greater effort to demonstrate legitimacy. These internalised messages can affect career decision-making, professional confidence, and long-term engagement with leadership pathways, leading some women to opt out not because of limited ability or ambition but because accumulated symbolic cues signal exclusion.

Within symbolic interactionism, the power of symbols lies in their ability to become taken for granted. Gendered assumptions about leadership often go unchallenged because they are embedded in everyday interactions and routine organisational practices. For example, patterns of communication in staff meetings, decisions about who is invited to lead school-wide initiatives, or expectations about who undertakes administrative or supportive tasks all reflect and reinforce gendered meanings.

Addressing these symbolic barriers, therefore, requires attention to the interactional level, not solely policy reform. Leadership development initiatives, mentorship programmes, inclusive language practices, and curriculum reforms must engage with the symbolic environment in which

educators operate. By reshaping the meanings attached to leadership and gender, symbolic interactionism offers both an analytic framework and a pathway for transformation.

In summary, symbolic interactionism demonstrates that gender inequality in educational leadership is not only structural or policy-driven but is also sustained through everyday meanings and assumptions. These symbolic processes shape how women in Trinidad and Tobago are perceived, how they perceive themselves, and how educational institutions reproduce or challenge gendered expectations. Making these meanings visible and subject to critical reflection is essential for building more inclusive and equitable leadership environments.

### **Feminist Theory and the Challenge to Patriarchy**

Feminist theory offers a crucial perspective for understanding the origins and persistence of gender inequality, particularly in relation to leadership and institutional power. At its core, feminist theory challenges the social, cultural, and institutional structures that have historically positioned men as the default holders of authority while relegating women to subordinate roles. In this study, feminist theory is used as a critical lens rather than as a singular explanatory model, supporting analysis of the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. Despite high levels of educational attainment and workforce participation, female educators remain disproportionately absent from senior decision-making positions.

Feminist theory is not a single unified perspective but consists of multiple strands that explain women's marginalization in different ways. Liberal feminist approaches focus on equal access and opportunity within existing institutional structures, while more critical feminist traditions examine how patriarchy is embedded in organizational and cultural systems. Intersectional feminist theory, most notably articulated by Crenshaw (n.d.), emphasizes that gender inequality operates in interaction with race, class, and historical context rather than as an isolated

category. This intersectional perspective is particularly relevant to post-colonial Caribbean societies such as Trinidad and Tobago, where women's leadership experiences are shaped not only by gender but also by race, culture, and colonial legacy. Black and decolonial feminist perspectives, reflected in the work of Hooks (2014) and Caribbean gender scholars, further stress that feminist analysis must be context-sensitive rather than universally applied. For this reason, the present study adopts an intersectional and institutional feminist lens to examine how gendered power operates within educational leadership structures in Trinidad and Tobago (Crenshaw, n.d.; Joseph et al., 2016; Washington & Gounko, 2024).

Feminist theory critiques patriarchal systems that legitimise male dominance through norms, policies, and institutional practices. It emphasises that gender inequality is not the result of individual inadequacy but of entrenched power relations that systematically privilege men over women. In educational leadership, this inequality is reflected in hiring and promotion practices that favour masculinised leadership traits, informal professional networks that exclude women, and persistent social narratives that question women's competence in positions of authority.

The lived experiences of women in Trinidad and Tobago reflect these dynamics. Despite notable progress in women's access to education and employment, leadership opportunities remain constrained by patriarchal norms embedded within both institutions and the broader culture. Male-dominated structures continue to shape schools, ministries, and educational agencies, where leadership roles are frequently perceived as masculine domains.

Feminist theorists argue that gender based stereotyping functions as a powerful mechanism of social control (Heilman et al., 2024). It reinforces inequality by framing men as more rational, assertive, and authoritative, qualities often equated with effective leadership, while portraying women as emotional, nurturing, and better suited to supportive or domestic roles. Such narratives

persist across institutional contexts and are often reproduced subtly, shaping performance evaluations, promotion decisions, and the confidence with which women pursue leadership roles.

OHCHR (2014) identifies gender stereotyping as a root cause of women's inequality, noting its impact across professional, social, and political domains. These stereotypes are particularly damaging when institutionalised, becoming embedded within systems such as education, healthcare, and governance. Within education systems, this may manifest as assumptions that men are more suitable for principalship, district supervision, or ministry-level leadership, despite women comprising the majority of the teaching workforce.

Feminist theory also highlights the internalisation of systemic messages by women themselves, often resulting in reduced self-efficacy and constrained leadership aspiration. The Chamorro-Premuzic and Gallop (2020) reports that workplace stereotypes influence not only how women are evaluated but also how they perceive their own competence. Many women report feeling compelled to overperform or display hypercompetence to achieve recognition equivalent to that of their male colleagues. In some cases, women adopt masculinised leadership behaviours to gain legitimacy, often at the expense of authenticity and professional satisfaction.

This internal conflict is also evident in Trinidad and Tobago. Research by Joseph et al. (2016) documents how female educators reported experiencing disrespect from students and male colleagues, particularly in male-dominated school environments. Some participants described feeling pressured to suppress traits traditionally associated with femininity and adopt more aggressive leadership styles to be taken seriously. These experiences illustrate how patriarchal norms continue to regulate leadership behaviour and constrain women's advancement.

Feminist theory further situates contemporary gender inequality within a broader historical trajectory of resistance and reform. From the suffrage movements of the nineteenth century to the

feminist waves of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, women have consistently challenged exclusion from leadership and decision-making. In Trinidad and Tobago, feminist advocacy has influenced public discourse and policy development related to gender equity in education, governance, and employment.

Despite these advances, feminist theorists caution that progress in representation does not automatically dismantle structural barriers. In educational leadership, patriarchal assumptions remain embedded within both policy frameworks and everyday practice. Achieving gender equity, therefore, requires not only increased representation but a fundamental rethinking of how leadership is defined, valued, and rewarded. This includes moving beyond hierarchical and masculinised leadership models toward more inclusive and collaborative approaches that recognise diverse forms of leadership competence.

In conclusion, feminist theory provides a transformative lens for analysing the gendered dimensions of educational leadership. It exposes the cultural expectations, institutional practices, and internalised beliefs that sustain inequality. Within the context of Trinidad and Tobago, feminist theory underscores the urgency of challenging patriarchal norms and reimagining leadership structures in ways that are equitable, inclusive, and reflective of the educators who shape the nation's educational future.

### **Inequality in Educational Leadership in Trinidad and Tobago**

#### **Historical Patterns of Gender Inequality in Educational Leadership**

Gender inequality in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago has deep historical roots that reflect entrenched patriarchal norms, institutional biases, and long-standing occupational segregation. Multiple studies spanning several decades demonstrate that while the majority of teachers in the country have been female, men have consistently occupied a disproportionate share

of leadership and decision-making positions (Oplatka, 2006). This imbalance has persisted despite women's numerical dominance within the teaching profession.

An early and influential study by Morris (1993) identified a persistent paradox within the education system. Although women comprised the majority of the teaching workforce, they remained underrepresented in senior leadership roles such as principals, vice principals, and policymakers. Conversely, men, despite being fewer in number, were significantly overrepresented in these positions of authority. Morris attributed this imbalance to the combined effects of negative socialization that discouraged women from aspiring to leadership and systemic discrimination within the education sector, which she described as both patriarchal and exclusionary.

More recent research confirms that these disparities have remained evident over time. Oplatka (2006), in his examination of women's experiences in educational administration across developing countries, including Trinidad and Tobago, found that most women occupied mid-level leadership roles, such as school principals or vice principals, while very few held senior policy-making positions. Despite representing the majority of educators, female teachers continued to experience limited access to top-tier leadership opportunities.

Further supporting these findings, Sookram and Strobl (2008) examined occupational segregation trends using labour force survey data from 1994 to 2004. Their analysis revealed that although women's access to education and employment had improved over time, occupational segregation persisted across sectors. Women remained concentrated in roles considered socially appropriate, while men were disproportionately represented in management and executive leadership positions, including within education. This pattern indicates that leadership, even in female-dominated sectors, continued to be gendered in favour of men.

Collectively, these studies underscore the historical consistency of gender inequality in educational leadership and portray an education system that has resisted substantive structural change. The exclusion of women from leadership roles is not incidental but reflects broader societal patterns that devalue women's leadership potential. These patterns are embedded within the socio-political and institutional fabric of Trinidad and Tobago and continue to shape contemporary leadership outcomes.

Despite gains in women's educational attainment and workforce participation, structural imbalances in leadership representation remain evident. This persistence reflects what is commonly described in the literature as the glass ceiling, an invisible barrier that restricts women's advancement into the highest levels of organisational leadership regardless of merit or qualification (Cotter et al., 2001). In Trinidad and Tobago, this barrier appears to be sustained through both formal institutional mechanisms and informal, culturally embedded perceptions of leadership as a predominantly male domain.

Overall, the historical and empirical evidence demonstrates that gender inequality in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago is long-standing and systemic. It is shaped by intersecting cultural, organisational, and policy-level dynamics that collectively preserve male dominance in leadership, even as women continue to make significant gains in education and employment overall.

### **Policy Frameworks and the Gap Between Rhetoric and Practice**

In response to persistent gender inequality, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has adopted several policy frameworks aimed at promoting gender equity, including within the education sector. Central among these is the National Policy on Gender and Development, which seeks to institutionalise gender mainstreaming across both public and private spheres. This policy

aligns with the objectives of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 5, which emphasises gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (UN Women, 2021).

These frameworks reflect growing recognition of the need to dismantle structural and cultural barriers that limit women's access to decision-making positions. Within the education sector, the Ministry of Education has publicly articulated its commitment to gender equity in leadership and curriculum development. Stated initiatives include leadership training programmes, mentorship opportunities for women, and efforts to address disparities in recruitment and promotion processes (Government of Trinidad and Tobago, 2022).

Despite these commitments, the implementation of gender equity policies has been uneven. Although formal frameworks exist, their practical impact has often failed to match policy rhetoric. Gender equity measures are frequently weakened through bureaucratic processes or insufficiently enforced. In many cases, institutional resistance rooted in entrenched patriarchal attitudes has limited the effectiveness of these initiatives at the school and regional levels.

A key challenge lies in the disconnect between policy intent and organisational culture. While national policy documents emphasise inclusion and equity, school-level practices often continue to reflect traditional gender hierarchies. For example, although increasing numbers of women pursue leadership training, they are not consistently selected for senior roles due to persistent gendered assumptions about authority, decision-making capacity, or leadership style. Such cultural biases are rarely addressed directly within policy frameworks, reducing their transformative potential.

This challenge is compounded by weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Many institutions lack systematic processes for assessing whether gender equity policies are effectively

implemented or sustained over time. As a result, gender inclusive practices tend to be reactive rather than embedded within organisational structures and are often dependent on external funding or advocacy.

International and regional organisations have similarly identified this gap between policy and practice. UN Women (2021) observes that while Caribbean countries, including Trinidad and Tobago, have made important advances in gender policy development, the impact of these policies remains limited without deep structural reform and sustained political commitment. Local education stakeholders have echoed these concerns, emphasising the need for gender responsive leadership development, institutional accountability, and cultural change that extends beyond symbolic compliance.

In summary, while policy frameworks represent an essential step toward gender equity, they are insufficient in isolation. Without consistent enforcement, cultural transformation, and regular evaluation, efforts to improve gender parity in educational leadership risk remaining rhetorical rather than substantive. This policy practice gap underscores the necessity for systemic change that reshapes everyday institutional practices, leadership norms, and opportunity structures within Trinidad and Tobago's education system.

### **Cultural Norms and Leadership Preparation**

In Trinidad and Tobago, persistent gender inequality in educational leadership is closely linked to the influence of cultural norms and the structure of leadership preparation processes. Despite the dominance of female teachers in the profession, particularly at the primary and secondary school levels, senior leadership roles such as superintendents, policymakers, and executive administrators remain disproportionately occupied by men. This imbalance extends

beyond numerical representation and reflects deeply ingrained societal beliefs about gender roles, leadership aptitude, and institutional privilege.

Miller (2013) highlights this dichotomy by noting that while women constitute the majority of the teaching profession, they are largely confined to mid-level leadership roles such as principals and vice principals. Meanwhile, men, though fewer in number, are overrepresented in top-tier leadership positions and policymaking structures. This vertical segregation indicates that educational institutions in Trinidad and Tobago continue to operate within androcentric norms, which associate authority, competence, and decision-making power with masculinity.

These gendered expectations are embedded within leadership preparation and development processes. Mohammed (2015), for instance, found that programmes designed to prepare teachers for leadership frequently overlook the distinct professional realities and personal responsibilities faced by women. The content and delivery of such programmes tend to be modelled on male-centred assumptions, favouring competitiveness, constant availability, willingness to relocate, long working hours, and hierarchical decision-making. These assumptions rarely accommodate the gendered division of labour outside the workplace, particularly the dual professional and domestic roles that many women continue to perform.

This imbalance contributes to what researchers describe as a “leaky pipeline,” whereby women progressively exit leadership pathways due to institutional and cultural pressures. Mohammed (2015) argues that these systemic constraints result in the disproportionate attrition of female leadership candidates, allowing men to dominate the final stages of leadership selection processes regardless of women’s academic qualifications or teaching experience.

The findings of Ruprah et al. (2018) further illustrate this pattern. Their regional study across several Caribbean countries, including Trinidad and Tobago, reveals that although

educational segregation has declined, occupational segregation persists. Women remain overrepresented in support and administrative roles, while men dominate executive and strategic positions, even in sectors where women outnumber men overall. The persistence of occupational gender segregation highlights cultural norms and workplace structures that continue to value and reward male-coded leadership styles, while marginalising alternative approaches often associated with female educators.

This structural androcentrism is not always explicit, yet it significantly influences recruitment, promotion, and succession planning processes. Informal professional networks, mentorship opportunities, and access to leadership responsibilities are frequently directed toward men, reinforcing their visibility and perceived readiness for advancement. In contrast, women are often overlooked or assumed to lack the “toughness” or “availability” required for high-stakes leadership roles, despite demonstrating high levels of competence, adaptability, and resilience within classrooms and school communities.

Leadership preparation and development pathways in Trinidad and Tobago, therefore, continue to reflect and reproduce gendered expectations. These processes are not isolated mechanisms but are deeply embedded within broader cultural scripts concerning authority, work-life balance, and leadership identity. As long as leadership development remains structured around male-centred models, women will continue to face systemic disadvantage, not due to lack of ability, but because institutional frameworks fail to recognise and support their leadership potential.

### **Women’s Lived Experiences and Barriers in Practice**

While quantitative data and policy analysis reveal structural patterns of gender inequality in educational leadership, it is through women’s lived experiences that the depth and complexity of these challenges are most vividly understood. In Trinidad and Tobago, qualitative research has

increasingly highlighted how female educators navigate, resist, and are constrained by institutional cultures that reflect and reinforce broader societal gender norms.

Washington and Gounko (2024) conducted a narrative inquiry into the leadership experiences of Trinidadian women of colour, revealing the deeply personal and systemic dimensions of gender discrimination. Grounded in ethics of care and constructivist theory, the study gathered accounts from retired female teachers who described experiences of exclusion, marginalization, and resistance within the education sector. Despite their qualifications and years of service, these women were frequently overlooked for leadership roles. Participants described their workplaces as androcentric, structured in ways that privileged male voices, behaviours, and expectations, limiting women's access to authority and decision-making positions.

These findings reflect a broader pattern in which women are underrepresented in leadership and discouraged through both overt and subtle signals from pursuing senior roles. One dominant theme emerging from the narratives was the emotional and psychological toll of operating within male-dominated professional environments. Participants reported that, in order to be perceived as competent or taken seriously, they were often expected to adopt behaviours coded as masculine, including assertiveness, emotional detachment, and authoritative communication styles. Many felt compelled to suppress or de-emphasise leadership approaches grounded in collaboration, empathy, and relational management, despite the effectiveness of these approaches in educational contexts.

The structural barriers encountered by these women also intersect with challenges related to career development. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2017), women across both public and private sectors face persistent obstacles to leadership advancement due to rigid and outdated career progression models. These models frequently fail to accommodate the complex balancing of professional responsibilities and family obligations that many women

navigate. As a result, women disproportionately exit leadership pipelines, not because of limited ambition or capability, but because institutional structures lack flexibility and sustained support.

These barriers are further reinforced by enduring gender stereotypes that shape how students, colleagues, and supervisors perceive female educators. Joseph et al. (2016) found that female teachers working in male-dominated schools were often subjected to overt and subtle forms of disrespect, particularly from male students who perceived them as less authoritative than male teachers. The researchers also documented resistance from some male colleagues, who undermined or dismissed women's leadership through everyday interactions and informal practices. Such dynamics reflect broader cultural narratives that associate leadership, authority, and competence with masculinity.

Faced with these conditions, many women reported modifying their professional demeanour in order to gain legitimacy. Adopting masculine-coded traits sometimes enabled short-term acceptance, yet often resulted in negative personal outcomes, including burnout, imposter syndrome, and diminished job satisfaction. Importantly, these adaptive strategies did little to disrupt the institutional cultures that necessitated them, allowing gendered expectations to persist unchallenged.

Collectively, these lived experiences demonstrate that gender inequality in educational leadership is not only a matter of policy or representation. It is relational, emotionally experienced, and reproduced through everyday interactions within schools and educational institutions. Addressing these barriers, therefore, requires more than formal reform. It demands cultural transformation that validates diverse leadership styles, challenges entrenched stereotypes, and creates inclusive environments in which women can pursue leadership without compromising their identity or well-being.

### **Agency, Success Stories, and Emerging Leadership Models**

While much of the literature emphasises the systemic barriers that limit women's access to educational leadership, it is equally important to recognise the agency, resilience, and achievements of women who have succeeded despite these constraints. In Trinidad and Tobago, numerous women have navigated structural barriers to attain senior leadership roles within schools and educational institutions, serving as principals, curriculum coordinators, district supervisors, and education officers.

These success stories reflect both individual determination and the presence of enabling conditions such as mentorship, family support, institutional encouragement, and access to professional development. Washington and Gounko (2024) found that many women who progressed into leadership roles attributed their advancement to strong professional networks and intentional mentorship, often provided by individuals who actively recognised and supported their leadership potential. These relationships offered critical guidance and emotional support in navigating male-dominated organisational cultures.

Transformational leadership approaches have also emerged as a strategic response to gendered expectations. Joseph et al. (2016) observed that many women leaders adopted inclusive and collaborative leadership styles that emphasised empathy, ethical decision making, and community engagement. These approaches enabled women to lead effectively within existing institutional structures while simultaneously challenging traditional, masculinised models of authority. By prioritising communication, transparency, and shared vision, women leaders often built trust and legitimacy while remaining authentic to their values.

The presence of women in senior leadership roles has generated a multiplier effect within the education system. By modelling alternative leadership practices and mentoring younger female

educators, these leaders have contributed to the gradual reshaping of leadership pathways. Their visibility challenges assumptions that leadership competence is inherently gendered and demonstrates the value of diverse leadership identities.

Despite their significance, such narratives remain underrepresented in academic literature, which often prioritises deficit-based analyses of inequality. Incorporating accounts of success provides a more balanced and comprehensive understanding of gender dynamics in educational leadership. Highlighting agency alongside constraint underscores the importance of context-sensitive strategies that support women's leadership development rather than framing inequality solely in terms of barriers.

These narratives align closely with feminist and constructivist perspectives that foreground lived experience and the co-construction of meaning within social systems. By documenting both struggle and success, the literature more accurately reflects the complexity of women's leadership journeys and informs policies that promote inclusive and sustainable leadership development.

In conclusion, while systemic inequities persist, the experiences of successful female leaders in Trinidad and Tobago illustrate the potential for institutional transformation. These women have navigated entrenched barriers and contributed to the reshaping of leadership cultures within their schools and communities. Their experiences demonstrate that meaningful change is possible when personal agency is supported by enabling environments, intentional mentorship, and recognition of diverse leadership practices within the education sector.

### **Summary**

This section has illustrated that the relationship between gender and teachers' access to educational leadership positions is deeply contextual and embedded within historical, cultural, and institutional constructions of gender roles. The hypothesis proposed by Ester Boserup offers a

compelling explanation for the origins of these roles by linking them to technological transitions in agriculture. The shift from cultivation characterised by the use of hoes and sticks to plough technology, which relied on animal power and demanded considerable physical strength, positioned men advantageously. As Boserup argued, this transition institutionalised a division of labour in which men increasingly assumed productive roles outside the home, while women became associated with domestic responsibilities.

Although biologically rooted differences in upper body strength have been observed (Hegge et al., 2015), it is the social interpretation and institutionalisation of these differences, rather than biology itself, that produced enduring gender norms. Over time, this division of labour was reinforced through socialisation processes, becoming deeply embedded within cultural expectations and later reproduced through institutional practices. Structural functionalism helps explain how these roles became normalised in the name of social stability, while simultaneously entrenching gender hierarchies that continue to shape contemporary leadership structures.

The Second World War introduced a temporary disruption to established gender norms. As men left for military service, women entered industrial and professional roles, demonstrating their capacity to perform work previously designated as masculine. However, women's post-war resistance to a full return to domestic roles generated social tension, prompting renewed efforts to reassert male dominance in professional and leadership spaces. Conflict theory provides insight into this dynamic by conceptualising gender inequality as an ongoing struggle over access to resources, including employment, status, and leadership authority. The post-war period thus functioned as a critical turning point, contributing to feminist resistance movements and future demands for gender equality.

In societies historically shaped by patriarchal ideologies, including those in the Caribbean, negative stereotypes of women emerged as symbolic mechanisms used to sustain male dominance. These stereotypes became embedded within institutional practices and everyday interactions, contributing to what is commonly described as the glass ceiling. Within Trinidad and Tobago's education sector, this invisible barrier continues to limit many qualified women to mid-level leadership roles, despite women's numerical dominance within the teaching profession.

As highlighted through symbolic interactionism, cultural meanings associated with leadership attributes such as assertiveness, authority, and rationality have traditionally been coded as masculine, while traits commonly associated with women, including collaboration and empathy, are often undervalued. These symbolic meanings shape not only how women are perceived by others but also how they perceive themselves, influencing self-efficacy, confidence, and willingness to pursue leadership roles. Feminist theory further clarifies that these outcomes are neither natural nor inevitable but are socially constructed and sustained by systems that uphold patriarchal privilege.

In Trinidad and Tobago, the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership is therefore not a reflection of individual capability or lack of ambition. Rather, it results from a complex interplay of historical legacies, social norms, institutional arrangements, and cultural narratives that continue to position leadership as a male domain. These forces do not operate independently. Instead, they are mediated through a range of moderating variables that shape how gender influences teachers' leadership trajectories.

As articulated in the conceptual framework, these moderating factors include individual-level influences, such as self-efficacy and leadership aspirations; family-related factors, such as caregiving responsibilities and support systems; organisational factors, such as mentorship access,

workplace culture, and promotion practices; and cultural factors, including societal stereotypes and gender role expectations. Together, these moderators explain why gendered outcomes in leadership persist despite formal commitments to equality.

The subsequent sections of the literature review examine these moderating factors thematically, exploring how they interact with gender to shape leadership trajectories within education. In doing so, this study not only identifies structural barriers to gender equity but also creates space for the voices, strategies, and successes of women who are navigating and transforming these systems. This integrative approach highlights the importance of future research that adopts diverse and context-sensitive perspectives in the analysis of gender and educational leadership.

## **The Moderating Impacts of Individual Factors on the Relationship Between Gender and Attainment of Educational Leadership Roles**

### **Self-Efficacy and Motivation in Career Advancement**

The conceptual framework of this study identifies individual factors as key moderators in the relationship between gender and career progression among educators. Notably, variables such as level of education, self-motivation, and self-perception significantly influence an individual's willingness to pursue leadership roles (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018; Victor & Shamila, 2018). These factors do not operate independently of context but are shaped through lived experiences and socialisation processes that are often gendered.

One of the most influential theoretical models explaining the role of individual factors in career progression is Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Career Theory. According to this model, an individual's belief in their capability to perform tasks effectively, referred to as self-efficacy,

plays a critical role in shaping career-related decisions and motivation (Wendling & Sagas, 2020). Bandura argues that even when individuals possess the requisite skills for a task, their perceived level of self-efficacy determines whether they will actively pursue opportunities or withdraw from them.

This belief-based mechanism is particularly relevant to understanding gender disparities in educational leadership. Bandura's theory is often illustrated through the skill motivation matrix, which suggests that motivation is highest when individuals believe they possess the skills necessary to succeed (Havermans et al., 2019). Conversely, individuals may refrain from pursuing leadership opportunities even when objectively competent if they doubt their capacity to succeed. Such patterns of self-doubt are more frequently observed among women, who, through gendered socialisation and repeated exposure to stereotypes, may internalise uncertainty about their leadership potential.

These beliefs are not formed in isolation. Social environments, peer interactions, and cultural expectations play a central role in shaping how individuals evaluate their capabilities. In this context, gender functions as a moderating lens through which self-efficacy is constructed and reinforced. Women are often socialised to value relational and communal behaviours, which may be perceived as misaligned with dominant leadership norms that prioritise assertiveness, authority, and control (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Over time, this perceived misalignment between gendered identity and institutional leadership expectations can undermine women's confidence in their suitability for leadership roles.

The application of Bandura's theory to educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago highlights the close relationship between individual psychological factors and broader sociocultural norms. Even when women possess qualifications equal to or exceeding those of their

male counterparts, they may refrain from seeking leadership positions due to perceived incompatibility between their self-identity and prevailing leadership ideals. Enhancing women's motivation to pursue leadership, therefore, requires more than skills acquisition. It necessitates addressing underlying beliefs about self-worth, capability, and the legitimacy of women's leadership identities.

Understanding the influence of self-efficacy and motivation helps explain why some female teachers in Trinidad and Tobago choose not to seek promotion. Despite their professional qualifications and experience, these educators may experience reduced motivation linked to diminished self-belief. This diminished self-belief is often the cumulative result of prolonged exposure to gender norms and organisational cultures that implicitly privilege masculine models of leadership.

This theoretical framing clarifies the moderating role of individual factors in the relationship between gender and career progression and provides a foundation for practical intervention. Leadership development programmes must therefore extend beyond technical competencies to include mentorship, identity-affirming feedback, and training that builds resilience to stereotype-based threat. Such approaches are particularly important for female educators operating within patriarchal or male-dominated educational systems.

### **Self-Perception, Self-Concept, and Gendered Socialization**

Self-efficacy does not exist in isolation. It is deeply rooted in an individual's broader sense of self, which includes self-perception, self-concept, and self-esteem. These constructs are interdependent and emerge through socialisation processes, particularly during formative stages of development. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory identifies self-efficacy as a belief system that is

built upon these self-assessments, making them central to an individual's motivation to pursue career advancement and leadership opportunities.

Self-perception refers to how individuals view their own traits and abilities. When individuals perceive themselves as capable and worthy, they are more likely to adopt a proactive orientation toward leadership and professional growth (Kung, 2009). Self-concept, by contrast, encompasses the beliefs individuals hold about who they are, which are shaped through social feedback, comparison, and interaction with others (Peiffer et al., 2020). Similarly, self-esteem reflects the value individuals place on their abilities and overall self-worth relative to others, and it plays a significant role in shaping confidence, aspiration, and career-related decision-making.

These psychological constructs are strongly shaped by gendered socialisation. According to Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, individuals experience a critical phase of identity formation during adolescence, in which they negotiate their sense of self in relation to societal expectations and norms (Ragelienė, 2016). For girls and young women, this stage is often complicated by social messages that reinforce traditional gender roles, prioritising emotional expression, nurturing, and conformity over leadership, ambition, and assertiveness. When internalised, these expectations can inhibit the development of a confident leadership identity.

Socialisation also influences how individuals interpret, internalise, and respond to feedback. Girls and women are more frequently exposed to messages that question their competence in domains associated with authority, decision-making, and leadership. Over time, these messages accumulate and shape a self-concept that may be less aligned with leadership roles. This process reinforces a self-limiting cycle, in which women may come to view leadership as incongruent with their identity, even when they possess the qualifications, skills, and experience required to succeed.

Gendered socialisation further operates through the activation and reinforcement of stereotypes. Individuals who do not conform to expected gender norms may encounter social penalties or feel pressure to suppress aspects of their identity in order to gain acceptance in leadership contexts. For example, women may feel compelled to adopt assertive behaviours traditionally coded as masculine to be perceived as competent leaders. This adaptation can generate internal conflict, negatively affecting self-perception and emotional well-being. Over time, such dissonance may weaken both self-concept and self-esteem, thereby reducing belief in one's leadership potential.

Within the educational context of Trinidad and Tobago, these dynamics are further shaped by prevailing cultural expectations. From an early age, female students may be encouraged toward supportive or nurturing roles rather than leadership aspirations, while male students are more frequently praised for assertiveness and decision making (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). These gendered patterns of reinforcement contribute to the persistence of occupational segregation, whereby women remain concentrated in teaching roles while men are disproportionately represented in administrative and leadership positions.

Understanding the psychological dimensions of gendered socialisation is therefore essential to explaining why individual factors play a significant moderating role in the relationship between gender and career progression. Teachers' self-perceptions and internalised beliefs about their capabilities are not simply personal attributes. They are produced through cultural norms, institutional practices, and everyday interactions that signal what leadership should look like and who is considered suitable to lead.

By foregrounding self-perception, self-concept, and self-esteem as central components of self-efficacy, this section underscores the importance of addressing internalised gender norms

within leadership development initiatives. Efforts to enhance women's access to educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago must therefore extend beyond skill building alone. They must also engage with the social cues, feedback mechanisms, and institutional cultures that shape how women view themselves and their leadership potential.

### **Stereotypes and the Internalization of Masculinity Norms**

Stereotypes function as powerful social mechanisms that shape individuals' self-concept and career aspirations, often in subtle yet deeply consequential ways. In the context of gender and leadership, stereotypes frequently cast self-confidence, assertiveness, and competitiveness as inherently masculine traits. These perceptions influence not only how leadership potential is evaluated by others but also how individuals, particularly women, assess their own capabilities. Consequently, self-efficacy may be undermined not by actual skill deficits but by the internalisation of socially constructed expectations.

Golan (2015) found that females tend to be more psychologically vulnerable to the negative effects of social stress and stereotype-driven expectations than their male counterparts. Because self-confidence is often socially coded as masculine, women who display it may be perceived as violating gender norms, resulting in social penalties. As a consequence, girls and women may internalise negative feedback and experience heightened emotional regulation demands, including self-doubt and self-monitoring. In contrast, men are more frequently placed in environments that encourage competition and dominance, conditions that reinforce confidence and leadership-oriented behaviour.

This gendered divergence in social experience is reflected in the development and expression of self-concept. While men often benefit from institutional and social reinforcement of their ambitions and traits, women are more likely to be situated in environments that reward

emotional openness, conformity, and relational competence. These traits, although valuable within educational settings, are not traditionally associated with dominant leadership models, contributing to the perception that women are less suited to leadership roles. As a result, women may develop a self-concept that is misaligned with prevailing leadership ideals, weakening belief in their leadership suitability.

Burnett et al. (1995) empirically examined how social environments exert pressure on individuals to conform to masculine or feminine ideals. Their study demonstrated that societal messaging is more strongly skewed toward masculinity, leading to higher self-esteem among individuals who exhibit stereotypically masculine characteristics. In workplace contexts, these dynamic advantages are displayed by those who display assertiveness and competitiveness, traits that are more often socially sanctioned in men, increasing their likelihood of promotion. Women, particularly those who do not naturally adopt such traits, are more susceptible to diminished self-esteem and reduced self-efficacy, making them less inclined to pursue high-stakes leadership roles.

The issue becomes further complicated when women attempt to bridge this gendered divide through androgyny, defined as the adoption of both masculine and feminine traits. Research grounded in role congruity theory demonstrates that women who adopt behaviours associated with leadership, such as assertiveness, dominance, and competitiveness, often experience social and professional penalties because these behaviours conflict with traditional expectations of femininity (Eagly & Karau, 2002). To be perceived as competent, women may feel compelled to suppress behaviours associated with femininity and adopt assertiveness, aggression, and competitiveness, traits culturally associated with male success. This dual burden generates psychological strain and reinforces the message that feminine attributes are undervalued in leadership contexts.

Gendered differences in coping strategies have been identified in the literature, with men more likely to adopt problem-focused approaches and women more likely to engage in emotion-focused coping (Prakash et al., 2010). These patterns can be understood within broader processes of gender socialisation, where men are often encouraged toward agency and problem-solving, while women are positioned within relational and supportive roles (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Cerrato & Cifre, 2018). In professional contexts, leadership continues to be associated with problem-focused, agentic behaviours aligned with masculine-coded norms, which can place women, particularly those conforming to traditional femininity, at a structural disadvantage (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Harquail, 2008).

These dynamics are not merely theoretical but are reproduced within practical contexts, including the education sector in Trinidad and Tobago. Baptiste (2016), drawing on Caribbean gender theory and Plato's concept of essentialism, argued that the physical, social, and cultural dimensions of patriarchy continue to shape professional trajectories. Within these contexts, genderism functions as a system that defines competence and success through biologically and socially assigned gender roles, maintained through stereotypes that pressure individuals to conform to rigid expectations. Women's competence is frequently evaluated through a masculine lens, requiring them to distance themselves from aspects of their gender identity to be viewed as legitimate leadership candidates.

The internalisation of these norms contributes to both symbolic and practical exclusion from leadership. Women who exhibit fewer masculine-coded characteristics are more likely to develop negative self-concepts and lower self-esteem, perceiving themselves as less capable of fulfilling roles historically occupied by men. This internal struggle reflects systemic conditioning

rather than individual inadequacy, reinforced through education systems, workplace cultures, media representations, and institutional practices.

In summary, the internalisation of masculine norms and gendered stereotypes significantly undermines women's self-efficacy and constrains their willingness to pursue leadership roles. These stereotypes operate as invisible yet powerful barriers, shaping both external evaluation and internal self-assessment. Efforts to address gender inequality in educational leadership must therefore include intentional strategies to challenge stereotype-driven expectations, affirm diverse leadership identities, and create institutional environments in which feminine, masculine, and androgynous traits are equally recognised and valued.

### **Empirical Evidence on Self-Efficacy and Career Decision-Making**

Empirical studies across diverse educational and cultural contexts confirm the strong relationship between gender-based experiences, self-efficacy, and career decision making. These studies demonstrate that stereotypes, societal expectations, and internalised gender norms shape how individuals, particularly women, evaluate their capabilities and make academic and professional choices. This relationship is central to understanding why many female educators may choose not to pursue leadership roles despite possessing the skills, qualifications, and experience required to do so.

Ertl et al. (2017) examined the experiences of 296 female students enrolled in STEM programmes across German universities. Their study, grounded in the recognition that STEM fields are culturally constructed as male-dominated, revealed that gender-based stereotypes negatively affected women's willingness to pursue technical fields even when their academic performance exceeded that of male peers. Participants' self-concept and confidence in their intellectual capacity were undermined by persistent narratives positioning STEM careers as more

appropriate for men. The authors concluded that women who internalised these stereotypes were less likely to pursue STEM careers, not due to lack of ability, but as a result of diminished self-efficacy shaped by social perception.

Complementing these findings, Schuster and Martiny (2016) demonstrated that women are more likely to experience psychological threat in environments where negative gender stereotypes are salient. Across two pilot studies involving female undergraduates, the researchers found that underrepresentation in male-dominated academic contexts activated stereotype threat, leading to increased anxiety and a reduced sense of belonging. These emotional responses weakened participants' self-efficacy and reduced their likelihood of persisting in technical or high-status career pathways, regardless of objective competence. The perception that men are inherently better suited to certain roles thus operates as a powerful psychological barrier.

Chen et al. (2013) explored similar dynamics within a Taiwanese context, surveying more than 1,400 secondary school students to examine the relationship between self-concept, academic performance, and career decision making. Their findings indicated a strong association between self-concept and both academic success and occupational aspiration. Students who perceived themselves as competent within specific subject areas were more likely to perform well and express interest in careers aligned with those domains. However, gendered expectations consistently channelled male students toward technical and high-status professions, while female students were more frequently directed toward nurturing or support-oriented roles. As a result, female students often reported lower academic self-concept in stereotypically masculine subjects such as mathematics and science, even when achievement levels were comparable.

Yang and Wong (2020) extended this analysis by examining how self-concept and academic achievement influence long-term career planning. Through a comprehensive review of

the literature, they affirmed that individuals' perceptions of their academic abilities play a decisive role in career pathway selection. The authors highlighted the multidimensional nature of self-concept, incorporating self-perception and self-esteem, all of which are shaped by social environments and feedback. Drawing on Marsh and Yeung (1997), they demonstrated a reciprocal relationship between academic self-concept and achievement, whereby perceived competence enhances performance, and success reinforces positive self-evaluation. Importantly, Yang and Wong emphasised that gendered socialisation processes significantly shape academic self-concept, influencing which careers individuals view as attainable or appropriate.

Collectively, these empirical findings reinforce the argument that self-efficacy is not solely an internal disposition but is deeply shaped by social structures, cultural narratives, and gendered expectations. Women's underrepresentation in leadership roles cannot therefore be attributed exclusively to institutional barriers or individual choice. It is also mediated by the ways women are socialised to understand their abilities, potential, and place within professional hierarchies.

Within the context of Trinidad and Tobago, where patriarchal norms and gendered expectations remain influential, these findings offer important insight into the internal barriers that female educators may encounter. Even where formal equality of opportunity appears to exist, the cumulative impact of gendered socialisation can diminish women's motivation to pursue leadership advancement. Consequently, efforts to promote gender equity in educational leadership must extend beyond structural reform to include psychological and cultural interventions that affirm self-concept and actively challenge stereotype-driven limitations on women's aspirations.

### **The Trinidad and Tobago Context: Cultural Legacies and Career Aspirations**

The broader patterns observed globally in the relationship between gender, self-efficacy, and career progression are clearly reflected in Trinidad and Tobago. Despite women's high levels

of educational attainment and their substantial representation in the teaching profession, they remain significantly underrepresented in educational leadership positions. This paradox is not solely a matter of qualifications or institutional access but is strongly influenced by individual self-belief shaped by longstanding cultural legacies and gendered socialisation processes.

The Author and Author (2024) found that many women worldwide, including those in leadership track professions, are hesitant to pursue promotions or senior roles. In their study, 18 percent of women reported being less likely to seek promotion or request pay increases due to a lack of confidence, while 9 percent cited doubts about their ability to perform effectively in certain roles. A further 7 percent expressed uncertainty regarding their managerial effectiveness compared to men. Notably, 38 percent reported feeling discouraged by the higher performance standards applied to women, reflecting the internalisation of beliefs that women must outperform men to be viewed as equally competent.

Women in the Workplace's (2021, n.d.) global report on women in the workplace reinforces these trends, noting that although women constitute a substantial proportion of the workforce, only 21 percent hold C-suite positions globally. The report highlights that even within organisations that espouse commitments to gender equality, systemic bias and masculine-coded norms of success remain prevalent. These male-centred frameworks for advancement often require women to conform to leadership models that undervalue traits traditionally associated with femininity, discouraging many from pursuing senior leadership roles.

Comparable patterns are evident across the Caribbean, including in Trinidad and Tobago. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2017), women account for more than 40 percent of the regional labour force but occupy only 30 percent of junior to senior management roles and approximately 10 percent of top executive positions. Within the education sector, women

dominate classroom teaching yet remain underrepresented in decision-making roles. Although many organisations formally endorse gender diversity, this commitment frequently lacks sustained structural implementation, and cultural beliefs continue to associate effective leadership with assertiveness, dominance, and decisiveness, traits traditionally aligned with masculinity.

In Trinidad and Tobago, a national gender policy exists with the stated aim of promoting equitable participation of women and men in leadership and governance. However, a significant gap persists between policy intent and lived experience. While the policy signals institutional commitment to gender equity, the cultural norms and workplace environments that women navigate often continue to reinforce gendered expectations and stereotypes. The symbolic absence of women from senior leadership roles not only sustains inequality but also communicates limiting messages to younger women and girls regarding the scope of their aspirations.

These contemporary patterns align with earlier research by Morris (1993), who observed that women in Trinidad and Tobago were significantly underrepresented in educational leadership despite forming the majority of the teaching workforce. Between 1987 and 1988, only 32 percent of primary school head teachers were women. More recent evidence suggests that while numerical representation has improved modestly, women continue to face invisible, yet powerful barriers rooted in social norms and cultural expectations. These barriers are frequently internalised by female educators, contributing to diminished self-concept and reduced motivation to pursue leadership advancement.

Further insight is provided by Baptiste (2016), who situates these outcomes within the Caribbean's postcolonial and patriarchal legacies. Drawing on Caribbean gender theory and Plato's concept of essentialism, Baptiste argues that women in Trinidad and Tobago encounter multiple intersecting dimensions of patriarchy, physical, social, and cultural. These dimensions are

sustained through what Baptiste terms “genderism,” a system that assigns value and capability on the basis of gender, compelling women to navigate professional spaces structured around masculine definitions of success and leadership.

Collectively, these findings reinforce the conclusion that self-efficacy and leadership aspiration are not merely individual attributes. They are produced through social experience, cultural signalling, and institutional reinforcement. In Trinidad and Tobago, women’s decisions not to pursue leadership roles are often shaped by internalised beliefs about what is acceptable, achievable, or appropriate for women within the education sector. Consequently, initiatives aimed at increasing women’s participation in educational leadership must address both structural and psychological barriers. Such interventions should combine skills development with mentorship, institutional support, and efforts to affirm women’s leadership identities and confidence.

## **The Moderating Impact of Family-Related Factors on the Relationship Between Gender and Attainment of Educational Leadership in Trinidad and Tobago**

### **Theoretical Assessments**

#### *Work-Family Interface Theory*

The work-family interface provides a foundational lens for understanding how family responsibilities mediate the relationship between gender and career progression, particularly within educational leadership. This theoretical perspective conceptualises a bidirectional relationship in which professional demands can conflict with domestic responsibilities and vice versa. Within this framework, work and family are not treated as separate spheres but as intersecting domains that frequently impose competing demands on individuals.

The seminal work of Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) established that inter-role conflict arises when pressures associated with work and family are mutually incompatible, making participation in one role more difficult due to involvement in the other. This foundational contribution highlighted the challenges individuals face in balancing responsibilities across domains, demonstrating that effective engagement in one area often necessitates compromise in another. Building on this work, Dåderman and Basinska (2016) observed that most individuals simultaneously participate in activities related to both work and family roles. Because these roles frequently overlap in time, emotional demand, and cognitive focus, individuals are often forced to prioritise one domain at the expense of the other, resulting in career stagnation or reduced family well-being.

The impact of work-family conflict is particularly pronounced for women, who traditionally assume a disproportionate share of domestic labour due to socially constructed gender roles (ILO, 2017; Heilman, 2012). In contexts such as Trinidad and Tobago, where patriarchal norms continue to shape both public and private life, the intersection of work and family responsibilities disproportionately constrains women's leadership trajectories. Despite increased female participation in the workforce, many women remain primary caregivers within their households, bearing responsibility for child rearing, elder care, and household management (Reddock & Bobb-Smith, 2008; Baptiste, 2016). These responsibilities demand sustained time, energy, and emotional investment, often limiting women's capacity to pursue leadership roles that require heightened visibility, flexibility, and additional commitment.

O'Driscoll et al. (2006) further refined the work family interface model by identifying key moderating variables that influence the intensity of conflict experienced, including personality characteristics, coping strategies, the presence of dependents, and the relative demands of each

role. For example, women who benefit from strong support networks or who can access paid domestic assistance may be better positioned to manage dual responsibilities. However, for many women, particularly those in lower-income households or single-parent families, such supports are limited or unavailable. In these circumstances, women often make strategic career sacrifices, including declining leadership opportunities, postponing promotion, or taking extended leave, all of which restrict upward mobility.

Social expectations further exacerbate the work-family interface for women. Societal norms frequently impose a dual expectation, requiring women to excel professionally while simultaneously maintaining primary responsibility for domestic labour. Within male-dominated organisational cultures, including educational institutions in Trinidad and Tobago, women are often held to heightened standards of performance and availability (Acker, 1990). They may be required to demonstrate that family responsibilities will not interfere with professional obligations, creating implicit bias in recruitment, promotion, and appraisal processes (ILO, 2017).

The gendered effects of the work-family interface extend beyond individual experience to institutional practice. When educational systems and policies fail to acknowledge or accommodate the dual role realities of women, they inadvertently reproduce structural inequality. Few schools or educational authorities offer leadership preparation programmes that are flexible or responsive to the schedules and responsibilities of working mothers (ILO, 2017). Without such institutional adaptation, many capable female educators are discouraged from entering or remaining within leadership pipelines, despite possessing the experience, competence, and qualifications required for advancement.

In summary, work-family interface theory provides a critical framework for analysing the intersection between domestic life and professional aspiration. Within the context of Trinidad and

Tobago, this intersection is shaped by entrenched gender norms, cultural expectations, and institutional rigidity. The disproportionate domestic burden placed on women significantly constrains their capacity to pursue and succeed in educational leadership roles. This theoretical perspective therefore supports the argument that family-related responsibilities operate as a key moderating factor in the relationship between gender and career progression. Addressing this imbalance requires supportive policy frameworks, flexible organisational cultures, and explicit recognition of caregiving labour within leadership development and career advancement models.

### *Role Strain Theory*

Role strain theory offers an important psychological perspective on how family-related responsibilities influence women's willingness or ability to pursue leadership positions (Goode, 1960). This theory proposes that individuals who occupy multiple social roles may experience conflict, tension, or overload when the demands associated with those roles become incompatible. Unlike work-family interface theory, which emphasises conflict between domains, role strain theory foregrounds the emotional and psychological burden that arises when concurrent expectations exceed available personal resources.

According to Goode (1960), role strain intensifies when time, energy, or emotional capacity is insufficient to meet the demands of one or more roles. For working women, particularly those in teaching and educational administration, this involves balancing professional responsibilities with expectations related to caregiving, household management, and community participation. The cumulative pressure to perform effectively across these roles may lead to chronic stress, emotional exhaustion, and eventual withdrawal from leadership aspiration.

Within educational environments such as those in Trinidad and Tobago, this strain is further exacerbated by systemic expectations and limited structural support. Women are often expected to

demonstrate nurturing and community-oriented qualities in their teaching roles while simultaneously fulfilling traditional domestic responsibilities (Heilman, 2012). When leadership opportunities arise, they typically involve increased administrative workload, extended working hours, and heightened expectations of availability and mobility. These conditions are frequently perceived as incompatible with family obligations, leading many women to pre-emptively withdraw from leadership pipelines or decline participation in leadership development programmes.

Perceptions of role strain are often intensified by internalised guilt and societal pressure. Women who aspire to leadership may encounter criticism for perceived neglect of family responsibilities or experience self-doubt regarding their performance in domestic roles. Conversely, women who prioritise family commitments may perceive themselves as falling short professionally. This emotional tension frequently produces a sense of inevitability and constraint, reducing job satisfaction and contributing to long-term disengagement from career advancement.

The consequences of role strain extend beyond psychological experience to observable behavioural outcomes. Research indicates that individuals experiencing high levels of role strain are more likely to avoid high-pressure positions, seek part-time employment, or remain in roles with limited responsibility (Goode, 1960). For women in the education sector, this often translates into remaining in classroom teaching positions rather than pursuing leadership roles, even when qualifications and professional competence are well established.

Role strain also shapes workplace perception and evaluation. Colleagues and supervisors may assume that women with substantial family responsibilities are less reliable, less committed, or less suited to leadership. Such assumptions can limit access to mentorship, reduce encouragement to apply for promotion, and exclude women from leadership pipelines (Acker,

1990). Over time, this cycle reinforces underrepresentation, as the scarcity of women in leadership positions is used to justify beliefs that women are less interested in or capable of leadership.

In the Trinidad and Tobago context, where extended family networks, community obligations, and religious participation often place additional demands on women, role strain operates as a significant moderating factor in leadership trajectories. The cumulative emotional and psychological burden of balancing these responsibilities in the absence of sufficient institutional support contributes directly to women's continued underrepresentation in educational leadership roles.

In summary, role strain theory highlights the internal conflicts and external pressures that shape women's professional decision-making. It provides insight into why many highly qualified and capable women choose to remain in supportive roles rather than pursue leadership. Addressing role strain, therefore, requires systemic responses, including flexible leadership models, supportive workplace policies, and institutional recognition of caregiving labour, rather than reliance on individual resilience alone.

### *Role Theory*

Role theory provides a sociological framework for understanding how gendered expectations shape behaviour, particularly in relation to professional advancement. This theory asserts that individuals behave in ways that align with the expectations associated with the social roles they occupy or aspire to. These expectations are produced and reinforced through social norms, cultural beliefs, and institutional structures that assign meaning to specific roles and prescribe appropriate behaviour (Biddle, 1986).

Within the context of educational leadership, role theory helps explain how teachers, particularly women, may internalise, conform to, or resist gendered expectations attached to

leadership roles. In many societies, including Trinidad and Tobago, traditional gender norms associate caregiving, nurturing, and support with women, while authority, assertiveness, and rationality are more commonly associated with men (Eagly & Karau, 2002). These expectations shape both external evaluations of women leaders and women's internal assessments of their professional identity and leadership potential.

For female educators, role theory highlights the tension between societal expectations of women as primary caregivers and professional expectations of leaders as decisive, authoritative, and continuously available. This tension often results in role conflict or role incongruity, where fulfilling the expectations of one role undermines the ability to fulfill another. For example, a female teacher may aspire to a principalship but perceive that pursuing such a role would violate cultural norms regarding motherhood or domestic prioritisation.

Women who do attain leadership positions frequently encounter what has been described as the double bind. When women adopt leadership behaviours traditionally coded as masculine, they risk being perceived as aggressive or unfeminine. Conversely, when they lead using relational or collaborative approaches associated with femininity, they may be judged as weak or ineffective. These contradictory expectations require women to continuously negotiate their professional identity, often at considerable emotional and psychological cost.

Research demonstrates that role expectations are not only culturally transmitted but also institutionally reinforced. Performance appraisal systems, promotion criteria, and leadership development frameworks often implicitly reward behaviours aligned with masculine leadership norms (Acker, 1990; Blackmore, 2017a). This institutional reinforcement marginalises alternative leadership styles and limits the recognition of approaches commonly practised by women, thereby sustaining the perception of leadership as inherently masculine.

In Trinidad and Tobago, where cultural norms are strongly influenced by patriarchal traditions and religious values, these role expectations are particularly pronounced. Female educators may experience tension between leadership ambition and community expectations related to modesty, submission, and domestic responsibility. Within school communities, the legitimacy of female leaders may be evaluated not on competence or achievement, but on conformity to gendered expectations.

Role theory thus illuminates why many women self-select out of leadership pathways or experience heightened scrutiny when they pursue them. It also helps explain the prevalence of internal conflict and imposter syndrome among women whose professional aspirations diverge from socially sanctioned gender norms.

In conclusion, role theory demonstrates how deeply embedded gender expectations mediate the relationship between gender and career progression. When women are expected to prioritise particular roles within the private sphere and leadership roles in the public sphere are constructed around opposing attributes, the pathway to leadership becomes structurally and psychologically constrained. Addressing these constraints requires not only organisational reform but broader cultural shifts that redefine acceptable roles for women both within the family and in positions of educational leadership.

#### *Family-Work Enrichment Theory*

While much of the literature on gender and career progression emphasises the conflicts between family and professional responsibilities, family work enrichment theory offers a more dynamic and asset-based perspective. Developed by Greenhaus and Powell (2006), this theory proposes that participation in family roles can positively influence performance in work roles, and

vice versa. Enrichment occurs when experiences in one domain improve the quality of functioning in the other through the transfer of skills, emotional energy, or a sense of accomplishment.

From this perspective, family life does not inevitably detract from professional success. Instead, it can serve as a source of strength, motivation, and personal development that enhances workplace effectiveness. Skills such as conflict resolution, time management, empathy, and patience, often developed and practised within family contexts, are directly transferable to leadership roles in educational settings. This model challenges deficit-oriented narratives that frame women's domestic responsibilities solely as constraints and instead repositions caregiving experience as a potential leadership asset (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

Within the context of Trinidad and Tobago, where family and community roles are highly valued and deeply embedded within cultural identity, the principles of family work enrichment theory are particularly salient. Women who maintain strong family relationships may draw upon emotional support and encouragement that sustains professional ambition. In addition, the resilience, multitasking ability, and relational competence cultivated through managing family responsibilities may enhance leadership effectiveness, particularly in educational environments where communication, collaboration, and emotional intelligence are critical.

Empirical research supports this perspective. Grzywacz and Marks (2000) found that family-to-work enrichment was significantly associated with increased job satisfaction, improved work performance, and lower turnover intentions. Similarly, Wayne et al. (2006) reported that individuals who experienced support within their family roles demonstrated higher levels of workplace engagement. These findings challenge assumptions that family responsibilities operate only as barriers, suggesting instead that family roles can generate emotional and psychological resources that strengthen leadership capacity.

However, the potential for family work enrichment is highly contingent on organisational context. Enrichment is more likely to occur within environments that recognise and support the intersection of work and family life. Without supportive organisational policies, such as flexible scheduling, accessible childcare, or family-inclusive workplace cultures, the benefits of enrichment may remain unrealized. In male-dominated work cultures, where success is frequently defined by uninterrupted availability and extended working hours, family-derived skills and emotional resources may be undervalued or dismissed.

Within educational institutions in Trinidad and Tobago, adopting a family work enrichment framework would therefore require both policy reform and cultural change. Leadership structures would need to support flexible leadership models, promote mentorship that values work-life integration, and explicitly recognise family-based competencies as relevant to leadership effectiveness, rather than viewing them as liabilities.

Integrating this perspective into leadership development programmes may also help address internalised doubt among female educators. By reframing caregiving and domestic responsibilities as sources of enrichment rather than impediments, women may begin to view their lived experiences as assets. This reframing has the potential to strengthen self-efficacy and encourage greater participation in leadership pathways.

In summary, family work enrichment theory provides an important counterbalance to conflict-based models of work and family interaction. Rather than conceptualising domestic responsibilities solely as constraints, this framework emphasises how skills, emotional resources, and support derived from family life can positively influence professional performance and leadership capacity. Within the Trinidad and Tobago context, the theory invites a reimagining of

the private-public divide, suggesting that women's family roles can enrich, rather than undermine, leadership trajectories when supported by inclusive institutional policies and cultural recognition.

### *Resource Drain Theory*

Resource drain theory offers a more economically grounded explanation of how family responsibilities can hinder professional advancement, particularly among women. According to this theory, individuals possess a finite pool of personal resources, including time, energy, attention, and emotional availability, which must be distributed across multiple life domains. When a disproportionate share of these resources is allocated to one domain, such as family responsibilities, fewer resources remain available for investment in career development or leadership pursuit (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Greenhaus & Powell, 2006).

This theory builds on the premise that resources are not only limited but are also non-transferable in certain contexts. Time spent managing household responsibilities or providing care cannot simultaneously be redirected toward leadership preparation, professional networking, or fulfilling the extended duties often associated with educational leadership roles. Consequently, individuals with substantial family obligations are more likely to experience constrained career progression, with women disproportionately affected due to persistent gendered expectations surrounding caregiving and domestic labour.

The application of resource drain theory to educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago is particularly salient. Many female teachers who assume primary responsibility for family care report difficulty balancing these obligations with the time-intensive demands of leadership roles. Leadership positions frequently require attendance at extended meetings, engagement in administrative planning, participation in professional development, and ongoing availability for urgent decision-making (Leithwood, 2021). For women who are simultaneously managing

caregiving responsibilities, these expectations can become unsustainable in the absence of institutional support or flexible working arrangements.

The implications of resource drain are twofold. First, women may self-select out of leadership pathways, not because of limited ambition or capability, but because they realistically assess the feasibility of meeting both family and leadership demands without high personal cost. Second, when women do assume leadership roles, the cumulative strain of competing demands may result in burnout, elevated stress levels, and reduced job satisfaction. These outcomes reinforce perceptions that leadership roles are incompatible with significant family responsibilities, further discouraging participation.

Empirical research indicates that the distribution of resource strain is uneven across genders. Men are more likely to benefit from domestic arrangements that reduce their direct involvement in household labour, enabling greater allocation of time and energy to professional advancement (Hill et al., 2010). Women, by contrast, more frequently experience the compounded burden of unpaid domestic work alongside full-time professional responsibilities. This imbalance limits opportunities for strategic career planning, leadership training, and engagement in informal professional networks.

Within the Trinidad and Tobago context, these dynamics are intensified by limited access to affordable childcare, enduring cultural expectations that position women as primary caregivers, and insufficient workplace support structures for working parents (Kossek & Lee, 2021). As a result, many qualified and capable female educators are effectively constrained from pursuing leadership advancement, despite meeting or exceeding formal eligibility criteria.

Resource drain theory, therefore, underscores the need for institutional reform. Educational systems seeking to promote gender equity in leadership must recognise and address the unequal

distribution of resource demands experienced by staff. Policy responses may include flexible scheduling, part-time or shared leadership roles, access to subsidised childcare, and distributed leadership models that reduce individual workload concentration.

In summary, resource drain theory highlights the material and emotional costs associated with balancing work and family responsibilities and explains how unequal domestic labour expectations contribute to persistent gender disparities in educational leadership. Without coordinated institutional support and cultural change, women will continue to bear a disproportionate share of resource strain, limiting leadership attainment and perpetuating systemic inequity within the education sector.

### **Implications**

The literature on family-related theories, including work-family interface theory, role strain theory, role theory, family-work enrichment theory, and resource drain theory, highlights how social values and gender norms significantly influence female participation in educational leadership. Collectively, these frameworks demonstrate that while family responsibilities affect both men and women, women in Trinidad and Tobago experience disproportionate constraint due to culturally entrenched expectations and a gendered division of domestic labour. As a result, social factors linked to traditional family structures continue to shape women's leadership trajectories within the education sector.

Across these theoretical perspectives, one consistent implication emerges. Women disproportionately carry the emotional, physical, and logistical demands associated with family life, which directly moderates their capacity to pursue and sustain leadership roles. Resource drain theory and role strain theory are particularly instructive in illustrating how time, energy, and emotional capacity constitute finite resources. When caregiving and household responsibilities are

socially assigned to women, their ability to engage in leadership preparation, professional networking, and extended administrative roles is significantly reduced (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Goode, 1960).

Role theory further demonstrates that societal scripts surrounding femininity and leadership shape both external evaluation and internal self-assessment. When leadership continues to be defined through a masculine framework emphasising assertiveness, constant availability, and emotional restraint, women are placed in a constrained position. They must either conform to these norms or risk being perceived as unsuitable for advancement, reinforcing internal conflict and limiting upward mobility (Biddle, 1986). This dynamic sustains exclusionary leadership cultures and normalises gender imbalance within educational hierarchies.

Within the Trinidad and Tobago context, these implications are intensified by persistent patriarchal norms. Research by Reddock and Bobb-Smith (2008) and Baptiste (2016) demonstrates that Caribbean social structures continue to assign women primary responsibility for domestic and community caregiving. These expectations persist even as women achieve high levels of educational attainment and professional competence, creating a tension between leadership aspiration and socially sanctioned gender roles. Resistance may arise not only within workplaces but also within family and community networks, further constraining women's advancement.

Even the more optimistic perspective offered by family work enrichment theory reveals important limitations. While family roles can enhance professional performance through the transfer of skills and emotional resources, such enrichment is contingent upon institutional cultures that actively recognise and support women's dual roles (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Wayne et al., 2006). In the absence of flexible scheduling, shared leadership models, and family-responsive career structures, the potential benefits of enrichment remain largely unrealized.

Taken together, these theoretical implications underscore that gender is not a peripheral variable within educational leadership pathways. It functions as a deeply embedded and dynamic social force that shapes opportunity structures, role interpretation, and individual self-perception. Within Trinidad and Tobago's education system, the interaction between gender and family-related pressures operates both visibly, through patterns of leadership representation, and invisibly, through psychological, cultural, and normative barriers that discourage women from aspiring to or sustaining leadership roles.

Addressing these implications requires educational institutions to move beyond formally gender-neutral leadership frameworks. Effective intervention demands recognition of the gendered realities of family life, including policies that support work-life integration, challenge stereotypical role expectations, and value diverse leadership pathways. Without such measures, the existing gender imbalance in educational leadership is likely to persist, regardless of women's continued entry into the teaching profession or their attainment of advanced qualifications.

### **Evidence in Trinidad and Tobago**

According to the conceptual framework presented in this study, the relationship between gender and the attainment of educational leadership roles in Trinidad and Tobago is significantly moderated by family-related factors. These factors, ranging from caregiving responsibilities to cultural expectations and levels of institutional support, shape the extent to which individuals, particularly women, are able to pursue leadership roles within the education sector. While both men and women encounter work-life demands, family-related commitments exert a disproportionately constraining influence on women, altering both the strength and direction of the relationship between gender and career progression.

A 2008 study commissioned by the International Labour Organization titled *Reconciling Work and Family in Trinidad and Tobago* provides critical insight into this dynamic. The study found that although women's participation in the workforce has increased substantially in recent decades, family responsibilities continue to be socially constructed as a predominantly feminine domain. As a result, women remain primarily responsible for domestic and caregiving labour, requiring them to continuously negotiate tensions between professional obligations and household responsibilities, often at the expense of career advancement (ILO, 2008). Responsibilities related to childcare and eldercare, deeply embedded within gendered norms, consume significant time and emotional resources, limiting women's availability for leadership roles that demand flexibility, extended hours, and high visibility.

These findings align closely with role strain theory, which emphasises the psychological and emotional burden associated with managing competing social roles. The ILO study further indicates that many workplaces in Trinidad and Tobago, functioning as extensions of broader patriarchal norms, implicitly expect women to demonstrate that domestic responsibilities will not interfere with professional performance. This expectation increases internal stress and simultaneously shapes external perceptions of women's suitability for leadership. Women with visible caregiving responsibilities are therefore more likely to be excluded from leadership pipelines or overlooked for promotion based on assumptions regarding availability and commitment.

Further evidence provided by Reddock and Bobb-Smith (2008) demonstrates how traditional family structures continue to shape leadership outcomes. Although Caribbean societies, including Trinidad and Tobago, have experienced rising female labour force participation, nuclear family models persist in positioning men as primary breadwinners and women as primary

caregivers. These perceptions endure even among educated and professional populations, moderating leadership outcomes by reinforcing occupational gender segregation and sustaining biased recruitment and selection practices. The study also highlights the matrifocal nature of extended family systems in the region, where women bear responsibility for household management and caregiving across generations. These domestic demands reduce the time and energy women can allocate to professional development, thereby weakening the relationship between qualification and leadership attainment.

This pattern reflects the core assumptions of resource drain theory, which posits that individuals possess finite personal resources, including time, attention, and energy, that must be distributed across life domains. In Trinidad and Tobago, women's disproportionate engagement in unpaid domestic labour, such as childcare, eldercare, and household work, results in fewer resources being available for leadership training, networking, and career planning. This imbalance is not experienced equally by men, who are less likely to face conflicting domestic expectations. Consequently, the effect of gender on career progression is moderated by differential access to time and energy for professional investment.

Supporting this perspective, a study by the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, cited by the ILO (2009), reported that women in Caribbean countries perform a substantially higher share of unpaid domestic labour than men. In nuclear households, women assume primary responsibility for childcare and household tasks, while in extended family arrangements, caregiving responsibilities often extend to elderly or ill relatives. This unpaid labour moderates women's leadership trajectories by limiting their capacity to engage in sustained career advancement, while men retain greater opportunity to pursue economically rewarded activities and professional visibility.

Role theory further explains how these expectations become normalised and internalised. Societal norms shape beliefs about appropriate behaviour within specific roles, and in Trinidad and Tobago, women are frequently expected to prioritise nurturing and caregiving responsibilities aligned with the private sphere. Educational leadership, by contrast, is often framed through a masculine lens emphasising assertiveness, decisiveness, and continuous availability. Women who adopt these traits may be perceived as violating gender norms, while those who conform to traditional expectations may be viewed as lacking leadership potential (Eagly & Karau, 2002). These conflicting role expectations moderate leadership outcomes by influencing both institutional assessment and women's self-perception.

Additional evidence is provided by the PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) Caribbean Women in Leadership Survey (n.d.). Among 3,600 professional women surveyed across 27 industries, including education, 42 percent reported that starting a family hindered their career progression, and 48 percent of mothers indicated that they were overlooked for promotion following maternity leave. Although 82 percent expressed confidence in their leadership capabilities, the absence of transparent promotion processes and post-maternity advancement opportunities moderated their actual progression. Notably, 58 percent cited persistent challenges related to access and transparency in leadership pathways. This study highlights organisational structures, rather than individual motivation alone, as active moderators shaping women's leadership outcomes.

While the majority of evidence highlights constraint, some findings point to the conditional potential for family-related enrichment. Consistent with family work enrichment theory, supportive family relationships and caregiving experiences may enhance leadership capacity when institutional conditions are favourable. In Trinidad and Tobago, where community ties are culturally valued, women may draw emotional strength and relational skills from family life that

support leadership effectiveness. However, these positive effects remain contingent on organisational flexibility, mentorship access, and distributed leadership structures. In their absence, family responsibilities are more likely to function as sources of strain rather than enrichment.

The ILO (2017) reinforces this conclusion, noting that gender inequality in employment persists due to the lack of gender responsive policies at both organisational and state levels. Women are more likely to be underpaid, excluded from leadership development, and overlooked for advancement due to caregiving expectations. When institutions fail to recognise or accommodate women's dual roles, leadership inequality is structurally reproduced, not because of a lack of interest or competence, but because of misalignment between organisational expectations and lived realities.

In summary, evidence from Trinidad and Tobago demonstrates that family-related factors moderate the relationship between gender and educational leadership attainment in complex and intersecting ways. Cultural expectations, unpaid domestic labour, rigid workplace norms, and insufficient policy support interact to weaken the connection between women's professional competence and leadership outcomes. These moderating dynamics are embedded within broader sociocultural and institutional structures, underscoring the need for gender aware leadership development, flexible organisational practices, and inclusive policy responses. Without such interventions, the forces moderating women's access to educational leadership will continue to sustain inequality within the education sector.

## **The Moderating Impacts of Organizational Factors on the Relationship between Gender and the Attainment of Educational Leadership**

Educational organisations play a critical role in shaping the conditions under which teachers pursue and attain leadership opportunities. This section examines how organisational culture and structure moderate the relationship between gender and access to educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. Rather than treating gender as an isolated variable, the analysis foregrounds the interaction between gendered experiences and institutional norms, demonstrating how organisational arrangements can either reinforce or disrupt existing inequalities. Formal policies, leadership selection practices, and informal cultural expectations are examined for their role in amplifying or mitigating gender-based barriers. Grounded in the updated conceptual framework and supported by theories such as Acker's gendered organisations theory (Acker, 1990) and Crenshaw's intersectionality (Crenshaw, n.d.), this section highlights the institutional mechanisms through which gender functions as either a constraint or an enabler within teachers' leadership trajectories.

### **Theoretical Assessments**

#### *Leaky Pipeline Theory*

The leaky pipeline theory provides a foundational explanation for the persistent underrepresentation of women in leadership roles across sectors, including education. It describes a phenomenon in which women, despite entering the workforce in significant numbers, fail to reach senior management positions at rates comparable to men (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2022). Analogous to a pipeline that loses water through unseen leaks, the theory suggests that systemic barriers embedded within organisational structures and cultures cause women to exit leadership pathways at multiple stages of their careers.

Within educational institutions in Trinidad and Tobago, these “leaks” are frequently associated with organisational cultures and structures that moderate the effect of gender on leadership progression. For example, male-centred leadership norms and evaluative practices often undervalue women’s leadership potential, particularly when women’s career trajectories do not align with the traditional, uninterrupted male model of advancement (Blackmore, 2017a). Such organisational biases interact with internalised psychological responses, including imposter syndrome, whereby women experience persistent self-doubt and perceived inadequacy in leadership contexts (Chrousos & Mentis, 2020). The limited visibility of women in senior leadership roles within schools and educational ministries further reinforces this dynamic, contributing to organisational cultures in which female teachers may feel distanced from leadership aspirations (Ryan & Haslam, 2005).

The leaky pipeline is also shaped by the gendered nature of prevailing career development models. Huang (2006) critiques the dominance of male-oriented frameworks that assume linear, full-time, and continuous career trajectories, failing to account for interruptions linked to caregiving and family responsibilities. In Trinidad and Tobago, socially constructed gender norms continue to position women as primary caregivers (Reddock & Bobb-Smith, 2008; Baptiste, 2016). These norms intersect with organisational expectations, limiting women’s ability to fully engage in rigid leadership pathways that do not accommodate non-linear career progression. Empirical studies indicate that women often negotiate flexible schedules, accept part-time roles, or delay advancement due to familial responsibilities, factors that are rarely incorporated into leadership selection or promotion criteria (Silim & Stirling, 2014; Begeny et al., 2020).

The cumulative effect of these organisational practices is that promotion systems and workplace cultures, when not intentionally inclusive, disproportionately disadvantage women.

This dynamic is particularly evident within the education sector, where women constitute the majority of the teaching workforce in Trinidad and Tobago yet remain underrepresented in school leadership and senior administrative roles (Morris, 1993; ILO, 2017). Leaky pipeline theory, therefore, illustrates how organisational structures do not simply mirror gender inequality but actively sustain it, by privileging career models and leadership norms aligned with male-dominated life courses.

When examined through the lens of gendered organisations theory (Acker, 1990), the leaky pipeline is revealed not as a consequence of women voluntarily opting out of leadership, but as the outcome of institutional systems that normalise male career patterns. Organisational rules, routines, and informal practices are embedded with gendered assumptions that advantage men while marginalising women. As a result, organisational culture and structure function as key moderating forces, shaping the formal and informal pathways through which leadership potential is recognised, developed, and rewarded.

#### *Glass Ceiling Barrier Theory*

Glass ceiling barrier theory extends the discussion of structural and cultural impediments by drawing attention to the invisible yet persistent organisational constraints that restrict women's upward mobility into leadership roles. Whereas the leaky pipeline theory emphasises gradual attrition over time, the glass ceiling metaphor captures the point at which women's advancement is abruptly blocked despite appropriate qualifications, experience, or proximity to senior positions. In the context of educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago, this theory illustrates how organisational norms, evaluative practices, and informal power structures moderate the influence of gender, functioning as silent gatekeeping mechanisms that preserve existing hierarchies and privilege.

The glass ceiling is rarely codified through explicit policy and is therefore difficult to quantify. Nevertheless, its effects are widely documented. The absence of formal discrimination is often offset by deeply embedded stereotypes and gendered expectations that shape how leadership potential is recognised and rewarded (Metz, 2011; Al-Manasra, 2013). Organisational systems that rely on subjective assessment, opaque recruitment processes, or informal sponsorship frequently advantage male candidates, particularly in sectors where leadership has historically been male-dominated. In Trinidad and Tobago, leadership selection processes within the education system, including those overseen by the Teaching Service Commission, have been criticized for reproducing male dominance, in part because decision-making bodies are often composed of former principals, the majority of whom are men (Morris, 1999).

These organisational preferences are reinforced by broader sociocultural stereotypes that position men as inherently more suited to authority and decision-making. Such assumptions are transferred from the wider society into institutional practice, moderating how women's capabilities are interpreted and assessed. Even when women demonstrate leadership competence, they may be perceived as transgressing gender norms and are therefore subjected to heightened scrutiny or scepticism regarding their legitimacy (Rhode, 2017). As a result, women are frequently held to higher performance standards, are less likely to receive informal mentorship, and must often outperform male colleagues to be considered equally qualified.

Male-dominated organisational cultures further restrict women's advancement by limiting access to influential leadership networks. The phenomenon commonly described as the "old boys' network" refers to informal professional relationships among men in senior positions that facilitate access to mentorship, sponsorship, and strategic visibility (Rhode, 2017). These networks operate as informal power structures, shaping promotion outcomes and leadership succession in ways that

systematically exclude women. Consequently, women are denied access to critical social capital that often determines who is identified as leadership material.

The impact of the glass ceiling is intensified by its interaction with internalised psychological responses. Women navigating patriarchal organisational environments may experience self-doubt, pressure to overperform, or the perceived need to adopt masculine behaviours to be taken seriously. Joseph et al. (2016) documented how female teachers in boys' schools in Trinidad and Tobago reported modifying their demeanour to project authority, implicitly acknowledging the gendered expectations attached to leadership roles. This additional emotional and psychological labour further compounds the cost of career progression for women.

Ultimately, the glass ceiling represents more than a symbolic barrier. It is a manifestation of institutionalised gender bias embedded within organisational cultures and structures. In educational institutions in Trinidad and Tobago, where patriarchal values remain influential, these barriers operate as moderating variables that amplify the disadvantages women face in attaining leadership roles. Unless organisational practices are intentionally restructured, they continue to sustain gender inequality by failing to recognise or accommodate the social and professional realities shaping women's leadership trajectories.

#### *Glass Wall Theory*

Glass wall theory offers a complementary perspective by focusing on horizontal segregation within organisations (Cotter et al., 2001). Unlike the glass ceiling, which constrains vertical advancement, the glass wall describes how women are often confined to roles or departments that lack clear pathways to executive leadership. This lateral restriction moderates women's access to leadership not by blocking promotion outright but by shaping the types of opportunities made available to them. Within the education sector in Trinidad and Tobago, this

theory provides a useful lens for examining how organisational structures channel women into positions that limit long-term mobility.

Glass walls operate through both formal role allocation and informal cultural expectations that define which positions are considered preparatory for leadership. Research by the International Labour Organization (2017) indicates that women are frequently concentrated in roles related to administration, human resources, pastoral care, or communication, areas that are valued but rarely function as stepping stones to senior leadership. Men, by contrast, are more often placed in operational, disciplinary, or strategic roles associated with authority, budgeting, and decision making, experiences that are more directly linked to promotion.

This structural separation reflects gendered assumptions about suitability and competence. Within educational institutions, female teachers may be assigned to supportive or relational roles that align with stereotypes of femininity, while male teachers are more readily associated with authority and control (Heilman, 2012). Although these roles are essential to school functioning, they do not typically provide the leadership exposure or institutional visibility required for advancement. As a result, women encounter horizontal barriers that restrict movement into roles that lead to principalship or senior administrative positions.

Glass walls also affect professional socialisation. Leadership development often occurs informally through participation in decision making, budget management, and crisis response, opportunities that are less accessible to those confined to support-oriented roles. Performance appraisal and promotion systems may undervalue experience gained in these positions, further limiting women's prospects for advancement. Consequently, women may perform effectively within their assigned roles yet remain excluded from leadership pipelines.

In Trinidad and Tobago, these patterns persist despite women's numerical dominance within the teaching profession. Female educators may achieve incremental promotion within departments, yet their advancement often plateaus when their roles are disconnected from core decision-making functions. This results in a stratified leadership structure, in which organisational design silently contains women within domains that restrict influence, visibility, and progression.

Glass wall theory, therefore, demonstrates how organisational role distribution moderates gendered leadership outcomes by shaping the nature and trajectory of career opportunities. Without deliberate restructuring of leadership pathways, transparent promotion criteria, and intentional rotation into strategic roles, women remain overrepresented in positions that stall rather than support leadership mobility. This form of structural marginalization reflects broader organisational values that continue to privilege career trajectories historically associated with male leadership.

#### *Sticky Floor Theory*

Sticky floor theory provides an additional lens for understanding gendered patterns of career progression by focusing on barriers that operate at the earliest stages of leadership development. While glass ceiling and glass wall theories address constraints encountered at mid to senior levels, sticky floor theory draws attention to how women are prevented from accessing the initial rungs of the leadership ladder. The theory posits that organizational norms and structures often restrict women's access to entry-level management experiences that are essential for building leadership competencies, professional visibility, and influential networks (Booth et al., 2003).

This limited access to foundational leadership opportunities significantly moderates the relationship between gender and career advancement. When educational institutions fail to support or encourage female teachers to assume early administrative or decision-making roles, they effectively constrain leadership trajectories before they can fully develop. In many schools, roles

such as subject coordinator, year head, or project lead function as critical steppingstones to senior leadership. However, when women are not selected for or encouraged to pursue these roles, often due to implicit bias or assumptions favoring male candidates, their progression is stalled at the outset (Begeny et al., 2020).

Sticky floor theory also highlights the interaction between organizational practices and broader societal expectations surrounding gender roles. In contexts such as Trinidad and Tobago, where women are more likely to carry primary responsibility for domestic and caregiving duties, rigid organizational structures further intensify these constraints. The absence of flexible scheduling, targeted mentorship, or leadership development pathways that reflect women's lived realities reinforces conditions that anchor women at lower organizational levels. As a result, women may be overlooked for initial leadership responsibilities based on perceptions that their availability or commitment is incompatible with leadership demands.

Contrary to narratives that attribute women's underrepresentation in educational leadership to a lack of ambition or confidence, sticky floor theory emphasizes the active role institutions play in shaping unequal outcomes. This perspective aligns with Acker's (1990) concept of gendered organizations, which argues that seemingly neutral organizational practices are structured in ways that reproduce gender hierarchies. Within the education system in Trinidad and Tobago, female teachers may therefore be systematically excluded from foundational leadership roles, not due to limited capability, but because organizational systems continue to privilege male-oriented career models.

The long-term consequences of sticky floor dynamics are significant. By limiting women's access to early leadership experiences, educational institutions restrict opportunities for women to accumulate administrative experience, professional recognition, and leadership confidence. This

restricted exposure weakens women's competitiveness in promotion processes and reinforces perceptions that they are less suited for leadership roles, thereby perpetuating a self-reinforcing cycle of exclusion.

Sticky floor theory thus demonstrates that gendered barriers to leadership do not emerge only at the upper tiers of organizational hierarchy. They are embedded at the very foundation of career progression, shaping who is able to enter leadership pathways in the first place. In educational systems that do not deliberately intervene through equitable selection practices, inclusive professional development, and supportive organizational structures, women remain anchored in roles that do not facilitate advancement, regardless of their qualifications or leadership potential.

### **Implications**

Taken together, the theories of the leaky pipeline, glass ceiling, glass wall, and sticky floor provide a comprehensive explanation of the organisational dynamics that moderate the relationship between gender and access to educational leadership. Rather than attributing gender inequality in leadership to individual choice, ambition, or capability, these theories demonstrate how organisational culture and structural arrangements interact with gender to shape leadership trajectories. This interaction is particularly significant within educational institutions in Trinidad and Tobago, where women comprise the majority of the teaching workforce yet remain underrepresented in leadership positions.

Leaky pipeline theory highlights how systemic attrition occurs across the leadership trajectory. While female teachers enter the profession in large numbers, organisational cultures, structural constraints, and insufficient support mechanisms contribute to their gradual disengagement from leadership pathways. This theory underscores the importance of examining

not only initial access to leadership roles but also the sustainability of women's career progression within educational systems.

Glass ceiling theory draws attention to the invisible yet deeply embedded organisational norms and biases that prevent women from reaching senior leadership positions. These barriers are reinforced through male-dominated recruitment panels, stereotype-driven selection criteria, and the systematic undervaluation of women's leadership potential. As a result, organisational culture and structure operate as powerful moderators that intensify the effect of gender on leadership access, frequently privileging male candidates even in the absence of overt discrimination.

Glass wall theory adds a further dimension by illustrating how women are disproportionately channelled into roles and departments that are disconnected from strategic leadership functions. These horizontal barriers limit women's exposure to leadership-relevant experience, reducing both their institutional visibility and their competitiveness for promotion. Within the education sector, this often manifests through the assignment of women to pastoral, welfare, or administrative roles rather than curriculum leadership, operations, or strategic planning roles that are more directly linked to principalship and senior administration.

Sticky floor theory highlights the foundational constraints women face at the very entry point of leadership pathways. The absence of early leadership opportunities, combined with rigid organisational structures that fail to accommodate caregiving responsibilities, anchors many qualified women at the lower levels of organisational hierarchy. This significantly narrows the pipeline of women eligible for future leadership roles, reinforcing cycles of stagnation and underrepresentation (Ryan & Haslam, 2005).

When considered collectively, these theories suggest that gender inequality in educational leadership is not merely a matter of unequal representation but of unequal organisational opportunity structures. Cultural norms, institutional practices, and gendered expectations converge to create environments in which the rules governing advancement are not equally accessible. Organisational culture and structure, therefore, function not as neutral backdrops but as active moderators shaping gendered leadership outcomes.

In the Trinidad and Tobago context, where sociocultural norms continue to assign primary caregiving responsibilities to women and where patriarchal values remain influential within professional spaces, these implications are particularly pronounced. Without deliberate efforts to restructure promotion pathways, redefine leadership competencies, and implement flexible and inclusive support mechanisms, educational institutions risk reproducing gender inequality and underutilising the leadership potential of a substantial proportion of their workforce.

The implications for policy and practice are therefore substantial. Educational institutions and governing bodies, including the Teaching Service Commission, must critically examine how internal processes related to recruitment, appraisal, mentorship, and professional development may be inadvertently reinforcing gender disparities. By addressing organisational factors that moderate gendered access to leadership, stakeholders can begin to construct more equitable, transparent, and inclusive leadership pathways within the education system.

### **Evidence in Trinidad and Tobago**

In the context of Trinidad and Tobago, a range of empirical studies and institutional reports provide clear evidence of how organisational culture and structure interact with gender to influence access to educational leadership. This body of evidence demonstrates that organisational factors operate as active moderators, shaping career advancement opportunities for women within the

education sector (Acker, 1990). The data reinforce the argument that gender is not merely a demographic characteristic but is deeply embedded within institutional systems, sociocultural norms, and organisational processes that collectively determine who attains leadership and under what conditions.

Despite women constituting the majority of the teaching workforce in Trinidad and Tobago, they remain significantly underrepresented in senior educational leadership positions. Morris (1993) observed that while women dominate classroom teaching, they are noticeably absent from principalship and senior administrative roles. This persistent paradox points to organisational mechanisms that constrain female mobility within leadership pipelines, indicating that limited representation is not the result of insufficient interest or capability but of restricted access shaped by institutional culture and advancement structures (Blackmore, 2017a).

One of the most pronounced patterns in the literature is the preferential selection of male candidates in promotional decision-making, particularly within the Teaching Service Commission, the body responsible for appointing principals and senior education officials. Morris (1999) found that the commission was largely composed of former principals, the majority of whom were men. This composition creates a self-reinforcing cycle in which male-dominated panels continue to reproduce male leadership, often through implicit bias and entrenched assumptions about leadership suitability. In this way, organisational structure moderates the effect of merit and qualification, with gender functioning as a determining variable in promotion outcomes (Heilman, 2012).

Joseph et al. (2016) provide further evidence of gendered organisational norms at the school level. In their qualitative study of female teachers in boys' schools across Trinidad and Tobago, participants reported experiencing systemic gender bias from both colleagues and students.

Many described encountering resistance from male staff, diminished authority in interactions with male students, and limited institutional support for female leadership. Several participants reported adopting masculinised leadership behaviours to gain legitimacy, illustrating how organisational cultures are shaped by patriarchal expectations. These norms function as moderating forces that influence whether women perceive leadership as attainable or desirable.

Organisational dynamics are further shaped by broader societal expectations surrounding gender roles. Reddock and Bobb-Smith (2008) and Baptiste (2016) document the disproportionate caregiving and domestic responsibilities carried by women in Trinidad and Tobago. These socially constructed roles intersect with rigid organisational structures, particularly in schools that offer limited flexibility or fail to accommodate caregiving responsibilities. As a result, women may be excluded from leadership development opportunities or administrative roles that require extended hours or after-school engagement, not because of limited competence, but due to structural inflexibility and lack of institutional support.

Data from the International Labour Organization (2017; 2022) further contextualise these patterns. While women enter the workforce at rates comparable to men, they remain underrepresented in executive roles across sectors, including education. The ILO reports indicate that gendered career pathways often channel women into positions that are less strategic or visible, such as administrative support or student services. These roles, although essential, do not typically provide exposure to the leadership competencies prioritised in promotion decisions, reflecting the dynamics described in the glass wall theory.

This gendered division of labour is frequently informal and culturally reinforced rather than explicitly codified. Rhode (2017) describes how male-dominated leadership environments often rely on informal networks and sponsorship arrangements commonly referred to as the “old

boys' club." In Trinidad and Tobago, the absence of parallel mentorship and sponsorship networks for women in education further constrains leadership access, limiting women's exposure to strategic guidance and advocacy during promotion processes.

Structural barriers are compounded by appraisal systems that privilege linear and uninterrupted career trajectories. Woodd (1999) noted that women's careers are often nonlinear, shaped by periods of part-time employment, caregiving, and role transitions. However, these adaptive career patterns are frequently penalised in performance evaluations and promotion interviews, where continuity and uninterrupted service are treated as indicators of commitment and suitability. In this way, organisational evaluation systems moderate leadership outcomes by disadvantaging women whose career paths diverge from male-oriented norms.

Perceptions of leadership capability are also shaped by persistent gender stereotypes embedded within both educational institutions and wider society. Hermans et al. (2016) found that traditional gender role attitudes remain prevalent across Latin America and the Caribbean, including Trinidad and Tobago. Women continue to be associated with domestic responsibility, while men are viewed as more appropriate for public leadership. These beliefs filter into organisational decision-making, moderating how competence and performance are interpreted and often diminishing the perceived legitimacy of women leaders.

Accumulated organisational discouragement, role strain, and limited institutional support contribute to patterns of self-selection out of leadership pathways. Silim and Stirling (2014) observed that women often recalibrate career aspirations in response to competing pressures, opting for roles that permit manageable work-life integration. In educational institutions that lack flexible leadership models or part-time advancement pathways, the perceived costs of leadership

may outweigh potential benefits, particularly for women with caregiving responsibilities. Organisational structure thus moderates not only access to leadership but also leadership aspiration.

The policy implications of these findings are substantial. If educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago is to become more equitable, organisational culture and structure must be critically examined and intentionally transformed. This includes diversifying promotion committees, restructuring appraisal systems to accommodate diverse career models, expanding flexible leadership pathways, and implementing targeted mentorship programmes for underrepresented groups. Without such interventions, gender will continue to operate as a powerful moderating variable in determining who advances to leadership within the education system.

In summary, evidence from Trinidad and Tobago demonstrates that organisational culture and structure do not simply reflect existing gender norms but actively reproduce and sustain them (Acker, 1990). Leadership inequality is therefore best understood as a systemic outcome shaped by institutional practices rather than individual limitation. Addressing women's underrepresentation in educational leadership requires sustained organisational transformation at both school and policy levels, without which progress toward gender equity will remain fragmented and unsustainable.

### **Summary**

The analysis of how organisational culture and structure moderate the relationship between gender and access to educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago reveals three interrelated and reinforcing themes. First, organisational culture within many educational institutions reflects a predominantly male-oriented career development model that privileges traditional, uninterrupted, full-time work trajectories. This model disadvantages women, particularly those navigating caregiving responsibilities or non-linear career paths, and reinforces systemic bias within

promotion and selection practices. As a consequence, institutional cultures often lack intentional structures designed to support or accommodate women's progression into leadership roles.

Second, educational organisations demonstrate limited receptiveness to female leadership, a pattern sustained by deeply embedded gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms. These perceptions contribute to the persistence of glass ceiling barriers, through which women are systematically undervalued or excluded from senior leadership opportunities despite possessing the required qualifications, experience, and professional competence. This dynamic is especially evident within recruitment, selection, and appraisal processes that rely heavily on subjective judgment shaped by cultural assumptions regarding gender, authority, and leadership suitability.

Third, women's lived experiences within these organisational environments are frequently characterised by restricted access to leadership networks, limited mentorship opportunities, gendered role expectations, and a lack of institutional flexibility. Over time, these conditions contribute to internalised barriers such as self-doubt, imposter syndrome, and heightened role strain. These internal responses do not originate in individual deficiency but emerge as adaptive reactions to organisational contexts that implicitly discourage female leadership, particularly when professional advancement conflicts with dominant social expectations surrounding caregiving and domestic responsibility.

Taken together, these findings underscore that gender disparities in educational leadership are not the result of individual shortcomings or lack of aspiration but are shaped by organisational factors that actively moderate women's ability to access, pursue, and sustain leadership trajectories. Organisational culture and structure, therefore, operate as powerful determinants of leadership outcomes rather than neutral contexts.

Addressing these barriers requires systemic and sustained organisational reform, including the implementation of inclusive promotion policies, flexible and non-linear career development models, and deliberate efforts to transform institutional cultures that continue to marginalise female leadership. Only through such structural and cultural change can educational institutions in Trinidad and Tobago move toward more equitable, representative, and sustainable leadership structures.

### **The Moderating Impacts of Cultural Factors on the Relationship between Gender and the Attainment of Educational Leadership**

This section examines how sociocultural factors moderate the relationship between gender and the attainment of educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. Cultural norms, including socially constructed gender roles, traditional expectations regarding women's primary responsibilities, and persistent patriarchal values, shape the institutional and social environments in which leadership decisions are made. These sociocultural factors operate not as background influences but as active moderators, interacting with organisational structures and practices to shape how gender affects career advancement. As Heilman (2012) observes, internalised self-perceptions shaped by societal expectations, limited public acceptance of female authority, and entrenched gender stereotypes contribute to a cultural landscape that disproportionately constrains women's leadership aspirations. Compared with their male counterparts, women experience heightened cultural scrutiny and systemic discouragement, which collectively moderate their capacity to pursue and attain leadership roles in education (Heilman, 2012; Begeny et al., 2020).

## **Theoretical Assessments**

### *Self-Efficacy Theory*

Self-efficacy theory, derived from Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory, provides a valuable framework for understanding how beliefs about personal capability influence motivation, decision-making, and persistence in career pursuits. Within the context of educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago, self-efficacy is shaped not only by individual experience but also by the sociocultural environment, including gender stereotypes, social expectations, and institutional norms. These cultural forces actively moderate the relationship between gender and leadership attainment by shaping internal perceptions of competence, legitimacy, and likelihood of success.

According to Bandura et al. (1999), self-efficacy develops through personal mastery experiences, social modelling, verbal persuasion, and physiological feedback. In patriarchal or male-dominated environments, female teachers are frequently exposed to fewer positive leadership role models and encounter more negative social cues related to authority and leadership suitability. Repeated exposure to gendered stereotypes, such as the assumption that men are more effective leaders, can erode women's belief in their leadership capability, fostering diminished self-confidence and reducing the likelihood that women will pursue roles traditionally perceived as masculine, including principalship or senior educational administration (Heilman, 2012; Feenstra et al., 2020; Crawford, 2021).

Women's self-efficacy is further shaped by processes of vicarious learning. When women rarely observe individuals like themselves occupying leadership roles, they may internalise the belief that such positions are unattainable or incompatible with their identities. This dynamic is intensified by the prevalence of imposter syndrome, whereby women doubt their competence despite clear evidence of qualification and experience (Kray et al., 2025). Imposter syndrome has

been consistently associated with reduced self-efficacy, constrained ambition, and withdrawal from leadership pathways, particularly within male-dominated professional contexts.

The sociocultural context of Trinidad and Tobago plays a decisive role in shaping these internalised beliefs. Cultural norms continue to position women as primary caregivers and moral anchors of family life, influencing both the prioritisation of career ambitions and perceptions of leadership suitability. These expectations intersect with organisational cultures that often lack flexibility or explicit support for work-life integration, reinforcing the perception that leadership roles are incompatible with women's domestic responsibilities and social identities. As a result, women's confidence in pursuing leadership is moderated not by ability but by culturally mediated assessments of role appropriateness.

Self-efficacy theory also intersects with the concept of personal agency in career development. Bandura et al. (1999) argue that individuals must believe they can exert control over their professional trajectories in order to act upon opportunity. However, in contexts where women are routinely excluded from early leadership roles or denied mentorship and sponsorship into decision-making spaces, the development of agency is systematically constrained. Research across the Caribbean, including Trinidad and Tobago, indicates that women often lack access to informal networks, mentorship relationships, and sponsorship structures that are essential for building confidence and navigating leadership pathways (Heilman, 2012; Gallo, 2011; Gilfillan-Farrell, 2020). The absence of these resources limits not only opportunity but belief in one's capacity to succeed.

In this way, sociocultural factors moderate the relationship between gender and self-efficacy, which in turn shapes whether female teachers envision themselves as legitimate leadership candidates. Negative cultural stereotypes, exclusion from male-dominated leadership

cultures, and the absence of women-centred leadership development models combine to erode self-efficacy, contributing directly to the persistent underrepresentation of women in educational leadership roles in Trinidad and Tobago, despite their numerical dominance within the teaching profession.

Self-efficacy, therefore, should not be understood as a purely individual attribute. It is a socially produced and culturally reinforced outcome shaped by structural, institutional, and symbolic forces. Efforts to address gender disparities in educational leadership must therefore extend beyond individual skill development and focus on transforming the cultural and organisational conditions that shape women's beliefs about leadership legitimacy and capability. By recognising how self-efficacy is culturally moderated, educational stakeholders can design more effective interventions that challenge gendered assumptions, strengthen women's leadership identity, and disrupt the systemic barriers that continue to limit advancement.

#### *Personal Agency for Career Development*

Personal agency for career development, rooted in Bandura's broader theory of human agency, emphasises individuals' capacity to shape their professional trajectories through intentional action, reflection, and adaptation. However, agency is not exercised independently of context. In gendered environments, personal agency is strongly influenced by sociocultural conditions that shape how individuals perceive opportunity, constraint, and legitimacy. Within the context of Trinidad and Tobago, these sociocultural influences function as moderating forces, shaping the extent to which female teachers are able to exercise agency in pursuing educational leadership roles.

Bandura et al. (1999) argues that individuals act as proactive agents capable of exercising control over their development when appropriate conditions and supports are present. In career

development, this involves learning through experience, observing role models, setting goals, and navigating institutional structures. When cultural and organisational systems privilege male-oriented leadership norms and restrict access to formative leadership experiences, women's capacity to exercise agency is systematically constrained. For example, women who are excluded from early leadership opportunities due to sticky floor dynamics are denied the experiential learning necessary to build confidence, competence, and professional visibility (Morgan et al., 2019; Ryan & Haslam, 2005). Without access to such experiences, women may struggle to perceive themselves as legitimate leadership candidates, even when formal qualifications and experience are comparable to those of male colleagues.

Within many educational institutions in Trinidad and Tobago, early career development opportunities are often distributed in ways that reflect gendered assumptions about leadership suitability. Acting appointments, leadership training opportunities, and committee chair roles may be more frequently offered to male teachers, reinforcing perceptions of men as natural leaders. As a consequence, female teachers are less likely to acquire the operational, strategic, and decision-making experience required for advancement, thereby moderating their ability to act on leadership ambition and limiting the practical exercise of agency.

Personal agency is also shaped by access to professional networks, mentorship, and sponsorship. Mentors play a critical role in career development by providing guidance, advocacy, and exposure to leadership opportunities. As Gallo (2011) notes, mentorship and sponsorship often function as decisive mechanisms in leadership advancement. In Trinidad and Tobago, where women remain underrepresented in educational leadership, female teachers frequently lack access to mentors who share or understand their lived experiences. In contrast, male teachers often benefit from established informal professional networks commonly described as the "old boys' network,"

within which influence and opportunity circulate through informal channels (Rhode, 2017). This unequal access to social capital further moderates women's capacity to navigate leadership pathways and exercise agency effectively.

Sociocultural expectations surrounding femininity and caregiving further shape women's career agency. In Trinidad and Tobago, cultural norms continue to position women as primary caregivers within families and communities (Reddock & Bobb-Smith, 2008; Baptiste, 2016). These expectations influence both personal prioritisation and institutional response, particularly in environments that lack flexible working arrangements, caregiving leave policies, or alternative leadership models. In such contexts, women may forgo leadership opportunities not due to lack of aspiration but because organisational conditions render advancement impractical or unsustainable. These constraints on agency are structural rather than personal, reflecting broader cultural and institutional arrangements that disproportionately burden women (Acker, 1990; Heilman, 2012).

Taken together, these dynamics demonstrate that personal agency for career development is both enabled and constrained by sociocultural and organisational conditions. Female teachers in Trinidad and Tobago may aspire to leadership and possess the qualifications required to succeed, yet their capacity to act on these aspirations is moderated by limited access to formative experiences, mentorship, and supportive institutional structures. Career decisions are therefore made within a cultural context that continues to reinforce traditional gender roles, undervalues women's leadership contributions, and normalises male dominance in senior educational positions.

Understanding these dynamics is essential for initiatives aimed at promoting gender equity in educational leadership. Efforts to enhance women's career development must extend beyond encouraging individual ambition or resilience. They must address the structural and cultural barriers that restrict the exercise of personal agency, including inequitable access to leadership

preparation programmes, mentorship opportunities, flexible career models, and transparent promotion pathways that recognise women's lived realities.

In summary, personal agency for career development among female teachers in Trinidad and Tobago cannot be fully realised without confronting the sociocultural and organisational conditions that shape how agency is exercised. Without targeted interventions that disrupt gendered norms and institutional practices, women's agency will remain constrained, and gender disparities in educational leadership will persist.

#### *Vroom's Expectancy Theory*

Vroom's Expectancy Theory provides a motivational framework for understanding career decision-making by proposing that individuals engage in goal-directed behaviour based on the expectation that their efforts will lead to valued outcomes (Vroom, 1964). According to this theory, motivation is determined by three core components: expectancy, defined as the belief that effort will lead to performance; instrumentality, defined as the belief that performance will result in desired outcomes; and valence, defined as the value placed on those outcomes. In sociocultural and organisational contexts characterised by gendered norms and unequal opportunity structures, these beliefs are not formed equally across individuals. For many female educators in Trinidad and Tobago, motivation to pursue educational leadership is moderated by the perception that effort and performance will not be rewarded equitably due to persistent gendered organisational and cultural barriers.

Expectancy theory assumes a rational evaluation process in which individuals assess whether sustained effort is likely to result in successful performance. However, when women repeatedly observe that leadership appointments are disproportionately awarded to men or that leadership roles are implicitly aligned with masculine traits and behaviours, their expectancy

beliefs are weakened (Heilman, 2012; Eagly & Karau, 2002). In educational institutions where patriarchal values remain embedded within leadership structures, female teachers may conclude that even high levels of performance will not be assessed on equal terms. This perception reduces motivation to engage in leadership development or to pursue promotion, reinforcing patterns of underrepresentation (Morris, 1999; Joseph et al., 2016).

Instrumentality is similarly undermined when organisational processes surrounding promotion and leadership development lack transparency or are perceived as biased. When women witness unequal access to acting appointments, mentorship, or professional development opportunities that serve as recognised pathways to leadership, the belief that performance will translate into advancement is diminished. In male-dominated organisational cultures, leadership is frequently associated with traits culturally coded as masculine, such as assertiveness, dominance, and competitiveness. Research indicates that women who adopt these behaviours may face social or professional penalties, while those who conform to traditional feminine expectations may be judged as insufficiently authoritative (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Harquail, 2008). This double bind erodes instrumentality by signalling that no behavioural strategy reliably leads to leadership advancement (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2012).

The valence component of expectancy theory is also shaped by sociocultural expectations. In Trinidad and Tobago, women are often culturally expected to prioritise family and caregiving responsibilities (Reddock & Bobb-Smith, 2008; Baptiste, 2016). These expectations influence how leadership roles are valued, particularly when such roles are associated with long working hours, heightened visibility, emotional labour, and public scrutiny. While many women may continue to value leadership in principle, the cumulative pressures of work-life imbalance, limited institutional

flexibility, and social judgment can reduce the perceived desirability of leadership roles, especially if success is viewed as coming at the expense of family stability or personal well-being.

Expectancy theory further intersects with issues of representation and visibility. When women see few examples of female leaders within their institutions, particularly leaders who successfully integrate professional responsibility with family life, the perceived attainability and value of leadership roles decline (Bandura et al., 1999; Begeny et al., 2020). This contributes to what has been described as a lack of imagined possibility, whereby women struggle to envision themselves within leadership positions that appear structurally inaccessible and culturally incongruent with accepted gender roles. In such contexts, opting out of leadership pathways reflects a rational response to constrained opportunity rather than a lack of ambition or competence.

Applying Vroom's Expectancy Theory to gender and educational leadership, therefore, reveals how motivational processes are shaped by sociocultural and organisational conditions. It challenges deficit-based explanations that attribute women's underrepresentation to insufficient drive or preparation and instead highlights how beliefs about effort, reward, and value are socially constructed and gendered. Expectancy, instrumentality, and valence are all moderated by organisational culture, leadership norms, and societal expectations, which together shape women's career decision-making.

In Trinidad and Tobago, where patriarchal values and gender stereotypes continue to influence institutional cultures, addressing gender disparities in educational leadership requires more than formal policy reform. It necessitates transforming the conditions that shape women's expectations about the feasibility and desirability of leadership. This includes increasing the visibility of female role models, implementing transparent and equitable promotion processes, and cultivating organisational cultures that recognise and value diverse leadership styles. Until such

changes are embedded within educational institutions, female educators are likely to continue experiencing reduced expectancy, weakened instrumentality, and diminished valence when evaluating leadership opportunities, thereby perpetuating gender disparities in educational leadership.

### *Symbolic Interactionism*

Symbolic interactionism offers a sociological lens through which to understand how gender roles and leadership identities are constructed, internalised, and reproduced through social interaction (Kanter and Blumer, 1971; Mead, 2014). This theoretical perspective proposes that individuals develop self-concept and role understanding through ongoing interaction with others, as well as through engagement with societal symbols, norms, and expectations. Within the context of educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago, symbolic interactionism helps explain how sociocultural factors operate as moderators, shaping both how women perceive themselves as leaders and how they are perceived by others within institutional settings.

According to symbolic interactionism, meaning is not fixed but is continually produced and negotiated through social interaction. Gender roles are therefore not inherent attributes, but socially constructed identities reinforced through repeated experiences. When female teachers are consistently exposed to messages, whether explicit or implicit, that leadership is a masculine domain, they may internalise beliefs that position leadership as misaligned with their gender identity. These meanings are reinforced through everyday practices such as differential treatment by colleagues and students, limited representation of women in leadership roles, and the absence of affirming professional narratives. Over time, these interactions shape professional self-concept in ways that may discourage leadership aspiration.

Gender stereotypes function as powerful symbols within this interpretive process. Widely held assumptions that women are nurturing, emotional, or passive, while men are decisive, authoritative, and assertive, influence how leadership is defined and who is perceived as suitable for such roles (Heilman, 2012; Harquail, 2008). These symbolic associations shape the behaviour of key educational stakeholders, including students, teachers, and administrators. As documented by Joseph et al. (2016), female teachers in Trinidad and Tobago frequently reported experiencing disrespect from male students and scepticism from male colleagues, interactions that signal diminished legitimacy and authority. Such experiences communicate to women that leadership requires overperformance or behavioural conformity to masculine norms in order to be accepted.

Symbolic interactionism also provides insight into the experience of role strain that emerges when individuals' self-concept conflicts with external expectations. Female educators socialised to prioritise caregiving roles and embody communal traits may experience internal tension when pursuing leadership positions that demand assertiveness, public authority, and visibility, traits culturally coded as masculine. This dissonance can lead to hesitation, withdrawal, or ambivalence toward leadership opportunities, particularly in organisational environments that fail to legitimise diverse leadership expressions.

The theory further emphasises the importance of representation and observation in meaning-making. When women do not see others like themselves occupying leadership positions, they receive symbolic cues that such roles are inaccessible or inappropriate (Bandura et al., 1999; Begeny et al., 2020). In Trinidad and Tobago, the limited visibility of women in principalship and senior educational leadership functions as a powerful symbolic message, moderating women's belief in their leadership potential. Conversely, visible female leaders can disrupt dominant

narratives, enabling alternative meanings of leadership that validate women's presence and authority.

Symbolic interactionism also reveals how organisational structures, although often presented as neutral, are imbued with symbolic meaning. Leadership selection processes based on traditional interviews, hierarchical promotion systems, or ambiguous performance criteria may implicitly privilege experiences and behaviours more commonly associated with men. These organisational practices communicate symbolic messages about what leadership looks like and who belongs within leadership spaces, shaping how women interpret their prospects for advancement. As a result, women may perceive such environments as misaligned with their identities, reducing engagement and ambition.

In summary, symbolic interactionism illuminates how gendered meanings are constructed and reinforced within educational institutions and how these meanings influence the behaviour, confidence, and career decisions of female educators. It explains how women may internalise doubts about leadership suitability and how stakeholders may unconsciously perpetuate exclusionary norms through everyday interaction. These processes do not arise from individual attitudes alone but are embedded within a broader sociocultural environment that moderates access to leadership through the construction of symbolic meaning, role expectation, and institutional narrative.

For educational reform efforts aimed at advancing gender equity to be effective, attention must extend beyond structural change to include the transformation of everyday interactions and cultural narratives. Leadership development initiatives should actively challenge harmful stereotypes, promote alternative leadership representations, and cultivate organisational cultures that affirm the legitimacy of diverse leadership identities. Only by reshaping the symbolic

meanings attached to leadership can educational institutions in Trinidad and Tobago create conditions that support equity, inclusion, and sustained female participation in educational leadership.

### *Feminism Theory*

Feminist theory provides a critical framework for understanding the structural and cultural foundations of gender inequality within education systems (Acker, 1990; Hooks, 2000). Drawing from broader critical and conflict-based sociological traditions, feminist perspectives challenge the assumption that social structures are neutral and instead argue that societal institutions, including educational organisations, are embedded with patriarchal values that systematically privilege men while subordinating women. Within the context of Trinidad and Tobago, feminist theory is particularly useful for explaining how gendered power relations operate as sociocultural moderators, shaping women's access to and progression within educational leadership.

Feminist theory is not a singular framework but encompasses multiple strands that examine gender inequality from different perspectives. Liberal feminism focuses on equal access to opportunities and institutional reforms that remove barriers to women's participation in leadership. Radical feminism critiques the patriarchal structures embedded within social institutions that reproduce male dominance and gender hierarchies. Black and postcolonial feminist perspectives extend this analysis by examining how gender intersects with race, colonial histories, and class structures to shape women's experiences differently across contexts (Collins, 2000; Reddock, 1994; Momsen, 1993). Within the Caribbean context, these latter perspectives are particularly relevant because women's social and professional roles have been shaped by colonial labour systems, racial stratification, and cultural expectations surrounding gender and authority.

At its core, feminist theory asserts that gender is a socially constructed category used to maintain unequal power relations (Miller & Lorber, 1995; Acker, 1990). These constructions are upheld through both explicit and implicit mechanisms, including policies, organisational practices, and cultural narratives that normalise male dominance and female subordination in public and professional life. Within educational institutions, this dynamic is reflected in promotion patterns, leadership definitions, and workplace cultures that continue to reproduce gendered expectations. Although women comprise the majority of the teaching workforce in Trinidad and Tobago, they remain significantly underrepresented in senior leadership roles, indicating that inequality emerges not at the point of entry but through organisational and cultural moderation of leadership access (Morris, 1993; George, 2003).

Feminist theory emphasises that these outcomes are not coincidental. Rather, they are produced by deeply embedded patriarchal systems that rely on stereotypes and social expectations to justify the exclusion of women from leadership. Women are frequently characterised as emotional, passive, or insufficiently authoritative, traits positioned in opposition to dominant leadership ideals such as assertiveness, rationality, and decisiveness, which are culturally coded as masculine (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Figart, 2005; Radtke, 2017). These assumptions shape how leadership is conceptualised and evaluated within schools, thereby moderating how women are perceived as potential leaders and influencing whether they pursue leadership roles at all.

A further contribution of feminist theory lies in its attention to intersectionality and historical context (Crenshaw, n.d.). Gender does not operate in isolation but intersects with class, race, and the legacies of colonialism to produce differentiated experiences of marginalization. In the Caribbean, and specifically in Trinidad and Tobago, the historical legacies of slavery and colonial labour systems produced rigid gender divisions, where men were positioned as leaders

and skilled workers while women were confined to domestic and supportive roles (Momsen, 1993; Reddock, 2012). These historical arrangements continue to shape contemporary organisational norms and expectations, reinforcing assumptions about leadership suitability and authority that disadvantage women. Within the Caribbean context, feminist scholarship has emphasized that gender inequality cannot be understood independently of colonial history, racial stratification, and class relations that continue to shape institutional structures and leadership norms (Reddock, 1994; Momsen, 1993).

Feminist theorists also highlight the psychological consequences of sustained structural inequality. Through socialisation and repeated exposure to discriminatory norms, women may internalise negative beliefs about their leadership capacity, resulting in reduced self-confidence and diminished self-efficacy. Evidence from Trinidad and Tobago suggests that many female teachers refrain from applying for leadership positions due to fear of judgment, anticipated resistance, or perceptions of inadequacy within male-dominated environments (Bandura et al., 1999; Schuster & Martiny, 2016). These internalised barriers are not individual failings but socially produced outcomes, sustained through organisational culture and broader sociocultural expectations.

In addition, feminist theory critiques how organisational career models systematically disadvantage women by privileging linear, uninterrupted career trajectories. As Woodd (1999) argues, dominant career progression models are based largely on male life patterns and fail to accommodate the complex work-life realities faced by many women. Despite evidence that female teachers in Trinidad and Tobago frequently balance professional responsibilities with caregiving and domestic roles (Reddock & Bobb-Smith, 2008; Baptiste, 2016), institutions continue to reward

availability, mobility, and uninterrupted service, thereby disadvantaging women within leadership pathways.

Feminist perspectives also draw attention to gendered access to mentorship and professional networks. Male-dominated institutions often sustain informal networks that facilitate sponsorship, information sharing, and advancement among men (Rhode, 2017). Women, particularly in contexts where they are underrepresented in senior roles, are less likely to benefit from these networks. The absence of intentional, inclusive mentorship structures functions as a further moderating factor, limiting women's access to the social capital necessary for leadership progression.

Importantly, feminist theory does not merely diagnose inequality but calls for active resistance and transformation of the systems that sustain it. Improving gender equity in educational leadership, therefore, requires more than increasing the number of women in senior positions. It necessitates a fundamental re-examination of leadership definitions, merit criteria, and professional development pathways, alongside institutional accountability for addressing exclusionary practices. Educational organisations must critically reflect on how their policies and cultures reproduce gendered power relations and take deliberate steps to affirm diverse leadership identities.

In conclusion, feminist theory offers a powerful lens for understanding how sociocultural factors moderate the relationship between gender and leadership attainment by exposing the embedded power dynamics within ostensibly neutral systems. In Trinidad and Tobago, where historical legacies and contemporary cultural narratives continue to frame leadership through a patriarchal lens, feminist theory provides a critical foundation for deconstructing inequality and advocating for structural change. By centring women's lived experiences, recognising intersecting

forms of constraint, and demanding institutional transformation, feminist theory contributes to a more comprehensive and transformative understanding of gender inequality in educational leadership.

### **Evidence in Trinidad and Tobago**

In the context of Trinidad and Tobago, a growing body of evidence illustrates how sociocultural factors such as gender stereotypes, historical legacies, and patriarchal norms operate as moderators in the relationship between gender and access to educational leadership. Despite women comprising the majority of the teaching workforce, they remain significantly underrepresented in senior leadership positions such as principals, vice principals, and education officers. This disparity cannot be attributed to differences in qualifications or professional experience, but rather to a broader constellation of cultural forces that influence how leadership is defined, who is perceived as capable of leading, and under what conditions leadership is pursued and granted (ILO, 2017; Morris, 1993).

Morris (1993) conducted foundational research demonstrating that women in Trinidad and Tobago dominate the teaching profession numerically yet remain underrepresented in educational management. His findings revealed that women were frequently overlooked for principalship positions, and those who did advance often encountered resistance from colleagues and students, particularly in all-male or co-educational schools. This early evidence highlighted the presence of entrenched patriarchal norms within school culture and wider society, which moderated both the leadership aspirations and professional outcomes of female educators.

Subsequent research by George (2003) confirmed that although more than half of newly hired teachers in the late nineteen nineties were women, men continued to dominate administrative and leadership roles. The persistent mismatch between representation at the entry level and

representation at senior levels reflected a clear glass ceiling effect, indicating that factors beyond professional competence were shaping promotion decisions. Importantly, the administrative composition of schools did not reflect the gender distribution of the teaching staff, reinforcing the argument that gendered cultural expectations moderated leadership access.

More recent qualitative work by Joseph et al. (2016) provides nuanced insight into the lived experiences of female teachers, particularly within boys' schools. Their study revealed that female educators frequently faced hostility from male students and scepticism from male colleagues. Participants described situations in which their authority was questioned, leadership was resisted, and gender was perceived as incompatible with educational leadership, especially in institutions dominated by masculine norms. Some women reported adopting traditionally masculine behaviours in order to maintain discipline and professional legitimacy, illustrating the cultural pressures that shape leadership enactment. These findings underscore how sociocultural norms directly moderate both women's access to leadership and their experiences once leadership roles are attained.

These institutional dynamics are embedded within the broader historical and cultural context of Trinidad and Tobago. Blank (2013) traces contemporary gender norms to colonial labour systems that valorised male authority and confined women to domestic or supportive roles. During the colonial period, labour was rigidly divided along gender lines, with men occupying skilled and supervisory positions and women relegated to domestic labour or informal economic activity. These divisions were not merely economic but symbolic, associating leadership, intelligence, and authority with masculinity while denying women access to these attributes (Heilman, 2012; Harquail, 2008).

The persistence of these historical patterns continues to shape how leadership is perceived in post-independence Trinidad and Tobago. Educational institutions have inherited and continue to operate within cultural frameworks that uphold traditional gender roles. Women are still widely expected to be primary caregivers and to exhibit nurturing and cooperative behaviours, while men are associated with assertiveness, rationality, and public authority. These expectations generate role strain for women seeking leadership positions, particularly when leadership demands decisiveness and visibility that may be culturally framed as unfeminine or inappropriate.

The impact of these sociocultural expectations on women's self-perception and career aspirations is substantial. Morris (1993) observed that many female educators internalised societal messages that positioned them as less suited to leadership, resulting in diminished self-confidence and reluctance to apply for promotion. Research on self-efficacy supports this observation, demonstrating that negative socialisation reduces belief in leadership capability. Schuster and Martiny (2016) and Reddan (2015) argue that self-efficacy is shaped by social environment, exposure to role models, and repeated interaction. In Trinidad and Tobago, where leadership roles in education remain predominantly male-occupied, women frequently lack the validation and modelling necessary to envision themselves as leaders.

This process is reinforced by public discourse and cultural representation. Heilman (2012) notes that women in Trinidad and Tobago are often portrayed as passive, less competent, or less assertive than men. These portrayals are reinforced through media, educational materials, and everyday interaction, shaping cultural narratives that influence leadership evaluation. When such narratives enter school environments, they affect how women are perceived by students, parents, and colleagues, as well as how women perceive themselves, aligning closely with symbolic interactionist explanations of meaning construction.

Structural discrimination further compounds these challenges. The International Labour Organization (2017) reports that across Latin America and the Caribbean, women face persistent barriers in progressing from entry-level roles to senior management. These include rigid promotion criteria, male-dominated leadership networks, and organisational cultures that privilege traditionally masculine leadership traits. In Trinidad and Tobago, similar dynamics are evident in the appointment practices of bodies such as the Teaching Service Commission. Morris (1999) observed that decision-making bodies responsible for principal appointments were largely composed of male former principals, raising concerns about implicit bias and gendered gatekeeping.

Informal professional networks also play a significant moderating role. Rhode (2017) describes the influence of male-dominated informal networks that provide mentorship, sponsorship, and access to opportunity. Women, particularly those outside senior leadership circles, are less likely to benefit from these networks. The absence of parallel pro-female support structures limits women's access to social capital, reducing the likelihood of leadership advancement even where formal equality exists.

While policy reforms and gender equity initiatives have been introduced, cultural norms continue to undermine their effectiveness. UN Women (2022) reports that women in Trinidad and Tobago continue to experience workplace segregation and discrimination, including being channelled into roles with limited leadership potential, overlooked for promotion, or held to higher performance standards than male colleagues. These patterns reflect deeply embedded cultural beliefs about gender and authority rather than isolated institutional failures.

Family-related cultural expectations further moderate leadership access. Women continue to be viewed as primary caregivers, and many educational institutions lack flexible work

arrangements or family-inclusive leadership models. As Burkus (2017) and the Society for Human Resource Management (2022) note, women often seek adaptable working conditions to balance professional and domestic responsibilities. However, leadership roles in Trinidad and Tobago's education system are frequently associated with long hours, rigid schedules, and high public visibility. This mismatch between institutional expectations and women's lived realities discourages leadership participation and constrains advancement.

Woodd (1999) argues that dominant career models assume continuous employment, mobility, and minimal external responsibility, reflecting male life patterns. These assumptions disadvantage women and contribute to a professional culture in which male leadership is normalised, and female leadership is viewed as exceptional or conditional. Even when women attain leadership positions, they often face heightened scrutiny and challenges to legitimacy, as documented by Joseph et al. (2016), further reinforcing exclusionary norms.

The psychological consequences of this environment are significant. Persistent exposure to discrimination, stereotype threat, and resistance can result in role strain, emotional exhaustion, and withdrawal from leadership aspiration. These outcomes reflect broader sociocultural mechanisms that continue to frame leadership through a patriarchal lens, requiring women to constantly negotiate legitimacy within educational institutions.

Although there is evidence of growing awareness and incremental progress, individual agency alone remains insufficient. Without sustained structural and cultural transformation, sociocultural moderators will continue to constrain women's leadership trajectories, limiting both aspiration and attainment.

In conclusion, evidence from Trinidad and Tobago demonstrates that gender disparities in educational leadership are not the result of individual choice or isolated institutional practice. They

are rooted in the interaction of historical legacies, cultural narratives, and organisational structures that shape how leadership is understood and distributed. These sociocultural factors function as powerful moderators in the relationship between gender and leadership access, influencing opportunity, perception, and participation. Addressing these dynamics requires not only policy reform but a deliberate transformation of cultural narratives and institutional practices that continue to define leadership through a gendered lens.

### **Summary**

The preceding sections have examined how sociocultural factors function as active moderators in the relationship between gender and access to educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. Gendered experiences shape teachers' opportunities and aspirations not as isolated influences, but through their interaction with personal, familial, and organisational domains, each of which is embedded within broader cultural narratives and power structures (Acker, 1990; Heilman, 2012).

At the personal level, socialisation processes shaped by patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes contribute to systematically diminished self-efficacy among many female teachers (Bandura et al., 1999; Heilman, 2012). These internalised beliefs, developed through repeated exposure to limiting cultural messages and the absence of visible female leadership role models, influence how women perceive their leadership capability and legitimacy. Self-doubt, imposter syndrome, and constrained leadership identity are reinforced by cultural scripts that associate authority and leadership with masculinity, leading many women to opt out of leadership pathways even when they possess the necessary qualifications and experience (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Kray et al., 2025).

At the familial level, cultural expectations surrounding caregiving and domestic responsibility continue to assign women primary responsibility for household management (Reddock & Bobb-Smith, 2008; Baptiste, 2016). This unequal distribution of unpaid labour moderates women's capacity to invest time, energy, and sustained focus in professional advancement. Leadership positions that require extended hours, availability, and public visibility are therefore frequently perceived as incompatible with family obligations, particularly within educational institutions that lack flexible work arrangements or family-inclusive policies (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Dåderman & Basinska, 2016).

At the organisational level, female teachers encounter structural and cultural barriers that further moderate leadership access, including opaque promotion processes, male-dominated leadership networks, and evaluation systems that privilege linear and uninterrupted career trajectories (Ryan & Haslam, 2005; Rhode, 2017). These systems are not gender neutral. Rather, they reflect and reproduce societal norms that associate authority with masculinity and continuity with commitment. Organisational cultures that valorise traditionally masculine leadership traits marginalise women further, especially when women must either conform at personal cost or risk being perceived as unsuitable for leadership (Harquail, 2008; Heilman, 2012).

These interrelated patterns are rooted in the broader sociocultural and historical context of Trinidad and Tobago, where colonial legacies and entrenched patriarchal values continue to shape institutional norms (Momsen, 1993; Reddock, 2012). Historical labour divisions, gendered constructions of femininity and masculinity, and the enduring influence of Eurocentric patriarchal systems have collectively informed contemporary assumptions about leadership suitability. As a result, sociocultural factors do not merely coexist with professional experiences. They actively

moderate how gender operates within the educational leadership landscape, shaping motivation, access, institutional support, and professional recognition.

In summary, cultural factors influence female participation in educational leadership by shaping the structures, norms, and interpersonal dynamics that govern women's opportunities and career decision-making (Heilman, 2012; Begeny et al., 2020). Addressing gender inequality in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago, therefore, requires both institutional reform and deliberate cultural transformation. By confronting the social values, symbolic meanings, and organisational practices that perpetuate exclusion, the education system can move toward more equitable leadership pathways and sustained female participation at all levels of educational leadership.

### **Constructs of Career Development**

In the context of the conceptual framework, career development is shaped by several interrelated constructs, including focus, intent, family support, and attitudes toward the organisation. Within the conceptual framework of this study, career development is not treated as a fixed individual attribute but as a dynamic process shaped by the interaction of gender with individual, familial, organisational, and cultural factors (Super, 1990; Lent et al., 1994). While career development is often framed as an individual process, it is increasingly recognised as one that emerges through interaction with social, economic, institutional, and cultural environments. Kalchik and Oertle (2010) define career development as “the total constellation of economic, sociological, psychological, educational, physical, and chance factors that combine to shape one's career” (p. 1). This definition reinforces the study's position that career development is neither

linear nor solely agentic but is dynamically structured through the interaction between personal decision-making and broader environmental conditions (Super, 1990; Lent et al., 1994).

Roos (2006) similarly conceptualises career development as a continuum that spans early career planning through to the consolidation of professional identity. Successful progression along this continuum depends not only on internal attributes such as focus and intent, but also on external supports including family encouragement, organisational culture, and institutional opportunity structures. Super (1990) describes career development as unfolding across five stages: growing, exploring, establishing, maintaining, and reinventing, each characterised by distinct challenges, transitions, and decision points. These stages frequently align with educational milestones and employment transitions and are moderated by social expectations and institutional frameworks.

During the growing stage, typically occurring from early childhood through adolescence, individuals begin forming preliminary ideas about interests and potential career pathways. The exploration stage, which often occurs during late adolescence and early adulthood, involves aligning these interests with perceived opportunities and constraints. In the establishing stage, individuals seek employment consistent with their aspirations and begin building a professional identity. The maintenance stage involves continued skill development, role consolidation, and pursuit of advancement. The reinvention stage, often associated with later career transitions or retirement, may involve redefining professional identity through mentorship, consultancy, or social contribution.

Importantly, these stages are not experienced uniformly across individuals or social groups. Gendered experiences, particularly within patriarchal societies such as Trinidad and Tobago, moderate how individuals engage with each stage of career development. For female teachers, processes of socialisation, cultural expectation, and workplace discrimination influence how career

focus is developed, how intent is sustained, how family support is accessed, and how organisational environments are navigated. As examined in preceding sections, these sociocultural moderators produce differentiated career development outcomes for men and women, particularly in relation to educational leadership trajectories.

### **Focus**

Career focus refers to the clarity, consistency, and intentionality with which individuals pursue professional goals. Focus often begins to form in early career stages and becomes increasingly strategic during the exploration and maintenance phases, as individuals plan, prepare, and act toward upward mobility (Chen, 1998). Focused individuals actively seek leadership-relevant experience, pursue professional development, and position themselves for recognition and advancement. Tiedeman and Miller's developmental model, as discussed by Chen (1998), highlights the importance of deliberation and decision-making in shaping career trajectories. Career-oriented individuals engage in sustained evaluation of options and develop purposeful strategies for achieving long-term goals.

However, within the Trinidad and Tobago context, gendered sociocultural factors significantly moderate how female teachers develop and sustain career focus. Morris (1993) found that negative gender socialisation contributes to diminished self-efficacy among women, reducing their willingness to pursue educational leadership roles. Dåderman and Basinska (2016) further observed that the complex work-life balance demands faced by female educators undermine their capacity to concentrate consistently on professional development and advancement (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Dåderman & Basinska, 2016). The need to manage competing professional and domestic expectations disrupts sustained career planning and weakens long-term focus.

Reports by UN Women (2022) and PwC (n.d.) similarly indicate that although women are entering the labour force in increasing numbers, many hesitate to pursue advanced roles due to concerns that family responsibilities will compromise career progression. Female respondents in Trinidad and Tobago reported apprehension regarding promotion bias, limited transparency in advancement processes, and restricted access to leadership pathways. These perceived institutional barriers further erode professional focus by diminishing the perceived returns of sustained effort.

These findings align with Mohr's (2018) argument that organisational stereotypes reduce women's self-perceived competence and discourage the pursuit of roles requiring visibility, authority, and decision-making. Negative self-concept, reinforced by stereotypes that frame leadership as masculine, undermines women's confidence and readiness to pursue leadership-focused career pathways. In contrast, male teachers, who often benefit from more supportive socialisation and fewer conflicts between professional and domestic roles, are more likely to sustain long-term career focus and engage proactively with leadership opportunities (Heilman, 2012; Ryan & Haslam, 2005).

### **Intent**

Career intent reflects an individual's motivation and commitment to achieving career goals. It represents the degree to which individuals are willing to invest sustained effort in pursuing advancement over time, and is closely linked to career insight, identity, and resilience (Lent et al., 1994; Boyle, 2022; Mishra & McDonald, 2017). Insight refers to self-awareness regarding career interests and abilities, identity pertains to the integration of one's profession into one's sense of self, and resilience denotes persistence despite setbacks and institutional resistance.

Sociocultural contexts strongly moderate female teachers' intent to pursue leadership roles in Trinidad and Tobago. The International Labour Organization (2013) noted that employment

policies in many Caribbean and Latin American countries, including Trinidad and Tobago, lack gender responsive frameworks. In the absence of such frameworks, women experience systematic disadvantage in promotion access, pay equity, and professional development opportunities, weakening career resilience and diminishing motivation to pursue leadership trajectories.

Joseph et al. (2016) further found that female teachers in Trinidad and Tobago frequently encounter both overt and symbolic resistance within school environments. Experiences of disrespect from male students and opposition from male colleagues reflect broader societal beliefs that position women as less suited for authority and leadership. These interactions moderate career intent by creating organisational climates in which women feel compelled either to adopt masculinised behaviours to gain acceptance or to withdraw from leadership aspiration altogether (Heilman, 2012; Ryan & Haslam, 2005). Those who are unwilling or unable to conform to these expectations often disengage from the leadership pipeline, not due to lack of ambition, but due to sustained cultural and institutional discouragement.

The erosion of intent observed among many female educators, therefore, does not reflect limited aspiration or capability. Rather, it emerges from the cumulative effect of sociocultural barriers that signal leadership as a space where women are neither fully welcomed nor consistently valued. As a result, female teachers' career development is shaped not only by access to training or opportunity, but also by whether they perceive themselves and are perceived by others as legitimate contenders for leadership roles within the education system (Blumer, 1969; Eagly & Karau, 2002).

### **Family Support**

Family support represents a critical construct in career development, particularly for women in societies where caregiving responsibilities are strongly gendered. Research

demonstrates that families influence career decision making through emotional encouragement, reinforcement of social values, and access to practical resources (Xing & Rojewski, 2018; Lankard, n.d.). Supportive family environments can strengthen resilience, sustain motivation, and enable individuals to navigate external career barriers. However, when family structures reinforce traditional gender roles, they may function as sources of constraint rather than support.

Paloş and Drobot (2010) observed that gender dynamics within families, particularly the unequal distribution of domestic labour, significantly shape career decisions and advancement. In Trinidad and Tobago, women continue to be widely perceived as primary caregivers even when engaged in full-time employment. According to Sultana and Gupta (2020), Karya et al. (2021), and Žnidaršič and Bernik (2021), female professionals frequently experience tension between family responsibilities and professional advancement, often resulting in the de-prioritisation of leadership ambition in favour of familial obligation.

The International Labour Organization (2008) confirms that many women struggle to balance professional and domestic demands, particularly in contexts lacking supportive workplace policies. This imbalance reduces women's capacity to invest time, energy, and sustained focus in leadership preparation and professional development. Family responsibilities, therefore, moderate the relationship between gender and career advancement by shaping how personal resources are allocated. Rather than drawing consistent support from family structures, many female teachers must continually negotiate competing demands, leading to elevated stress levels and reduced capacity for long-term career growth.

Aboobaker and Edward's (2019) family work enrichment theory provides a useful framework for understanding these dynamics. When family life contributes positively to professional identity and motivation, it can enhance career development and leadership readiness.

However, when domestic obligations generate role strain or chronic stress, as is frequently the case for women balancing teaching and caregiving, negative spillover effects emerge within the workplace. Tasnim et al. (2017) and Mensah and Adjei (2020) found that such conflicts reduce job satisfaction, impair productivity, and ultimately constrain promotion potential and long-term career progression.

In summary, while family support has the potential to strengthen career focus and intent, sociocultural norms in Trinidad and Tobago often limit women's ability to benefit fully from such support. The persistent assumption that domestic labour is primarily women's responsibility creates a structural imbalance that disadvantages female educators in their pursuit of educational leadership. Without shifts in both family role expectations and institutional support structures, family-related factors will continue to moderate women's leadership trajectories in unequal ways.

## **Summary**

This literature review critically examined how gender influences teachers' access to educational leadership positions in Trinidad and Tobago, with particular emphasis on the sociocultural, familial, and institutional factors that moderate this relationship. Drawing on international and regional scholarship, including foundational works by Morris (1993), Joseph et al. (2016), and Washington and Gounko (2024), the review highlighted that despite women's numerical dominance in the teaching profession, their advancement into senior leadership roles remains limited. This disparity is not attributable to differences in merit, qualification, or professional competence, but to entrenched patriarchal norms, gendered expectations, and cultural stereotypes that continue to shape leadership trajectories.

Framed by a conceptual model that positions gender as the independent variable and access to educational leadership as the dependent variable, the literature examined the influence of four key moderating variables: individual, family-related, organisational, and cultural factors. These moderators interact dynamically with gender, shaping female teachers' career development processes and influencing whether leadership pathways are accessed, sustained, or abandoned. Importantly, these interactions often operate subtly through institutional practices and cultural norms that are deeply embedded within the social fabric of Trinidad and Tobago.

At the individual level, constructs such as self-efficacy, self-concept, focus, and career intent are shown to be strongly influenced by gendered socialisation. The literature demonstrates that many female educators internalise societal messages that associate leadership with masculinity, resulting in diminished confidence, reduced motivation, and hesitation in pursuing leadership roles. Theoretical frameworks, including Bandura's Social Cognitive Career Theory, Symbolic Interactionism, Feminist Theory, and Expectancy Theory, collectively explain how these internalised beliefs are produced, reinforced, and sustained through repeated social interaction and institutional feedback.

At the family level, gendered expectations surrounding caregiving and domestic responsibility continue to constrain women's time, flexibility, and mobility, all of which are critical for career advancement. The literature indicates that in the absence of adequate family support or institutional accommodation, many female educators experience work-life conflict that moderates their engagement in leadership development and pursuit of senior roles. Family structures, therefore, function not merely as private contexts but as active moderators shaping women's professional trajectories.

At the organisational level, leadership development pathways, recruitment criteria, and institutional cultures frequently reflect male-centred norms that prioritise uninterrupted career trajectories, availability, and hierarchical leadership styles. Women who approach leadership through relational, collaborative, or care-oriented practices are often undervalued or excluded from key mentorship, sponsorship, and advancement opportunities. These organisational dynamics reproduce structural barriers such as the glass ceiling, sticky floor, and glass wall, which systematically restrict women's access to senior leadership positions (Cotter et al., 2001; Booth et al., 2003).

Cultural factors operate as overarching moderators that shape perceptions of leadership suitability and legitimacy. In Trinidad and Tobago, leadership continues to be symbolically constructed as a masculine domain. Female leaders must therefore contend with cultural resistance, stereotype threat, and symbolic exclusion (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2012). These dynamics are further compounded by historical legacies of colonialism and patriarchal labour divisions, as theorised by Boserup (1970), and reinforced through broader sociological frameworks such as structural functionalism and conflict theory.

The literature also addressed the core research questions guiding this study. First, it identified the social values influencing female participation in leadership, including traditional gender roles, colonial legacies, and institutionalised patriarchy. Second, it examined the barriers contributing to female underrepresentation in educational leadership, such as discriminatory organisational structures, limited support systems, and persistent cultural bias. Third, it reviewed strategies proposed in the literature for addressing gender inequality, including mentorship, inclusive leadership models, flexible work policies, and gender responsive professional development programmes.

Despite the breadth of existing scholarship, significant gaps remain. Few recent studies focus explicitly on the contemporary experiences of female educators in Trinidad and Tobago, and male perspectives on gender equity in educational leadership remain underexplored. Moreover, there is limited empirical research examining how family support and cultural expectations actively moderate women's career development and leadership decision-making within the education sector.

This literature review integrates theoretical, empirical, and contextual perspectives to establish a comprehensive foundation for the present study. It demonstrates that gender inequality in educational leadership is a multifaceted phenomenon produced through the dynamic interaction of personal beliefs, family dynamics, organisational practices, and cultural norms. Achieving equity, therefore, requires more than policy reform alone. It necessitates sustained transformation of the social values, institutional structures, and cultural narratives that continue to reproduce gendered barriers.

The findings of this chapter justify the need for an empirical investigation into how these moderating factors currently operate within Trinidad and Tobago. Such an investigation has the potential to generate context-specific insights that inform inclusive leadership pathways, challenge patriarchal assumptions, and support educators, particularly women, in accessing, attaining, and sustaining leadership roles within the national education system.



### CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

This chapter provides a comprehensive account of the research methods employed in the design and execution of this study, which investigates the social values and structural factors that influence female participation in educational leadership within Trinidad and Tobago. Specifically, the research examines how social values and institutional structures function as moderating factors shaping women's access to, engagement with, and progression within educational leadership roles. While significant progress has been made globally and nationally toward gender parity in education and leadership positions, particularly at senior decision-making levels, it remains unevenly distributed (Begeny et al., 2020; Heilman et al., 2023). This persistent disparity underscores the need for a methodologically robust investigation into the sociocultural and systemic conditions that shape leadership participation.

The purpose of this study is to analyse the underlying factors contributing to the continued underrepresentation of women in educational leadership and to understand how institutional dynamics, social expectations, and personal experiences intersect to influence leadership aspirations and outcomes. Chapter 2 established the conceptual framework, theoretical foundations, and research questions guiding the study. Building on those foundations, this chapter details the methodological strategies through which empirical data were generated, analysed, and interpreted to address the research problem.

To ensure analytical rigor and credibility, the study adopts a survey-based explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative data through a semi-structured questionnaire administered to a purposive sample of teachers. The quantitative component enabled the identification of patterns related to leadership perceptions, gender equity, and institutional support, while the qualitative component provided contextual depth by capturing

educators' lived experiences and interpretations of these patterns. This integrated approach is particularly appropriate given the culturally embedded nature of gender norms within leadership contexts (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017).

The choice of methodology was guided by both the nature of the research questions and the sociocultural context in which the study is situated. Educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago operates within a historically stratified institutional framework influenced by colonial legacies, denominational governance structures, and evolving societal expectations (O'Connor & Irvine, 2020). These forces shape both formal leadership pathways and informal practices, often reinforcing gendered perceptions of authority and leadership suitability. Accordingly, a descriptive and exploratory research design was selected to allow for systematic examination of prevailing patterns while remaining sensitive to contextual and experiential complexity.

As noted by Sileyew (2019), the selection of an appropriate research design must be grounded in the research questions and conceptual framework. In this study, gender is positioned as the independent variable, female participation in educational leadership as the dependent variable, and social values and institutional structures as moderating influences. This positioning enables analysis of leadership participation not merely as an outcome but as a socially mediated process shaped by both agency and constraint. Rather than focusing exclusively on numerical representation, the study emphasises the quality of participation, including access to leadership pathways, recognition, decision-making authority, and career progression. This orientation aligns with feminist and sociological perspectives that conceptualise gender as socially constructed and context-dependent.

The chapter begins by elaborating on the research approach and design, outlining the rationale for the survey method and the integration of quantitative and qualitative elements within

an explanatory sequential framework. It explains how the design supports both pattern identification and interpretive explanation, while also addressing the strengths and limitations of survey research in this context. This section further details the instrument refinement and pilot testing processes undertaken to ensure cultural relevance, clarity, and methodological coherence.

The subsequent section on Population and Sample describes the demographic, institutional, and professional characteristics of the participants. Purposive sampling was employed to select teachers from two schools, a government primary school and a government-assisted secondary school, chosen for their distinct leadership structures and governance arrangements. This sampling strategy enabled comparative insight into how institutional context moderates leadership access. Both male and female teachers were included to allow for analysis of gendered perceptions within shared organisational environments.

Following this, the Materials and Instrumentation section outlines the development and structure of the semi-structured questionnaire. The instrument was grounded in established literature on self-efficacy (Bandura et al., 1999), gender norms (Morris, 1993), and organisational structures and processes that reproduce gender inequality (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015), and refined through a staged process of expert feedback and pilot testing with practising educators. The mixed-format design, incorporating Likert-scale items and open-ended questions, ensured both analytical breadth and interpretive depth.

The Operational Definitions of Variables section clarifies how the study's key constructs were defined, measured, and operationalised. Independent, dependent, and control variables are specified, with attention to levels of measurement and analytic treatment. Gender is conceptualised as a sociocultural variable, female leadership participation as a multidimensional construct

encompassing representation and experience, and school type as a control variable accounting for institutional variation.

The Study Procedures and Ethical Assurances section details the ethical safeguards implemented throughout the research process, including Ministry of Education approval, informed consent, confidentiality protections, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw. Given the sensitivity of issues relating to gender, leadership, and professional identity, ethical rigor was prioritised to ensure participant well-being and data integrity.

The Data Collection and Analysis section describes the procedures used to administer the questionnaire and analyse the resulting data. Quantitative data were analysed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS to generate descriptive statistics and conduct inferential testing, including independent samples t-tests. Qualitative responses were analysed thematically using an inductive approach. This dual analytic strategy facilitated triangulation and strengthened the explanatory power of the findings (Huyler & McGill, 2019).

Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary that consolidates the methodological decisions and reaffirms their alignment with the study's aims, research questions, and conceptual framework. It highlights both the strengths and limitations of the design and establishes a clear foundation for the presentation and interpretation of findings in Chapter 4.

In summary, Chapter 3 presents a methodologically rigorous and ethically grounded framework for investigating gender-based disparities in educational leadership. By integrating quantitative and qualitative data within an explanatory sequential design and applying a culturally responsive lens, the chapter lays a strong foundation for a nuanced and credible examination of how social values and institutional structures shape female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago.

## **Research Approach and Design**

This section outlines the research methodology used to explore how social values and systemic factors influence female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. The research aims to investigate how cultural expectations, institutional structures, and individual perceptions intersect to moderate women's access to and representation in school leadership roles. In alignment with the study's revised conceptual framework, gender is treated as the central analytical lens through which access to leadership is examined, with individual, family-related, organisational, and cultural factors functioning as moderating influences rather than direct causal determinants.

In alignment with the study's research objectives, an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed (Huyler & McGill, 2019), beginning with the collection and analysis of quantitative survey data, followed by the integration of qualitative responses to explain and contextualise the observed patterns. This design was selected to ensure that statistical trends regarding leadership access and perceptions of gender bias could be meaningfully interpreted through participants' lived experiences and social contexts. Data were collected using a semi-structured questionnaire that incorporated both closed and open-ended items. This approach supports a comprehensive analysis of educators' perceptions and experiences, allowing for the identification of measurable trends while also capturing nuanced, context-specific narratives.

While the study was originally designed to include follow-up interviews as a second qualitative phase, practical constraints limited the collection of qualitative data to open-ended survey responses. These responses nevertheless provided rich contextual insight into participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of leadership access. The integration of open-ended

items within the questionnaire allowed for explanatory depth while maintaining consistency with the study's explanatory sequential design. Although the absence of interviews constrained the depth of individual narrative exploration, the mixed structure of the instrument ensured that qualitative data remained embedded within the research design, supporting interpretation of quantitative findings rather than weakening the overall methodological coherence.

The study is grounded in the recognition that gender inequality in educational leadership is not merely a numerical imbalance but the outcome of historically embedded social values, cultural norms, and institutional practices. These include patriarchal expectations, gendered leadership stereotypes, and organisational structures that privilege uninterrupted and male-oriented career trajectories. As such, the research approach needed to be sufficiently flexible to examine both observable patterns of inequality and the subjective meanings educators attach to their experiences. An explanatory sequential design was therefore considered appropriate, as it enables quantitative findings to be elaborated and interpreted through qualitative insight.

A non-experimental, cross-sectional survey design was adopted. The study does not seek to manipulate variables or establish direct causal relationships between gender and leadership attainment. Instead, it aims to examine associations, perceptions, and moderated relationships that illuminate how social values and institutional contexts shape leadership access. This distinction is important in order to avoid overstating causal claims based on perceptual and self-reported data. The design is therefore descriptive and explanatory rather than predictive, aligning with the study's intention to understand how gendered experiences are constructed and interpreted within the education system of Trinidad and Tobago.

### **Alignment of Approach with Research Purpose and Objectives**

This study seeks to examine how deeply rooted societal values and institutional frameworks shape women's participation in educational leadership. It focuses on educators' perceptions of leadership, gender-based bias, self-confidence, organisational support, and access to professional development within the education system of Trinidad and Tobago. The research questions are explicitly aligned with the conceptual framework and are designed to explore how gender operates indirectly through multiple moderating influences rather than as a singular explanatory factor.

A survey methodology integrating quantitative and qualitative components was selected to support this purpose. The quantitative phase enables the identification of patterns and distributions related to leadership access, perceptions of fairness, and institutional support. The qualitative component, embedded within the same instrument through open-ended questions, provides contextual depth by capturing educators' reflections on professional barriers, family responsibilities, mentorship experiences, discrimination, and leadership aspirations. This sequential integration strengthens the explanatory power of the study by allowing participants' narratives to illuminate and contextualise statistical trends.

As a cross-sectional study, data were collected at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of prevailing perceptions and experiences within the education system. While this design limits claims about change over time, it is appropriate for examining how social values and organisational practices are currently experienced and interpreted by educators. The mixed structure of the questionnaire supports the multidimensional scope of the study. Closed-ended items generate data suitable for descriptive and comparative quantitative analysis, while open-

ended responses enhance interpretive validity by foregrounding participants' voices and contextual realities.

### **Justification for the Survey Method**

Within the explanatory sequential mixed-methods design adopted for this study, the survey method was chosen as the primary data collection instrument for several reasons. First, it provides an efficient and systematic way to gather data from a relatively broad population of educators, which is essential given the study's aim to identify shared and divergent experiences across different institutional contexts. This breadth is particularly important for examining how gendered patterns of leadership access operate across schools rather than within a single organisational setting. Second, survey research is especially well-suited to studies focused on perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes, which are central to understanding how gender norms and social values influence leadership trajectories.

While a case study design was initially considered, particularly for its capacity to explore complex dynamics within a bounded institutional setting, it was ultimately not selected. A case study would have required an in-depth focus on one or two institutions, potentially yielding rich contextual insight but limiting the ability to identify cross-institutional patterns and shared sociocultural influences. The purpose of this study is to examine leadership access as a socially embedded phenomenon shaped by cultural and structural factors operating across the education system of Trinidad and Tobago. For this reason, a survey-based approach, embedded within an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, was better aligned with the study's conceptual framework and explanatory objectives.

Additionally, the use of a survey instrument within a mixed methods design allows for a structured examination of both prevalent trends, such as perceptions of gender bias in leadership

selection, and individual variation, including the influence of caregiving responsibilities, organisational culture, and professional support on leadership aspirations. This structure supports the examination of moderated relationships rather than direct causal effects, consistent with the study's non-experimental and explanatory orientation. The survey accommodates the collection of quantitative data to identify patterns while also capturing qualitative insight that helps explain how these patterns are experienced and interpreted by educators.

Although the study was originally designed to include follow-up interviews as a second qualitative phase, qualitative depth was instead achieved through the inclusion of open-ended survey items. These items enabled participants to elaborate on their experiences of leadership access, discrimination, mentorship, and institutional support in their own words. The integration of open-ended responses within the survey instrument maintained consistency with the explanatory sequential design by allowing qualitative data to contextualise and interpret quantitative findings, even in the absence of standalone interviews.

This mixed structure follows established guidance in social science and educational research, which supports the integration of quantitative and qualitative data to enhance explanatory depth and interpretive validity (Huyler & McGill, 2019). The approach also enables triangulation between numerical indicators and narrative responses, strengthening the credibility of the findings without overstating causal claims.

### **Design of the Instrument**

The semi-structured questionnaire used in this study was developed based on established theoretical frameworks and empirical literature. Key constructs explored in the survey include self-efficacy (Bandura et al., 1999), organisational culture (Morris, 1993; Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015), and gendered leadership expectations (Torrance et al., 2016). These constructs directly reflect the

moderating variables identified in the conceptual framework, ensuring coherence between theory, instrument design, and analysis. The instrument comprises 20 items organised into sections that assess leadership intent, institutional support, family obligations, perceived equity in promotion, mentorship access, and gender norms.

To reflect the educational and cultural context of Trinidad and Tobago, the survey was adapted to include local terminology, such as references to job titles, including School Supervisor I and Teacher III. The instrument also incorporated language aligned with the Ministry of Education's classification system and promotion procedures. This contextual adaptation enhanced cultural relevance, reduced ambiguity, and increased the likelihood of accurate and meaningful responses.

The survey includes a combination of Likert scale items ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, binary yes or no questions, and open-ended prompts. This combination supports both descriptive statistical analysis and qualitative interpretation, allowing the study to capture not only what patterns exist but also how participants make sense of them. Each item was explicitly linked to the research questions and conceptual framework, ensuring analytical alignment and methodological coherence.

### **Instrument Refinement and Pilot Study**

The development of the survey instrument followed a clearly defined two-stage process comprising an initial instrument refinement phase followed by a formal pilot study. This sequencing was intentional and aligned with best practice in survey-based research, ensuring that issues of clarity, cultural relevance, and conceptual alignment were addressed prior to evaluating instrument performance and data generation.

#### **Instrument Refinement Stage**

Prior to formal piloting, the draft questionnaire was reviewed by a small group of educators using online platforms. This initial refinement stage focused specifically on improving clarity, wording, and cultural relevance rather than testing the analytic usefulness of the data generated. Participants were invited to comment on the structure, terminology, sequencing of questions, and overall appropriateness of the items in relation to local educational practices and leadership pathways in Trinidad and Tobago.

Feedback from this refinement stage resulted in several targeted adjustments aimed at improving respondent comprehension and usability. These included the rephrasing of ambiguous or overly abstract items, clarification of technical terminology related to leadership roles and promotion pathways, and minor restructuring of question sequencing and response layout. Particular attention was given to ensuring that leadership titles and institutional references reflected those used within the national education system. This refinement process ensured that the instrument was accessible, contextually appropriate, and clearly aligned with the constructs identified in the conceptual framework before being subjected to formal pilot testing.

#### Pilot Study Stage

Following the refinement phase, a two-week pilot study was conducted with a small sample of educators to assess whether the revised instrument generated responses that were meaningful, relevant, and aligned with the study's research objectives. Unlike the refinement stage, the pilot study functioned as a validation exercise focused on instrument performance rather than question clarity alone. The pilot assessed whether items elicited sufficient variation in responses, whether Likert scale items captured discernible patterns, and whether open-ended prompts encouraged reflective qualitative commentary relevant to leadership access and gendered experience.

The revised questionnaire was distributed electronically via Facebook, a strategy that enabled efficient outreach and timely engagement with practicing teachers in Trinidad and Tobago. Participants in the pilot were asked not only to complete the questionnaire but also to comment on response options, completion time, and overall coherence. The pilot phase provided insight into expected completion duration and confirmed the logistical feasibility of electronic distribution within the target population.

Based on pilot feedback, no substantive changes to the content of the instrument were required, indicating that the prior refinement stage had been effective. Minor presentational adjustments were made to further enhance accessibility and flow, but the conceptual structure and item content remained intact. The finalized questionnaire was then approved for full deployment, with participants provided with clear instructions, ethical disclosures, and adequate time for completion.

#### Scope Adjustment and Focus

An initial plan to include a supplementary questionnaire for school supervisors, intended to capture leadership perspectives on gender and promotion, was not pursued due to limited participation from this stakeholder group. Despite targeted outreach, no completed responses were received from supervisors, leading to a methodological decision to narrow the scope of the study. While this adjustment limited the inclusion of hierarchical viewpoints, it strengthened the analytical focus on classroom teachers, who are directly affected by leadership practices, promotion processes, and institutional culture.

Focusing on classroom teachers provided a critical vantage point for examining how gender influences leadership aspirations and perceptions at the operational level of the education system. Teachers operate at the intersection of policy implementation and organisational culture,

making their perspectives particularly valuable for understanding how social values and institutional practices moderate access to leadership roles.

#### Replicability and Rigor

One of the strengths of the survey method employed in this study is its replicability. Because the instrument underwent systematic refinement followed by formal pilot testing, the research design demonstrates methodological transparency and internal coherence. The questionnaire can be used in future studies involving similar populations or adapted for comparative research within other Caribbean education systems. Each item was explicitly linked to the research objectives and conceptual framework, supporting consistency across design, data collection, and analysis.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative analysis procedures further supports the reliability and validity of the findings. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS to generate descriptive statistics and conduct inferential tests, including independent samples t-tests. Qualitative responses were analysed using an inductive thematic approach, allowing patterns and meanings to emerge directly from participants' narratives rather than being imposed a priori.

To minimise potential bias, participant responses were anonymised, and consistent administration procedures were applied across schools. Although the final sample size was smaller than originally anticipated, the complete response rate among consenting participants and representation across gender strengthened the credibility of the dataset. Furthermore, the focused sampling frame of educators employed in government and government-assisted schools ensured that the findings were contextually grounded and directly relevant to national education policy and leadership development structures in Trinidad and Tobago.

## **Summary**

In summary, the research design reflects a deliberate and well-supported choice to employ an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach, with a semi-structured survey serving as the primary data collection instrument. This approach is aligned with the study's conceptual framework, which situates gender inequality in educational leadership within broader sociocultural and institutional structures and conceptualises gender as operating through multiple moderating influences. The design enables the identification of measurable patterns in leadership access while also supporting qualitative interpretation through participants' reflective responses.

The research design was selected after careful consideration of alternative approaches and was deemed appropriate due to its scalability, flexibility, and capacity to capture both breadth and contextual depth across diverse educational settings. The use of embedded qualitative items within the survey instrument allowed explanatory insight to be generated alongside quantitative findings, maintaining methodological coherence despite the absence of standalone interviews. The two-stage instrument development process, comprising initial refinement followed by pilot testing, alongside attention to cultural specificity and ethical safeguards, contributed to the overall rigor and credibility of the study.

As a non-experimental and cross-sectional design, the study does not seek to establish causal relationships but rather to examine associations and moderated relationships that illuminate how social values and institutional contexts shape women's access to leadership. Within these parameters, the research design provides a robust foundation for addressing the guiding research questions and generating findings that are empirically grounded, contextually meaningful, and relevant to educational policy and leadership development in Trinidad and Tobago.

## **Population and Sample of the Research Study**

Banerjee and Chaudhury (2010) define a population as the entire group of individuals or events that possess specific characteristics relevant to a study. For this research, the population consisted of teachers employed at two selected schools in Trinidad and Tobago. At the time of the study, Trinidad and Tobago's public education system comprised approximately 476 government and government-assisted primary schools and 134 secondary schools, illustrating the scale of the national system relative to the focused institutional sample selected for this research. Within this national context, the selection of two schools was intended to support in-depth, contextually grounded analysis rather than statistical generalisation across the education system.

Within the explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, this population was defined to support an in-depth, contextually grounded examination of how gendered access to educational leadership is moderated by institutional and sociocultural factors. The population was purposefully chosen to reflect key characteristics of government and government-assisted schools, which form the core of the country's public education system. This decision aligns with the study's aim of ensuring analytical relevance rather than statistical representativeness. As Trafimow and Myüz (2018) assert, population definition plays a critical role in determining the validity and reliability of the data gathered.

The target population included teachers working at a government primary school and a government-assisted secondary school. These institutions were not selected at random but were chosen strategically because of their contrasting organisational structures and leadership histories. This contrast provided an appropriate context for examining how organisational culture and institutional legacy moderate the relationship between gender and leadership participation, consistent with the conceptual framework of the study. By narrowing the population to two

structurally distinct institutions, the research enabled focused exploration while preserving analytical depth.

In total, 66 teachers accessed the survey, of whom 3 did not provide consent to participate. While 63 teachers consented, only 33 completed the survey in full. The final sample consisted of 10 teachers from the primary school and 23 from the secondary school, representing all valid and complete submissions from both institutions. Of the 33 respondents, 20 identified as female and 13 as male. Participants also represented a range of teaching experience levels across both institutions, allowing perspectives from both early-career and more experienced educators to be reflected in the data. Although the final sample was smaller than initially projected, the completed responses provided sufficient variation and depth to support the explanatory aims of the study. Faber and Fonseca (2014) note that while larger samples may strengthen external validity, smaller purposively selected samples can yield reliable findings when they are closely aligned with the research objectives.

Memon et al. (2020) emphasize that there is no universal rule for determining an ideal sample size, particularly in exploratory and mixed methods research. Instead, adequacy must be evaluated in relation to the study's scope, design, and analytical intent. In this study, the focus was not on generalisation but on understanding how social values, gender norms, and institutional dynamics operate within specific educational contexts. Within these parameters, the final sample of 33 completed surveys provided sufficient depth and diversity of perspectives to meet the study's objectives.

Practical considerations also informed sampling decisions. A purposive sampling strategy was adopted to identify institutions with contrasting leadership and gendered histories. One school was a government-run all-boys primary school with a longstanding history of male leadership,

while the other was a government-assisted secondary school organised into three sub-schools under separate principals. These contrasting institutional arrangements allowed for comparative insight into how leadership access is shaped and experienced under different organisational conditions, reinforcing the analytical value of the sample.

All 10 consenting teachers from the government primary school and all 23 consenting teachers from the secondary school completed the questionnaire, resulting in a 100 percent completion rate among participants who agreed to take part in the study. This high level of participation reflects both the relevance of the research topic and the effectiveness of the recruitment process. The focused nature of the sample supported detailed examination of leadership perceptions and gender norms while maintaining consistency with the study's explanatory design.

Das et al. (2016) argue that excessively large samples are not always necessary and may lead to inefficient use of resources, particularly in studies aimed at contextual understanding rather than population-level inference. In this study, the two selected institutions provided sufficient diversity of experience to explore leadership perceptions across different organisational settings. Their distinct cultures and leadership structures enabled a comparative perspective consistent with the study's analytical goals. Analysis of the open-ended survey responses revealed recurring themes related to leadership perceptions, gender norms, and institutional culture. The repetition of these patterns across participants indicated that sufficient analytical depth had been achieved, suggesting that additional responses would likely have produced limited new insights.

Purposive sampling was selected because of its suitability for research examining complex social processes. West (2016) notes that purposive sampling allows researchers to intentionally select participants or settings that are most likely to yield rich and relevant data. Given the study's

focus on gendered leadership access, intentional selection of institutions with contrasting leadership legacies maximised analytical relevance.

Gender representation was a careful consideration in the sampling process. The inclusion of both male and female teachers enabled a comparative analysis of how gender moderates leadership perceptions and access to professional opportunities within the same institutional contexts. Rich-Edwards et al. (2018) suggest that gender balanced samples enhance analytical rigor by ensuring that multiple perspectives are represented.

In addition to gender, participants represented a range of subject areas and levels of professional experience. While demographic variables such as age and years of service were not used as selection criteria, all participants were adults with relevant teaching experience in government or government-assisted schools. This ensured that respondents were positioned to provide informed reflections on leadership, institutional culture, and gendered opportunity structures.

Participant recruitment was conducted through formal channels approved by the Ministry of Education. Following approval, school principals supported the dissemination of study information and facilitated voluntary participation. This process ensured transparency and adherence to ethical requirements. Teachers were given eight weeks to complete the survey, allowing adequate time for reflection and reducing the likelihood of incomplete responses.

Recruitment relied on direct institutional outreach rather than open calls through social media or mass email distribution. This targeted approach preserved the contextual focus of the study and ensured that all participants shared relevant institutional affiliations. Gelinas et al. (2017) note that controlled recruitment strategies can enhance response quality in studies examining specific professional populations.

Although the sample was narrower than originally planned, its focused composition did not compromise analytical strength (Turner, 2020). Turner (2020) argues that in research exploring nuanced social phenomena, relevance and depth of data often outweigh numerical size. The inclusion of both primary and secondary institutions and balanced gender representation strengthened the study's explanatory capacity.

The limitations of purposive sampling are acknowledged. Because participants were drawn from only two institutions, the findings are not intended to be statistically generalizable across all schools in Trinidad and Tobago. However, the study's objective was analytic rather than statistical generalisation, seeking to illuminate how gendered leadership access is shaped within specific organisational and cultural contexts. Bornstein et al. (2013) note that purposive sampling is well-suited to such research aims.

Potential selection bias was mitigated through clearly defined inclusion criteria and full participation from the targeted institutions. Bergelson et al. (2022) note that anonymization and careful analytic practice can reduce bias and enhance objectivity. In this study, participant identities were anonymized, and the analysis focused exclusively on response content rather than personal characteristics.

In summary, this study employed purposive sampling to select two educational institutions in Trinidad and Tobago that reflected contrasting organisational structures and leadership histories. While the initial target sample size was not achieved, the final group of 33 educators provided rich, contextually grounded data aligned with the study's explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. Their perspectives offered substantive insight into the societal, institutional, and cultural influences shaping women's participation in educational leadership. The sample's composition, gender

representation, and complete response rate support the credibility and relevance of the findings within the defined research context.

### **Materials/Instrumentation of the Research Tools**

This study investigates the social values and structural factors that influence female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. It explores how institutional practices, cultural expectations, and personal experiences may affect access to leadership positions for female educators. While women constitute a significant portion of the national teaching workforce, they remain underrepresented in senior leadership roles. In alignment with the study's conceptual framework and explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the research instrument was designed to examine how gender operates through individual, family-related, organisational, and cultural moderators rather than as a direct causal factor. The instrument examined constructs such as self-efficacy, motivation, institutional support, and perceived gender related barriers to leadership (Francis, n.d.; Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2018; UNESCO, 2019).

A semi-structured questionnaire was used as the primary data collection tool. The instrument consisted of 20 items, including a combination of closed-ended questions, such as yes or no, and Likert-type items, and open-ended prompts. Within the explanatory sequential design, the closed-ended items supported the identification of response patterns, while the open-ended items provided explanatory insight into those patterns. Closed-ended items allowed for consistency in response analysis, while open-ended questions encouraged participants to elaborate on their experiences and perceptions in their own words. This mixed format facilitated a broad, yet nuanced exploration of issues related to gender and leadership in educational settings, consistent with

recommendations for survey research in the social sciences (Huyler & McGill, 2019; De Vaus, 2014).

The content of the questionnaire was informed by key theoretical and empirical literature. Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy provided the foundation for several items examining beliefs about leadership capability, personal goal setting, and perceived competence. Education-specific applications of self-efficacy theory, such as those proposed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001), informed the formulation of questions on teacher confidence, leadership readiness, and intent.

Concepts relating to institutional and societal expectations were also embedded within the instrument. Morris's (1993) work on gender and leadership in Trinidad and Tobago informed the inclusion of items examining gender norms, organisational culture, and perceived discrimination. To ensure contemporary relevance, more recent Caribbean-focused scholarship, including Smith et al. (n.d.), was used to shape questions addressing professional development pathways, institutional support, and leadership visibility for women.

One ranking item asked respondents to evaluate social values that may influence perceptions of leadership, including the stereotype of "perceived emotional instability." This item was included to capture commonly documented gender stereotypes that portray women leaders as overly emotional or less rational than men. Research on role congruity and gender bias has shown that such stereotypes continue to shape leadership evaluations and promotion decisions (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman et al., 2023). The inclusion of this item was therefore intended to assess whether such perceptions persist within educational contexts rather than to endorse the stereotype itself.

Open-ended items were included to allow respondents to reflect on and describe experiences related to leadership aspirations, family roles, cultural expectations, and perceived support systems. These questions were designed to elicit contextual explanations that could illuminate quantitative trends, drawing on scholarship by Seguino (2003) and UNESCO (2019), which emphasise the enduring influence of gendered social norms within Caribbean and global contexts. The qualitative responses generated through these items provided depth and context to complement the structured quantitative data.

Although open-ended responses generated diverse narrative accounts, they were analysed systematically through thematic analysis. Responses were reviewed iteratively to identify recurring themes related to leadership perceptions, gender norms, and institutional culture. This approach enabled qualitative insights to complement the quantitative survey findings while maintaining analytical structure and comparability across participants.

To ensure clarity and contextual appropriateness, the questionnaire underwent a two-stage development process consisting of initial refinement followed by pilot testing. The refinement stage focused on clarity, wording, and cultural relevance, while the pilot study assessed whether the instrument generated meaningful and analytically useful responses. This process strengthened the instrument's face and content validity. As Bolarinwa (2015) notes, piloting is a critical component of survey development as it helps identify ambiguity and improve respondent understanding. In addition, the alignment of questionnaire items with established theoretical constructs, including self-efficacy and gendered leadership perceptions, further supported the instrument's conceptual validity (De Vaus, 2014). Some items asked respondents to reflect directly on gender in relation to leadership confidence and responsibility. This wording was intentional because the study examines perceived gender influence on leadership participation, and open-

ended follow-up items were included to allow respondents to qualify or contextualize their responses.

The semi-structured format allowed the questionnaire to capture both measurable response patterns and contextual explanations of participants' experiences of gender and leadership. This design supported the integration of quantitative and qualitative insights within a single instrument, consistent with recommendations for mixed-methods survey research (Malina et al., 2011; Goertzen, 2017).

The questionnaire was organised thematically to ensure coherence between its structure and the study's conceptual framework. Questions addressed leadership goals, perceptions of institutional culture, experiences of gender bias, access to mentorship, and confidence in leadership ability. The inclusion of both male and female respondents supported comparative analysis of gendered perceptions within the same institutional contexts, strengthening analytical depth.

All participants received clear instructions outlining the purpose of the study, their rights as participants, and the voluntary nature of participation. The questionnaire included an informed consent prompt and assurances of confidentiality. Ethical considerations relating to anonymity, data protection, and informed participation were upheld throughout instrument design and administration, consistent with best practice in social research (Cohen et al., 2017).

In summary, the research instrument was purposefully designed to capture both measurable trends and reflective insight into how gender, social values, and institutional culture intersect in educational leadership contexts. Grounded in established theoretical frameworks, refined through piloting, and adapted to the Trinidad and Tobago context, the instrument supported the study's explanatory aims while maintaining methodological rigor and coherence.

### **Questionnaire for Teachers**

The teacher questionnaire was carefully designed to examine how educators perceive their leadership potential and how sociocultural factors shape their aspirations for educational leadership roles. Grounded in Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy, the instrument explored how beliefs about personal capability interact with external influences to shape leadership intentions and career development. Within the explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, self-efficacy was treated as an individual-level construct that is moderated by family-related, organisational, and cultural factors rather than as an isolated predictor of leadership attainment. This theoretical framework emphasizes that self-efficacy is not formed in isolation but is shaped through ongoing interaction with cultural norms, gendered expectations, and institutional structures. In this context, the survey aimed to uncover how gender specific challenges such as societal messaging, historical stereotypes, and organisational barriers influence both the confidence and ambitions of teachers (Kung, 2009).

While the study primarily sought to understand the perspectives of female teachers, data were also collected from male educators to allow for comparative analysis of gendered perceptions within the same institutional contexts. Sociocultural values influence not only women's leadership aspirations but also how men perceive leadership and those who pursue it. Research grounded in role congruity theory demonstrates that traits traditionally associated with masculinity, such as assertiveness, competitiveness, and dominance, are more strongly aligned with leadership expectations than communal or relational qualities typically associated with femininity (Eagly & Karau, 2002). These biases shape male teachers' perceptions of leadership and influence their attitudes toward female colleagues seeking advancement. As Morris (1999) observed in Trinidad and Tobago, male interviewers and principals have historically favoured male applicants in

leadership selection processes, reinforcing the importance of examining how gendered perceptions are reproduced across all educator groups.

The questionnaire was constructed to assess teachers' perceptions of their leadership capability and to explore how gender roles, family responsibilities, and societal expectations influence professional ambition. Rather than assuming a direct relationship between gender and leadership outcomes, the instrument was designed to examine how gender operates through moderating variables identified in the conceptual framework. It measured the extent to which cultural norms, organisational practices, and family-related expectations influence self-efficacy and willingness to pursue school leadership roles. The instrument was adapted from an existing survey initially developed in England that examined gender and leadership in educational settings. To ensure contextual relevance, the questionnaire was revised to reflect the structure and terminology of the Trinidad and Tobago education system. Modifications included the use of role-specific terms such as School Supervisor I and Teacher III, ensuring familiarity and clarity for participants. Because several items addressed socially perceived leadership traits and gender-linked expectations, responses were interpreted as perception-based indicators of social narratives rather than objective personal characteristics.

The final instrument included 20 semi-structured items designed to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire featured a combination of closed-ended items, including yes or no and Likert scale responses, and open-ended prompts that encouraged narrative reflection. Within the explanatory sequential design, the closed-ended items supported the identification of response patterns, while the open-ended items provided explanatory depth by allowing participants to contextualise their responses. This structure enabled the identification of measurable trends while also capturing insight into participants' lived experiences. The content

focused on themes such as leadership aspiration, motivation, perceived discrimination, workplace dynamics, and the influence of cultural values on leadership decision-making. In line with the study's conceptual framework, particular attention was given to how social expectations, gender norms, and family responsibilities shape self-perception and leadership intent.

To strengthen transparency and methodological coherence, a mapping matrix was developed to align each research question with the corresponding conceptual variables and questionnaire items. This alignment demonstrates how the instrument was systematically constructed to capture data across individual, family-related, organisational, and cultural dimensions. The matrix also clarifies how empirical evidence collected through the questionnaire directly addresses the study's research questions and supports the explanatory aims of the research design.

**Table 1***Mapping Matrix: Alignment of Research Questions, Conceptual Variables, and Survey Items*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Conceptual Variables</b>	<b>Survey Items</b>
RQ1: What social values influence female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago?	Cultural norms, stereotypes, religion; Family-related expectations	Perceptions of social values shaping leadership; public views of male vs. female leaders; ranking family/marriage obligations; barriers faced by gender; influence of cultural and religious views. Willingness to pursue leadership; ambition for highest post; confidence in leadership ability; experiences of gender bias in promotion; equal opportunity perceptions; work–life balance challenges; family support; mentorship access; organizational barriers; stereotypes; equity in advancement and policy support.
RQ2: What factors lead to inequality and underrepresentation of women in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago?	Individual (confidence, ambition); Family-related (caregiving); Organizational (promotion, mentorship, policies)	
RQ3: What strategies could promote greater gender equality and enhance female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago?	Organizational strategies (policy, mentorship, flexibility); Cultural values (equity, inclusivity)	Suggested strategies to increase representation; mentorship as a pathway; organizational policy changes (flexible work, transparent promotions).

**Alignment with Local Context**

To ensure cultural relevance and institutional alignment, the survey was adapted to reflect the realities of Trinidad and Tobago’s educational system. Within the explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, contextual alignment was treated as essential to the accurate interpretation of both quantitative patterns and qualitative responses. Questions addressed locally relevant themes, including access to promotion, the visibility of female role models in leadership, and perceived fairness in appointment procedures. Respondents were asked, for instance, whether they believed that men and women had equal opportunities for promotion within their schools and whether they had witnessed or experienced gender-based exclusion from leadership opportunities.

In accordance with Ministry of Education guidelines, binary gender identity options, male and female, were used in the demographic section, as these were the only approved categories for public sector research. This decision ensured regulatory compliance while also shaping the scope of gender analysis within the institutional context. While this limited the exploration of broader understandings of gender identity, the study remained compliant with regulatory requirements and consistent with the study's stated focus. Additionally, the survey incorporated terminology familiar to local educators, including references to teacher classification systems and leadership hierarchies, to enhance clarity and participant engagement.

Formal approval for the survey was obtained from the Ministry of Education in mid-January following review of the research purpose and tools. To maximise participation and reduce external pressures that could affect response quality, survey distribution was scheduled after the national Carnival period. This timing allowed educators adequate opportunity to complete the questionnaire thoughtfully and without undue distraction.

In summary, the teacher questionnaire was a carefully designed and culturally grounded tool that supported the study's aim of exploring how social values, institutional dynamics, and gender norms moderate female participation in educational leadership. By including both male and female voices, using language aligned with local practice, and integrating structured and open-ended items, the instrument enabled a nuanced examination of leadership perceptions and gendered experiences within Trinidad and Tobago's schools.

### **Operational Definition of Variables**

To effectively implement this research, a structured approach to defining and operationalising key variables was adopted. This systematic process strengthens the study's

analytical precision by ensuring that abstract concepts are translated into measurable and interpretable components. By applying a clear operational framework to the participation of respondents, the study reduces interpretive bias and enhances the reliability and transparency of its findings (Slife et al., 2016). The process of operationalisation began with the identification and clarification of core variables derived directly from the research questions and conceptual framework.

As Haucke et al. (2021) explain, operationalisation involves translating theoretical constructs into observable and measurable indicators that can be systematically examined. This step was particularly important given the study's focus on socially embedded phenomena such as gender norms, leadership aspirations, self-efficacy, and institutional support. These constructs do not exist as discrete or directly observable entities but must be inferred through carefully designed survey items. The operationalisation process, therefore, ensured that complex social concepts were meaningfully represented within the research instrument.

The variables used in this study were derived explicitly from the research questions, which served as the foundation for the overall design. This ensured conceptual coherence and methodological integrity across the stages of data collection and analysis (Huyler & McGill, 2019). A review of the literature informed the identification of relevant variables, particularly those related to the moderating effects of individual, familial, organisational, and cultural factors on female participation in educational leadership. These insights guided the development of survey items capable of capturing both individual perceptions and broader structural influences. Through this process, the study remained empirically grounded while maintaining alignment with its theoretical and contextual aims.

### **Independent Variable**

In this study, the independent variable is gender, conceptualised through the lens of socially constructed roles, expectations, and meanings that shape participation in educational leadership. Gender is not treated as a purely biological category but as a social construct produced and reproduced through cultural norms, institutional practices, and historical conditions. These gendered constructs influence how leadership is perceived, who is considered suitable for leadership roles, and how professional opportunities are distributed within educational institutions.

The conceptualisation of gender (Acker, 1990) draws on feminist theory and symbolic interactionism, both of which emphasise that gender is continuously shaped through social interaction, interpretation, and performance. From this perspective, gender operates as a foundational social position that influences how educators interpret their own capabilities and how they are perceived by others within organisational settings. This framing allows gender to be examined not only as a demographic characteristic but as a socio-cultural determinant that interacts with other variables to shape leadership trajectories.

Within the scope of this study, gender is operationalised using a binary classification of male and female, in accordance with Ministry of Education approval guidelines for educational research in Trinidad and Tobago. While this operationalisation limits the exploration of non-binary gender identities, it reflects the regulatory and institutional context within which the study was conducted. Importantly, the binary classification does not imply a simplistic understanding of gender. Rather, it serves as an entry point for analysing how traditionally defined gender roles and expectations influence access to leadership and career progression.

As the independent variable, gender functions as the primary lens through which the moderating effects of individual factors such as self-efficacy and intent, family-related factors such

as caregiving responsibilities and support structures, organisational factors such as promotion practices and workplace culture, and cultural factors such as societal stereotypes are examined. This framing enables the study to explore how gender interacts with these moderators to influence leadership participation, providing a nuanced understanding of the barriers and enablers shaping teachers' experiences within Trinidad and Tobago's education system.

### **Dependent Variable**

The dependent variable in this study is female participation in educational leadership. This variable refers to the extent to which women are represented in, aspire to, and actively engage with leadership roles within educational institutions. Leadership roles include formal positions such as principals, vice principals, and senior administrative staff, as well as engagement with leadership pathways and advancement opportunities within the education system of Trinidad and Tobago.

Female participation is conceptualised as a multidimensional construct rather than a purely numerical outcome. While representation in formal leadership positions remains a critical indicator, participation also encompasses access to leadership opportunities, visibility within leadership structures, perceived legitimacy as leaders, and the ability to exercise leadership effectively within existing institutional frameworks. This broader framing acknowledges that women may be present within institutions but remain marginalised from decision-making, advancement pathways, or influential leadership roles.

As a dependent variable, female participation reflects the cumulative outcome of interacting social, institutional, and individual factors. These include organisational support structures, cultural expectations, gender norms, promotion practices, and personal motivation. Measuring female participation, therefore, involves examining not only whether women hold leadership positions but also how they perceive their leadership potential, the availability of

advancement opportunities, and the extent to which gendered constraints influence their engagement with leadership trajectories.

The focus on participation also allows the study to capture variation in aspiration, ambition, and actual engagement with leadership opportunities. Participation is not assumed to be static or uniform; rather, it fluctuates based on institutional context, policy environment, and the presence or absence of enabling conditions. This conceptualisation ensures that the dependent variable captures both quantitative dimensions, such as leadership representation, and qualitative dimensions, such as perceived inclusion, confidence, and leadership identity.

By centring female participation in educational leadership as the dependent variable, the study is positioned to examine how gender operates within a system shaped by social values and institutional norms. This framing allows for a nuanced analysis of how moderating factors influence women's advancement and representation in leadership roles within Trinidad and Tobago's education system.

### **Control Variable**

The control variable in this study is the type of school in which participants are employed. This refers specifically to the distinction between government schools and government-assisted schools in Trinidad and Tobago. While both school types operate under the national education framework and fall under the oversight of the Ministry of Education, they differ in governance arrangements, leadership structures, and historical foundations, particularly in the case of government-assisted schools with denominational affiliations.

Controlling for school type is methodologically important because institutional context may shape leadership pathways, access to promotion, and perceptions of gender roles within leadership hierarchies. Differences in governance models, organisational culture, and decision-

making authority can influence how leadership opportunities are distributed and how gendered expectations are reinforced or challenged. For example, leadership appointment processes in government-assisted schools may reflect denominational values or traditions that differ from those in government-run institutions.

By accounting for school type, the study seeks to reduce the influence of institutional variation on the analysis of gender and leadership participation. This allows for a clearer examination of how gender and the identified moderating variables operate across educational settings, independent of structural differences in governance. The inclusion of this control variable strengthens the internal validity of the study by minimising potential confounding effects when comparing leadership aspirations, perceived barriers, and institutional support.

Maintaining school type as a control variable ensures that observed differences in leadership participation are more accurately attributed to gendered experiences and sociocultural influences rather than to institutional configuration alone. This approach supports the study's broader aim of isolating the interaction between gender, social values, and moderating factors in shaping access to educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago.

### **Study Procedures and Ethical Assurance**

Ethical considerations are essential to maintaining the integrity, validity, and credibility of any research study (Cohen et al., 2017). In research involving human participants, ethical standards ensure that individuals are treated with respect, autonomy, and care throughout the research process. As noted by Sng et al. (2016), ethics not only protect participants but also uphold the overall reliability and trustworthiness of the research. Ethical assurance is therefore not separate from study procedures but embedded within each stage of the research design and implementation.

Even in studies without direct human interaction, ethical practice remains foundational, as it reflects the researcher's commitment to academic honesty and scientific rigour.

In this study, key ethical principles were upheld, including informed consent, confidentiality, voluntary participation, the right to withdraw without penalty, and the avoidance of deception. These principles informed the sequencing of study procedures, from institutional approval and participant recruitment to data collection, analysis, and reporting. Ethical safeguards were applied consistently to ensure that participants' rights, privacy, and well-being were prioritised throughout the research process.

Prior to data collection, formal approval to conduct the study was obtained from the Ministry of Education in Trinidad and Tobago, following review of the research purpose, methodology, and data collection instrument. This approval ensured that the study complied with national research regulations and ethical expectations governing research within public and government-assisted schools. Only after this approval was granted did recruitment and data collection commence.

### **Informed Consent**

Informed consent formed a central component of the ethical framework underpinning this research. Participants received clear, written documentation explaining the study's objectives, their role in the research, and the procedures involved. This information included the voluntary nature of participation, the estimated time required to complete the questionnaire, the intended use of the data, and assurances regarding anonymity and confidentiality. Participants were explicitly informed that their decision to participate or decline would have no impact on their professional standing or employment conditions.

Consent was obtained electronically at the beginning of the questionnaire. Participants were required to review the consent information and actively indicate their agreement before gaining access to the survey items. This process ensured that participation was both informed and intentional, reinforcing autonomy and participant agency. No identifying information was collected, and responses were recorded anonymously to further protect participant privacy.

The language used in the consent statement was intentionally clear, concise, and accessible, avoiding technical terminology to ensure comprehension across a diverse group of educators. This was particularly important given the study's inclusion of both primary and secondary school teachers with varied professional backgrounds. Participants were reminded of their right to withdraw at any stage by exiting the questionnaire prior to submission, without explanation or consequence.

The informed consent process reflected the ethical principles of autonomy, beneficence, and respect for persons (Xu et al., 2020). By embedding ethical assurance within the study procedures, the research promoted transparency, trust, and voluntary engagement, which in turn strengthened the credibility and validity of the data collected.

### **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality was treated as a fundamental ethical priority throughout the planning, execution, and presentation of this research. Protecting participant identity was particularly important given the professional context of the study and the sensitivity of issues related to gender, leadership, and workplace experience (Cohen et al., 2017). Participants were assured that their input would remain anonymous, and no personally identifying information was collected or shared. To maintain privacy, the survey intentionally avoided requesting names, contact details, school

identifiers, or any information that could reasonably be used to link responses to specific individuals or institutions.

All collected data were stored securely on password-protected devices, with access restricted solely to the researcher. Electronic survey responses were downloaded and stored in encrypted digital files to reduce the risk of unauthorised access or data breaches. During both the analysis and reporting phases, findings were presented in aggregated and summarised form. No individual quotations or response patterns were attributed in a manner that could enable indirect identification of participants or schools.

Participants were informed of these confidentiality measures through the consent form and survey instructions prior to participation. This transparency was intended to promote trust and encourage candid and reflective responses. Given the potential professional sensitivity surrounding discussions of leadership access, discrimination, and institutional culture, confidentiality safeguards were essential to creating a safe environment for honest participation. These procedures were therefore integral to maintaining research integrity and upholding participants' rights to privacy and protection.

### **Self-determination**

The ethical foundation of this study was grounded in the principle of self-determination, ensuring that all participants retained full control over their decision to take part in the research (Sng et al., 2016; Cohen et al., 2017). It was clearly communicated that participation was entirely voluntary and that individuals were free to decide whether or not to complete the questionnaire. Participants were also informed that choosing not to participate, or withdrawing partway through the survey, would carry no penalties or professional consequences.

This safeguard was explicitly outlined in both the consent form and the introductory section of the questionnaire. Participants were able to withdraw from the study at any point prior to submission by exiting the survey, without being required to provide justification. No form of coercion or inducement was applied, and respondents were encouraged to answer only those questions they felt comfortable addressing.

Upholding self-determination was particularly important given the study's focus on gender, leadership aspirations, and professional experiences, topics that may be perceived as sensitive or personal. Allowing participants control over their level of disclosure supported ethical engagement and reduced potential discomfort or risk. By foregrounding voluntary participation and participant agency, the study aligned with ethical principles that prioritise autonomy, respect, and dignity, thereby strengthening both the ethical soundness and credibility of the research findings.

### **Right to Withdraw**

Participants were made fully aware of their absolute right to withdraw from the study at any point, without any risk of penalty or negative consequences. This right applies at all stages of participation, including prior to commencing the questionnaire, during completion, and up to the point of final submission. The right to withdraw was explicitly outlined in the informed consent form and reiterated in the introduction to the survey, ensuring that participants clearly understood their ability to discontinue participation at any stage.

Respecting the right to withdraw is a core component of ethical research involving human participants, as it reinforces the principles of autonomy and voluntary participation (Sng et al., 2016). By foregrounding this right, the study ensured that participation was based on ongoing consent rather than a single point of agreement. Upholding this principle allowed participants to

make decisions aligned with their comfort level, professional circumstances, and personal boundaries.

Given the study's focus on gender, leadership, and professional identity, topics that may be experienced as personally or professionally sensitive, emphasizing the right to withdraw was particularly important. This assurance helped to promote psychological safety and reduce perceived pressure to participate or disclose information. By prioritising participant agency, the study supported ethical integrity while also enhancing the authenticity and reliability of the responses gathered.

### **Avoid Using Deceptive Practices**

The research was conducted with a commitment to full transparency, ensuring that no form of deception, concealment, or misrepresentation occurred at any stage of the study. Participants received clear and accurate information regarding the study's purpose, research focus, methodology, and intended use of the data prior to providing consent. This information was presented in both the participant information statement and the survey introduction to ensure consistency and clarity.

No false, misleading, or ambiguous information was presented, and no elements of the research were intentionally withheld from participants. Participants were not exposed to hidden objectives, manipulation, or covert data collection practices. This transparent approach aligns with established ethical guidelines that emphasise honesty, openness, and respect for participants' right to make informed decisions about their involvement in research (Sng et al., 2016).

Maintaining transparency throughout the research process helped to foster trust and reduce the potential for discomfort or distress. It also encouraged participants to respond openly and reflectively, contributing to the quality and credibility of the data collected. By ensuring that all

data were gathered within an environment of informed agreement and mutual respect, the study upheld high ethical standards and reinforced its overall methodological integrity.

## **Data Collection and Analysis**

### **Data Collection**

The data collection phase of this study was guided by a structured yet context-sensitive approach to ensure alignment with the research purpose, ethical standards, and institutional realities in Trinidad and Tobago. The primary aim was to explore how gender and social values influence teachers' access to educational leadership roles, with particular attention to the moderating effects of institutional and cultural dynamics. Consistent with the explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the data collection process prioritised the generation of quantitative patterns alongside qualitative insight capable of contextualising those patterns (Huyler & McGill, 2019). Data were collected from two purposefully selected schools: a government primary school and a government-assisted secondary school, each chosen for their distinctive organisational structures and relevance to the study's focus.

Following receipt of formal approval from the Ministry of Education, the survey instrument was finalised and prepared for distribution. The questionnaire, which had undergone both refinement and pilot testing, was disseminated electronically via a secure online platform. This mode of delivery was selected for its accessibility, efficiency, and suitability within the professional constraints of educators' schedules. Electronic distribution also supported anonymity and reduced the potential influence of institutional power dynamics on participation. Clear instructions were provided to accommodate varying levels of digital familiarity, and technical assistance was made available through school administrators where required. While the online

format enhanced efficiency, limitations related to internet access and digital confidence were acknowledged as potential constraints.

Prior to survey distribution, school administrators were contacted to facilitate internal communication with teaching staff and to endorse the legitimacy of the study within their institutions. This indirect recruitment strategy was adopted to respect institutional protocols while avoiding direct pressure on teachers to participate. The data collection period extended over eight weeks, a timeframe deliberately selected to avoid overlap with national events such as Carnival and major school assessment periods. This scheduling was intended to minimise external distractions and allow participants to engage with the questionnaire at a time of their choosing.

Participation commenced with an electronic consent prompt embedded at the beginning of the survey. Respondents were required to review a concise overview of the study's purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature before indicating their consent to proceed. The survey platform was configured to prevent access to the questionnaire without confirmation of consent, reinforcing ethical compliance and participant autonomy. This step served both ethical and methodological functions by ensuring that participation was informed and intentional.

A total of 66 teachers accessed the survey link. Of these, 63 individuals provided consent to participate. However, only 33 respondents completed the questionnaire in full. These 33 completed responses constituted the final dataset used for analysis. The difference between consented participants and completed responses reflects voluntary withdrawal or partial completion rather than institutional nonparticipation. Although the final sample size was smaller than initially anticipated, the study's descriptive and exploratory design prioritised depth and contextual understanding over statistical generalisability. The completed responses provided sufficiently rich data to address the research questions and explore moderating relationships.

The questionnaire comprised 20 items, incorporating a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions. Closed-ended items employed Likert-type scales and binary response options to enable quantitative analysis of patterns related to leadership perceptions, gender norms, and organisational culture. Open-ended questions invited participants to elaborate on their experiences of leadership access, institutional practices, and cultural expectations. This design facilitated methodological triangulation by allowing narrative responses to explain and contextualise quantitative trends.

Survey items were organised thematically to enhance coherence during completion and analysis. Themes included leadership ambition, professional support, perceived equity in promotion processes, family responsibilities, and cultural attitudes toward gender and authority. Thematic sequencing supported logical progression through the questionnaire and reduced cognitive burden on respondents. To further enhance response quality, the survey was designed to be concise and user-friendly, with an estimated completion time of 20 to 25 minutes. Local terminology and role descriptors, including School Supervisor I and Teacher III, were incorporated to ensure clarity and contextual relevance.

Throughout the data collection period, the researcher maintained communication with school administrators to address logistical issues and monitor general participation trends. No direct reminders were issued to teachers, as this was considered potentially coercive within a hierarchical professional environment. Instead, administrators received periodic confirmation that the survey remained open and accessible.

Upon closure of the survey, responses were reviewed for completeness and internal consistency. Only fully completed questionnaires were retained for analysis to ensure that all included cases addressed the full scope of the instrument. Partially completed surveys were

excluded to prevent analytical gaps that could compromise the reliability of comparative interpretation.

The data collection process was conducted with continuous attention to ethical integrity. Participants were reminded of their right to skip questions or withdraw by exiting the survey at any point. Although no identifying information was collected, particular care was taken during data handling and reporting to ensure that narrative responses could not be traced to individual participants or schools. This systematic and ethically grounded approach enabled the study to generate robust, contextually grounded insights into how gender, social values, and institutional dynamics interact to shape participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of data collected through the SurveyMonkey questionnaire was structured to convert raw responses into organised and meaningful insights aligned with the study's research objectives. Consistent with the explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, quantitative analysis was conducted first to identify patterns, followed by qualitative analysis to contextualise and explain those patterns (Huyler & McGill, 2019). The instrument featured a mix of closed-ended yes or no items and open-ended questions, enabling both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Microsoft Excel and SPSS were utilised as the primary platforms for data organisation and statistical assessment. The analytic process involved a series of systematic steps, including data cleaning, coding, and inferential testing, to extract relevant patterns and findings.

The initial step involved exporting raw survey data from SurveyMonkey into Microsoft Excel. Once transferred, the dataset was cleaned by checking for duplicate entries, incomplete submissions, and formatting inconsistencies. Only fully completed questionnaires were retained for analysis to ensure comparability across variables. Each response was reviewed to ensure clarity

and internal consistency, particularly in the open-ended sections. Ambiguous or incomplete narrative responses were retained but interpreted cautiously during thematic analysis rather than excluded outright. This cleaning process ensured that only valid and usable data informed subsequent analyses.

Following the cleaning phase, open-ended responses were subjected to qualitative coding. An inductive thematic analysis approach was employed to allow themes to emerge from participant narratives rather than being imposed a priori (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). Recurring ideas were identified and grouped into categories relevant to the study's focus on gender, leadership access, and sociocultural influence. Particular attention was given to responses describing experiences of gender bias, discrimination, or perceived barriers to leadership, allowing these narratives to be systematically coded and interpreted within the study's thematic framework. A codebook was developed to define and track each theme, enhancing analytic consistency and transparency. Microsoft Excel's filtering, sorting, and conditional formatting functions were used to manage the qualitative dataset. Frequencies of coded themes were recorded to support integration with quantitative findings, while preserving the interpretive depth of narrative responses. Because the qualitative component was embedded within a mixed-methods survey design rather than a standalone interview study, formal saturation thresholds were not applied. Instead, qualitative responses were analyzed thematically, and recurring patterns across responses were used to support interpretation of the quantitative findings.

Microsoft Excel also played a central role in analysing closed-ended survey items. Built-in functions were used to calculate frequencies, percentages, and descriptive statistics for yes or no and scaled response questions. Charts and graphs were generated to visualise response

distributions and support pattern recognition. These descriptive outputs informed the selection of variables for inferential testing and guided the sequencing of qualitative interpretation.

SPSS was employed to conduct independent samples t-tests for inferential analysis. These tests were used to examine whether statistically significant differences existed between groups based on gender and school type, rather than to establish causal relationships. Prior to analysis, variables were defined and labelled, and the dataset was formatted to meet SPSS requirements. Data were imported from Excel into SPSS, where missing values were assessed and handled consistently across variables. Independent samples t-tests were then conducted using the compare means function to evaluate group differences and associated significance levels.

The t-test procedures included comparisons across gender for variables such as childcare responsibilities, marriage expectations, access to higher education, work-family balance, and perceptions of emotional stability in leadership. School type, defined as government or government-assisted, was also used as a grouping variable to assess institutional differences in perceived leadership opportunity and support. All tests followed standard statistical protocols, with significance levels set at  $p < 0.05$  (Singhal & Rana, 2015).

Throughout the data analysis process, established procedures were followed to ensure validity, reliability, and transparency. Coding of qualitative responses was conducted systematically using the codebook to guide theme identification. For quantitative analysis, statistical techniques were selected based on the scale and distribution of the data and the study's non-experimental design. As noted by Divisi et al. (2017), Microsoft Excel remains a widely used tool for managing and analysing research datasets, and in this study, its flexibility supported both qualitative organisation and quantitative summarisation. SPSS provided the necessary functionality for rigorous inferential testing.

All analyses were conducted with careful attention to ethical data handling, including confidentiality, secure storage, and accurate reporting of procedures and results. Analytic decisions were guided by the conceptual framework, with particular attention to how gender interacted with individual, family-related, organisational, and cultural moderators. By employing a complementary combination of Excel and SPSS, the researcher was able to prepare the dataset for a coherent and integrated presentation of findings in Chapter 4.

In summary, the data analysis process involved multiple stages, including data cleaning, inductive coding of qualitative responses, descriptive statistical analysis, and inferential testing using independent-samples t-tests. This layered approach supported the explanatory aims of the research by balancing breadth of coverage with thematic depth. The analytic procedures provided a robust foundation for the interpretation and discussion of findings, ensuring alignment with the study's methodological design and research objectives.

## **Summary**

This chapter outlined the research design employed to examine the social and structural influences affecting women's participation in educational leadership within Trinidad and Tobago. The methodological approach was deliberately selected to address the central research problem: the continued underrepresentation of women in educational leadership roles despite their numerical dominance within the teaching profession. The chapter established a clear methodological foundation by detailing the research approach, design logic, procedures, and ethical safeguards that guided the study. Each phase of the methodology was closely aligned with the study's research questions and the conceptual framework underpinning the investigation.

The chapter began by reasserting the relevance of the research problem and clarifying the methodological choices that guided the study. In response to the cultural, institutional, and historical characteristics of the Trinidad and Tobago education system, a descriptive, survey-based research design was adopted. Within an explanatory sequential mixed methods framework, this design enabled the identification of quantitative patterns alongside qualitative insight capable of explaining those patterns. The survey method was particularly appropriate given the need to engage educators across two distinct school types while facilitating both breadth of coverage and depth of understanding.

A case study approach was initially considered for its capacity to generate rich, institution-specific insight. However, given the study's objective of comparing experiences across different school contexts and identifying broader sociocultural influences, the case study design was deemed insufficiently expansive. The survey-based approach was therefore selected as the most appropriate means of capturing cross-institutional patterns while retaining contextual sensitivity. This decision ensured that the study remained grounded in local realities while producing findings relevant across institutional settings.

The research design integrated both quantitative and qualitative traditions through a mixed-format questionnaire. Likert-scale and binary items generated quantitative data suitable for descriptive and inferential analysis, while open-ended prompts allowed participants to articulate their experiences and interpretations in their own words. This integration was central to the explanatory aims of the study, enabling qualitative responses to contextualise and deepen understanding of quantitative trends.

The survey instrument was developed based on established theoretical constructs, including Bandura et al. (1999) theory of self-efficacy, Morris's (1993) work on organisational

culture, and Caribbean scholarship on gender, leadership, and post-colonial institutional structures (for example, Smith et al., n.d.; Washington & Gounko, 2024). The instrument comprised 20 items addressing leadership access, fairness in promotion, mentorship availability, caregiving expectations, and institutional culture. Each item was explicitly linked to one or more research questions and to the moderating variables identified in the conceptual framework, ensuring conceptual and analytical coherence.

Instrument development included a two-stage process of refinement and pilot testing. An initial refinement phase focused on clarity, cultural relevance, and alignment with local educational terminology. This was followed by a formal pilot study with practicing educators, which assessed instrument performance, completion time, and response quality. Feedback from these stages confirmed the suitability of the questionnaire and informed minor adjustments without altering its conceptual structure.

The study population comprised teachers from one government primary school and one government-assisted secondary school. A purposive sampling strategy was employed to ensure that participants had direct experience with leadership structures and organisational culture. The final dataset consisted of 33 fully completed questionnaires. Although the sample size was smaller than originally anticipated, it was sufficient for the study's descriptive and exploratory purposes and allowed for meaningful thematic and comparative analysis (Turner, 2020).

Ethical considerations were embedded throughout the research process. Formal approval was obtained from the relevant authorities, and participants were informed of the study's purpose, voluntary nature, and ethical safeguards. Measures relating to informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, self-determination, and the right to withdraw were consistently

applied. The researcher's positionality and the potential for bias were acknowledged, with reflexive awareness guiding analytic decisions to safeguard interpretive integrity.

Operational definitions of key variables were presented to ensure transparency and analytical clarity. Gender was conceptualised as a socially constructed variable operating within cultural and institutional contexts. Female participation in educational leadership was defined as a multidimensional construct encompassing representation, access, engagement, and perceived legitimacy. School type was included as a control variable to account for institutional variation in governance and leadership pathways. These operational definitions provided a clear foundation for the subsequent data analysis.

Data collection was conducted electronically to ensure accessibility, confidentiality, and participant convenience. The data analysis process involved multiple stages, including data cleaning, descriptive statistical analysis, inferential testing using independent samples t-tests, and inductive thematic analysis of qualitative responses (Schoonenboom & Johnson, 2017). This layered analytic strategy supported triangulation and strengthened the explanatory power of the findings by integrating numerical trends with lived experience.

In conclusion, Chapter 3 presented a rigorous, transparent, and ethically grounded methodological framework for the study. The chosen research design and procedures were carefully tailored to the Trinidad and Tobago context and aligned with the study's conceptual and theoretical foundations. By combining quantitative breadth with qualitative depth, the methodology established a strong platform for the presentation and interpretation of findings in the subsequent chapters and reinforced the study's contribution to scholarly and policy-focused discussions on gender, leadership, and equity in Caribbean education.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter presents and evaluates the findings of the study examining how social values and systemic factors influence female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. Building on the conceptual framework and research questions established in earlier chapters, this chapter brings together quantitative and qualitative evidence from educator survey responses to provide an integrated account of leadership access, inequality patterns, and participant-identified strategies for improving gender equity in educational leadership. The focus of the chapter is not only descriptive but interpretive. It reports what was found in the data and evaluates how those findings help explain patterns of participation, underrepresentation, and potential reform pathways within the national educational context.

The study is guided by a conceptual framework that positions gender as the independent variable influencing participation in educational leadership, with outcomes moderated by organizational, cultural, personal, and family-related factors. This framework assumes that leadership access is not determined solely by formal qualifications or policy statements but is shaped by interacting institutional norms, social expectations, identity processes, and opportunity structures. Consistent with this model, the chapter examines how educators' perceptions, experiences, and reported barriers reflect deeper systemic and value-based influences operating within schools and leadership pathways. The findings, therefore, are interpreted through multiple layers of influence rather than as isolated individual outcomes.

The chapter addresses the three research questions that structure the study. Research Question 1 examines which social values influence female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. Research Question 2 investigates the factors that lead to inequality and underrepresentation of women in educational leadership. Research Question 3 explores

participant-identified strategies that could increase female participation and advance gender equality in leadership roles. These questions are addressed through a combination of descriptive statistics, comparative statistical testing where appropriate, and qualitative thematic interpretation of open-ended responses. The chapter maintains clear distinctions between descriptive results, analytical interpretation, and later evaluative discussion in order to preserve methodological transparency and analytical coherence.

Because the study draws on both quantitative and qualitative survey data, the presentation of findings follows a structured mixed-evidence approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Quantitative results are reported using frequency distributions, comparative summaries, and statistical tests used to examine group differences. Qualitative responses are analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns, shared meanings, and explanatory narratives that deepen interpretation of the statistical patterns (V. Braun & Clarke, 2006). Qualitative excerpts are used selectively to illustrate themes that emerged directly from participant responses. Care is taken throughout the chapter to ensure that interpretations remain grounded in the collected data and that illustrative examples reflect actual response patterns rather than generalized assumptions.

Given the sensitivity of the topic and the interpretive nature of several findings, the chapter begins with a focused discussion of trustworthiness, reliability, and validity considerations as they apply specifically to the data set used in this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Rather than repeating procedural details from the methodology chapter, this discussion evaluates how data quality, response consistency, and analytic procedures support confidence in the reported findings. Attention is given to response completeness, internal consistency across survey items, thematic stability across open-ended responses, and the alignment between research questions and analytic

categories. These elements establish a foundation for interpreting the findings responsibly and within appropriate evidentiary limits.

Following this foundation, the chapter presents the general results of the study before moving into research-question-specific findings. The general results section provides an overview of participant characteristics, leadership interest patterns, perceived barriers, and leadership perception trends across the sample. This overview establishes context for the more focused analyses that follow and allows readers to understand the distributional landscape of responses before entering deeper thematic and comparative interpretation. Where statistical comparisons are used, they are presented cautiously and interpreted within sample and design constraints.

Subsequent sections are organized by research question. Each research question section first presents the relevant findings and then evaluates their meaning in relation to the conceptual framework and theoretical foundations of the study. This structure ensures that interpretation remains anchored to the original inquiry design rather than drifting into generalized commentary. For Research Question 1, the analysis focuses on how social values, including gender norms, caregiving expectations, leadership archetypes, and symbolic authority beliefs, shape leadership perception and aspiration. For Research Question 2, the evaluation examines how institutional practices, informal networks, mentorship access, role conflict, and organizational culture contribute to inequality and underrepresentation. For Research Question 3, the chapter evaluates participant-proposed strategies and considers their feasibility, systemic implications, and alignment with identified barriers.

After the research question evaluations, the chapter includes a theory alignment synthesis that examines how the findings correspond with, refine, or challenge the theoretical perspectives identified in the conceptual framework. These include capability-based interpretations of

opportunity and constraint, self-efficacy processes, symbolic interactionist interpretations of leadership identity, structural inequality frameworks such as glass ceiling and sticky floor models, expectancy-value interpretations of motivation, and intersectional perspectives on overlapping disadvantage. The purpose of this synthesis is not to force alignment but to critically assess explanatory fit and theoretical usefulness in light of the empirical findings.

The chapter then examines gaps, tensions, and contradictions that emerged in the data. These include mismatches between formal policy rhetoric and reported institutional practice, differences between expressed leadership values and promotion criteria, tensions between representation and transformation, and inconsistencies in perceptions of meritocracy and fairness. Attention is given to areas where participant narratives complicate prevailing assumptions in the literature or reveal under-examined contextual dynamics. This section is included deliberately to strengthen analytical credibility by acknowledging complexity rather than presenting findings as uniformly consistent.

A comparative alignment section follows, situating the study's findings in relation to existing scholarship on gender and educational leadership. This section identifies points of convergence and divergence with prior research, including work conducted in Caribbean and international contexts. Rather than treating literature as confirmation alone, the comparison highlights where the present findings extend, refine, or problematize existing models, particularly in relation to cultural context, institutional variation, and symbolic leadership norms.

The chapter concludes with an integrated summary that synthesizes the major findings across all three research questions and highlights their implications for understanding gender and leadership participation in Trinidad and Tobago's education system. The summary emphasizes interaction effects across social values, institutional structures, and identity processes, reinforcing

the conceptual framework's multi-moderator design. This concluding synthesis prepares the ground for the final chapter, which develops implications, recommendations, and future research directions based on the evaluated findings.

Throughout this chapter, interpretive caution is maintained (Maxwell, 2012). Claims are framed within the limits of the study design, sample size, and data type. Statistical results are not overstated, qualitative interpretations are grounded in response patterns, and theoretical links are presented as explanatory lenses rather than definitive proofs. This balanced approach ensures that the chapter contributes analytically meaningful and contextually grounded insights into gender and educational leadership while maintaining methodological integrity.

### **Trustworthiness of Data**

Ensuring the trustworthiness of research findings is essential for producing meaningful and credible results, especially in studies that explore sensitive social dynamics such as gender inequality in educational leadership. In this research, trustworthiness was supported through methodological transparency, structured instrument development, and clearly documented analytic procedures. Particular care was taken to align survey items with the conceptual framework variables and research questions, and to pilot the instrument for clarity and contextual appropriateness. Because the study examined how gendered experiences and sociocultural expectations shape leadership aspirations and perceptions within schools in Trinidad and Tobago, attention to neutrality, clarity of wording, and interpretive rigor was prioritized throughout the research process.

The study applied four established trustworthiness criteria, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, as guiding principles for research design and analysis. These

criteria were operationalized through concrete procedures, including pilot testing of the instrument, transparent sampling rationale, documented coding and thematic analysis steps, and explicit linkage between participant responses, conceptual themes, and theoretical interpretation. Each criterion, therefore, functioned not only as a conceptual standard but as a practical guide for methodological decision-making.

### **Credibility**

Credibility pertains to the believability and accuracy of the findings from the participants' perspective. Because this study examined personal perceptions of gender, leadership, and institutional norms, particular care was taken to ensure that participant meanings were captured and interpreted in a way that reflected their intended experiences. Credibility was strengthened through careful alignment of survey items with the research questions and conceptual framework variables, as well as through pilot testing of the instrument to confirm clarity, cultural appropriateness, and interpretive consistency in the Trinidad and Tobago school context.

Survey items were phrased in clear, role-specific language and adapted to reflect terminology familiar within the local education system. Pilot feedback informed wording refinements and sequencing adjustments, reducing ambiguity and improving respondent understanding. This process increased confidence that participants interpreted questions as intended and that responses reflected their actual perceptions rather than a misunderstanding of terms.

An additional contributor to credibility was the dual-format design of the questionnaire, which combined structured response items with open-ended questions. This enabled comparison between scaled responses and participants' narrative explanations. Qualitative comments were

used to interpret, qualify, and contextualize quantitative patterns, allowing cross-validation of trends and reducing the risk of misinterpretation based solely on numerical responses.

Survey flow and question sequencing were also structured to support thoughtful reflection. Items were grouped thematically and ordered from general to more specific prompts, reducing cognitive overload and supporting more considered responses. Participation was voluntary, anonymity was emphasized, and respondents were free to exit at any time. These conditions reduced response pressure and increased the likelihood of candid reporting, further supporting the credibility of the data collected.

### **Transferability**

Transferability refers to the extent to which a study's findings may be meaningfully applicable to other settings, populations, or institutional contexts. In qualitative and mixed-methods research, transferability is not achieved through statistical generalization but through the provision of sufficiently detailed contextual description that allows readers to determine whether the findings are relevant to their own environments. Accordingly, this study prioritized contextual transparency and institutional detail so that similarities and differences across settings can be reasonably assessed by future researchers and practitioners.

The research design intentionally selected two schools that were meaningfully distinct in their structural and administrative contexts, reflecting variation within Trinidad and Tobago's education system. One institution operated within a government primary school structure, while the other represented a government-assisted secondary school context, each with different leadership hierarchies, reporting relationships, and role classifications. This contrast enabled the study to capture perspectives across differing governance arrangements and leadership pathways rather than relying on a single institutional model.

While the study is grounded in a specific national setting, participant roles, leadership pathways, and institutional structures were described in detail, including locally recognized position titles and promotion ladders. References to role classifications such as Teacher I–III and School Supervisor levels were retained to preserve organizational authenticity and allow readers to understand how leadership progression is formally structured within this system. Descriptions of leadership traditions, institutional expectations, and staff composition further supported contextual interpretation of findings.

Care was also taken to document sociocultural and organizational features that shape leadership participation, including gender norms, caregiving expectations, and institutional promotion practices. By situating findings within clearly described cultural and administrative conditions, the study enables educators, policymakers, and researchers working in similarly structured systems, particularly postcolonial, Caribbean, and Global South education contexts, to evaluate the relevance and resonance of the findings within their own environments.

Transferability was further supported through participant diversity across gender, experience level, and leadership exposure. Although the central analytic focus remained on female leadership participation, the inclusion of both male and female educators allowed comparative perception patterns to emerge, strengthening contextual interpretation of institutional culture and social expectations. This breadth of perspective increases the likelihood that the study's conceptual insights, rather than its numeric proportions, may inform understanding in related educational leadership settings.

### **Dependability**

Dependability is concerned with the consistency and stability of the research process over time. A dependable study is one in which the methodological steps are logical, clearly documented,

and sufficiently transparent that another researcher could understand how decisions were made and could reasonably replicate the procedure under similar conditions. In this study, dependability was supported through a structured and monitored approach to survey design, distribution, and data handling, with attention to maintaining consistency in how the instrument was presented, how responses were screened, and how both quantitative and qualitative data were processed.

Each stage of the research process, from instrument development to response collection and dataset preparation, was documented to ensure traceability. The two-stage development process (refinement and pilot testing) was treated as part of the dependability strategy, and adjustments made during pilot feedback were recorded along with the rationale for each change. These adjustments included revisions to terminology to ensure cultural relevance and clarity within the Trinidad and Tobago education system, as well as revisions to sequencing to improve the flow and comprehension of the questionnaire. Maintaining a clear record of these decisions supports consistency and allows methodological choices to be revisited and evaluated.

During data collection, uniform procedures were applied to administer the questionnaire. All participants accessed the instrument through the same standardized digital platform and received identical instructions and prompts. No additional explanations, coaching, or clarifications were provided outside of the survey text itself, reducing variation in interpretation arising from researcher interaction. This consistency ensured that differences in responses reflected participant perspectives rather than differences in administration conditions.

Dependability was also supported through consistent data handling and inclusion criteria. Clear rules were applied to determine which responses were included in the analysis, and these criteria were applied evenly across the dataset. Only complete questionnaires were included in the final analytic dataset to ensure consistent coverage across items and enable valid comparison

across explaining variables. Where incomplete responses occurred, they were retained for record purposes but excluded from cross-item analysis to prevent uneven item-level representation from distorting patterns and interpretation.

To strengthen dependability in qualitative analysis, an audit trail was maintained documenting how open-ended responses were coded and grouped into categories and themes. Coding and theme development proceeded through iterative rounds of review, with codes refined as patterns became clearer across the dataset. Coding decisions were revisited multiple times to verify internal coherence, to avoid unnecessary overlap between themes, and to ensure alignment with the research aims and conceptual framework. Theme labels were adjusted where needed so that emerging categories reflected patterns of meaning rather than isolated statements, supporting stable and defensible interpretive conclusions.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability addresses the extent to which the findings of a study are grounded in participants' reported experiences and meanings rather than being shaped primarily by researcher bias, preference, or prior assumptions. In this study, confirmability was supported through procedural transparency, data-anchored interpretation, and systematic documentation of analytic decisions. Care was taken to ensure that interpretations remained closely connected to participant responses and that analytic conclusions could be traced back to identifiable evidence within the dataset.

All major interpretations presented in the findings were grounded in direct excerpts from participant responses. Illustrative quotations were included not merely for emphasis but as analytic anchors demonstrating how interpretive claims were derived. Quotes were selected to represent recurring patterns as well as meaningful variation across respondents, rather than highlighting only

extreme or especially persuasive statements. This approach allows readers to independently assess whether the interpretations reasonably follow from the evidence presented and strengthens the traceability of conclusions.

Confirmability was further supported through transparent linkage between raw data, codes, themes, and conceptual interpretations. Qualitative coding began with data-proximate labels and progressed through iterative refinement toward conceptual categories aligned with the study's framework. Theme development was therefore evidence-led rather than theory-imposed. While theoretical perspectives on gender, leadership, and institutional culture informed interpretation, they were applied after pattern identification rather than used to pre-sort responses. This sequencing reduced the risk that theoretical expectations would override participant meaning.

Reflexivity was also practiced throughout the research process. The researcher maintained ongoing awareness that prior professional experience and scholarly positioning in gender and leadership studies could influence interpretive emphasis. To manage this risk, analytic decisions, including theme naming, category merging, and interpretation boundaries, were documented during coding and review stages. Interpretations were periodically re-checked against raw responses to confirm that conclusions remained proportionate to the data and did not extend beyond what participant narratives supported.

Confirmability was further supported through a structured and transparent analytic organization appropriate to a mixed-methods survey design. Open-ended responses were coded within a structured spreadsheet environment, and category labels and theme definitions were developed and refined directly within the analytic workflow. Rather than relying on separate qualitative audit files typical of interview-based studies, traceability was maintained through documented coding logic, preserved response excerpts within the dataset, and an explicit

explanation of how themes were derived and applied in the findings chapter. Quantitative summaries and qualitative patterns were reviewed alongside each other during interpretation to ensure that conclusions were supported by converging evidence rather than selective emphasis. These practices support analytic transparency and demonstrate that the study's interpretations are grounded in participant data and documented analytic reasoning.

### **Ongoing Strategies to Uphold Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness was treated not as a discrete procedural stage but as a continuous objective embedded throughout the research design, instrument development, data collection, and analytic phases. Methodological decisions were made with ongoing attention to clarity, transparency, and interpretive fairness. This included careful alignment of survey items with the conceptual framework, explicit documentation of analytic procedures, and deliberate attention to how findings were framed and supported with evidence. Reflexive awareness and interpretive caution were maintained throughout engagement with the dataset.

The survey instrument was structured to allow participants to determine the level of detail they wished to provide, particularly through the inclusion of open-ended response opportunities alongside scaled items. This design supported more context-rich and self-directed responses rather than forcing participants into predetermined explanatory categories. Question wording was reviewed during refinement and pilot stages to improve clarity and reduce ambiguity. While some items explicitly addressed gender and leadership relationships in line with the study focus, open-response options allowed participants to qualify, challenge, or contextualize those prompts in their own terms.

Ongoing attention was also given to balanced representation during analysis and reporting. Findings were presented to reflect both dominant patterns and meaningful variation across

responses. Areas of convergence were identified, but divergent and minority perspectives were also included where they contributed to conceptual understanding. This approach reduced the risk of overgeneralization and supported a more nuanced interpretation of gender, leadership, and institutional experience within the study context.

Interpretive discipline was further maintained by linking analytic claims directly to response patterns and representative excerpts rather than isolated statements. Quantitative trends and qualitative explanations were reviewed together during interpretation to ensure that conclusions reflected the weight of evidence across data types. These ongoing practices collectively supported trustworthiness by reinforcing analytic transparency, interpretive balance, and evidence-based reporting throughout the study.

### **Reliability and Validity of Data**

In educational and social research, particularly when addressing complex and sensitive issues such as gender inequality in leadership, ensuring the reliability and validity of data is critical to achieving trustworthy and defensible results. This study, which investigates the social values and factors influencing female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago, adopts an integrated mixed-methods design combining structured quantitative measures with qualitative open-response data. As a result, particular care was required in instrument construction, pilot refinement, sampling transparency, and analytic procedure to support both measurement reliability and interpretive validity. Reliability and validity were therefore treated not as isolated technical checks but as design principles guiding how variables were operationalized, how questions were framed, and how responses were interpreted within context.

The reliability and validity of the data were strengthened through multiple complementary strategies aligned with established practices in educational and mixed-methods research, including instrument piloting, construct–framework alignment, consistent administration procedures, and transparent analytic documentation (Huyler & McGill, 2019; Lincoln et al., 1985). These strategies ensured that the measures used were conceptually grounded, contextually appropriate, and analytically traceable, thereby supporting confidence that the findings reflect stable response patterns and credible interpretation rather than measurement error or procedural inconsistency.

### **Reliability of Data**

Reliability concerns the consistency and dependability of a research instrument and whether the same data collection tool would yield similar results under similar conditions (Ary et al., 2018). In mixed-methods survey research, reliability applies both to measurement stability in structured items and to procedural consistency in qualitative coding and interpretation. In this study, reliability was addressed across three interrelated areas: instrument design, data collection procedure, and qualitative coding process, with emphasis on clarity, stability of administration, and consistency of analytic handling.

The research instrument, a 20-item semi-structured questionnaire, was reviewed for clarity, cultural relevance, and logical structure prior to full deployment. Questions were organized thematically and aligned with the conceptual framework variables to reduce construct drift and misinterpretation. Rather than relying solely on statistical reliability coefficients, which are not always appropriate for mixed-format instruments, reliability was strengthened through pilot refinement and wording stabilization. During the pilot phase, teacher feedback was used to identify ambiguous phrasing, unclear terminology, and sequence issues, leading to targeted revisions in wording and format. Piloting is an established method to improve question clarity and instrument

reliability (Bolarinwa, 2015), and in this case, it provided practical evidence that the survey items were understandable, contextually appropriate, and consistently interpreted by respondents within the Trinidad and Tobago education context.

Consistency in data collection procedures further supported reliability. All respondents completed the same finalized version of the questionnaire through a secure online platform, with identical instructions, item order, and response formats. No adaptive branching or individualized clarification was introduced during administration. This standardized delivery ensured uniform exposure to prompts and reduced administration variability. According to Cohen et al. (2017), standardized administration procedures are essential to minimizing procedural variation and enhancing reliability in survey-based research, particularly where perception and attitude measures are involved.

Reliability in the handling of open-ended responses was supported through a structured thematic analysis process. Coding followed an inductive approach, with categories developed from response patterns rather than imposed in advance. Coding proceeded iteratively, and earlier coded responses were periodically revisited as the coding framework evolved to maintain internal consistency in category application. Code labels and theme boundaries were adjusted where overlap or ambiguity emerged, supporting coherence across the dataset. This iterative stabilization of codes aligns with recommended thematic analysis practice for improving coding consistency and interpretive reliability (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In addition, only fully completed surveys were included in the final analytic dataset. Applying a consistent completeness criterion reduced distortion that can arise from partial-response variability and ensured that all analyzed cases contributed data across the same item set. This uniform inclusion rule supports comparability across responses and strengthens pattern

stability, consistent with survey reliability guidance (Fink, 2016). Taken together, these instruments, administration, and analytic consistency measures support the reliability of the data generated in this study.

### **Validity of Data**

Validity indicates how effectively an instrument measures what it is intended to measure and how well the resulting findings reflect the actual experiences and perceptions of participants in real contexts (Ang, 2018; DeVellis, 2016). In mixed-methods educational research, validity involves both measurement alignment and interpretive accuracy. This study addressed multiple complementary dimensions of validity, content validity, construct validity, face validity, and contextual validity, to ensure that the instrument and resulting interpretations were conceptually grounded, contextually appropriate, and analytically defensible.

Content validity was strengthened by grounding questionnaire items in the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and explicitly aligning them with the research questions and conceptual framework. Each item cluster was mapped to key constructs, including gender roles, cultural norms, leadership ambition, institutional support, and moderating social factors. Items were therefore not developed in isolation but derived from theory and prior scholarship. Experts in educational leadership and gender studies emphasize that strong construct-objective alignment is central to content validity (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Theoretical sources, including Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1977), Seguino's (2003) work on gender and Caribbean culture, and Morris's (1993) analysis of leadership structures in Trinidad and Tobago, informed both item framing and construct coverage, increasing conceptual relevance and scope coverage.

Construct validity was supported through a multi-indicator measurement design rather than single-item proxies. Core constructs such as leadership self-efficacy, organizational support, and

perceived cultural expectations were represented through grouped items examining related dimensions of perception and experience. Using multiple indicators for each construct reduces the likelihood that responses reflect wording artifacts or single-item misinterpretation, thereby strengthening construct representation (DeVellis, 2016). In addition, structured items were complemented by open-ended prompts, allowing respondents to elaborate on or qualify their scaled responses. This design feature supported construct depth and reduced the risk that complex perceptions would be oversimplified through fixed-choice formats alone.

Open-ended responses further enhanced interpretive and construct validity by allowing unanticipated themes and contextual qualifiers to emerge. These qualitative responses were used to interpret and contextualize quantitative patterns rather than treated as anecdotal supplements. Where qualitative explanations aligned with or clarified scaled trends, interpretive confidence was strengthened through cross-evidence consistency, consistent with mixed-methods validity strategies described by Patton (2014).

Face validity, the extent to which an instrument appears meaningful and relevant to respondents, was reinforced through the pilot phase. Teachers participating in pilot testing reviewed item clarity, professional relevance, and contextual appropriateness. Their feedback confirmed that the questions reflected recognizable leadership pathways, institutional realities, and gender-related experiences within the school system. Face validity is particularly important in perception-based self-report instruments, where respondent engagement depends on perceived relevance and clarity (Zohrabi, 2013). Positive pilot feedback, therefore, supported confidence that the instrument meaningfully represented the topic domain.

Contextual validity was addressed by adapting the survey language and role references to match the institutional terminology and leadership structures specific to Trinidad and Tobago.

Rather than using generic role labels, locally recognized classifications, such as School Supervisor I (SS1) and Teacher III (T3), were incorporated. This increased interpretive accuracy by ensuring that respondents mapped questions onto familiar organizational realities. Context-sensitive adaptation of instruments is widely recognized as improving applied validity in cross-cultural and system-specific research settings (Punch & Oancea, 2014).

Attention was also given to wording neutrality and interpretive openness. While some items directly addressed gender and leadership relationships in line with the study purpose, question phrasing avoided prescriptive or evaluative language where possible. Open-ended response opportunities allowed participants to express divergent, critical, or qualifying perspectives beyond structured response frames. This design reduced the likelihood that conclusions were artifacts of forced-choice structure and supported more authentic representation of participant meaning.

Validity was further supported through the diversity of perspectives within the sample. Although women formed the majority of respondents, consistent with national teaching workforce demographics, male educators were also included. This enabled comparative perception analysis and reduced the likelihood that findings reflected a single-gender interpretive frame. Inclusion of multiple standpoint perspectives strengthens interpretive validity in leadership and organizational research (Marshall & Rossman, 2014).

During analysis, qualitative excerpts were used as evidentiary anchors for theme identification and interpretation. Quotations were examined within their full response context before coding and thematic grouping to avoid decontextualized interpretation. This practice supports interpretive validity by ensuring that analytic claims remain proportionate to participant meaning (Miles et al., 2018).

Finally, interpretive validity was supported through researcher reflexivity. Ongoing awareness of the researcher's positionality in relation to gender and leadership scholarship informed analytic caution and documentation of interpretive decisions. Reflexive monitoring of assumptions is recognized as an essential validity safeguard in gender and social identity research (Berger, 2013).

### **Ensuring Validity During Interpretation**

Ensuring validity during interpretation required a structured and iterative approach to qualitative coding and theme development appropriate to a mixed-methods survey design. Open-ended responses were analyzed using a staged coding process that moved from initial open coding toward more focused category refinement. The first coding pass emphasized data-proximate labels that captured participant meaning in their own terms. A subsequent focused coding stage reviewed these initial labels to consolidate overlapping categories, clarify boundaries between themes, and improve conceptual alignment with the research questions and framework variables. This layered analytic progression reduced the risk of premature categorization and supported more defensible thematic interpretation (Saldaña, 2012).

Theme development was guided not only by recurrence across responses but also by explanatory value and conceptual coherence. Patterns were evaluated based on how well they illuminated relationships among social values, institutional influences, and leadership perceptions rather than on frequency counts alone. Where responses appeared ambiguous or multi-layered, excerpts were re-read in full context before final coding decisions were made. This interpretive discipline helped ensure that themes reflected patterns of meaning rather than isolated phrases or decontextualized statements.

Interpretive validity was also strengthened through systematic comparison between qualitative explanations and quantitative response patterns. Open-ended comments were used to clarify, qualify, or elaborate on structured survey trends, supporting cross-evidence interpretation rather than single-source inference. This integrative review process reduced the likelihood that conclusions were driven by selective qualitative excerpts or isolated numeric patterns.

Participant anonymity, voluntary participation, and the absence of imposed time pressure further supported interpretive validity by creating response conditions conducive to candor and reflection. Respondents could answer at their own pace and decline any question, reducing social desirability pressure and response distortion. Such response conditions are recognized as important contributors to validity in self-report social science instruments (Bryman, 2012). Together, these procedural and analytic safeguards strengthened confidence that interpretive conclusions were grounded in authentic participant meaning rather than analytic overreach.

## Results

### Teacher Survey Results

**Table 2**

*Background Characteristics*

<b>Background Characteristics</b>		<b>Frequency</b>
Gender	Female	28
	Male	5
Educational Attainment	Masters	4
	Post-Grad Certificate	6
	Bachelors	23
School Level	Primary	14
	Secondary	19
Current Positions	Principal	4
	Dean	1
	Teacher	28

### Participant Demographics

The demographic composition of the 33 respondents in the teacher survey provides important contextual grounding for interpreting the subsequent findings related to gender, leadership perception, and institutional influence. Of the participants, 28 identified as female and 5 as male, indicating a pronounced gender imbalance in the achieved sample (see Table 1). This distribution is consistent with documented national patterns within the teaching profession at both primary and secondary levels, where female educators constitute the majority of the workforce. The gender composition of the sample is therefore not anomalous but reflective of sector-wide participation trends, which is directly relevant given that the study examines female participation and leadership pathways within education.

Table 1 illustrates the highest educational qualifications of respondents. The majority, 23 individuals, reported holding a Bachelor's degree, which aligns with the standard entry qualification for the teaching profession. An additional 6 participants had completed a

postgraduate certificate, and 4 held a Master's degree, while none reported doctoral-level qualifications. This qualification profile suggests that the respondent group broadly represents typical professional preparation levels within the national teaching workforce rather than an unusually specialized or academically elite subset. As a result, leadership perceptions captured in the study can reasonably be interpreted as emerging from mainstream professional experience rather than advanced academic leadership training contexts.

In terms of teaching level, 14 respondents work at the primary school level and 19 at the secondary level (see Table 1), providing cross-level institutional representation. This distribution supports comparative interpretation across school contexts, which is important because leadership structures, promotion pathways, and administrative expectations differ between primary and secondary systems. Including both levels strengthens the interpretive scope of leadership perception patterns and allows institutional context to be examined as a moderating factor rather than treated as uniform across the education system.

Regarding job roles, 28 participants identified as classroom teachers, while the remainder included four principals and one dean. Although classroom educators form the majority of the sample, the inclusion of current school leaders adds interpretive depth by incorporating perspectives from individuals who have already navigated leadership pathways. This role diversity allows the findings to reflect both aspirational and experienced leadership viewpoints, which is analytically relevant when examining perceived barriers and enabling factors.

While 63 teachers initially consented to participate in the survey, 33 respondents completed all survey items in full and were therefore included in the final analytic dataset. Applying a complete-response inclusion rule ensured consistency across variable comparisons and statistical testing. Although the final sample is smaller than initially targeted, it retains gender variation, role

diversity, and institutional contrast across two distinct school contexts, one government primary school and one government-assisted secondary school, which supports analytic comparison aligned with the study's explanatory aims.

These demographic characteristics, particularly the predominance of female participants, the distribution across institutional levels, and the range of professional roles, are analytically significant rather than merely descriptive. They inform how leadership perceptions are interpreted, justify the use of gender and school type as comparison variables in the independent-samples *t*-tests, and frame the qualitative interpretations that follow within the structural realities of the teaching workforce.

### **Motivations for Pursuing Leadership Roles**

While this section presents primary descriptive findings, statistical comparisons by gender and school type are addressed in subsequent sections of this chapter. The purpose here is not only to report the range of leadership roles participants are willing to pursue, but also to interpret how motivational drivers reflect broader patterns of professional identity, institutional perception, and value-based leadership aspiration within the education sector.

Participants were asked to indicate the highest leadership position they would be willing to pursue. Responses varied across several roles, reflecting differentiated leadership ambitions among the 33 educators surveyed. Eight participants expressed interest in the position of Dean, and another eight indicated willingness to pursue the role of Principal. Seven respondents identified School Supervisor I or II as their preferred leadership destination. The largest group, ten participants, selected "Other" roles not explicitly listed in the survey, including Curriculum Officer, School Supervisor III, department head, instructional coordinator, and related specialist or system-level roles.

Table 1 illustrates this distribution and indicates that leadership aspiration is not concentrated solely in traditional hierarchical administrative roles. Instead, participants associate leadership with multiple influence pathways, including instructional leadership, curriculum coordination, and system-support functions. This pattern suggests that leadership is conceptualized by many respondents as functional and impact-oriented rather than strictly positional. From an organizational theory perspective, this reflects a distributed or influence-based understanding of leadership rather than a purely authority-based model, which is consistent with contemporary educational leadership frameworks.

Participants were also invited to describe factors that would motivate them to pursue leadership roles. Their responses clustered into several conceptual motivation patterns rather than isolated practical reasons. One major motivation cluster can be described as instrumental–career motivation, centered on financial advancement and professional progression. Financial considerations were frequently mentioned, with phrases such as “increased salary” and “higher pay” recurring across responses. This indicates that leadership is partly framed as an economic mobility pathway, aligning with expectancy-value theory, where individuals pursue roles perceived to offer tangible rewards and advancement.

A second motivation cluster reflects purpose-driven institutional improvement motivation. Many participants expressed a desire to contribute to school effectiveness, address systemic gaps, and improve student outcomes. These responses emphasized impact, reform, and organizational contribution rather than personal status. Participants described aspirations to strengthen instructional quality, close performance gaps, and modernize practices. This suggests that for many educators, leadership aspiration is linked to perceived agency and institutional stewardship rather than personal authority alone.

A related but distinct pattern can be described as student-centered moral motivation. Several respondents framed leadership ambition in terms of student welfare, academic achievement, and developmental support. References to literacy improvement, emotional needs, and student growth indicate that leadership is viewed as a mechanism for extending pedagogical influence beyond the classroom. Conceptually, this pattern is consistent with values-based and service-oriented leadership models commonly discussed in educational leadership literature.

Another important motivational pattern reflects institutional gap–response motivation. A subset of participants reported leadership interest emerging from perceived deficiencies in current leadership structures. Comments referencing weak decision-making, ineffective communication, or lack of vision suggest that leadership aspiration in these cases is reactive and problem-driven. Rather than being motivated primarily by advancement, these respondents appear motivated by perceived organizational need. This pattern is analytically significant because it frames leadership ambition as a corrective response to institutional dysfunction rather than a purely aspirational career goal.

Participants also identified structural enablement motivations, including access to professional development, policy influence, resource control, and reduced teaching load. These responses indicate that leadership roles are perceived not only as status positions but as structural platforms that enable broader organizational action. Technology integration leadership was mentioned by several respondents, suggesting that modernization and innovation opportunities function as emerging motivational drivers within contemporary school systems.

Taken together, these motivational patterns indicate that leadership aspiration among respondents is multi-dimensional, combining economic, moral, institutional, and structural drivers. Rather than representing a single motivational pathway, leadership interest appears to emerge from

the intersection of personal advancement goals, institutional commitment, perceived organizational need, and values-based educational purpose. This multi-layered motivation structure is consistent with leadership identity formation models, in which professional self-concept, institutional context, and perceived impact interact to shape advancement intention.

**Figure 2**

*Motivational Themes for Pursuing Leadership*

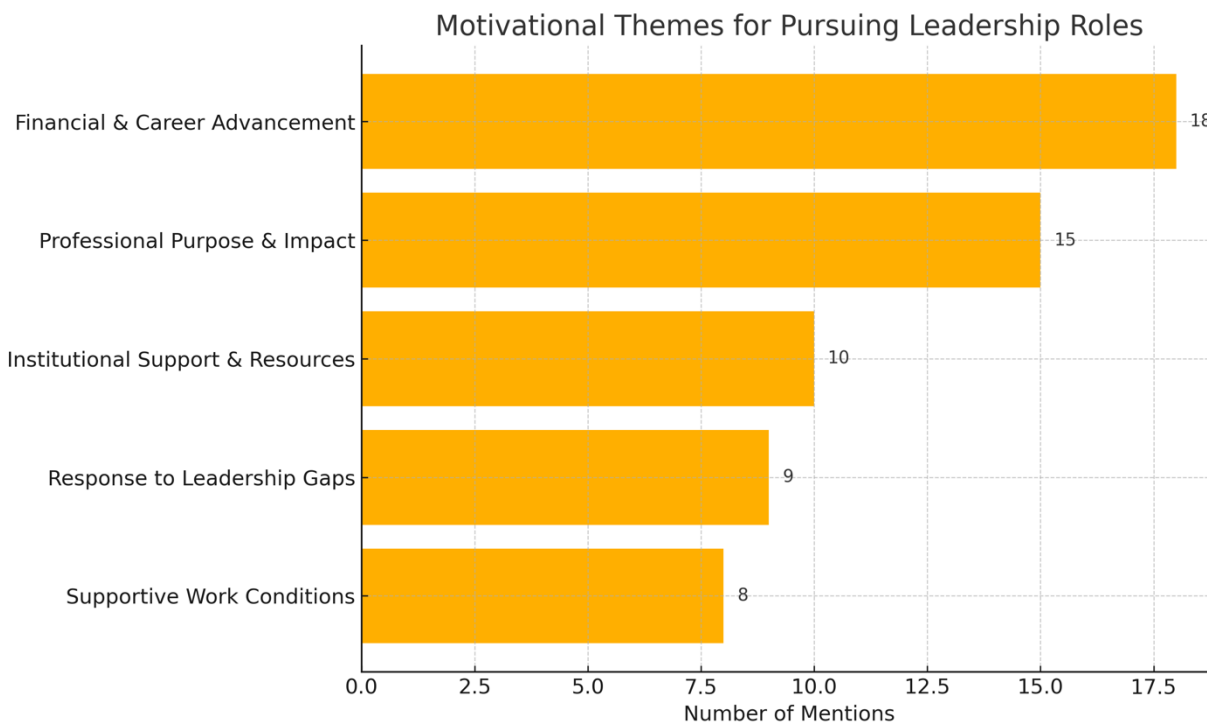


Figure 1 summarizes these motivational patterns and illustrates the conceptual spread across instrumental, values-driven, institutional, and structural drivers. The range and nuance in the responses indicate that leadership motivation among participants is not reducible to a single advancement pathway but instead reflects the interaction of individual professional goals, educator value systems, and perceived organizational realities. Motivational statements frequently combined personal advancement considerations with system-oriented concerns, suggesting that leadership aspiration is being constructed at the intersection of self-efficacy beliefs, professional responsibility, and institutional context rather than purely hierarchical ambition.

Importantly, the distribution of motivational drivers aligns with the study's conceptual framework, particularly the interaction between social values, institutional conditions, and perceived opportunity structures. Responses referencing student impact, institutional reform, and corrective leadership action indicate that leadership aspiration is often framed as a form of professional agency rather than status attainment. This framing is analytically significant because it suggests that leadership identity is shaped not only by career incentives but also by normative beliefs about responsibility, fairness, and institutional effectiveness, variables directly linked to the study's social-values dimension.

Although this section presents descriptive findings, the motivational patterns identified here provide interpretive grounding for Research Question 2, which examines the factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership. Several motivation clusters, particularly those centered on institutional gap response, corrective leadership intent, and reform-oriented aspiration, indicate that leadership interest is frequently triggered by perceived structural or cultural deficiencies rather than simple promotion desire. This pattern suggests that leadership aspiration may function, for some participants, as a response to perceived inequity, exclusion, or ineffective governance conditions within school systems.

These findings also foreshadow later analytic results showing how institutional norms and gendered expectations shape leadership pathways. When motivation is tied to overcoming systemic barriers or compensating for weak leadership structures, it indicates that aspiration is developing within constraint conditions rather than neutral opportunity environments. This strengthens the interpretive link between motivational drivers and the broader gendered leadership landscape examined throughout the chapter.

### **Barriers to Leadership Advancement**

This section presents descriptive responses from participants regarding perceived barriers to leadership, offering qualitative insight into how educators interpret and experience constraints on advancement. While these findings are not derived from statistical testing, they provide important thematic and interpretive context that supports later comparative and inferential analysis. Rather than functioning only as descriptive obstacles, the reported barriers reveal patterned perceptions about institutional structure, role demands, organizational culture, and gendered experience within leadership pathways.

Participants were asked to identify factors that may hinder their interest or motivation in pursuing leadership positions. Their responses cluster into several conceptual barrier categories rather than isolated concerns. One major barrier pattern can be described as an institutional–structural constraint. Multiple participants referenced administrative and policy-related challenges, using phrases such as “bureaucratic red tape,” “inefficiencies within our public sector,” and “restrictive administrative policies.” These responses indicate that leadership advancement is perceived not merely as competitive but procedurally obstructed. The emphasis on process barriers suggests that institutional structure itself is viewed as a gatekeeping mechanism, which aligns with organizational theory perspectives that identify bureaucratic complexity as a deterrent to leadership mobility.

A second barrier cluster reflects role-intensity and workload deterrence. Participants frequently described leadership positions as involving excessive workload and time burden, citing “unreasonable workload,” “demands of the position,” and “lengthy meetings.” These statements indicate that leadership roles are perceived as high-cost positions in terms of time, cognitive load, and work-life balance. This perception is analytically important because it reframes leadership avoidance not as a lack of ambition but as a rational cost–benefit evaluation. Within gender and

leadership literature, workload deterrence is often linked to unequal care expectations and role strain, making this barrier category particularly relevant to the study's gender-participation focus.

A third barrier pattern can be described as a relational–organizational climate constraint. Participants referenced interpersonal and communication difficulties, including “lack of cooperation,” “poor communication with stakeholders,” and challenging interactions with “persons in authority.” These responses point to perceived cultural and relational friction within leadership environments. Rather than structural policy barriers alone, participants identify organizational climate as a discouraging factor. This suggests that leadership aspiration is shaped not only by formal opportunity structures but also by anticipated relational dynamics and perceived institutional support culture.

Gender-related barriers, although less frequently stated explicitly, were nonetheless present and analytically significant. One participant directly reported “victimization because of gender,” while others referred indirectly to inequitable treatment and workplace bias. Even when not numerically dominant, such statements carry interpretive weight because they indicate that gendered experience remains part of the perceived leadership landscape. In qualitative barrier analysis, low-frequency but high-salience responses often signal structurally sensitive issues rather than marginal concerns.

Another barrier cluster reflects role-satisfaction and contribution-at-level orientation. Several participants expressed satisfaction with their current professional roles, using statements such as “I prefer to make a difference at this level I am at.” These responses should not be interpreted simply as a lack of ambition but rather as alternative professional identity positioning. Some educators appear to define impact through classroom or mid-level contribution rather than

hierarchical leadership. Conceptually, this reflects a non-positional leadership identity model, where influence is decoupled from formal authority roles.

Participants also identified mobility and change-resistance barriers, referencing “lack of mobility in education” and resistance from “persons who refuse to embrace change.” These responses indicate perceived stagnation and cultural inertia within institutional systems. Such perceptions suggest that leadership advancement is not viewed as a dynamic pathway but as constrained by entrenched practices and resistance to innovation.

### Figure 3

*Reported Barriers To Pursuing Leadership Roles*

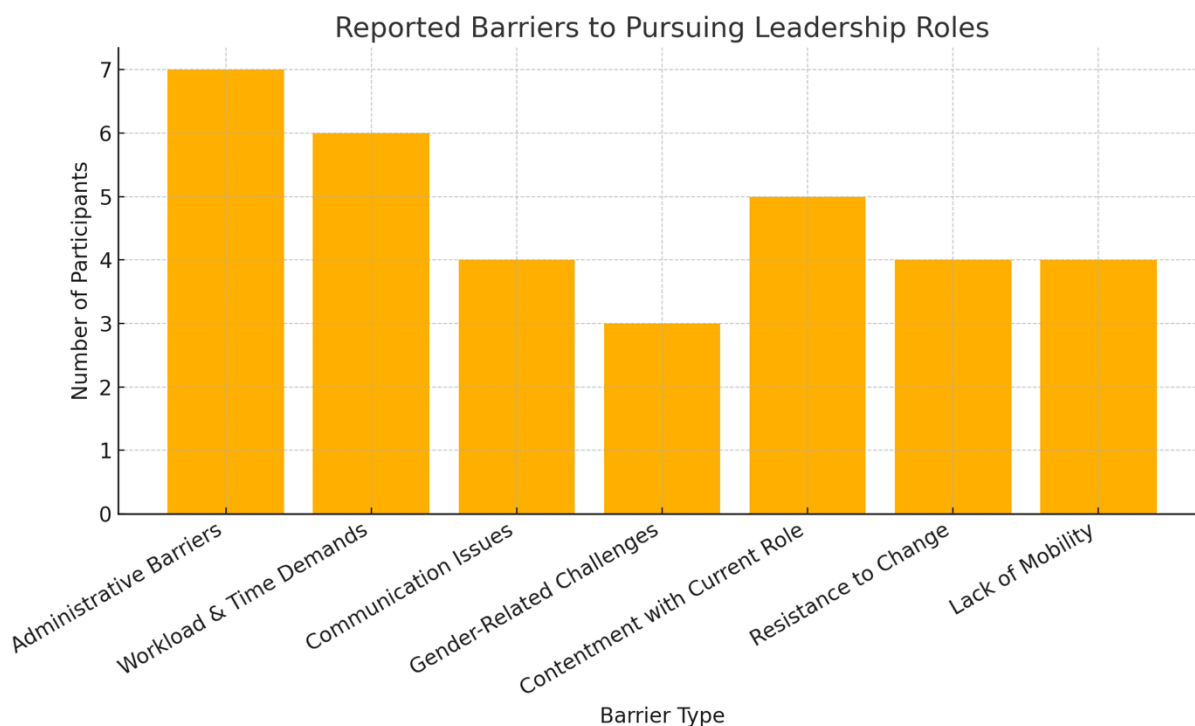


Figure 2 presents the overall distribution of reported barriers. While several respondents identified one or more challenges, others indicated that they did not perceive any barriers to leadership advancement. The presence of both barrier recognition and barrier absence responses suggests that perceived constraint is not uniform but mediated by institutional context, personal experience, and role positioning.

Importantly, these barrier patterns align closely with the study's conceptual framework variables, particularly institutional structures and social-value influences. Perceptions of red tape, workload burden, relational climate difficulty, and gendered treatment indicate that leadership access is experienced as structurally and culturally mediated rather than purely merit-based. When advancement is perceived as procedurally opaque, relationally difficult, or normatively biased, motivational pathways are likely to narrow.

Quantitative analysis presented later in the chapter revealed a statistically significant difference between participants from primary and secondary schools regarding perceptions of equal leadership opportunities. Teachers in primary schools were more likely to believe that gender equity in leadership access does not exist, possibly linked to longstanding institutional patterns such as historically male-dominated principalship at that level. This cross-level difference strengthens the interpretation that barrier perception is institutionally patterned rather than solely individually constructed.

Taken together, these findings provide interpretive grounding for Research Question 2, which examines the factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership. The barrier typology identified here, structural, workload-based, relational, gendered, identity-based, and cultural, reflects the interaction of institutional practices and social norms that shape leadership participation. These patterns support the broader argument that underrepresentation is not produced by a single constraint but by layered institutional and cultural mechanisms operating simultaneously.

### **Gender and Leadership Perceptions**

This section presents descriptive findings related to participants' perceptions and experiences of gender in educational leadership, while also examining the interpretive patterns that

emerge beneath surface-level responses. Although the results reported here are descriptive rather than inferential, they provide important conceptual insight into how educators interpret gender roles, leadership effectiveness, workplace legitimacy, and institutional culture. These perception patterns are directly relevant to the study's social values and institutional framework variables and contribute to a deeper interpretation of Research Questions 1 and 2.

When asked whether gender had influenced their opportunities for career advancement, the majority of participants, 31 out of 33, reported that gender had not played a role in their personal experiences, with only two respondents indicating perceived gender impact on advancement. At face value, this suggests a perceived environment of equal opportunity. However, perception-of-fairness responses must be interpreted cautiously. In gender-structure research, low reported discrimination does not necessarily indicate the absence of bias but may instead reflect normalization of institutional patterns, indirect discrimination mechanisms, or threshold effects in what respondents classify as discriminatory. Thus, the dominant "no gender impact" response pattern indicates perceived procedural neutrality but does not by itself negate structural inequality.

In contrast, when participants were asked about leadership effectiveness in relation to gender, response patterns shifted. Eighteen participants stated that they believe females make better leaders, while the remainder either expressed no gender preference or stated that leadership effectiveness is gender-independent. Those favoring female leadership frequently cited relational and communicative traits such as empathy, collaboration, adaptability, and strong communication skills. These attributes correspond closely with transformational and relational leadership models in educational leadership theory. However, these responses also reflect gender-coded leadership expectations, suggesting that leadership effectiveness is still being interpreted through socially constructed gender-trait frameworks rather than purely performance-based criteria.

A smaller subset of responses drew on contrasting gender stereotypes, associating male leaders with rigidity or authoritarianism and female leaders with emotional intelligence and flexibility. This polarity indicates that gender schemas remain active in leadership perception. Even when expressed positively toward female leadership, such schemas reinforce trait-based gender differentiation, which can both support and constrain leadership legitimacy depending on context. From a social-values perspective, this indicates that gendered leadership narratives continue to operate symbolically within professional interpretation frameworks.

Participants were also asked about direct and observed experiences of gender-based discrimination. While the majority (26 of 33) reported that they had not personally experienced sexism in the workplace, seven participants reported that they had. These responses included references to gender-based victimization and unequal treatment linked to religious or cultural norms. Although numerically smaller, these accounts carry analytic significance because they identify lived instances of bias within institutional settings. Qualitative research on inequality emphasizes that low-frequency discrimination reports can still indicate structurally meaningful patterns, particularly when they reference legitimacy undermining or authority dismissal.

Observed discrimination responses showed a similar distribution pattern, with 27 participants reporting no observed discrimination and six reporting that they had witnessed it. One reported case involved a female leader whose decisions were dismissed as hormonally driven, illustrating a classic delegitimization stereotype that undermines female authority. This type of symbolic diminishment is consistent with documented gendered leadership bias mechanisms and represents a form of micro-level authority erosion rather than formal discrimination.

When asked about difficulties working with leaders of the opposite gender, twelve participants reported such challenges, while twenty-one did not. This mixed distribution suggests

that gender-relational tension is context-dependent rather than universal. Importantly, relational difficulty responses often reflect organizational climate and communication culture as much as gender difference itself, indicating an interaction effect between gender and institutional environment.

Perceptions of social values and leadership norms showed stronger consensus. Twenty-three participants affirmed that societal norms and expectations influence how leadership is viewed in educational contexts. References to caregiving roles, authority expectations, and culturally defined legitimacy indicate that respondents recognize leadership perception as socially mediated rather than purely meritocratic. This response pattern strongly supports the study's social-values dimension and confirms that participants themselves perceive leadership legitimacy as culturally shaped.

Participants were also asked whether they compare themselves to colleagues of the opposite gender regarding leadership opportunities. Most respondents (29 of 33) reported that they do not engage in such comparisons. This may indicate either low perceived competition across gender lines or a norm against explicit gender comparison in professional self-assessment. However, the absence of comparison behavior does not necessarily imply the absence of comparative evaluation at institutional decision-making levels.

Notably, all 33 participants reported confidence in their ability to undertake leadership responsibilities regardless of gender. This universal self-efficacy response is analytically important. It indicates that internal leadership confidence is not the primary limiting factor in participation. Instead, any underrepresentation patterns are more likely linked to structural, cultural, or institutional mediators rather than self-perceived capability. This distinction aligns with gender

leadership research that differentiates between self-efficacy barriers and opportunity-structure barriers.

Taken together, these perception patterns reveal a layered interpretive landscape. Participants simultaneously report perceived fairness in advancement opportunity, express gendered leadership preferences, acknowledge social-value influence, and recognize instances of symbolic bias. This combination suggests that gender inequality in leadership is not experienced primarily as overt exclusion but as culturally embedded and symbolically mediated differentiation. These findings contribute directly to the broader analysis of value-driven leadership norms and institutional participation patterns developed in the subsequent sections addressing Research Question 1.

### **Perceptions of Equal Opportunity**

Participants were asked whether they believe equal opportunities exist for both genders to pursue leadership roles in the education sector. Of the 33 respondents, 24 indicated that they believe such opportunities do exist, while nine reported that they do not share this view. At a descriptive level, this distribution suggests that the dominant perception among respondents is that leadership opportunity structures are formally gender-neutral. However, closer examination of the accompanying explanations reveals important distinctions between perceived formal equality and experienced or practical equality.

Several comments from respondents who affirmed equality emphasized the formal openness of leadership roles. Statements such as “the education sector has equal opportunities for everyone regardless of gender” and “both genders are accounted for” indicate that equality is often interpreted in procedural or policy terms, meaning that positions are not explicitly restricted by

gender. This interpretation reflects a rule-based or structural definition of equality focused on access eligibility rather than outcome patterns or advancement conditions.

In contrast, responses from participants who did not perceive equal opportunity often introduced contextual qualifiers that complicate the formal-equality interpretation. Some respondents pointed to the need for greater support or incentives, particularly for male teachers, to enter and remain in the education system and progress toward leadership roles. These responses indicate that opportunity perception is being evaluated not only in terms of policy openness but also participation patterns and pipeline dynamics. In this framing, unequal representation is interpreted as a signal of unequal effective opportunity, even when formal eligibility is equal.

Other responses suggested that opportunity may exist in principle but is moderated in practice by social expectations and personal-role responsibilities. References to caregiving roles, workload balance, and professional sustainability indicate that respondents recognize that opportunity structures are socially mediated. This distinction between theoretical access and practical accessibility aligns with opportunity-structure theory, which differentiates between nominal availability and usable opportunity. From a social-values perspective, this suggests that leadership pathways are perceived as culturally conditioned rather than purely procedurally determined.

Several participants also emphasized individual character traits, such as “character and integrity”, as the decisive factors in leadership advancement. While this merit-based framing appears gender-neutral, it reflects an individualistic interpretation of leadership mobility that may under-recognize structural or cultural constraints. In leadership perception research, merit-centered explanations often coexist with systemic inequality patterns, indicating that fairness

beliefs and inequality realities can operate simultaneously within participant perception frameworks.

The coexistence of majority equality perception alongside a substantial minority reporting inequality is analytically significant. It indicates that leadership opportunity is not experienced uniformly across respondents and may vary by institutional context, role position, gender experience, or career stage. This perception split supports the study's broader finding that leadership access is interpreted through both structural-policy and social-cultural lenses rather than through a single equality framework.

Taken together, these responses suggest that participants distinguish, sometimes implicitly, between formal equality of access and socially mediated equality of advancement. This distinction is central to interpreting underrepresentation patterns, as it indicates that perceived fairness at the policy level does not necessarily translate into perceived fairness at the experience level. These perception patterns contribute directly to the study's investigation of how social values and systemic factors, particularly institutional conditions, shape leadership participation outcomes.

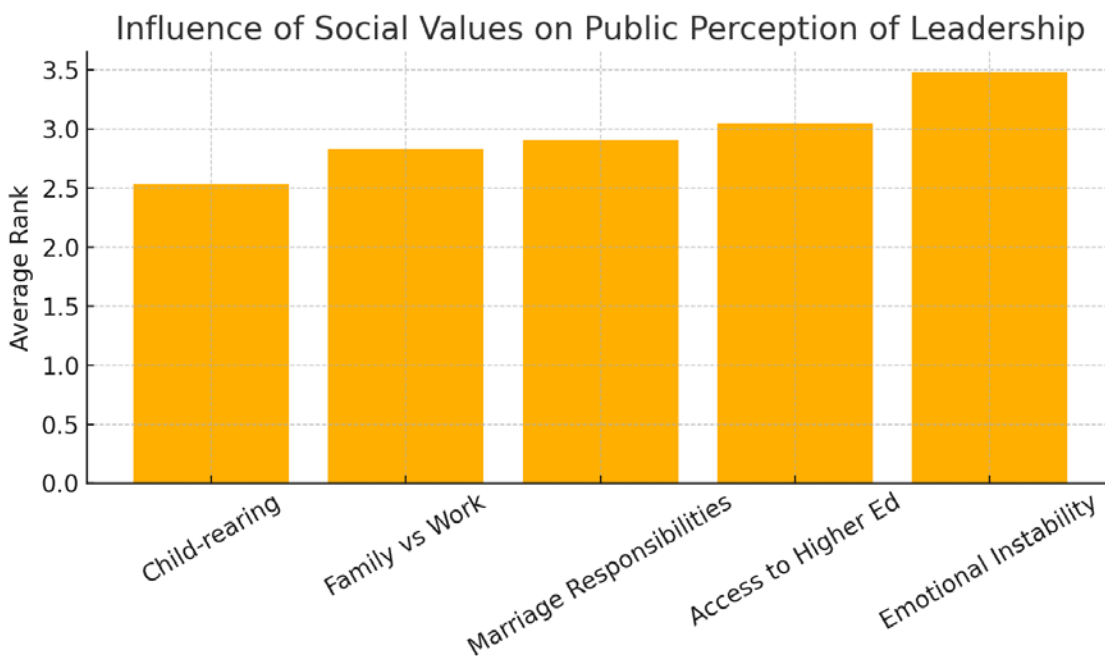
### **RQ1: What social values influence female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago?**

This section addresses Research Question 1: What social values influence female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago, using primarily qualitative thematic analysis of open-ended survey responses, supported by descriptive statistics and independent-samples t-test results where applicable. The qualitative findings are derived from participants' written survey explanations rather than interviews and are interpreted using an inductive thematic approach aligned with the study's conceptual framework. Together, these results provide an analytically grounded account of how social values and systemic factors,

particularly institutional norms and role expectations, shape perceptions of leadership access and suitability. Rather than treating social values as abstract cultural ideas, this analysis examines how they are expressed through educator perceptions, ranking patterns, and explanatory comments linked to leadership participation.

#### Figure 4

*Ranked Influence Of Societal Values On Leadership Perceptions*



To examine these influences, participants were asked to rank the extent to which selected social values were perceived to shape public evaluations of leadership in education. The results are presented in Figure 3 and Table 2. The ranking exercise was designed to operationalize social values in a measurable form while allowing interpretation through participant meaning-making. As shown in Figure 3, child-rearing responsibilities were ranked as the most influential social value shaping leadership perceptions, followed by the perceived need to choose between family and work. Marriage responsibilities and access to higher education followed as secondary influences. In contrast, the category labeled perceived emotional instability stereotype received the

highest mean ranking score, indicating that respondents viewed it as the least influential among the listed factors. These ranked patterns provide a structured descriptive baseline for interpreting how gender-linked social expectations are believed to affect leadership legitimacy and opportunity within the education sector.

In addition to the descriptive ranking patterns, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine whether participant gender was associated with statistically significant differences in how these social values were rated. The results of this analysis are summarized in Table 3. The statistical test indicated no significant gender-based difference in overall perceptions of the listed social values ( $p > 0.05$ ). However, closer descriptive inspection of the response distribution shows patterned variation that remains analytically informative even in the absence of statistical significance. Given the small number of male respondents in the sample, these descriptive differences are interpreted cautiously and are used to inform qualitative interpretation rather than to support inferential claims about gender-wide perception differences.

**Table 3***Independent T-Test Of Gender And Social Values On Public Perceptions Of Leadership*

<b>Social values</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>sig</b>
Child care	Male	5	1.8	1.30	31	1.33	0.20
	Female	28	2.6	1.31			
Marriage responsibilities	Male	5	2.60	0.55	31	0.70	0.24
	Female	28	3.60	1.31			
Access to higher education	Male	5	3.80	1.64	31	1.1	0.17
	Female	28	2.96	1.60			
Having to choose between family and work	Male	5	2.80	0.84	31	0.2	0.44
	Female	28	2.90	1.73			
Perceived emotional instability	Male	5	4.0	1.73	31	0.67	0.25
	Female	28	3.5	1.45			

$p < 0.05$

Specifically, although both male and female participants most frequently identified childcare responsibilities as highly influential in shaping leadership perceptions, a larger proportion of male respondents endorsed this factor relative to their representation in the sample. Four out of five male participants rated childcare influence highly, compared with approximately half of the female respondents. A similar descriptive pattern appeared for marriage responsibility, where endorsement levels were lower overall but still unevenly distributed across gender groups. While these differences do not meet statistical significance thresholds, they suggest that caregiving-related social values remain highly salient across gender perspectives and may be interpreted not only as personal constraints but as culturally recognized leadership filters. These descriptive tendencies support the interpretation that caregiving expectations function as a shared social-value reference point in leadership evaluation, even when respondents differ in how strongly they weigh its effect.

Taken together, the ranking patterns and descriptive response trends indicate that gender-linked caregiving expectations occupy a central place in how leadership legitimacy is socially evaluated within the education context. When interpreted through the study's conceptual framework, these patterns suggest that social values related to family responsibility and role

prioritization operate alongside systemic factors, particularly institutional expectations about availability and commitment, to shape perceived leadership suitability. In this analysis, theoretical perspectives on gender and leadership are used as interpretive lenses rather than as direct explanatory proof, helping situate participant response patterns within established scholarship on gendered leadership perception. Prior research has shown that leadership evaluation is often filtered through culturally embedded assumptions about gender roles and authority (Acker, 2009; Harquail, 2008; Ridgeway, 2011), and the present survey findings are broadly consistent with those interpretive models.

Open-ended survey responses further indicate that, although women constitute the numerical majority within the teaching workforce, respondents perceive upward leadership mobility as shaped by durable socio-cultural expectations and institutionalized norms. Participants frequently pointed to patterns in which senior leadership roles are still more commonly associated with men, especially at upper administrative levels. These responses suggest that leadership authority continues to be symbolically linked with traditionally masculine-coded traits such as decisiveness, dominance, and command presence. From a social-values perspective, this indicates that leadership is not interpreted as a neutral functional role but as a culturally coded position carrying gendered expectations of behavior and legitimacy. This perception pattern aligns with gender status belief theory (Harquail, 2008; Ridgeway, 2011), which proposes that authority judgments are often shaped by culturally reproduced competence assumptions.

Across multiple open-ended survey comments, respondents indicated that leadership expectations within school environments continue to reflect historically male-centered models of authority and governance. Participants frequently referenced perceived norms that equate effective leadership with behavioral traits culturally coded as masculine, including firmness, emotional

restraint, and directive control. Several respondents noted that men are often assumed to be more immediately suitable for senior leadership roles, even where qualifications are comparable. Statements such as “men are automatically considered for principal roles” and “a male voice commands more respect” illustrate how symbolic authority cues remain gender-associated in perception. These responses suggest that social values linked to gender and authority continue to operate within leadership evaluation processes and interact with systemic factors such as hiring culture, promotion signaling, and informal endorsement practices.

Respondents also indicated that these expectations are reproduced through institutional norms and everyday professional feedback rather than through formal written policy. Open-ended responses suggest that leadership legitimacy is often assessed against behavior standards that align with traditionally masculine leadership scripts. Several participants reported being advised to appear “less emotional” or to “toughen up” when pursuing or acting in leadership roles, indicating that acceptable leadership behavior is implicitly benchmarked against gendered expectations. From an interpretive standpoint, these responses suggest that systemic factors, particularly organizational culture and informal evaluation norms, function as behavioral filters that shape how leadership readiness is judged. This pattern is consistent with gendered-organization theory perspectives (Acker, 2009), which describe how apparently neutral institutions can reproduce gender-coded expectations through routine practice and evaluation language.

Another major social-value pattern reflected in participant responses concerns expectations that women prioritize caregiving responsibilities over career advancement. Open-ended survey responses indicate that respondents perceive family-role expectations as continuing to shape leadership opportunity and leadership evaluation within schools. Participants pointed to assumptions about availability, time commitment, and role conflict when women pursue leadership

posts, suggesting that the leadership pathway is not interpreted as socially neutral. Within the study's conceptual framework, this pattern reflects the interaction between social values and systemic factors, particularly where institutional advancement pathways implicitly reward uninterrupted career trajectories, extended availability, and high visibility. Several responses indicated that leadership consideration may be informally filtered through assumptions about domestic responsibility, meaning that women's leadership interest and suitability can be assessed through culturally loaded expectations rather than solely through qualifications and performance.

Importantly, participants did not frame caregiving responsibilities as neutral constraints applied equally across genders. Instead, responses suggest that similar family circumstances may be interpreted differently for men and women, with women more likely to be viewed as constrained by caregiving expectations. Participants described being overlooked for leadership opportunities due to assumptions about domestic responsibilities or future family plans, indicating that caregiving norms operate as evaluative signals rather than merely practical time limitations. This pattern is consistent with scholarship on the "motherhood penalty," in which women's perceived or actual caregiving responsibilities can translate into professional disadvantage (Budig & England, 2001). In the present findings, caregiving expectations appear not only as workload realities but as socially interpreted indicators that shape perceptions of commitment, legitimacy, and leadership readiness.

Another social-value pattern reflected in participant responses concerns the relative undervaluing of leadership traits culturally associated with femininity, including empathy, collaboration, and relational awareness. Open-ended survey responses indicate that participants perceive leadership evaluation systems as favoring assertiveness, managerial control, and directive efficiency over relational and participatory leadership approaches. Several respondents expressed

concern that leadership training and performance assessment frameworks appear to privilege command-oriented styles while giving less recognition to listening, consensus-building, and emotional intelligence. This perception aligns with prior educational leadership scholarship suggesting that relational leadership competencies often contribute significantly to school effectiveness but are not always equally rewarded within formal evaluation structures (Coleman, 2003). Interpreted through the study framework, this pattern indicates that social values surrounding “strong leadership” remain partially gender-coded and interact with systemic factors such as evaluation criteria and training design.

Survey responses also suggest that gendered leadership expectations are not experienced only as external judgments but may also be internalized over time through professional socialization and representation patterns. Several participants indicated that limited exposure to female leaders earlier in their careers influenced how they initially understood leadership identity and possibility. Respondents referenced the historical visibility of male principals and senior leaders and noted that this representation pattern shaped early leadership expectations. One participant explicitly recalled that all principals encountered during early schooling were men and that female leadership visibility came later in their professional experience. From an interpretive perspective, these responses indicate that social values operate not only through institutional practice but also through symbolic representation and role-model availability. This pattern is consistent with gender socialization perspectives and symbolic interactionist interpretations of professional identity formation, where repeated exposure patterns shape perceived role fit and leadership self-concept.

Open-ended survey responses also highlight the symbolic dimension of leadership legitimacy, particularly how gender shapes first-impression role recognition within school

environments. Participants indicated that female leaders are sometimes misidentified or not immediately recognized as authority figures, suggesting that leadership status continues to carry gender-coded expectations. These responses indicate that leadership is interpreted not only as a formal role but also as a symbolic category shaped by social values about who typically occupies positions of authority. From the perspective of gendered-organization theory (Acker, 2009), leadership operates simultaneously as a functional responsibility and a culturally signaled identity position. The survey data suggest that when leadership imagery remains historically masculine, female authority may encounter additional legitimacy-testing interactions before being accepted as normative.

At the same time, participant responses indicate that social values surrounding leadership are not static and are subject to gradual challenge and renegotiation. Several respondents noted that newer entrants to the profession and younger educators appear more open to diverse leadership models and less tied to traditional gender expectations. However, these perceived shifts were frequently described as occurring alongside persistent institutional inertia. Survey comments suggest that even where formal policies endorse gender equity, informal organizational culture and legacy leadership patterns may change more slowly. This contrast between policy-level reform and culture-level continuity illustrates how systemic factors, particularly informal norms, promotion traditions, and leadership succession habits, can moderate the practical impact of equity-oriented policy statements. Interpreted through the study framework, this indicates that value change and structural change do not necessarily progress at the same pace.

Open-ended survey responses further indicate that access to leadership development opportunities is perceived as unevenly encouraged and socially mediated rather than purely merit-driven. Participants suggested that advancement pathways are influenced not only by formal

eligibility criteria but also by informal signals of encouragement, sponsorship, and assumed readiness. Several responses indicated that male teachers are sometimes more readily encouraged by administrators to pursue leadership training or advancement roles through informal conversations, recommendations, or opportunity invitations. In contrast, female teachers were described as more often needing to self-nominate or independently initiate leadership pursuit. Interpreted through the study framework, this pattern reflects the interaction between social values and systemic factors, where informal encouragement practices operate as gatekeeping mechanisms that shape who enters leadership pipelines.

Participants also indicated that the design and emphasis of leadership development programs may themselves reflect and reproduce traditional leadership norms. Survey responses suggest that training materials and evaluation criteria are often perceived as emphasizing decisiveness, control, and rapid decision authority more than collaborative or relational leadership competencies. Several respondents expressed concern that leadership preparation spaces do not consistently engage with gender, leadership identity, or alternative leadership styles as explicit topics of reflection. From an interpretive perspective, this suggests that systemic factors, particularly training frameworks and competency models, may implicitly reinforce established leadership archetypes rather than actively broadening them. This perception aligns with the study's social-values lens, indicating that leadership preparation environments can function as cultural transmission sites as well as skill-development spaces.

Survey responses also pointed to the continued influence of informal leadership networks operating alongside formal institutional structures. Several participants described what they labeled a "boys' club" dynamic, referring to unofficial relationship networks where mentorship, endorsement, and leadership opportunity signaling occur outside formal processes. These informal

spaces were described as influential in shaping advancement pathways, alliance formation, and decision influence. Responses suggest that access to these networks may depend on time availability, social proximity, and cultural fit, which can interact with gendered expectations and caregiving responsibilities. Interpreted through the study framework, this pattern reflects how systemic factors, particularly informal organizational practices, can moderate the practical accessibility of leadership pathways even where formal policy structures appear neutral.

Participants further indicated that increases in numerical female representation do not always translate into equivalent decision authority or institutional influence. Survey comments suggest that in some cases, women are appointed to leadership roles that carry title recognition but constrained operational power. One respondent characterized this pattern by stating, “They’ll give you the title but not the power,” highlighting a perceived distinction between symbolic inclusion and substantive authority. From an interpretive standpoint, this distinction is analytically important because it indicates that representation alone is not viewed by participants as sufficient evidence of equity. Instead, respondents appear to evaluate leadership inclusion in terms of functional decision capacity, resource control, and organizational voice, all of which are shaped by systemic factors as well as social values regarding authority and legitimacy.

Across the combined ranking data, descriptive statistics, and open-ended survey responses, a consistent interpretive pattern emerges: social values related to gender, authority, caregiving, and professional legitimacy continue to shape how leadership participation is perceived and evaluated within the education sector. Participants’ responses indicate that these values are reproduced through everyday institutional culture, informal advancement signals, training norms, and symbolic leadership expectations rather than through explicit exclusionary rules. Female educators pursuing leadership roles, therefore, appear to be navigating not only formal qualification

requirements but also socially mediated expectations about behavior, availability, authority style, and role identity. From the perspective of the conceptual framework, this reflects the layered interaction between social values and systemic factors, where cultural meaning systems and organizational practices operate together to influence leadership participation pathways.

### **Synthesis of Findings for Research Question 1**

The integrated findings for Research Question 1 indicate that female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago is influenced by a cluster of recurring social values related to gender roles, authority, caregiving, and leadership legitimacy. Across descriptive rankings, comparative tests, and thematic survey responses, several values emerged consistently: the prioritization of child-rearing and family responsibility, the cultural association of authority with masculine behavioral traits, gendered expectations of leadership style, stereotype-based judgments of competence, and the symbolic visibility of male leadership models. These values operate not as formal rules but as socially embedded expectations that shape how leadership is perceived, evaluated, and pursued within educational settings.

The findings suggest that these social values influence participation through identifiable mechanisms. Caregiving and family-priority norms shape perceived availability and willingness to pursue leadership roles. Masculinity–authority associations influence perceived leadership legitimacy and credibility judgments. Gendered leadership-style expectations affect how identical behaviors are interpreted when demonstrated by women versus men. Representation patterns influence aspiration and leadership self-concept by shaping what participants perceive as attainable. Together, these value-driven mechanisms affect both opportunity perception and participation confidence, even where formal eligibility criteria appear gender-neutral.

Interpreted through the study's conceptual framework, these patterns demonstrate how social values function as moderating forces between formal leadership structures and individual participation decisions. The results align with gender-and-leadership theory perspectives that describe leadership as a socially coded role rather than a purely functional one (e.g., Acker, Harquail, Ridgeway), referenced here as interpretive lenses. Within the Trinidad and Tobago education context, where women comprise the majority of the teaching workforce but leadership symbolism remains uneven, these social values act as filters on recognition, encouragement, and advancement signaling. RQ1 is therefore answered by the finding that female leadership participation is shaped not only by access to roles but by culturally embedded value systems that influence how leadership is defined, who is perceived as fitting it, and how women evaluate their own leadership pathways.

**RQ2: What factors lead to inequality and underrepresentation of women in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago?**

Research Question 2 examines what factors contribute to inequality and the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. Based on the survey findings, the observed underrepresentation is best interpreted as being associated with interacting social values and systemic factors rather than a single isolated cause. Participant responses indicate that cultural expectations, institutional practices, and role-related constraints operate together in ways that can limit leadership participation pathways for women. Many of these influences appear embedded in routine organizational norms and professional expectations, which makes them less visible as formal barriers but still influential in shaping advancement outcomes. To address this research question, participants were asked to identify both motivating

and demotivating factors related to leadership pursuit, allowing barrier patterns and participation constraints to be examined through both structured responses and open-ended explanations.

**Table 4**

*Independent T-test of School Type and Leadership Opportunities*

<b>Leadership Opportunities</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>sig</b>
Difficulties working with colleagues of the opposite sex	Primary	14	1.64	0.49	31	0.36	0.72
	Secondary	19	1.58	0.51			
Confidence to undertake leadership responsibilities	Primary	14	1.0	0.0	31	0.86	0.33
	Secondary	19	1.1	0.23			
Equal opportunities for both genders for leadership	Primary	14	1.5	0.52	31	2.6	0.01
	Secondary	19	1.1	0.32			

$p < 0.05$

The analysis integrates descriptive statistics, comparative tests, and thematic interpretation of open-ended survey responses to examine how these factors operate across contexts. Table 4 shows that there was no statistically significant difference by school type in reported difficulty collaborating with colleagues of the opposite sex or in self-confidence regarding leadership responsibilities. However, a statistically significant difference was observed in perceptions of whether equal leadership opportunities exist for both genders across school types ( $t(31) = 2.6$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ). Respondents from secondary schools were more likely to view leadership opportunities as gender-equal than respondents from primary schools. Interpreted cautiously, this pattern suggests that institutional context, as a systemic factor, shapes opportunity perception. This difference may be connected to historically embedded leadership representation patterns at the primary level, which respondents referenced in their explanations. Descriptive comparisons also indicate that female participants were more likely than male participants to perceive unequal leadership opportunity, a trend that is interpretively meaningful even where subgroup sizes differ.

### **Cultural Expectations and Gendered Norms**

A central theme emerging from the survey data is the continuing influence of cultural expectations and gendered social norms on leadership participation and advancement. Open-ended

survey responses indicate that many participants perceive educational leadership as still symbolically associated with masculinity, authority distance, and directive control. Several respondents indicated that when leadership roles, such as principal or supervisor, are imagined, they are often associated with traditionally masculine-coded behavioral traits. One female respondent noted, "When people think of a principal or supervisor, they still picture a man, someone strict, assertive, and distant." This response illustrates how leadership imagery operates as a social-value construct, shaping expectations before formal evaluation occurs. Participants' comments suggest that these expectations are not limited to community perception but are also experienced within school-level institutional culture, indicating interaction between social values and systemic factors.

Survey responses further suggest that gender-role socialization patterns continue to influence how educators are positioned and evaluated within leadership pathways. Participants indicated that female educators are often informally associated with caregiving, pastoral, and supportive roles, while authority and disciplinary leadership functions are more readily attributed to men. One participant reported, "Even when I ran the department, the male teacher was still seen as the real leader." Interpreted analytically, this pattern indicates that role legitimacy may be filtered through gender-role expectations rather than role performance alone. This perception pattern is consistent with gender-role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), referenced here as an interpretive lens, which proposes that leadership evaluations are often shaped by alignment, or misalignment, between gender stereotypes and leadership stereotypes.

In addition to externally applied expectations, responses indicate that gendered norms may also influence leadership self-perception and aspiration through representation patterns and symbolic visibility. Several participants indicated that the historical scarcity of women in senior

leadership roles affected how leadership possibilities were imagined early in their careers. Respondents referenced not encountering female principals or senior leaders during formative professional stages. One respondent summarized this dynamic by stating, "You don't aspire to what you never see." From an interpretive standpoint, this pattern suggests that symbolic representation functions as a participation mediator, where visibility influences perceived attainability. This interpretation aligns with symbolic interactionist perspectives, which emphasize that professional identity and role aspiration are shaped through repeated exposure to socially validated role models and authority symbols rather than through formal eligibility criteria alone.

### **Institutional Structures and Informal Power Networks**

Another major factor associated with inequality and underrepresentation in leadership participation relates to institutional structures and the operation of informal power networks within schools. Open-ended survey responses indicate that, although formal policy language often emphasizes merit-based selection and equal opportunity, participants perceive advancement processes as partly shaped by informal endorsement patterns and relationship-based signaling. Respondents suggested that leadership selection is not always experienced as fully transparent and may involve informal conversations, sponsorship cues, and administrator preference channels that function alongside formal criteria. From the perspective of the study framework, this pattern reflects the interaction between systemic factors, particularly institutional practices, and social values regarding leadership fit and trust.

Several participants described perceived disparities in how informal recommendation pathways operate across gender. One respondent stated, "They say everyone has a fair shot, but there's a lot that happens behind the scenes. Recommendations, nods of approval, those don't go to women as often." This perception highlights how informal validation mechanisms can function

as gatekeeping structures within leadership pipelines. Prior leadership research has described similar dynamics as informal or “hidden” leadership pathways (Lumby & Coleman, 2007), referenced here as an interpretive lens rather than a direct explanatory claim. Within the present survey findings, these responses suggest that advancement opportunity is perceived as partly mediated by access to informal influence channels rather than determined solely by documented qualification and performance metrics.

Participants also indicated that access to preparatory or visibility-enhancing roles may be unevenly distributed. Survey responses suggest that acting roles and mid-level leadership assignments, such as year head, department coordinator, or acting principal, are perceived by some respondents as more frequently offered to male teachers. One respondent reported, "He had less experience than I, but he was the one chosen to act as principal when ours retired." Such responses indicate that credibility-building assignments are viewed as important stepping stones in leadership progression and that perceived inequality in access to these roles can have cumulative advancement effects. Participants’ explanations frequently referenced confidence judgments, availability assumptions, and leadership-style preferences as justification criteria, which respondents interpreted as being shaped by gender-coded expectations. Interpreted analytically, this suggests that systemic factors, particularly informal assignment practices, interact with social values about authority and leadership style to influence progression pathways.

### **Exclusion from Mentorship and Sponsorship**

Access to mentorship and sponsorship emerged in the survey responses as another factor associated with unequal leadership progression pathways. Participants’ structured and open-ended responses indicate that mentorship, defined here as active professional guidance and developmental support, is unevenly experienced across the sample. A substantial portion of

respondents reported not having had a mentor who actively supported their leadership development. In total, twenty respondents indicated that they had never experienced sustained mentorship linked to professional advancement. Within the study framework, this pattern is interpreted as a systemic factor because mentorship access often operates through institutional culture and leadership network structures rather than through formal assignment processes.

Open-ended responses suggest that mentorship relationships are perceived as influenced by comfort, familiarity, and informal affinity patterns. One participant noted, "There are very few women in senior positions, and the men rarely take us under their wing. They mentor who they're comfortable with, and that's usually other men." This perception indicates that mentorship access may be shaped by gender-homophily tendencies, the tendency for senior leaders to guide those perceived as socially or professionally similar, rather than by structured equity mechanisms. Interpreted analytically, this reflects the interaction between social values about trust and leadership fit and systemic factors related to informal professional network formation.

Participants also distinguished between mentorship and sponsorship, emphasizing that advancement often depends not only on advice and guidance but also on active advocacy by individuals in positions of authority. Sponsorship, where senior leaders publicly endorse or recommend candidates for advancement, was described by respondents as more limited and more closely tied to existing power structures. One educator summarized this dynamic by stating, "It's not just about training, it's about being seen, trusted, and spoken for." From an interpretive standpoint, these responses suggest that when institutional authority is concentrated within a narrow leadership demographic, sponsorship flows may follow similar patterns, thereby reinforcing participation inequality. This theme aligns with the study's focus on how systemic

factors and socially mediated trust networks influence leadership access beyond formal qualification pathways.

### **Work-Life Imbalance and Role Conflict**

Work–life balance pressures and role conflict emerged in the survey responses as a frequently reported constraint influencing willingness to pursue leadership roles. Both structured responses and open-ended comments indicate that participants, particularly those with caregiving responsibilities, often perceive leadership positions as carrying time and emotional demands that are difficult to reconcile with family obligations. Within the conceptual framework, this theme reflects the interaction between social values regarding caregiving roles and systemic factors related to workload expectations and leadership-role design. Participants described leadership not only as a promotion in authority but also as an expansion of after-hours responsibility, emotional labor, and institutional visibility requirements.

One respondent explained this tension by stating, "Leadership comes with late meetings, weekend events, and stress. As a mother, I already have all that at home. Adding leadership to it seems impossible." Such responses suggest that leadership roles are perceived as structured around availability assumptions that may not account for unequal caregiving burdens. Interpreted analytically, this reflects role-strain dynamics, where competing expectations attached to professional and family roles create perceived incompatibility. Importantly, several respondents indicated that leadership opportunities were declined not due to lack of interest or ambition but due to anticipated overload, reputational judgment, or perceived unsustainability of combined responsibilities.

Participants' comments also indicate that institutional responses to work–family conflict are perceived as uneven in practice. Some respondents described situations where requests for

flexibility or family-related accommodation were interpreted differently depending on gender. One respondent recalled, "When I asked for time off to attend a family emergency, I was told leadership required sacrifices. But when a male colleague did the same, they called him responsible." From an interpretive standpoint, such responses suggest that social values about caregiving and commitment may influence how identical behaviors are evaluated. This theme therefore illustrates how systemic factors, such as leadership workload norms and flexibility practices, interact with gendered social expectations to shape leadership participation decisions.

### **Stereotypes and Perceived Incompetence**

Another theme emerging from participant responses concerns stereotype-based evaluation and perceived competence thresholds in leadership contexts. Survey comments indicate that several respondents believe female educators are evaluated under narrower behavioral expectations and experience greater scrutiny when exercising authority. Within the study framework, this theme reflects the operation of social values related to gendered leadership norms, interacting with systemic evaluation practices inside institutions. Participants described situations in which identical leadership behaviors were perceived differently depending on whether they were demonstrated by men or women, suggesting that leadership judgment may be filtered through gender-coded expectations of acceptable conduct.

One respondent captured this perceived double standard by stating, "If I make a firm decision, I'm called bossy. If I compromise, I'm seen as weak. There's no winning." Interpreted analytically, this response reflects a perceived behavioral double-bind pattern, where leadership actions are judged against gender-norm expectations rather than neutral performance criteria. Prior leadership research has described similar dynamics through the competence–likability trade-off framework (Heilman, 2012), referenced here as an interpretive lens, in which women in authority

roles may face penalties for behaviors that are positively evaluated in male leaders. Within the present findings, participants' accounts suggest that stereotype-mediated evaluation may function as a participation constraint by increasing the reputational risk associated with leadership visibility.

Participants also linked stereotype pressure to overperformance behavior and professional fatigue. Several respondents described taking on additional duties, volunteering for extended responsibilities, or increasing visible effort in order to establish credibility and commitment. However, responses indicate that these efforts were not always perceived as translating into proportional recognition or advancement opportunities. One participant summarized this concern by stating, "They say we lack leadership drive, but we're actually doing more. It just doesn't get acknowledged." From an interpretive standpoint, this pattern suggests that perceived recognition gaps may arise when performance signals do not align with socially preferred leadership prototypes. This theme, therefore, illustrates how stereotype-based social values, when operating within systemic evaluation environments, may contribute to unequal leadership progression experiences.

### **Intersectional Disadvantages**

Survey responses also indicate that perceived disadvantage in leadership progression is not experienced solely along gender lines but is sometimes described as intersecting with ethnicity and geographic location. Open-ended responses suggest that some participants interpret leadership access as being shaped by overlapping social identity factors, including race, ethnicity, and institutional culture. Within the conceptual framework, these patterns are interpreted through an intersectional lens, where multiple social-value dimensions interact with systemic factors to influence opportunity perception and advancement experience. Rather than presenting these

accounts as universal conditions, the findings reflect participant-reported experiences and perceptions within specific institutional contexts.

Some respondents described perceived ethnic-pattern effects in leadership selection environments where a particular cultural or ethnic identity was viewed as dominant. One teacher reported, "I was told I wouldn't be accepted as principal in this school because I didn't fit the culture." Interpreted analytically, this response suggests that cultural-fit narratives may function as informal gatekeeping signals within leadership selection environments. Such accounts point to the role of social values related to belonging, institutional identity, and cultural alignment in shaping perceived leadership eligibility, particularly when evaluation criteria are not fully transparent.

Geographic location was also identified by participants as a practical constraint affecting leadership preparation access. Several respondents indicated that professional development and Ministry-sponsored leadership programs are often held in major urban centers, which can create participation barriers for educators working in more distant districts. One participant noted, "Traveling to Port of Spain for a two-day workshop isn't realistic for me. I have three kids and no support system." From an interpretive standpoint, this response illustrates how systemic factors, such as program location and delivery structure, interact with social values around caregiving responsibility and family support expectations. Although logistical in form, these access barriers may have cumulative effects on who is able to engage consistently in leadership preparation pathways.

### **Institutional Inertia and Lack of Accountability**

Participant responses also identified perceived gaps between gender-equity policy language and institutional practice as a contributing factor associated with continued leadership inequality. Survey comments suggest that while formal policy statements referencing equity and

inclusion are visible within the education system, several respondents believe that implementation and monitoring mechanisms are inconsistent. Within the study framework, this theme is interpreted as a systemic factor, where policy intent and operational practice are not always experienced as aligned. Participants described advancement outcomes as not always reflecting stated equity commitments, leading to skepticism about institutional accountability processes.

One respondent expressed this perception directly, stating, "They say the right things, but when you look at who gets promoted, it's still mostly men." Such responses indicate that some educators interpret leadership outcomes as uneven despite formal equality language. Participants also noted the perceived absence of systematic gender-disaggregated tracking of leadership development participation and promotion outcomes, which they viewed as limiting institutional self-evaluation capacity. Interpreted analytically, this suggests that when monitoring systems are not visible to stakeholders, confidence in equity progress may be reduced regardless of actual policy intent.

Some respondents further described what they perceived as symbolic or limited inclusion practices within leadership structures. Comments indicated that representation without decision authority was sometimes experienced as insufficient. One participant stated, "Tokenism is real. I've been put on panels just to check a box." From an interpretive standpoint, these responses suggest that perceived symbolic inclusion, without corresponding influence, may be experienced as reinforcing rather than resolving participation inequality. This pattern can be interpreted through Ridgeway's (2011) concept of cultural lag, used here as an analytical lens, where institutional culture and everyday practice evolve more slowly than formal policy language. Together, these responses indicate that systemic accountability mechanisms and implementation practices are viewed by some participants as important moderators of leadership equity outcomes.

### **The Role of Male Dominance in Leadership Culture**

Participant responses also highlighted perceptions of male-dominated leadership culture as a factor influencing advancement opportunity and decision-making influence. Several survey comments indicate that some educators experience leadership environments as socially and culturally male-centered, particularly within senior administrative circles. Within the study framework, this theme is interpreted as the interaction between social values regarding authority and leadership identity and systemic factors related to informal decision networks. Respondents suggested that leadership influence may sometimes be shaped through relationship-based peer circles and informal interaction spaces rather than exclusively through formal governance structures.

One respondent described this perception by stating, "They choose who they're comfortable with, and it's almost never a woman." Another participant noted, "They go out for drinks after work, and that's where the real decisions are made. We're not invited." Interpreted analytically, these responses suggest that informal social spaces may function as perceived influence channels in leadership culture. When access to these spaces is uneven, participants may interpret leadership selection and endorsement patterns as socially filtered. From a systemic-factor perspective, this reflects how informal professional networking environments can be experienced as participation moderators, particularly when they overlap with gendered social comfort patterns.

Even where leadership teams were described as mixed-gender in composition, some respondents reported perceived differences in how contributions were received and credited. One participant explained, "I've had my suggestions ignored, only for a male colleague to say the same thing later and be praised for it." Such responses indicate that participants perceive conversational authority and idea validation as unevenly distributed within some leadership spaces. Interpreted

cautiously, these accounts suggest that perceived voice recognition gaps may affect experienced legitimacy and influence. This theme, therefore, connects social values related to authority recognition with systemic interaction practices, both of which participants associate with unequal leadership experience and advancement confidence.

### **Synthesis of Findings for Research Question 2**

Taken together, the quantitative comparisons and qualitative thematic findings indicate that inequality and the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago are associated with the combined influence of social values and systemic factors rather than any single barrier operating in isolation. Across the dataset, participants described leadership participation as being shaped by culturally embedded gender norms, institutional practices, informal influence networks, mentorship access patterns, workload expectations, and representation dynamics. While not all participants reported direct personal discrimination, the thematic patterns show that many educators interpret leadership pathways as being moderated by gendered expectations and structurally uneven opportunity conditions.

At the social-values level, participants' responses consistently referenced gendered expectations around authority, caregiving, leadership style, and credibility. Leadership was frequently described as symbolically aligned with masculine-coded traits, while women were more often associated with supportive or nurturing roles. These social expectations were also reported to influence self-perception, aspiration, and perceived legitimacy, particularly where visible female leadership representation was limited. Role-conflict pressures, stereotype-based evaluation, and perceived double standards in behavioral judgment further illustrate how social meaning systems shape leadership participation decisions and advancement confidence.

At the systemic level, respondents identified institutional practices that they perceived as influencing leadership access and progression. These included informal selection pathways, uneven distribution of preparatory leadership roles, mentorship and sponsorship gaps, perceived network-based gatekeeping, uneven flexibility in work–family accommodation, and limited visible accountability mechanisms linking equity policy to advancement outcomes. Differences in perception by school type, as reflected in the statistically significant variation in perceived equal opportunity, further suggest that institutional context functions as a meaningful moderator of leadership opportunity perception.

Importantly, the findings do not suggest that barriers operate uniformly across all schools or for all educators. Instead, the evidence indicates patterned perceptions of constraint and unequal access emerging from the interaction between cultural expectations and organizational structures. Intersectional responses further suggest that ethnicity, geography, and institutional culture may compound or modify these experiences in specific contexts. Interpreted through the study's conceptual framework, inequality in leadership participation is therefore best understood as a layered phenomenon produced through the interaction of social values, institutional norms, and opportunity structures.

Overall, research question 2 is answered by the finding that underrepresentation is associated with reinforcing cycles between gendered social expectations and systemic organizational practices. These factors influence not only formal advancement outcomes but also mentorship access, role visibility, leadership identity formation, and willingness to pursue leadership roles. Addressing underrepresentation, therefore, requires attention not only to formal policy provisions but also to the cultural meanings, informal practices, and structural conditions that shape how leadership opportunity is experienced in practice.

**RQ3: What strategies could help increase female participation and achieve gender equality in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago?**

Findings addressing Research Question 3 indicate that participants identify multiple strategy pathways for increasing female participation and advancing gender equality in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. Survey responses suggest that no single intervention is viewed as sufficient; rather, participants describe a combination of institutional, cultural, and systemic strategies as necessary to address the participation gaps and advancement constraints identified in earlier findings. These strategies are drawn from respondents' professional experiences and observations and are closely connected to the social values and systemic factors previously identified as influencing leadership access and progression.

Participant responses point toward strategy areas that include leadership development access, mentorship and sponsorship expansion, transparency in advancement processes, workload and flexibility reform, representation visibility, and accountability mechanisms. Rather than being framed only at the policy level, many of the suggested strategies relate to everyday institutional practices, leadership preparation structures, and organizational culture. Respondents frequently linked recommended strategies to themes of equity, access, encouragement, and recognition, indicating that participation change is perceived as requiring both formal structural adjustment and deliberate cultural repositioning of leadership norms. Interpreted within the limits of the survey design, these findings present participant-identified strategy directions rather than tested intervention outcomes, but they provide grounded insight into where educators believe change efforts would be most effective.

**Reforming Institutional Policies and Practices**

Participant responses identify reform of institutional policies and advancement practices as a key strategy area for increasing female participation and strengthening gender equity in educational leadership. Survey comments indicate that some educators perceive leadership hiring and promotion processes as insufficiently transparent, with information about vacancies, acting roles, or advancement opportunities not always widely communicated. Respondents described situations in which leadership appointments were learned after decisions had already been finalized, which they interpreted as limiting fair access to opportunity. One teacher stated, "Sometimes we hear someone has been appointed, and we didn't even know the post was open." Interpreted analytically, this perception aligns with earlier RQ2 findings concerning informal advancement pathways and network-mediated selection patterns, suggesting that transparency functions as a systemic participation moderator.

Many participants proposed clearer and more standardized hiring and promotion protocols as a corrective strategy. In structured and open-ended responses, twenty-one teachers emphasized the importance of formal vacancy announcements, documented eligibility criteria, and structured evaluation processes. Respondents also identified gender-balanced selection committees as a potential equity-supporting measure, indicating that representation within decision panels may influence perceived fairness and trust in outcomes. One respondent explained, "If it's a real interview, let's see the requirements, let's see the scoring, it shouldn't be based on who's in the principal's good books." These responses suggest that procedural clarity is viewed not only as an administrative improvement but also as a strategy for reducing the influence of informal social-value judgments and relationship-based preference patterns.

Participants further recommended periodic institutional review and audit practices focused on leadership distribution and advancement outcomes. Several respondents indicated that gender-

disaggregated tracking of applications, appointments, and promotion rates would help institutions evaluate whether equity goals are being realized in practice. One participant suggested, "We should be tracking how many women apply and how many are successful. Otherwise, how will we know what's really happening?" From an interpretive standpoint, these responses position accountability and monitoring as systemic strategies that can make participation patterns visible and therefore actionable. Within the study framework, such measures address systemic factors directly while also signaling institutional commitment to reshaping social-value expectations around leadership access.

### **Developing Mentorship and Support Structures**

Participant responses identify the development of structured mentorship and support systems as a central strategy for increasing female participation in educational leadership. This strategy theme directly corresponds with the RQ2 finding that uneven access to mentorship and sponsorship functions as a participation constraint. Survey responses indicate that many educators view leadership progression as significantly easier when guided by experienced mentors, yet report that such support is not consistently available. One participant stated, "I've never had a female mentor. Most of the men look out for each other. We just figure things out alone." Interpreted analytically, this response suggests that mentorship access is perceived as socially patterned rather than systematically distributed, linking this strategy area to both social values around affinity and systemic factors related to leadership network structure.

Structured response data reinforces this perception gap. Eighteen teachers reported never having had a mentor across their teaching career, while others described mentorship experiences as informal, short-term, or inconsistent. Participants frequently characterized existing mentorship as dependent on personal relationships rather than institutional design. From a systemic-factor

perspective, this suggests that mentorship currently operates more as an informal practice than as a formal leadership development mechanism, which may contribute to uneven preparation and uneven advancement confidence among aspiring female leaders.

Many respondents advocated for formal mentorship programs designed with explicit inclusion goals. Participants suggested that structured pairing systems, leadership shadowing opportunities, and guided preparation pathways could reduce uncertainty and increase readiness to pursue leadership roles. One respondent explained, "If someone had encouraged me or helped me understand what to expect, I would have pursued leadership earlier." This response indicates that mentorship is perceived not only as a support mechanism but also as an aspiration catalyst that influences participation timing and leadership self-efficacy.

Teachers also identified peer-support structures as a complementary strategy. Several respondents recommended organized peer networks for female leaders and leadership aspirants, where experiences, strategies, and institutional navigation knowledge could be shared. While some participants noted that informal peer support already occurs, they described these efforts as fragmented and lacking formal recognition. One teacher noted, "Sometimes we support each other, but it's not part of any program. It's just what we do quietly." Interpreted cautiously, these responses suggest that institutionalizing peer-support networks could transform existing informal social-value solidarity practices into recognized systemic support structures, thereby strengthening pathways for leadership participation.

### **Ensuring Equitable Access to Leadership Training**

Participants identified equitable access to leadership training as a critical strategy area for increasing female participation in educational leadership. Survey responses indicate that leadership preparation opportunities are viewed as highly influential in shaping readiness, confidence, and

advancement eligibility, yet access to such training is perceived as uneven. Thirteen respondents reported that they were either unaware of available leadership training opportunities or had not been selected to attend when such opportunities were offered. Interpreted within the study framework, this theme reflects systemic factors related to information flow, nomination practices, and selection processes interacting with social values regarding availability and perceived suitability.

Several participants attributed unequal training access to informal nomination pathways and assumption-based selection judgments. One female teacher explained, "They assume I wouldn't want to go to a weekend session because I have children." This response suggests that caregiving-related social values may influence how decision-makers interpret candidate availability, potentially limiting opportunity invitations. Other respondents noted that training announcements and invitations were often circulated through informal professional networks rather than centralized communication channels, which participants perceived as narrowing the pool of participants. As one participant stated, "Don't just send the same few people. Open it up. Let everyone apply." Analytically, these responses position communication transparency and open application structures as systemic strategy levers for widening participation.

Participants also recommended structural adjustments to training delivery formats to improve accessibility. Suggested approaches included online modules, recorded sessions, hybrid delivery, and regionally distributed workshops. Respondents indicated that flexible formats would make participation more feasible for educators with caregiving responsibilities and those working in geographically distant schools. From an interpretive standpoint, this reflects how training design, as a systemic factor, can either reinforce or reduce participation barriers linked to social values around family responsibility and time availability.

In addition to access and format, some participants emphasized the importance of leadership training content itself as a strategy dimension. Respondents suggested that leadership preparation programs should include broader leadership models and explicitly address alternative leadership competencies. One respondent noted, "We're always told to be assertive. But what about collaboration? What about empathy? Those should be leadership values, too." This response indicates that participants view leadership training not only as skill development but also as a site where social values about legitimate leadership behavior can be reshaped. Interpreted cautiously, this suggests that training curricula may function as both a preparation tool and a cultural reframing mechanism within leadership development systems.

### **Addressing Work-Life Balance and Institutional Flexibility**

Participants identified work–life balance and institutional flexibility as a major strategy area for increasing female participation and sustainability in educational leadership roles. Survey responses indicate that leadership positions are widely perceived as carrying extended time demands that may conflict with caregiving responsibilities and family obligations. Twenty-three respondents identified work–life conflict as a significant deterrent to pursuing or remaining in leadership roles. One participant stated, "Leadership sounds great until you realize it means being at school at 6 a.m. and staying for events until 8 p.m." Interpreted within the study framework, this theme reflects the interaction between social values surrounding caregiving responsibility and systemic factors related to leadership workload design and scheduling norms.

Participants proposed several institutional flexibility strategies aimed at reducing role-conflict pressure. Suggested approaches included shared or distributed leadership models, where administrative responsibilities are divided across more than one educator, as well as adjustments to meeting schedules and after-hours expectations. Some respondents questioned whether existing

leadership routines unnecessarily assume unrestricted availability. One teacher asked, "Why are leadership meetings always after school when people need to pick up their kids?" From an interpretive standpoint, these responses suggest that leadership role structure, as a systemic factor, may unintentionally privilege educators with fewer caregiving constraints. Flexibility-oriented leadership models were therefore described by participants as a participation-enabling strategy rather than simply a convenience measure.

Respondents also emphasized the importance of equitable parental leave and caregiving policies as part of leadership participation reform. Several participants indicated that when caregiving accommodations are perceived as applying primarily to women, leadership reliability judgments may become gender-skewed. One respondent explained, "When only women take time off, it reinforces the idea that they're not reliable leaders." Interpreted analytically, this response suggests that policy symmetry, where caregiving flexibility is normalized across genders, may function as a social-value recalibration strategy. Within the limits of participant perception, these findings position institutional flexibility measures as systemic strategies that may reduce participation deterrents linked to gendered caregiving expectations.

### **Improving Representation and Visibility**

Participants identified improved representation and leadership visibility as an important strategy dimension for increasing female participation in educational leadership. Survey responses indicate that the limited visibility of women in senior leadership roles is perceived by some educators as both an indicator of inequality and a reinforcing influence on future participation patterns. Respondents suggested that when women are rarely seen in top-tier leadership positions, this absence communicates implicit messages about who is considered typical or acceptable in authority roles. One participant stated, "You hardly see a female School Supervisor 3. That tells

young teachers something, whether we realize it or not." Interpreted analytically, this response aligns with earlier RQ1 findings concerning symbolic leadership imagery and social-value expectations about authority identity.

Participants recommended that leadership appointments and public leadership visibility should more closely reflect the gender composition of the teaching workforce. Responses emphasized not only numerical representation but also role-level visibility across leadership tiers, including principalship, supervisory, ministry, and public-facing leadership roles. One teacher shared, "When I finally met a female principal who didn't act like the male ones, it changed how I saw myself. She made space for different leadership." From an interpretive standpoint, this response suggests that visible leadership diversity may function as an aspiration and identity-expansion mechanism, influencing how leadership style and leadership possibility are socially constructed.

Respondents also cautioned that representation strategies must be substantive rather than symbolic. Several participants expressed concern that formal inclusion without decision-making authority does not produce meaningful participation change. One respondent argued, "Putting a woman on a committee doesn't fix anything if she can't speak up or influence the outcome." Interpreted within the study framework, this reflects the distinction between symbolic inclusion and systemic influence. Participants linked meaningful representation to mentorship availability, role modeling effects, and gradual cultural repositioning of leadership norms. Taken together, these responses suggest that representation and visibility strategies are perceived as operating at both the social-values level, reshaping leadership imagery, and the systemic level, expanding influence access within leadership structures.

### **Institutionalizing Equity and Tracking Progress**

Participants identified improved representation and leadership visibility as an important strategy dimension for increasing female participation in educational leadership. Survey responses indicate that the limited visibility of women in senior leadership roles is perceived by some educators as both an indicator of inequality and a reinforcing influence on future participation patterns. Respondents suggested that when women are rarely seen in top-tier leadership positions, this absence communicates implicit messages about who is considered typical or acceptable in authority roles. One participant stated, "You hardly see a female School Supervisor 3. That tells young teachers something, whether we realize it or not." Interpreted analytically, this response aligns with earlier RQ1 findings concerning symbolic leadership imagery and social-value expectations about authority identity.

Participants recommended that leadership appointments and public leadership visibility should more closely reflect the gender composition of the teaching workforce. Responses emphasized not only numerical representation but also role-level visibility across leadership tiers, including principalship, supervisory, ministry, and public-facing leadership roles. One teacher shared, "When I finally met a female principal who didn't act like the male ones, it changed how I saw myself. She made space for different leadership." From an interpretive standpoint, this response suggests that visible leadership diversity may function as an aspiration and identity-expansion mechanism, influencing how leadership style and leadership possibility are socially constructed.

Respondents also cautioned that representation strategies must be substantive rather than symbolic. Several participants expressed concern that formal inclusion without decision-making authority does not produce meaningful participation change. One respondent argued, "Putting a woman on a committee doesn't fix anything if she can't speak up or influence the outcome."

Interpreted within the study framework, this reflects the distinction between symbolic inclusion and systemic influence. Participants linked meaningful representation to mentorship availability, role modeling effects, and gradual cultural repositioning of leadership norms. Taken together, these responses suggest that representation and visibility strategies are perceived as operating at both the social-values level, reshaping leadership imagery, and the systemic level, expanding influence access within leadership structures.

### **Engaging Male Educators in Gender Equity Efforts**

Participants also identified the engagement of male educators and leaders as an important strategy dimension in advancing gender equity in educational leadership. Survey responses indicate that many educators view leadership-culture change as requiring participation from both men and women rather than being treated as a women-only initiative. Sixteen respondents explicitly emphasized that male involvement is necessary to shift leadership norms, decision-making culture, and opportunity support patterns. One participant stated, "Some male teachers are great allies, but others don't see this as their problem." Interpreted analytically, this response suggests that gender equity is perceived not only as a representation issue but also as a shared cultural and systemic responsibility.

Participants described everyday interaction patterns that they perceived as unintentionally reinforcing unequal voice influence in leadership spaces. Several respondents indicated that male colleagues sometimes dominated discussions or overlooked female contributions through habitual communication styles rather than explicit exclusion. One respondent noted, "I've had male colleagues say they support us, but then they speak over us in meetings. They don't see it." From an interpretive standpoint, these responses suggest that awareness gaps, rather than overt resistance, are perceived as part of the participation barrier pattern. Participants therefore positioned

awareness-building and reflective practice as strategy tools linked to social values around communication, authority, and legitimacy.

Many respondents supported the inclusion of gender-equity content within teacher training and leadership development programs for all educators. Suggested topics included unconscious-bias awareness, privilege recognition, and inclusive leadership behaviors. One teacher explained, "It's not about blaming men. It's about helping everyone see the patterns." Interpreted within the study framework, this positions professional learning as a social-values recalibration mechanism operating through systemic training structures rather than individual correction alone.

Participants also emphasized the perceived influence of male leaders in sponsorship and nomination behaviors. Several responses indicated that encouragement and endorsement from male principals or supervisors were experienced as particularly influential in legitimizing women's leadership candidacy. One participant stated, "When a male principal says, 'You'd be great for this role,' it carries weight." Analytically, this is consistent with earlier findings on sponsorship and informal advancement pathways, suggesting that allyship behaviors function as micro-level systemic interventions within existing leadership structures. Taken together, these responses indicate that male engagement strategies are perceived as operating at both the cultural level, reshaping norms, and the systemic level, influencing opportunity signaling and advancement support.

### **Shifting Leadership Norms and Professional Culture**

Participants frequently identified the need to broaden prevailing definitions of leadership as a strategy for increasing female participation and advancing gender equity in educational leadership. Survey responses indicate that many educators perceive current leadership norms as narrowly defined around control, assertiveness, and individual authority, which some respondents

believe limits who is recognized as leadership-ready. Several participants expressed concern that dominant leadership models reflect a restricted behavioral template that does not capture the full range of effective leadership practice. One respondent stated, "Leadership shouldn't just mean being loud and in charge. It can mean being strategic, caring, and collaborative." Interpreted analytically, this response suggests that social values surrounding leadership style function as participation filters by shaping who is perceived as fitting accepted leadership archetypes.

Participants advocated for broader leadership frameworks that recognize relational, collaborative, and reflective leadership competencies alongside managerial and directive skills. Suggested attributes included emotional intelligence, teamwork orientation, developmental support, and adaptive decision-making. Some respondents indicated that narrow leadership norms may discourage capable educators from pursuing advancement because they do not identify with dominant leadership stereotypes. One teacher noted, "There are women who would be excellent leaders, but they don't see themselves in the current model." From an interpretive standpoint, this suggests that leadership identity alignment, shaped by social-value expectations, plays a role in participation willingness and leadership self-concept.

Respondents also recommended revisiting how leadership potential and leadership success are evaluated within institutions. Participants suggested that assessment criteria should recognize multiple leadership styles and value relational and developmental strengths in addition to operational efficiency. One respondent explained, "If we only value command and control, we're missing half the talent." These responses position evaluation reform as a systemic strategy lever that can reshape advancement pathways by aligning assessment practices with more inclusive leadership models.

Participants emphasized that shifts in leadership norms must occur at both formal and informal levels. Suggested strategy areas included revising leadership preparation curricula, updating evaluation frameworks, and modeling diverse leadership styles within training and development programs. Respondents indicated that without corresponding cultural change inside institutions, policy-level adjustments alone may have limited participation impact. Interpreted cautiously, these responses suggest that leadership-culture repositioning operates at the intersection of social values and systemic factors, influencing both recognition patterns and advancement confidence.

### **Synthesis of Findings for Research Question 3**

The integrated findings for Research Question 3 indicate that strategies to increase female participation and advance gender equality in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago are perceived by participants as necessarily multi-level and mutually reinforcing. Survey responses suggest that no single reform measure is viewed as sufficient; instead, educators identified an interconnected set of institutional, cultural, and professional strategies that address both systemic factors and underlying social values associated with leadership access and legitimacy. Across responses, the most frequently emphasized strategy domains included transparent promotion processes, structured mentorship and sponsorship systems, equitable access to leadership training, flexibility-oriented leadership models, stronger representation and visibility of women leaders, broader leadership-norm definitions, and active engagement of male educators in equity efforts.

Participants' strategy recommendations consistently map onto the barrier patterns identified in RQ2 and the social-value influences identified in RQ1. Institutional transparency and accountability strategies were proposed in response to perceived informal advancement pathways. Mentorship and sponsorship programs were recommended to address uneven leadership

preparation support. Training-access reforms and flexible delivery models were linked to caregiving-related participation constraints. Representation and visibility strategies were associated with leadership identity formation and aspiration expansion. Cultural and professional-norm repositioning strategies were connected to stereotype-based leadership evaluation patterns. Male-engagement strategies were identified as important for shifting everyday leadership culture and opportunity signaling practices.

Taken together, these findings answer RQ3 by showing that participants view gender-equity advancement as dependent on aligned change across policy, practice, culture, and professional development systems. Interpreted within the limits of a survey-based, perception-focused design, the results do not establish intervention effectiveness but do provide grounded evidence of practitioner-identified strategy directions. These strategies are understood by participants as operating through both systemic-factor reform and deliberate reshaping of social values surrounding leadership style, authority, and legitimacy within the education sector.

### **Evaluation of Findings**

This section presents a critical evaluation of the research findings in relation to the study's three research questions. The evaluation is interpreted through the conceptual framework, which positions gender as a central analytic variable associated with variation in female participation in educational leadership, moderated by social values and systemic factors operating at organizational, cultural, and individual levels. Within this framework, leadership participation outcomes are not understood as determined by policy intent alone but as shaped through the interaction of institutional practices, culturally embedded expectations, and individual leadership self-perception. The evaluation, therefore, integrates empirical survey findings with theoretical

perspectives and prior research in order to assess how patterns of inequality, underrepresentation, and participation opportunity are experienced and interpreted within the Trinidad and Tobago education context.

The purpose of this evaluative section is not to restate the descriptive findings but to interpret their significance in relation to established theory and existing scholarship. The analysis examines where the study's results align with, extend, or complicate prior work on gender and leadership. Interpretive lenses referenced include Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, glass ceiling and sticky floor models, symbolic interactionist perspectives, Vroom's expectancy theory, and strands of feminist organizational analysis. These frameworks are used as analytical guides rather than deterministic explanations. The evaluation is also situated within the socio-historical and cultural context of Trinidad and Tobago, whose postcolonial institutional development and gender norms continue to influence leadership imagery, authority expectations, and advancement practices (Morris, 1993; Joseph et al., 2016).

To anchor the evaluation clearly, it is useful to restate the three research questions that structured the inquiry: (1) what social values influence female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago; (2) what systemic factors are associated with inequality and underrepresentation in educational leadership; and (3) what strategies participants identify as potentially supportive of increased female participation and gender equity in leadership roles. These questions were designed to examine gender inequality not only through formal policy and structural lenses but also through educator perceptions and reported experiences gathered through survey instruments. The study, therefore, evaluates leadership participation patterns by analyzing how perceived barriers, cultural expectations, and institutional practices are interpreted by teachers and school leaders who operate within the system.

Participants in this study, drawn from two educational institutions in Trinidad and Tobago, contributed a range of perspectives shaped by gender, professional experience, school level, and degree of leadership exposure. Although the respondent group was predominantly female, consistent with national teaching workforce patterns, responses from both male and female educators were included in the analysis to support comparative and interpretive depth. Data were collected through a semi-structured survey instrument that combined scaled items with open-ended response fields, enabling both quantitative comparison and qualitative elaboration. The open-ended responses provided context-rich explanatory detail that clarified how participants interpret the influence of gender norms, caregiving expectations, mentorship access, and leadership perceptions on women's participation pathways in educational leadership.

This evaluative section examines the significance, coherence, and theoretical alignment of the major themes that emerged from the findings in relation to the conceptual framework. The framework positions leadership participation as influenced by gender through the moderating effects of social values and systemic factors operating at cultural, organizational, and individual levels. The evaluation, therefore, begins with findings related to RQ1, assessing how socially embedded gender-role expectations and leadership imagery influence perceived leadership legitimacy, opportunity access, and aspiration formation. Particular attention is given to how symbolic associations between masculinity and authority, reinforced through historical and institutional patterns, are reflected in participant interpretations of leadership suitability and advancement signaling (Heilman et al., 2023).

The evaluation of RQ2 findings then considers the systemic and interactional factors that participants associate with continued underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. These include reported patterns related to mentorship access, informal advancement pathways,

stereotype-based evaluation, and work–life role conflict (Kossek & Lee, 2021). These elements are evaluated as interacting influences rather than isolated variables. The analysis also examines the perceived gap between formal policy language, such as equal opportunity commitments, and participant-reported everyday practices within institutions. Throughout this section, interpretation remains grounded in participant-reported perceptions and aligned with the survey-based design of the study.

The section evaluating RQ3 examines the strategies proposed by participants to address gender inequality in educational leadership, with attention to how respondents perceive the practicality, relevance, and potential impact of these strategies within their institutional contexts. Rather than assessing intervention outcomes, this evaluation interprets participant-identified approaches, including mentorship structures, expanded access to leadership training, flexible work arrangements, and more inclusive leadership models, as perception-based recommendations grounded in lived professional experience. These proposed strategies are interpreted alongside relevant research literature and existing educational policy directions in Trinidad and Tobago to identify areas where participant perspectives appear aligned with, or in tension with, broader institutional intentions.

This chapter maintains a reflective and analytical orientation, emphasizing interpretation and theoretical integration rather than repetition of descriptive findings. It also considers internal tensions within the dataset. For example, many participants expressed confidence in women’s leadership capability while also reporting experiences or observations of skepticism, resistance, or exclusion in leadership pathways (Begeny et al., 2020). Similarly, some respondents characterized leadership advancement as gender-neutral and merit-based, while other responses described uneven access to encouragement, opportunity visibility, or informal support structures. These

contrasts are interpreted as perceptual and experiential variation within the participant group rather than treated as mutually exclusive truths.

The evaluation also recognizes that gender does not operate in isolation from other identity and contextual variables. Although intersectional factors such as ethnicity, religion, and geographic location were not primary analytic variables in the study design, they emerged in participant responses and are therefore interpreted cautiously as contextual influences. References to rural location, community expectations, and cultural or religious norms are treated as participant-reported conditions that may shape perceived leadership access and aspiration. Their inclusion in this evaluation supports a more contextually grounded interpretation of leadership participation patterns without extending beyond the evidentiary limits of the survey data.

Evaluation in this context also involves a re-examination of the conceptual framework in light of the study's empirical patterns and participant-reported experiences. The findings show interpretive alignment with Bandura et al. (1999) theory of self-efficacy, particularly regarding how gendered socialization patterns and the visibility of leadership role models appear to shape teachers' confidence in their leadership potential. Participant responses indicate that lower expressed leadership confidence was more frequently associated with limited exposure to female leadership examples and with perceived cultural messages linking leadership authority to masculine traits. These patterns do not function as direct tests of self-efficacy theory but are consistent with its explanatory propositions when applied to gendered leadership contexts.

The glass ceiling metaphor also remains analytically useful for interpreting participant perceptions of institutional barriers, especially those associated with decision-making access, informal influence networks, unclear selection processes, and gendered evaluation standards. Survey narratives describing restricted access to leadership pathways, opaque advancement

processes, and unequal informal sponsorship align with how glass ceiling dynamics are conceptualized in leadership literature. Within this study, the metaphor functions as an interpretive lens rather than a measured structural condition.

At the same time, participant responses also suggest the presence of what leadership literature describes as “sticky floor” dynamics, conditions that constrain upward mobility earlier in the leadership pathway rather than only at its highest levels. Respondents frequently associated stalled advancement with caregiving expectations, limited mentorship access, and perceived administrative under-recognition of leadership potential. Interpreted cautiously, these patterns suggest that constraint mechanisms may operate across multiple levels of the leadership pipeline, not solely at senior leadership thresholds. This interpretation complements existing theory by illustrating how participants perceive mobility limitations across career stages within their institutional contexts.

Symbolic interactionism likewise provides a useful interpretive framework for understanding how gendered leadership identities are negotiated within school environments. Participant responses frequently described the need to balance authority projection with expectations of emotional availability and relational support. These descriptions suggest ongoing identity negotiation processes in which women leaders or aspiring leaders adjust behavioral presentation in response to socially embedded expectations. Within the limits of survey-based qualitative data, these patterns are interpreted as indicative of symbolic role negotiation rather than measured identity transformation processes.

The chapter further evaluates how the theoretical assumptions embedded in the study align with the patterns observed in participant responses. Rather than functioning as formal tests of theory, the findings show interpretive consistency with aspects of Vroom’s expectancy theory,

particularly in how female teachers appeared to weigh the perceived benefits of leadership roles against the anticipated effort and personal cost required to attain them. Participant responses suggest that where organizational support was viewed as limited, and the benefits of leadership were not clearly defined or equitably accessible, expressed motivation to pursue leadership roles was lower, even among well-qualified educators. These patterns support an interpretation of motivation as context-dependent and institutionally mediated rather than purely individual.

Feminist theory functioned as an overarching interpretive lens for examining how structural and cultural conditions interact to shape leadership access. Participant narratives point to perceived institutional bias as well as the internalization of gendered leadership expectations that normalize male authority and marginalize alternative leadership styles. Women who reported attaining leadership roles frequently described their experiences in terms that suggested exceptionality rather than normalcy, indicating that leadership participation may still be perceived as gender-marked within some institutional cultures. These interpretations are presented as perception-based patterns rather than verified structural conditions.

The evaluation also highlights the importance of local context in interpreting the findings. Trinidad and Tobago's postcolonial history, religious influences, and educational governance structures provide an important interpretive backdrop for understanding how leadership is perceived and enacted. Participant responses indicate that these contextual factors contribute to how leadership legitimacy is interpreted and how advancement opportunities are perceived. Accordingly, the evaluation avoids universal claims and instead situates interpretations within the specific cultural and institutional environment reflected in the sample.

In summary, this introductory evaluation section frames the analysis as a critical and contextually grounded interpretation of the research findings. It emphasizes meaning-making,

pattern interpretation, and theoretical alignment rather than theory confirmation. The discussion moves beyond descriptive reporting to examine underlying tensions, consistencies, and implications present in participant responses. The sections that follow evaluate each research question in detail, drawing on the conceptual framework and the reported data patterns to assess perceptions of gender equity in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago.

### **Evaluation of RQ1: Gender and Access to Leadership**

The first research question, “*What social values influence female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago?*” examined how culturally embedded values and institutional norms are perceived to shape women’s access to, participation in, and experience of leadership roles. The findings from RQ1 indicate recurring perception patterns related to gender, leadership traits, and authority expectations. This section evaluates those patterns in relation to the conceptual framework, using participant responses, theoretical perspectives, and contextual interpretation to assess the coherence and explanatory value of the observed trends, while recognizing the limits of perception-based survey data.

Findings related to RQ1 suggest that, in participant perception, educational leadership within the Trinidad and Tobago context continues to be symbolically associated with traits culturally coded as masculine. Respondents frequently described leadership expectations in terms of assertiveness, emotional restraint, and control-oriented decision-making. These descriptions appeared alongside participant recognition that empathetic, communicative, and collaborative leadership qualities are valued in practice, yet not always perceived to carry equal weight in leadership selection or advancement processes. Interpreted through the conceptual framework, this pattern is consistent with gendered leadership norms described in prior literature, though the present study captures perception patterns rather than institutional selection data.

The independent samples t-test analysis identified a statistically significant difference between primary and secondary school teachers in their perceptions of equal leadership opportunity by gender. Secondary school teachers were more likely than primary school teachers to report that leadership roles are equally accessible to both genders. This statistical difference suggests that institutional context and organizational history may influence how leadership accessibility is perceived. One plausible interpretation is that where participants have greater exposure to female leadership representation, perceptions of leadership opportunity appear more gender-neutral. This interpretation is presented cautiously as a context-linked perception pattern rather than a verified institutional condition.

This reported tension is consistent with gender-role congruity theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), which proposes that women may experience evaluative penalties when their behavior either conforms to or departs from traditional gender expectations. Participant accounts reflected this perceived double standard. Female respondents described situations in which assertive behavior was negatively labeled, while more collaborative or empathetic approaches were not interpreted as evidence of leadership strength. One teacher shared, “If I speak up, I’m called aggressive. If I stay quiet, I’m seen as weak. You can’t win.” Interpreted within the conceptual framework, this perception pattern suggests that some participants experience leadership evaluation as constrained by gendered expectations, which aligns with Ridgeway’s (2011) description of leadership as a gendered status belief rather than a purely role-based assessment.

Although most respondents explicitly rejected the idea that leadership ability is inherently tied to male traits, their narratives nevertheless reflected enduring symbolic associations between male identity and leadership authority. Many participants recalled that early professional exposure to leadership roles primarily involved male principals, supervisors, or ministry officials. These

recollections were described by respondents as influential in shaping their early mental models of who occupies leadership positions. One participant noted, “All the principals I had as a new teacher were men. So I never really saw myself in that position.” Within the limits of perception-based data, this pattern suggests that leadership imagery and early career exposure may contribute to how leadership possibility is internally visualized and socially reinforced.

Symbolic interactionism offers a useful interpretive lens for evaluating these accounts. From this perspective, meanings are formed and stabilized through repeated social interaction rather than fixed institutional definitions. Leadership, therefore, functions not only as a formal role but also as a social symbol shaped by repeated representation and shared expectation. Participant descriptions indicate that some women perceive a need to actively manage how they present themselves in leadership-adjacent situations in order to be recognized as legitimate authority figures. Respondents described modifying communication style, emotional expression, and professional presentation to align with what they perceived to be institutionally accepted leadership norms. Interpreted cautiously, these accounts suggest that leadership legitimacy is experienced by some participants as symbolically negotiated rather than automatically granted, indicating that female leadership may not yet be fully normalized across all school contexts in the sample.

Participant responses were also broadly consistent with key propositions associated with Bandura’s (1977) self-efficacy theory, particularly the idea that perceived capability influences goal pursuit and role aspiration. Many respondents referenced personal confidence and self-belief as important considerations in deciding whether to pursue leadership roles. However, self-efficacy was rarely described as an inherent personal trait. Instead, participants framed it as something developed through experience, mentorship, encouragement, and visible examples of successful

leadership. Teachers who reported exposure to female leaders or supportive professional guidance more frequently described leadership as attainable, whereas those without such exposure more often described hesitation or delayed aspiration. One respondent noted, “Nobody ever told me I could be a principal. I had to tell myself.” Interpreted within the study framework, these accounts suggest that perceived leadership capability is socially reinforced rather than individually fixed.

The t-test analysis also identified a statistically significant difference between primary and secondary school teachers in perceptions of equal leadership opportunity and institutional support. Secondary school teachers were more likely to report that leadership opportunities were equally accessible across gender. One possible interpretation is that variation in institutional context and leadership visibility may influence how opportunity structures are perceived. It is plausible that settings with greater exposure to women in leadership roles or more structured advancement pathways may contribute to stronger perceptions of support and possibility. This interpretation is presented cautiously, as the study measures perception rather than institutional leadership distribution directly.

Taken together, these patterns are consistent with theoretical arguments that self-efficacy is shaped by social environment, modeled success, and reinforcement signals rather than policy statements alone. Participant accounts indicate that exposure to role models, encouragement from colleagues, and perceived fairness in opportunity structures contribute to leadership confidence and aspiration. At the same time, many respondents reported limited access to these reinforcing conditions. Within the limits of the dataset, this suggests uneven institutional cultivation of leadership confidence among female educators, rather than uniformly distributed developmental support.

Several respondents described cultural expectations associated with femininity as being experienced, in their view, as misaligned with leadership roles and advancement pathways. Participants referenced social messages that position women primarily as caregivers and family anchors, with professional leadership sometimes framed as secondary or conditional. One participant shared, “They say I should focus on raising my kids first, then think about promotion later.” Within the limits of perception-based reporting, these accounts suggest that some educators experience cultural role expectations as placing conditional boundaries around women’s leadership timing and ambition, rather than leadership being understood as fully role-neutral.

Family expectations and caregiving responsibilities were identified by respondents in both primary and secondary school settings as factors influencing leadership decisions and perceived feasibility. Survey patterns and comparative test results indicate that these constraints were reported as more salient among primary school respondents. While the statistical test identifies a difference in perception by school type, the data do not establish the institutional cause of that difference. A cautious interpretation is that variation in historical leadership patterns, role visibility, or organizational culture between school sectors may shape how caregiving–leadership tension is perceived. From an evaluation standpoint, this pattern highlights the importance of examining how institutional context interacts with gender-role expectations when interpreting leadership access perceptions.

Even among women who expressed strong leadership motivation, participants described perceived cultural penalties associated with visible ambition. Several respondents suggested that assertive career pursuit by women may be socially judged differently than similar behavior by men. Some described hesitation about signaling leadership interest due to fear of negative labeling. This perception of differential ambition norms indicates that gendered value judgments may operate

not only at the institutional selection level but also at the level of self-presentation and aspiration signaling. Interpreted within the conceptual framework, these responses suggest that leadership aspiration is mediated by anticipated social evaluation as well as formal opportunity structures.

These perception patterns are broadly consistent with strands of feminist organizational theory that describe how gender inequality is reproduced through both formal structures and informal cultural norms. Participant accounts of leadership expectations, symbolic authority signals, and evaluative double standards can be interpreted through Acker's (1990) concept of "gendered substructures" within organizations. In this view, organizations operate not only through formal rules but also through embedded symbols, expectations, and interaction patterns that influence who is perceived as credible or "natural" in leadership roles. Within the limits of the present dataset, participant narratives suggest that such informal evaluative norms remain salient in how leadership legitimacy is socially interpreted.

At the same time, respondents did not present the leadership landscape as uniformly exclusionary. Several participants referenced examples of supportive male colleagues, inclusive principals, or recent appointments of women to senior roles. These accounts indicate that participants perceive variability across institutions and leadership teams. However, these examples were frequently described by respondents as incremental or localized improvements rather than evidence of system-wide transformation. As one participant expressed, "It's getting better, but slowly." This phrasing suggests perceived gradual change rather than structural resolution, reinforcing the interpretation that progress is uneven across contexts.

Informal power networks were also described by participants as influencing leadership access, particularly in settings where female leadership representation was perceived to be low. Respondents associated these networks with mentorship access, nomination patterns, and informal

decision influence. Comparative test results indicated a statistically significant difference between primary and secondary school teachers in perceived openness of leadership opportunity structures, with secondary teachers more likely to view leadership pathways as accessible. While the statistical test identifies a perception difference rather than a structural mechanism, a reasonable contextual interpretation is that institutional culture and leadership representation patterns may shape how inclusion or exclusion is experienced. From an evaluation perspective, this suggests that informal organizational dynamics function as moderating conditions in perceived leadership accessibility rather than universally fixed barriers.

The evaluation of these findings also draws attention to a perceived disconnect between formal gender-equality policy language and participant-reported experience. While institutional policies may articulate equal opportunity principles, several respondents described leadership access as being shaped in practice by informal norms, expectations, and relationship-based processes. Within the limits of perception-based evidence, these accounts suggest that written equality provisions do not automatically translate into experienced equality of access. Interpreted analytically, this pattern points to gender equity functioning not only as a procedural condition but also as a cultural and relational one, requiring shifts in organizational practice as well as policy language.

Family dynamics emerged as another recurring theme in the evaluation of RQ1. Participants described how expectations from partners, extended family members, and religious communities influenced their perceived ability or willingness to pursue leadership roles. One teacher explained, “My husband supports my teaching, but he doesn’t want me to stay at school. Leadership would change the whole balance.” Such responses indicate that professional decision-making is, for some participants, negotiated within domestic relationship structures as well as

institutional ones. From an interpretive standpoint, these accounts are consistent with the conceptual framework's recognition of family-level moderators that shape leadership aspiration and participation.

Participants from rural or more religiously conservative communities more frequently described resistance to women occupying highly visible leadership roles. One respondent noted, "In my district, they still believe a woman should be home early to cook. Being a principal wouldn't sit well with my in-laws." These accounts suggest that social-value influences are not experienced uniformly across settings but may vary according to geographic, cultural, and religious context. Evaluated cautiously, this pattern indicates that leadership access perceptions are shaped by intersecting social environments rather than a single, uniform cultural expectation.

Participant narratives also described variation in school-level cultures in how leadership and gender were experienced. Some institutions were characterized by respondents as collaborative, inclusive, and supportive of female professional growth, while others were described as more hierarchical, competitive, and aligned with what participants referred to as a "boys' club" dynamic. These contrasting descriptions indicate that institutional culture is experienced by participants as uneven rather than uniform across schools. From an evaluative standpoint, this variation supports interpreting institutional culture as a moderating context in perceived leadership access, rather than assuming a single system-wide pattern.

The interaction between personal leadership aspiration and perceived organizational support also emerged as an important evaluative theme. Many teachers expressed interest in leadership roles but described limited encouragement, nomination, or developmental opportunities from administrators. One respondent stated, "It's not that I don't want to lead. It's that no one's ever encouraged me or given me a chance." These accounts suggest a perceived gap between

individual motivation and institutional facilitation. Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory provides a useful interpretive lens here, proposing that motivation is influenced by whether individuals believe effort will lead to valued outcomes. Interpreted through this framework, participant responses suggest that when leadership pathways are perceived as unclear, inaccessible, or socially unwelcoming, even motivated educators may choose not to pursue advancement.

A smaller subset of respondents described signs of cultural change, particularly among younger educators entering the profession. One teacher shared, "The younger staff are more open-minded. They don't think leadership has to be male." These responses suggest that some participants perceive generational differences in leadership attitudes and gender norms. However, respondents generally framed these shifts as gradual and localized rather than systemically transformative. Evaluated cautiously, this indicates that while value orientations may be evolving in parts of the system, participants still perceive enduring symbolic and structural barriers operating alongside emerging attitudinal change.

Overall, the findings associated with RQ1 indicate that participant-perceived access to leadership in Trinidad and Tobago's educational system is shaped by socially embedded gender values and historically influenced institutional cultures. Within this sample, reported experiences and perception patterns suggest that gendered expectations continue to play a role in how leadership opportunities and legitimacy are interpreted. The t-test results provide quantitative evidence of a statistically significant difference by school type in perceptions of gender equity in leadership opportunity, with secondary school respondents more likely to report that leadership roles are equally accessible. This statistical difference reflects variation in perception rather than verified institutional access patterns, but it nevertheless indicates that institutional context is an important interpretive factor when evaluating gender and leadership participation.

Taken together, the RQ1 findings are broadly consistent with several theoretical lenses used in the conceptual framework, including the glass ceiling metaphor, symbolic interactionism, and self-efficacy theory. Rather than serving as proof of these theories, the participant accounts align with key propositions within them, particularly the role of symbolic leadership norms, socially reinforced confidence, and perceived advancement barriers. At the same time, the findings point toward the importance of context-specific interpretation. The cultural, historical, and organizational features of Trinidad and Tobago's education system shape how leadership identity and gender norms are experienced, suggesting that global theoretical models are most useful when applied with local contextual grounding.

From an evaluative perspective, RQ1 findings suggest that social values function, in participant experience, as moderating influences between gender and leadership participation. Respondent narratives indicate that these values shape perception, influence aspiration signaling, and affect how leadership suitability is socially interpreted. Because such values operate informally through expectations, symbols, and interaction patterns, participants frequently described them as difficult to name yet influential in practice. This interpretive conclusion provides a conceptual bridge to RQ2, where structural and organizational barriers are evaluated in relation to these value-based influences to explain patterns of underrepresentation more fully.

### **Evaluation of RQ2: Inequality and Underrepresentation Factors**

The second research question, "*What factors lead to inequality and underrepresentation of women in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago?*" generated multi-layered participant accounts pointing to interacting personal, institutional, and sociocultural constraints. This section evaluates those findings using the study's conceptual framework and associated theoretical lenses, while grounding interpretation in participant-reported experience rather than institutional

verification. The evaluative focus moves beyond listing barriers to examining how respondents describe the interaction of organizational culture, social norms, and opportunity structures in shaping perceived leadership access for women within the education sector.

Participants described several recurring factors associated with female underrepresentation, including informal gatekeeping practices, uneven access to mentorship, work–family role conflict, gender stereotyping, and male-dominated organizational cultures. Respondent narratives suggest that these factors are experienced as mutually reinforcing rather than isolated obstacles. Within the limits of perception-based data, accounts indicate that institutional practices and cultural expectations operate together to influence both opportunity access and self-selection out of leadership pathways. Interpreted through the conceptual framework, this pattern is consistent with a systemic-factor model of inequality, where aspiration, access, and advancement are shaped by interacting social and organizational conditions rather than individual merit alone.

One of the most frequently described mechanisms was the perceived influence of informal power networks in leadership selection and advancement. Although formal hiring structures exist, several respondents reported that leadership appointments were experienced as partially opaque or discretionary in practice. Participants described learning about vacancies late or after informal decisions had already been made. One respondent stated, “I didn’t know the post was available until they said he got it.” These accounts suggest that some participants perceive informal nomination and network proximity as influencing leadership outcomes. From an evaluative standpoint, such perceptions indicate that network-based opportunity flow may function as a moderating condition in perceived fairness of leadership access, particularly for educators who are not embedded in dominant institutional circles.

Participant accounts in this area can be interpreted in relation to Lumby and Coleman's (2007) concept of the "hidden curriculum" of leadership, which describes how advancement processes may be shaped by informal relationships and internal signaling rather than fully transparent competition. Respondent descriptions of recommendation patterns, informal nominations, and selective visibility are broadly consistent with this interpretive model. Participants repeatedly reported that male colleagues were more frequently encouraged toward leadership preparation opportunities, including training and acting appointments, even where female colleagues perceived themselves as equally or more qualified. One respondent noted, "He was chosen to act as VP even though I'd been teaching longer and led more projects." Within the limits of self-reported perception data, these narratives suggest that some participants experience leadership evaluation and nomination processes as unevenly distributed. From an evaluative perspective, this pattern is consistent with a gendered interpretation of competence rather than a neutral assessment alone.

Mentorship access emerged as another frequently referenced influence on leadership progression. While a minority of participants described receiving informal guidance or advice, many reported the absence of sustained mentorship relationships across their careers. Female respondents, in particular, described fewer developmental conversations initiated by senior leaders and fewer explicit encouragement signals regarding leadership pathways. One teacher shared, "Nobody ever pulled me aside to say, 'You'd be great at this.' I had to figure it out myself." These accounts indicate that mentorship exposure is experienced as uneven rather than systematically embedded across institutions.

These participant-reported patterns are consistent with arguments advanced by Ibarra et al. (2013), who describe informal networks as important channels for leadership grooming and

advancement signaling, with access often patterned by gender similarity and relational proximity. Sponsorship, defined as active advocacy by a senior leader, was described by respondents as even less common than mentorship. Interpreted cautiously, the reported absence of mentorship and sponsorship can be understood as a perceived exclusion from key leadership preparation channels rather than verified institutional policy exclusion. From an evaluative standpoint, this suggests that relational opportunity structures may function as an important moderating factor in perceived leadership advancement pathways.

The t-test results also indicated a statistically significant difference in perceptions of equal leadership opportunity between primary and secondary school teachers. Respondents from secondary schools were more likely to report that leadership opportunities and institutional support structures are equally available across gender. This statistical difference reflects variation in perception by school context rather than verified differences in actual opportunity distribution. One plausible interpretation is that differences in leadership visibility, mentorship exposure, or advancement culture across school types may shape how support and accessibility are experienced by staff. Interpreted cautiously, this pattern is consistent with the possibility that environments with more visible female leadership representation may influence perceived attainability and confidence, though the present data measure perception rather than institutional staffing patterns directly.

Role conflict and family obligations were also frequently described by participants as influencing leadership decisions and timing. Female respondents, in particular, cited caregiving responsibilities and socially reinforced expectations of maternal availability as factors in declining or postponing leadership opportunities. One participant stated, “I couldn’t take on the principal role because my youngest was still in primary school, and my husband works shifts.” These

accounts indicate that leadership decisions are often evaluated by respondents within a broader family-role context rather than purely professional criteria.

Participants also described perceived differences in how caregiving responsibilities are interpreted depending on gender. Several respondents reported that men with families were more often viewed as dependable and established, while women with similar obligations were perceived as potentially overstretched. From an evaluative standpoint, these narratives are consistent with what prior literature describes as the “motherhood penalty” (Budig & England, 2001), in which caregiving expectations are socially linked to reduced professional opportunity for women. Within this study, these dynamics appear in participant perception as interpretive patterns rather than measured promotion outcomes, but they nevertheless suggest that gendered role evaluation continues to influence how leadership readiness is socially judged.

Participant descriptions of school organizational culture suggest that, in some settings, existing leadership structures and operational norms are experienced as reinforcing gendered participation patterns. Respondents referenced male-dominated leadership teams, gendered task allocation, and limited institutional flexibility around time and availability expectations. Several participants noted that leadership meetings and events were often scheduled outside regular hours and required extended presence, which they experienced as difficult to reconcile with caregiving responsibilities. One participant remarked, “They say we’re not applying, but they don’t create an environment where we can.” Within the limits of perception-based reporting, these accounts indicate that organizational scheduling norms and availability expectations are experienced by some educators as indirectly discouraging leadership participation.

Participant narratives in this area are also broadly consistent with Heilman’s (2012) competence–likability tradeoff framework, which proposes that women in leadership may be

evaluated differently depending on whether they display assertiveness or relational leadership behaviors. Respondents described situations in which directive behavior was negatively labeled while collaborative approaches were interpreted as insufficiently authoritative. One teacher shared, “If I make quick decisions, they say I’m pushy. If I take input, they say I’m indecisive.” Interpreted analytically, these perception patterns suggest that some participants experience leadership evaluation criteria as gender-differentiated in practice, contributing to a perceived double bind in leadership behavior expectations rather than a single neutral standard.

Intersectional influences were also raised by participants as relevant to leadership access, even though gender remained the primary analytical focus of the study. Several respondents indicated that ethnicity, geographic location, and school context influenced how promotion and leadership fit were perceived. Teachers in rural districts described fewer leadership development opportunities and reduced access to training events, while some respondents in denominational school contexts perceived alignment with dominant religious identity as influential. One teacher reported, “They didn’t say it, but I felt that being Hindu in a Catholic school made them question whether I fit.” These accounts suggest that leadership access is experienced by some participants as shaped by intersecting identity and context factors, indicating layered rather than single-axis inequality perceptions.

Participant accounts relating to ethnicity, religion, and location can be interpreted through Crenshaw’s (n.d.) intersectionality framework, which proposes that overlapping identity positions may produce distinct patterns of disadvantage and constraint. Within this dataset, respondents who described themselves as navigating both gender and minority ethnic or religious status reported experiencing layered barriers in leadership consideration and fit perception. Rather than indicating uniform exclusion, these narratives suggest that some participants experience leadership access as

shaped by intersecting identity markers that are not always visible in formal eligibility criteria or surface-level evaluation processes.

Participants also described what they perceived as a gap between formal gender-equity policy language and everyday institutional practice. While respondents acknowledged the existence of Ministry-level and school-level inclusion policies, several reported that implementation and follow-through were inconsistent in their experience. One respondent stated, “There’s a gender policy, but nobody checks whether it’s working. It’s just there.” These accounts indicate that policy presence alone is not experienced by all participants as sufficient to ensure procedural equity. From an evaluative perspective, this suggests that enforcement visibility and accountability mechanisms may influence whether equity policies are perceived as operational rather than symbolic.

Respondents repeatedly emphasized the symbolic dimension of leadership culture in shaping advancement perceptions. The “ideal leader” image described by participants was frequently framed in traditionally masculinized terms: decisive, commanding, and emotionally restrained. Female educators who did not match this perceived prototype reported being viewed as less leadership-aligned despite demonstrated competence. Interpreted analytically, these accounts suggest that symbolic leadership prototypes function, in participant experience, as informal evaluative filters. This perception-based symbolic framing narrows the range of behaviors recognized as leadership-consistent and helps explain why representation alone does not automatically translate into perceived legitimacy.

Participant accounts were frequently interpreted through the metaphor of the glass ceiling, which many respondents used to describe an experienced sense of invisible advancement limits beyond which promotion appeared unlikely. Within this sample, the metaphor functioned as a

useful interpretive frame for how leadership ceilings were perceived rather than as a measured structural threshold. At the same time, narratives also pointed toward what the literature describes as sticky floor conditions, factors that keep individuals concentrated in entry- and mid-level roles. Participants associated these conditions with uneven access to training, limited encouragement, undervaluation of contributions, and the cumulative emotional strain of balancing professional and personal responsibilities. Taken together, these reported dynamics are consistent with gendered-organization interpretations, suggesting that upward mobility is experienced by some respondents as both constrained and resource-intensive rather than equally accessible.

Vroom's expectancy theory also provides a useful interpretive lens for understanding how respondents described their leadership decision-making processes. Participants often framed advancement choices as a cost-benefit evaluation, weighing required effort and anticipated personal sacrifice against perceived reward and institutional support. In environments described as unsupportive or adversarial, respondents reported lower motivation to pursue leadership roles despite adequate qualifications. One teacher explained, "I'm qualified. I could lead. But it's just not worth the stress and sacrifices." Interpreted analytically, this pattern suggests that reduced leadership pursuit may represent a rational response to perceived organizational conditions rather than a deficit in ambition or capability.

From an evaluative perspective, the RQ2 findings indicate that inequality and underrepresentation are experienced by participants as emerging from interacting cultural expectations, organizational practices, and relational opportunity structures. Rather than arising from single events, respondents described patterns of informal exclusion, role strain, gender-differentiated evaluation, and symbolic leadership norms operating together. Within the limits of perception-based data, these accounts support analyzing educational leadership inequality through

a systemic and culturally embedded lens, where institutional context and social-value frameworks function as interacting moderators of advancement experience.

Moreover, participant accounts suggest that addressing underrepresentation may require more than formal equal-opportunity statements alone. Within this sample, respondents frequently indicated that policies perceived as gender-neutral in wording do not automatically translate into gender-neutral outcomes in practice. Several participants emphasized the importance of equitable systems, visible leadership role models, institutional flexibility, and broader recognition of diverse leadership contributions. Interpreted cautiously, these responses indicate that respondents experience leadership inequality as shaped not only by formal rules but also by how those rules are enacted and supported within everyday institutional culture.

Taken together, the RQ2 findings indicate that inequality in educational leadership is experienced by participants as being sustained through both visible organizational arrangements and less visible normative expectations. Respondent narratives referenced informal hiring patterns, uneven mentorship access, narrow leadership prototypes, and culturally embedded gender expectations as interacting influences. Within the limits of perception-based survey data, these patterns are consistent with the study's conceptual framework, which positions systemic factors and social values as moderators of leadership participation. From an evaluative standpoint, the findings support the use of intersectional and context-specific analytical approaches when examining leadership inequality in the Trinidad and Tobago education context, rather than relying solely on generalized or policy-level explanations.

### **Evaluation of RQ3: Strategies and Participant-Suggested Solutions**

The third research question, "*What strategies could help increase female participation and achieve gender equality in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago?*" generated participant

recommendations that were practical, experience-based, and often grounded in personal professional journeys. Respondent suggestions highlighted what they perceived as gaps in policy implementation, institutional culture, and access to developmental resources. This section evaluates those proposed strategies not as proven solutions, but as participant-informed interventions, interpreted through the study's conceptual framework. The analysis considers how these recommendations relate to the cultural, organizational, and interpersonal barriers identified earlier and the extent to which they are aligned with a systemic understanding of leadership inequality.

Across the sample, participants frequently emphasized several recurring strategy themes, including mentorship structures, more equitable access to leadership training, flexible work arrangements, and broader leadership evaluation criteria. These recommendations are best interpreted within the specific cultural and institutional context described by respondents rather than as universally transferable solutions. Importantly, these proposals emerged from educators who reported firsthand experience navigating gendered leadership expectations in their professional settings. As such, they represent practitioner-informed perspectives on both visible procedural barriers and less visible cultural constraints affecting advancement.

One of the most frequently proposed strategies was the formal institutionalization of mentorship and sponsorship structures aimed at supporting female educators' leadership development. Many participants described their advancement experiences as largely self-directed, with limited structured guidance or senior advocacy. One teacher stated, "Nobody tells you how to move forward. If you're not in the loop, you stay where you are." Respondents across school levels and contexts referenced the perceived value of consistent mentorship channels. From an evaluative standpoint, these accounts suggest that participants view structured relational support

mechanisms as a potentially important lever for improving perceived leadership pathway clarity and access.

Mentorship is widely discussed in leadership development literature as a supportive advancement mechanism (Ely et al., 2011), and participant recommendations in this study are broadly consistent with that perspective. However, evaluating its potential application within the Trinidad and Tobago education context requires attention to participant-reported structural conditions, particularly the limited number of women currently occupying senior leadership roles. Several respondents indicated that even when mentorship relationships were available, their scope and sustainability were constrained by workload, hierarchical distance, and mentor availability. One respondent explained, “The one female principal we have is already doing too much. She can’t mentor all of us.” These accounts suggest that while mentorship is perceived as beneficial, its practical reach may be moderated by representation patterns and workload distribution at senior leadership levels. From an evaluative standpoint, participants view mentorship as a promising but capacity-dependent strategy rather than a standalone solution.

Participants also repeatedly emphasized the perceived importance of transparent and equitable access to leadership training and development opportunities. Respondents described patterns in which professional development invitations were experienced as informally distributed and unevenly communicated, sometimes reinforcing existing relational or positional advantages. One teacher reported, “We find out about workshops after they’re full, or the same few people keep getting sent.” Within participant perception, such practices limit access to credentials, experience, and visibility signals often associated with leadership readiness.

To address these perceived inequities, respondents proposed several procedural strategies, including centralized communication channels for training opportunities, open application systems,

and rotation-based nomination practices. These recommendations align conceptually with the organizational barrier patterns discussed in RQ2, particularly participant concerns regarding informal gatekeeping and network-based opportunity flow. From an evaluation perspective, these proposals can be interpreted as participant-informed structural correctives. Their effectiveness, however, would likely depend on consistent implementation, monitoring visibility, and institutional follow-through, areas which respondents earlier described as variable across contexts.

Beyond access to training, participants were also critical of the perceived content and orientation of existing leadership development programs. Several respondents described training experiences as heavily procedural and compliance-focused, emphasizing administrative management, documentation processes, and performance monitoring over relational leadership and people-centered competencies. One teacher remarked, “They teach you how to manage forms, not how to lead people.” Other participants similarly perceived that dominant training approaches privileged directive, control-oriented, and performance-driven leadership models, with comparatively less attention given to collaborative, relational, or transformative approaches that some respondents associated with alternative leadership styles.

From an evaluative perspective, these perceptions suggest a possible misalignment between participant-valued leadership competencies and the leadership behaviors emphasized in formal preparation spaces. This critique is consistent with Acker’s (1990) concept of gendered organizational substructures, in which implicit norms and reward systems shape which leadership behaviors are legitimized and reproduced. Interpreted cautiously, participant feedback indicates that strategy discussions should not be limited to expanding training access alone but may also include reflective review of training emphases, instructional framing, and leadership models

presented. Participants' recommendations, therefore, extend beyond participation equity toward conceptual inclusivity in how leadership capability itself is defined and developed.

Another widely proposed strategy involved increasing institutional flexibility in leadership role design and scheduling expectations, particularly in recognition of caregiving responsibilities that participants reported as disproportionately affecting women. Respondents frequently described traditional leadership schedules as structurally difficult to reconcile with family obligations, citing early morning meetings, late-day events, and weekend commitments as practical deterrents to leadership pursuit. One respondent explained, "I want to lead, but I can't be in school at 6:30 and also get my kids ready for the day." Within the evaluation framework, these accounts position flexibility not as a convenience measure but as a perceived structural enabler that could influence leadership participation decisions under certain contextual conditions.

Some participants proposed structural flexibility strategies such as administrative job-sharing, remote meeting options, and adjusted leadership timetables as mechanisms that could potentially widen participation in leadership roles. These suggestions demonstrate participant awareness of how organizational design features influence who is realistically able to pursue and sustain leadership positions. Respondents' proposals implicitly question the assumption that leadership must always be full-time, continuously on-site, and unrestricted by domestic responsibilities. From an evaluative standpoint, these strategies can be interpreted as attempts to reconfigure role structures rather than individual capability, shifting attention from personal limitation to institutional design. While such approaches are broadly consistent with international gender-equity recommendations (ILO, 2019), participants also acknowledged that implementation within the Trinidad and Tobago educational context would likely depend on institutional readiness and prevailing cultural interpretations of professionalism, availability, and commitment.

Representation emerged as another major strategy domain, particularly in relation to the difference between symbolic inclusion and decision-making authority. Participants expressed dissatisfaction with what they perceived as limited-influence appointments, where women were present in leadership structures but not positioned within core decision channels. One teacher stated, “They say we have women in leadership, but they’re not in the real decision-making roles.” Participant responses, therefore, distinguished between numerical representation and functional authority, emphasizing that visibility alone was not viewed as sufficient to alter leadership culture or opportunity pathways. This distinction aligns with earlier findings in RQ1 and RQ2 showing that symbolic inclusion does not necessarily disrupt gendered leadership norms.

Evaluation of this pattern is consistent with Kanter’s (1977) argument that presence without power does not translate into organizational influence. Interpreted within the study framework, participants’ emphasis on substantive representation suggests that strategy effectiveness is perceived to depend not only on how many women hold titles, but on whether those roles carry agenda-setting capacity, resource control, and policy influence. Respondent-proposed solutions, therefore, extend beyond representation counts toward leadership pipeline design, succession planning visibility, and role allocation transparency. Framed cautiously, the data indicate that participants view meaningful authority distribution, rather than symbolic appointment alone, as more likely to contribute to sustained gender equity in educational leadership structures.

Institutional accountability was also identified by participants as a necessary enabling condition for progress toward gender equity in leadership. Respondents described a perceived gap between formal equity commitments and observable implementation, noting that existing gender-related policies were not always accompanied by monitoring or outcome evaluation. Participants therefore proposed mechanisms such as periodic audits, public reporting of leadership

demographics, and gender-sensitive evaluation indicators as possible tools for strengthening institutional follow-through. One respondent noted, “It’s one thing to say you support women, but it’s another to show it.” Suggested instruments included leadership scorecards, compliance checklists, and structured feedback loops designed to compare policy intent with promotion outcomes. From an evaluative perspective, these proposals reflect participant recognition that structural transparency and monitoring may influence whether equity commitments translate into measurable practice rather than remaining declarative.

These participant recommendations are consistent with feminist organizational theory, which argues that formal accountability structures can function as counterweights to informal bias patterns embedded in organizational routines (Acker, 2006). Within the context of this study’s findings, accountability mechanisms can be interpreted as structural moderators that may reduce the discretionary space in which gendered assumptions operate. The data suggest that when oversight is limited, responsibility for navigating inequitable systems is experienced at the individual level, contributing to frustration, withdrawal, or reduced leadership pursuit among qualified candidates. Interpreted cautiously, participants viewed accountability not as punitive control but as structural clarification of expectations and outcomes.

Participants also reflected on the symbolic dimension of leadership identity and evaluation criteria. Several respondents proposed that progress toward gender equity is linked not only to access strategies but also to how leadership itself is defined and assessed within educational institutions. Teachers described dominant leadership images as narrow and behaviorally rigid, and they recommended broader recognition of relational and collaborative leadership capacities. One respondent stated, “Real leadership isn’t about being loud. It’s about listening, supporting, and building people up.” Evaluated within the study framework, these comments indicate that

participant-proposed strategies extend beyond procedural reform toward symbolic and cultural reframing of leadership legitimacy. This pattern is consistent with earlier RQ1 findings that leadership archetypes function as social-value filters influencing who is perceived as leadership-ready.

This proposal can be interpreted not merely as a preference for alternative leadership styles but as an indication of participants' perception that organizational culture itself requires adjustment. Rather than focusing only on individual leadership behavior, the responses point toward institutional-level change in how leadership is defined, recognized, and rewarded. Participants' recommendations implicitly challenge cultural codes that associate leadership legitimacy with traditionally masculine traits and support broader recognition of inclusive leadership identities. In practical terms, this would involve reconsideration of hiring criteria, evaluation rubrics, and professional discourse surrounding leadership effectiveness. As Ridgeway (2011) argues, gender inequality is sustained not only through structural barriers but also through durable status beliefs about who is competent and how competence is expected to be expressed. The participant proposals, therefore, align with a value-level and symbolic reinterpretation of leadership, consistent with the cultural moderator dimension of the conceptual framework.

The evaluation of RQ3 also reveals a recurring tension between perceived feasibility and perceived implementability. While many strategies were described as practical and desirable, they were simultaneously viewed by participants as difficult to realize within existing institutional cultures. Respondents characterized schools and educational authorities as cautious, procedurally rigid, and slow to revise established norms and routines. One teacher commented, "We've had gender training before. It didn't change much because nobody followed up." This observation highlights a recognized implementation gap between intervention design and sustained

institutional follow-through. From an evaluative standpoint, this suggests that strategy effectiveness is mediated not only by design quality but by accountability, monitoring, and reinforcement structures, factors already identified in earlier sections as organizational moderators affecting leadership access.

In addition, several strategies identified by participants, particularly allyship and advocacy by male colleagues, were described as dependent on discretionary individual behavior rather than guaranteed structural support. Teachers noted the positive influence of male leaders who nominated women for training opportunities, endorsed their candidacy, or challenged exclusionary practices. At the same time, respondents recognized the fragility of strategies that rely primarily on voluntary action. As one participant noted, “It helps when men support us. But what happens when they don’t?” Evaluated in relation to the broader findings, this concern reinforces the distinction between interpersonal interventions and systemic safeguards. While allyship can function as an enabling factor, participants’ responses indicate that durable change is more likely when supportive behaviors are embedded in formal processes rather than left to individual discretion.

Thus, participant-suggested strategies should be evaluated not only in terms of their practical appeal or internal logic but also in relation to the institutional, cultural, and resource conditions that influence their potential uptake and sustainability. Many of the frequently proposed strategies, including mentorship structures, flexible scheduling arrangements, and more inclusive leadership training, depend on more than administrative approval alone. Their effectiveness is likely to be moderated by how leadership, gender roles, and professional commitment are currently interpreted within institutional culture. From an evaluative perspective, this indicates that technical

interventions may have limited impact if underlying value systems and organizational norms remain unchanged.

The evaluation must also account for the layered and differentiated character of inequality reflected in participant responses. Although most proposed strategies were framed in gender terms, they implicitly addressed intersectional dimensions of disadvantage. Respondents noted that educators in rural locations reported reduced access to leadership development opportunities, that religiously conservative environments shaped leadership expectations, and that denominational contexts sometimes influenced perceptions of leadership suitability. These observations suggest that strategy design cannot assume a uniform institutional environment. Approaches intended to increase female participation are more likely to be effective when they are context-responsive and attentive to overlapping social and structural constraints affecting different subgroups of educators.

Taken together, the RQ3 findings indicate that participants generated contextually grounded and experience-based recommendations that correspond closely with the structural and symbolic barriers identified in earlier analyses. The proposed strategies address both organizational processes and cultural meanings attached to leadership participation, demonstrating coherence across the three research questions. At the same time, the data suggest that implementation outcomes remain contingent rather than guaranteed. Their impact will depend on the extent to which educational authorities and institutional leaders acknowledge the systemic character of gender inequality and are prepared to support sustained procedural and cultural adjustment. Framed within the study's conceptual model, strategy effectiveness is therefore best understood as conditional, context-mediated, and dependent on alignment between policy intent, institutional practice, and cultural interpretation.

### **Synthesis of Theoretical Alignment**

This section synthesizes how findings across the three research questions align with, refine, and extend the theoretical foundations and conceptual framework guiding this study. The framework, informed by Amartya Sen's (2001) capability approach, positioned gender as the independent variable and educational leadership participation as the outcome variable, moderated by organizational, personal, and cultural factors. This structure enabled a multidimensional analysis of how inequality is produced and maintained through institutional culture, symbolic meanings, and differential access to opportunity and support. Consistent with Sen's emphasis on capabilities and substantive freedoms, the framework examined how structural and social conditions shape what female educators are realistically able to pursue and achieve in leadership pathways.

Overall, the findings show strong theoretical alignment across multiple levels of analysis and suggest the value of integrating macro-structural and micro-social psychological perspectives when examining gendered leadership trajectories in the Trinidad and Tobago education sector. The results align with and help contextualize key constructs drawn from Sen's capability approach, Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), glass ceiling and sticky floor frameworks (Cotter et al., 2001; Purcell, 2022), Vroom's expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964), and intersectional feminist theory (Crenshaw, n.d.; Hooks, 2000). Rather than operating as isolated explanations, these theories collectively help interpret how institutional arrangements, social meanings, and individual perceptions interact to shape leadership access and participation.

Sen's capability approach is particularly useful for interpreting how institutional arrangements and social norms influence professional freedom and agency. The findings indicate that organizational culture and societal expectations in Trinidad and Tobago can constrain what

female educators are practically able to pursue, even where formal qualifications and stated interest are present. Participants frequently described limited access to mentorship, decision-making spaces, and leadership development opportunities. These patterns are consistent with Sen's (2001) concept of constrained "real freedoms," referring to the gap between formal eligibility and substantive opportunity.

For example, while policy documents may assert equal access to leadership, participant responses indicate that, in practice, informal hiring practices, rigid time structures, and symbolic expectations limit many women's ability to pursue these roles. These constraints operate not only through material resource limitations but through institutional definitions of legitimacy, access, and leadership potential. This pattern supports Sen's (2001) argument that freedom should be evaluated in terms of actual capabilities rather than formal or theoretical entitlements alone. The responses from participants make visible several institutional conversion constraints, including time poverty linked to domestic responsibilities, symbolic exclusion from leadership identity, and the absence of mentorship structures.

This interpretation also aligns with Robeyns (2005), who extends Sen's capability approach by emphasizing the importance of conversion factors, personal, social, and environmental, that influence how individuals translate resources into real opportunities. In this study, the personal factor of self-efficacy, the social factor of gender role expectations, and the institutional environment characterized by opaque leadership cultures function as conversion barriers that reduce female educators' practical capacity to aspire to and attain leadership roles.

Bandura et al. (1999) theory of self-efficacy is likewise strongly reflected in the findings. Many participants described how their belief in their leadership ability was shaped not only by prior experience but by the presence or absence of role models, mentorship, and positive

reinforcement. Teachers who lacked exposure to successful female leaders more frequently expressed doubts about their suitability for leadership. This self-perception gap appeared particularly pronounced among early-career educators and those working in more traditionally structured school environments. As Bandura et al. (1999) explains, self-efficacy develops through mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional regulation processes, and participant narratives revealed constraints across each of these developmental pathways.

Moreover, when self-efficacy did exist, it often had to be sustained in opposition to dominant cultural narratives. One participant remarked, *“I know I can lead, but I keep having to prove it because I’m not what they expect.”* This reflects the need for strong internal self-efficacy in the face of external invalidation, a dynamic that Bandura et al. (1999) identifies as especially difficult under conditions of limited reinforcement and social skepticism. The theory’s applicability is further strengthened in the local context, where formal support structures are uneven, and leadership encouragement is inconsistently distributed, requiring self-efficacy beliefs to be maintained with limited institutional affirmation.

The theory of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) is particularly useful in explaining how meanings around leadership and gender are constructed, reinforced, and negotiated within school environments. Leadership in this context operates not only as a functional organizational role but also as a socially interpreted symbol embedded with gendered expectations. Participants described how their behaviors, dress, communication styles, and emotional expressions were interpreted differently from those of their male counterparts. Assertiveness in men was frequently interpreted as strength, whereas similar behavior in women was interpreted as aggressiveness. Emotional intelligence displayed by women was often undervalued or rendered less visible, even where it contributed meaningfully to institutional climate and staff relationships.

This symbolic dimension is consistent with Ridgeway's (2011) argument that gender functions as a primary frame for organizing social relations and competence expectations. The continual performance and interpretation of gender within school settings influences both professional self-concept and external evaluation, thereby shaping who is perceived as legitimate leadership material. The negotiation of these identities was evident in participants' accounts of modifying their communication style, emotional expression, or professional presentation in order to be taken seriously, forms of identity management that underscore the symbolic and interactional nature of leadership legitimacy.

The data also support the continued relevance of the glass ceiling metaphor (Cotter et al., 2001), but with important nuance. While several participants described being able to ascend to middle management roles, they reported encountering resistance or reduced visibility at the highest leadership levels. Promotions to principal or Ministry-level posts were frequently described as limited in accessibility or dependent on informal networks. This ceiling was not always explicitly stated, but became evident through repeated patterns described across responses. The metaphor captures the paradox of being formally qualified and institutionally present, yet systematically overlooked in final-stage advancement decisions.

However, the sticky floor metaphor (Purcell, 2022) was equally, and in some respects more, applicable to this study. Many women remained in classroom teaching roles for extended periods without advancement, not due to lack of aspiration or competence but due to cumulative structural and social constraints. These included limited access to leadership training, caregiving responsibilities, and informal discouragement from applying. The "stickiness" of these roles was reinforced by cultural messages that normalized women's presence in nurturing and non-leadership positions. This metaphor captures the entrapment dynamic operating across multiple career stages,

aligning with participant accounts of stagnation occurring not only at senior levels but throughout the leadership pipeline.

Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory also helps explain the decision-making calculus participants described when considering leadership pathways. Several respondents indicated that they opted out of leadership pursuit not because of low ambition but because they did not expect proportional recognition or reward for their effort. Where leadership cultures were perceived as exclusionary or prior advancement attempts had failed, motivation declined. This reflects a reduced expectancy value condition, in which the perceived probability of reward lowers the willingness to invest effort. This interpretation highlights the rational basis of these decisions and helps prevent misclassification of disengagement as a lack of drive.

This finding resonates with recent research by Su and Baird (2023), who argue that expectancy-value theory should be interpreted within socio-cultural environments to fully explain career decision-making patterns. In the Trinidad and Tobago context, participant responses indicate that perceived institutional bias, limited organizational support, and cultural resistance to female authority collectively reduce the subjective value attached to leadership roles, particularly when these roles are weighed against anticipated personal and family sacrifices.

Intersectional feminist theory (Crenshaw, n.d.; Hooks, 2000) is also supported by the findings. Although the primary analytical focus of the study was gender, participants frequently identified additional social identity dimensions, including ethnicity, religion, and geographic location, as influencing leadership access and perception. Teachers from rural districts and religiously conservative communities described added layers of constraint affecting their willingness or ability to pursue leadership roles. Others referenced denominational dynamics and perceived cultural fit as influencing leadership selection processes.

These reflections reinforce the importance of understanding inequality as a differentiated and layered experience rather than a uniform condition. Intersectionality provides a necessary analytical lens for recognizing how multiple forms of structural and cultural bias interact within educational systems. The findings, therefore, suggest that leadership inclusion strategies should be context-sensitive and targeted, rather than purely generalized, in order to address the varied forms of constraint experienced by different groups of educators.

Furthermore, scholarship by Tissot (2013) on intersectional approaches to educational leadership highlights that equity efforts often fail when they do not account for how class, race, and religion mediate gendered experiences. This study contributes to that line of inquiry by illustrating how intersectional disadvantage can operate even within a formally unified policy environment, where equality is stated but unevenly experienced.

The participant data revealed several interconnected categories of challenges affecting women's leadership participation, including limitations in institutional support, experiences of gender bias, structural constraints within leadership pathways, and policy-practice gaps within the education system. Across all three research questions, the findings reveal the cumulative and intersecting effects of structural, symbolic, and interpersonal constraints on female leadership participation in education. The qualitative responses revealed several recurring interpretive themes related to gendered leadership expectations, institutional constraints, and access to professional support. The conceptual model positioning gender as the independent variable and leadership participation as the dependent variable, moderated by organizational, cultural, and personal factors, remains useful and well-supported in explaining these dynamics. Each moderating domain was reflected in the participant data: personal factors (including self-efficacy and family role

expectations), cultural factors (including gender norms and religious influence), and organizational factors (including mentorship access and leadership selection practices).

A multi-theoretical approach is necessary to adequately interpret the gendered dynamics of educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. No single theory fully accounts for the breadth of constraints and experiences described by participants. However, taken together, these frameworks provide a coherent and context-sensitive explanatory structure for understanding patterns of underrepresentation. The findings both validate and extend existing theory by emphasizing the interaction of structural arrangements and symbolic meanings, the importance of institutional accountability mechanisms, and the value of embedding capability-expanding practices within educational leadership systems.

Institutional cultures, symbolic meanings, and structural conditions converge to shape women's leadership pathways in the education sector. The study's findings are consistent with Sen's (2001) call for expanding real freedoms and echo feminist critiques that emphasize not only formal access but also the transformation of norms, expectations, and organizational logic. Participant evidence indicates that policy statements alone are insufficient when symbolic leadership models and informal institutional practices remain unchanged.

These findings must also be interpreted within the institutional structure of the Trinidad and Tobago education system, where leadership pathways operate within a centralized governance framework overseen by the Ministry of Education. Advancement typically progresses from classroom teacher roles to senior teacher positions and subsequently to administrative roles such as vice-principal and principal. Although national policies promote merit-based promotion and gender equality, participant responses suggest that informal professional networks, mentorship access, and institutional culture within schools continue to influence leadership progression. In

this context, the experiences described by educators reflect broader structural dynamics in which organizational hierarchies, cultural expectations, and leadership norms intersect to shape women's opportunities for advancement.

Theory-informed, contextually grounded, and intersectionally aware strategies are therefore required to advance gender equity in educational leadership in ways that are both structurally meaningful and culturally sustainable.

### **Gaps and Contradictions**

This section critically explores the gaps and contradictions that emerged across the findings, revealing not only areas where the literature was reinforced but also where the study diverged from, extended, or complicated existing assumptions about gender and educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. The conceptual framework grounded in Sen's (2001) capability approach offered a structure for understanding constraints on agency, yet the findings exposed practical limits in how theoretical models and institutional practices operate when viewed through the nuanced lens of participant experience. This chapter also highlights unique insights contributed by the data, especially the ways in which participants negotiated complex intersections of gender, culture, leadership identity, and institutional expectations.

One of the most prominent contradictions lies in the difference between formal policy intent and actual institutional practice. Many participants were aware of gender equity policies within the Ministry of Education, yet they reported little observable evidence of their implementation or evaluation at the school level. Teachers cited the existence of policy documents, training manuals, and strategic goals, but their narratives suggested a disconnect between stated commitment and operational behavior. This dissonance indicates a performative approach to

gender equality, one that acknowledges the issue rhetorically but lacks enforcement mechanisms. One participant reported that gender equity was discussed in workshops but not reflected in everyday school practice.

This gap between symbolic support and practical enactment supports observations by Tissot (2013), who argues that institutional declarations of inclusion often function as reputational signals rather than drivers of structural change. The contradiction was most evident when respondents described how the same institutions that promoted gender equity continued to operate through informal male-dominated networks and subjective institutional appointment processes. The presence of equity policies thus did not translate into expanded capabilities for women in line with Sen's framework. Instead, these policies created a dual reality: one of formal opportunity and one of informal exclusion.

Another notable contradiction appeared in how leadership was defined and perceived. While many participants, regardless of gender, espoused values such as collaboration, empathy, and community-building, leadership roles within many schools were described as being awarded based on more hierarchical and managerialist criteria. This inconsistency between desired leadership qualities and the traits rewarded in promotions speaks to a deeper symbolic contradiction. Respondents who expressed support for inclusive and relational leadership models also acknowledged that those same traits were often perceived as soft, feminine, and therefore less authoritative. One participant indicated that although collaboration was publicly valued, promotion decisions tended to favor candidates viewed as more disciplinarian or control-oriented.

This contradiction reflects a broader cultural tension around leadership identity. The symbolic dimension of leadership, how it is imagined and enacted, continues to privilege masculinized behaviors, even as rhetorical support for inclusive styles increases. Ridgeway's

(2011) framework of status beliefs helps explain this dynamic: certain traits associated with masculinity continue to be subconsciously linked to competence and authority. The findings thus reveal an internalized bias at odds with evolving discourse, suggesting that the transformation of leadership identity must include not only structural change but symbolic redefinition.

Participants' perceptions of mentorship offer another area of tension. Mentorship was widely endorsed as a solution to underrepresentation, yet several respondents reported that even when female mentors were present, they were perceived as unavailable, overextended, or operating within the same exclusionary culture as their male counterparts. In some participant accounts, senior female leaders were described as maintaining existing norms rather than actively disrupting them. This finding complicates the assumption that simply increasing the number of women in leadership will automatically result in mentorship and systemic support.

The contradiction here lies in the conflation of representation with transformation. As Kanter (1977) and, more recently, Holman and Schneider (2020) have argued, tokenism can lead to overburdening the few women in leadership with representational and emotional labor without equipping them with the institutional power to effect change. The presence of female leaders does not inherently create equitable systems, especially when they are embedded in patriarchal cultures that reward conformity over reform.

One notable insight emerging from the study is the emotional labor involved in aspiring to leadership as a woman. Several participants spoke not only about logistical and structural barriers but also about the psychological toll of constantly needing to validate their competence. Participants described monitoring their tone, attire, and facial expressions to avoid being labeled as emotional or aggressive. This labor was described as largely invisible yet exhausting, and it

revealed how leadership is not merely about responsibilities or skills but also about performing a socially acceptable identity.

This insight extends the literature on gendered emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983; Guy & Newman, 2004) by showing how such labor is not confined to caregiving roles but is also embedded in leadership trajectories. Female teachers described modifying their behavior to manage perceptions from colleagues, superiors, and students. This need to continually adjust one's professional persona challenges the idea of leadership as purely empowering and instead suggests that, in some contexts, it is experienced as a domain of compliance and scrutiny.

Another notable difference arose in how some male participants viewed gender equality. While many male teachers expressed support for their female colleagues' advancement, others subtly reinforced traditional hierarchies. One male participant expressed support for women's leadership but qualified this by suggesting that emotional expression could be a limitation. Such comments suggest a well-intentioned but limited understanding of gender equity, one that supports inclusion as long as women conform to established leadership norms. This conditional acceptance reproduces the very barriers it claims to oppose.

This insight adds complexity to the literature on male allyship, which often presents male support as a key component of institutional change. The findings here suggest that allyship must be critical and reflective, not merely supportive in name. Support that is contingent on assimilation to dominant norms does not dismantle inequality but may instead reconfigure it in more subtle forms.

Differences in perception based on school type and geographic location also emerged as important but under-theorized dynamics. Participants from rural schools reported fewer training opportunities, less exposure to female leaders, and greater pressure to conform to traditional gender

roles. These spatial differences highlight a geographic dimension of inequality that intersects with gender to produce distinct leadership trajectories.

While urban–rural divides have been documented in educational access and outcomes (UNESCO, 2019), their impact on leadership representation appears less frequently examined in the literature. The findings here suggest that geographic location functions as a moderating factor, influencing both opportunity and aspiration. The capability approach, while comprehensive, as applied in this study, may require greater sensitivity to spatial and infrastructural variables to fully capture the range of constraints experienced by women.

Religious affiliation and denominational school governance also presented contradictions. Some participants from faith-based institutions expressed frustration that leadership appointments appeared influenced by religious conformity rather than merit. One participant indicated that religious alignment seemed to matter in leadership selection, even where this was not formally acknowledged. This finding complicates narratives of meritocracy and suggests that institutional affiliations may quietly reproduce exclusionary practices.

This also raises questions about the secular–universal applicability of leadership frameworks. The findings suggest that in culturally pluralistic and religiously diverse societies like Trinidad and Tobago, leadership access may be contingent not only on gender but also on religious alignment. Intersectional feminist theory helps account for this pattern, but the literature would benefit from more context-specific analyses of how faith-based governance interacts with gender norms.

Contradictions were also evident in how participants evaluated their own motivations. Several respondents who initially declared disinterest in leadership roles later described systemic barriers that had deterred them. One participant indicated that she had not pursued a principalship

because she believed she would not be seriously considered. This suggests that what appears to be personal preference may in some cases reflect adaptive rationalization, a response to anticipated exclusion rather than purely intrinsic disinterest.

This discrepancy between stated intention and underlying context challenges models that attribute underrepresentation to a lack of ambition or individual choice. It underscores the importance of interpreting agency within its structural context. As Sen (2001) argued, real freedom requires not only the formal ability to choose but also the substantive opportunity to do so. The findings suggest that some participants operate within constrained fields of possibility, where decisions are shaped by anticipated exclusion as well as personal preference.

Finally, a persistent contradiction ran through participants' simultaneous critique and reproduction of gender norms. Some respondents articulated frustration with patriarchal leadership structures while also expressing reservations about women's suitability for leadership. One female participant suggested that some women may be perceived as too soft for leadership roles, even while acknowledging the presence of double standards. This internalized tension reflects the power of socialization and suggests that gender norms are not only externally imposed but also internally maintained.

This contradiction suggests the value of leadership development programs that include consciousness-raising components, not only skills training. Feminist pedagogy emphasizes the importance of reflection, dialogue, and critical analysis in transforming internalized oppression (Freire, 1970; Hooks, 2014). The findings indicate that without such reflective spaces, equity efforts risk reproducing the ideologies they seek to dismantle.

Overall, the gaps and contradictions revealed in this study emphasize the complexity of achieving gender equity in educational leadership. They demonstrate that formal structures alone

cannot overcome deeply embedded norms, that representation does not guarantee transformation, and that individual aspiration is closely tied to institutional context. The study offers context-specific insights related to emotional labor, conditional allyship, religious dynamics, geographic inequity, and internalized norms that extend existing literature and point to the need for multidimensional strategies that are both critical and contextually grounded.

### **Comparative Alignment and Challenges Between Findings and Literature**

This section presents a critical analysis of the intersections, consistencies, and contrasts between this study's findings and existing scholarship on gender and educational leadership. By engaging with literature from local, regional, and international sources, it explores how the current research supports, expands upon, or challenges prevailing understandings, particularly within the sociocultural context of Trinidad and Tobago. The findings are considered in relation to the works reviewed in Chapter 2 and the theoretical perspectives outlined in the conceptual framework, particularly those relating to gender constructs, organizational culture, self-perception, and intersectionality.

A recurring point of convergence between this study and the literature is the concept of the glass ceiling (Purcell, 2022; Fitzsimmons et al., 2020), which refers to the subtle yet enduring limitations that prevent women from rising to top leadership roles. Participants described instances consistent with professional stagnation despite holding strong credentials and long service records. These accounts mirror the work of Joseph et al. (2016) and Morris (1993), who documented similar patterns among female educators in the Caribbean, noting that structural and cultural norms act as covert barriers. The findings suggest that access to formal leadership opportunities does not automatically translate into equitable outcomes when implicit organizational behaviors and symbolic structures continue to favor male dominance in leadership advancement.

The study aligns with the literature on the sticky floor phenomenon (Coate & Howson, 2021), which describes the mechanisms that keep women in lower-level roles due to systemic undervaluing, lack of support, or conflicting role expectations. Several female teachers described experiences of prolonged stagnation, in which they were not encouraged to advance or were discouraged from applying for leadership posts. Leadership inequality, therefore, appears to operate not only at the highest levels but also throughout the professional pipeline. This pattern supports the study's framework in which organizational and cultural moderators influence mobility across multiple career stages, not solely senior leadership access.

Bandura et al.'s (1999) theory of self-efficacy remains a useful interpretive lens. Women's confidence in their leadership potential appeared to be influenced by the presence or absence of mentorship, role models, and institutional support. This reflects Kung's (2009) work, which argues that self-efficacy is constructed through environmental reinforcement. Female educators exposed to successful women leaders reported greater ambition, while those without such exposure more frequently described self-doubt. Self-belief, therefore, is not static but responsive to social cues and institutional culture.

Symbolic interactionist interpretations of leadership and gender (Blumer, 1969; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004) offer further explanatory power. Participants described how traits like assertiveness were interpreted positively in men and negatively in women. This perception gap prompted identity management strategies where women altered their tone, appearance, and emotional expression to align with dominant expectations. Leadership in this context functions as a performative act regulated by cultural scripts rather than solely an administrative role.

This study adds context-specific insight to emotional labor theory (Guy & Newman, 2004) by showing how emotional regulation demands are embedded in the pursuit of leadership roles.

Teachers described the psychological toll of repeatedly needing to demonstrate competence in environments where their legitimacy was questioned. The burden was compounded by expectations to perform both emotional sensitivity and administrative competence. These forms of labor were not formally recognized, yet were described as influential in shaping leadership trajectories.

Male allyship in the participant accounts revealed inconsistencies with some existing assumptions. Some male educators expressed support for female leadership, but this was often contingent on women adopting dominant leadership styles. Expressions of support often appeared to stop short of advocacy for structural reform. The conditional nature of allyship complicates interpretations in the literature that present male support as unambiguously positive (Ellis et al., 2021).

Disinterest in leadership, as expressed by some women, was frequently described as being shaped by prior experiences of exclusion rather than a genuine lack of ambition. This pattern is consistent with critiques of choice-based models of career development (Su & Baird, 2023). The adaptation of preferences in response to systemic barriers echoes Sen's (2001) concern with evaluating agency within constraints. Aspirations in constrained contexts do not always reflect true preference or potential.

School type and geographic location appeared to play a larger role than is commonly emphasized in the literature reviewed for this study. Teachers in rural or religiously conservative communities described more rigid expectations regarding gender roles and leadership suitability. While educational access has been studied in urban–rural terms (UNESCO, 2023), this study indicates that leadership development opportunities are also distributed unevenly. These spatial dimensions suggest a need for greater attention in future leadership research.

Faith-based governance structures were described by some participants as introducing another dimension of exclusion. Several respondents reported that religious affiliation was perceived to influence leadership selection. In schools affiliated with specific denominations, candidates perceived as outsiders reported difficulty advancing. This issue complicates meritocratic ideals and suggests that religious identity intersects with gender in ways not often accounted for in the literature.

Participants noted inconsistencies in gender equity policy enforcement. Policy documents were present but lacked monitoring mechanisms. Institutional behavior was widely described as remaining largely unchanged at the school level. This supports Tissot's (2013) critique of equity as a symbolic project rather than a transformative one. The implementation gap between rhetoric and practice continues to undermine reform efforts.

Leadership development programs were frequently described by participants as promoting a narrow, masculinist model of leadership, reflecting what Blackmore (2017a) describes as the historical construction of educational administration as a masculinist enterprise. The training emphasized authority and compliance rather than inclusive or pedagogical styles. Teachers viewed such programs as misaligned with the realities of educational practice. This raises questions about the content and assumptions embedded in current professional development models.

Representation was viewed critically. The presence of women in leadership did not consistently result in advocacy or reform, according to participant accounts. In some cases, participants perceived that female leaders maintained the status quo. Participants questioned whether representation alone is sufficient without institutional accountability or cultural change. The findings suggest that representation must be accompanied by power redistribution and institutional openness to transformation.

These comparisons between findings and existing literature reveal both congruence and divergence. They point to the persistence of structural barriers while highlighting potentially under-theorized dynamics specific to the Trinidad and Tobago context. Emotional labor, adaptive preference, conditional allyship, and geographic and religious exclusions offer context-grounded insights that extend and, in some cases, challenge dominant understandings of gender in educational leadership.

### **Summary**

The findings from Chapter 4 provide a comprehensive examination of gender dynamics in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago, with particular attention to the barriers associated with female participation and the strategies participants proposed to address them. This chapter integrates quantitative and qualitative data from educators to examine how gender roles, social values, and systemic institutional factors shape perceived leadership access and opportunity in the education sector.

One central finding is that gendered perceptions of leadership remain embedded within participants' descriptions of educational leadership culture. Leadership was frequently associated with traits culturally and historically coded as masculine, such as assertiveness, decisiveness, and control (Heilman, 2012). Participants indicated that these traits are often perceived to be prioritized in leadership selection contexts, while relational traits such as empathy and collaboration are viewed as less strongly associated with formal authority. This perception reinforces a gendered leadership model that participants linked to uneven access to senior leadership roles. Female respondents described experiencing tension in how their leadership behaviors were interpreted, particularly when assertiveness and empathy were evaluated differently depending on gender

(Heilman et al., 2023). These patterns help explain how socially embedded leadership norms can function as barriers to women's advancement.

The findings also indicate differences in how leadership opportunity structures are perceived across participants. Many male respondents described leadership advancement as primarily merit-based, while a substantial number of female respondents identified systemic and institutional barriers, including limited mentorship access, uneven encouragement, and concerns about transparency in promotion processes (Begeny et al., 2020). Work–family role expectations were frequently referenced as influencing leadership decisions and opportunities. Participants described how caregiving responsibilities and social expectations regarding women's family roles can constrain leadership pursuit or acceptance (Kossek & Lee, 2021). These responses suggest that leadership participation is shaped not only by individual ambition but also by interacting social and institutional conditions.

Moreover, the findings suggest that although women encounter multiple leadership-related challenges, many participants described reduced confidence in their leadership potential, particularly in contexts where female role models in senior positions were limited. Participant responses indicated that perceived leadership self-efficacy was shaped by visibility, mentorship, and exposure to women in authority roles. Female teachers who reported little or no exposure to female leaders were more likely to question their readiness or suitability for leadership positions. This pattern is consistent with Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, which emphasizes the importance of vicarious experience and social modeling in the development of confidence and perceived capability. In this way, limited representation functions not only as a structural barrier but also as a psychological constraint that may contribute to continuing gender disparities in leadership participation.

The chapter also examined how gender interacts with other identity markers, including ethnicity, religion, and geographic location. While these variables were not the primary analytic focus of the study, they emerged in participant responses as additional moderating influences on leadership access and aspiration. Teachers working in rural contexts and those in more religiously conservative school environments more frequently described restrictive cultural expectations and reduced access to leadership development opportunities. Participants also noted uneven distribution of training access and leadership visibility across regions and school types. These findings suggest that gender inequality in educational leadership is experienced unevenly and may be intensified by intersecting social and institutional conditions, supporting the relevance of an intersectional interpretive lens (Collins & Bilge, 2020).

At a broader institutional level, the findings revealed a recurring tension between formal gender equity policy language and perceived implementation in school settings. Although participants were generally aware that gender equity policies and statements exist within Ministry frameworks, many described limited evidence of systematic monitoring, enforcement, or outcome evaluation at the institutional level. Gender equity initiatives were frequently characterized by respondents as symbolic or procedural rather than operational. These perceptions point to an implementation gap between policy intent and lived organizational practice. Taken together, the findings suggest that advancing gender equity in educational leadership requires attention not only to formal policy design but also to institutional culture, accountability mechanisms, and everyday leadership selection practices.

The evaluation of the findings also underscores the continued relevance of the “glass ceiling” effect in educational leadership, as reflected in participant accounts and perceived promotion patterns. Many respondents described advancement barriers at higher leadership levels

that were not formally stated but were experienced as persistent and difficult to overcome, even where qualifications and experience were present. In addition, participant narratives reflected “sticky floor” dynamics, in which women remain concentrated in classroom and mid-level roles due to limited mentorship access, uneven development opportunities, and constrained encouragement to pursue advancement. Taken together, these patterns suggest a dual constraint effect, where both upward breakthrough and early-stage progression are experienced as challenging within current institutional cultures.

Participants proposed multiple strategies to support increased female participation in educational leadership, including structured mentorship programs, more equitable and transparent access to leadership training, and more flexible work arrangements. However, many respondents indicated that such strategies would likely have a limited impact without sustained institutional commitment and changes in leadership selection culture. There was broad support among participants for expanding definitions of leadership effectiveness to include relational and collaborative competencies alongside decisiveness and authority (Offermann & Foley, 2020). At the same time, respondents recognized that redefining leadership norms would require confronting entrenched cultural expectations and long-standing organizational practices that continue to privilege masculinized leadership models.

Overall, the findings of this chapter indicate that progress toward greater gender equity in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago is perceived by participants as dependent on both structural reform and cultural change. Respondent accounts suggest that alignment between gender equity policy language and everyday institutional practice remains uneven. Leadership development systems, selection processes, and professional norms were frequently described as needing recalibration toward more inclusive criteria and more transparent pathways. Participants

also emphasized the continuing influence of societal expectations, work–family role pressures, and symbolic leadership norms in shaping women’s leadership trajectories. Interpreted within the limits of the study design, these findings support the case for more context-responsive, institutionally grounded, and culturally aware approaches to leadership equity.

## **CHAPTER 5: IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION**

This chapter critically evaluates and synthesizes the findings of the study, outlining key implications, practical recommendations, and concluding reflections. It provides a space to consider the overall research journey and to examine how gender dynamics shape leadership access and participation within educational contexts. Through the integration of theoretical insights and applied considerations, this chapter contributes to the broader discourse on gender inequality in educational leadership and identifies directions for future research, policy development, and institutional reform.

The study addresses the persistent issue of gender inequality in educational leadership within the context of Trinidad and Tobago. Despite women comprising the majority of the teaching workforce, they remain significantly underrepresented in leadership positions. This imbalance is shaped by a convergence of factors, including entrenched gender stereotypes, systemic institutional barriers, and prevailing societal expectations surrounding caregiving and leadership suitability. The research sought to investigate the gendered dynamics that contribute to this disparity, while also examining how leadership access is further mediated by intersecting factors such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Through this intersectional lens, the study aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of leadership inequality and to identify strategies capable of fostering more equitable leadership pathways.

A survey-based mixed-methods approach was employed, integrating quantitative and qualitative data through a semi-structured questionnaire. The quantitative component examined patterns related to leadership aspirations, perceived barriers, and gendered perceptions of leadership suitability. These data provided insight into broader trends across participants. Complementing this, the qualitative component consisted of open-ended survey responses that

captured participants' reflections on lived experiences, institutional cultures, and sociocultural expectations. This integrated design allowed for both measurable analysis and contextual interpretation, enabling a deeper examination of the layered and interrelated barriers influencing women's participation in educational leadership.

While the study offers valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. The sample size was relatively small and geographically specific, focusing on educators within Trinidad and Tobago. As a result, the findings may not be broadly generalizable beyond similar educational and cultural contexts. In addition, reliance on self-reported survey data may have introduced response bias, as participants may have moderated their responses due to professional sensitivities or social desirability. Although the inclusion of open-ended items strengthened the depth of the data, future research could expand methodological breadth through larger samples, comparative regional studies, or longitudinal designs to further enrich understanding of gendered leadership trajectories.

Ethical standards were rigorously upheld throughout the research process. Participants were provided with detailed informed consent outlining the study's purpose, voluntary participation, and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. No identifying information was collected, and data were securely stored and reported in aggregate form. These ethical safeguards were central to ensuring participant autonomy, minimizing risk, and maintaining the integrity and credibility of the research.

This chapter begins by revisiting the research problem, objectives, and methodological approach, situating the findings within the study's conceptual framework. It then synthesizes the key results in relation to the research questions, drawing connections between empirical evidence and theoretical perspectives. The discussion proceeds to examine practical implications for policy,

institutional practice, and leadership development, followed by targeted recommendations for key educational stakeholders. The chapter concludes by outlining directions for future research and reflecting on the broader significance of the study, with the overarching aim of advancing gender equity and promoting inclusive leadership structures that enable women to access, sustain, and thrive in educational leadership roles.

### **Implications**

This research examined the social, institutional, and family-related influences on women's participation in educational leadership within Trinidad and Tobago. The findings indicate that gender disparities in leadership persist not because of a lack of qualification or interest among women, but because of the interaction of sociocultural values, organisational practices, and individual-level experiences that collectively shape leadership access and leadership aspirations (Begeny et al., 2020). Although women constitute a significant proportion of the teaching profession, their participation in leadership remains constrained by structural and cultural barriers operating across multiple levels of the education system.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- RQ1: What social values influence female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago?
- RQ2: What factors lead to inequality and underrepresentation of women in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago?
- RQ3: What strategies could promote greater gender equality and enhance female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago?

In addressing these questions, the findings suggest that leadership inequality is best interpreted as a moderated and context-dependent process rather than a single causal outcome. Consistent with the conceptual framework, gender operates as a primary explanatory variable whose effects are shaped by moderating influences at the individual, family, organisational, and cultural levels. This supports the study's theoretical position that women's leadership participation is socially structured and institutionally mediated rather than individually determined.

At the level of social values, the findings suggest that deeply embedded gender norms in Trinidad and Tobago continue to associate leadership with traditionally masculine-coded traits such as authority, decisiveness, and uninterrupted availability. These norms influence both institutional recognition of leadership potential and women's own interpretations of leadership suitability. Rather than functioning as overt exclusionary mechanisms, these values operate symbolically, shaping expectations about legitimacy, authority, and competence. This interpretation aligns with feminist and sociological perspectives that conceptualise leadership inequality as the product of gendered socialisation, symbolic power, and status beliefs rather than explicit discrimination alone.

At the institutional level, the findings indicate that organisational cultures and promotion structures frequently privilege linear, uninterrupted career pathways and continuous visibility within leadership networks. Such models can disproportionately disadvantage women who navigate caregiving responsibilities or non-linear career trajectories. In this context, underrepresentation is sustained not necessarily through formal policy restrictions but through institutional norms that implicitly reward availability, mobility, and conformity to established leadership archetypes. These findings extend Caribbean and international scholarship by

illustrating how organisational practices in Trinidad and Tobago actively moderate the relationship between gender and leadership attainment within the education sector.

At the individual and family levels, the findings suggest that self-efficacy, career intention, and access to family support significantly shape women's leadership aspirations. However, these factors operate within broader cultural expectations that normalise women's primary responsibility for domestic and emotional labour. As a result, leadership decisions are often negotiated within constrained fields of possibility. Rather than reflecting a lack of ambition, women's cautious engagement with leadership pathways may represent adaptive responses to anticipated institutional and familial pressures (Kray et al., 2025). This interpretation reinforces the study's moderated framework by demonstrating how personal agency is shaped, enabled, or constrained by social and organisational contexts.

Importantly, the implications of these findings must be interpreted within the study's methodological parameters. The data were drawn from a purposive sample of teachers across two institutional contexts and relied on quantitative survey responses supplemented by open-ended qualitative comments rather than in-depth interviews or longitudinal observation. While this design limits statistical generalisability at a national level, the recurrence of thematic patterns across participants enhances the internal credibility and contextual validity of the conclusions. The findings should therefore be interpreted as analytically transferable rather than universally representative, offering insight into structural and cultural dynamics operating within Trinidad and Tobago's education system.

From a practical perspective, the findings indicate that gender-neutral leadership development frameworks are insufficient in contexts where inequality is structurally mediated. Policy responses must therefore account for the moderating factors identified in this study. This

includes the establishment of transparent promotion and selection criteria within the Teaching Service Commission, formalised mentorship and sponsorship structures for aspiring female leaders, more flexible leadership role configurations that acknowledge caregiving responsibilities, and institutional monitoring mechanisms to assess gender distribution in leadership appointments. Without such targeted interventions, existing organisational norms are likely to reproduce patterns of underrepresentation.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study contributes to the literature by demonstrating how gender operates as a relational variable moderated by cultural norms, institutional structures, and family dynamics within a postcolonial Caribbean education system. Rather than treating gender inequality as either a structural or psychological phenomenon in isolation, the findings support a multi-level analytical approach. By integrating individual self-efficacy, family role expectations, organisational culture, and broader social values within a unified conceptual framework, the research extends existing leadership theories through context-specific application. It illustrates how moderated gender dynamics are shaped by historical, religious, and institutional hierarchies unique to Trinidad and Tobago, thereby contributing a regionally grounded perspective to global discussions on educational leadership and gender equity.

Finally, the findings identify several avenues for future research. Given the cross-sectional nature of the present study, longitudinal research designs would be valuable in examining how female educators' leadership aspirations, self-efficacy, and institutional positioning evolve over time. Such approaches could illuminate whether shifts in organisational culture, mentorship access, or policy enforcement meaningfully alter leadership trajectories. In addition, larger-scale quantitative studies across multiple school types and geographic regions would strengthen

national-level analysis and allow for more robust comparison between urban, rural, denominational, and government institutions.

Further qualitative research, including in-depth interviews or ethnographic inquiry, would also provide deeper insight into the processes of leadership identity negotiation, emotional labour, and adaptive preference formation identified in this study. Particular attention should be given to how intersectional factors such as religion, ethnicity, and geographic location mediate access to leadership opportunities. Expanding research in these areas would not only refine theoretical understanding but also support more context-sensitive policy development within Trinidad and Tobago's education system.

### **Limitations**

While the findings of this study provide meaningful insight into the gendered dynamics of educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago, they must be interpreted within clearly defined methodological boundaries. Identifying these limitations does not diminish the study's contribution; rather, it clarifies the scope of inference and situates the conclusions within their appropriate empirical context. A transparent discussion of constraints strengthens the study's credibility and provides direction for future scholarly development.

#### **Sample Size and Generalizability**

One of the primary limitations relates to sample size. Thirty-three educators completed the full survey instrument. Although this number was sufficient to generate descriptive statistical trends and substantive qualitative commentary, it restricts the extent to which findings can be generalised across the national education system. The sample size limited the use of more complex multivariate statistical procedures and constrained the power of inferential tests, particularly when comparing subgroups such as gender or school type.

Additionally, the use of purposive sampling focused on one government primary school and one government-assisted secondary school. This design enabled contextual depth and comparative insight between institutional types but necessarily limited representativeness. Perspectives from private schools, rural schools beyond the selected site, denominational institutions with different governance structures, and other regional contexts were not included. Given that the findings suggest geographic and institutional variation in perceptions of leadership opportunity, future research would benefit from a broader sampling frame. Expanding participation across diverse school categories and districts would allow for more robust regional comparisons and strengthen claims regarding national patterns of gender inequality in educational leadership.

#### **Reliance on Self-Reported Data**

This study relied on self-reported data collected through a semi-structured questionnaire. As with most survey-based research in the social sciences, this approach introduces potential limitations related to perception, interpretation, and response bias. Participants' accounts reflect their subjective experiences and understandings of leadership opportunity, institutional culture, and gender dynamics. While such perceptions are central to examining social values and identity formation, they do not constitute direct observation of institutional processes.

Social desirability bias may also have influenced responses, particularly when addressing sensitive issues such as discrimination, ambition, mentorship access, or perceptions of fairness. Although anonymity and confidentiality were assured, respondents may have moderated their answers due to professional caution or concern about institutional repercussions. This possibility is especially relevant in small institutional settings where participants may perceive their views as identifiable despite anonymisation procedures.

Furthermore, self-reported data capture interpretations of events rather than independently verified behaviour or documented institutional practice. The findings, therefore, represent how educators make meaning of their professional environments rather than definitive accounts of organisational decision-making processes. While the inclusion of open-ended responses strengthened interpretive depth, future research could incorporate in-depth interviews, focus groups, or document analysis to allow for greater triangulation and to probe the nuances of gendered leadership experiences more comprehensively.

### **Absence of Follow-Up Interviews**

The study was initially conceptualised within an explanatory sequential mixed-methods framework, with the intention that qualitative follow-up interviews would deepen interpretation of quantitative findings. However, due to practical and contextual considerations, standalone interviews were not conducted. Instead, qualitative insight was generated through open-ended survey responses embedded within the questionnaire instrument.

While this approach preserved the integration of quantitative and qualitative strands, it limited opportunities for extended narrative probing, clarification of ambiguities, and exploration of emergent themes at greater depth. Open-ended survey items allow participants to articulate perspectives in their own words, but they do not permit iterative questioning or real-time elaboration in the way interviews do. As a result, certain themes, particularly those related to identity negotiation, institutional power dynamics, and emotional labour, may have benefited from deeper dialogic engagement.

Future research could build on this foundation by incorporating semi-structured interviews, focus groups, or longitudinal qualitative designs. Such approaches would enable richer exploration of how leadership aspirations evolve over time and how female educators negotiate identity,

authority, and institutional culture within gendered organisational environments. This would further strengthen understanding of the dynamic relationship between social values, structural constraints, and leadership participation in the Trinidad and Tobago education sector.

### **Timing and Contextual Factors**

The study was conducted during a period of heightened cultural and institutional activity in Trinidad and Tobago, including the Carnival season and concurrent school-based obligations. This timing may have influenced both participant availability and overall response rates. Educators managing professional responsibilities alongside personal and community commitments may have had limited capacity to engage fully with survey participation, potentially contributing to the reduced completion rate relative to initial consent.

While there is no direct evidence that timing altered the substantive nature of responses received, it may have affected the breadth and diversity of participation. Specifically, teachers with heavier extracurricular, administrative, or familial commitments may have been underrepresented. As such, the findings should be interpreted within the temporal context in which the data were collected.

Future research could mitigate this limitation by distributing data collection across multiple time points or scheduling surveys during less intensive periods of the academic calendar. Doing so may increase participation rates and support broader demographic representation, thereby strengthening comparative and inferential analysis across school types and institutional settings.

### **Policy Implementation Constraints**

Although gender equity policies were identified within the national education framework, the study revealed a perceived gap between policy articulation and policy enactment at the institutional level. Because this research relied primarily on educator perceptions rather than direct

policy analysis or interviews with policymakers and regulatory authorities, it was not possible to systematically evaluate the implementation fidelity, monitoring mechanisms, or enforcement structures associated with these policies.

This limitation constrains the study's ability to determine whether reported leadership disparities reflect policy design weaknesses, implementation inconsistencies, or broader cultural resistance within institutional settings. Participants frequently referenced institutional inertia, limited transparency, and uneven application of leadership procedures; however, these accounts represent experiential interpretations rather than formal policy audits. As such, conclusions regarding policy effectiveness must be interpreted cautiously and within the bounds of perceptual data.

Future research could address this limitation by incorporating policymakers, members of the Teaching Service Commission, school boards, and supervisory authorities into the sample. A multi-level policy implementation analysis, combining document review, stakeholder interviews, and institutional data tracking, would allow for a more comprehensive assessment of how gender equity frameworks operate in practice and where structural gaps persist.

In summary, these limitations define the interpretive boundaries of the study rather than diminish its scholarly contribution. They underscore the complexity of examining gender and leadership within institutional systems where policy, culture, and practice intersect. Expanding sample diversity, integrating longitudinal or multi-site designs, and directly evaluating policy implementation processes would further strengthen future investigations and build upon the contextual insights generated in this research.

**RQ1: What social values influence female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago?**

The study reveals that social values and systemic factors in Trinidad and Tobago play a significant role in shaping female participation in educational leadership. Quantitative analysis, including an independent samples *t*-test, was used to examine whether perceptions of selected social values differed between male and female educators. Although the analysis did not reveal statistically significant differences between groups, the absence of statistical significance does not imply the absence of meaningful social influence. Instead, descriptive patterns and qualitative responses provided important insight into how these values operate across genders. In particular, caregiving expectations and familial responsibility emerged as widely shared social assumptions that shape how leadership suitability is understood within the education system.

Across responses, leadership was frequently associated with traits such as assertiveness, decisiveness, and authority (Acker, 1990). These characteristics were implicitly framed as masculine, reinforcing perceptions that women are less suited to leadership roles that demand visibility, authority, and constant availability. This finding aligns with existing literature on gendered leadership norms, which argues that leadership traits are socially constructed and frequently coded as masculine, while traits associated with women, such as empathy and nurturance, are undervalued within traditional leadership paradigms (Acker, 1990; Torrance et al., 2016). Within the conceptual framework of this study, these social values function as cultural moderating factors that shape both institutional expectations of leadership and women's internalised perceptions of leadership legitimacy.

The study further indicates that caregiving responsibilities are widely perceived as incompatible with leadership roles. In Trinidad and Tobago, social norms continue to position

women as primary caregivers, reinforcing expectations that family responsibilities should take precedence over professional advancement (Kossek & Lee, 2021). These norms operate not only at the family level but also within institutional cultures, where leadership roles are structured around assumptions of uninterrupted availability, extended working hours, and limited flexibility. As Washington and Gounko (2024) and Karya et al. (2021) note, such work–family expectations operate as structural constraints that disproportionately affect women and limit their participation in leadership pathways.

Participants' open-ended responses frequently reflected this tension between professional aspiration and socially prescribed gender roles. Several female educators described consciously limiting their leadership ambitions due to perceived conflicts between family obligations and professional demands. These narratives illustrate how social values are not only externally imposed but also internalised and translated into forms of self-regulation. In this sense, leadership underrepresentation cannot be attributed solely to institutional exclusion; rather, it is sustained through cumulative and often subtle pressures that shape how women evaluate their own suitability, timing, and readiness for leadership. This finding reinforces the study's broader argument that social values influence leadership participation through layered cultural expectations rather than overt discrimination alone.

Despite these constraints, the findings also suggest evidence of gradual attitudinal shifts regarding female leadership. In schools where women already occupy principal positions, participants reported greater acceptance of women in authority and stronger support for gender equity initiatives. The visibility of female leaders was described as contributing to perceptual change, particularly among younger educators, by normalising women's presence in positions of authority and disrupting entrenched gendered assumptions. This observation aligns with Shaked

et al. (2018), who argue that increased representation of women in leadership can recalibrate organisational norms and expectations. Similarly, Baglama & Uzunboylu (2017) emphasise that exposure to female role models can weaken stereotypical associations between gender and leadership competence.

Taken together, the findings for RQ1 indicate that social values in Trinidad and Tobago function as both constraining and enabling forces. Traditional norms related to caregiving, availability, and gendered leadership traits continue to limit women's leadership trajectories; however, evolving perceptions suggest that these norms are dynamic rather than fixed. Within the study's conceptual framework, social values operate as cultural moderators that shape leadership access by influencing institutional practice, individual self-efficacy, and the symbolic legitimacy afforded to women leaders. This dual movement constraint and gradual transformation underscores the importance of addressing both structural reform and cultural redefinition in efforts to advance gender equity in educational leadership.

### **Implications for Practice**

To foster meaningful and sustainable cultural change, educational institutions in Trinidad and Tobago must move beyond generic leadership development initiatives and adopt approaches that explicitly address the gendered barriers identified in this study. The findings demonstrate that women's underrepresentation is not a function of qualification deficits but of socially embedded expectations regarding caregiving, authority, and availability. Leadership development programmes must therefore be intentionally designed to respond to these contextual realities rather than operating under the assumption that existing institutional structures are gender neutral. In particular, programmes should acknowledge that work–family tensions are structurally reinforced

within the local sociocultural context and provide institutional mechanisms that support women navigating professional advancement alongside socially prescribed domestic responsibilities.

Leadership development initiatives should also validate and legitimise a broader range of leadership styles. The data revealed that leadership traits commonly associated with women, such as collaboration, empathy, relational decision-making, and community orientation, are frequently undervalued within traditional leadership selection processes despite being central to effective school functioning. Training frameworks within the Teaching Service Commission and Ministry-affiliated development programmes should therefore incorporate inclusive leadership models that position relational and transformational competencies as equally authoritative and strategically valuable. Redefining leadership effectiveness in this way would directly challenge the symbolic association between authority and masculinity that participants identified and help recalibrate promotion criteria to reflect contemporary educational realities.

In addition, school leaders, supervisory officers, and promotion panels should receive structured training focused specifically on identifying and mitigating gender bias within organisational practices. The findings indicated that bias often operates informally through opaque nomination processes, subjective evaluation of “readiness,” and assumptions about women’s availability or long-term commitment. Addressing these patterns requires more than awareness; it requires institutional accountability mechanisms. Reflective leadership forums, equity audits of promotion processes, and transparent reporting on gender representation at different leadership levels would help move gender equity from rhetorical commitment to measurable practice. As Acker (1990) and Braun et al. (2017) argue, reform that interrogates gendered organisational processes is more transformative than initiatives that focus solely on individual skill enhancement.

From a structural standpoint, institutions should consider implementing flexible leadership pathways that accommodate non-linear career trajectories. Participants repeatedly described leadership structures that assume uninterrupted availability and linear progression conditions that disproportionately disadvantage women managing caregiving responsibilities (Ryan & Haslam, 2005). Flexible models, such as shared administrative roles, phased leadership appointments, hybrid meeting structures, and transparent succession planning that does not penalise temporary caregiving breaks, would directly address the moderated relationship between gender and leadership participation identified in this study. Such measures recognise that leadership sustainability depends not on constant physical presence but on strategic competence and institutional support.

### **Connection to Framework**

The findings of this study demonstrate strong alignment with the conceptual framework, which positions gender as the central independent variable influencing educational leadership participation, moderated by individual, family, organisational, and cultural factors. Rather than identifying a single causal pathway, the results confirm that women's leadership participation in Trinidad and Tobago is shaped through a layered and mediated process. Social values, institutional practices, family expectations, and self-perception interact to expand or constrain leadership access.

At the cultural level, the findings validate the framework's assertion that shared beliefs about gender roles function as powerful moderators of leadership participation. Leadership was frequently associated with masculine-coded traits such as authority, decisiveness, and constant availability. Simultaneously, caregiving expectations were normalised as feminine responsibilities. These cultural norms operate not merely as background influences but as structuring forces that shape how leadership suitability is interpreted within institutions and internalised by educators

themselves. In this sense, the findings affirm Sen's (2001) argument that substantive opportunity must be evaluated within the context of social arrangements that define what is realistically attainable.

At the organisational level, the study demonstrates how institutional structures reinforce these cultural expectations. Promotion pathways that privilege uninterrupted career progression, informal nomination practices, and limited transparency in leadership development act as institutional moderators that convert gendered expectations into concrete patterns of underrepresentation. These findings confirm that inequality is not solely the product of individual aspiration but of organisational systems that distribute opportunity unevenly.

At the family and individual levels, the data show that self-efficacy, career intent, and access to domestic support significantly influence women's engagement with leadership pathways. However, these factors are themselves shaped by broader cultural expectations regarding women's primary responsibility for caregiving. This interdependence between personal belief, family structure, and institutional norms strengthens the explanatory value of the moderated framework and illustrates how agency operates within structural constraint rather than independently of it.

Importantly, the quantitative findings reinforce this interpretation. Although the independent samples t-test did not reveal statistically significant gender differences in perceptions of selected social values, the convergence of descriptive trends and qualitative narratives indicates that these norms are widely shared across genders. This suggests that gender inequality in leadership is sustained not through overt disagreement but through collective normalisation of gendered expectations. The absence of statistical divergence does not negate the framework; rather, it underscores the depth of cultural embedding.

Overall, the results confirm the robustness of the conceptual model. Leadership participation is not determined solely by capability, qualification, or ambition. It is mediated through interconnected cultural, organisational, familial, and individual dynamics that shape both access and aspiration. The framework, therefore, provides an appropriate structure for interpreting how gender inequality is reproduced within Trinidad and Tobago's education system and where systemic reform must intervene.

### **Contribution to Literature**

This study makes a significant contribution to the literature by providing contextually grounded empirical evidence of how social values and systemic factors influence female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. While gender and leadership have been extensively examined in Western and global contexts, comparatively limited research has foregrounded Caribbean sociocultural dynamics as active forces shaping leadership access. By centering the role of social values within a postcolonial education system, this study extends existing scholarship and demonstrates that leadership inequality cannot be understood apart from culturally embedded norms surrounding gender, caregiving, authority, and legitimacy.

The findings build upon foundational work by Acker (1990), who argued that organisations are inherently gendered through embedded assumptions, symbols, and expectations. In the Trinidad and Tobago context, leadership is not simply an administrative role but a culturally coded position associated with authority, decisiveness, and constant availability traits historically aligned with masculinity. This study reinforces the argument that leadership norms are socially constructed rather than neutral. However, it extends the literature by illustrating how these norms operate within a Caribbean society shaped by colonial legacies, religious pluralism, and deeply entrenched family structures. The data show that gendered leadership expectations are not imposed solely

through formal policy but are reproduced through everyday assumptions about caregiving, ambition, and professional commitment.

A further contribution lies in demonstrating how social values function as cultural moderators within leadership pathways. Rather than treating gender as a static explanatory variable, the study situates gender within a moderated framework where its effects are shaped by shared beliefs about family responsibility, moral respectability, and appropriate female behaviour. The findings reveal that caregiving expectations operate not only at the household level but also symbolically within institutions. Leadership roles structured around long hours and uninterrupted career progression implicitly assume freedom from domestic responsibilities, thereby privileging those who conform to traditional male career trajectories. This contributes to scholarship on gendered organisations by empirically illustrating how cultural norms are translated into institutional structures in subtle yet powerful ways.

The study also advances understanding of how social values are internalised. Participants' narratives showed that women often regulate their own aspirations in anticipation of social judgment or perceived incompatibility between leadership and caregiving. This supports Sen's (2001) argument that substantive freedoms must be evaluated in relation to social conditions that shape perceived possibilities. It also aligns with sociological theories of adaptive preference formation, in which individuals adjust their ambitions to align with constrained opportunity structures. By providing empirical evidence of how female educators interpret and respond to these pressures, the study adds nuance to existing discussions of leadership aspiration and agency in gender research.

Importantly, the research contributes to Caribbean scholarship by identifying the gradual evolution of social attitudes toward female leadership. In institutions where women already occupy

visible leadership roles, participants reported greater normalization of female authority and reduced resistance to women's advancement. This finding supports the work of Shaked et al. (2018) and others who argue that visibility can shift organisational norms. However, the study extends this insight by demonstrating that visibility alone is insufficient without broader cultural change. In contexts where leadership remains symbolically masculinized, individual female leaders may be accepted as exceptions rather than indicators of systemic transformation.

Another key contribution lies in its methodological integration of quantitative and qualitative evidence. Although statistical analysis did not reveal significant gender differences in perceptions of social values, descriptive trends combined with qualitative narratives illuminated the pervasive influence of caregiving norms and gendered leadership expectations across respondents. This convergence highlights the importance of mixed methods approaches in leadership research, particularly in culturally sensitive contexts where overt bias may not always be statistically visible but is nonetheless deeply experienced.

Finally, this study contributes to global debates on gender and leadership by foregrounding the importance of cultural specificity. Much of the literature on gendered leadership norms emerges from Western corporate or educational systems. By situating analysis within Trinidad and Tobago's postcolonial and culturally pluralistic environment, the study challenges the assumption that leadership inequality operates uniformly across contexts. It demonstrates that while global theories of gendered leadership remain relevant, their application must be interpreted through local histories, religious influences, and family structures that shape social values.

Overall, this research enriches the literature by empirically demonstrating that social values are not peripheral influences but central mechanisms shaping female participation in educational leadership. By identifying how caregiving norms, gendered leadership expectations, and

institutional structures intersect within a Caribbean context, the study advances a culturally embedded understanding of leadership inequality. It provides a foundation for future scholarship that seeks to explore how shifting social values may gradually reshape leadership participation in similarly situated postcolonial education systems.

**RQ2: What factors lead to inequality and underrepresentation of women in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago?**

This research identified several interrelated factors that contribute to the inequality and underrepresentation of women in educational leadership roles in Trinidad and Tobago. These factors operate primarily at the organisational level and include gender biased promotion practices, limited access to mentorship, exclusion from informal leadership networks, and institutional cultures that privilege masculine leadership norms. Collectively, these dynamics moderate women's access to leadership opportunities even when formal qualifications and experience are comparable to those of their male counterparts.

The findings indicate that women are frequently overlooked for leadership opportunities despite possessing the necessary credentials and professional experience. Participants described promotion processes as opaque and inconsistently applied, with leadership potential often evaluated through subjective criteria aligned with traditionally masculine traits such as assertiveness and authority. This pattern aligns with Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organisations, which argues that organisational structures and practices are not neutral but are shaped by gendered assumptions that systematically favour men. As Acker suggests, institutional cultures frequently reproduce masculine norms under the guise of merit and professionalism, reinforcing perceptions of leadership as inherently male.

The study further revealed that exclusion from informal leadership networks plays a significant role in sustaining gender inequality. These networks, which are often male-dominated, function as critical sites for information sharing, mentorship, sponsorship, and decision-making. Women's limited access to these spaces reduces their visibility and restricts opportunities for leadership development and advancement. Victor and Shamila (2018) similarly note that exclusion from informal professional networks constrains women's leadership trajectories by limiting access to social capital and strategic influence. Within the conceptual framework of this study, informal networks function as organisational moderators that amplify gender disparities in leadership access.

In addition to network exclusion, the study highlighted a persistent gap between gender equity policy and institutional practice. Although many educational institutions formally endorse gender equity, participants reported that such policies were unevenly implemented and rarely translated into meaningful structural change. This finding reflects Hallinger's (2019) argument that gender equity policies often remain symbolic, lacking the institutional commitment, accountability mechanisms, and cultural shifts necessary for effective implementation. As a result, deeply embedded organisational practices continue to disadvantage women despite the presence of policy frameworks intended to promote equality.

Taken together, these findings suggest that inequality in educational leadership is not the result of individual shortcomings but of institutional conditions that systematically disadvantage women. Organisational cultures, informal power structures, and ineffective policy implementation interact to create leadership pathways that are more accessible to men than to women. These dynamics reinforce gendered hierarchies and limit women's progression into leadership roles across the education system.

### **Implications for Practice**

To address these organisational barriers, educational institutions must prioritise the development of intentional and structured mentorship initiatives that specifically support women pursuing leadership roles. Such programmes should provide not only skills development but also advocacy, sponsorship, and access to influential professional networks. Mentorship has been shown to be a critical mechanism for countering gendered organisational barriers, particularly in contexts where informal networks shape leadership advancement (Ibarra et al., 2013).

Institutions must also take deliberate action to dismantle exclusionary informal networks by fostering inclusive professional spaces. This includes creating transparent leadership pathways, broadening access to leadership-related responsibilities, and ensuring that decision-making forums are accessible to educators of all genders. Promoting collaborative leadership cultures that value relational competencies such as empathy, communication, and teamwork can help disrupt narrow definitions of leadership that marginalise women. Inclusive leadership frameworks are essential for reducing gender gaps and supporting equitable leadership development within educational organisations (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Bertrand & Rodela, 2018).

### **Connection to Framework**

The findings align closely with the organisational factors identified in the conceptual framework, particularly the role of gendered organisational structures in shaping women's access to educational leadership. The results demonstrate that organisational practices, including promotion procedures, mentorship availability, and informal networking norms, operate as moderating forces that influence how gender affects leadership attainment. These practices do not function independently but are embedded within broader institutional cultures that reflect and reproduce gendered assumptions about leadership suitability.

The study's findings reinforce the framework's emphasis on structural and cultural moderation rather than direct causation. Women's underrepresentation in leadership emerges not from individual incapacity but from organisational environments that privilege masculine career models and restrict access to key leadership resources. In this regard, mentorship gaps, exclusion from informal networks, and inconsistent policy implementation represent institutional mechanisms through which gender inequality is sustained.

The findings also underscore the necessity of moving beyond symbolic or surface-level policy interventions. While gender equity policies exist within many educational institutions, their limited implementation highlights the gap between formal commitment and everyday practice. This observation directly supports the conceptual framework's assertion that cultural and structural change is required to disrupt entrenched organisational bias. Institutional transformation must therefore involve sustained evaluation of organisational norms, leadership selection processes, and professional development structures to cultivate genuinely inclusive leadership environments.

### **Contribution to Literature**

This research extends Acker's (1990) theory of gendered organisations by providing empirically grounded evidence from a Caribbean educational context, where institutional leadership structures are shaped by intersecting cultural, historical, and social influences. While Acker's work established that organisations are inherently gendered, this study demonstrates how these gendered dynamics manifest within Trinidad and Tobago's education system through specific practices such as inequitable promotion pathways, exclusion from informal leadership networks, and the uneven implementation of equity policies.

The findings also build on the work of Braun et al. (2017) by illustrating how unexamined organisational norms continue to constrain women's professional mobility, even in contexts where

women dominate the teaching workforce numerically. This study contributes by showing that numerical representation alone does not translate into leadership equity when organisational cultures remain aligned with masculine leadership ideals.

In addition, the research expands on Victor and Shamila (2018) by deepening the understanding of how institutional cultures shape access to leadership through informal mechanisms. While previous studies emphasised the importance of inclusive professional networks, the current findings reveal how exclusion from these networks functions as a systemic barrier that reinforces gender hierarchies within educational leadership. This highlights the need for intentional organisational reform rather than reliance on informal change processes.

More broadly, the study contributes to the global literature on gender and leadership by foregrounding the Caribbean context as a site where leadership inequality is shaped by the intersection of gender norms, colonial legacies, racialised social structures, and institutional traditions. By situating organisational inequality within this context, the research challenges the universal application of leadership models developed in Western settings and underscores the importance of culturally responsive approaches to gender equity in leadership.

Overall, this study enriches the literature by offering a context-specific, theoretically informed analysis of organisational barriers to women's leadership. It provides empirical support for gendered organisation theory while extending its application to Caribbean education systems, thereby contributing both local insight and broader theoretical relevance to the field of educational leadership research.

**RQ3: What strategies could promote greater gender equality and enhance female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago?**

The findings of this study identify several interrelated strategies that could promote greater gender equality and enhance female participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. These strategies operate across individual, organisational, and cultural levels and directly address the moderating factors identified in the conceptual framework. Key approaches include gender responsive leadership development, flexible work arrangements, and the establishment of structured mentorship and professional networks for women educators.

Leadership development emerged as a central strategy for addressing gender inequality. Participants emphasised the value of leadership training that explicitly accounts for gender dynamics rather than assuming leadership pathways are gender neutral. Effective leadership development was described as extending beyond technical skill acquisition to include confidence building, identity affirmation, and critical engagement with gendered leadership norms. This finding aligns with Castaño et al. (2019), who highlight the importance of mentoring and organisational support in facilitating women's leadership advancement. Adams et al. (2017) similarly argue that leadership programmes must confront both overt and subtle forms of exclusion by addressing the social values and assumptions that frame leadership as a male domain.

The study also underscores the importance of flexible work policies in supporting women's sustained engagement in leadership roles. Participants consistently identified caregiving responsibilities as a significant constraint on leadership participation, particularly in roles that require long hours and constant availability. Flexible arrangements such as job sharing, part-time leadership roles, and adaptable scheduling were viewed as essential strategies for enabling women to balance professional responsibilities with family obligations. Žnidaršič and Bernik (2021) note

that family-related constraints remain a primary barrier to women's career progression, particularly in contexts where caregiving expectations are strongly gendered. Torrance et al. (2016) further emphasise that work environments that fail to accommodate caregiving responsibilities inadvertently reinforce leadership inequality.

Another key strategy identified in the findings is the creation of both formal and informal networks for women in education. These networks were seen as critical for reducing professional isolation, increasing access to mentorship, and enhancing visibility within leadership pipelines. Participants noted that informal networks often function as gatekeeping mechanisms within educational institutions and that women's exclusion from these spaces limits access to leadership opportunities. Braun et al. (2017) similarly identify mentorship as a crucial mechanism for countering gender discrimination and supporting leadership advancement. Peer-based and gender-focused networks have been shown to foster resilience, professional confidence, and career progression among women navigating male-dominated leadership structures (Ibarra et al., 2013; Ragins, 1999).

Taken together, the findings suggest that strategies to promote gender equality in educational leadership must be systemic rather than piecemeal. Isolated interventions are unlikely to produce sustainable change unless they are embedded within broader organisational and cultural reform. Leadership development, flexible work policies, and mentorship initiatives must be implemented concurrently and supported by institutional commitment to equity.

### **Implications for Practice**

To promote greater gender equality, educational institutions must prioritise the development of gender-sensitive leadership training programmes that prepare women for leadership while also challenging gendered expectations of authority and competence. Such

programmes should explicitly recognise the legitimacy of diverse leadership styles and equip women with strategies to navigate gendered organisational cultures.

Mentorship initiatives should be formally integrated into leadership development frameworks, ensuring that women have access to guidance, advocacy, and professional sponsorship throughout their careers. Institutions should also implement flexible leadership structures that enable women to engage in leadership roles without sacrificing family responsibilities. Job sharing and part-time leadership options should be normalised rather than treated as exceptions.

Finally, the establishment of sustained networks for women educators can provide critical spaces for professional support, collective learning, and leadership identity development. As Harquail (2008) emphasise, multi-level strategies that address structural barriers, cultural norms, and individual confidence are essential for achieving meaningful and lasting gender equity in leadership.

### **Connection to Framework**

The strategies identified in this study align directly with the individual, family-related, organisational, and cultural components of the conceptual framework. The findings demonstrate that gender equality in educational leadership cannot be achieved through isolated interventions, but instead requires coordinated action across multiple moderating domains. Flexible work policies and structured mentorship programmes respond specifically to family-related constraints and organisational barriers, enabling women to sustain leadership engagement while managing caregiving responsibilities.

At the organisational level, these strategies address the absence of institutional support systems that currently restrict women's career development. Mentorship and inclusive leadership

pathways function as organisational moderators that can disrupt gendered promotion practices and reduce reliance on informal, male-dominated networks. This reinforces the framework's emphasis on institutions as active sites where gender inequality is either reproduced or challenged.

At the cultural level, the strategies outlined reflect the need to transform societal attitudes toward female leadership. Gender-sensitive leadership development and policy reform serve not only as practical interventions but also as mechanisms for challenging deeply embedded beliefs about leadership suitability and authority. By addressing both structural arrangements and cultural perceptions, these strategies operationalise the framework's central premise that leadership inequality is socially constructed and institutionally mediated.

### **Contribution to Literature**

This study contributes to the literature by offering empirically grounded and context-specific strategies for enhancing gender equality in educational leadership within the Caribbean. Building on the work of Castaño et al. (2019) and Torrance et al. (2016), the findings reinforce the importance of mentorship and flexible work policies in supporting women's leadership development. The study extends this scholarship by demonstrating how these strategies function within a Caribbean context shaped by distinct cultural norms, historical legacies, and institutional traditions.

This research extends existing literature by translating theoretical insights into institutional strategies that address both family-related responsibilities and gendered organisational structures (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Rather than treating these barriers in isolation, the study illustrates how integrated interventions can mitigate the cumulative effects of gendered expectations across personal, organisational, and cultural domains.

In conclusion, this research highlights the multifaceted factors that shape women's participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. It confirms that leadership pathways are influenced by the interaction of social values, institutional practices, and family-related responsibilities rather than individual capacity alone. While the findings suggest emerging shifts in attitudes toward women leaders, they also underscore the persistence of structural and cultural barriers that require sustained institutional response.

By advocating for gender responsive leadership training, adaptable work environments, and structured mentorship systems, the study offers actionable strategies for fostering more equitable leadership pathways. Beyond contributing to academic discourse, the research provides practical guidance for policymakers, educational leaders, and institutions seeking to advance gender equity in leadership across Trinidad and Tobago and the wider Caribbean.

### **Recommendations for Application**

This section outlines clear and actionable strategies for addressing gender disparities in educational leadership within Trinidad and Tobago, informed directly by the study's findings. The evidence demonstrates that women's underrepresentation in leadership is not the result of individual deficit but of intersecting cultural beliefs, societal expectations, institutional practices, and family-related responsibilities that collectively restrict access to leadership pathways (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). Although women comprise a substantial proportion of the education workforce, they remain significantly underrepresented in senior leadership roles across schools and educational institutions (Begeny et al., 2020).

Addressing this imbalance requires coordinated and multi-level action involving educational policymakers, school leaders, government and institutional bodies, and women

educators themselves. No single group can dismantle gender inequality in leadership in isolation. Instead, sustainable change depends on alignment between policy reform, institutional practice, leadership culture, and individual empowerment.

The recommendations presented are designed to be practical, context-sensitive, and implementable within the existing educational structures of Trinidad and Tobago. Each recommendation is grounded in the study's findings and aligned with the conceptual framework, which highlights how individual, family-related, organisational, and cultural factors interact to moderate women's access to leadership. Rather than addressing symptoms alone, these recommendations target the underlying structural and cultural mechanisms that sustain gender inequality.

The following sections present specific recommendations tailored to four key stakeholder groups:

- Educational policymakers are responsible for shaping legislative frameworks and ensuring the consistent implementation and enforcement of gender equity policies across the education system.
- School leaders play a critical role in cultivating inclusive school cultures, ensuring transparent leadership pathways, and supporting women's professional advancement at the institutional level.
- Government and institutional bodies, which oversee national education strategy, resource allocation, and leadership development frameworks, are positioned to embed gender equity within systemic structures.

- Female educators, whose empowerment through confidence building, professional advocacy, mentorship engagement, and leadership aspiration is essential to transforming leadership participation from within.

By addressing responsibility at each of these levels, the recommendations reflect the study's central conclusion that gender equality in educational leadership must be pursued as a shared institutional and cultural commitment rather than an individual burden placed on women.

### **Recommendations for Educational Policymakers**

Educational policymakers exert substantial influence over the regulatory, structural, and procedural conditions that shape leadership pathways within the education system. Their decisions directly affect women's access to advancement opportunities and determine whether existing gender inequities are reinforced or actively dismantled. The findings of this study indicate that leadership disparities are not primarily the result of absent policy frameworks, but rather of inconsistent implementation, limited accountability mechanisms, and insufficient institutional support. Addressing these gaps requires targeted policy reform coupled with strengthened enforcement and monitoring processes.

#### **Strengthen Enforcement and Accountability for Gender Equity Policies**

Although gender equity policies exist within many educational institutions, this study found that their implementation is often uneven and symbolic rather than transformative. Policymakers must therefore move beyond policy articulation toward systematic enforcement, monitoring, and evaluation. One mechanism to support this shift is the introduction of clear gender representation benchmarks for leadership roles across educational institutions.

Rather than functioning as rigid quotas, representation benchmarks can serve as accountability instruments that prompt institutions to critically examine promotion practices,

selection criteria, and leadership pipelines. Phased targets for leadership positions such as department heads, vice principals, and principals would allow for incremental progress while remaining sensitive to institutional context. Krook (2013) demonstrates that representation benchmarks, when accompanied by monitoring and institutional commitment, can normalise women's presence in decision-making roles and contribute to sustained demographic change.

To reinforce accountability, regular gender audits should be embedded within the Ministry of Education oversight processes. These audits should assess gender distribution in leadership appointments, access to leadership training, and promotion outcomes. Importantly, audit findings should be used diagnostically to identify systemic barriers and guide corrective strategies rather than as punitive measures. Such an approach enhances transparency, supports institutional learning, and provides an empirical basis for ongoing policy refinement.

### **Introduce Family-Responsive Leadership Policies**

A central barrier identified in this study is the persistent tension between leadership demands and family responsibilities, particularly within a sociocultural context where caregiving is predominantly gendered (Kossek & Lee, 2021). Policymakers therefore have a critical role in redefining leadership structures to accommodate diverse career trajectories rather than privileging uninterrupted, linear progression models that disproportionately disadvantage women.

Policy initiatives should promote flexible leadership arrangements, including adaptable work schedules, job-sharing models, and part-time leadership options where appropriate. These arrangements enable women to remain professionally engaged while managing caregiving responsibilities, reducing structural exclusion from leadership pathways. International research indicates that family-responsive workplace policies are associated with increased female leadership participation without compromising organisational effectiveness (Harquail, 2008).

In addition, access to affordable and reliable childcare should be recognised as a systemic leadership equity issue rather than a private responsibility. Policymakers can support female leadership participation by facilitating partnerships with childcare providers, subsidising childcare services for educators, or integrating childcare support within school communities where feasible. Reducing the caregiving burden enhances women's capacity to engage in leadership preparation, professional development, and decision-making roles.

### **Introduce Incentive-Based Support for Gender Equity Initiatives**

To reinforce institutional commitment to gender equity, financial and professional incentives should be explicitly linked to demonstrable progress in equity-focused practices. Schools that actively support women's leadership development through mentoring programs, transparent promotion processes, and balanced leadership representation could be prioritised for targeted funding or access to professional development resources.

Policymakers should also expand scholarships, fellowships, and funded leadership development programs specifically for women educators, particularly those from underrepresented or resource-constrained backgrounds. These initiatives reduce financial barriers to leadership preparation while signalling institutional recognition of women's leadership potential. By aligning funding mechanisms with equity outcomes, policymakers can contribute to the development of a sustainable leadership pipeline that supports long-term systemic change rather than isolated or symbolic interventions.

### **Increase Gender-Responsive Research and Data Collection**

The findings of this study reveal a persistent gap in gender-responsive research within the education sector of Trinidad and Tobago, particularly in relation to leadership trajectories and advancement pathways. To address this gap, policymakers should prioritise and allocate dedicated

funding for systematic, longitudinal research examining the gendered experiences of educators across leadership stages. Such research should move beyond surface-level representation to interrogate the structural and sociocultural mechanisms that shape women's leadership participation.

Future research initiatives should examine institutional practices, including recruitment criteria, promotion procedures, leadership appraisal processes, and the interaction between caregiving responsibilities and career progression. Generating context-specific empirical evidence will enable policymakers to better understand how gender inequality is reproduced within educational leadership structures and to design interventions that are responsive to local realities rather than reliant on externally imported policy models. This approach aligns with calls in gender and leadership scholarship for contextually grounded research that reflects the lived realities of women in leadership pipelines.

In addition, gender-disaggregated data collection should be standardised across schools and educational institutions. This includes systematic reporting on leadership appointments, promotion outcomes, access to professional development, and career progression by gender and school type. Making such data routinely available at the system level would allow policymakers to identify persistent patterns of inequality, monitor progress over time, and evaluate the effectiveness of equity-focused interventions. Reliable, standardised data is essential for shifting gender equity initiatives from rhetorical commitment toward evidence-based policy action and accountability.

### **Develop Comprehensive Gender Equity Training Programs**

Gender equity training should form a core component of professional development for policymakers and senior education officials, particularly those directly involved in leadership

selection, appraisal, and promotion processes. The findings of this study indicate that unconscious bias and deeply embedded gender norms continue to influence leadership decisions, often in subtle and unexamined ways. Training initiatives must therefore move beyond general awareness-raising to include practical, application-focused strategies for identifying and mitigating bias within institutional systems.

The design of gender equity training programs should draw on interdisciplinary expertise, incorporating perspectives from gender studies, educational leadership research, and public policy. Training content should address unconscious bias, gendered leadership stereotypes, inclusive recruitment practices, and equitable promotion frameworks. Interactive, scenario-based workshops are particularly effective in illustrating how bias operates in real-world educational contexts and in equipping participants with concrete tools to challenge discriminatory practices during hiring, evaluation, and leadership selection processes.

By embedding gender equity training within mandatory professional development structures, policymakers can help ensure that those shaping leadership pathways possess the critical awareness and institutional competence required to implement equity-focused policies consistently. Over time, this approach can contribute to cultural transformation within educational institutions by normalising inclusive leadership practices and reinforcing accountability for equity outcomes.

### **Strengthen Stakeholder Collaboration on Gender Equity Initiatives**

Achieving sustainable gender equity in educational leadership requires coordinated, system-wide action involving multiple stakeholder groups, including education policymakers, school leaders, teacher unions, professional associations, and civil society organisations. The findings of this study suggest that fragmented or isolated initiatives are insufficient to address

deeply rooted structural inequalities. Policymakers, therefore, play a critical role in facilitating cross-sector collaboration to promote shared ownership of gender equity outcomes.

Formal collaborative mechanisms, such as joint committees or advisory panels involving the Ministry of Education and educational institutions, can provide structured spaces for dialogue, policy review, and strategic planning. These bodies should convene regularly to assess policy implementation, identify emerging challenges, and evaluate the impact of existing gender equity initiatives. Importantly, such platforms should incorporate teacher and practitioner voices, ensuring that policy responses are informed by lived experiences at the school level rather than solely by administrative perspectives.

By fostering collaboration that operates both top-down and bottom-up, policymakers can support more coherent, responsive, and sustainable gender equity strategies. This approach enhances policy legitimacy, strengthens institutional commitment, and increases the likelihood that gender equity initiatives will be embedded into long-term governance structures rather than implemented as short-term or symbolic measures.

### **Recommendations for School Leaders**

School leaders occupy a pivotal position in shaping institutional culture and determining whether leadership pathways are experienced as accessible or exclusionary. The findings of this study indicate that leadership practices at the school level significantly influence women's confidence, visibility, and willingness to pursue leadership roles. In particular, mentorship structures, leadership models, and recruitment practices emerged as key levers through which school leaders can either reinforce or challenge gendered barriers to advancement.

#### **Promote Inclusive Leadership Models**

School leaders should actively adopt and model inclusive leadership frameworks that recognise and legitimise diverse leadership styles. Traditional leadership norms in education often privilege hierarchical, authoritative approaches that align with masculine stereotypes, thereby marginalising leadership practices rooted in collaboration, empathy, and relational engagement. Transformational leadership offers a viable alternative, emphasising shared vision, empowerment, and collective responsibility qualities that align well with both contemporary educational needs and leadership approaches commonly associated with women (Harquail, 2008; Offermann & Foley, 2020).

By promoting transformational and distributed leadership models, school leaders can broaden the definition of effective leadership and reduce the pressure on women to conform to narrow, masculinised leadership expectations. Professional development initiatives should therefore include training on inclusive and transformational leadership, explicitly validating multiple leadership styles and demonstrating how these approaches contribute to school improvement. Normalising such models increases the likelihood that female educators will view leadership as compatible with their professional identity and values.

### **Formalize Mentorship and Sponsorship Programs**

The findings highlight mentorship as a critical but inconsistently available support mechanism for women aspiring to leadership roles. To address this gap, school leaders should establish formal, structured mentorship programs that pair emerging female leaders with experienced mentors who can provide guidance, feedback, and strategic career support. Formalisation ensures equity of access and reduces reliance on informal networks that often advantage male educators.

In addition to mentorship, schools should implement sponsorship mechanisms, whereby senior leaders actively advocate for women's advancement by nominating them for leadership opportunities, professional development programs, and promotion processes. Unlike mentorship, sponsorship involves the deliberate use of positional power to open doors and increase women's visibility within leadership pipelines. Kogler Hill (2017) and Pant & Shiwakoti (2025) underscores that sponsorship is particularly effective in counteracting exclusion from informal, male-dominated networks. Together, mentorship and sponsorship create a more transparent and supportive leadership development ecosystem.

### **Challenge Gendered Perceptions of Leadership**

Gendered perceptions of leadership emerged as a persistent barrier within school environments, with masculine traits such as assertiveness and authority often privileged over collaborative and relational competencies (Heilman et al., 2023). School leaders must therefore take deliberate steps to disrupt these perceptions by embedding gender-neutral recruitment, evaluation, and promotion practices. This includes reviewing selection criteria, interview processes, and performance indicators to ensure that they value a broad range of leadership competencies rather than reinforcing gendered norms.

Visibility also plays a critical role in challenging stereotypes. School leaders should actively recognise and celebrate the achievements of female leaders within their institutions through public acknowledgment, leadership showcases, and representation on decision-making bodies. Increasing the visibility of women in leadership positions not only validates their contributions but also provides role models that help other female educators envision themselves in leadership roles. Over time, these practices can contribute to cultural change by reshaping assumptions about who can lead and how leadership is enacted within schools.

### **Foster a Gender-Inclusive School Culture**

School leaders play a central role in shaping the cultural climate of educational institutions and, by extension, determining whose leadership is recognised, encouraged, and legitimised. The findings of this study indicate that gendered stereotypes about leadership continue to influence how women in senior roles are perceived, often framing leadership competence through masculine norms. To address this, school leaders must engage in intentional cultural transformation that challenges embedded biases and normalises women's presence in leadership positions.

Creating a gender-inclusive school culture requires more than symbolic commitment; it demands sustained action that addresses everyday practices, language, and values within the institution. One strategic approach is the integration of gender equity education into both curricular and extracurricular activities. By introducing students to concepts of gender equality, inclusive leadership, and diverse leadership styles, schools can contribute to long-term cultural change by shaping attitudes toward leadership from an early age. Such initiatives reinforce the understanding that leadership is not gender-bound but relational, ethical, and collaborative.

At the organisational level, school leaders should ensure that institutional policies reflect a clear commitment to gender equity. This includes the use of gender-sensitive language in recruitment materials, job descriptions, appraisal frameworks, and leadership criteria. Importantly, leaders must model inclusive behaviour through transparent decision-making, equitable workload distribution, and consistent recognition of staff contributions. When inclusivity is visibly enacted by those in authority, it signals institutional legitimacy and reinforces cultural norms that support women's leadership aspirations.

### **Encourage Women to Apply for Leadership Roles**

The study revealed that many qualified female educators refrain from applying for leadership positions due to self-doubt, internalised stereotypes, or perceptions that selection processes are biased or inaccessible. These findings suggest that underrepresentation is not solely the result of structural barriers but also of psychological and cultural deterrents that shape women's self-perceptions and career decisions.

School leaders can play a proactive role in countering these deterrents by explicitly encouraging women to consider leadership roles and affirming their leadership potential. Public endorsement from senior leaders, whether through staff meetings, professional development forums, or performance discussions, can significantly influence women's confidence and willingness to apply. Such encouragement helps disrupt the assumption that leadership aspiration must be self-initiated and instead positions leadership development as a supported institutional pathway.

Practical interventions may include informational workshops that demystify leadership application processes, clarify selection criteria, and outline available professional development opportunities. Featuring testimonials from female leaders who have navigated similar challenges can further reinforce leadership as an attainable and legitimate goal. These strategies collectively reduce ambiguity, build confidence, and contribute to a more transparent and inclusive leadership pipeline.

### **Implement Peer Support Systems for Women Leaders**

Social isolation emerged as a significant challenge for women in leadership roles, particularly within male-dominated leadership teams. Female leaders often lack access to informal support networks that facilitate knowledge sharing, emotional support, and professional

affirmation. This isolation can undermine leadership sustainability and reinforce feelings of marginalisation.

To address this, school leaders should facilitate the establishment of peer support systems that connect women leaders within and across schools. These networks can provide safe spaces for sharing experiences, discussing challenges, and collectively problem-solving leadership dilemmas. Peer support systems also serve as informal mentoring structures, enabling experienced female leaders to support those at earlier stages of their leadership journey.

Such networks foster a sense of belonging and collective resilience, reducing the emotional burden associated with leadership in gender-imbalanced environments. Over time, peer support systems can strengthen women's leadership identity, enhance retention in leadership roles, and contribute to the normalisation of women's presence within educational leadership structures.

### **Recommendations for Government and Institutional Bodies**

Government bodies and institutional organisations occupy a pivotal position in shaping the national education system through policy formulation, resource allocation, regulatory oversight, and institutional accountability. Their influence extends beyond individual schools to the broader structures that determine leadership preparation, access, and progression. The findings of this study underscore the need for coordinated, system-level interventions to address gender disparities in educational leadership and to ensure that equity initiatives are embedded, monitored, and sustained across the sector.

#### **Implement Gender-Sensitive Leadership Training Programs**

Government and institutional bodies should collaborate with universities, teacher training colleges, and professional development organisations to design and deliver gender-sensitive leadership training programmes specifically tailored for women in education. These programmes

should address the structural and sociocultural challenges identified in this study, including gender bias in leadership selection, work–family tensions, and leadership development within male-dominated institutional cultures.

Training content should extend beyond technical leadership skills to include components such as navigating gendered organisational dynamics, building leadership confidence, managing role strain, and exercising authority within contexts that may resist female leadership. Emphasis should also be placed on transformational and relational leadership models, conflict resolution, and collaborative team-building, which are particularly relevant to contemporary educational settings. To ensure equitable access, government bodies should provide scholarships or subsidised training opportunities for women educators, particularly those from under-resourced schools or rural communities.

### **Support Regional and International Collaboration on Gender and Leadership**

Government and institutional bodies should actively promote regional and international collaboration focused on gender equity in educational leadership. Participation in conferences, policy exchanges, research partnerships, and professional learning networks would allow Trinidad and Tobago to engage with evidence-based practices from jurisdictions that have made measurable progress in advancing women’s leadership.

Such collaborations provide opportunities to benchmark national practices against international standards, adapt successful gender equity models to local contexts, and contribute Caribbean perspectives to the global discourse on gender and leadership. Regional collaboration within the Caribbean is particularly valuable, as it enables shared learning across systems shaped by similar historical, cultural, and institutional legacies.

### **Develop a National Gender Equity Framework for Educational Leadership**

A comprehensive national gender equity framework is essential to guide consistent and coordinated action across the education system. This framework should articulate clear principles, strategic priorities, timelines, and measurable indicators for advancing gender equity in educational leadership at all levels, from middle management to senior administration.

The framework should be informed by empirical research, including findings from this study, and developed through consultation with key stakeholders such as educators, school leaders, unions, and civil society organisations. Importantly, it should be treated as a living document, subject to regular review and revision in response to emerging data and changing educational contexts. Embedding gender equity objectives within national education strategies would help ensure that leadership equity is not treated as a peripheral concern but as a core dimension of system quality and effectiveness.

### **Establish National Gender Equity Standards for Educational Institutions**

To promote consistency and accountability, government bodies should introduce national gender equity standards that define expectations for educational institutions in areas such as recruitment, promotion, leadership training, mentorship provision, and institutional culture. These standards would provide a clear benchmark against which schools can assess their progress and identify areas for improvement.

Institutions that demonstrate alignment with these standards could be recognised through accreditation incentives, targeted funding, or public acknowledgement, thereby encouraging proactive engagement with gender equity initiatives. Standards should be evidence-based, regularly reviewed, and responsive to contextual variation across school types, ensuring that equity measures are both rigorous and adaptable.

### **Integrate Gender Equity into National Educational Accreditation**

Gender equity should be embedded as a formal criterion within national educational accreditation and quality assurance frameworks. Schools seeking accreditation or renewal should be required to demonstrate concrete actions toward gender-equitable leadership practices, including transparent promotion processes, equitable access to leadership development, and inclusive organisational cultures.

Integrating gender equity into accreditation processes would elevate it from a discretionary initiative to an institutional expectation. This approach encourages sustained commitment by linking equity outcomes to institutional legitimacy and accountability. Over time, such integration can normalise gender-inclusive leadership practices and reinforce the principle that educational excellence and equity are mutually reinforcing goals.

### **Promote Public Awareness of Gender Equity in Education**

Public institutions and government agencies play a critical role in shaping societal attitudes toward leadership and gender roles. To support sustained progress toward gender equity in educational leadership, coordinated public awareness initiatives are necessary to challenge entrenched stereotypes, increase the visibility of women leaders, and build societal support for gender-responsive education policies. The findings of this study indicate that cultural perceptions of leadership continue to influence women's aspirations and acceptance within leadership spaces, making public engagement an essential component of systemic change.

National and regional awareness campaigns should highlight the value and impact of women's leadership in education, emphasising both individual success stories and institutional benefits. Showcasing women principals, vice principals, and senior education officials who have navigated structural and cultural barriers can serve as powerful counter-narratives to traditional,

male-dominated leadership models. Such representation helps normalise women's presence in leadership and provides aspirational role models for early-career educators and students alike.

Public awareness efforts should utilise multiple communication platforms, including television, radio, print media, and social media, to reach diverse audiences. Digital platforms, in particular, offer opportunities to engage younger demographics and amplify messages through storytelling, interviews, and short-form content that humanise leadership journeys. These campaigns should move beyond symbolic representation to explicitly address the structural barriers women face, reinforcing the legitimacy of policy interventions aimed at promoting equity.

Educational institutions themselves can contribute to public awareness by embedding gender equity messaging within their outward-facing activities. Parent–teacher meetings, school open days, community forums, and public lectures can be used as spaces to discuss the importance of inclusive leadership and its contribution to educational quality and student outcomes. Schools can also host workshops or seminars that engage parents, students, and community members in dialogue about gender equity, leadership diversity, and social change.

Transparency and accountability further strengthen public trust and awareness. Government agencies and education authorities should disseminate accessible policy briefs, progress reports, and summary data outlining advances toward gender equity in leadership. Public reporting not only demonstrates institutional accountability but also reinforces the expectation that equity is a measurable and ongoing priority rather than a symbolic commitment.

Engagement with media organisations is also essential. Journalists and media practitioners should be encouraged to portray women leaders in education in ways that emphasise competence, expertise, and professional achievement rather than exceptionalism or gendered novelty. Positive

and consistent representation contributes to reshaping dominant leadership narratives and reinforces the legitimacy of women's authority in educational settings.

Finally, cross-sector collaboration is crucial for amplifying impact. Partnerships with civil society organisations, women's advocacy groups, youth organisations, and professional associations can extend the reach of awareness initiatives and ensure that messages reflect intersectional perspectives. By fostering collective ownership of gender equity goals, these collaborations can help shift public perception, challenge resistance, and build sustained momentum toward inclusive leadership practices within the education system.

### **Recommendations for Female Educators**

While systemic and institutional reforms are essential for addressing gender inequality in educational leadership, the findings of this study also highlight the importance of individual agency in navigating and responding to gendered barriers. Female educators operate within sociocultural and organisational contexts that may constrain leadership opportunities; however, strategic engagement with professional development, networks, and advocacy can strengthen women's positioning within leadership pathways. These recommendations are not intended to shift responsibility away from institutions but to support women in exercising agency within existing structures while broader reforms take effect.

#### **Strengthen Self-Efficacy and Leadership Confidence**

The study confirms that self-efficacy is a critical moderating factor influencing women's willingness to pursue leadership roles (Bandura, 1977). Female educators are therefore encouraged to engage intentionally in activities that build leadership confidence and reinforce professional identity. This may include participation in leadership development workshops, conferences, and training programmes designed specifically for women in education.

Setting clear leadership goals, seeking constructive feedback, and taking on incremental leadership responsibilities within schools, such as committee leadership, project coordination, or mentoring roles, can further enhance confidence and readiness for advancement. These experiences allow women to develop leadership competence while challenging internalised doubts shaped by gendered socialisation.

### **Actively Seek Mentorship and Sponsorship**

Mentorship emerged as a significant enabler of leadership progression in this study. Female educators should proactively seek mentors within and beyond their institutions who can provide guidance, professional insight, and psychosocial support. Mentors can help women navigate organisational cultures, interpret promotion processes, and build strategic career plans.

In addition to mentorship, women should seek sponsorship relationships where senior leaders actively advocate for their advancement. Sponsorship plays a distinct role in increasing visibility and access to leadership opportunities, particularly within systems where informal networks influence promotion decisions.

### **Engage in Strategic Networking and Professional Alliances**

Building professional networks is essential for reducing isolation and increasing access to leadership information and opportunities (Pant & Shiwakoti, 2025). Female educators should engage in formal and informal networks at the school, district, national, and regional levels, including professional associations, leadership forums, and gender-focused education networks.

These networks facilitate the exchange of experiences, provide peer support, and enhance visibility within the education sector. Strategic alliances with both female and male colleagues can also help women navigate organisational politics and challenge exclusionary leadership norms.

### **Commit to Continuous Leadership Development**

Ongoing professional learning is a key mechanism for strengthening leadership capacity and credibility. Female educators are encouraged to pursue continuous learning opportunities, including leadership certifications, postgraduate study in educational leadership, and professional development programmes focused on management, policy, and organisational leadership.

Such engagement not only enhances technical competence but also equips women with the skills needed to navigate complex leadership environments and respond effectively to gendered challenges within institutions.

### **Advocate for Gender Equity and Inclusive Leadership Practices**

Female educators can play an important role as advocates for gender equity within their schools and professional communities. This includes supporting initiatives that promote transparent promotion processes, equitable access to leadership development, and inclusive workplace cultures. Advocacy may involve participating in policy discussions, serving on school committees, or contributing to gender equity initiatives at the institutional or system level.

By encouraging dialogue, challenging biased practices, and supporting other women's leadership aspirations, female educators can contribute to collective efforts to reshape leadership norms and expectations.

### **Exercise Agency While Building Collective Momentum**

Finally, the study highlights the importance of women recognising themselves as legitimate leadership candidates and agents of change. Taking initiative to apply for leadership roles, seek leadership experiences, and support peers strengthens collective momentum toward equity. While individual action alone cannot dismantle structural inequality, it plays a crucial role in sustaining progress alongside institutional reform.

Through strategic engagement, professional solidarity, and sustained advocacy, female educators can contribute to creating educational environments that increasingly support, value, and normalise women's leadership.

### **Summary**

The recommendations presented in this chapter offer a coordinated and multi-level response to the persistent gender inequalities identified in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. The findings of this study demonstrate that barriers to women's leadership are not isolated or individualised but are produced through the interaction of sociocultural norms, institutional structures, family-related expectations, and individual experiences. As such, addressing these barriers requires collective action across policy, organisational practice, and professional development.

By engaging policymakers, school leaders, government and institutional bodies, and female educators, the recommendations emphasise shared responsibility for transforming leadership pathways. Proposed strategies focus on strengthening self-efficacy and leadership confidence, expanding access to mentorship and sponsorship, implementing inclusive and transparent promotion practices, and introducing family-responsive leadership structures. Together, these measures address the individual, organisational, and cultural moderators identified in the conceptual framework.

Importantly, the recommendations recognise that sustainable change depends not only on policy reform but also on cultural transformation within educational institutions and the wider society. Gender-sensitive leadership training, data-informed accountability mechanisms, and public awareness initiatives are critical for challenging entrenched assumptions about leadership and normalising women's presence in decision-making roles.

In summary, advancing gender equity in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago requires sustained, system-wide commitment rather than isolated interventions. When institutional reform is combined with professional support and collective advocacy, educational leadership structures can become more equitable, representative, and responsive. Such transformation has the potential to strengthen educational governance while contributing to broader social equity and development outcomes.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

### **Expanding the Scope of Gender and Leadership Research**

While this study contributes important insights into the social and institutional factors influencing women's participation in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago, it also highlights areas requiring further scholarly attention. Future research should extend beyond broad descriptive trends to examine the nuanced and intersectional dynamics that shape leadership access. In particular, scholars should investigate how gender interacts with socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, and cultural expectations to produce differentiated leadership experiences across educational contexts.

An expanded research scope would enable a more precise understanding of how structural inequalities operate simultaneously at multiple levels, individual, organisational, and societal, and how these dynamics vary across demographic groups. Such work is essential for developing equity strategies that are responsive to the diversity of women's lived realities rather than assuming uniform barriers or solutions.

### **Differentiation Across Educational Levels**

Future research should also distinguish more explicitly between leadership pathways in primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Findings from this study suggest that leadership experiences and barriers are not uniform across educational levels. Leadership roles in primary education often involve closer engagement with families and communities, where traditional gender norms and caregiving expectations may exert stronger influence. In contrast, leadership in secondary and tertiary education typically requires navigating larger bureaucratic systems, policy-driven accountability frameworks, and more formalised promotion structures.

Comparative research across these levels would clarify how gendered expectations shift across educational contexts and how women's leadership aspirations and strategies evolve accordingly. Key questions include whether family-related pressures are more pronounced in primary education, how institutional hierarchies differ across sectors, and whether gender-responsive policies such as flexible leadership arrangements or representation targets operate differently across educational levels.

### **Intersectionality and Leadership Experiences**

A critical direction for future research is the systematic application of intersectionality in the study of educational leadership. Gender does not operate in isolation, and women's leadership trajectories are shaped by intersecting identities such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. In the Caribbean context, Black women, Indigenous women, and women from economically marginalised backgrounds may face compounded barriers that are not fully captured by gender-focused analyses alone.

Intersectional research would allow scholars to examine how overlapping forms of disadvantage influence access to leadership preparation, mentorship, professional networks, and promotion opportunities. Such studies could explore how discrimination manifests differently

across groups and how institutional responses may unintentionally privilege certain women while marginalising others. Incorporating intersectionality would enhance the inclusivity and explanatory power of future research and support the development of more equitable leadership interventions.

### **Gender-sensitive Leadership Policies Across Educational Levels**

Future research should examine how gender-sensitive leadership policies operate across different educational levels, recognising that leadership demands, institutional structures, and sociocultural expectations vary significantly between primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Disaggregating leadership research by educational tier would allow for a more precise understanding of how gendered barriers emerge and how policy responses can be tailored accordingly.

At the primary level, leadership roles often require sustained engagement with families and local communities, where traditional gender norms and caregiving expectations may exert stronger influence. Research in this area could explore how policies such as flexible working arrangements, compensated parental leave, and structured parent engagement initiatives support or constrain women's leadership participation. Such studies would provide insight into how leadership frameworks can be aligned with women's caregiving responsibilities without reinforcing gendered assumptions about domestic roles.

At the secondary and tertiary levels, leadership pathways are typically shaped by more complex organisational hierarchies, policy-driven accountability structures, and administrative responsibilities. Future research should investigate whether existing leadership development programs at these levels adequately address gendered barriers, including unequal access to mentorship, differential expectations regarding availability, and the privileging of masculine

leadership norms. Studies could assess whether leadership training programs explicitly engage with gender dynamics or whether they implicitly reproduce male-centred models of leadership preparation.

Further research is also needed to evaluate the effectiveness of leadership training and coaching programs designed specifically for women. Such studies could examine whether these programs meaningfully address the structural and cultural barriers women face, or whether they place disproportionate emphasis on individual skill acquisition without challenging institutional practices. Evaluating programs for both aspiring and current women leaders would offer evidence on how leadership development initiatives can foster gender-inclusive leadership cultures rather than individual adaptation to inequitable systems.

In addition, research should scrutinise leadership recruitment and selection policies, particularly within secondary and tertiary institutions, to determine whether they promote gender equity or perpetuate existing biases. This includes examining whether women are disproportionately channelled into roles associated with pastoral care or support functions, while men are more frequently positioned in strategic or decision-making roles. Findings from such research could inform the development of genuinely gender-neutral recruitment frameworks that expand women's access to a full range of leadership opportunities.

By examining leadership policies and practices across educational levels, future research can support the development of differentiated, context-responsive strategies for promoting gender equity in educational leadership. This approach moves beyond one-size-fits-all solutions and recognises that effective policy intervention must reflect the distinct institutional realities and gendered expectations operating at each level of the education system.

## **Investigating Alternative Educational Institutions**

In addition to mainstream primary, secondary, and tertiary education, future research should expand its scope to include alternative educational institutions, such as vocational schools, adult education centres, and special education programmes, in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of gendered leadership across the full educational landscape of Trinidad and Tobago. These institutions often operate under distinct organisational structures, professional norms, and resource conditions, all of which may shape leadership pathways and gender dynamics in ways that differ from traditional school settings.

Vocational institutions, in particular, tend to prioritise technical expertise and industry-aligned competencies, which are frequently associated with masculinised notions of authority and leadership (Heilman et al., 2023). In these contexts, leadership legitimacy may be closely tied to perceived technical competence rather than pedagogical or relational skills, potentially creating additional barriers for women seeking advancement. Future research should therefore examine whether women in vocational education leadership are disproportionately channelled into administrative or student-support roles rather than strategic or policy-influencing positions. Such studies could explore how gendered assumptions about technical competence influence recruitment, promotion, and leadership recognition within vocational settings.

Understanding gender bias within vocational leadership structures is especially important given the historical underrepresentation of women in technical and trades-based fields. Research could investigate whether women are systematically overlooked for senior leadership roles in favour of male counterparts perceived as more technically authoritative, even when women possess equivalent qualifications and experience. Additionally, future studies could assess whether gender-sensitive leadership training and mentoring programmes within vocational institutions

reduce bias and expand leadership opportunities for women operating in traditionally male-dominated professional environments.

### **Adult Education Centers and Leadership Opportunities**

Adult education centres represent another important but underexplored site for examining gendered leadership trajectories. These institutions often serve learners who are returning to education following significant life events, such as caregiving, career changes, or migration. Because adult education programmes frequently operate with more flexible curricular and organisational structures, they may offer alternative leadership pathways that differ from those in conventional school systems. Future research should examine whether these structural differences translate into more inclusive leadership opportunities for women or whether similar gendered barriers persist.

In particular, the flexibility associated with adult education leadership may create opportunities for women re-entering the workforce after extended caregiving periods to assume leadership roles that were previously inaccessible. However, adult education institutions may still be constrained by outdated leadership norms or limited policy support for gender equity. Further research could therefore explore how adult education centres design mentorship systems, leadership development initiatives, and support structures that are responsive to the lived realities of women balancing leadership responsibilities with ongoing family obligations.

### **Special Education Programs and the Gendered Nature of Leadership**

Leadership in special education programmes presents a distinct set of challenges and expectations, often requiring high levels of emotional labour, empathy, and relational competence alongside administrative expertise. These relational expectations often align with gendered assumptions about leadership and service roles within organisations (Liu, 2017). Such attributes,

while essential to effective practice, are often feminised and undervalued within formal leadership hierarchies, raising important questions about how women's leadership is recognised and sustained in special education contexts. Future research should examine whether women are more likely to be appointed to leadership roles in special education because of these perceived strengths or whether the demanding nature of such roles discourages long-term leadership participation.

Special education leaders often face heightened risks of emotional exhaustion and role overload, particularly when institutional support mechanisms are weak. Women in these roles may be expected to perform both intensive emotional labour and formal leadership duties without corresponding recognition or support, increasing the likelihood of burnout. Future studies could investigate whether female leaders in special education receive adequate organisational support, including access to mental health resources, workload flexibility, and peer leadership networks. Research could also evaluate the effectiveness of structured peer-support systems in sustaining women's leadership capacity within emotionally demanding educational environments.

Collectively, expanding future research to include alternative educational institutions will deepen understanding of how gendered leadership barriers operate across diverse educational contexts. Such work would enable the development of more nuanced, context-sensitive strategies for promoting gender equity in leadership, ensuring that policy and practice address the varied institutional realities that shape women's leadership experiences across the education system.

### **Creating Inclusive Leadership Structures in Alternative Educational Institutions**

Examining the intersection of gender and diverse educational settings offers an important opportunity to extend understanding of how gender inequality in leadership manifests beyond mainstream schooling. Future research that focuses on alternative educational institutions can illuminate how leadership norms are constructed, challenged, or reproduced within organisational

environments that differ structurally, culturally, and professionally from traditional primary and secondary schools. Such inquiry is essential for identifying how leadership can be redefined in ways that promote greater equity and inclusivity across the education sector.

Gender-sensitive leadership models within alternative educational contexts may differ significantly from those embedded in conventional educational hierarchies. These settings often prioritise distinct forms of expertise, flexibility, and learner engagement, which may either disrupt or reinforce traditional gendered leadership expectations. Understanding how these differences operate in practice would allow researchers to assess whether alternative institutions offer more inclusive leadership pathways for women or whether they replicate the same structural barriers observed elsewhere.

This line of research would also provide valuable insight into how alternative educational institutions can intentionally design inclusive leadership structures that encourage women to pursue and sustain leadership roles. For example, vocational institutions could review recruitment, promotion, and leadership development practices to ensure that women are afforded equal access to leadership opportunities in both technical and administrative domains. Research could examine whether leadership credibility in these institutions is disproportionately tied to masculinised notions of technical authority and how such assumptions might be challenged through revised evaluation criteria and leadership training.

In adult education contexts, future studies could explore the development of tailored mentorship and leadership preparation programmes that support women transitioning into leadership roles later in their careers. These programmes could acknowledge the cumulative impact of caregiving responsibilities, career interruptions, and non-linear professional pathways, thereby offering more responsive and inclusive leadership development models.

Similarly, research on leadership within special education programmes could examine how gendered expectations related to empathy, care, and emotional labour shape leadership roles and responsibilities. Rather than devaluing these competencies, future studies could investigate how they might be formally recognised and integrated into leadership structures that balance relational and administrative demands. This includes examining the effectiveness of family-responsive policies, such as flexible scheduling or shared leadership models, in supporting women leaders operating in emotionally intensive educational environments.

Finally, future research should explore how gender-focused leadership initiatives can be coordinated across educational sectors, including vocational, adult, and special education settings. Cross-sector collaboration could facilitate the exchange of effective practices, support the development of adaptable policy frameworks, and promote a more coherent system-wide approach to gender equity in leadership. By generating comparative and context-sensitive evidence, such research would contribute to the design of leadership structures that are equitable, sustainable, and responsive to the diverse realities of women across the full spectrum of educational institutions.

### **Longitudinal Studies on the Impact of Policy Interventions**

While cross-sectional studies provide valuable snapshots of gender inequality in educational leadership, they are limited in their ability to capture how leadership trajectories and institutional cultures evolve over time. As Woodd (1999) argues, gender relations and equity outcomes are dynamic rather than static, meaning that the effects of policy interventions may only become visible after sustained implementation. Longitudinal research is therefore essential for understanding whether initiatives designed to promote gender equality result in enduring structural and cultural change or merely produce short-term gains.

Longitudinal inquiry would allow researchers to track the long-term impact of interventions such as gender quotas, leadership development programs, mentorship schemes, and family-friendly workplace policies. Rather than focusing solely on immediate increases in female representation, such studies could examine whether women appointed to leadership roles experience sustained career progression, increased influence in decision-making, and reduced exposure to gendered barriers over time.

### **Assessing the Long-Term Effects of Gender Quotas**

Longitudinal studies could provide critical insight into whether gender quotas lead to lasting shifts in leadership demographics and organisational culture. While existing research demonstrates that quotas can increase women's representation in leadership in the short term, questions remain about their long-term effectiveness. Krook (2013) highlights the success of quotas in improving access, yet other scholars caution that quotas alone may not dismantle deeply embedded gender norms within institutions. Dickson (2010) suggests that without accompanying cultural and structural reforms, women appointed through quotas may continue to face marginalisation or heightened scrutiny. Longitudinal research would enable scholars to examine whether quota-based appointments contribute to sustained normalisation of women's leadership or whether they function as temporary corrective measures without deeper institutional transformation.

### **Impact of Family-Friendly Policies and Their Long-Term Effectiveness**

Family-friendly policies such as flexible working hours, parental leave, and part-time leadership roles have been shown to improve women's work-life balance and short-term leadership participation. However, their long-term implications remain underexplored. Research by Bianchi et al. (2012) indicates positive outcomes for women's job satisfaction, yet other studies

caution that such policies may inadvertently reinforce gendered expectations around caregiving (Harquail, 2008; McGoldrick et al., 2015). Longitudinal research could track women's career trajectories over extended periods to determine whether these policies enable sustained leadership advancement or whether women eventually encounter stalled progression due to persistent bias or reduced access to high-visibility roles. Such an inquiry would clarify whether family-friendly policies function as transformative tools or compensatory mechanisms within unchanged organisational cultures.

### **Tracking Mentorship's Long-Term Effectiveness**

Mentorship is widely recognised as a critical support mechanism for women aspiring to leadership, yet its long-term impact is rarely examined systematically. Longitudinal studies could assess whether early-stage mentorship leads to sustained leadership attainment or whether the absence of ongoing sponsorship limits long-term advancement. Ibarra et al. (2013) and Joseph et al. (2016) argue that mentorship must evolve as women progress into more senior roles, while Ragins (1999) emphasises the importance of continuous mentorship across career stages. Longitudinal research would allow for examination of how mentorship relationships develop over time and whether they provide the advocacy, visibility, and institutional access required for sustained leadership growth.

Such studies could also explore the interaction between formal mentorship programs and informal professional networks. Informal networks often play a decisive role in leadership advancement, yet women are frequently excluded from them. Longitudinal inquiry could examine whether formal mentorship compensates for this exclusion or whether informal networks continue to reproduce gendered power imbalances, thereby limiting the effectiveness of structured support initiatives.

### **Evaluating the Efficacy of Gender-Sensitive Leadership Training**

Long-term research is also necessary to assess the sustained impact of gender-sensitive leadership training programs. While such programs may enhance confidence and leadership skills in the short term, Noland et al. (2016) caution that training alone is insufficient without systemic organisational change. Longitudinal studies could examine whether women who complete leadership training are subsequently offered meaningful leadership opportunities or whether institutional barriers continue to restrict their advancement. Tracking participants over time would provide insight into whether training initiatives contribute to durable career progression or whether persistent stereotypes and structural constraints undermine their effectiveness.

Overall, longitudinal research offers a critical methodological extension to the current study by enabling a deeper understanding of how gender equity interventions function over time. Such inquiry would support evidence-based policy refinement, ensure that leadership initiatives produce sustained outcomes, and contribute to the development of more robust, context-sensitive strategies for advancing gender equality in educational leadership within Trinidad and Tobago and comparable contexts.

### **Exploring the Role of Mentorship and Networking in Leadership Development**

Existing research consistently highlights mentorship and professional networking as critical mechanisms for supporting women's advancement into leadership roles. However, the specific ways in which mentorship structures operate within educational leadership contexts, particularly in relation to sustained career progression, remain insufficiently examined. Kogler Hill (2017) emphasizes that effective mentorship extends beyond guidance and skills development to include advocacy, visibility, and sponsorship, all of which are essential for women seeking leadership advancement. Despite this, many women in education report limited access to

meaningful mentorship opportunities, and where mentorship exists, it is often informal, unevenly distributed, and insufficiently structured to support long-term leadership development.

Women educators frequently encounter barriers to forming consistent and effective mentorship relationships. Dawson (2014) notes that the underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions reduces the availability of female mentors, leaving aspiring women leaders without accessible role models who share similar experiences. This scarcity is particularly acute in educational systems where leadership hierarchies remain male-dominated. As Rhode (2017) argues, mentorship plays a dual role in leadership development by providing both professional guidance and institutional advocacy. Without access to mentors who are positioned to influence promotion and appointment decisions, women may struggle to gain the credibility and visibility necessary for advancement, resulting in stalled leadership trajectories.

### **Formalizing Mentorship Programs**

Future research should prioritise the examination and development of formalised mentorship programs within educational institutions. Structured mentorship initiatives can ensure that women have equitable, sustained access to mentors who are equipped to provide both guidance and advocacy across different career stages. Such programs should move beyond ad hoc pairings and be embedded within leadership development frameworks, linking mentorship participation to professional learning, leadership preparation, and advancement opportunities.

Longitudinal research would be particularly valuable in examining how mentorship relationships evolve as women progress through leadership pipelines. Questions such as whether mentors continue to provide support as leadership responsibilities increase, and whether mentorship adapts to address new institutional challenges, warrant closer examination. Ragins and Kram (2007) suggests that the effectiveness of mentorship is closely tied to relationship quality,

trust, and sustained engagement. Future studies could therefore explore how different mentorship models, including peer mentorship, cross-gender mentorship, and institutionally assigned mentorship, vary in their capacity to support women's leadership aspirations.

Cross-gender mentorship represents a particularly important area for further investigation. Given that men often occupy senior leadership positions, male mentors may have greater institutional influence and access to decision-making networks. However, unconscious bias may limit their effectiveness in supporting women's advancement. Research should therefore examine how cross-gender mentorship can be structured to mitigate bias and enhance advocacy outcomes, ensuring that such relationships contribute meaningfully to women's leadership progression rather than reinforcing existing power asymmetries.

### **Mentorship, Sponsorship, and Leadership Outcomes**

An emerging area of scholarship distinguishes mentorship from sponsorship, highlighting the latter as a potentially more powerful driver of leadership advancement. Sponsorship involves active advocacy by senior leaders, including nominating women for leadership roles, endorsing their readiness for advancement, and facilitating access to high-visibility opportunities. Ibarra et al. (2010) argue that sponsorship may offer greater career benefits for women than mentorship alone, particularly in organisational contexts where informal networks heavily influence promotion decisions.

Future research should therefore investigate the comparative effectiveness of mentorship and sponsorship models in educational leadership contexts. Studies could examine whether mentorship programs that incorporate sponsorship elements lead to higher rates of leadership appointment, sustained career progression, and increased institutional influence for women. By identifying mentorship structures that produce tangible leadership outcomes, researchers can

inform the design of more effective leadership development initiatives and contribute to evidence-based strategies for advancing gender equity in educational leadership.

Overall, a deeper and more systematic examination of mentorship and networking practices would strengthen the understanding of how leadership pathways are shaped within education systems. Such research would provide critical insight into how mentorship can be institutionalised as a mechanism for equity, ensuring that women are not only prepared for leadership roles but are also actively supported in accessing and sustaining them.

### **Investigating Professional Networking and Leadership Opportunities**

In addition to mentorship, professional networking plays a critical role in shaping women's access to leadership opportunities within educational institutions. Future research should examine how women's professional networks differ from those of their male counterparts and the extent to which these differences influence leadership trajectories. Key questions include whether women are systematically excluded from informal networks where leadership decisions are negotiated, what social and institutional factors contribute to the gendered nature of these networks, and how educational institutions can foster more inclusive networking structures that support women's advancement.

Ely et al. (2011) demonstrate that women are frequently excluded from informal professional networks, such as social gatherings, informal meetings, and decision-making spaces, where access to leadership opportunities is often negotiated. These networks function as sources of social capital, providing individuals with visibility, endorsement, and access to influential decision-makers. As Ragins (1999) argues, exclusion from such informal networks limits women's ability to demonstrate leadership potential, acquire sponsorship, and gain insider knowledge about advancement opportunities. Future research should therefore investigate how access to social

capital differs by gender within educational settings and how these disparities shape leadership outcomes.

Understanding the mechanisms through which informal networks operate is essential for designing institutional interventions. Research could explore how leadership opportunities are circulated within these networks, the role of homophily in sustaining male-dominated spaces, and the extent to which organizational culture legitimizes or challenges exclusionary networking practices. Such inquiry would provide evidence to inform strategies aimed at creating transparent, inclusive networking opportunities that reduce reliance on informal and gendered pathways to leadership.

### **Women's Self-Constructed Networks**

Future studies should also examine how women develop and sustain alternative professional networks outside traditional institutional structures. Burt (2004) suggests that individuals excluded from dominant networks often construct parallel networks that provide emotional support, information sharing, and career guidance. For women in education, these self-constructed networks may serve as critical spaces for peer mentoring, validation, and collective problem-solving in male-dominated leadership environments.

Research could investigate how women strategically build relationships that facilitate leadership development, including cross-institutional alliances, peer networks, and affinity-based professional groups. Examining how these networks function, the resources they provide, and the conditions under which they translate into leadership opportunities would offer valuable insight into how women navigate and challenge existing power structures. Understanding these processes could also inform institutional efforts to formally recognize and support such networks as legitimate components of leadership development.

### **Digital Mentorship and Online Platforms**

An emerging area for future research involves the role of digital mentorship and online networking platforms in supporting women's leadership development. Ibarra et al. (2013) highlight the growing importance of digital platforms in facilitating professional connections, particularly in contexts where geographical distance or institutional isolation limits access to in-person mentorship. Online platforms such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and specialised professional networks have the potential to connect women educators across regions, expand access to leadership resources, and facilitate knowledge exchange.

As A. Stewart and LaVaque-Manty (2008) note, digital networks can increase exposure to a wider and more diverse range of mentors and role models. However, access to these platforms is uneven, and the digital divide remains a significant barrier for women in low-income or rural contexts. Future research should examine how digital access, technological literacy, and institutional support influence women's participation in online mentorship and networking initiatives. Additionally, studies could explore how the virtual nature of digital mentorship affects relationship quality, trust, and long-term career outcomes compared to face-to-face interactions.

Finally, research should investigate how educational institutions can intentionally design and implement digital mentorship and networking programs tailored to women in leadership. Evaluating the effectiveness of institutionally supported digital platforms in promoting sustained mentorship, peer support, and leadership advancement would provide evidence-based guidance for leveraging technology to reduce structural and geographic barriers. By integrating digital tools into leadership development strategies, educational systems may be better positioned to support women's access to leadership opportunities in equitable and scalable ways.

### **Intersectionality: Researching Gender, Race, Ethnicity, and Socioeconomic Status**

A key contribution of this study is its recognition that gender inequality in educational leadership cannot be fully understood in isolation from other social identities. Intersectionality theory asserts that gender interacts with race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status to shape individuals' experiences, access to opportunity, and professional outcomes (Crenshaw, n.d.; Morris, 1999). Adopting an intersectional lens enables a more nuanced examination of how multiple systems of power and inequality operate simultaneously within educational leadership structures. Contemporary scholarship emphasizes that leadership pathways are not only gendered but also racialized and classed, producing differentiated experiences among women themselves.

Future research should therefore examine how women of colour experience leadership access and advancement within Trinidad and Tobago's education system. While this study identifies gender as a significant barrier, race and ethnicity may compound these challenges, creating distinct obstacles for Black women, women of mixed heritage, and women from other ethnic minority groups. Research indicates that racialized stereotypes often intersect with gendered expectations, influencing how women's leadership competence is perceived and evaluated (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Fuller, 2018). In Caribbean contexts, where colonial legacies continue to shape social hierarchies, these intersecting biases may further marginalise women from leadership roles despite comparable qualifications and experience.

Intersectional research could explore how cultural narratives surrounding race and gender influence leadership identity formation and career trajectories. For example, Black women may encounter contradictory stereotypes that frame them as either insufficiently authoritative or excessively assertive, both of which can undermine leadership legitimacy. Latina women may face similar tensions, particularly where cultural norms are interpreted as incompatible with dominant

leadership ideals. Jones (2020) highlight that women of colour frequently navigate a double bind in leadership contexts, where attempts to conform to expected leadership behaviours risk reinforcing negative stereotypes.

Socioeconomic status further intensifies these disparities. Women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may experience limited access to leadership preparation opportunities, professional networks, and mentoring relationships. Stephens et al. (2013) argue that socioeconomic disadvantage restricts access to social capital, which is often critical for leadership advancement. In the context of educational leadership, this may manifest as reduced exposure to leadership development programs, fewer opportunities for postgraduate study, and diminished visibility within institutional decision-making spaces.

Future studies should therefore employ intersectional research designs that examine how race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status interact with gender to influence leadership participation. Such research could investigate how intersecting identities shape leadership styles, workplace interactions, and promotion outcomes. For instance, women from marginalised backgrounds may adopt relational or community-centred leadership approaches as a strategic response to exclusion from dominant leadership norms. Recognising and valuing these leadership expressions could inform the development of more inclusive leadership frameworks and training programs.

An intersectional research agenda would also have important policy implications. Findings could inform equity-focused leadership development initiatives tailored to the needs of women from diverse backgrounds, ensuring that leadership pipelines do not privilege a narrow subset of women. Educational institutions could use this evidence to broaden definitions of effective leadership, incorporate culturally responsive mentoring practices, and promote equitable representation in leadership roles. By embedding intersectionality into future research, scholars

and policymakers can better address the complex and layered realities shaping women's participation in educational leadership.

### **Comparative Studies: Gender Equity Across the Caribbean Region**

Future research should extend beyond national boundaries to include comparative analyses of gender equity in educational leadership across the Caribbean region. As highlighted by Baptiste (2016) and Reddock and Bobb-Smith (2008), gender equality in education is shaped by distinct historical, cultural, and policy environments, and therefore cannot be understood as a uniform regional phenomenon. Comparative studies would allow researchers to identify both shared structural constraints and context-specific strategies that influence women's access to leadership across Caribbean education systems.

The Caribbean presents a particularly valuable comparative context due to its diversity in colonial histories, governance models, denominational influences, and socioeconomic conditions. Examining how these factors interact with gender norms and leadership pathways can yield insights that are not visible within single-country studies. A comparative approach would also enable the identification of transferable best practices while recognising the limits of policy borrowing without cultural adaptation.

### **Regional Differences in Gender Equality in Education**

Existing evidence suggests that countries such as Barbados, Jamaica, and Guyana have made measurable progress in promoting gender equity in educational leadership, albeit with uneven outcomes. Barbados, for example, has been commended for embedding gender-sensitive principles within its educational leadership development frameworks. Research indicates that leadership programs supported by the Ministry of Education have incorporated mentoring and

professional development pathways designed to increase women's representation in senior roles (Pant & Shiwakoti, 2025).

Jamaica has similarly implemented national initiatives aimed at strengthening women's leadership capacity in education, including mentorship and leadership training programs linked to broader gender equity agendas. However, studies by Williams et al. (n.d.) demonstrate that despite these advances, socioeconomic status continues to mediate women's access to leadership opportunities, with women from lower-income backgrounds remaining underrepresented in senior educational roles.

Guyana offers an additional perspective through its Gender Equity Action Plan, which explicitly targets leadership development among women in rural and Indigenous communities. This approach foregrounds intersectionality by recognising how gender, geography, and ethnicity interact to shape leadership access. Comparative research examining the outcomes of such initiatives could provide valuable insight into how inclusive leadership policies can be designed to reach women who are often marginalised within national education systems.

### **Lessons for Trinidad and Tobago**

Comparative analysis of these regional cases can inform more nuanced and effective strategies for Trinidad and Tobago. For instance, research could examine whether gender representation targets or quotas used in other Caribbean contexts have resulted in sustained increases in women's leadership participation, or whether mentorship-based and developmental approaches yield more durable outcomes. Such findings would assist policymakers in Trinidad and Tobago in determining which strategies are most appropriate given the country's specific institutional and sociocultural context.

Further comparative work could also investigate how leadership policies in Barbados, Jamaica, and Guyana influence women's leadership styles, professional confidence, and career trajectories. Do these policies foster genuinely inclusive leadership cultures, or do they primarily address surface-level representation without dismantling deeper structural barriers? Understanding these dynamics would allow Trinidad and Tobago to move beyond symbolic equity measures toward systemic transformation.

### **Adapting Regional Best Practices to Local Contexts**

Comparative research also offers opportunities to adapt successful regional practices to the Trinidad and Tobago context in culturally responsive ways. For example, mentorship models developed in Barbados could be adapted to address urban–rural disparities in leadership access within Trinidad and Tobago. Jamaica's emphasis on increasing the visibility of women leaders could inform national strategies aimed at normalising female leadership and challenging persistent gender stereotypes in schools.

Similarly, Guyana's focus on culturally responsive leadership development highlights the importance of tailoring gender equity initiatives to diverse community contexts. Adapting such approaches could support the development of leadership models in Trinidad and Tobago that recognise caregiving responsibilities, cultural expectations, and non-linear career pathways, all of which were identified as significant moderating factors in this study.

Overall, comparative Caribbean research has the potential to strengthen both theory and practice by situating gender and leadership within shared regional histories while respecting national differences. Such work would not only deepen scholarly understanding of gender equity in educational leadership but also provide evidence-based guidance for policymakers seeking to design sustainable, context-sensitive reforms in Trinidad and Tobago and beyond.

## Summary

The recommendations presented in this study offer a comprehensive framework for addressing persistent gender disparities in educational leadership. They underscore the necessity of moving beyond descriptive accounts of underrepresentation toward sustained, theoretically informed inquiry that interrogates the structural, cultural, and institutional conditions shaping women's leadership trajectories. Continued research is essential to capturing the layered and dynamic nature of gendered leadership experiences and to identifying strategies capable of dismantling deeply embedded inequalities.

Key priorities for future research include intersectional analysis, longitudinal investigation, mentorship and sponsorship structures, professional networking dynamics, and cross-regional comparison. Together, these areas respond directly to gaps identified in the current literature and reflect the complexity of leadership development as a socially situated process. An intersectional lens remains particularly critical, as it enables a more nuanced understanding of how gender interacts with race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and cultural expectations to shape women's access to and sustainability within leadership roles. Such an approach is essential for capturing the compounded barriers faced by women from historically marginalised groups and for avoiding overly universalised interpretations of women's leadership experiences.

Longitudinal and comparative research designs are also necessary to assess the durability and effectiveness of gender equity initiatives over time. Tracking leadership trajectories and policy outcomes across educational levels and national contexts can provide valuable insight into which interventions produce meaningful change and which remain symbolic. In the Caribbean context, comparative studies offer particular value by situating Trinidad and Tobago within a shared

regional history while accounting for national variations in governance, culture, and institutional practice.

Collectively, this future research agenda has the potential to inform the development of inclusive, evidence-based policies and strategic interventions that empower women, challenge exclusionary leadership norms, and promote equitable representation in educational leadership. By advancing both scholarly understanding and practical application, continued research can contribute to the transformation of leadership structures across Trinidad and Tobago and the wider Caribbean, supporting more diverse, responsive, and socially just education systems.

## **Conclusions**

The central aim of this research was to examine the gender-related factors that influence women's access to and attainment of leadership positions within educational institutions in Trinidad and Tobago. The study sought to contribute to the expanding body of literature on gender disparities in educational leadership by analysing how intersecting dimensions of identity, including gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background, shape women's leadership opportunities. This focus was essential in revealing how overlapping forms of bias operate simultaneously to structure women's professional experiences, particularly within a sociocultural context where entrenched norms and historical inequalities continue to reinforce gendered limitations on leadership participation.

By adopting an intersectional framework, the study addressed the complexity of women's leadership experiences and demonstrated that barriers to advancement cannot be understood through gender alone. The findings illustrate how racialised and socioeconomic factors intersect with gender to create distinct and compounded challenges, particularly for women of colour and

those from less advantaged backgrounds. In doing so, the research contributes to theoretical understandings of gendered organisations by showing how power, authority, and leadership access are embedded within both formal institutional structures and informal cultural practices. The study also advances intersectionality theory by applying it to the field of educational leadership, offering empirical evidence of how multiple social identities interact to shape professional trajectories within a Caribbean context.

Methodologically, the study combined quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a nuanced analysis of gendered leadership experiences. While inferential statistical tests, such as the independent samples t-test, did not reveal statistically significant differences between groups, the descriptive trends and qualitative responses yielded important insights. These findings highlighted subtle but persistent differences in perceptions related to caregiving expectations, leadership suitability, and professional legitimacy, reinforcing the qualitative evidence that social values continue to influence leadership aspirations and opportunities in gendered ways.

Overall, the findings make a meaningful contribution to both theory and practice. The study offers evidence-based recommendations for policymakers, educational leaders, and researchers, underscoring the importance of gender-sensitive leadership development, inclusive mentorship structures, and family-responsive institutional policies. These recommendations aim to support the creation of more equitable leadership environments in which women, regardless of background or identity, can access, sustain, and thrive in leadership roles. By linking intersectional theory with practical strategies for institutional change, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of gender inequality in educational leadership and provides a foundation for advancing more inclusive and just leadership systems in Trinidad and Tobago.

### **Responding to the Study Problem**

This research set out to examine the persistent underrepresentation of women in educational leadership within Trinidad and Tobago, despite women constituting the majority of the teaching workforce and demonstrating comparable qualifications and professional experience to their male counterparts. The findings confirm that gender disparity in leadership is not the result of individual deficiency or lack of aspiration but is produced through a convergence of structural, cultural, and institutional constraints that continue to shape leadership access and progression.

Consistent with existing scholarship, the study affirms that women encounter enduring structural barriers, including gendered leadership norms, biased promotion practices, and organisational cultures that privilege traditionally masculine leadership traits. Adams et al. (2017) and Agrawal and Mahajan (2021) similarly identify the persistence of stereotypes that position women as less authoritative or less suited for leadership, particularly in environments that equate leadership with assertiveness, uninterrupted availability, and hierarchical control. These findings reinforce the argument that leadership selection processes remain embedded within gendered assumptions that disadvantage women, even when formal equality policies are in place.

Importantly, this study extends the literature by demonstrating that these barriers are intensified by intersecting identity factors, including race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background. Drawing on Crenshaw's (n.d.) intersectionality framework, the findings reveal how women's leadership trajectories are shaped by overlapping systems of disadvantage rather than gender alone. In the context of Trinidad and Tobago, where colonial histories, racial stratification, and cultural traditions continue to influence institutional norms, access to leadership is mediated by complex social hierarchies. This intersectional perspective provides a more nuanced explanation of why leadership inequities persist and why gender-neutral approaches to leadership reform have yielded limited results.

At the same time, the findings suggest cautious evidence of change within the education sector. Participants identified emerging support for gender-sensitive leadership training, mentorship initiatives, and increased visibility of women in leadership roles. Similar patterns have been observed by Braun et al. (2017) and Baglama & Uzunboylu (2017), who argue that structured mentorship and leadership development programs can contribute to gradual shifts in leadership representation. However, this study confirms that such initiatives remain unevenly implemented and insufficiently embedded within organisational cultures to produce sustained systemic change.

As Harquail (2008) caution, policy interventions alone are unlikely to dismantle deeply entrenched gender hierarchies. The findings underscore the necessity of both top-down reforms, such as transparent promotion criteria and accountability mechanisms, and bottom-up cultural change, including the redefinition of leadership norms and the validation of diverse leadership styles. In responding to the study problem, this research demonstrates that meaningful progress toward gender equity in educational leadership requires coordinated structural reform, cultural transformation, and sustained institutional commitment rather than isolated or symbolic interventions.

### **Significance of the Results**

The findings of this research are significant in several key respects. Most notably, they demonstrate that gender inequality in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago cannot be adequately understood through a single-axis analysis of gender alone. Instead, the results affirm the necessity of an intersectional approach, in which gender operates in conjunction with race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background to shape leadership access and progression. This aligns with Crenshaw's (n.d.) theory of intersectionality, which argues that individuals who occupy

multiple marginalized identities experience distinct and compounded forms of disadvantage that are obscured when social categories are examined in isolation.

The study further supports contemporary scholarship that calls for intersectional frameworks as essential tools for analysing leadership inequities. Nash (2019) contends that intersectionality enables a more precise understanding of how power operates across social structures, particularly within professional hierarchies. In this study, women of color and women from less advantaged socioeconomic backgrounds reported layered constraints on leadership participation, reflecting how historical legacies, cultural norms, and institutional practices intersect to limit access to leadership roles. These findings are consistent with the work of Fuller (2018) and Jones (2020), who highlight how race, ethnicity, and gender interact to produce compounded barriers in leadership pathways, especially in postcolonial and culturally stratified contexts such as the Caribbean.

Beyond its theoretical contribution, the study also holds significant practical and policy relevance. The findings underscore the importance of family-responsive workplace policies and gender-sensitive leadership development programs as critical mechanisms for addressing the barriers that restrict women's advancement. Participants consistently identified work-family conflict, inflexible leadership structures, and limited institutional support as factors that moderated their leadership aspirations and participation. This aligns with research by Bianchi et al. (2012) and Harquail (2008), which demonstrates that flexible work arrangements, comprehensive parental leave, and intentional equity policies can substantially increase women's representation in leadership without compromising organisational effectiveness.

Importantly, the study highlights that the effectiveness of such policies depends not on their existence alone but on their depth of implementation and cultural integration. Gender-inclusive

initiatives must be embedded within organisational norms, leadership expectations, and accountability structures to produce sustained change. As Harquail (2008) argue, policies that fail to address underlying cultural assumptions about leadership and caregiving risk becoming symbolic rather than transformative. The findings therefore reinforce the need for institutional commitment that supports women's professional advancement alongside their caregiving responsibilities, enabling women not only to remain in leadership roles but to aspire confidently to senior positions.

Collectively, these results contribute meaningful empirical evidence to the literature on gender and educational leadership by demonstrating how intersectional identities and institutional conditions jointly shape leadership outcomes. They also provide a strong evidentiary basis for policy reform and organisational change aimed at advancing more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable leadership structures within the education system of Trinidad and Tobago.

### **Contribution to the Literature**

This study makes a substantive contribution to the literature on gender and educational leadership by extending existing scholarship into an under-researched Caribbean context and by operationalising intersectionality as an analytical framework rather than a purely conceptual lens. While a substantial body of research has documented gender disparities in leadership (Adams et al., 2017; Agrawal & Mahajan, 2021; Ibarra et al., 2013), much of this work is grounded in Global North contexts and treats gender as a largely singular explanatory variable. This research advances the field by demonstrating how gendered leadership experiences in Trinidad and Tobago are shaped through the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic positioning within historically and culturally specific institutional settings.

Consistent with Crenshaw's (n.d.) theory of intersectionality, the findings illustrate that women's leadership trajectories cannot be understood through gender alone. Instead, women experience leadership access and exclusion through overlapping systems of power that are historically rooted in colonial legacies, racial stratification, and entrenched social norms within Caribbean societies. By empirically examining these intersections within educational institutions, the study responds directly to calls from scholars such as Fuller (2018) and Jones (2020) for more contextually grounded analyses of gender and leadership that move beyond universalised or homogenised accounts of women's experiences.

A further contribution lies in addressing the relative scarcity of empirical research focused on educational leadership in the Caribbean. Existing leadership literature frequently generalises women's experiences across regions without sufficient attention to local sociocultural dynamics. This study counters that tendency by foregrounding the lived experiences and perceptions of educators in Trinidad and Tobago, thereby generating locally situated knowledge that reflects how leadership is understood, negotiated, and constrained within this specific context. In doing so, it provides a corrective to the dominance of Western-centric leadership models and contributes region-specific evidence that enriches comparative and international leadership scholarship.

Methodologically, the study contributes to the literature through its application of an explanatory sequential mixed-methods logic within a survey-based design. While much leadership research relies either on purely quantitative measures or small-scale qualitative case studies, this research demonstrates how quantitative patterns can be meaningfully contextualised through qualitative open-ended responses embedded within a single instrument. As highlighted during the defence, this approach allows teachers' voices to play an interpretive role in explaining statistical trends, rather than positioning participants solely as data points. This methodological contribution

is particularly relevant for leadership research in contexts where access to elite leadership populations may be limited but where practitioner insight remains essential.

The study also extends emerging scholarship on intersectional leadership by illustrating how overlapping identities influence not only access to leadership roles but also leadership practice, self-perception, and decision-making. Women's leadership approaches are often shaped by experiences of marginalisation and structural inequality (Nash, 2019; Blackmore, 2017a). This research builds on that insight by showing how intersectional positioning affects how women interpret leadership expectations, negotiate authority, and assess the personal costs of advancement within educational institutions.

Collectively, these contributions advance theoretical, contextual, and methodological understandings of gender and educational leadership. By centring intersectionality, amplifying educators' voices, and grounding analysis within a Caribbean educational system, the study provides a more nuanced and globally relevant account of leadership inequality. It also offers a foundation for future comparative research and policy-oriented scholarship aimed at developing inclusive, context-responsive leadership frameworks in education.

### **Practical Implications**

The practical implications of this research are substantial, offering clear and actionable guidance for addressing gender inequity in educational leadership within Trinidad and Tobago. The findings indicate that meaningful progress will require coordinated action at the institutional, policy, and school levels, rather than reliance on individual women's resilience or ambition alone. Schools, policymakers, and educational authorities must therefore move beyond symbolic commitments to gender equity and implement structural interventions that actively redistribute leadership opportunities.

One key implication is the need to institutionalise mechanisms that counteract historically male-dominated leadership pipelines. Strategies such as structured mentorship and sponsorship programs, leadership development initiatives targeted at women, and the use of representation benchmarks or quotas are not merely aspirational but evidence-based interventions. Research by Harquail (2008) and Braun et al. (2017) demonstrates that gender quotas and targeted leadership pathways have been effective in increasing women's representation across multiple sectors by disrupting informal, exclusionary selection practices. When applied carefully within education systems, such measures can help normalise women's presence in leadership roles and reduce the perception of leadership as inherently masculine.

The findings also underscore the importance of leadership training that explicitly addresses gender dynamics rather than treating leadership development as gender-neutral. Traditional leadership frameworks often privilege assertiveness, uninterrupted career trajectories, and constant availability, norms that disadvantage women, particularly those with caregiving responsibilities. Gender-responsive leadership training should therefore challenge male-centric leadership models and legitimise diverse leadership styles, including collaborative, relational, and emotionally intelligent approaches. As Bianchi et al. (2012) note, leadership development that integrates emotional intelligence and inclusive decision-making equips leaders to navigate complex institutional environments while fostering healthier organisational cultures.

A further practical implication concerns the redesign of organisational policies to support work-life integration. The study highlights that caregiving responsibilities continue to act as a structural barrier to women's leadership participation. Educational institutions must therefore treat family-responsive policies, such as flexible scheduling, job-sharing, part-time leadership roles, and accessible parental leave, as leadership equity mechanisms rather than personal accommodations.

Harquail (2008) emphasises that without such support, women are disproportionately forced to choose between leadership advancement and personal well-being. Embedding flexibility within leadership structures enables institutions to retain skilled educators and sustain women's leadership over time.

Finally, the research calls for a re-evaluation of how leadership effectiveness is defined and assessed within educational organisations. Leadership grounded in empathy, collaboration, cultural awareness, and relational capacity qualities frequently associated with women's leadership experiences has been shown to enhance institutional effectiveness and inclusivity (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Blackmore, 2017b). Recognising and valuing these competencies in recruitment, appraisal, and promotion processes can contribute to more equitable leadership environments and improved organisational outcomes.

Collectively, these practical implications highlight that advancing gender equity in educational leadership requires systemic reform rather than isolated interventions. By embedding gender-responsive leadership development, accountability mechanisms, and family-supportive policies into institutional practice, educational organisations in Trinidad and Tobago can create leadership environments in which women are not only encouraged to lead but are structurally supported to do so sustainably.

### **Future Research Directions**

While this study offers important insights into gender disparities in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago, it also highlights several avenues for further scholarly inquiry. One key direction for future research involves expanding the scale and diversity of participant samples. This study focused on a relatively small group of educators within a specific national context, which, while appropriate for in-depth contextual analysis, limits broader generalisability

(Bornstein et al., 2013). Future studies should therefore incorporate larger and more diverse samples across multiple Caribbean nations or comparative international contexts. As Hallinger (2020) notes, cross-national and cross-cultural research is essential for distinguishing context-specific leadership barriers from those that reflect broader global patterns of gender inequality. Comparative studies would allow researchers to assess how historical, cultural, and institutional differences shape leadership access and whether similar mechanisms operate across educational systems.

Another important direction concerns the use of longitudinal research designs. This study provides a snapshot of gendered leadership experiences at a particular moment in time; however, leadership trajectories unfold across extended periods and are influenced by cumulative institutional and personal factors. Longitudinal research would enable scholars to examine how women's leadership aspirations, participation, and retention evolve over time and to evaluate the sustained impact of interventions such as gender equity policies, mentorship programs, and leadership training initiatives. Without longitudinal analysis, it remains difficult to determine whether such interventions produce sustained structural change or only short-term improvements in representation (Bando, 2019; UNESCO, 2023). Longitudinal inquiry could also reveal whether women who access leadership roles continue to encounter structural barriers at advanced career stages, thereby informing more comprehensive policy responses.

Future research should also examine the growing role of digital platforms and online mentorship in leadership development. As educational systems increasingly rely on digital technologies, online mentorship and professional networking platforms may offer alternative pathways for women to access leadership support, particularly in geographically dispersed or resource-constrained settings. Ibarra et al. (2013) suggest that digital networks can reduce isolation,

expand access to role models, and facilitate flexible mentorship relationships that are not limited by institutional or geographic boundaries. In the Caribbean context, where physical distance and uneven resource distribution can constrain professional development opportunities, digital leadership initiatives warrant systematic investigation. Research in this area could assess the effectiveness, accessibility, and equity implications of virtual mentorship models compared to traditional face-to-face approaches.

Collectively, these future research directions underscore the need to move beyond descriptive analyses toward designs that capture change over time, across contexts, and through evolving leadership practices. By extending the methodological and theoretical scope of gender and leadership research, future studies can contribute to more robust, evidence-based strategies for advancing equitable educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago and comparable settings.

### **Conclusion**

This research deepens understanding of gender disparities in educational leadership by foregrounding the intersecting barriers that women encounter and by proposing practical, context-responsive strategies to address these challenges. Although women's participation in the education sector has increased, a persistent leadership gap remains evident. The findings reveal that women's underrepresentation in leadership is not the result of individual deficits but is shaped by systemic institutional constraints, reinforced by cultural expectations and structural inequities. Importantly, these challenges are further compounded by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic background. By advocating for gender-responsive policies, inclusive leadership development, and targeted mentorship structures, this study offers actionable pathways for promoting greater gender parity in educational leadership. The findings indicate that dismantling these barriers requires deliberate

structural reform to cultivate inclusive and equitable institutional environments in which women, regardless of background, can access and sustain leadership roles.

Central to this study is the application of intersectionality, extending Crenshaw's (n.d.) foundational framework to the field of educational leadership. The analysis demonstrates how gender intersects with race, ethnicity, and class to generate layered and cumulative disadvantages for women pursuing leadership positions. Women of colour and those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds often experience intensified forms of exclusion that further restrict leadership access. Within the Caribbean context, racialised and cultural dynamics strongly shape leadership legitimacy and opportunity, reinforcing historical hierarchies and normative expectations. These findings corroborate the work of Reddock and Bobb-Smith (2008) and Jones (2020), who illustrate how women of colour in leadership are subjected to multiple, overlapping forms of marginalisation, particularly in societies such as Trinidad and Tobago, where colonial legacies and sociocultural traditions remain influential. This underscores the necessity of embedding intersectionality within leadership research and policy, ensuring that gender equity initiatives are responsive to the differentiated realities women experience across social locations.

The study further highlights the importance of gender-sensitive leadership training as a practical mechanism for challenging persistent gender stereotypes embedded in educational leadership. Leadership continues to be framed through masculinised norms that privilege assertiveness, competitiveness, and linear career progression Heilman et al. (2023). Women, particularly those from marginalised groups, are frequently evaluated against these narrow standards, limiting their access to leadership roles and advancement opportunities. This research argues for leadership development programmes that explicitly interrogate gendered assumptions while promoting inclusive leadership models that value collaboration, empathy, and emotional

intelligence. Such attributes, often undervalued in traditional leadership paradigms, are increasingly recognised as essential to effective leadership in contemporary educational contexts. As demonstrated by Bianchi et al. (2012) and Harquail (2008), inclusive leadership approaches not only enhance organisational effectiveness but also contribute to more equitable and supportive professional environments. Leadership training that acknowledges women's diverse leadership capacities and equips them to navigate gendered institutional contexts is therefore essential to fostering sustainable change.

Additionally, the research underscores the critical role of mentorship in supporting women's leadership trajectories. Mentorship remains a key driver of professional advancement, particularly within leadership systems where men continue to dominate senior roles. However, women frequently face barriers to accessing meaningful mentorship, especially at higher leadership levels. Consistent with Ibarra et al. (2013) and Joseph et al. (2016), the findings reaffirm mentorship as a vital mechanism for building leadership capacity, confidence, and visibility among women, particularly those navigating intersecting social and professional constraints. In the context of Trinidad and Tobago, mentorship initiatives must be intentionally designed to address prevailing gender norms, leadership biases, and racialised dynamics. Gender-responsive mentorship programmes can provide women with the guidance, advocacy, and institutional navigation skills required to overcome systemic barriers, enabling them to develop the legitimacy, recognition, and assurance necessary to succeed in educational leadership.

The practical implications of this study extend beyond discrete policy recommendations to encompass the need for systemic transformation within educational institutions. The findings underscore that gender inequality in leadership is sustained by entrenched structural arrangements rather than individual limitations. Addressing these disparities, therefore, requires deliberate

institutional reform aimed at dismantling the mechanisms that continue to marginalise women from leadership pathways.

One intervention highlighted by this research is the strategic use of gender representation targets, including gender quotas, to address persistent underrepresentation in leadership roles. While quotas remain contested in some policy debates, empirical evidence suggests that, when implemented alongside broader equity initiatives, they can serve as an effective corrective mechanism. Harquail (2008) demonstrate that gender quotas can increase women's representation in leadership and promote more inclusive decision-making cultures. Importantly, this study positions quotas not as a permanent solution but as a transitional strategy that compels institutions to interrogate biased promotion practices, expand leadership pipelines, and normalise women's presence in decision-making roles. Used judiciously, such measures can catalyse institutional accountability and accelerate progress toward gender equity in leadership.

Equally critical is the implementation of family-responsive workplace policies, including flexible scheduling, parental leave, job-sharing, and part-time leadership arrangements. The findings confirm that work–family conflict remains a significant barrier to women's leadership progression, particularly in contexts where caregiving responsibilities are disproportionately assigned to women. Without institutional support, many women either withdraw from leadership roles or limit their career aspirations to accommodate family demands. Family-friendly policies are central to retaining women in leadership and ensuring that professional advancement does not come at the expense of personal well-being (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Silim & Stirling, 2014). Embedding such policies within educational institutions enables women to sustain leadership

trajectories while fulfilling caregiving responsibilities, thereby strengthening leadership continuity and organisational stability.

Beyond policy reform, this study calls for a reconceptualisation of leadership itself within educational settings. Traditional leadership models have long privileged masculinised norms emphasising control, autonomy, and assertiveness, often marginalising leadership styles associated with collaboration, empathy, and emotional intelligence. These latter attributes, frequently aligned with women's leadership practices, have historically been undervalued despite their relevance to contemporary educational contexts. As Harquail (2008) contend, effective leadership in modern educational institutions increasingly requires inclusive, relational, and collaborative approaches that recognise diversity and foster shared responsibility. Redefining leadership to legitimise these approaches not only expands access for women but also enhances organisational performance by better responding to the complex needs of students, staff, and communities.

Collectively, the findings of this research highlight the urgency of systemic reform to remove enduring barriers to women's advancement in educational leadership. Gender-responsive policies, inclusive leadership development programmes, and structured mentorship initiatives emerge as essential components of an equitable leadership framework. These reforms support leadership environments that value diverse perspectives, recognise differentiated experiences, and promote fairness in access to power and decision-making. In doing so, this study makes a substantive contribution to scholarship on gender and educational leadership while offering evidence-based guidance for policymakers, school leaders, and researchers committed to advancing equity. Through sustained institutional commitment to these reforms, education systems can take meaningful steps toward reducing gender-based disparities, strengthening leadership diversity, and creating conditions in which women are empowered to thrive as leaders. Ultimately,

meaningful progress toward gender equity in educational leadership will depend on the collective willingness of institutions to move from symbolic commitment to sustained structural reform.

## REFERENCES

- Aboobaker, N., & Edward, M. (2019). Collective influence of work–family conflict and work–family enrichment on turnover intention: Exploring the moderating effects of individual differences. *Global Business Review*, 21(5), 1218–1231. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0972150919857015>
- Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender & Society*, 4(2), 139–158. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089124390004002002>
- Acker, J. (2006). Inequality regimes. *Gender & Society*, 20(4), 441–464. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243206289499>
- Acker, J. (2009). From glass ceiling to inequality regimes. *Sociologie Du Travail*, 51(2), 199–217. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.soctra.2009.03.004>
- Adams, D., Kutty, G. R., & Zabidi, Z. M. (2017). Educational leadership for the 21st century. *International Online Journal of Educational Leadership*, 1(1), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.22452/iojel.vol1no1.1>
- Agrawal, M., & Mahajan, R. (2021). Work–family enrichment: an integrative review. *International Journal of Workplace Health Management*, 14(2), 217–241. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ijwhm-04-2020-0056>
- Akosah-Twumasi, P., Emeto, T. I., Lindsay, D., Tsey, K., & Malau-Aduli, B. S. (2018). A systematic review of factors that influence youths career choices—the role of culture. *Frontiers in Education*, 3. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2018.00058>
- Al-Manasra, E. A. (2013). What are the “Glass ceiling” barriers effects on women career progress in Jordan? *International Journal of Business and Management*, 8(6). <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v8n6p40>

- Alesina, A., Giuliano, P., & Nunn, N. (2013). On the origins of gender roles: Women and the plough. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 128(2), 469–530. <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjt005>
- Ang, N. (2018). Mills, G. E., & Gay, L. R. (2016) Education research: Competencies for analysis and applications. London, England: Pearson Education. *Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching*, 1(2). <https://doi.org/10.37074/jalt.2018.1.2.14>
- Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., Irvine, C. K. S., & Walker, D. (2018). *Introduction to research in Education*. Cengage Learning.
- Author, N., & Author, N. (2024, April 14). *Chapter 3: Obstacles to Female Leadership*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2015/01/14/chapter-3-obstacles-to-female-leadership/>
- Baglama, B., & Uzunboylu, H. (2017). The relationship between career decision-making self-efficacy and vocational outcome expectations of preservice special education teachers. *South African Journal of Education*, 37(4), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v37n4a1520>
- Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191–215. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295x.84.2.191>
- Bandura, A., Freeman, W. H., & Lightsey, R. (1999). Self-Efficacy: the exercise of control. *Journal of Cognitive Psychotherapy*, 13(2), 158–166. <https://doi.org/10.1891/0889-8391.13.2.158>
- Banerjee, A., & Chaudhury, S. (2010). Statistics without tears: Populations and samples. *Industrial Psychiatry Journal*, 19(1), 60. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0972-6748.77642>

- Baptiste, J. P. (2016). Gender practices and relations at the Jamaat Al Muslimeen in Trinidad. *Rutgers University Community Repository (Rutgers University)*.  
<https://doi.org/10.7282/t33j3g0g>
- Barger, J. (2013). *Beyond the Call of Duty: Army flight nursing in World War II*.  
<https://doi.org/10.21038/ksup.2013.0004>
- Bautista, S. N., Chudnovsky, M., Strazza, L., Mosqueira, E., & Castañeda, C. (2022). Women leaders in the public sector of Latin America and the Caribbean: Gaps and opportunities. In *Inter-American Development Bank eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.18235/0004597>
- Begeny, C. T., Ryan, M. K., Moss-Racusin, C. A., & Ravetz, G. (2020). In some professions, women have become well represented, yet gender bias persists—Perpetuated by those who think it is not happening. *Science Advances*, 6(26), eaba7814.  
<https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aba7814>
- Bergelson, I., Tracy, C., & Takacs, E. (2022). Best practices for reducing bias in the interview process. *Current Urology Reports*, 23(11), 319–325. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11934-022-01116-7>
- Berger, R. (2013). Now I see it, now I don't: researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 15(2), 219–234.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794112468475>
- Bianchi, S. M., Sayer, L. C., Milkie, M. A., & Robinson, J. P. (2012). Housework: Who did, does or will do it, and how much does it matter? *Social Forces*, 91(1), 55–63.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sos120>
- Biddle, B. (1986). Recent developments in role theory. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 12(1), 67–92.  
<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.12.1.67>

- Blackmore, J. (2017). Rethinking gender and socially-just leadership in the context(s) of global edu-capitalism. *Deakin Research Online (Deakin University)*, 79–102.
- Blackmore, J. (2017a). In the shadow of men: The historical construction of educational administration as a masculinist enterprise. In C. Shakeshaft & L. Grogan (Eds.), *Gender matters in educational administration and policy* (pp. 27–48). Routledge.
- Blank, S. (2013). An historical and contemporary overview of gendered Caribbean relations. *Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 2(4), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.18533/journal.v2i4.90>
- Bolarinwa, O. (2015). Principles and methods of validity and reliability testing of questionnaires used in social and health science researches. *Nigerian Postgraduate Medical Journal*, 22(4), 195. <https://doi.org/10.4103/1117-1936.173959>
- Booth, A. L., Francesconi, M., & Frank, J. (2003). A sticky floors model of promotion, pay, and gender. *European Economic Review*, 47(2), 295–322. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0014-2921\(01\)00197-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0014-2921(01)00197-0)
- Bornstein, M. H., Jager, J., & Putnick, D. L. (2013). Sampling in developmental science: Situations, shortcomings, solutions, and standards. *Developmental Review*, 33(4), 357–370. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dr.2013.08.003>
- Boserup, E. (1970). *Woman's role in economic development*. St. Martin's Press.
- Boyle, K. A. (2021). Career identities and Millennials' response to the graduate transition to work: lessons learned. *Journal of Education and Work*, 35(1), 78–91. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2021.2009782>
- Braun, S., Stegmann, S., Bark, A. S. H., Junker, N. M., & Van Dick, R. (2017). Think manager—think male, think follower—think female: Gender bias in implicit followership theories. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 47(7), 377–388. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12445>

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Britton, D. M. (2000). The epistemology of the gendered organization. *Gender & Society*, 14(3), 418–434. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089124300014003004>
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods, 4th Edition*. <https://www.amazon.com/Social-Research-Methods-Alan-Bryman/dp/0199588058>
- Burkus, D. (2017, February 20). *Everyone likes flex time, but we punish women who use it*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2017/02/everyone-likes-flex-time-but-we-punish-women-who-use-it>
- Burnett, J. W., Anderson, W. P., & Heppner, P. P. (1995). Gender roles and self-esteem: A consideration of environmental factors. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 73(3), 323–326. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1995.tb01757.x>
- Burt, R. S. (2004). Structural holes and good ideas. *American Journal of Sociology*, 110(2), 349–399. <https://doi.org/10.1086/421787>
- Carpenter, S. A. (2006). Review of the book *Our mothers' war: American women at home and at the front during World War II*, by E. Yellin. *The American Historical Review*, 111(3), 857–858. <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr.111.3.857>
- Carter, M. (2014). Gender Socialization and Identity Theory. *Social Sciences*, 3(2), 242–263. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci3020242>
- Castaño, A., Fontanil, Y., & García-Izquierdo, A. (2019). Why can't I become a manager? A systematic review of gender stereotypes and organizational discrimination. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 16(10), 1813. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph16101813>

- Cerrato, J., & Cifre, E. (2018). Gender inequality in household chores and work-family conflict. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 1330. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01330>
- Chamorro-Premuzic, T., & Gallop, C. (2020, April 1). *7 Leadership lessons men can learn from women*. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2020/04/7-leadership-lessons-men-can-learn-from-women>
- Chen, C. P. (1998). Understanding career development: a convergence of perspectives. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 50(3), 437–461. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13636829800200053>
- Chen, C., Chen, C., Hu, J., & Wang, C. (2013). A study on the influence of self-concept, social support and academic achievement on occupational choice intention. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 24(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-013-0153-2>
- Chrousos, G. P., & Mentis, A. A. (2020). Imposter syndrome threatens diversity. *Science*, 367(6479), 749–750. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aba8039>
- Chung, H., & Van Der Horst, M. (2017). Women's employment patterns after childbirth and the perceived access to and use of flexitime and teleworking. *Human Relations*, 71(1), 47–72. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726717713828>
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2017). *Research methods in education*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315456539>
- Collins, P. H., & Bilge, S. (2020). *Intersectionality*. Polity.
- Conrad, D. A. (1999). Educational leadership and the ethic of care: the experiences of four women educators of trinidad and tobago. In *VTechWorks (Virginia Tech)*. <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/theses/available/etd-111899-141000/>

- Cotter, D. A., Hermsen, J. M., Ovadia, S., & Vanneman, R. (2001). The glass ceiling effect. *Social Forces*, 80(2), 655–681. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2001.0091>
- Crawford, J. T. (2021). Imposter syndrome for women in male dominated careers. *eYLS (Yale Law School)*, 32(2), 26. <https://repository.uchastings.edu/hwlj/vol32/iss2/3>
- Crenshaw, K. (n.d.). *Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black Feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics*. Chicago Unbound. <http://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8>
- Dåderman, A. M., & Basinska, B. A. (2016). Job Demands, engagement, and turnover Intentions in Polish Nurses: The role of Work-Family Interface. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7, 1621. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.01621>
- Danaj, E. (2016). Gender stratification. *Encyclopedia of Family Studies*, 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119085621.wbefs261>
- Das, S., Mitra, K., & Mandal, M. (2016). Sample size calculation: Basic principles. *Indian Journal of Anaesthesia*, 60(9), 652. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0019-5049.190621>
- Dawson, P. (2014). Beyond a definition. *Educational Researcher*, 43(3), 137–145. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189x14528751>
- De Vaus, D. (2013). *Surveys in social research*.
- DeVellis, R. F. (2016). *Scale development: theory and applications*. SAGE Publications, Incorporated.
- Dickson, L. (2010). Review of the book *Thinking about women: Sociological perspectives on sex and gender* (8th ed.), by M. L. Andersen & D. Hysock (Eds.). *Journal of Women & Aging*, 22(1), 77–79. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08952840903489151>

- Divisi, D., Di Leonardo, G., Zaccagna, G., & Crisci, R. (2017). Basic statistics with Microsoft Excel: a review. *Journal of Thoracic Disease*, 9(6), 1734–1740. <https://doi.org/10.21037/jtd.2017.05.81>
- Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, 109(3), 573–598. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295x.109.3.573>
- Edwards, J. R., & Rothbard, N. P. (2000). Mechanisms linking work and family: Clarifying the relationship between work and family constructs. *Academy of Management Review*, 25(1), 178–199. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2000.2791609>
- Ely, R. J., Ibarra, H., & Kolb, D. M. (2011). Taking gender into account: theory and design for women’s leadership development programs. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 10(3), 474–493. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2010.0046>
- Ertl, B., Luttenberger, S., & Paechter, M. (2017). The impact of gender stereotypes on the self-concept of female students in STEM subjects with an under-representation of females. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, 703. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00703>
- Faber, J., & Fonseca, L. M. (2014). How sample size influences research outcomes. *Dental Press Journal of Orthodontics*, 19(4), 27–29. <https://doi.org/10.1590/2176-9451.19.4.027-029.ebo>
- Feenstra, S., Begeny, C. T., Ryan, M. K., Rink, F. A., Stoker, J. I., & Jordan, J. (2020). Contextualizing the impostor “syndrome.” *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 575024. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.575024>
- Figart, D. M. (2005). Gender as more than a dummy variable: Feminist approaches to discrimination. *Review of Social Economy*, 63(3), 509–536. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00346760500255692>

- Fink, A. (2016). *How to conduct surveys: A step-by-step guide*. SAGE Publications, Incorporated.
- Francis, T. M. (n.d.). *The lived experience of Caribbean women and their experiences as senior-level leaders: A phenomenological study* - ProQuest. <https://www.proquest.com/openview/9956d2bea49a219bc6393c2439451fea/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750>
- Frey, J. H. (1986). Working wives/working husbands. *Anthropology of Work Review*, 7(3), 37–38. <https://doi.org/10.1525/awr.1986.7.3.37>
- Fuller, K. (2018). New lands, new languages: Navigating intersectionality in school leadership. *Frontiers in Education*, 3. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2018.00025>
- Gallo, A. (2011). Demystifying mentoring. In *HBR Blog Network*. [https://www.bumc.bu.edu/facdev-medicine/files/2014/09/Demystifying\\_Mentoring\\_-\\_Amy\\_Gallo\\_-\\_Harvard\\_Business\\_Review.pdf](https://www.bumc.bu.edu/facdev-medicine/files/2014/09/Demystifying_Mentoring_-_Amy_Gallo_-_Harvard_Business_Review.pdf)
- Gelinas, L., Pierce, R., Winkler, S., Cohen, I. G., Lynch, H. F., & Bierer, B. E. (2017). Using social media as a research recruitment tool: Ethical issues and recommendations. *The American Journal of Bioethics*, 17(3), 3–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15265161.2016.1276644>
- George, J., & Quamina-Aiyejina, L. (2003). *An analysis of primary teacher education in Trinidad and Tobago: Multi-site teacher education research project (MUSTER), country report four*. <https://ideas.repec.org/p/ags/dfider/12873.html>
- Giele, J. Z. (2006). The changing gender contract as the engine of work-and-family policies. *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis Research and Practice*, 8(2), 115–128. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13876980600681982>

- Gilfillan-Farrell, H. G. (n.d.). *Black Caribbean Women pursuing leadership roles - ProQuest*.  
<https://www.proquest.com/openview/bcfe14badd99bef05225dcff77fda7be/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>
- Giuliano, P. (2017). Gender: an historical perspective. *SSRN Electronic Journal*.  
<https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3029801>
- Goertzen, M. J. (2017). Introduction to quantitative research and data. *Library Technology Reports*, 53(4), 12–18. <https://www.mendeley.com/catalogue/879a21d6-7bbc-3442-9f1d-b37c24ed3003/>
- Golan, M. (2015). Gender differences in respect to self-esteem and body image as well as response to adolescents' school-based prevention programs. *Journal of Psychology & Clinical Psychiatry*, 2(5). <https://doi.org/10.15406/jpcpy.2015.02.00092>
- Goode, W. J. (1960). A theory of role strain. *American Sociological Review*, 25(4), 483.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2092933>
- Gough, I., Runciman, G., Mace, R., Hodgson, G., & Rustin, M. (2008). Darwinian evolutionary theory and the social sciences. *Twenty-First Century Society*, 3(1), 65–86.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17450140701780218>
- Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, Education Towers, Educational Planning Division, Central Statistical Office, Corporate Communications Division, MOE, Division of Educational Research and Evaluation, MOE, Early Childhood Care and Education Division, MOE, Finance and Accounts Division, MOE, Research, Planning and Technical Services Division, MOE, & School Supervision Management Division, MOE. (2022). *Education Statistics Digest 2019/2020*.

<https://storage.moe.gov.tt/corporate/2022/12/2019-2020-EDUCATION-STATISTICS-DIGEST-ccd-1.pdf>

- Greenhaus, J. H., & Beutell, N. J. (1985). Sources of conflict between work and family roles. *Academy of Management Review*, *10*(1), 76–88. <https://doi.org/10.2307/258214>
- Greenhaus, J. H., & Powell, G. N. (2006). When work and family are allies: A theory of work-family enrichment. *Academy of Management Review*, *31*(1), 72–92. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2006.19379625>
- Grzywacz, J. G., & Marks, N. F. (2000). Reconceptualizing the work–family interface: An ecological perspective on the correlates of positive and negative spillover between work and family. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, *5*(1), 111–126. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8998.5.1.111>
- Gussak, D. (2008). An Interactionist perspective on understanding gender identity in art therapy. *Art Therapy*, *25*(2), 64–69. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07421656.2008.10129414>
- Guy, M. E., & Newman, M. A. (2004). Women’s jobs, men’s jobs: Sex segregation and emotional labor. *Public Administration Review*, *64*(3), 289–298. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3542594>
- Hallinger, P. (2019). Science mapping the knowledge base on educational leadership and management from the emerging regions of Asia, Africa and Latin America, 1965–2018. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *48*(2), 209–230. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143218822772>
- Hancock, A. (2016). Intersectionality. In *Oxford University Press eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199370368.001.0001>

- Harquail, C. V. (2008). Alice H. Eagly and Linda L. Carli: Through the labyrinth: The truth about how women become leaders. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 53(2), 363–366. <https://doi.org/10.2189/asqu.53.2.363>
- Haucke, M., Hoekstra, R., & Van Ravenzwaaij, D. (2021). When numbers fail: do researchers agree on operationalization of published research? *Royal Society Open Science*, 8(9), 191354. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.191354>
- Havermans, L., Van Der Heijden, B. I. J. M., Savelsbergh, C., & Storm, P. (2019). Rolling into the profession: Exploring the motivation and experience of becoming a project manager. *Project Management Journal*, 50(3), 346–360. <https://doi.org/10.1177/8756972819832782>
- Hegge, A. M., Myhre, K., Welde, B., Holmberg, H., & Sandbakk, Ø. (2015). Are gender differences in Upper-Body power generated by elite Cross-Country skiers augmented by increasing the intensity of exercise? *PLoS ONE*, 10(5), e0127509. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0127509>
- Heilman, M. E. (2012). Gender stereotypes and workplace bias. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 32, 113–135. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.riob.2012.11.003>
- Heilman, M. E., Caleo, S., & Manzi, F. (2023). Women at work: Pathways from gender stereotypes to gender bias and discrimination. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 11(1), 165–192. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-110721-034105>
- Hermans, M., Newbury, W., Alvarado-Vargas, M. J., Baldo, C. M., Borda, A., Durán-Zurita, E. G., Geleilate, J. M. G., Guerra, M., Morello, M. V. L., Madero-Gómez, S. M., Olivás-Lujan, M. R., & Zwerg-Villegas, A. M. (2016). Attitudes towards women's career advancement

- in Latin America: The moderating impact of perceived company international proactiveness. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 48(1), 90–112. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41267-016-0039-7>
- Hooks, B. (2000). *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*. Pluto Press.
- Hooks, B. (2014). *Teaching to transgress*. Routledge.
- Hoominfar, E. (2021). Gender socialization. In *Encyclopedia of the UN sustainable development goals* (pp. 645–654). [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-95687-9\\_13](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-95687-9_13)
- Huang, Q. (2006). *The nature of women's career development: Determinants and consequences of career patterns* (Doctoral dissertation, Stockholm University). <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:189607/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Huyler, D., & McGill, C. M. (2019). Review of the book *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*, by J. W. Creswell & J. D. Creswell. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, 31(3), 75–77. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nha3.20258>
- Ibarra, H., Ely, R. J., & Kolb, D. M. (2013). Women rising: The unseen barriers. *Harvard Business Review*, 91(9), 60–66. <https://hbr.org/2013/09/women-rising-the-unseen-barriers>
- International Labour Organization. (2008). *Reconciling work and family: Issues and policies in Trinidad and Tobago* (Conditions of Work and Employment Series No. 18). [https://www.ilo.org/travail/info/publications/WCMS\\_TRAVAIL\\_PUB\\_17/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/travail/info/publications/WCMS_TRAVAIL_PUB_17/lang--en/index.htm)
- International Labour Organization. (2013). *Decent work and gender equality*. [https://www.oitcenterfor.org/sites/default/files/file\\_publicacion/wcms\\_229430\\_3.pdf](https://www.oitcenterfor.org/sites/default/files/file_publicacion/wcms_229430_3.pdf)

- International Labour Organization. (2017). *Towards a better future for women and work: Voices of women and men*. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/@publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_546256.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/@publ/documents/publication/wcms_546256.pdf)
- International Labour Organization. (2022). *Women in business and management: Gaining momentum in Latin America and the Caribbean*. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_dialogue/---act\\_emp/documents/publication/wcms\\_579085.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---act_emp/documents/publication/wcms_579085.pdf)
- Jacobson, R., & Joel, D. (2018). Self-reported gender identity and sexuality in an online sample of cisgender, transgender, and gender-diverse individuals: An exploratory study. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 56(2), 249–263. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2018.1523998>
- Jean-Marie, G., Williams, V. A., & Sherman, S. L. (2009). Black women's leadership experiences: Examining the intersectionality of race and gender. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, 11(5), 562–581. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422309351836>
- Jones, K. (2020). *ICGR20-Proceedings of the 3rd International Conference on Gender Research*. Acpil.
- Joseph, R. P., Keller, C., & Ainsworth, B. E. (2016). Recruiting participants into pilot trials. *Californian Journal of Health Promotion*, 14(2), 81–89. <https://doi.org/10.32398/cjhp.v14i2.1878>
- Joseph, S., Ramsook, L., & Simonette, G. (2016). Women teachers in boys' schools: Experiences and perspectives. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 4(4), 295–303. <https://www.ijern.com/journal/2016/April-2016/23.pdf>

- Kalchik, S., & Oertle, K. (2010). *The integral role of career development in supporting programs of study and career pathways* (Transition Highlights No. 1). Office of Community College Research and Leadership. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED513402.pdf>
- Kanter, R. M., & Blumer, H. (1971). Symbolic interactionism: perspective and method. *American Sociological Review*, 36(2), 333. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2094060>
- Karya, D. F., Zahara, R., Anshori, M. Y., & Herlambang, T. (2021). Work-family conflict and organizational commitment of female lecturers of Nahdlatul Ulama University of Surabaya: an investigation of job satisfaction as a mediator using partial least square. *IOP Conference Series Earth and Environmental Science*, 747(1), 012110. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/747/1/012110>
- Kaufman, G., & Taniguchi, H. (2019). Gender equality and work–family conflict from a cross-national perspective. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 60(6), 385–408. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020715219893750>
- Kim, S., & Shin, M. (2017). The effectiveness of transformational leadership on empowerment. *Cross Cultural & Strategic Management*, 24(2), 271–287. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ccsm-03-2016-0075>
- Knaff, D. B. (2013). *Beyond Rosie the Riveter: Women of World War II in American popular graphic art*. University Press of Kansas.
- Kogler Hill, S. E. (2017). *Team leadership*. In P. G. Northouse (Ed.), *Leadership: Theory and practice* (7th ed., pp. 327–355). Sage Publications.
- Kossek, E. E., & Lee, K. (2021). Work-life inclusion for women’s career equality. *Organizational Dynamics*, 51(2), 100818. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.orgdyn.2020.100818>

- Kray, L. J., Mishra, S., Townsend, C. H., & Kennedy, J. A. (2025). Psychological drivers of gender disparities in leadership paths. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2025.10.008>
- Krook, M. L., & Messing-Mathie, A. (2013). Gender quotas and comparative politics: Past, present, and future research agendas. *Politics & Gender*, 9(03), 299–303. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1743923x13000160>
- Kung, H. (2009). Perception or confidence? Self-Concept, Self-Efficacy and Achievement in Mathematics: A longitudinal study. *Policy Futures in Education*, 7(4), 387–398. <https://doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2009.7.4.387>
- Lankard, B. A. (n.d.). *Family role in career Development*. *ERIC Digest No. 164*. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED389878>
- Leithwood, K. (2021). A review of evidence about equitable school leadership. *Education Sciences*, 11(8), 377. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11080377>
- Lent, R. W., Brown, S. D., & Hackett, G. (1994). Toward a unifying social cognitive theory of career and academic interest, choice, and performance. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 45(1), 79–122. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.1994.1027>
- Levitt, H. M. (2019). Applications of a functionalist theory of gender: A response to reflections and a research agenda. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 43(3), 309–316. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684319851467>
- Lincoln, Y. S., Guba, E. G., & Pilotta, J. J. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 9(4), 438–439. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767\(85\)90062-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(85)90062-8)
- Liu, H. (2017). Just the Servant: an intersectional critique of servant leadership. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 156(4), 1099–1112. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-017-3633-0>

- Lumby, J., & Coleman, M. (2007). *Leadership and diversity: Challenging Theory and Practice in Education*. SAGE Publications Limited.
- Madsen, S. R., & Andrade, M. S. (2018). Unconscious Gender Bias: Implications for Women's Leadership development. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 12(1), 62–67. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jls.21566>
- Malina, M. A., Nørreklit, H. S., & Selto, F. H. (2011). Lessons learned: advantages and disadvantages of mixed method research. *Qualitative Research in Accounting & Management*, 8(1), 59–71. <https://doi.org/10.1108/11766091111124702>
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2014). *Designing qualitative research*. SAGE Publications.
- Martínez, M. M., Molina-López, M. M., & De Cabo, R. M. (2020). Explaining the gender gap in school principalship: A tale of two sides. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 49(6), 863–882. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220918258>
- McGoldrick, M., Carter, E. A., Garcia-Preto, N., & Carter, B. (2015). *The expanding family life cycle: Individual, Family, and Social Perspectives*.
- McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (2010). *Research in education: Evidence-based Inquiry*.
- Mead, G. H. (2014). 1934. Mind, Self, and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist, edited by Charles W. Morris. Chicago: University of Chicago, selected 68-75. In *John Benjamins Publishing Company eBooks* (pp. 42–47). <https://doi.org/10.1075/z.184.19mea>
- Memon, M. A., Ting, H., Cheah, J., Thurasamy, R., Chuah, F., & Cham, T. H. (2020). Sample size for survey research: Review and recommendations. *Journal of Applied Structural Equation Modeling*, 4(2), i–xx. [https://doi.org/10.47263/jasem.4\(2\)01](https://doi.org/10.47263/jasem.4(2)01)

- Mensah, A., & Adjei, N. K. (2020). Work-life balance and self-reported health among working adults in Europe: a gender and welfare state regime comparative analysis. *BMC Public Health*, 20(1), 1052. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-09139-w>
- Metz, I. (2011). Women leave work because of family responsibilities: Fact or fiction? *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 49(3), 285–307. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1038411111413216>
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2018). *Qualitative data analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. SAGE Publications.
- Milkman, R., Campbell, D., Honey, M., Summerfield, P., & Walsh, A. S. (1987). Gender, consciousness, and social change: Rethinking women's World War II experience. *Contemporary Sociology: A Journal of Reviews*, 16(1), 21–23. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2071182>
- Miller, E. M., & Lorber, J. (1995). Paradoxes of gender. *Contemporary Sociology a Journal of Reviews*, 24(3), 337. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2076487>
- Miller, P. (2013). The political dichotomy of school leadership in the Caribbean: A multi-lens look. In P. Miller (Ed.), *School leadership in the Caribbean: Perceptions, practices, paradigms* (pp. 181–198). Symposium Books.
- Mishra, P., & McDonald, K. (2017). Career resilience: An Integrated review of the empirical literature. *Human Resource Development Review*, 16(3), 207–234. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484317719622>
- Mohammed, J. (2015). Giving gender sustainable power: Exploring critique of theories of educational leadership. *Journal of Eastern Caribbean Studies*, 40(3), 118-137.
- Mohr, E. J. (2018). *Be more: Buffering against gender stereotypes by building self-efficacy beliefs* (Doctoral dissertation).

- Momsen, J. H. (1993). *Women & Change in the Caribbean: A Pan-Caribbean Perspective*. James Currey.
- Morgan, J., Brown, J. V. E., Crampton, P., & Finn, G. (2019). From the sticky floor to the glass ceiling and everything in between. *Open Science Framework*. <https://doi.org/10.17605/osf.io/mfy7a>
- Morris, J. (1993). Women and Educational Management: A Trinidad and Tobago Perspective. *British Educational Research Journal*, 19(4), 343–356. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1500689>
- Morris, J. (1999). Managing women: Secondary school principals in Trinidad and Tobago. *Gender and Education*, 11(3), 343-355.
- Nance-Nash, S. (2022, February 25). *Why imposter syndrome hits women and women of colour harder*. <https://www.bbc.com/worklife/article/20200724-why-imposter-syndrome-hits-women-and-women-of-colour-harder>
- Noland, M., Moran, T., & Kotschwar, B. R. (2016). Is gender diversity profitable? Evidence from a global survey. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2729348>
- O'Connor, E. C. (n.d.). *The Patriarchy's role in gender inequality in the Caribbean*. The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. [https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student\\_scholarship/258](https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student_scholarship/258)
- O'Connor, P., & Irvine, G. (2020). Multi-level state interventions and gender equality in higher education institutions: the Irish case. *Administrative Sciences*, 10(4), 98. <https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci10040098>
- O'Driscoll, M., Brough, P., & Kalliath, T. (2006). Work–family conflict and facilitation. In F. Jones, R. J. Burke, & M. Westman (Eds.), *Work–life balance: A psychological perspective* (pp. 117–142). Psychology Press.

- O'Neil, J. M., Wester, S. R., Heesacker, M., & Snowden, S. J. (2017). Masculinity as a heuristic: Gender role conflict theory, superorganisms, and system-level thinking. In *American Psychological Association eBooks* (pp. 75–103). <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000023-004>
- Oecd. (2010). *Atlas of Gender and Development How social norms Affect gender Equality in non-OECD Countries: How Social Norms Affect Gender Equality in non-OECD Countries*. OECD Publishing.
- Offermann, L. R., & Foley, K. (2020). Is there a female leadership advantage? *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Business and Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190224851.013.61>
- Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2014). *Gender stereotypes and stereotyping and women's rights* [Fact sheet]. [https://www.ohchr.org/documents/issues/women/wrgs/onepagers/gender\\_stereotyping.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/documents/issues/women/wrgs/onepagers/gender_stereotyping.pdf)
- Oplatka, I. (2006). Women in educational administration within developing countries. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 44(6), 604–624. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09578230610704819>
- Organization of American States. (2024). *Advancing human rights for women and girls in Trinidad and Tobago*. <https://www.oas.org/en/sare/social-inclusion/events/AdvancingHumanRightsWomenandGirls.pdf>
- Paloş, R., & Drobot, L. (2010). The impact of family influence on the career choice of adolescents. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2(2), 3407–3411. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.03.524>

- Pant, Y., & Shiwakoti, R. (2025). Women in educational leadership: Realities and challenges. *Nepal Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 8(2), 151–160. <https://doi.org/10.3126/njmr.v8i2.78025>
- ParlAmericas. (2021). *Young women in leadership: Trinidad and Tobago* [Report]. [https://parlamericas.org/uploads/documents/YWiLTT\\_Report\\_ENG.pdf](https://parlamericas.org/uploads/documents/YWiLTT_Report_ENG.pdf)
- Patton, M. Q. (2014). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating Theory and Practice*. SAGE Publications.
- Peiffer, H., Ellwart, T., & Preckel, F. (2020). Ability self-concept and self-efficacy in higher education: An empirical differentiation based on their factorial structure. *PLoS ONE*, 15(7), e0234604. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0234604>
- Post, C., & Byron, K. (2014). Women on boards and firm financial performance: A meta-analysis. *Academy of Management Journal*, 58(5), 1546–1571. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2013.0319>
- Prakash, J., Kotwal, A., Ryali, V., Srivastava, K., Bhat, P., & Shashikumar, R. (2010). Does androgyny have psychoprotective attributes? A cross-sectional community-based study. *Industrial Psychiatry Journal*, 19(2), 119. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0972-6748.90343>
- PricewaterhouseCoopers. (n.d.). *Press room*. PwC. <https://www.pwc.com/cb/en/press-releases/women-career-goals.html>
- Punch, K. F., & Oancea, A. (2014). *Introduction to research methods in education*. SAGE Publications Limited.
- Radtke, H. L. (2017). Feminist theory in feminism & psychology: Dealing with differences and negotiating the biological. *Feminism & Psychology*, 27(3), 357–377. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353517714594>

- Ragelienė, T. (2016). Links of adolescents' identity development and relationship with peers: A systematic literature review. *Journal of the Canadian Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 25(2), 97–105.
- Ragins, B. R. (1999). Gender and mentoring relationships: A review and research agenda for the next decade. In G. N. Powell (Ed.), *Handbook of gender and work* (pp. 347–370). Sage Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452231365.n18>
- Ragins, B. R., & Kram, K. E. (2007). *The Handbook of Mentoring At Work: Theory, Research, and Practice*. SAGE.
- Reddan, G. (2015). Enhancing students' self-efficacy in making positive career decisions. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 16(4), 291–300.
- Reddock, R. (1994). *Women, Labour and politics in Trinidad and Tobago: A History*. Zed Books.
- Reddock, R. (2012). *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities : Theoretical and Empirical analyses*.
- Reddock, R., & Bobb-Smith, Y. (2008). Reconciling work and family: Issues and policies in Trinidad and Tobago. *International Labour Organization*. [http://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/2008/108B09\\_17\\_engl.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/public/libdoc/ilo/2008/108B09_17_engl.pdf)
- Rhode, D. L. (2017). *Women and leadership*. Oxford University Press.
- Rich-Edwards, J. W., Kaiser, U. B., Chen, G. L., Manson, J. E., & Goldstein, J. M. (2018). Sex and Gender Differences Research Design for Basic, Clinical, and Population Studies: Essentials for Investigators. *Endocrine Reviews*, 39(4), 424–439. <https://doi.org/10.1210/er.2017-00246>
- Ridgeway, C. L. (2011). *Framed by gender: How Gender Inequality Persists in the Modern World*. Oxford University Press.

- Ridgeway, C. L., & Correll, S. J. (2004). Unpacking the gender system. *Gender & Society, 18*(4), 510–531. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243204265269>
- Rodela, K. C., & Bertrand, M. (2018). Rethinking educational leadership in the margins: youth, parent, and community leadership for equity and social justice. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education, 13*(1), 3–9. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1942775117751306>
- Roos, L. (2006). *The effects of career development on employment and recidivism among juvenile offenders*. Universal-Publishers.
- Ruiz, V. L., & Gluck, S. B. (1988). Rosie The Riveter revisited: Women, the War, and Social Change. *Journal of American History, 75*(1), 303. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1889772>
- Ruprah, I. J., Schimanski, C., & Chagalj, C. (2018). *Gender-based Educational and Occupational Segregation in the Caribbean*. <https://doi.org/10.18235/0001232>
- Ryan, M. K., & Haslam, S. A. (2005). The Glass Cliff: Evidence that Women are Over-Represented in Precarious Leadership Positions. *British Journal of Management, 16*(2), 81–90. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8551.2005.00433.x>
- Saldana, J. (2012). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. SAGE Publications Limited.
- Santana, M. C. (2016). From empowerment to domesticity: The case of Rosie the Riveter and the WWII campaign. *Frontiers in Sociology, 1*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2016.00016>
- Scarborough, W. J., & Risman, B. J. (2018). Gender inequality. In *Cambridge University Press eBooks* (pp. 339–362). <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108656184.020>
- Schoonenboom, J., & Johnson, R. B. (2017). How to construct a mixed methods research design. *KZfSS Kölner Zeitschrift Für Soziologie Und Sozialpsychologie, 69*(S2), 107–131. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11577-017-0454-1>

- Schuster, C., & Martiny, S. E. (2016). Not feeling good in STEM: Effects of stereotype activation and anticipated affect on women's career aspirations. *Sex Roles*, 76(1–2), 40–55. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-016-0665-3>
- Seguino, S. (2003). Why are women in the Caribbean so much more likely than men to be unemployed. *Munich Personal RePEc Archive (Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich)*, 52(4), 83–120. [https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/6507/1/MPRA\\_paper\\_6507.pdf](https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/6507/1/MPRA_paper_6507.pdf)
- Sen, A. (2001). The many faces of gender inequality. *the æNew Republic/the æNew Republic*, 35–40. <http://scholar.harvard.edu/sen/publications/many-faces-gender-inequality>
- Shaked, H., Glanz, J., & Gross, Z. (2018). Gender differences in instructional leadership: how male and female principals perform their instructional leadership role. *School Leadership and Management*, 38(4), 417–434. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2018.1427569>
- Shava, G. N., Tlou, F. N., & Mporu, M. (2019). Challenges facing women in school leadership positions: Experiences from a district in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 10(14), 30–37. <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/9508/011410832128bdd90ba3ad1883ad5e0d2cb1.pdf>
- Sileyew, K. J. (2019). Research design and methodology. In *IntechOpen eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.5772/intechopen.85731>
- Silim, A., & Stirling, A. (2014). Women and flexible working: Improving female employment outcomes in Europe. *Institute for Public Policy Research*. [https://ippr.org.files.svdcdn.com/production/Downloads/women-and-flexible-working\\_Dec2014.pdf](https://ippr.org.files.svdcdn.com/production/Downloads/women-and-flexible-working_Dec2014.pdf)
- Singh, P. (2023). Gender-based differences in leadership style: An empirical analysis. *Journal of Accounting Finance Economics and Social Sciences*, 8(2), 39–49. [https://doi.org/10.62458/jafess.160224.8\(2\)39-49](https://doi.org/10.62458/jafess.160224.8(2)39-49)

- Singhal, R., & Rana, R. (2015). Chi-square test and its application in hypothesis testing. *Journal of the Practice of Cardiovascular Sciences*, 1(1), 69. <https://doi.org/10.4103/2395-5414.157577>
- Slife, B. D., Wright, C. D., & Yanchar, S. C. (2016). Using operational definitions in research: A best-practices approach. *The Journal of Mind and Behavior*, 37(2), 119–139. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44631540>
- Smith, E., & Crimes, B. (2007). Women in management: A case of a “glass ceiling”? An investigation into the relative under-representation of women in senior management positions in UK travel and tourism. *International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities & Nations*, 7(5), 323–331.
- Smith, P., Francis, D. G., & Harper, A. (n.d.). *Reframing transformational leadership for education and nation building in the Caribbean*. Fordham Research Commons. [https://research.library.fordham.edu/gse\\_facultypubs/13](https://research.library.fordham.edu/gse_facultypubs/13)
- Sng, B., Yip, C., & Han, N. (2016). Legal and ethical issues in research. *Indian Journal of Anaesthesia*, 60(9), 684. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0019-5049.190627>
- Solbes-Canales, I., Valverde-Montesino, S., & Herranz-Hernández, P. (2020). Socialization of gender stereotypes related to attributes and professions among young Spanish School-Aged children. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 609. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00609>
- Sookram, S., & Strobl, E. (2008). The role of educational choice in occupational gender segregation: Evidence from trinidad and tobago. *Economics of Education Review*, 28(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2008.04.002>
- Sorgner, A. (2021). *Gender and industrialization: Developments and trends in the context of developing countries* (IZA Discussion Paper No. 14160)

- Stamarski, C. S., & Hing, L. S. S. (2015). Gender inequalities in the workplace: the effects of organizational structures, processes, practices, and decision makers' sexism. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6, 1400. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.01400>
- Stephens, N. M., Markus, H. R., & Phillips, L. T. (2013). Social Class Culture Cycles: How three gateway contexts shape selves and fuel inequality. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 65(1), 611–634. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010213-115143>
- Stewart, A., & LaVaque-Manty, D. (2008). Advancing women faculty in science and engineering: An effort in institutional transformation. In *American Psychological Association eBooks* (pp. 299–322). <https://doi.org/10.1037/11706-011>
- Sultana, M., & Gupta, S. D. (2020). Work -life balance of women Professionals: Impact and implications. *International Journal of Services and Operations Management*, 1(1), 1. <https://doi.org/10.1504/ijssom.2020.10028531>
- Super, D. E. (1980). A life-span, life-space approach to career development. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 16(3), 282–298. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0001-8791\(80\)90056-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/0001-8791(80)90056-1)
- Tasnim, M., Hossain, M. Z., & Enam, F. (2017). Work-life balance: Reality check for the working women of Bangladesh. *Journal of Human Resource and Sustainability Studies*, 05(01), 75–86. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jhrss.2017.51008>
- Tissot, S. (2013). Ahmed Sara, on being included. Racism and diversity in institutional life. *Genre Sexualité & Société*. <https://doi.org/10.4000/gss.2763>
- Torrance, D., Fuller, K., McNae, R., Roofe, C., & Arshad, R. (2016). A social justice perspective on women in educational leadership. In *Palgrave Macmillan UK eBooks* (pp. 25–52). [https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-58567-7\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-58567-7_2)

- Trafimow, D., & Myüz, H. A. (2018). The sampling precision of research in five major areas of psychology. *Behavior Research Methods*, 51(5), 2039–2058. <https://doi.org/10.3758/s13428-018-1173-x>
- Tschannen-Moran, M., & Hoy, A. W. (2001). Teacher efficacy: capturing an elusive construct. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17(7), 783–805. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0742-051x\(01\)00036-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0742-051x(01)00036-1)
- Turner, D. P. (2020). Sampling methods in research design. *Headache the Journal of Head and Face Pain*, 60(1), 8–12. <https://doi.org/10.1111/head.13707>
- UN Women. (2021). *Trinidad and Tobago: Gender equality context brief*. <https://caribbean.unwomen.org>
- UN Women. (2022). *Status of women and men report: Productive employment and decent work for all*. <https://caribbean.unwomen.org/en/materials/publications/2019/10/status-of-women-and-men-report-productive-employment-and-decent-work-for-all>
- Unesco. (2019). Global education monitoring report – gender report: Building bridges for gender equality. In *UNESCO eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.54676/qtbo2301>
- UNESCO. (2023). *Leave no child behind: Global education monitoring report 2023*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384754>
- Victor, L. D., & Shamila, F. A. (2018). The impact of glass ceiling on career development of executive level female employees in financial sector in Kandy District. *Asian Journal of Advanced Research and Reports*, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajarr/2018/v2i429773>
- Vroom, V. H. (1964). *Work and motivation*.

- Washington, C., & Gounko, T. (2024). Understanding through stories: leadership experiences of Trinidadian women of color. *Advancing Women in Leadership Journal*, 43, 54–65. <https://doi.org/10.21423/awlj-v43.a498>
- Wendling, E., & Sagas, M. (2020). An application of the social cognitive career theory model of career self-management to college athletes' career planning for life after sport. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 9. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00009>
- West, P. W. (2016). Simple random sampling of individual items in the absence of a sampling frame that lists the individuals. *New Zealand Journal of Forestry Science*, 46(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40490-016-0071-1>
- Williams, J. C. (n.d.). *Double Jeopardy? An Empirical Study with Implications for the Debates over Implicit Bias and Intersectionality*. UC Law SF Scholarship Repository. [http://repository.uchastings.edu/faculty\\_scholarship/1278](http://repository.uchastings.edu/faculty_scholarship/1278)
- Women in the Workplace 2021*. (n.d.). LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company. <https://womenintheworkplace.com/2021>
- Woodd, M. (1999). The move towards a different career pattern: are women better prepared than men for a modern career? *Women in Management Review*, 14(1), 21–28. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09649429910255465>
- Xu, A., Baysari, M. T., Stocker, S. L., Leow, L. J., Day, R. O., & Carland, J. E. (2020). Researchers' views on, and experiences with, the requirement to obtain informed consent in research involving human participants: a qualitative study. *BMC Medical Ethics*, 21(1), 93. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12910-020-00538-7>

Žnidaršič, J., & Bernik, M. (2021). Impact of work-family balance results on employee work engagement within the organization: The case of Slovenia. *PLoS ONE*, *16*(1), e0245078.

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0245078>

Zohrabi, M. (2013). Mixed method research: instruments, validity, reliability and reporting findings. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *3*(2).

<https://doi.org/10.4304/tpls.3.2.254-262>

## APPENDICES

## Appendix A: Ethics Decision

UREC Decision, Version 2.0 

**Unicaf University Research Ethics Committee  
Decision**

**Student's Name:** Jody Tonia Belcon**Student's ID #:** R1809D6221789**Supervisor's Name:** Dr Chrysa Tamisoglou**Program of Study:** UU-EDUD-900-1-ZM **Offer ID /Group ID:** O26681G27452**Dissertation Stage:** DS 1 **Research Project Title:** THE ROLE OF GENDER IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

**Comments:** 4b - Disabilities - You should only include the participants who can provide informed consent for themselves, therefore, people with mental disabilities should not take part in the research. Please add this information to the section.

**Decision\*:** B. Provisionally approved with comments for minor revision **Date:** 22.07.2021

\*Provisional approval provided at the Dissertation Stage 1, whereas the final approval is provided at the Dissertation stage 3. The student is allowed to proceed to data collection following the final approval.



**Unicaf University Research Ethics Committee  
Decision**

**Student's Name:** Jody Tonia Belcon

**Student's ID #:** R1809D6221789

**Supervisor's Name:** Dr Chrysa Tamisoglou

**Program of Study:** UUZ: EdD Doctoral of Education

**Offer ID /Group ID:** O38429G40203

**Dissertation Stage:** 3

**Research Project Title:** The Role of Gender in Educational Leadership in Trinidad and Tobago

**Comments:** Informed Consent Form: You have received this form with a link to the parent survey from your child's principal because your child is/was a student of a government school. Please read carefully before signing. All data collection and analysis should be done solely by the researcher. The doctoral degree is awarded to one person, therefore all work should be completed by the PhD candidate himself, no research assistants or enumerators should be hired for data collection.

**Decision\*:** A. Approved without revision or comments

**Date:** 21/10/2022

\*Provisional approval provided at the Dissertation Stage 1, whereas the final approval is provided at the Dissertation stage 3. The student is allowed to proceed to data collection following the final approval.

## Appendix B: Gatekeeper Letter



UU\_GL - Version 2.0



### Gatekeeper letter

**Address:** 29 Eventide Road, Sunrise Park, Trincity

**Date:** 20-Jul-2022

**Subject:** PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a doctoral student at Unicaf University, Zambia. As part of my degree, I am carrying out a study on The Role of Gender in Educational Leadership in Trinidad and Tobago under the supervision of Chrysa Tamisoglou. I am writing to enquire whether you would grant permission for me to conduct this research. Subject to Unicaf Research Ethics Committee (UREC) approval, this study will use a survey questionnaire and zoom interview to collect data from participants.

I will also require the following information from the ministry:

- The number of teachers (male and female)
- The number of principals (male and female)
- The number of school supervisors (male and female)
- The number of primary and secondary schools in Trinidad and Tobago
- How does a teacher get promoted to the dean, vice-principal, principal, and school supervisor

The research project aims to examine the role of gender in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. Even though most teachers in Trinidad and Tobago are female, female teacher representation in leadership roles or positions is lower than that of male teachers. Hence, it is significant to conduct a research study to examine the role of gender in educational leadership.

A sample population of 100 persons (inclusive of teachers, school supervisors and parents) would be used during the collection of data period (November 2022-December 2022).

Thank you in advance for your time and your consideration of this project. Please let me know if you require further information or need further clarification.

Yours Sincerely,

Jody Belcon

**Student's Name:** Jody Belcon

**Student's E-mail:** jtb650@gmail.com

**Student's Address and Telephone:** Huizhou, China +8613534081557

**Supervisor's Title and Name:** Chrysa Tamisoglou

**Supervisor's Position:**

**Supervisor's E-mail:** c.tamisoglou@unicaf.org

## Appendix C: Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Education Permissions



Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago  
**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION**  
 Education Towers, No.5 St. Vincent Street, Port of Spain, Trinidad  
 1.868.622.2181 Ext. 2342, (Fax) 1.868.624.1222, [www.moe.gov.tt](http://www.moe.gov.tt)  
 Educational Planning Division  
 Level 14

E: 14/4/16

November 22, 2022

**Ms. Jody Belcon**  
 Jingtuan North Road  
 Park Lane Harbour  
 Daya Bay  
 Huizhou  
 China

Dear Ms. Belcon,

Your request to conduct research entitled “**The Role of Gender in Educational Leadership in Trinidad and Tobago**” has been approved by the Chief Education Officer of the Ministry of Education.

This approval is granted for the academic year 2022/2023 and permits the researcher to:

- 1) conduct surveys and interviews with school supervisors in all seven (7) districts in Trinidad;
- 2) conduct surveys and interviews with parents and teachers at all public primary and secondary schools in Trinidad;
- 3) access data on the number of school supervisors, principals and teachers by sex;
- 4) access information on how teachers are promoted to dean, vice-principal, principal and school supervisor; and
- 5) access information on the basic criteria for dean, vice-principal, principal and school supervisor positions.

Attached is a letter of confidentiality, which is to be completed and returned to the Educational Planning Division of the Ministry of Education by the person conducting their research.

Should you require additional information please contact Ms. Jermaine Williams, Research Officer I, Educational Planning Division at 1 868 622-2181 ext. 2334 or [jermaine.williams@moe.gov.tt](mailto:jermaine.williams@moe.gov.tt).

Yours sincerely,

  
 .....  
**Director**  
**Educational Planning Division**

**CERTIFIED CORRECT**

## Appendix D: Informed Consent Form



UU\_IC - Version 2.1

**Informed Consent Form**

**Part 2: Certificate of Consent**

**This section is mandatory and should to be signed by the participant(s)**

**Student's Name:** Jody Belcon

**Student's E-mail Address:** jtb650@gmail.com

**Student ID #:** R1809D6221789

**Supervisor's Name:** Chrysa Tamisoglou

**University Campus:** Unicaf University Zambia (UUZ)

**Program of Study:** UUZ: EdD Doctoral of Education

**Research Project Title:** The Role of Gender in Educational Leadership in Trinidad and Tobago

I have read the foregoing information about this study, or it has been read to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss about it. I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions and I have received enough information about this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw from this study at any time without giving a reason for withdrawing and without negative consequences. I consent to the use of multimedia (e.g. audio recordings, video recordings) for the purposes of my participation to this study. I understand that my data will remain anonymous and confidential, unless stated otherwise. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Participant's Print name:

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date:

**If the Participant is illiterate:**

I have witnessed the accurate reading of the consent form to the potential participant, and the individual has had an opportunity to ask questions. I confirm that the aforementioned individual has given consent freely.

Witness's Print name:

Witness's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date:

## Appendix E: Survey for Teachers

**Doctor of Education Dissertation Questionnaire Research: The Role of Gender in  
Educational Leadership in Trinidad and Tobago**

My name is, and I am currently studying for a Doctorate in Education at University, Zambia. I am conducting research into the role of gender in educational leadership in Trinidad and Tobago. This questionnaire is for past and current teachers. It consists of 20 questions and will take no longer than 20 minutes to complete. Thank you for taking the time to assist with this research; your opinions are highly appreciated. Under no circumstances are you obliged to answer any of the questions; however, pay your all-out effort to assist me in completing my research and enhancing my understanding of this research focus. The data collected will remain confidential and used solely for this research paper.

Please answer the following questions before you begin the questionnaire

I consent to be part of the research (Participants will move to Question 1)

I do not consent to be part of the research (Participants will move to the end of the survey)

**1. To which gender identity do you most identify?**

Female    Male    Prefer not to say

**2. What is the highest level of education you have completed?**

Bachelors    Masters    Post-Grad Certificate    Ph.D./EDd    Prefer not to say

**3. How old are you?**

**4. What is your current position in the education sector?**

**5. What is the highest leadership office that you often interact with?**

Dean(s)      Principal      School Supervisors (SS1 or SS11)  
 District Supervisor (SS111)      CEO      Minister of Education  
 Other (please specify)      None of the above

**6. Would you be willing to pursue a leadership role in the educational sector?**

Yes      No

**7. What is the highest post you would be willing to pursue?**

Dean      Principal      School Supervisors (SS1 or SS11)  
 Other (please specify)

**8. What factors may motivate you to pursue leadership positions in your institution?**

**9. What factors may demotivate you to pursue leadership positions in your institution?**

**10. Have you ever felt that your gender has played a role in you accessing or missing a raise, promotion, key assignment, or chance to get ahead?**

Yes      No

Please specify

**11. In your opinion, who makes a better leader?**

Males                      Females

Please specify why

**12. Do you think prevailing social values (gender-specific views) play a role in how the public view educational leaders?**

Yes    No

**13. Please rank the following prevailing social values (gender-specific views) that may play a role in how the public view educational leaders.**

Having a Child/Children

Marriage responsibilities

Access to higher education

Having to choose between family and work

Perceived emotional instability

**14. Do you compare yourself with other genders concerning your chances of ascending to an educational leadership position?**

Yes                      No

**15. Have you ever experienced sexism (a belief that one sex is superior to or more valuable than another sex) or discrimination at work?**

Yes      No

If yes, please specify

**16. Have you ever seen a colleague of the opposite gender experience sexism or discrimination at work?**

Yes No

If yes, please specify

**17. Have you encountered difficulties working with colleagues of the opposite sex in leadership roles?**

Yes No

**18. Do you feel confident about your ability to effectively undertake leadership responsibilities despite gender?**

Yes No

**19. Do you believe there are equal opportunities for both genders to pursue leadership roles in the education sector?**

Yes No

If yes, please specify

**20. Do you consent to participate in a zoom interview?**

Agree Disagree

If yes, please leave your email address