

Article

Revisiting Female Instructional Leaders' Crisis Management Experience During the Pandemic: A Phenomenological Inquiry

Mary Julie V. Pagayon*, Gian Lawrence V. Trinidad, Era S. Apaso and John Erwin P. Pedroso

West Visayas State University, Iloilo City, Philippines; gianlawrence.trinidad@wvsu.edu.ph (G.L.V.T.)
era.apaso@wvsu.edu.ph (E.S.A.); johnerwin.pedroso@wvsu.edu.ph (J.E.P.P.)

* Correspondence: maryjulie.pagayon@wvsu.edu.ph (M.J.V.P)

Abstract: This study was designed in Contingency Theory to explore the leadership struggles, strategies, and contextual influences experienced by female instructional leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic. Utilizing a semi-structured, researcher-developed interview guide, the research aimed to uncover how cultural and institutional factors shaped their crisis leadership, filling in the limited research regarding the lived experiences of female instructional leaders during said pandemic. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with five purposely selected female instructional leaders from various schools. Thematic analysis was performed following Braun and Clarke's six-phase approach. The analysis yielded three major themes, namely gendered leadership challenges, cultural and institutional influences, and adaptive crisis management strategies. These were further categorized into eight sub-themes and twenty thematic categories. Female instructional leaders exhibited a relational and context-responsive leadership style marked by emotional resilience, equity-oriented practices, and collaborative innovation. Findings highlight the need for gender-sensitive support systems and inclusive policy reforms to strengthen educational leadership in times of crisis.

Keywords: female leadership; instructional leaders; crisis management; educational leadership; COVID-19; contingency theory

1. Introduction

This phenomenological inquiry focuses on their struggles, strategies, and leadership practices, while considering how prevailing cultural and institutional frames constrain or facilitate their responses during the pandemic. Effective crisis management requires resilience and immediate responsiveness to minimize further damage and harm. However, there is still a limited discussion regarding the evolving role and perceptions of instructional leaders during these crises. Crisis calls for a significantly different leadership from the ones done on a daily basis of school management, demanding new and adaptive attributes and skills to manage and foster a positive school environment (Smith and Dan 2012). While leaders are expected to display a wide range of abilities to foster a positive school climate during pandemic, the lived realities of female instructional leaders as they step into crisis-focused roles have not received due attention. This phenomenological inquiry focuses on their struggles, strategies, and leadership practices, while considering how prevailing cultural and institutional frames both constrain and facilitate their responses during the pandemic.

Unique challenges of crises are particularly difficult for female instructional leaders. However, there is a lack of research on how they handled these complexities. The leadership skills and decision-making strategies of female instructional leaders' highlight how their experiences were shaped by cultural and institutional contexts. During crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, these factors influenced their responses (De Bruyn and Raj 2020). Social solidarity and culture were key in crisis management. The results highlight the importance of understanding cultural and institutional contexts for effective leadership (Altun and Mustafa 2021). No research highlights how these leaders adapted their practices in the new normal. Some studies identified an apparent knowledge gap concerning the lack of information about the cultural and institutional factors. However, these studies don't explore knowledge on the struggle, strategies, and success of female school leaders within the institutional and cultural context of education during the pandemic.

Current study examines the experiences on how female instructional leaders navigated the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis through adaptive leadership strategies. It investigates which practices continued, changed, and how institutional and cultural settings affected their decision-making (De Bruyn and Raj 2020; Altun and Mustafa 2021). This study will comprehend the crisis

Citation: Mary Julie V. Pagayon, Gian Lawrence V. Trinidad, Era S. Apaso and John Erwin P. Pedroso. 2025. Revisiting Female Instructional Leaders' Crisis Management Experience During the Pandemic: A Phenomenological Inquiry. *Social Lens* 2(2), 32-41. <https://doi.org/10.69971/sl.2.2.2025.44>



Copyright: © 2025 by the authors. Submitted for possible open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

leadership by underscoring gender-specific leadership experiences. This study will support female instructional leaders by influencing future policy, leadership training, and crisis preparedness in education. Grounded by the contingency theory, which highlights the significance of situational factors for an effective management (Newcastle University 2023).

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Design

Using a phenomenological research design as a qualitative method which captures people's personal experiences and perceptions on particular events (Creswell and Cheryl 2016). Phenomenological reduction was employed through epoche or bracketing, which demands researchers to put aside biases in order to focus on participants' authentic narratives (Manen 2016). The primary methods of data collection were in-depth interviews (written and oral). The results will help improve future policy and leadership training and provide that are essential for educational leadership in times of crisis, particularly for female leaders (Urlick et al. 2021).

2.2 Instrument

The primary instruments used to collect the detailed narratives of female instructional leaders' crisis management during COVID-19 pandemic were both the semi-structured written and oral interviews to allow flexibility in phrasing and sequencing while grounded by a guided thematic framework (Creswell and Cheryl 2016). This dual-method approach balanced structure with openness-enabling comparability across participants while allowing them to elaborate on personal insights. To ensure consistency in key topics across both written and oral formats, an interview guide was used while still allowing for follow-up questions to deepen responses.

Oral interviews were recorded with the respondents consent to ensure accuracy and detail for transcription and analysis. Participants were given a choice to have written interviews to allow respondents to think and react at their own pace for comfort and in-depth responses. All responses were confidential and then subjected to thematic analysis to identify patterns in leadership strategies, difficulties, and culturally influenced experiences during the pandemic.

2.3 Informants

This study selected five female instructional leaders as the study's informants (Table 1). The inclusion criteria were female instructional leaders served during the pandemic and serving in the field of education for more than 10 years.

The youngest was 44, followed by ages 50, 53, and two (2) 58. They all worked in the field of education for a significant period, ranging from 11 years to 37 years. All served as instructional leaders during the pandemic. To ensure a diversity and wide of perspectives, the school type, geographic location, and age were purposefully considered using purposeful sampling and to ensure a comprehensive understanding of how these leaders adapted in areas such as policy implementation, crisis management, and resilience (Creswell and Cheryl 2018). To maintain anonymity, the informants were assigned with pseudonyms.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Informants.

Informants	Sex	Age	Year of Service	Position during Pandemic
Ma'am Gem	Female	58	36	Principal IV
Ma'am Jos	Female	53	32	Head Teacher III
Ma'am Jan	Female	58	37	Head Teacher III
Ma'am Jes	Female	50	29	Assistant Principal II
Ma'am Jon	Female	44	11	Teacher III - TIC

2.4 Data Collection

This study adopted a phenomenological approach for data collection through semi-structured written and oral interviews in the perspective of our research questions. Prior to conducting interviews, necessary permissions were obtained and signed consent forms were obtained in accordance with ethical research guidelines (Orb et al. 2024). To ensure accuracy of collected data, interview recordings were utilized in written, audio, and video formats (Creswell and Cheryl 2018). Follow-up questions further elaborated ambiguous responses. The interview question was designed in accordance with ethical guidelines to maintain a sensitivity and respect for the participants' privacy and well-being (Seidman 2006).

2.5 Data Analysis

To interpret the data gathered, (Colaizzi's 1978) method was applied using a seven-step process including familiarization, identifying important statements, formulating meanings, clustering themes, creating a thorough description, and seeking confirmation of the basic structure. (Morrow et al. 2015). Field notes and memos were used to document significant observations and background information, and interviews were verbatim transcribed to ensure accuracy. Inductive approach was used to allow themes to emerge from the data rather than being limited to predetermined frameworks (Thomas 2006). By comparing interviews, field notes, and other qualitative sources to guarantee a thorough and objective analysis, triangulation also increases the credibility of research (Denzin 2012). Through the integration of verbatim transcription, inductive analysis, triangulation, and Colaizzi's phenomenological method, this study guaranteed a thorough and well-grounded interpretation of female instructional leaders' leadership experiences.

3. Findings in Exploring

To explore the experiences of female instructional leaders' lived crisis management during the COVID-19 pandemic, three major themes emerged from the data, guided by the research questions and rooted in Contingency Theory. These were navigating gendered leadership challenges; cultural and institutional influences on leadership; and, adaptive crisis management strategies during the pandemic.

3.1 Gendered Leadership Challenges

Findings revealed that gender-related expectations are one of the root causes of female instructional leaders' leadership struggles during pandemic. These are divided into three sub-themes namely, work-life imbalance, role overload and shifting responsibilities, and stereotyping and being undermined.

3.1.1 Work-Life Imbalance

Female instructional leaders struggled to strike a balance between their leadership duties with personal and family obligations. Setting a clear boundary between roles is very essential particularly during crisis to avoid burnout, which causes immense stress. Sub-themes included, dual burden of leadership and family care and struggle for personal time.

Female instructional school leaders often juggle professional and personal obligations, leading to increased stress level while sacrificing valuable personal time. As Ma'am Jos said, *"As a woman, I've carried the emotional and logistical weight of both my profession and home life. A challenge of balancing the demands of the role with personal and family responsibilities."* Similarly, Ma'am Jan shared, *"Expectations around caregiving responsibilities and work-life balance."* For Ma'am Jes, the challenge was even greater, as she explained, *"I have 6 children, and... I have this little kid who really needs attention. So it's always a struggle for me to balance my time, rendering 8 hours everyday in school."* In the same way, Ma'am Jon expressed, *"Biggest challenges include... managing work-life balance while building trust and credibility with staff, students, and parents."* Their experiences highlight how work-life imbalance is one of the most pressing challenges for female leaders, as they constantly strive to fulfill both professional duties and personal responsibilities.

Many institutional policies lacked gender-sensitivity for women in leadership which caused frustration in many female instructional leaders. Ma'am Jes shared, *"If you are a principal like us... you really have to render duty in school for 12 months... So we wish that we could also spend time with our family."* This shows how rigid institutional policies often overlook the personal needs of female leaders, making it difficult for them to achieve balance between their professional roles and family life.

3.1.2 Role Overload and Shifting Responsibilities

The pandemic uncovered new responsibilities that went beyond the conventional administrative duties, female instructional school leaders stressed the escalation of workload that burdened them roles. Their roles became more complex due to the fast-shifting demands of the pandemic, underscoring the need for adaptable leadership and effective institutional support. Sub-theme includes becoming everything at once, emotional support work and exhaustion and limited resources.

Female instructional leaders had to take additional roles, like health expert, tech manager, and counselor, despite not having much support or training in these duties. Ma'am Gem said, *"Being a School Head is a huge responsibility. You have to be prepared in all aspects."* Ma'am Jos expressed, *"I have to shift from being an institutional leader to becoming a crisis manager, tech coordinator, emotional support system, and community liaison."* Ma'am Jan reflected, *"Pandemic has likely changed perspectives on school leadership in several ways: Shifts in perspective and in new priorities."* These experiences reveal how the pandemic expanded the responsibilities of female instructional leaders, requiring them to adapt quickly and take on multiple roles beyond their traditional duties.

Instructional leaders extended their administrative role by being an emotional support for teachers and students. Ma'am Gem said, *"Being a School Head is a huge responsibility. You have to be prepared in all aspects."* Ma'am Jos added, *"I have to shift from being an institutional leader to becoming a crisis manager, tech coordinator, emotional support system, and community liaison."* Ma'am Jan reflected, *"Pandemic has likely changed perspectives on school leadership in several ways: Shifts in perspective and in new priorities."* These insights emphasize how instructional leaders went beyond administrative tasks, becoming sources of strength and support to guide their school communities through the challenges of the pandemic.

Inadequate resources, unclear rules, and conflicting demands became a root cause of stress due for female instructional leaders. Ma'am Jos expressed that there was a *"lack of gender sensitive leadership pipelines."* Meanwhile, Ma'am Jan shared that among the *"biggest challenges in operation, education, communication, emotion, and in strategy"* was a situation where *"the local health department recommended a temporary shift to remote learning. The principal must decide whether to implement remote learning immediately or wait for further guidance."* On the other hand, Ma'am Jes highlighted the pressing concerns of *"classroom shortage, too many learners that are enrolling in our school, the population, the ratio of the teacher to our learners, and at the same time also the shortage of the teachers and the curriculum."* These challenges reveal how limited resources and unclear policies intensified the burden on female instructional leaders, forcing them to make difficult decisions while addressing multiple urgent concerns in their schools.

3.1.3 Stereotyping and Being Undermined

Due to societal biases, female school leaders experienced undermining and stereotypes, which forced them to prove themselves while maintaining professionalism. Sub-theme includes leadership as a male-dominated space and navigating gendered expectations and subtle undermining.

Women in leadership are rarely seen compared to men in leadership positions which has led many female instructional leaders to do extra work to prove themselves. Ma'am Jos shared, *"Leadership is still associated with male authority... I have to work harder to earn respect and trust."* In agreement, Ma'am Jan added, *"Yes, many female leaders in education have experienced gender-related perceptions and biases."* Similarly, Ma'am Jon expressed, *"I've encountered gender expectations that influenced how others perceive my leadership, but I've worked to establish trust and respect through my actions and decisions."* These experiences

highlight the persistent gender biases in leadership, showing how female instructional leaders often need to exert extra effort to gain recognition, respect, and credibility in their roles.

Gendered stereotypes made it difficult for female instructional leaders to find the ideal balance between being assertive and approachable due to this skepticism. Ma'am Jan shared, *"Lack of gender sensitive leadership pipelines, inflexibility of institutional policies, representation of the session making levels, and gender-based discrimination and harassment."* In agreement, Ma'am Jon added, *"As a female leader, I may face challenges such as being questioned or undermined, stereotyping, and balancing assertiveness and likability."* To this, Ma'am Jes expressed, *"You are always expected that you're understanding, you show compassion, you become motherly."* These insights reveal how female leaders continue to navigate systemic barriers and gendered expectations, making their leadership journey more challenging compared to their male counterparts.

3.2 Cultural and Institutional Influences on Leadership

Leadership practices were significantly shaped by societal norms and institutional frameworks. Sub-themes include gender role expectations and institutional systems and policy.

3.2.1 Gender Role Expectations

Gender-based expectations significantly influenced the leadership approaches of the instructional leaders, whether it be coming from outside factors such as society or inside factors such as family. This includes cultural perception and family responsibility.

Female instructional leaders often encounter biases, being stereotyped as nurturing figures expected to prioritize emotional sensitivity. Ma'am Jos stated that *"I was not only seen as a school leader but also a maternal figure, someone expected to remain calm, compassionate and emotionally available to everyone in the school community,"* which is a point further emphasized by Ma'am Gem, saying *"If you are a female principal, you are expected to be motherly, considerate, soft, and kind hearted."* Ma'am Jes added *"If you're a female you are expected to be really like a mother, you become compassionate, you are more caring."* These statements emphasize that these female leaders are perceived and expected to act in a certain way due to their gender.

Family is also one of the main considerations of these instructional leaders, often either directly or indirectly influencing them in the way they approach leadership. It was mentioned by Ma'am Jos saying it is *"A challenge of balancing the demands of the role with personal and family responsibilities."* Ma'am Jes also shared that *"I had this experience, when my daughter went to WVSU, and she was crying because she said they are behind... That challenged me to offer online classes to help the learners."* and *"I have 6 children... So it's always a struggle for me to balance my time, rendering 8 hours everyday in school."* Both statements highlight the fact that family is especially influential and important to them.

3.2.2 Institutional Systems and Policy

The instructional leaders expressed how there are both institutional barriers and support systems. While some policies actively help them in their duties, there are others that hinders them from performing to the best of their abilities. This theme includes support systems and opportunities and structural policy barriers.

While there were no specific support systems for women, school leaders benefited from general institutional resources like mentorship, training, and professional development. Ma'am Jan mentioned *"Support Systems through mentorship programs, leadership development and networking opportunities,"* with Ma'am Jos emphasizing that *"These systems support leadership by providing clear guidelines, professional development opportunities, and framework for accountability."* They show that there are indeed resources available for these instructional leaders should they need assistance or to further their skillset.

Despite the general helpfulness of these institutional policies, sometimes they can ultimately hinder a principal's ability to respond properly to a given situation. Oftentimes, when this happens, the principal must act upon their best judgement, depending on the situation. Ma'am Jon shared that *"Existing policies on remote learning and emergency protocols helped, while some outdated tech infrastructure and bureaucratic processes hindered my ability to respond effectively to the pandemic's challenges."* In line with this, Ma'am Jan stated that *"Effective policies can enhance crisis response, while hindering policies can impede it."* Ma'am Jes concluded that *"So the policy of the DepEd should be followed, unless if maybe there are exceptions —rule of thumb."* This reflects the fact that policies shouldn't always be followed, and these leaders had to decide which policies are a hindrance and which are actually helpful.

3.3 Adaptive Crisis Strategies

Context-sensitive approaches were utilized by instructional leaders to address the challenges during the crisis. Sub-themes include compassionate and empathetic leadership, innovation and flexibility and self-care and delegation.

3.3.1 Compassionate and Empathetic Leadership

Instructional leaders led the pandemic by showcasing a high emotional intelligence to lead with compassion while maintaining a firm command. These skills are particularly significant due to the fact leaders balance both administrative and emotional obligations by caring for staff and students while balancing personal responsibilities. By combining understanding and decisiveness, their leadership made a safe culture in schools. This theme includes blending authority with nurturing care, fostering psychosocial support and motivation and cultural sensitivity and community responsiveness.

Instructional leaders balanced decisive action with empathy, handling both administrative and emotional demands. Ma'am Gem stated, *"You have to be strong and firm in your decision coupled with compassion and motherly love."* Ma'am Jes expressed, *"...if you really listen to the stories of these learners, of your teachers, that would really make you become more compassionate, motherly, because you're looked up to by these people."* These responses emphasized how instructional leaders deliberately create a comforting environment into their most challenging role of authority.

Instructional leaders played a vital role in crisis leadership by motivating and boosting morale, creating an inclusive environment that fostered emotional well-being and enhanced student engagement. Ma'am Jos emphasized, *"...leadership goes far beyond policies and performance metrics at its core about people's compassion and adaptability."* Ma'am Jan added, *"Leadership lessons [include] building a support network, prioritizing self-care, empowering teachers and students."* Ma'am Jes also stressed

that *“If you really motivate and appreciate your teachers... that would affect how they deal with the students... and if they feel happy, that also radiates in how they deal with the learners.”* A leader’s role is not only to guide but to serve as a source of light—a light that, even amidst the struggle, offers support to every student and teachers.

Effective leadership transcends management, requiring adaptability to local contexts and cultures. Instructional leaders tailored their approach to fit community values, fostering cooperation and empowering community-led solutions. Ma’am Jan emphasized the need to *“...create a more inclusive and supportive environment”* Ma’am Jes reminisced that *“During the pandemic... when we called for help there was a great response, especially from people in the community.”* She also added, *“Listening to your teachers, even to the learners... would really make you become more compassionate.”* Ma’am Jon affirmed, *“Cultural expectations shaped my crisis management approach by prioritizing community values, respecting authority, and adapting communication styles to resonate with diverse groups.”* The educational crisis is not merely a crisis among teachers and students; it is a crisis that involves the entire country—one that involves the needed support from the community, which the instructional leaders have fully integrated.

3.3.2 Innovation and Flexibility

Instructional leaders used technology, instructional design, and community support to showcase technological flexibility at a fast pace of uncertainty and shifting circumstances. This theme includes technological adaptation, blended learning implementation and learner support and equity solutions.

Instructional leaders rapidly adapted to digital platforms, redefining their roles to meet urgent tech needs despite limited prior training or support. Ma’am Jes stressed the big shift of mode of instruction, *“There are so many concerns because we’re not prepared at those times...”* Ma’am Jos added, *“I have to shift from being an institutional leader to becoming a crisis manager, tech coordinator, emotional support system and community liaison.”* Ma’am Jon emphasized, *“COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted my role as a principal, requiring adaptations like remote leadership, virtual communication...”* The Covid-19 pandemic forced instructional leaders to shift to an unfamiliar mode of learning, adding another burden to their role as crisis managers. Despite the big shift, leaders adapted smoothly to meet the demand of the pandemic.

Female instructional leaders bridged the digital divide by innovating blended learning models, combining online, modular, and in-person approaches to meet students’ diverse needs. Ma’am Jan shared her technique by *“Implementing a blended learning model that combined online and in-person instruction”* Ma’am Jes stated, *“In management, we do a lot of asking for help from the LGU, tapping our barangay officials, tapping the parents... every barangay, they come up with a committee on education... These people will help us distribute all the modules... since our learners cannot go out to the school... then our challenge again is how to retrieve the module... the challenge for the teacher is the checking of the module.”* She also added, *“...my daughter went to WVSU, and she was crying because she said they are behind because they have only the module, whereas students coming from other schools have online classes. That challenged me to offer online classes to help the learners.”* Ma’am Jon also shared the importance of *“Implementing a flexible learning model, combining in-person and online instruction... improving student engagement, increasing accessibility, and supporting diverse learning needs during the pandemic.”* These responses showcased how instructional leaders used innovation and solutions to ensure that must go on amidst the pandemic.

Instructional leaders implemented targeted interventions to support struggling students, promoting inclusivity and reducing dropout risks in response to remote learning challenges. Ma’am Jos shared that *“We created a small team of teachers and student leaders... to reach out to pupils who were falling behind.”* The same with Ma’am Jan, *“I implemented a mentorship program for struggling students... we saw a significant improvement in their academic performance.”* Ma’am Jon also had the same initiative, *“Implementing a school-wide initiative that improved student engagement and academic performance, showcasing the power of collaborative leadership.”* The pandemic truly emphasized the gap in students’ learning differences, which instructional leaders bridged the gap through various strategies to ensure no student falls behind.

3.3.3 Self-Care and Delegation

The pandemic demanded female instructional leaders to go beyond administrative and managerial skills but also emotional resilience. Strategies grounded by self-preservation, collective responsibility, and deliberate delegation helped maintain their leadership role. This theme includes boundary-setting and work-life management, peer and professional support and emotional resilience and reflective practice.

Female instructional leaders set clear work-life boundaries, preserving energy and preventing burnout, especially given their significant caregiving responsibilities. Ma’am Jos stated, *“Balancing my responsibilities as a school leader with my personal and family life requires intentional planning, constant reflection, and most importantly setting healthy boundaries.”* Ma’am Jan also emphasized to *“Set a clear boundaries: Establish a healthy work-life balance”* Ma’am Jes advised that *“When you are in school, you focus on your work in school... and if I am also at home, I don’t bring works at home so that i can also focus in my children, my responsibility as a mother”* Ma’am Jon also shared, *“I balance my responsibilities by setting clear boundaries... and effectively managing my time to meet both work and family commitments.”* Instructional leaders shared their experiences on how they managed the pressure by creating a clear boundary between work and personal life to avoid overlapping of responsibilities.

Female instructional leaders relied on support networks, mentorship groups, and peer circles for emotional reassurance and practical guidance, helping them navigate pandemic challenges. Ma’am Gem emphasized, *“You cannot do all the work and you need the help of everyone.”* She also added, *“Building a good relationship with your people is the key for the smooth operation of the school.”* Ma’am Jos also shared, *“...combination of formal support system and informal networks has been essential in helping navigate leadership challenges like mentorship, peer support networks, women leadership association and institutional support.”* Ma’am Jan also shared the importance of *“Leadership lessons by building a support network, prioritizing self care, empowering teachers and students.”* Ma’am Jes also advised, *“As school leader, you should not think that you can do it alone. It’s always a collaborative work of the people in the community.”* She also highlighted, *“I consider my teachers to be competent, but all they need is to show them your support, let them feel they are important... if you really motivate and appreciate your teachers, that’d affect how they deal with the students...”* Ma’am Jon wanted to share that she *“...overcome challenges by building a support*

network... and continuously learning and seeking feedback.” These responses reflect a shared sentiment that leadership requires a strong network of support to ensure the well-being of instructional leaders.

Instructional leaders leaned on inner strength and self-awareness, including reflection, emotional regulation, and integrity, to manage stress and maintain stable leadership during the pandemic. Ma’am Gem emphasized important qualities, “*Transparency, role model, committed, dedicated, good interpersonal relationship.*” Ma’am Jos highlighted the significance of “*Staying calm under pressure, trusting your instincts and leading with integrity.*” She also advised to “*Lead with confidence, not apology... Protect your well-being... Trust your instincts. School leadership is not about perfection it's about purpose, persistence, and people.*” Ma’am Jan added, “*Be resilient and adaptable in changing circumstances*” Ma’am Jon stressed that “*Leadership qualities that have been most helpful in managing struggles include resilience, empathy, effective communication, problem-solving, and adaptability.*” These statements highlighted the importance of inner strength, self-regulation, and constant reflection, which became their anchor in stabilizing the crisis in education and within themselves.

Effective crisis leadership necessitates a policy that has more sensitivity to context. Navigating the overlapping of gender roles, cultural expectations, emotional demands, and institutional limitations was essential for female instructional leaders to lead effectively to face the demand of the context. They exhibit both resilient and context-based leadership styles by making a careful balance of empathy, adaptability, and strategic action.

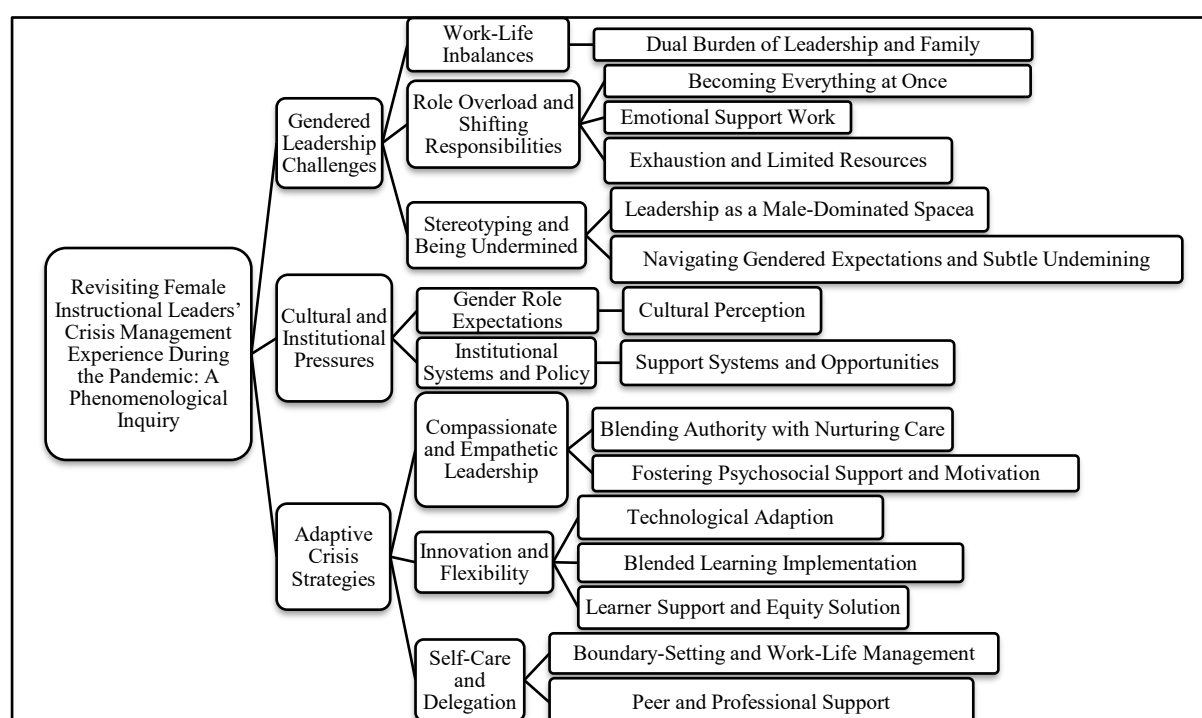


Figure 1: Thematic Map of female instructional leaders' struggles, strategies, and the influence of cultural and institutional contexts during the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. Discussion

This phenomenological study highlighted the struggles and strategies of female instructional leaders, as well as to examine the influence of cultural and institutional contexts, specifically during the COVID-19 pandemic. As per Contingency Theory, which holds that effective leadership is shaped by situational demands (Fiedler 1964; Newcastle University 2023), current findings reflect that these female leaders adapted to complex and evolving school environments during crisis conditions, revealing a certain understanding of leadership shaped not only by organizational needs but by personality, societal expectations, and resilience. The researchers categorized these findings into three primary thematic clusters of gendered leadership challenges; cultural and institutional influences on leadership; and, adaptive crisis management strategies. These themes were further classified into eight sub-themes, under which twenty categories were identified namely work-life imbalances, which includes dual burden of leadership and family care, and struggle for personal time; role overload and shifting responsibilities, that includes becoming everything at once, emotional support work, and exhaustion and limited resources; stereotyping and being undermined, which includes leadership as a male-dominated space, and navigating gendered expectations and subtle undermining; gender role expectations, divided into cultural perception and family responsibility; institutional systems, separated into support systems and opportunities, and structural policy barriers; compassionate and empathetic leadership, which includes blending authority with nurturing care, fostering psychosocial support and motivation, and cultural sensitivity and community responsiveness; innovation and flexibility, further categorized into technological adaptation, blended learning implementation, and learner support and equity solutions; and, self-care and delegation, which includes boundary-setting and work-life management, peer and professional support, and emotional resilience and reflective practice.

Female leaders in particular were seen as emotional anchors within their communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. These leaders, often viewed as "maternal figures," were expected to be caring, emotionally available, morally upright, and overall, simply

motherly. Their leadership during this time was influenced by cultural norms that linked female authority with maternal traits such as compassion, empathy, and emotional sensitivity (Rivas and Elreen 2023). While many female instructional leaders are mothers, the expectation for them to embody a motherly and nurturing leadership style was not only limited to them. Even single women in leadership roles were often expected to display "motherly" characteristics (Crisp 2020). Instructional leaders were expected to care for their teachers and students, physically and mentally, as well as serve as nurturing figures in the overall community. Motherly traits were a significant part of their leadership, and these traits helped them create a more inclusive, caring, and compassionate environment. These qualities, often rooted in their personal experiences as mothers or caregivers, proved crucial in guiding schools through crisis and adversity (Novotney 2024).

Crisis management during the COVID-19 pandemic extended past strategic decision making including emotional, social, and psychological labor. For many female instructional leaders, leadership was not limited in school, it is also with their roles at home. They were not only expected to act motherly in the school community, caring for students and supporting teachers, but were also actual mothers, wives, and caregivers within their own houses. These leaders had to fill multiple roles at the same time during the pandemic, such as conducting online meetings while preparing meals, attending to school matters while helping their children. The boundaries between home and work blurred, demanding efforts to set limits and protect their mental well-being (Felicia and Perumal 2021). These burdens were worsened because of the limited number of support systems, and the expectations placed on them by school communities looking to them for reassurance, guidance, and solutions (Jones et al. 2020; Angayarkanni and K. Nufaila 2023). Many of these leaders carried an emotional burden, which scholars refer to as the "invisible labor" of female leaders. It is where the blending of emotional and logistical responsibilities erodes the boundaries between professional life and personal life (Dave, 2019; Norander and Leslie 2023). Even so, despite the pressure, these women remained resilient.

Institutional factors both helped and restricted the effectiveness of female instructional leaders. The value of leadership training, mentorship, and accountability systems was acknowledged, which enhanced their confidence and professional competence (Darling-Hammond et al. 2023). However, many school leaders were still taken by surprise-unprepared for a crisis of such magnitude. The pandemic forced schools to abruptly shift to modular, blended, and online learning modalities, revealing technological and infrastructural limitations that many instructional leaders were unequipped to manage. Lack of sufficient trainings, mentorship, and workshops on digital education did not help. Many instructional leaders struggled with implementing distance learning due to limited resources and inadequate institutional preparation (Lien 2022; Dare and Atif 2022; Moyo and Thavamoni 2025). Despite these obstacles, support systems such as leadership development programs, seminars, and their own experience from previous administrative roles helped female instructional leaders remain composed and flexible. Although the policies were ever-changing and sometimes vague, these leaders demonstrated flexibility. In many occasions, they acted based on their own judgment, choosing to deviate from the policy frameworks when necessary to better serve their school communities (Moyo and Thavamoni 2025; Altun and Mustafa 2021). This is in line with the principle that effective decision-making must respond to the realities of the external environment (De Bruyn and Raj 2020).

One of the most significant strategies employed by female instructional leaders involved a significant innovation. Drawing from their roles as mother figures in their schools and communities, these leaders exhibited compassion, empathy, and sensitivity, traits that naturally led to equity-driven leadership (Larasatie and Chorirotun 2023). Their decision-making was shaped by this maternal instinct, making them ensure that no learner was left behind. Scholars identified this as heart leadership and mother leadership, ways of leadership that emphasizes empathy, compassion, and creating a supportive environment, which highlights emotional intelligence, resilience, time management, and unconditional love from these leaders. Both styles offer valuable lessons for effective leadership in various settings (Larasatie and Chorirotun 2023; Kusinski 2019). In rapidly changing educational demands, they demonstrated innovation across three key areas of technological adaptation, blended learning implementation, and equity-oriented learner support. With limited technical training and scarce digital resources, many instructional leaders nonetheless embraced the use of online platforms, social media, and mobile communication to maintain school operations. They redefined their responsibilities-taking on the roles of tech coordinators, emotional caregivers, and community liaisons to bridge the gaps caused by remote learning.

Understanding that not all students had equal access to the internet and devices, instructional leaders implemented flexible and context-based learning delivery systems. Blended learning models combining modular, online, and occasional in-person formats were customized to accommodate diverse learner needs. This required intricate logistical planning, with the school coordinating with barangay officials and parents for module distribution and retrieval, and offering online classes in areas where it was possible to do so. These leaders leveraged community partnerships to mobilize resources and ensure learning continues even in the most isolated and underprivileged areas (Bautista and Mark 2023; Sukirma 2021). To further support learners at risk of exclusion, they initiated school-based interventions such as mentorship programs, peer tutoring, outreach campaigns, and the establishment of learning hubs. Leadership became a shared burden, with the responsibilities delegated among teachers, parents, barangay education committees, and even the students. These efforts highlight the leaders' flexibility and adaptability, as well as the important role of human relationships in navigating crises. Their inclusive, learner-centered responses serve as powerful examples of ethical leadership, grounded in both care and collaboration (UNESCO 2025).

Many female instructional leaders sustained their leadership during the pandemic by adopting self-regulation, emotional resilience, and collaborative support as coping mechanisms. These women struggled with immense psychological pressure and emotional strain, which intensified their pre-existing managing institutional demands which only escalated the burden of the pandemic (Carmen et al. 2021; Superville 2022). Female instructional leaders recognized that all students are not privileged enough to have technological access necessary for learning continuity (Bortoletti 2024; Chaturvedi et al. 2021). Despite the lack of resources, this reality became their driving force for their steadfast commitment to guarantee that all learners, particularly non-privileged to have access to quality education despite the crisis. Instructional leaders resorted to both formal and informal support networks and actively participating in several mentorship programs, joining professional leadership associations available, instructional leaders were able to build support circles which gave guidance, encouragement, and practical strategies (Salhen et al. 2023). These support circles helped them share burdens, acknowledge small victories, and learn from one another's experiences. These relationships and

connections made them realize that being a leader does not have to be a solo pursuit, but is a shared journey supported by mutual empowerment, trust, and cooperation rather than a solitary endeavor.

In addition to external and institutional support, female instructional leaders developed inner strength through reflective practice and emotional self-regulation (Martínez 2024). Establishing a clear boundary between professional and personal life became essential to maintain long-term leadership, adopting time management between overlapping burdens, and maintaining self-care (Morawczynski 2024; Harris and Michelle 2020). Through empathy, connection, and continuous learning, female instructional leaders understood that resilience is a relational process that individuals need during crises (Day, Qing and Pam 2014). Instructional leaders were able to lead with clarity and empathy by reflecting on their leadership decisions and their purpose despite the shifting condition. It was a strong testament for them to remain calm despite multiple institutional and cultural pressures, and be able to assist their staff and students, and maintain focus on the broader goal of equitable education. Their relationships with peers, teachers, families, and communities became the pillars of strength for them to sustain their leadership and allowed them to lead above uncertainty with purpose and integrity.

As female instructional leaders experience the intersecting pressures from institutional expectations and cultural norms, managing and surviving the pandemic was a tightrope. Inequalities already existed long before the pandemic, but it was accelerated and exposed how rigid systems and gendered assumptions hindered the immediate response of women in leadership during the pandemic (OECD 2021; Nesrine and Arrar 2022; Nkosi 2024). The crisis compelled many instructional leaders to adapt immediately to new and challenging responsibilities that are beyond administrative roles. They become crisis managers, digital coordinators, emotional caregivers, and community mobilizers, while having limited institutional support. The narratives of instructional leaders call to further improve institutional policies and cultural and social sensitivity to support female instructional leaders. There is an urgent demand for gender-sensitive training, more inclusive leadership pipelines, and flexible workplace policies that acknowledge the dual burdens carried by women. Schools and education systems must institutionalize equity by crafting policies that reflect the lived realities of female instructional leaders—ensuring leadership support is not only technical but also empathetic and human-centered (Ravele and Moyo 2023; Moyo and Thawamoni 2025).

Furthermore, educational leadership during crisis is an evolving, relational, and deeply contextual process. Female instructional leaders redefined what it means to lead by embodying multiple roles of institutional heads, emotional caregivers, cultural brokers, and crisis responders, while having qualities include compassion, moral behavior, and negotiating the challenging realities of being a woman in both personal and professional contexts (Urbaniak 2023). Female instructional leaders lead by being adaptable, emotionally grounded, and culturally and socially sensitive (De Bruyn and Raja 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic served as a transformative period that exposed the limitations of traditional leadership paradigms and illuminated the need for a redefinition of leadership to include emotional labor, cultural intelligence, and adaptive decision-making. The lived experiences of female instructional leaders revealed how educational leadership must be prepared not just procedurally, but holistically. Being able to innovate, empathize, and persevere from the face of turbulent times confirms the necessity of female instructional leaders to be heard by improving a gender-sensitive, context-aware and structural inclusive institutional support system (Moyo and Thawamoni 2025). The study calls for the reconsideration of many educational leadership preparation policies to recognize that leadership is not static but a dynamic, compassionate and socially embedded practice that can withstand crises and is capable of supporting continuity learning.

While this study offers valuable insights into the lived experiences of female instructional leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic, there are multiple limitations that must be recognized. First, a phenomenological approach was used with a small sample size of five chosen from particular regions. Hence, the findings may not accurately reflect the experiences of all female instructional leaders across the Philippines and in other cultural contexts. The shared narratives and perceptions were deeply contextual in which they differ based on their local governance structures, regional resources, or institutional support networks. Second, self-reported narratives and retrospective reflections were the main component of the study's findings. Although the study employed a phenomenology approach to understand female instructional leaders' life experiences, it may also initiate biases such as self-presentation, emotional framing, or selective memory. Furthermore, while it was chosen purposefully for female instructional leaders to be the focus of the study for gendered analysis, it however does not provide comprehensible comparative experiences with male counterparts, which could provide a wider ground on gender dynamics in school leadership during crisis. Third, the time frame of the study was only limited to lived experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Though the findings were detailed they are formed by the new and challenging global crisis. The relevance of some strategies during the pandemic or challenges identified may change depending how educational contexts shift. Lastly, the study's ability to link qualitative findings with quantitative results was also limited by institutional data such as school performance metrics, policy implementation records, or comparative policy analyses. Future researchers may address these gaps by increasing the number of participant diversity, utilizing a blended method, and exploring the long-term impact of the crisis on leadership development and academic performance.

5. Conclusions

Female instructional leadership showed the effective leadership during crisis which is context-driven, and emotionally heavy. Existing gendered expectations, institutional gaps, and cultural norms were indeed uncovered and escalated during the pandemic which molded the female instructional leaders' decision-making and how to lead. Despite having intersecting roles for their professional and personal obligations, leaders are able to showcase immediate resilience, innovation, and nurturing care to ensure an educational continuity and inclusivity. Instructional leaders are expected to manage the school system and environment, however due to the pandemic they were forced to manifest empathy, adapt immediately, and aid community resources when structural support was limited. Institutional conditions and cultural roles became the source of the leaders' struggles, while also molding their leadership identities and pedagogical strategies. These women redefined school leadership as a practice ingrained in empathy, collaboration, and flexibility by effectively utilizing their networks, life experiences, and moral dedication to equity. The study calls for a reconsideration of educational leadership that truly acknowledges the gendered, emotional, and cultural aspects, particularly during crisis. There is also a need to change institutional frameworks that promote inclusiveness, flexibility, and sensitivity to the

realities of female leaders which continue to hold a significant role in keeping the schools and communities together in the face of crisis.

References

- Alma, Harris, and Michelle Jones. 2020. COVID-19 – school leadership in disruptive times. *School Leadership & Management* 40: 243-247. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13632434.2020.1811479>
- Altun, Sadegül Akbaba and Mustafa Bulut. 2021. School Principals' Learnings From Covid-19 Pandemic. *Inquiry in Education* 13: 1-18. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1338253.pdf>
- Apaydin, Çiğdem, and Oksana Manolova Yalçın. 2024. The Impact of COVID-19 on K-12 School Principals' Management Processes. *Sage Open* 14: 1-18. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/21582440241265328>
- Bautista, Maria Cynthia Rose B. and Mark Vincent P. Aranas. 2023. The learning crisis in Philippine education: An overview. Philippine Institute for Development Studies: 1-12. <https://edcom2.gov.ph/media/2023/10/pidspn2317.pdf#:~:text=While%20the%20pandemic%20catalyzed%20changes%20in%20teaching,learning%20outcomes%20at%20all%20levels%20remains%20a>
- Bortoletti, Sara. 2024. Education: a right or a privilege in the time of COVID-19? *Centre for Youth and International Studies* <https://www.cyis.org/post/education-a-right-or-a-privilege-in-the-time-of-covid-19>
- De Bruyn, Nicolette and Raj Mestry. 2020. Voices of Resilience: Female School Principals, Leadership Skills, and Decision-Making Techniques. *South African Journal of Education* 40: 1-9. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1268276.pdf>
- Chaturvedi, Kunal, Dinesh Kumar Vishwakarma, and Nidhi Singh. 2021. COVID-19 and its impact on education, social life and mental health of students: A survey. *Children and Youth Services Review* 12: 1-16. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S019074092032288X>
- Creswell, John W. and Cheryl N. Poth. 2016. Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches. 4th edition. *Sage Journal*. <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/qualitative-inquiry-and-research-design/book246896>
- Crisp, Beth R. 2020. Expected to be mother: Women's experiences of taking on leadership roles in the academy. *Greenwich Social Work Review* 1: 5-67. <https://journals.gre.ac.uk/index.php/gswr/article/view/1116>
- Dare, Philip Saagyum, and Atif Saleem. 2022. Principal Leadership Role in Response to the Pandemic Impact on School Process. *Frontiers in Psychology* 13: 1-4. <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.943442/full>
- Darling-Hammond, Linda, Marjorie Wechsler Stephanie Levin Melanie Leung-Gagné and Steve Tozer. 2023. Developing effective principals: How Policies Can Make a Difference. *Learning Policy Institute*. <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/developing-effective-principals-brief>
- Dave, Saumya. 2019. 'Invisible labor' taking a toll on mothers' well-being: What you need to know. *abcNews*. <https://abcnews.go.com/GMA/Wellness/invisible-labor-taking-toll-mothers/story?id=60519555>
- Day, Christopher and Qing Gu. 2014. Resilient teachers, resilient schools: Building and sustaining quality in testing times. *Routledge*: 1-92. <https://www.routledge.com/Resilient-Teachers-Resilient-Schools-Building-and-sustaining-quality-in-testing-times/Day-Gu/p/book/9780415818957>
- Day, Christopher, Qing Gu, and Pam Sammons. 2016. The impact of leadership on student outcomes: How successful school leaders use transformational and instructional strategies to make a difference. *Educational Administration Quarterly* 52: 221-258. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X15616863>
- Felicia Williams and Perumal Juliet. 2021. Female Principals' Narratives of Leading Schools in the Time of the COVID-19 Pandemic https://openurl.ebsco.com/EPDB%3Agcd%3A14%3A13052206/detailv2?sid=ebsco%3Aplink%3Ascholar&id=ebsco%3Agcd%3A155076023&crl=c&link_origin=scholar.google.com.ph
- Fiedler, Fred. E. 1964. A contingency model of leadership effectiveness. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 1: 149-190. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0065260108600519>
- Jones, Megan S., Tara L. Teel, Doreen E. Martinez, and Jennifer Solomon. 2020. Conflict and adaptation at the intersection of motherhood and conservation leadership. *Biological Conservation* 243: 1-8. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0006320719316854>
- K. Nufaila and R. Angayarkanni. 2023. A Study On The Family-Work Conflict Among Married Working Women in Pattambi Municipality. *YMER* 22: 527- 533. <https://ymerdigital.com/uploads/YMER220746.pdf#:~:text=This%20can%20lead%20to%20feelings%20of%20guilt,or%20childcare%20facilities%2C%20can%20exacerbate%20family%2Dwork%20conflict>
- Kusinski, John. 2019. Leadership Reflections: What I learned from the Mothers in my life about Leadership. *LinkedIn*. <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/leadership-reflections-what-i-learned-from-mothers-my-john>
- Larasatie, Pipiet, and Chorirotun Nur Ulifah. 2023. Mother Leads with Her Heart: A Case Study of Women Worker Leaders in the Men-Dominated Forestry Sector. *Merits* 3: 432-444. <https://doi.org/10.3390/merits3030025>
- Ledesma, Janet. 2024. COVID-19 Impact on School Principal Leadership: Lessons Lived and Lessons Learned. *The Journal of Adventist Education* 86: 29-35. <https://www.journalofadventisteducation.org/2024.86.2.6>
- Lien, Camilla Martine, Samaira Khan, and Jarle Eid. 2022. School Principals' Experiences and Learning from the Covid-19 Pandemic in Norway. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00313831.2022.2043430>
- Manen, Max van. 2023. Phenomenology of Practice: Meaning-Giving Methods in Phenomenological Research and Writing. *Routledge 2nd edition*: 1-520. <https://www.routledge.com/Phenomenology-of-Practice/van-Manen/p/book/9781629582110>
- Martínez, Lorea. 2024. Leading from the HEART. *ascd* 81. <https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/leading-from-the-heart>
- Mgiba, Penelope, and Zvisinei Moyo. 2024. The Impact of COVID-19 on Female School Leadership in the Tshwane South District in South Africa Women Leading Schools in a Crisis. *Journal of Law Society and Development* 11: 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.25159/2520-9515/14224>
- Morawczynski, Olga 2024. Leadership Burnout: The Hidden Crisis for School Heads. *Heal3*. <https://www.heal-3.com/blog/leadership-burnout-the-silent-crisis-in-school-heads>
- Moyo, Zvisinei, and Thavamoni Naidoo. 2025. Female School Leaders Navigating Leadership During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Quintile 2 Ranking Schools in Gauteng, South Africa. *Progressio* 45: 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.25159/2663-5895/16372>
- Nesrine, Touatit and Arrar Anes. 2022. The Role of Women's Leadership In Higher Education Institutions: Challenges of Marginalization And Empowerment Strategies. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice* 30: 161-167. <https://kuey.net/index.php/kuey/article/download/8003/6000/15532>

- Newcastle University. 2023. Contingency Theory. *Theory Hub*. <https://open.ncl.ac.uk/academic-theories/4/contingency-theory/>
- Nkosia, Ntombikayise. 2024. Breaking Barriers and Building Bridges: Unveiling the Enablers of Women School Leaders to Overcome Gender Inequality in KwaZuluNatal, South Africa. *Research in Educational Policy and Management* 6: 436-453. <https://repamjournal.org/index.php/REPAM/article/download/267/119/>
- Norander, Stephanie and Leslie Zenk. 2023. Invisible Labor for Emerging Women Leaders: A Critical Analysis of Literature in Higher Education. *Advancing Women in Leadership Journal* 42: 13-22. <https://awl-ojs-tamu.tdl.org/awl/article/view/410>
- Novotney, Ammy. 2024. Women leaders make work better. Here's the science behind how to promote them. *American Psychological Association*. <https://www.apa.org/topics/women-girls/female-leaders-make-work-better>
- OECD. 2021. Policies and Practices to Promote Women in Leadership Roles in the Private Sector. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2020/12/policies-and-practices-to-promote-women-in-leadership-roles-in-the-private-sector_27543052/60bb6113-en.pdf
- Orb, Angelica, Laurel Eisenhauer, and Dianne Wynaden. 2024. Ethics in qualitative research. *Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 33: 93-96. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1547-5069.2001.00093.x>
- Pedroso, John Erwin Prado, Nurdy D. Siason, and Amabel Tangco- Siason. 2021. Principal's Leadership Practices during the COVID 19 Pandemic: An Exploratory Study. *International Journal of Arts and Humanities Studies*: 1-12. http://researchgate.net/publication/356473118_Principal%27s_Leadership_Practices_during_the_COVID_19_Pandemic_An_Exploratory_Study
- Rivas, Elisa and Elreen Delavin. 2023. Women Leaders and the Pandemic: Metaphors of Their Leadership styles. *Psychology and Education: A Multidisciplinary* 8: <https://ejournals.ph/article.php?id=20709>
- Sáez, Andrea Carrasco and Ignacia Palma Salinas. 2024. Leading from care: the experiences of Chilean female school principals during the pandemic. *Revista de Investigación Educativa* 42: 79-94. <https://doi.org/10.6018/rie.547331>
- SageEdge. 2025. Leadership Northhouse Theory and Practice Eight Edition. <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/newto8e>
- Sahlin, Susanne, Monica Sjöstrand, Maria Styf, and Sandra Lund. 2023. Novice principals coping strategies during the Covid-19 pandemic in Sweden. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*: 1-18. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/17411432231208789>
- Seidman, Seidman. 2006. Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences. 3rd edition. *Teachers College Press*. <https://www.tcpress.com/interviewing-as-qualitative-research-9780807746660>
- Smith, Larry, and Dan Riley. 2012. School leadership in times of crisis. *School Leadership & Management* 32: 57-71. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2011.614941>
- Sukirman, Dian Hidayati. 2021. Leadership of women school principals to improve school quality in the COVID-19 pandemic. *Educational Administration Research and Review* 5: 38-46. <https://ejournal.upi.edu/index.php/EARR/article/view/35884>
- Superville, Denisa R.. 2022. New Survey: How the Pandemic Has Made School Leadership More Stressful. *EducationWeek*. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/new-survey-how-the-pandemic-has-made-school-leadership-more-stressful/2022/01>
- Thomas, David R. 2006. A General Inductive Approach for Analyzing Qualitative Evaluation Data. *American Journal of Evaluation* 27: 237-246. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1098214005283748>
- UNESCO. 2025. Education: UNESCO Report calls for more women at the top. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/education-unesco-report-calls-more-women-top#:~:text=about%204%20months.,Women%20principals%20promote%20a%20collaborative%20culture,as%20a%20percentage%20of%20GDP>
- Urbaniak, Jessica A. 2023. A Phenomenological Study of Women Principals Who Resigned During the Pandemic. *University of Denver*. <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3317&context=etd>
- Williams, Ruth, and Juliet Perumal. 2021. Educational Leadership under Lockdown: Gendered Perspectives from South African School Principals. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540253.2020.1863206>