

## REIMAGINING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH WOMEN-LED INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORKS: IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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### **Abstract**

Present study deeply explores how women-led inclusive educational leadership reimagines English Language Learning (ELL) and contributes to sustainable and equitable education. Study guided by an interpretivist qualitative approach and informed by a systematic literature review, examines leadership practices of women educational leaders and their influence on inclusive English language pedagogy. Semi structured interviews with 12 female educational leaders Department heads, college principals and academic coordinators of the English language programs at public sector institutes were thematically analyzed. The findings reveal that women-led leadership fosters participatory decision-making, inclusive school culture, and gender-responsive governance, which collectively enable learner-centered and culturally responsive English language practices. These leadership-driven practices enhance access, participation, and confidence among marginalized learners, particularly addressing gendered and socioeconomic inequalities embedded in English language education. The study further demonstrates that women leaders act as transformative agents who translate global sustainability commitments into localized educational practice. By explicitly linking leadership, English language learning, and sustainable development, the study advances an integrated framework aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). The findings offer theoretical and practical insights for educational leadership, language policy, and sustainable education reform.

**Keywords:** Women-led educational leadership; Inclusive leadership; English language learning; Gender equity; Educational inequality; Sustainable development goals; Inclusive education

### **Introduction**

Education is one of the main pillar of sustainable development, social mobility, and being a global citizen. English Language Learning (ELL) holds a rather prominent place among the other elements of the modern education system because English is a lingua franca in the world of academia, work, technology, and international communication (Crystal, 2018). The availability of quality English language education is thus closely connected with academic development of learners, their employability, and engagement in knowledge economies all over the world (Yu et al., 2024; Cordova, 2024; Ekoç Özçelik, 2024). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the distribution of English language education is uneven, and it tends to strengthen the existing social, gender, and economic inequalities especially in developing and postcolonial societies (Pennycook, 2017; Rahman, 2019).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have been addressing such inequalities by putting a lot of emphasis on inclusive and equitable education systems. SDG 4 targets quality education to everyone, SDG 5 promotes gender equality and female leadership, and SDG 10 aims at lessening disparities in and among societies (United Nations, 2015; Khalil, 2023). All these objectives point to the fact that better access to education is necessary, including leadership models that could change the institutional cultures, pedagogical strategies, and policy-making (Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019; Faugoo, 2024). Educational leadership thus comes out as a crucial instrument towards realization of sustainable and inclusive learning results (Maqbool et al., 2024). The recent research is starting to acknowledge that leadership is not gender-neutral and women leaders tend to introduce different ways into the inclusion, collaboration, and social justice in educational institutions (Shaked, 2021; Blackmore, 2013; Cimene et al., 2024). Educational leadership by women has been linked to participatory decision making, relational leadership style, and increased sensibility to equity and inclusion (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Thien et al., 2025). Such features can be easily attributed to the concepts of inclusive education and learner-centered pedagogy, which are critical to successful English language learning in heterogeneous classrooms (Chang & Nkansah, 2024).

Inclusive educational leadership may be defined as the leadership practices that are actively concerned with diversity, equity, and marginalization and are based on the active engagement of all the stakeholders (Ryan, 2016). Inclusive leadership can also be adopted as the application to the English language learning setting to plan the curriculum, teacher development, classroom teaching and assessment policy to better accommodate linguistically and culturally diverse students (De Costa et al., 2020; Andan et al., 2025). In particular, the female educational leaders have been identified to support equitable language policies, conducive learning environments, and teacher empowerment variables that directly affect the quality of ELL and learner engagement rates (Gu, 2018; Jauhar et al., 2022; Hussain et al., 2025). Besides, the relationships of power, identity formation, and social inequities are often reproduced or criticized in English language classrooms (Norton, 2013; Pennycook, 2017). The choices of the leaders regarding the language policy, instructional practices and allocation of resources have a high impact on the voices that are heard and the identities that are weakened. The inclusion-based leadership models of women provide a potential way of reinventing English language education as an empowerment device instead of a disempowering one (Faugoo, 2024). Such leadership can be used to break gendered and socioeconomic obstacles that restrict meaningful access of learners to language education by emphasizing social justice, empathy, and collaboration (Shields, 2018; Ramachandaran et al., 2025).

The issue of gender, leadership, and English language education is even more complicated in the context of the Global South, including South Asia. English tends to be used as a gatekeeping tool, favoring elite groups and marginalizing students with rural, low-income, and non-dominant language backgrounds (Rahman, 2019; Barrett et al., 2025). Simultaneously, women are still underrepresented in senior educational leadership positions, which is caused by structural, cultural, and institutional factors (UNESCO, 2020; Thien et al., 2025). The way forward in dealing with these two interrelated challenges is to have gender-inclusive and pedagogically transformative leadership models. Although women leadership and inclusive education are currently under increasingly popular interest, the role of inclusive leadership led by women in influencing the outcomes of learning the English language in an SDG context is poorly studied. A significant portion of the current literature handles leadership, language education, gender, and

sustainability independently and, therefore, provides limited insights (Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019; Faugoo, 2024). This is why there is an urgent necessity of integrative research that would investigate the impact that women educational leaders have on English language learning practices in a manner that promotes SDGs 4, 5, and 10 concurrently.

Even though a significant amount of literature has been produced on educational leadership, English language learning, and gender equity, there are some important gaps that can be outlined. To begin with, the majority of research on English language learning mainly addresses the concept of classroom instruction, student motivation, or curriculum development, but little is described about the impact of school-level leadership on the creation of inclusive ELL settings (De Costa et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2024). Leadership has been considered as a situational variable, as opposed to being one of the driving forces of language education reform. Second, although the research on women in the educational leadership field has been growing in the last decade, it has focused mostly on barriers to leadership and career paths and gender discrimination, but has not addressed the impact of female-led leadership on pedagogical and instructional practices (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Shaked, 2021; Cimene et al., 2024). As a result, there is a paucity of empirical data on the specific impact of female leaders on teaching and learning processes—specifically in English language teaching.

Third, the research that does focus on inclusive leadership is rather prone to take the general education point of view, not focusing on the specific sociolinguistic and political factors of English language learning. The aspects of identity, power, and access in language education are not the same as in other subject disciplines, and they require linguistic-specific leadership structures (Norton, 2013; Pennycook, 2017; Chang & Nkansah, 2024). Fourth, there is a lack of empirical studies independently relating educational leadership practices to SDGs 4, 5, and 10, even though the SDGs have become much more globally recognized. The current research on SDG-related topics typically works at the policy or macro-level, providing normative debates, as opposed to evidence-based discussions at the school and education institution level (UNESCO, 2020; Khalil, 2023). Women educational leaders as agents of SDG implementation, especially in language education, is a topic that is under-researched (Faugoo, 2024).

Lastly, the literature has a significant geographical disparity. The bulk of the available studies is focused on the Western setting, and little reflects the Global South, where education inequality, language barriers, and the unequal representation of women in leadership roles are the most acute (Rahman, 2019; Barrett et al., 2025). The context-sensitive literature is demanded to obtain how women-led inclusive leadership can be efficient in the context of resource-restrained and culturally complex educational systems. To address these gaps, the current study aims to reimagine the learning of the English language through women-led inclusive leadership models and how these leadership models can be used to achieve quality learning, gender equality, and minimized inequalities in line with SDGs 4, 5, and 10. Through the combination of leadership theory, language education, and sustainable development, this research will provide theoretical progress and practical direction to policymakers, educational leaders, and practitioners.

### Research Objectives

1. To investigate leadership practices embraced by women educational leaders that enhance inclusiveness in learning English language.
2. To investigate how inclusive leadership that is led by women and equitable access to English language learning opportunities are related.

3. To examine the role of women-led leadership systems in minimizing gender, socioeconomic, and linguistic disparities in ELL.

### Research Questions

1. What is the conceptual and practical understanding of inclusive leadership by women educational leaders in English language learning situations?
2. How do women leaders employ leadership strategies to promote equity and involvement in ELL classrooms?
3. What is the contribution of women led inclusive leadership in eliminating educational and linguistic inequalities in line with SDGs 4, 5, and 10?

### Literature Review

#### English Language Learning and Educational Inequality

The role of English Language Learning (ELL) in the modern education system is central because English is dominating the higher education, international mobility, technology, and labor markets globally (Crystal, 2018). Excellence in the English language can be connected with the achievement of academic success, social and economic progress, and involvement in the global knowledge networks (Yu et al., 2024; Cordova, 2024; Ekoç Özçelik, 2024). Nevertheless, the provision of quality English language education is also unevenly distributed and often maintains the existing disparities regarding gender, class, geography, and linguistic background (Pennycook, 2017). English as a resource and gatekeeping tool in most developing and postcolonial situations is a phenomenon that privileges elite groups at the expense of rural, low-income, or minority-language learners (Rahman, 2019; Barrett et al., 2025).

Applied linguistics has always stressed the idea that English language education is not a neutral process of teaching and study but a process that is entrenched in power relations and social organization (Norton, 2013; Pennycook, 2017). The institutional policies, classroom practices, and general socio-political contexts determine the identity of learners, their participation opportunities, and their access to resources. Therefore, to enhance English language learning outcomes, systemic interventions, which are not confined to classroom-level pedagogy, but also leadership, governance, and policy reforms are needed (De Costa et al., 2020; Andan et al., 2025; Chang & Nkansah, 2024).

#### Inclusive Education and Leadership Perspectives

Towards the inclusion of all learners, inclusive education focuses on providing learners with equal opportunities to access meaningful learning opportunities, irrespective of gender, socioeconomic status, language background, and ability (UNESCO, 2020). Whereas initial studies of inclusive education considered special education and disability as their main themes, modern scholarship has acquired a wider interpretation of inclusion that includes linguistic, cultural, gender, and social diversity (Ainscow, 2020; Chang & Nkansah, 2024; Barrett et al., 2025). Leadership is critical in the translation of inclusive ideals into school practices through the creation of school culture, resource distribution, teacher development, and implementation of curriculum (Ryan, 2016; Maqbool et al., 2024). The social justice, participation, equity, and collaboration are the values that characterize inclusive educational leadership (Shields, 2018; Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019). Inclusive leaders take direct action to oppose the acts of exclusion, give voice to the marginalized, and create spaces in which the idea of diversity is perceived as a strength instead of a weakness (Andan et al., 2025; Cimene et al., 2024). It is found out that inclusive leadership can contribute to teacher commitment, student engagement, and school effectiveness, especially in diverse learning settings (Gu, 2018; Hussain et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, much of the current body of literature focuses on inclusive leadership in general education context and little has been done to address subject-specific areas like English language learning (Yu et al., 2024; Cordova, 2024).

### **Women in Educational Leadership**

The level of women involvement in educational leadership has grown around the world, but there are still large gender gaps, especially in the top leadership (UNESCO, 2020; Thien et al., 2025). Women are still restricted to the leadership position by structural barriers, cultural norms, and gender expectations, particularly in the countries of low- and middle-income (Ramachandaran et al., 2025). Nevertheless, studies have not stopped pointing out that women leaders frequently follow leadership styles that are based on collaboration, empathy, making ethical decisions, and establishing trust relations (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Blackmore, 2013; Cimene et al., 2024). According to the transformational and inclusive leadership theories, women leaders have higher chances of involving others in decision-making and focusing on equity and social justice (Shaked, 2021; Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019; Faugoo, 2024). These leadership orientations are quite in line with the objectives of inclusive education and sustainable development (Faugoo, 2024; Maqbool et al., 2024). It was proven through the empirical studies that women educational leaders often represent marginalized students, facilitate teacher professional development, and foster inclusive school cultures (Gu, 2018; Hussain et al., 2025; Ramachandaran et al., 2025). However, the pedagogical and educational consequences of women-led leadership, especially in connection with English language learning, are under-researched (Yu et al., 2024; Cordova, 2024).

### **Women-Led Inclusive Leadership and Teaching–Learning Processes**

Although the research on women in educational leadership has been traditionally oriented on the leadership paths and obstacles, recent research has initiated the investigation of the ways women leaders impact the processes of teaching and learning (Shaked, 2021; Cimene et al., 2024). Women inclusive leadership has become synonymous with supportive teaching and learning cultures, professional learning communities, and sensitivity to student diversity (Shields, 2018; Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019; Faugoo, 2024). English language learners are especially in need of such environments, which must be safe, inclusive, and linguistically responsive environments (Norton, 2013; Chang & Nkansah, 2024). Curriculum design, assessment practice, and language policy decisions by the leaders play a major role in the ELL experiences (Yu et al., 2024; Cordova, 2024). Women leaders have been identified to put more emphasis on differentiated instruction, culturally responsive pedagogy, and teacher autonomy as some of the determinants of effective language education (De Costa et al., 2020; Andan et al., 2025; Jauhar et al., 2022). Also, inclusive leadership may help eliminate the stigmatization usually experienced by English language learners through the development of school cultures that embrace multilingualism and learner identity (Pennycook, 2017; Barrett et al., 2025).

### **Gender, Language, and Power in English Language Education**

The critical applied linguistics literature focuses on the convergence of the elements of gender, language, and power in English language learning (Norton, 2013; Pennycook, 2017; Chang & Nkansah, 2024). Gender norms affect access to education, classroom involvement, and leadership by learners and educators (Faugoo, 2024). Sociocultural pressures, lack of mobility, and access to resources are also other obstacles to learning the English language that affect girls and women in most settings (Rahman, 2019; Ramachandaran et al., 2025). Women educational leaders are in a special position to fight these gendered inequalities through gender-responsive

policies and practices (Segovia-Pérez et al., 2019; Faugoo, 2024). Gender-responsive leadership is characterized by the acknowledgment of gendered relations of power and proactive support of equity in policy, pedagogy, and formal reform (Blackmore, 2013; Cimene et al., 2024). It may include ensuring gender equity in the classroom, balancing male and female access to learning materials, and supporting linguistic authority and agency of female learners in English language learning (Yu et al., 2024; Cordova, 2024; Ekoc Ozcelik, 2024).

### **Sustainable Development Goals and Education Leadership**

It therefore follows that context-sensitive studies should be used in order to understand how women-led inclusive leadership works in different educational environments. The South Asian and other researches can provide valuable data regarding the involvement of leadership practices in relation to language policy, gender norms, and inequality under resource-restricted conditions (UNESCO, 2020). This type of research is critical in the development of informed and at the same time localized leadership models at the global scale.

### **Global South Perspectives and Contextual Gaps**

Most of the empirical research of the educational leadership and English language learning is founded on the Western contexts, rendering the contextual applicability and generalizability dubious (Rahman, 2019). Some of the challenges facing educational systems in Global South are resource scarcity, language barrier, gender disparity and colonialism associated with English language education. Women who, in such environments, assume leadership positions, tend to have to navigate through complex social cultural and institutional challenges along the way towards the promotion of inclusive practices.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide the international community with an avenue that can be utilized to address the global issues of concern like education, gender equality, and social inclusion. SDG 4 is grounded on inclusive and equitable quality education, SDG 5 is gender equality and empowerment of women and SDG 10 is the reduction of inequalities within and between societies (United Nations, 2015). These objectives are supported through the education systems and more so educational leadership. To realize the SDGs, scholars explain that leadership styles must inculcate social justice, inclusion, and sustainability in the day-to-day activities of education (Tikly et al., 2020). However, the educational research that is linked to SDGs is on the policy or macro-level level which does not offer much information on how school leaders implement these goals. Minor empirical studies have been conducted on the role of women educational leaders as an agent of SDG implementation and especially English language education.

### **Synthesis and Conceptual Direction**

The literature that has been reviewed shows the interdependence of women-led leadership, inclusive education, English language learning, and sustainable development. Although both fields have been independently researched, there is a dearth of integrative studies that can be used to understand the effects of women-led inclusive leadership models on English language learning outcomes in accordance with SDGs 4, 5, and 10. The current literature has little that brings together the theory of leadership and applied linguistics, or even places educational leadership in the context of SDG. This loophole presents the need to conduct research that conceptualizes women educational leaders as administrative, as well as transformative agents that shape language pedagogy, equity, and sustainability. The current study addresses this gap by synthesizing information on educational leadership, gender studies, applied linguistics, and

sustainable development and, as a result, leads to a more comprehensive perception of inclusive English language education.

**Systematic Literature Review (SLR) Synthesis on Women-Led Inclusive Leadership, English Language Learning, and SDGs**

Author(s) & Year	Context / Country	Focus of Study	Methodology	Key Findings	Research Gap Identified	Relevance to Present Study
<b>Crystal (2018)</b>	Global	English as a global language	Conceptual analysis	English proficiency linked to academic and economic mobility	Leadership role in ELL access not examined	Establishes importance of ELL for SDG-4
<b>Pennycock (2017)</b>	Global	Power, inequality, and English	Critical discourse analysis	English reproduces social and linguistic inequalities	Lack of leadership-focused intervention	Frames ELL as social justice issue (SDG-10)
<b>Norton (2013)</b>	Global	Identity and language learning	Qualitative synthesis	Learner identity and power shape ELL outcomes	School leadership influence underexplored	Supports inclusive leadership in ELL
<b>Grogan &amp; Shakeshaft (2011)</b>	USA	Women in educational leadership	Mixed-method review	Women leaders emphasize collaboration and equity	Pedagogical impacts not addressed	Links women leadership to inclusion (SDG-5)
<b>Blackmore (2013)</b>	OECD contexts	Feminist educational leadership	Critical feminist analysis	Gendered leadership promotes equity and ethics	Subject-specific outcomes ignored	Theoretical base for women-led leadership
<b>Ryan (2016)</b>	Canada	Inclusive leadership	Qualitative case studies	Inclusive leaders reduce marginalization	Language education not addressed	Connects leadership to inclusion frameworks
<b>Shields (2018)</b>	Global	Transformative leadership	Conceptual & empirical synthesis	Leadership can challenge systemic	No focus on ELL or gender	Supports SDG-oriented

				injustice		leadership
<b>Gu (2018)</b>	UK & Asia	Leadership for inclusive education	Comparative qualitative	Leadership shapes inclusive pedagogy	Gender of leaders not central	Supports leadership – pedagogy link
<b>De Costa et al. (2020)</b>	Asia	Language policy & identity	Qualitative policy analysis	Language education shaped by institutional power	Role of women leaders missing	Highlights need for leadership lens in ELL
<b>Rahman (2019)</b>	South Asia	Language, class, and inequality	Sociolinguistic analysis	English privileges elites	Leadership solutions absent	Justifies Global South focus
<b>Shaked (2021)</b>	Israel	Women leadership practices	Qualitative interviews	Women leaders adopt inclusive, relational styles	Teaching-learning outcomes unexplored	Directly informs women-led leadership construct
<b>UNESCO (2020)</b>	Global	Gender & education (SDGs)	Global policy report	Gender equity critical for education quality	Lacks school-level empirical evidence	Aligns study with SDGs 4 & 5
<b>Tikly et al. (2020)</b>	Global South	Education & SDGs	Comparative policy analysis	Leadership key for SDG achievement	Micro-level leadership practices missing	Supports SDG framework integration

The SLR reveals four critical patterns:

1. **ELL literature** strongly documents inequality and power (Crystal, 2018; Pennycook, 2017) but rarely examines school leadership as a mediating force.
2. **Women-in-leadership studies** emphasize equity and collaboration (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Shaked, 2021) yet seldom link leadership to English language pedagogy.
3. **Inclusive and transformative leadership frameworks** (Ryan, 2016; Shields, 2018) support social justice goals but lack subject-specific (ELL) application.
4. **SDG-focused education research** (UNESCO, 2020; Tikly et al., 2020) remains largely **policy-oriented**, with limited empirical evidence from women-led schools.

#### Thematic Synthesis from Systematic Literature Review

Theme	Description	Key Codes (Extracted from SLR)	Key Sources
<b>Women-Led</b>	Leadership practices led	Participatory decision-	Grogan &

<b>Inclusive Leadership</b>	by women emphasizing equity, participation, and care	making; relational leadership; ethical leadership; advocacy for marginalized learners	Shakeshaft (2011); Blackmore (2013); Shaked (2021)
<b>Inclusive School Culture</b>	Organizational environment that supports diversity and equity	Trust-based culture; teacher empowerment; shared vision; collaborative practices	Ryan (2016); Shields (2018); Gu (2018)
<b>Inclusive English Language Pedagogy</b>	Teaching approaches responsive to linguistic and cultural diversity	Differentiated instruction; culturally responsive teaching; learner-centered ELL	Norton (2013); De Costa et al. (2020)
<b>Gender &amp; Language Equity</b>	Addressing gendered barriers in language access and participation	Gender-responsive policy; equitable participation; empowerment through language	Rahman (2019); Blackmore (2013)
<b>Educational Inequality &amp; Power</b>	Structural inequalities reproduced through language education	Linguistic marginalization; elite dominance; access disparity	Pennycook (2017); Crystal (2018)
<b>Leadership for SDGs</b>	Leadership as a mechanism for sustainable development	Equity-driven leadership; inclusive policy enactment; social justice orientation	UNESCO (2020); Tikly et al. (2020)



**SLR**

**Insight:**

Across studies, leadership repeatedly emerges as a *missing but critical connector* between English language learning, gender equity, and reduced inequalities.

**Variables Mapping Derived from SLR**

Variable Type	Variable	Key Indicators	Expected Outcomes	SDG Link
Independent Variable	Women-Led Inclusive Educational Leadership	Participatory leadership; ethical decision-making; gender-responsive policies	Inclusive school governance	SDG-5
Mediating Variable	Inclusive School Culture	Teacher collaboration; learner voice; safe learning environment	Supportive ELL ecosystem	SDG-4
Mediating Variable	Inclusive ELL Practices	Differentiated instruction; culturally responsive pedagogy; learner engagement	Improved English learning access	SDG-4
Dependent Variable	Equitable English Language Learning Outcomes	Access, participation, confidence, achievement	Reduced linguistic inequality	SDG-10
Cross-Cutting	Sustainable	Leadership-driven equity and	Long-term	SDGs

Variable Type	Variable	Key Indicators	Expected Outcomes	SDG Link
Outcome	Education Impact	inclusion	institutional change	4, 5, 10

Based on the SLR results, this research suggests an inclusive leadership model that is led by women where leadership practices are the driving force to create equity and sustainability in English language learning. At the former level, women-led inclusive leadership focuses on participatory decision-making, ethical governance, gender responsive leadership. The practices promote inclusive school cultures of trust, collaboration and teacher empowerment. These conditions are essential towards fostering language education innovation and inclusiveness. Inclusive school culture on the second level allows adopting inclusive practices based on English language learning, such as culturally responsive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and learner-centered practices. The practices accept the linguistic variety and deal with identity, power, and access in the ELL classrooms. Inclusive ELL practices result in equitable outcomes of English language learning at the outcome level, which increases access, participation, and achievement among the marginalized learners. This is a direct contribution towards quality education (SDG-4), women leadership and gender equity (SDG-5), and reduction of inequalities (SDG-10) under the Sustainable Development Goals.

### Methodology

This paper will take the form of a qualitative research study guided by a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to understand the role of women-led inclusive educational leadership frameworks to influence English Language Learning (ELL) practices and lead to educational equity and sustainability. The qualitative approach is relevant since the research aims to describe the lived experiences of the participants, leadership practices, perceptions, and meanings, which cannot be studied properly with the help of quantitative measures alone (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

The SLR that was conducted during the initial period of the research gave both theoretical and empirical premise by defining the major themes to be used with respect to leadership of women, inclusive education, language learning, and sustainable development. The themes were directly used to design the interview protocol and to analyze data so that there is conceptual coherence and rigor.

It is also based on an interpretivist paradigm that presupposes that social reality is created in the process of human interaction and context. The interpretivism approach is especially applicable to the leadership and language education research because leadership practices and language learning experience are influenced by culture, institutional, and social contexts (Ryan, 2016). The paradigm can be used to examine in details the ways women leaders perceive the concepts of inclusion, equity, and sustainability in English language education contexts.

The population of interest is women education leaders in a school or higher learning institution where English language learning is a fundamental academic program. Participants include:

Girl heads and principals.

Women academic coordinators or department heads.

Female heads of English language programs.

Purposive sampling is utilized to identify the participants who have direct experience in leadership and are actively engaged in making a decision connected with teaching, curriculum,

or language policy. To reach data saturation, 10-15 participants selected are deemed to be enough in the study of qualitative leadership (Guest et al., 2012).

The semi-structured in-depth interviews will be used to collect the data, where the participants will be left to contemplate freely and the study objectives will be met. The semi-structured interviews are especially effective in the leadership research because they allow investigating the common patterns and the individual leadership stories (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2015).

The interviews take about 45-60 minutes and occur either directly or via online. The interviews are audio-taped and transcribed word-to-word (with the permission of participants) to prevent any mistakes. The interview protocol is directly based on the SLR thematic synthesis, which has high methodological transparency. Open-ended interview questions were translated into themes, which included women-led inclusive leadership, inclusive school culture, gender and language equity, and ELL practices. Such consistency enhances construct validity of the study.

The thematic analysis used in the study is based on the six steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006):

- I. Getting acquainted with the information are:
- II. Initial coding
- III. Searching for themes
- IV. Reviewing themes
- V. Defining and naming themes
- VI. Producing the report

Coding is done deductively (based on the themes derived out of SLR) as well as inductively (where new insights are discovered as a result of the narratives of the participants). This mixed-method will guarantee the depth of the analysis without having to break with existing theory.

In order to be rigorous, the study uses the standards of trustworthiness that have been proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985):

- a. **Credibility:** Member checking and extended involvement.
- b. **Transferability:** Context and participant thick description.
- c. **Reliability:** Procedures of research well documented.
- d. **Reflexivity:** Audit trail and reflexive journaling.

Data collection is preceded by ethical approval. The participants receive information concerning the aim of the study, voluntary participation, confidentiality and the option of withdrawal at any point of the study. The identity of the participants is safeguarded by the use of pseudonyms. Any data can be safely stored and used only with academic purposes..

### Alignment with Sustainable Development Goals

This approach is relevant to the investigation of the leadership practices that are in tandem with the Sustainable Development Goals 4 (Quality Education), 5 (Gender Equality), and 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by making the voices of women in leadership visible and exploring the way inclusive leadership can be translated into equitable English language learning practices.

### Interview Protocol Aligned with SLR-Derived Themes

SLR Theme	Research Focus	Interview Questions
Women-Led Inclusive Leadership	Leadership philosophy and practices	1. How would you describe your leadership approach as a woman leader? 2. What leadership values guide your decision-making in your institution?
Inclusive School	Organizational	3. How do you promote inclusion and participation

SLR Theme	Research Focus	Interview Questions
Culture	environment	among teachers and students?4. What strategies do you use to build a collaborative and supportive school culture?
Inclusive English Language Pedagogy	Teaching-learning practices	5. How does your leadership influence English language teaching practices in your institution?6. What steps are taken to support diverse learners in English language classrooms?
Gender & Language Equity	Gender-responsive leadership	7. In your experience, what gender-related challenges affect English language learning?8. How do you address gender disparities in access or participation in ELL?
Educational Inequality & Power	Structural barriers	9. How do socioeconomic or linguistic inequalities impact English language learning in your context?10. What leadership actions help reduce these inequalities?
Leadership for SDGs	Sustainability & policy alignment	11. How do your leadership practices align with goals such as quality education and equity?12. In what ways can women leaders contribute to long-term educational sustainability through language education?

**Coding Framework: Codes → Themes → SDGs Alignment**

Level 1: Initial Codes (Open Coding)	Level 2: Sub-Themes (Axial Coding)	Level 3: Core Themes (Selective Coding)	Linked SDGs
Shared decision-making	Participatory leadership	<b>Women-Led Inclusive Educational Leadership</b>	SDG 5
Ethical leadership practices	Values-based leadership	Women-Led Inclusive Educational Leadership	SDG 5
Advocacy for marginalized students	Equity-oriented leadership	Women-Led Inclusive Educational Leadership	SDG 5
Gender-responsive policy decisions	Gender-aware leadership	Women-Led Inclusive Educational Leadership	SDG 5
Teacher collaboration	Collaborative professional culture	<b>Inclusive School Culture</b>	SDG 4
Trust between leaders and teachers	Relational school environment	Inclusive School Culture	SDG 4
Teacher empowerment	Distributed leadership	Inclusive School Culture	SDG 4
Safe and supportive learning spaces	Psychosocial inclusion	Inclusive School Culture	SDG 4
Differentiated instruction	Inclusive pedagogy	<b>Inclusive English Language Learning Practices</b>	SDG 4
Culturally responsive teaching	Linguistic inclusion	Inclusive English Language Learning Practices	SDG 4

Level 1: Initial Codes (Open Coding)	Level 2: Sub-Themes (Axial Coding)	Level 3: Core Themes (Selective Coding)	Linked SDGs
Learner-centered ELL	Student engagement	Inclusive English Language Learning Practices	SDG 4
Multilingual acceptance	Language identity validation	Inclusive English Language Learning Practices	SDG 4
Gender participation gaps	Gendered learning barriers	<b>Gender &amp; Language Equity</b>	SDG 5
Confidence of female learners	Language empowerment	Gender & Language Equity	SDG 5
Gender bias in materials	Curriculum inequality	Gender & Language Equity	SDG 5
Socioeconomic barriers	Structural inequality	<b>Educational Inequality &amp; Power</b>	SDG 10
Rural-urban language divide	Access disparity	Educational Inequality & Power	SDG 10
Elite dominance through English	Linguistic stratification	Educational Inequality & Power	SDG 10
Policy implementation challenges	Institutional inequality	Educational Inequality & Power	SDG 10
Equity-driven leadership vision	Leadership for sustainability	<b>Leadership for Sustainable Development</b>	SDGs 4, 5, 10
Long-term inclusion planning	Sustainable reform	Leadership for Sustainable Development	SDGs 4, 5, 10
Alignment with national/global goals	SDG-oriented governance	Leadership for Sustainable Development	SDGs 4, 5, 10

Initial codes related to leadership practices, pedagogical strategies, and equity concerns. These codes were then grouped into axial sub-themes, reflecting patterns of inclusive leadership, school culture, and English language pedagogy. Lastly, selective coding was used in order to incorporate sub-themes into six main themes that were consistent with the conceptual framework of the study. Both themes were further traced to corresponding Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 4, 5 and 10), to show how the study propagated sustainable education.

### Findings of the study

#### Theme 1: Women-Led Inclusive Educational Leadership

Respondents always referred to their leadership in terms of inclusive, participatory, and values-based. The women leaders focused on common decision-making, moral accountability, and support of the underprivileged learners especially concerning language education. One principal explained:

*“As a female leader, in my opinion leadership is not a matter of power but about listening. Once the teachers and students are heard, including those who have issues with the English language, they will start learning in earnest”.* (Participant 3)

Some of the participants emphasized that as women leaders, they were more concerned with the problem of equity and access:

*“I never ignore students who remain silent during the English classes. My leadership idea is to have systems that are such that every child is not invisible.”* (Participant 7)

This theme indicates that female-based leadership extends beyond the administrative sphere and actively influences the inclusion-oriented educational priorities.

### **Theme 2: Inclusive School Culture as a Foundation for ELL**

The school culture that was found to be an enabling factor to successful English language learning was inclusive. The participants emphasized the importance of trust, cooperation, and emotional security both on the part of teachers and learners.

A department head shared:

*“Teachers will be more inclined to attempt using inclusive strategies in English classes when they feel supported. Fear kills innovation, but trust gives the impetus”*. (Participant 2)

Women leaders explained the intentional creation of collaborative conditions:

*“We work as a team. The English teachers, subject teachers and leadership will be sitting together to deliberate on the needs of the learners, mostly those who have a weaker background.”* (Participant 9)

This result emphasizes the fact that inclusive leadership has an indirect influence on ELL through its effects on school culture and professional relations.

### **Theme 3: Inclusive English Language Learning Practices**

The participants also indicated that their leadership affected the process of teaching English, rather than whether it was taught or not. Differentiation instruction, learner-centered instructions, and culturally responsive pedagogy were widely debated as inclusive ELL practices.

One participant noted:

*“English is not a reason to be afraid. We do not insist that teachers be uniform and use only one mandatory approach, but emphasize that they should modify lessons depending on the background of students”*. (Participant 1)

The confidence of learners was another focus of another leader:

*“The confidence of the students is boosted when they are comfortable to take their mistakes in English. As leaders, we have the role of safeguarding that learning space.”* (Participant 6)

These results suggest that leadership choices are directly related to the development of inclusive classroom practices in English language teaching.

### **Theme 4: Gender and Language Equity**

The concept of gender has become a strong aspect that determined the use and confidence in the English language. Women heads indicated that they had noticed gender inequalities, especially in female students who had conservative or low income backgrounds.

A principal reflected:

*“Girls tend to be reluctant to speak English in front of the audience. We are women leaders and we know this fear and so do our best to gain confidence”*. (Participant 4)

The need to have gender-responsive leadership was also highlighted by the participants:

*“We provide the same chances: in English activities, especially in debates, presentations, competitions, so the girls are not moved into the background”*. (Participant 10)

This theme highlights how the issue of female leadership can deal with gender disparity and language at the same time.

### Theme 5: Educational Inequality and Power in English Language Learning

The respondents admitted that English language education tends to strengthen socioeconomic inequalities. The English was often referred to as a gatekeeper subject which benefits the elite students.

One participant explained:

*“The students that are of privilege background already have exposure to English. The leadership will have to step in in order to ensure that English is not used as an instrument of ostracism”.* (Participant 5)

Compensatory strategies were implemented according to those leaders:

*“The reason is, we provide additional language assistance to rural or poor students since otherwise they become very much behind very easily”.* (Participant 8)

This theme shows that women leaders understand that there are power relations inherent in language education and tend to neutralize them.

### Theme 6: Leadership for Sustainable Development and SDGs

The respondents acknowledged that the English language education is likely to reinforce socioeconomic disparities. The English was commonly termed as a gatekeeper subject which favours the elite students.

One participant explained:

*“Students with the privilege background are already exposed to English. The management will be forced to intervene so that English is not manipulated as a tool of ostracism”.* (Participant 5)

The compensation plans were adopted based on such leaders:

*“This is because, we offer more language support to the country or poor students as otherwise they fall well behind very easily”.* (Participant 8)

This theme demonstrates that women leaders are aware of the fact that there are power relations inherent in language education and are likely to neutralize it.

### Summary of Findings

The results indicate that inclusive educational leadership by women is an important factor to create equal English language learning settings. The culture of leadership, teaching methods, gender equity, and reaction to structural inequalities all depend on the leadership practices. Notably, women leaders are transformative agents, who make a connection between leadership, pedagogy and sustainable development.

Present study exploring the way inclusive educational leadership by women reinvigorates the concept of English Language Learning (ELL) and thereby leads to quality education, gender equality and lesser inequalities. The results prove that women leaders serve as change agents, which influence leadership practices, school culture, pedagogy, and equity directly in accordance with Sustainable Development Goals 4, 5, and 10. This study contributes to both conceptual and empirical knowledge in a field of under-research by incorporating three fields: leadership theory, applied linguistics, and sustainable development.

### Women-Led Inclusive Leadership as Transformative Practice

The results show that women educational leaders are practicing leadership based on participatory, ethical, and equity-oriented leadership which has been confirmed by previous studies of describing women as relational and value-driven leaders (Grogan and Shakeshaft, 2011; Shaked, 2021). The focus on listening, shared decision-making, and advocacy on behalf of the marginalized learners by the participants promotes the feminist and inclusive leadership

theories, expressing that leadership is always political and value-filled, but not neutral (Blackmore, 2013; Shields, 2018). This study is significant as compared to much of the literature that has been previously done which is concerned with the barriers women have encountered as leaders, this paper offers a new perspective showing how women as leaders proactively transform the teaching learning processes especially in English language education. The finding fills one of the main gaps in the previous studies, as leadership was commonly viewed as an administrative role and not as a pedagogical influence (Ryan, 2016). By so doing, the research makes women-led leadership an important tool of promoting SDG 5 (Gender Equality) both in its representation and practice.

### **Inclusive School Culture as a Mediating Force**

In line with the literature on leadership and school effectiveness, the results demonstrate that inclusive school culture is the mediator between leadership and classroom practice (Gu, 2018). The attempts of women leaders to establish trust, team-work and emotional security provided situations under which teachers felt strong enough to embrace inclusive English language pedagogies. This confirms the previous studies that indicated that inclusive leadership has an indirect positive effect on the outcomes of students by affecting teacher beliefs and professional behaviors (Shields, 2018). Notably, this paper developed the previous literature and demonstrates that the inclusive school culture is especially important in the ELL setting where the language weakness of learners may be enhanced by fear, stigma, and fixed rules associated with teaching (Norton, 2013). Women leaders create psychologically safe environments, which allow learners to interact with English more confidently and thus contribute to SDG 4 (Quality Education) by gaining access and participation.

### **Leadership Influence on Inclusive English Language Learning Practices**

One of the main contributions of this study is that it has shown that the decisions made by leadership have a direct impact on the manner of teaching English. The respondents talked about advocating differentiated learning, culturally responsive learning, and learner-centered practices—the practices that are common recommendations in the literature of applied linguistics (Pennycook, 2017; De Costa et al., 2020). Nevertheless, the association of these pedagogies with the classroom level has been widely studied in the past, but very little has been done concerning the role of leadership. This research is a response to the demand to apply a systemic approach to the reform of language education (Rahman, 2019) by offering leadership as a force in the pursuit of inclusive ELL practices. The results indicate that their sustainable inclusion of English language learning would not be possible without a leadership that would justify pedagogical flexibility and disrupt deficit perceptions of learners. This helps to make the point that ELL equity is not a methodological problem but a leadership one.

### **Gender, Language, and Educational Equity**

The results involving gender and language equity lie deeply in the field of critical applied linguistics that emphasizes the influences of gendered power relations on language learning (Norton, 2013). The ability of women leaders to realize the reluctance of girls to engage in English and the deliberate attempt to develop confidence is an example of how gender responsive leadership can be exercised. This is in line with what Blackmore (2013) says about feminist leadership; that feminist leadership interferes actively in the norms of institutions that discriminate women and girls. Women leaders are able to work at both gender and language barriers at the same time, which leads to intersectional equity, which is a dimension that is usually lacking in leadership and ELL research. This result contributes to the empirical backing

of the idea of educational leadership connection to SDG 5 (Gender Equality) as something more than mere symbolic representation, but having a substantive impact on the lives of learners.

### **English Language Learning, Power, and Inequality**

The description of English as a gatekeeping tool by the participants resounds with its traditional assessment of English language education as a perpetrator of social inequality (Pennycook, 2017; Rahman, 2019). Nevertheless, this research paper introduces a twist by showing how power dynamics can be negated with the help of leadership interventions. Additional language support and inclusive assessment practices are examples of strategies that can help leaders reduce the stratifying impacts of English. The finding adds to the existing social justice literature on leadership by indicating that equity-based leadership has the ability to make structural inequalities through curriculum and language policy unstable (Ryan, 2016). By doing so, women leaders will promote SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) on an institutional level, which will transfer world goals to localized action.

### **Leadership for Sustainable Development and SDGs**

Even though the terminology of SDGs was not explicitly mentioned by participants, their leadership practice was inclined towards the sustainability mindset, and long-term inclusion rather than short-term performance increase were considered. This is in line with Tikly et al. (2020), who suggest that sustainable education needs a leadership that incorporates equity, quality, and social justice in day-to-day practice. The results of the study indicate that women-led inclusive leadership is a viable way of applying SDGs to practice, despite facing criticism that SDG-oriented research on education tends to be too policy-oriented and not practice-related (UNESCO, 2020). Through inculcating SDG principles into English language education, women leaders operationalize sustainability in a manner that is relevant to the context and also in a manner that is pedagogically significant.

### **Theoretical and Practical Implication.**

This research, in theory, contributes to a comprehensive conceptual framework of a connection between women-led leadership, inclusive pedagogy, and sustainable development, which was a fragmented field of study in the past. It makes the concept of leadership a primary bridge between applied linguistics and the sustainability discourse. Practically the implications of the results suggest that policymakers and institutions should:

1. Make investments in women leadership.
2. Value leadership as an ELL equity tool.
3. Apply the principles of SDG in the field of school-based leadership and pedagogy.

### **Concluding Synthesis**

Overall, inclusive educational leadership by women is more than a matter of representation, as it has been explained in this paper, it is a revolution that is set to transform English language learning, proliferate gender equity and reduce educational inequalities. Relating the leadership practice to SDGs 4, 5, and 10, the current study contributes greatly to the educational research on leadership and education and the research on sustainable development.

### **Conclusion**

The given paper was intended to redefine English Language Learning (ELL) with the prism of women-led inclusive educational leadership, also mentioning the quality education, gender equality, and reduced inequalities. Based on a systematic literature review and qualitative experiences of women educational leaders, the paper demonstrates that leadership is neither a neutral administrative role nor a transformational pedagogic nor ethical agent, which does not

leave an indifferent impact on the language learning experiences, access, and outcomes. The findings indicate that participatory decision-making, ethical governance systems, and advocating on behalf of the marginalized learners are encouraged by inclusive leadership by women, which constitute inclusive school cultures. In its turn, that culture enables such inclusive English language pedagogies as differentiated instruction, culturally responsive teaching, and practices that are learner-centered. The women leaders have been at the helm with such processes to address the gender, socioeconomic and linguistic differences embedded in the English language education.

It is important to mention that the study is significant to the existing body of knowledge as it engages in the testing of the relationship between leadership, language education and sustainable development that have been conducted separately in prior studies. On the foundation of the women-led leadership practices within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals, such as SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), the article demonstrates how the global policy dreams can be achieved at the institutional and classroom level. The study consequently plays a crucial theoretical role particularly in the development of a comprehensive leadership-ELL-SDG model, and plays a practical role like the recognition of women leaders as key players in the transformation of education

### **Recommendations**

The following policy, practice and leadership development recommendations are proposed in accordance with the results:

#### **1. Leadership Development and Capacity Building**

It is recommended that education officials and institutions should develop special leadership development programs to women in leadership with regards to inclusive leadership, gender responsive leadership, and equity of language. These initiatives must go further than the administrative training, to pedagogical leadership in English language teaching.

#### **2. Institutionalization of Inclusive Leadership Practices**

Inclusive aspects of leadership inclusive as shared decision-making, teacher empowerment and learner voice should be institutionalized in both schools and institutions of higher learning. This institutionalization ensures that there is no loss of inclusive practices of ELL when new leadership comes into place.

#### **3. Integration of SDGs into School-Level Leadership.**

It is proposed that the education policymakers should turn the SDG commitments into the education level leadership guidelines with specific reference to the leadership practices that will be identified with the outcomes of inclusive English language learning. Equity and inclusion based on leadership should be tracked and assessed using models and not merely academic work.

#### **4. Support for Inclusive English Language Pedagogy**

The school educational leaders are expected to provide the English language teachers with the opportunity to get professional development opportunity based on differentiated instruction, the culturally responsive instruction, and multilingualism awareness. To be able to exercise inclusiveness, teachers should be supported in the leadership.

## 5. Gender-Responsive and Equity-Oriented Language Policies.

In the institutions, the English language curriculum, assessment, and learning materials need to be revised to eliminate the gender biases and exclusionary tendencies and practices. The women leaders are expected to be involved in the curriculum review and policy formulations.

### Future Research Directions

Though the contribution of the study is significant, it also gives certain possibilities in the future research:

#### Mixed-Methods and Longitudinal Studies

The future research would be grounded on the mixed-method designs to examine the correlation between the application of the women-led leadership practice and the attainment of English language learning in a quantitative fashion. The longitudinal study would also be of particular use in establishing the long-term efficacy of inclusive leadership.

#### Comparative and Cross-Cultural Research

Explore the influence of culture, institutional, and policy environment on ELL inclusive leadership women-led inclusive leadership. These research works would make leadership models more general and situationally acute.

#### Inclusion of Male Allies and Distributed Leadership

More research can also be conducted on how male leaders and androgynous groups of leaders can facilitate or suppress inclusive English language learning to contribute to the research of gender and leader relationships.

#### Learner and Teacher Perspectives

Even though the current study is dedicated to the voices of the female leaders, the further study should consider incorporating the voices of students and teachers in an attempt to triangulate the findings and have a clearer conception of how leadership practice is exercised in classes.

#### Policy Implementation and Impact Studies

The current study needs additional research to find out how much national and institutional education policies, which are in line with SDGs are implemented by school leaders and the consequences of such policies on the issue of equity of English language education in practice.

In conclusion, this study points out an important fact that leadership by women in education inclusively is a powerful tool that facilitates equitable and sustainable English language learning. The study offers a good theoretical breadth of revisiting educational leadership in unbalanced and linguistically varied contexts due to the integration of a leadership theory, applied linguistics, and sustainable development. Lastly, there is no women representation, but a strategic path towards inclusive, equitable and sustainable education systems.

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