LEADERSHIP STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES IN FOSTERING INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE L2 LANGUAGE EDUCATION: CASE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN RURAL PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This study investigates the leadership strategies and challenges female head teachers face in promoting inclusive and equitable second language (L2) education in rural Pakistan. Employing a structured questionnaire, the research gathers perspectives from female head teachers regarding their approaches to fostering educational equity in the face of persistent sociocultural barriers. The findings reveal effective leadership strategies, such as collaborative initiatives and community engagement, while highlighting significant challenges, including socio-cultural norms and inadequate infrastructure, that impede progress. The study aims to inform policymakers and educational practitioners on improving educational outcomes for marginalized students in similar contexts. By providing empirical evidence and insights into the experiences of female head teachers, this research contributes to the understanding of educational leadership in rural Pakistan and its implications for advancing gender equity and inclusive education in challenging environments.

Keywords: leadership, L2 language education, equity, rural Pakistan, educational barriers

INTRODUCTION

Overview of Pakistan's Commitment to SDG-4

As a signatory to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Pakistan has committed to achieving SDG-4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities by 2030 (United Nations, 2015). This commitment underscores the importance of education as a fundamental human right and a crucial driver of sustainable development. Pakistan's National Education Policy aligns with SDG-4, aiming to provide free and compulsory education for all children aged 5-16 (Government of Pakistan, 2017). However, despite these policy frameworks, implementing these goals faces numerous challenges, particularly in rural areas. Political instability, economic constraints, and socio-cultural barriers significantly impact the education sector (Abbas & Iqbal, 2020). Moreover, Pakistan's literacy rate, although improving, remains below the global average, with substantial disparities between urban and rural areas (UNESCO, 2020). Moreover, Ahmed and Sheikh (2021) state that the government's efforts to enhance educational infrastructure, teacher training, and curriculum development are ongoing. However, progress is slow, necessitating more robust interventions and international support.

Significance of L2 Language Education in Rural Areas

L2 (second language) education holds considerable significance in rural Pakistan, where the primary language spoken at home often differs from the official language of instruction, Urdu or English. Proficiency in L2 is essential for students to access broader educational resources, participate fully in the national economy, and engage in socio-political

discourse (Rahman, 2002). In rural areas, where educational resources are scarce, effective L2 instruction can bridge the gap between local dialects and national or global languages, fostering greater inclusion and mobility (Coleman, 2010). Studies have shown that L2 proficiency is correlated with better academic performance and higher educational attainment, which are critical for breaking the cycle of poverty (Brock-Utne, 2006). Furthermore, L2 education can enhance cognitive skills, cultural awareness, and global competencies, preparing students for diverse opportunities (Cummins, 2000). However, the quality of L2 education in rural schools is often compromised by a lack of trained teachers, inadequate teaching materials, and limited exposure to the language outside the classroom (Khan, 2011; Mahboob & Jain, 2016). Addressing these challenges is vital for leveraging the full potential of L2 education to promote equitable and inclusive development.

Challenges Faced in Rural Pakistan, Particularly for Girls

The educational landscape in rural Pakistan is fraught with numerous challenges, with girls facing disproportionate barriers to accessing and succeeding in education. Socio-cultural norms and gender biases significantly impede girls' educational opportunities, as traditional roles often prioritize domestic responsibilities over schooling (Human et al., 2018). Early marriage and child labor further exacerbate the issue, reducing the likelihood of girls completing their education (UNICEF, 2021). Additionally, infrastructural deficiencies, such as the lack of safe and accessible school facilities, sanitation, and transportation, disproportionately affect female students (Aslam, 2009). The scarcity of female teachers in rural areas also acts as a deterrent, as parents are often reluctant to send their daughters to schools predominantly by male teachers (Andrabi, Das, & Khwaja, 2012). Moreover, economic constraints force families to prioritize the education of boys over girls, perpetuating a cycle of gender inequality in education (Lloyd et al., 2009; Sathar & Lloyd, 1994)). Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including community sensitization, policy reforms, and targeted interventions to create a more conducive learning environment for girls.

Research Problem

Educational inequalities in rural Pakistan are profound, with socio-cultural barriers playing a significant role in perpetuating these inequalities. According to Aslam (2009), the gender gap in education is particularly pronounced, with girls facing numerous obstacles that hinder their access to and retention in schools. Traditional gender roles and societal norms often prioritize boys' education over girls', relegating the latter to domestic responsibilities and early marriages (Lloyd et al., 2009). This disparity is further exacerbated by economic constraints that force families to make difficult choices, often resulting in girls being withdrawn from school (Sathar & Lloyd, 1994). Additionally, infrastructural inadequacies, such as the lack of safe school facilities and insufficient sanitation, disproportionately affect female students, making it difficult for them to attend and remain in school (Human Rights Watch, 2018). Effective leadership strategies are critical to addressing these disparities. According to Abbas and Iqbal (2020), educational leaders play a pivotal role in creating inclusive and equitable learning environments, particularly in rural settings where resources are scarce. Effective leadership can help mitigate sociocultural barriers by advocating for policies that promote gender equity and by implementing community engagement initiatives that raise awareness about the importance of education for all children (Khan, 2011). Moreover, leadership strategies that focus on capacity building and professional development for teachers can enhance the quality of education, making it more accessible and effective (Ahmed & Sheikh, 2021). Leadership responsive to rural education's unique challenges, such as resource constraints and socio-cultural norms, can significantly improve educational outcomes. By fostering a collaborative and supportive educational environment, leaders can help bridge the

gap between policy and practice, ensuring that all students, regardless of gender or socio-economic status, have the opportunity to succeed.

Research Purpose

This research investigates the leadership strategies and challenges in fostering inclusive and equitable L2 language education in rural Pakistan, focusing on the perspectives of female head teachers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. By employing a quantitative approach, this study aims to identify effective leadership practices that can overcome sociocultural barriers and enhance educational equity for marginalized students, especially girls. Drawing on the critical **Feminist-Inclusive Leadership Theory** by Irby and Brown (1995), the research seeks to understand how educational leaders can implement strategies to promote gender equity and inclusive education within the constraints of rural settings. The findings from this study are intended to provide empirical evidence that can inform policy reforms and practical interventions, ultimately contributing to the broader goals of educational equity and the fulfillment of SDG-4 in comparable contexts.

Research Objectives

Below are the research objectives of this study.

1. To investigate leadership strategies used by female head teachers
2. To identify challenges and barriers to inclusive education

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant value for both the academic field of educational leadership and policy-making aimed at improving educational equity. By exploring the leadership strategies and challenges female head teachers face in rural Pakistan, the research contributes to the existing literature on educational leadership, particularly within socio-cultural and gender-specific barriers. It provides empirical insights into how leadership practices can be adapted and implemented to promote inclusive and equitable education. Furthermore, the findings have important policy implications, offering evidence-based recommendations for developing and refining policies that support educational equity in rural areas. By highlighting effective leadership strategies and identifying systemic barriers, this study aims to inform policy-makers and educational stakeholders on ways to enhance educational outcomes for marginalized students, thereby contributing to the achievement of SDG-4 and fostering a more inclusive and equitable education system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender Equity in Educational Leadership

Gender equity in educational leadership remains a critical issue globally, with significant implications for the inclusivity and effectiveness of educational systems. According to Blackmore (2013), the representation of women in educational leadership positions is crucial for fostering gender-sensitive policies and practices within schools. However, as per Shapira et al. (2011), women often face systemic barriers that hinder their advancement to leadership roles, including gender biases and a lack of support structures. In the context of developing countries, these challenges are exacerbated by socio-cultural norms that traditionally limit women's participation in public and professional spheres (Ngunjiri, 2010). Studies have shown that female leaders bring unique perspectives and skills that can enhance educational environments, particularly in promoting gender equity and inclusivity (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). According to Coleman (2012), female educational leaders are more likely to implement collaborative and empathetic leadership styles, which can positively impact school culture and student outcomes. Despite these benefits, the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership continues to be a significant issue, necessitating targeted interventions and policy reforms to support and empower women in these roles (Lumby & Coleman, 2007). Addressing

gender equity in educational leadership is essential for creating more inclusive and equitable educational systems.

Leadership Strategies in Education

Effective educational leadership strategies are critical for fostering environments that promote student achievement and institutional success. According to Leithwood et al. (2004), transformational leadership, which involves inspiring and motivating staff through a shared vision, has significantly enhanced school performance. As per Hallinger and Heck (2010), instructional leadership, which focuses on the core activities of teaching and learning, is essential for improving student outcomes. This approach requires leaders to actively participate in curriculum planning, teacher professional development, and student assessment. Furthermore, according to Spillane et al. (2001), distributed leadership, which involves delegating leadership roles across various stakeholders within the school community, can lead to more effective decision-making and a greater sense of ownership among staff. This strategy helps leverage different members' diverse skills and expertise, leading to improved problem-solving and innovation. Bush and Glover (2014) argue that ethical leadership, grounded in fairness, integrity, and respect for all school community members, is also crucial. This approach fosters a positive school culture and promotes trust and collaboration among teachers, students, and parents. When effectively implemented, these leadership strategies can create a supportive and inclusive educational environment that enhances overall school effectiveness and student learning outcomes.

Community engagement and advocacy

Community engagement and advocacy are vital to effective educational leadership, particularly in rural and underserved areas. According to Epstein (2010), schools involving parents and community members in decision-making have better student outcomes and more robust support systems. This engagement fosters a shared responsibility and partnership between the school and the community, leading to a more supportive educational environment. As per Anderson-Butcher and Ashton (2004), community-based programs and partnerships can provide essential resources and support services that schools might otherwise lack, such as after-school programs, health services, and parental involvement initiatives. Moreover, according to Auerbach (2012), advocacy efforts by educational leaders are crucial in addressing systemic barriers and securing necessary resources and policy changes. Advocacy can involve lobbying for improved funding, better infrastructure, and policies that promote equity and inclusion. Harris and Goodall (2008) argue that schools prioritizing community engagement and advocacy are more likely to develop innovative solutions to local challenges, thus enhancing educational equity and access. Additionally, Leithwood and Jantzi (2006) highlight that leaders who build strong community ties and advocate for their schools can create a more positive school climate and improve student achievement. Therefore, effective community engagement and advocacy are essential strategies for fostering inclusive and equitable education.

Collaborative Initiatives and Partnerships

Collaborative initiatives and partnerships are essential for enhancing educational quality and fostering school innovation. Fullan (2007) states that successful collaboration among schools, businesses, and community organizations can significantly improve educational outcomes. These partnerships enable schools to leverage external resources and expertise, thus enriching the educational experience for students. As per Blank, Melaville, and Shah (2003), community schools that engage in partnerships with local organizations provide a holistic approach to education, addressing academic needs and social, emotional, and health-related issues. Moreover, according to Sanders (2001), collaborative initiatives between

schools and families enhance parental involvement, a critical factor in student success. When schools actively involve parents and caregivers in educational processes, students benefit from increased support and motivation at home and school. Furthermore, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) argue that professional learning communities, where teachers collaborate to share best practices and engage in continuous professional development, lead to improved teaching practices and student outcomes. These communities foster a culture of collective responsibility and continuous improvement. Lastly, according to Chapman et al. (2010), international partnerships and collaborations can bring new perspectives and innovative practices to local schools. Such partnerships facilitate knowledge exchange and provide opportunities for schools to adopt and adapt successful educational strategies from different contexts. Overall, collaborative initiatives and partnerships are pivotal in creating dynamic and responsive educational environments that cater to the diverse needs of students.

Barriers to Inclusive Education in Rural Settings

Inclusive education in rural settings faces many barriers that hinder its effective implementation. According to UNESCO (2015), one of the primary challenges is the lack of adequate infrastructure, including insufficient school buildings, inadequate sanitation facilities, and limited access to educational resources. These infrastructural deficits disproportionately affect students with disabilities and girls, who are more likely to be excluded from the educational system. As per Mitchell (2014), rural schools often struggle with a shortage of trained teachers who are equipped to handle diverse classrooms, further complicating efforts to provide inclusive education. Socio-cultural barriers also play a significant role in limiting educational access in rural areas. According to Lloyd et al. (2009), deeply entrenched gender norms often prioritize boys' education over girls', leading to higher dropout rates among female students. Additionally, cultural attitudes towards disability can result in stigmatization and exclusion of children with disabilities from mainstream education (Miles, 2011). These socio-cultural factors are compounded by economic challenges, as many rural families cannot afford the direct and indirect schooling costs, such as uniforms, books, and transportation (Watkins, 2013). Another significant barrier is the policy and governance landscape. According to Lewin (2007), many rural areas suffer from weak educational governance and insufficient funding, which impede the implementation of inclusive education policies. There is often a disconnect between national policies and local practices, with rural schools lacking the support and resources to implement inclusive education effectively. This gap is exacerbated by limited community involvement and advocacy, crucial for driving policy changes and resource allocation (Ainscow et al., 2006). Addressing these barriers requires a multifaceted approach that includes infrastructure development, teacher training, community engagement, and robust policy implementation.

Socio-cultural Norms and Gender Biases

Socio-cultural norms and gender biases significantly impact educational access and quality, particularly in rural settings. According to Unterhalter (2005), gender biases deeply rooted in traditional beliefs and practices often prioritize boys' education over girls', leading to disparities in educational attainment. In many rural communities, girls are expected to assume household responsibilities from a young age, limiting their regular opportunities to attend school (Lloyd, 2009). This entrenched gender bias contributes to higher dropout rates among girls and perpetuates cycles of poverty and limited socio-economic mobility. Furthermore, as per Stromquist (2007), community leaders and elders often reinforce socio-cultural norms that devalue female education, making it challenging to implement policies that promote gender equity in education. These norms also influence the attitudes and behaviors of teachers and school administrators, who may unconsciously perpetuate gender stereotypes in their

interactions with students and their pedagogical practices (Leach, 2008). As a result, girls may face lower expectations and fewer opportunities for academic achievement, further entrenching gender disparities in education. According to Herz and Sperling (2004), addressing socio-cultural norms and gender biases requires comprehensive strategies that involve community engagement and advocacy. Educational interventions must be culturally sensitive and involve local stakeholders to challenge and change harmful norms effectively. Programs that promote female role models and provide incentives for girls' education can also play a crucial role in shifting community attitudes and behaviors (Grant & Hallman, 2008). Additionally, policies must be enforced to ensure that schools provide a safe and supportive environment for all students, free from discrimination and bias. Overall, the impact of socio-cultural norms and gender biases on education is profound, necessitating targeted efforts to promote gender equity and inclusivity.

Infrastructure and Resource Constraints

Infrastructure and resource constraints are significant barriers to inclusive and equitable education in rural settings. According to UNESCO (2015), many rural schools in developing countries lack basic facilities, such as classrooms, sanitation, and clean drinking water. These deficiencies delay the delivery of quality education and negatively impact student attendance and retention rates, especially for girls. As per Glewwe and Kremer (2006), inadequate infrastructure can exacerbate health issues, leading to higher absenteeism and lower academic performance among students. Furthermore, resource constraints extend beyond physical infrastructure, including a shortage of educational materials and trained personnel. According to Lewin (2007), rural schools often face significant challenges accessing up-to-date textbooks, teaching aids, and technological resources. This lack of materials hampers the ability of teachers to deliver effective instruction and engage students in meaningful learning activities. Additionally, many rural areas struggle to attract and retain qualified teachers, compromising education quality (Mulkeen, 2010). Teachers in these settings often lack professional development opportunities, limiting their ability to implement inclusive teaching practices and support diverse learners. Financial constraints also play a critical role in perpetuating educational inequities. According to Watkins (2013), insufficient funding for rural education leads to disparities in resource allocation, with urban schools often receiving a larger share of educational budgets. This financial imbalance means rural schools cannot invest in necessary improvements and innovations. As per Hite et al. (2018), sustainable financing models are essential to address these resource gaps and ensure all students have access to quality education. Community-based funding initiatives and international aid can provide additional support, but systemic changes in national budgeting practices are needed to achieve long-term improvements.

Gaps in Literature

Research on inclusive and equitable education in rural Pakistan reveals significant gaps that necessitate further investigation. Existing studies, such as by Naich et al. (2020) and Khan (2021), have highlighted educational access and quality challenges in rural areas, focusing primarily on infrastructural deficiencies and socio-cultural barriers. However, there is a lack of research specifically examining the leadership strategies employed by female head teachers to overcome these challenges. According to Mitchell and Halpern (2015), understanding the unique leadership approaches in rural contexts is crucial for developing targeted interventions. Additionally, there is limited empirical data on the effectiveness of community engagement and policy advocacy initiatives in promoting educational equity. This gap underscores the need for comprehensive studies that explore innovative leadership practices and their impact on educational outcomes in rural Pakistan.

Theoretical Framework
Feminist-Inclusive Leadership Theory by Irby & Brown (1995)

The Feminist-Inclusive Leadership Theory, as articulated by Irby and Brown (1995), addresses the need for a paradigm shift in leadership models to include feminine perspectives and experiences. Traditional administrative preparation programs have been criticized for their lack of applicability to the real world of school leadership, a concern shared by both men and women. However, women feel these programs do not address their realities (Shakeshaft, 1987). As Murphy and Hallinger (1987) noted, the critique of these programs often revolves around their theoretical nature and lack of integration with practical experiences. Irby and Brown (1995) argue that reform efforts should address these charges and advance new theories incorporating feminine perspectives. This approach would make leadership theories more relevant to feminist-inclusive educational organizations and administrative training programs. Rost (1994) further contends that the white male leadership paradigm lacks relevance for the post-industrial age, highlighting the need for new theoretical frameworks.

Management and leadership models have traditionally been based on male leadership behaviors. With more women attempting to break the glass ceiling and position themselves in executive roles, current theories must be reevaluated and revalued to include feminist perspectives (Irby & Brown, 1995). The term "reevaluated" refers to a technical examination of the subject, while "revalued" involves examining deep, personal value systems. There is a pressing need to modify the male-dominated theoretical paradigms used in management and leadership training programs to make them inclusive of feminine viewpoints (Shakeshaft, 1992). This modification would address the existing gaps in theory that fail to account for the diverse experiences of both men and women in leadership roles. Brown, Irby, and Smith (1993) emphasize that incorporating feminist perspectives into leadership theories would benefit women and enhance these theories' overall relevance and applicability in contemporary organizational contexts.

Despite recognizing these issues, there remains a lack of research addressing differences in gender perceptions of leadership effectiveness within organizational cultures (Irby & Brown, 1995). The existing literature highlights that current management and leadership theories are not viable for women and that there is a need for reconceptualization to include the experiences of both genders (Shakeshaft, 1992). Research on women executives began in the 1970s and has gone through several stages, from documenting the number of women in leadership roles to studying women on their terms and challenging existing theories (Shakeshaft, 1987). However, the field is still considered embryonic, with data indicating significant differences in the profiles and histories of women executives compared to their male counterparts (Shakeshaft, 1992). This legacy of discrimination and exclusion has shaped a world where women's experiences and behaviors differ from those of men (Shakeshaft, 1986; Shakeshaft, 1987). To move forward, there is a need for additional research to transform current theories or develop new ones that reflect the realities of both male and female leaders.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research design to examine the leadership strategies and challenges in fostering inclusive and equitable L2 language education in rural Pakistan. A quantitative approach is suitable for systematically collecting and analyzing numerical data to identify patterns and relationships (Creswell, 2014). By using structured questionnaires, the

research aims to gather data from a large sample of female head teachers, providing a comprehensive understanding of their perspectives and practices. According to Bryman (2016), quantitative methods allow for the application of statistical techniques to test hypotheses and draw generalizable conclusions about the effectiveness of leadership strategies in rural educational settings.

Sample and Participants

The sample for this study comprises 100 female head teachers from rural public schools in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The selection criteria for participants include having at least five years of experience in a leadership role and active involvement in promoting L2 language education within their schools. This criterion ensures that the participants possess sufficient expertise and practical knowledge relevant to the research focus (Creswell, 2014). The sampling method employed is purposive sampling, which allows individuals to be selected who can provide rich and relevant data for the study (Patton, 2015). The demographic details of the participants reveal a diverse group of educators. The age range of the head teachers varies from 30 to 55 years, with the majority falling within the 40-50 age bracket. Most participants hold a Master's degree in Education, while many possess additional educational leadership and management qualifications. The schools represented in the study are located in various rural districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, ensuring a broad geographic coverage and diverse contextual insights. Additionally, as per settings Marshall and Rossman (2016), the participants' professional backgrounds include extensive experience dealing with socio-cultural and infrastructural challenges unique to rural education.

Data Collection Procedures

This study's primary data collection tool is a structured questionnaire administered through **Google Forms**. The questionnaire comprises multiple sections designed to elicit information on leadership strategies, perceptions of barriers, and approaches to promoting inclusive L2 language education. Participants are invited through **WhatsApp, Facebook,** and **LinkedIn** to complete the questionnaire, ensuring ease of access and convenience. As per Creswell (2014), this method efficiently collects large amounts of data while maintaining participant anonymity. Additionally, reminders are sent to non-respondents to enhance the response rate and ensure comprehensive data collection.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected from the questionnaires are analyzed using quantitative data analysis techniques using **SPSS software.** Descriptive statistics summarize the participants' demographic details and provide an overview of their responses. This includes measures of central tendency (mean, median, and mode) and measures of variability (range, variance, and standard deviation) (Bryman, 2016). Additionally, frequency analysis is conducted to examine the distribution of responses across different items in the questionnaire. According to Field (2018), this method helps identify common patterns and trends in the data, providing insights into the leadership strategies and challenges female head teachers face in rural settings.

Ethical Considerations and Informed Consent

Ethical considerations are paramount in this study to protect participants' rights and well-being (Cohen et al., 2018). Informed consent is obtained from all participants before their involvement in the study. The consent form outlines the purpose of the research, the procedures

involved, and the voluntary nature of participation. It also assures participants of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Participants are informed that they can withdraw from the study without any repercussions. Additionally, the study adheres to ethical guidelines for conducting research, including the ethical review process and approval from the relevant institutional review board (IRB).

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This section presented the findings of the study, structured around the identified research objectives. The primary aim was to investigate the leadership strategies employed by female head teachers and to identify the challenges and barriers they faced in promoting inclusive education. The chapter began by outlining the demographic characteristics of the participants, providing context for the analysis. Subsequently, the results of the first research objective were discussed, detailing the various leadership strategies that female head teachers utilized within their educational environments. This section included quantitative data that captured the effectiveness of these strategies in fostering an inclusive atmosphere. Following this, the challenges and barriers to inclusive education were examined, highlighting the various obstacles that hindered the implementation of inclusive practices in schools, supported by relevant statistical analyses that depicted the nature and extent of these barriers. The chapter concluded with a summary of the key findings, reiterating their significance about the research objectives and setting the stage for a more in-depth discussion of these results in the subsequent chapter.

Section 1: Demographic Profile

This section provides a detailed analysis of the demographic characteristics of the participants in the study. The data collected illustrates a comprehensive profile of the female headteachers surveyed, encompassing their age, educational qualifications, years of teaching experience, place of residence, and average class size. The **age distribution** of the participants revealed that a significant majority, 53% (n = 53), were under the age of 30, indicating a younger demographic among the female head teachers. In contrast, 38% (n = 38) fell within the 31-40 age range, while only 9% (n = 9) were aged 41-50. This data suggests that younger female educators are assuming leadership roles, which may contribute fresh perspectives and approaches to educational leadership. Regarding **educational qualifications**, nearly half of the participants, 48% (n = 48), held a Bachelor's degree. Those with a Master's degree comprised 12% (n = 12), whereas 40% (n = 40) had pursued MPhil or PhD qualifications. This distribution indicates a strong emphasis on higher education among female head teachers, which may enhance their capacity to implement effective leadership strategies and contribute to the educational landscape. The data on **years of teaching experience** revealed that the majority of participants, 65% (n = 65), had less than five years of teaching experience, while 24% (n = 24) had 5 to 10 years. Only 6% (n = 6) reported having 11-15 years of experience, and 5% (n = 5) had more than 15 years of teaching experience. This trend suggests that many female head teachers are relatively new to the profession, potentially indicating a shift towards younger leaders in the educational field. In terms of **geographical distribution**, 51% (n = 51) of the participants resided in small towns, while 32% (n = 32) lived in larger rural areas, and 17% (n = 17) were from remote villages. This finding illustrates the diverse backgrounds of female head teachers, with a notable concentration in small towns, which may impact their leadership experiences and strategies. The **average class size** reported by the participants varied, with 29% (n = 29) teaching classes of 20-30 students and 27% (n = 27) teaching classes of 31-40 students. Additionally, 24% (n = 24) had fewer than 20 students, while 20% (n = 20) had more than 40 students in their classes. This range in class sizes highlights the challenges female head

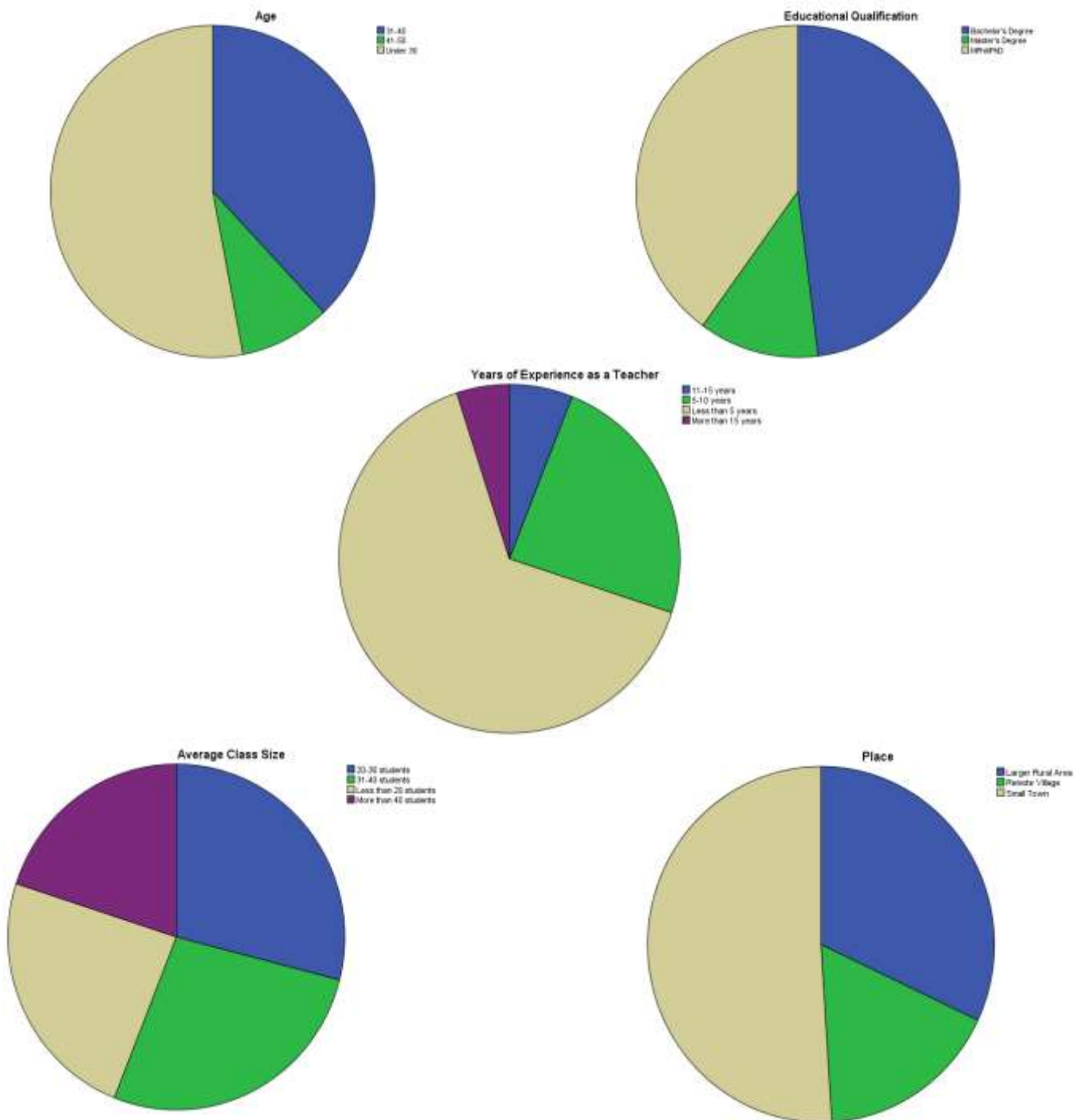teachers face, as larger classes may impact their ability to implement inclusive practices effectively.

Figure 1: Pie Charts of Demographic Analysis

Table 1: Demographic Profile Table

Demographic Factor	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
Age	31-40	38	38.0
	41-50	9	9.0
	Under 30	53	53.0
Educational Qualification	Bachelor's Degree	48	48.0
	Master's Degree	12	12.0
	MPhil/PhD	40	40.0
Years of Experience as a Teacher	11-15 years	6	6.0
	5-10 years	24	24.0
	Less than 5 years	65	65.0
	More than 15 years	5	5.0
Place of Residence	Larger Rural Area	32	32.0
	Remote Village	17	17.0
	Small Town	51	51.0
Average Class Size	20-30 students	29	29.0
	31-40 students	27	27.0
	Less than 20 students	24	24.0
	More than 40 students	20	20.0

Figure 1 and Table 1 summarize the demographic profile of the female head teachers, facilitating an understanding of their backgrounds and experiences, which may influence their leadership strategies and approaches to inclusive education.

Section 2: Analysis of Leadership Strategies for Inclusive Language Education

This section examines the leadership strategies employed by female head teachers in promoting inclusive second language (L2) education based on the participants' responses to a series of statements. Each statement assesses different aspects of their engagement, advocacy, collaboration, professional development, and implementation of strategies to ensure equitable access to L2 language education. The majority of respondents, comprising 39% (n = 39), agreed with the statement that they regularly **engage with the local community** to promote inclusive L2 language education. Additionally, 9% (n = 9) strongly agreed with this assertion. In contrast, 20% (n = 20) disagreed, while 16% (n = 16) strongly disagreed. This suggests that while many female head teachers value community engagement, a notable proportion may require further support or encouragement to enhance their involvement with local stakeholders. Regarding **advocacy for policies** supporting gender equity in education, 44% (n = 44) of the participants strongly agreed with this statement, indicating a strong commitment to promoting gender equity within their educational practices. An additional 24% (n = 24) agreed, while only 4% (n = 4) disagreed. This overwhelmingly positive response reflects the importance placed on gender equity among female head teachers, suggesting they recognize its significance in creating inclusive educational environments. When asked about **encouraging collaborative initiatives** with other schools and organizations, 35% (n = 35) strongly agreed, while 24% (n

= 24) agreed with the statement. However, 25% (n = 25) remained neutral, and 8% (n = 8) disagreed. This mixed response indicates that while many head teachers value collaboration, barriers may prevent some from fully engaging in such initiatives. This suggests an opportunity for further exploration into the factors influencing collaboration among educational institutions. Regarding providing **professional development opportunities** for teachers to enhance their L2 teaching skills, 36% (n = 36) of participants agreed, and 19% (n = 19) strongly agreed. However, 20% (n = 20) disagreed, indicating some uncertainty regarding providing professional development opportunities. Additionally, 25% (n = 25) remained neutral. This suggests that while there is a recognition of the need for professional development, there may be challenges or gaps in implementation that must be addressed to ensure that all teachers can improve their skills effectively. Regarding implementing **strategies to ensure equal access** to L2 language education for girls, 44% (n = 44) agreed, and 32% (n = 32) strongly agreed. Only 4% (n = 4) disagreed, indicating that most female head teachers are proactive in implementing strategies that promote gender equality in language education. This strong consensus highlights the commitment of female head teachers to creating inclusive educational environments where girls have equal access to learning opportunities.

Table 2: Leadership Strategies Table

Leadership Strategy	Frequency	Percent (%)
Engagement with Local Community		
Agree	39	39.0
Disagree	20	20.0
Neutral	16	16.0
Strongly Agree	9	9.0
Strongly Disagree	16	16.0
Advocacy for Gender Equity		
Agree	24	24.0
Disagree	4	4.0
Neutral	20	20.0
Strongly Agree	44	44.0
Strongly Disagree	8	8.0
Encouragement of Collaborative Initiatives		
Agree	24	24.0
Disagree	8	8.0
Neutral	25	25.0
Strongly Agree	35	35.0
Strongly Disagree	8	8.0
Provision of Professional Development Opportunities		
Agree	36	36.0
Disagree	20	20.0
Neutral	25	25.0

| Leadership Strategy	Frequency	Percent (%)
Strongly Agree	19	19.0
Implementation of Strategies for Gender Equality		
Agree	44	44.0
Disagree	4	4.0
Neutral	16	16.0
Strongly Agree	32	32.0
Strongly Disagree	4	4.0

1. I regularly engage with the local community to promote inclusive L2 language education.
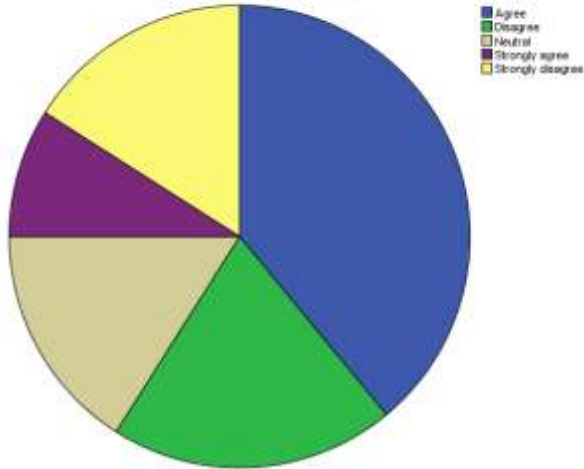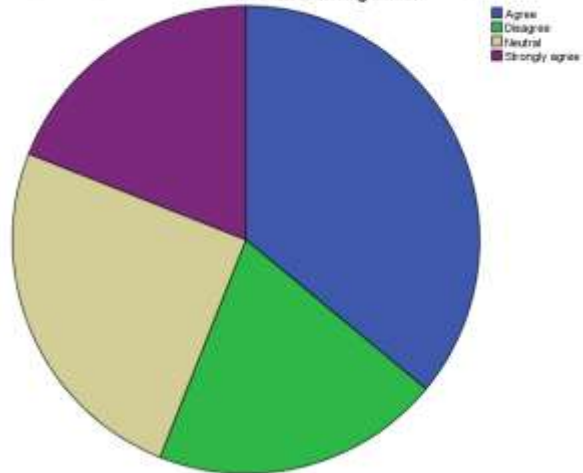
2. I advocate for policies that support gender equity in education.
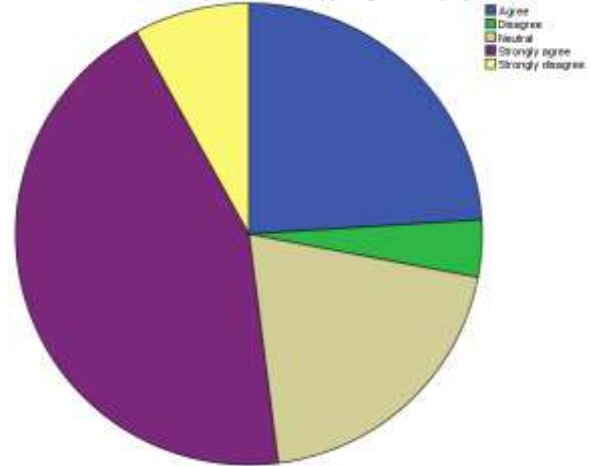
3. I encourage collaborative initiatives with other schools and organisations.
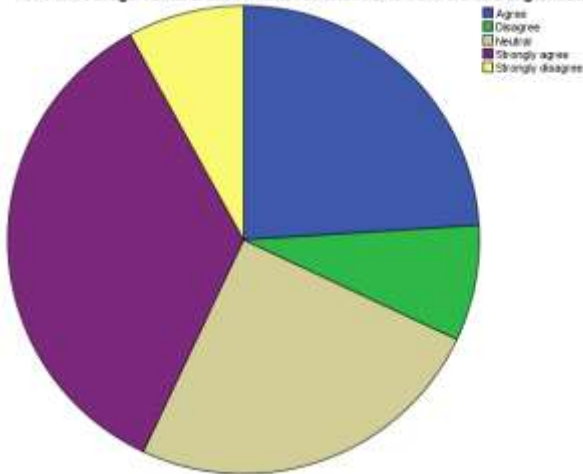
4. I provide professional development opportunities for my teachers to improve their L2 teaching skills.

5. I implement strategies to ensure that girls have equal access to L2 language education.
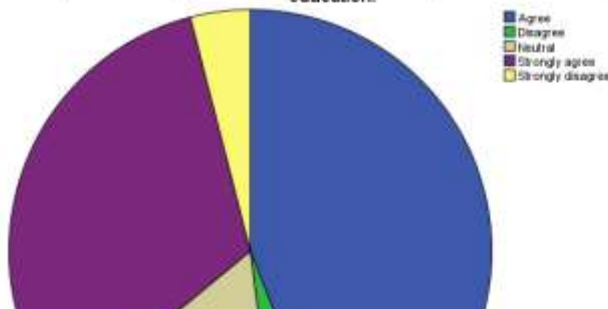
Figure 2 summarise the responses of female head teachers regarding their leadership strategies in promoting inclusive L2 education, providing a clearer understanding of their perceptions and practices in this domain. The analysis of the leadership strategies employed by female head teachers in promoting inclusive L2 education reveals a

Figure 2: Pie Charts of Leadership Strategies

and Table 2

generally positive outlook. Most participants demonstrated strong engagement with gender equity advocacy and the implementation of strategies aimed at ensuring equal access to education for girls. However, some areas, such as community engagement and professional development opportunities, indicate potential gaps that could benefit from further investigation and support.

Section 3: Analysis of Challenges and Barriers to Inclusive Education

This section explores the challenges and barriers female head teachers face in promoting inclusive education, particularly for girls, as indicated by their responses to a series of statements. The data reveals significant insights into the socio-cultural, infrastructural, and financial obstacles hindering effective language education. Most respondents, 44% (n = 44), agreed that **socio-cultural norms** in their community hinder girls' access to education, with an additional 13% (n = 13) strongly agreeing. This finding suggests a substantial recognition among female head teachers of the detrimental impact of prevailing cultural attitudes and practices on girls' educational opportunities. Conversely, 18% (n = 18) disagreed, and 9% (n = 9) strongly disagreed, indicating that a smaller proportion of head teachers may not perceive socio-cultural factors as significant barriers. However, the overall trend suggests a pressing need for initiatives to transform community attitudes towards girls' education. Regarding the statement on **inadequate infrastructure** limiting the effectiveness of L2 language education, 36% (n = 36) agreed, and 16% (n = 16) strongly agreed. A notable 25% (n = 25) remained neutral, indicating uncertainty or variability in experiences among respondents. Only 19% (n = 19) disagreed. This suggests that while many head teachers identify infrastructure as a challenge, the varied responses highlight the necessity for specific assessments of educational facilities to understand the unique needs of different schools, particularly in rural areas. The perception of a **lack of trained L2 language teachers** in rural areas received strong support, with 42% (n = 42) agreeing and 41% (n = 41) strongly agreeing. Only 4% (n = 4) disagreed, underscoring a widespread acknowledgment of this issue. The data indicates that the scarcity of qualified teachers is a significant barrier to effective language instruction, particularly in rural contexts. Addressing this shortage may require targeted training programs and incentives to attract qualified teachers to these areas. Regarding **financial resources**, 47% (n = 47) of respondents agreed that limited financial resources impede the implementation of inclusive education strategies, with an additional 32% (n = 32) strongly agreeing. Only 4% (n = 4) strongly disagreed. This overwhelming consensus suggests that inadequate funding is perceived as a critical barrier, necessitating advocacy for increased financial support for schools to ensure that inclusive education practices can be effectively implemented. The responses concerning **parental attitudes** towards girls' education revealed that 54% (n = 54) agreed that these attitudes represent a significant barrier. An additional 16% (n = 16) strongly agreed, reinforcing that parental perspectives play a crucial role in shaping educational access for girls. Only 22% (n = 22) disagreed with the statement, indicating that most head teachers see parental attitudes as a factor that can either promote or hinder educational opportunities for girls. This finding underscores the need for community engagement and parental education initiatives to foster positive attitudes towards girls' education.

Table 3: Barriers to Inclusive Education Table

Barriers to Inclusive Education	Frequency	Percent (%)
Socio-Cultural Norms		
Agree	44	44.0
Disagree	18	18.0

Barriers to Inclusive Education	Frequency	Percent (%)
Neutral	16	16.0
Strongly Agree	13	13.0
Strongly Disagree	9	9.0
Inadequate Infrastructure		
Agree	36	36.0
Disagree	19	19.0
Neutral	25	25.0
Strongly Agree	16	16.0
Strongly Disagree	4	4.0
Lack of Trained L2 Language Teachers		
Agree	42	42.0
Disagree	4	4.0
Neutral	9	9.0
Strongly Agree	41	41.0
Strongly Disagree	4	4.0
Limited Financial Resources		
Agree	47	47.0
Neutral	17	17.0
Strongly Agree	32	32.0
Strongly Disagree	4	4.0
Parental Attitudes Towards Girls' Education		
Agree	54	54.0
Disagree	22	22.0
Neutral	8	8.0
Strongly Agree	16	16.0

ISSN E: 2709-8273
ISSN P: 2709-8265

JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS AND TESOL

JOURNAL OF APPLIED
LINGUISTICS AND
TESOL

Vol.8. No.1.2025

1. Socio-cultural norms in my community hinder girls' access to education.

2. Inadequate infrastructure limits the effectiveness of L2 language education in my school.

3. There is a lack of trained L2 language teachers in rural areas.

4. Limited financial resources impede the implementation of inclusive education strategies.

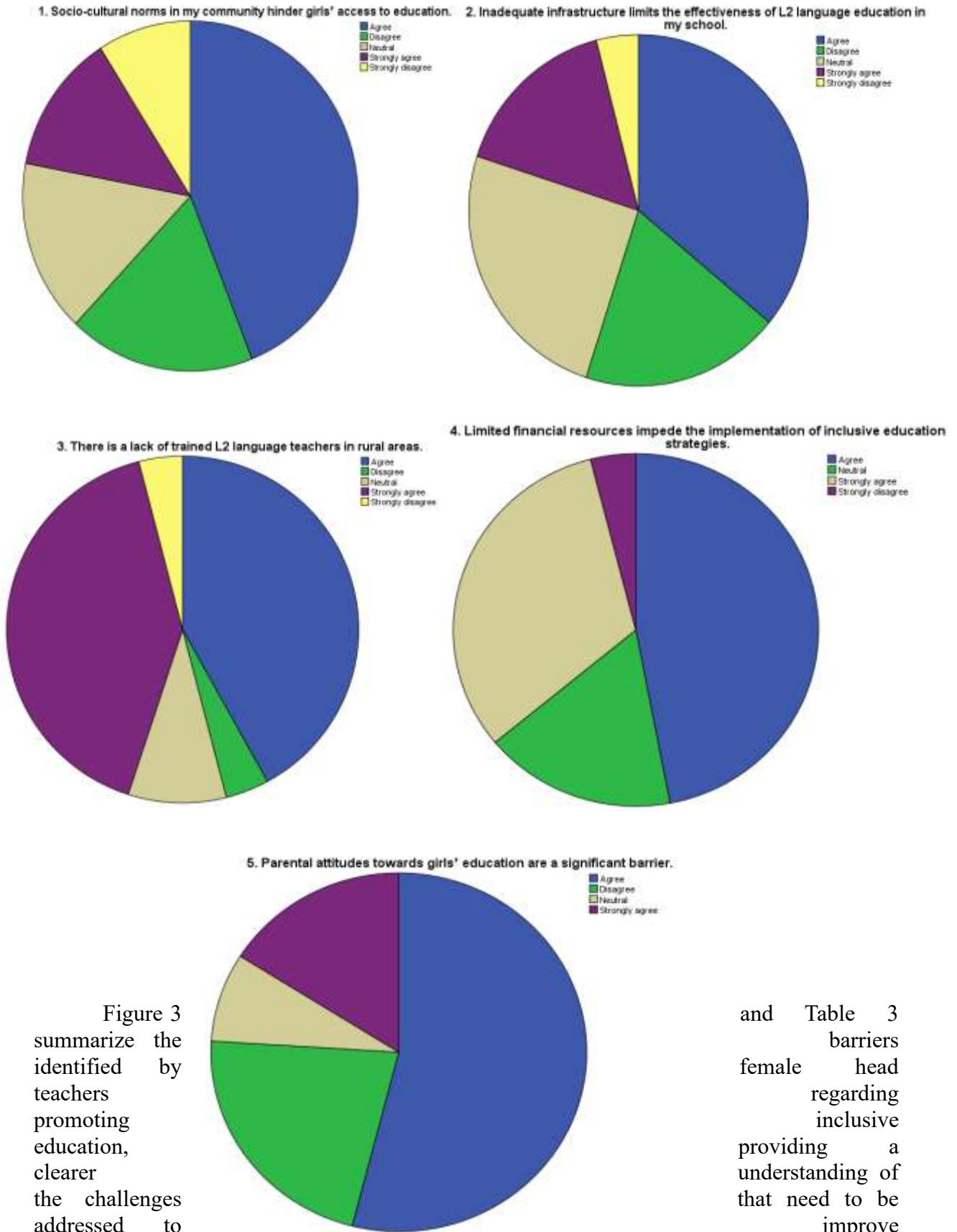5. Parental attitudes towards girls' education are a significant barrier.

Figure 3 summarize the identified by teachers promoting education, clearer the challenges addressed to and Table 3 barriers female head regarding inclusive providing a understanding of that need to be improve

Figure 3: Pie Charts of Challenges and Barriers to Inclusive Education

educational access for girls. The analysis of challenges and barriers to inclusive education indicates a variety of socio-cultural, infrastructural, and financial obstacles that female head teachers encounter. The responses reflect a consensus on the significant influence of socio-cultural norms and parental attitudes, as well as the pressing need for improved infrastructure and trained teachers. These insights highlight the need for targeted interventions to address these barriers to enhance educational access and inclusivity for girls.

Section 4: Analysis of Leadership Strategies for Promoting Inclusive Education

This section examines female head teachers' leadership strategies to enhance inclusive education, particularly for L2 language learning and girls' education. The findings provide valuable insights into the approaches taken by these educators in their roles as leaders and advocates for inclusivity. The data reveals a divided perspective regarding **collaboration with local NGOs** to support L2 language education initiatives. While 31% (n = 31) of respondents agreed with this statement, an equal percentage (32%, n = 32) disagreed, and 33% (n = 33) remained neutral. This indicates that while some head teachers actively seek partnerships with NGOs, many do not, possibly due to a lack of available resources or awareness of potential collaborations. The neutrality expressed by a third of respondents suggests an opportunity for further engagement and information dissemination regarding the benefits of collaboration with NGOs to bolster L2 initiatives. When asked about organizing **workshops for parents** to raise awareness about the importance of girls' education, only 23% (n = 23) agreed, while 36% (n = 36) disagreed, and 25% (n = 25) remained neutral. The relatively low engagement in this area may indicate challenges in mobilizing parents or securing attendance at such workshops. The results highlight the need for more effective strategies to engage parents in discussions about the significance of education for girls, potentially leading to a greater emphasis on parental involvement in educational initiatives. In contrast, a substantial majority of respondents (46%, n = 46) agreed that they employ **inclusive teaching practices** to address the diverse needs of their students, with an additional 26% (n = 26) strongly agreeing. This signifies a commendable commitment to inclusivity within the classroom. The relatively low percentage of disagreement (12%, n = 12) suggests that headteachers generally recognize the importance of adapting their teaching methods to cater to diverse learning needs, which is crucial for the success of L2 language education. The responses regarding **student involvement in decision-making processes** were mainly positive. A substantial 54% (n = 54) of head teachers agreed that they involve students in decisions related to their education, and 30% (n = 30) strongly agreed. Only 4% (n = 4) disagreed, indicating a widespread understanding of the value of student agency in the educational process. This approach empowers students and fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility toward their learning, which can enhance motivation and academic success. Regarding **promoting extracurricular activities** that support L2 language learning, 46% (n = 46) of respondents agreed, while 25% (n = 25) strongly agreed. However, 8% (n = 8) disagreed, and an additional 8% (n = 8) remained neutral. The positive response suggests that head teachers recognize the importance of extracurricular activities in enhancing language learning experiences. However, the small percentage of disagreement and neutrality highlights a potential area for further development, as schools could benefit from increased support and resources to expand these activities.

Table 4: Leadership Strategies Table

Leadership Strategy	Frequency	Percent (%)
Collaboration with Local NGOs		

Leadership Strategy	Frequency	Percent (%)
Agree	31	31.0
Disagree	32	32.0
Neutral	33	33.0
Strongly Agree	4	4.0
Organizing Workshops for Parents		
Agree	23	23.0
Disagree	36	36.0
Neutral	25	25.0
Strongly Agree	16	16.0
Inclusive Teaching Practices		
Agree	46	46.0
Disagree	12	12.0
Neutral	8	8.0
Strongly Agree	26	26.0
Strongly Disagree	8	8.0
Student Involvement in Decision-Making		
Agree	54	54.0
Disagree	4	4.0
Neutral	4	4.0
Strongly Agree	30	30.0
Strongly Disagree	8	8.0
Promotion of Extracurricular Activities		
Agree	46	46.0
Disagree	8	8.0
Neutral	8	8.0
Strongly Agree	25	25.0
Strongly Disagree	8	8.0

Figure 4 and Table 4 summarize female head teachers' strategies in promoting inclusive education, revealing a commitment to inclusive practices while highlighting potential growth and improvement areas. The analysis of leadership strategies indicates a mixed approach among female head teachers in promoting inclusive education. While there is a strong commitment to inclusive teaching practices and student involvement, challenges remain in engaging parents and collaborating with local NGOs. The findings suggest that further efforts are needed to strengthen community partnerships and parental engagement to enhance the overall impact of inclusive education initiatives.
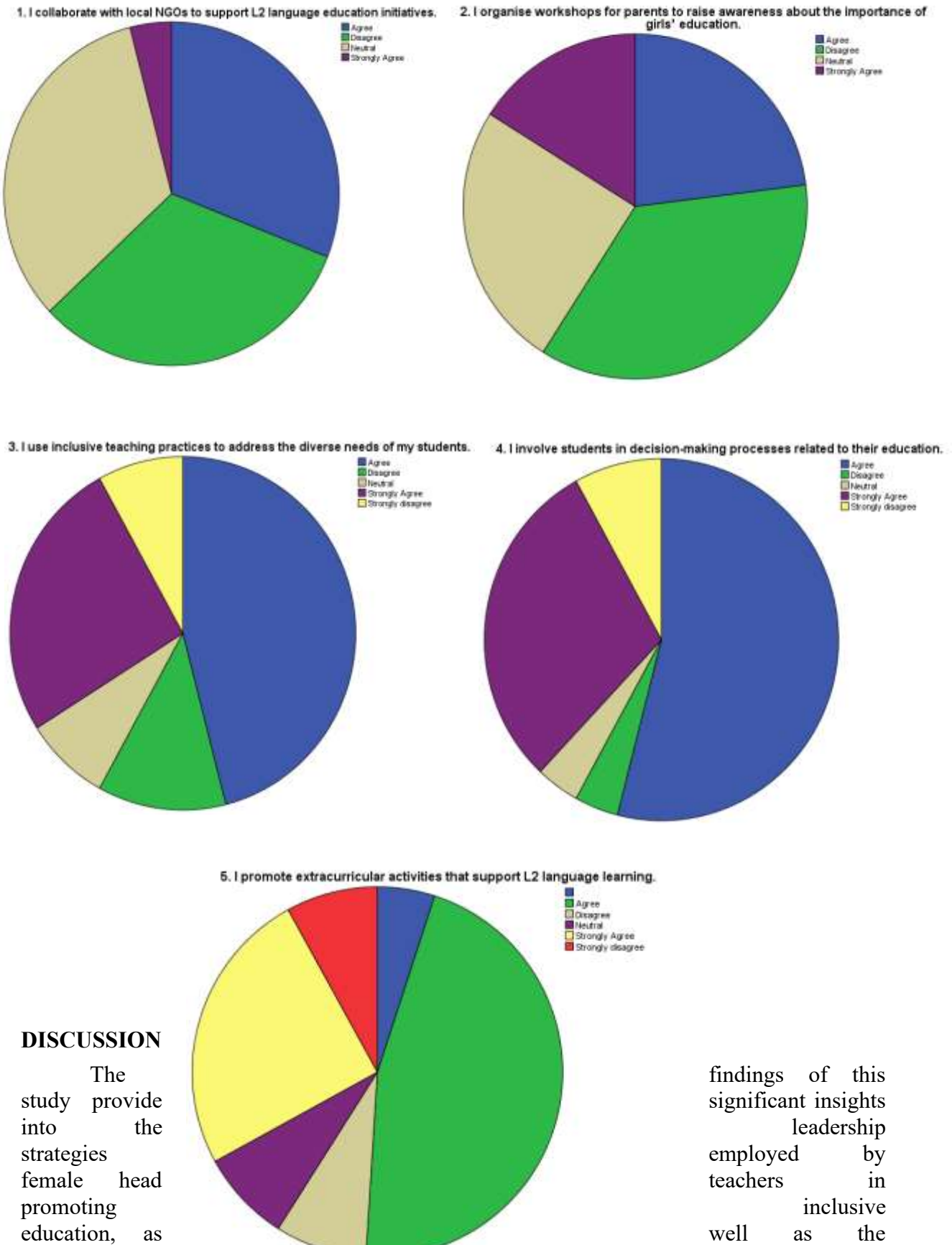
DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the leadership strategies employed by female head teachers in promoting inclusive education, as well as the

Figure 4: Pie Charts of Leadership Strategies for Promoting Inclusive Education

challenges and barriers they encounter. The study's objectives aimed to investigate these leadership strategies and identify obstacles to inclusive education, which the results effectively address.

Leadership Strategies

The **first objective** focused on investigating the leadership strategies used by female head teachers. The data revealed a strong commitment to inclusive teaching practices, with 46% of respondents affirming their use of strategies that cater to diverse student needs. This aligns with the literature, highlighting the importance of differentiated instruction and inclusive pedagogies in promoting student engagement and success (Ainscow, 2016). Furthermore, the substantial percentage (54%) of head teachers involving students in decision-making processes resonates with research that emphasizes the role of student agency in enhancing educational outcomes (Shirley, 2016). Such involvement fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among students, which is crucial for their academic motivation and performance. However, the findings also indicated mixed results regarding collaboration with local NGOs and organizing workshops for parents. While a third of respondents expressed neutrality about their collaboration with NGOs, the literature suggests that such partnerships are essential for resource mobilization and community support in inclusive education initiatives (Cummings & McGowan, 2018). The limited engagement in parental workshops highlights a critical gap, as parental involvement is recognized as a key factor influencing children's educational attainment (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). This discrepancy suggests that although female head teachers may employ effective strategies within the classroom, there remains a need for greater community engagement and collaboration to create a more comprehensive support system for inclusive education.

Challenges and Barriers

The study's **second objective** aimed to identify the challenges and barriers to inclusive education. The results revealed significant obstacles, particularly in socio-cultural norms, inadequate infrastructure, and financial resources. For instance, 44% of respondents agreed that socio-cultural norms hinder girls' access to education. This finding echoes existing literature highlighting the persistent influence of cultural attitudes and beliefs on educational opportunities for girls, particularly in rural contexts (Khan & Awan, 2018). Additionally, the acknowledgment of inadequate infrastructure (36% agreed) aligns with previous studies that underscore the importance of physical resources in facilitating effective teaching and learning (UNESCO, 2019). Moreover, the data indicated that 54% of respondents perceived parental attitudes towards girls' education as a significant barrier. This finding is particularly concerning, as it suggests that despite the efforts of female head teachers, entrenched attitudes within communities may continue to impede progress toward gender equity in education. This aligns with the work of Mukhwana et al. (2020), who argue that addressing parental perceptions and beliefs is critical for fostering a supportive environment for girls' education.

Thus, the findings of this study effectively address the research objectives, demonstrating the leadership strategies employed by female head teachers and highlighting the challenges they face in promoting inclusive education. While head teachers exhibit a commendable commitment to inclusive practices and student involvement, notable gaps in community engagement and collaboration require attention. Additionally, the identified barriers to inclusive education underscore the need for comprehensive strategies focusing on school-based initiatives and engaging parents, communities, and external organizations. By addressing these challenges, female head teachers can enhance their leadership effectiveness and contribute to creating more inclusive educational environments for all students.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the leadership strategies employed by female head teachers in promoting inclusive education while identifying the challenges and barriers they face. The findings revealed a range of effective leadership strategies, including using inclusive teaching practices and involving students in decision-making processes. These strategies reflect a commitment to fostering an environment that supports all students, particularly in the context of second language (L2) education. However, the study also highlighted persistent challenges, such as socio-cultural norms, inadequate infrastructure, and financial constraints, which significantly hinder the advancement of inclusive education, especially for girls.

The contributions of this research are significant in the field of educational leadership in Pakistan. By providing empirical evidence of the leadership strategies employed by female head teachers, this study adds to the existing body of knowledge regarding the complexities of educational leadership in a context marked by gender disparities. Additionally, the insights garnered from this study can inform policy and practice aimed at enhancing L2 language education and promoting gender equity in educational settings. Recognizing barriers to inclusive education emphasizes the need for targeted interventions that engage communities and address cultural attitudes, fostering a more supportive environment for girls' educational attainment.

Future research directions can build upon the findings of this study by exploring further studies that examine the impact of specific leadership strategies on student outcomes in various educational contexts. Longitudinal studies that assess the long-term effects of inclusive education practices and the role of community engagement in supporting female head teachers could provide valuable insights. Additionally, potential areas for continued investigation could include exploring collaboration between schools and local NGOs, the impact of socio-economic factors on educational leadership, and the effectiveness of training programs to enhance female head teachers' skills. By addressing these areas, future research can contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics of educational leadership and its implications for inclusive education in Pakistan.

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