

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS FACED BY FEMALE PRINCIPALS IN RURAL
PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN SHANXI PROVINCE, CHINA

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CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS FACED BY FEMALE PRINCIPALS IN RURAL
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A project report submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree of
Master of Education (Management and Administration)

School of Education
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Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

JANUARY 2025

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation entitled “CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS FACED BY FEMALE PRINCIPALS IN RURAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN SHANXI PROVINCE, CHINA ” is the result of my own research except as cited in the references. The project report has not been accepted for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature of any other degree.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the challenges and obstacles faced by female principals in rural primary schools in Shanxi Province, and addressed an important but not yet fully explored area in educational leadership within China's unique cultural and social framework. This study is based on Schein's organizational culture theory and feminist theory, and uses qualitative methods to explore the factors that affect the leadership effectiveness of female principals, their strategies for overcoming gender and organizational barriers, and the interaction of demographic factors such as age, experience, and school type. The data is collected through surveys and interviews to provide a detailed understanding of the multifaceted challenges faced by these leaders. The research findings indicate that female principals face common gender biases, work family conflicts, and structural barriers in male dominated organizational cultures. These challenges are manifested in limited opportunities to access resources, doubts about leadership abilities, and strict social expectations. Although some female principals have adopted strategies such as advocating gender equality, supporting networks, and improving professional skills, other principals emphasize balancing work and family responsibilities through time management and resilience building. Demographic variables, including age and school location, have been found to affect the severity of challenges and the effectiveness of coping strategies. The study concludes that systemic reforms, including promoting gender sensitive policies and targeted support systems, are crucial for empowering female principals. These findings provide a foundation for further research and practical interventions aimed at cultivating inclusive leadership and promoting gender equality in educational environments.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini menyiasat cabaran dan halangan yang dihadapi oleh pengajar perempuan di sekolah rendah luar bandar di Wilayah Shanxi, dan menangani kawasan penting tetapi belum diterokai sepenuhnya dalam kepimpinan pendidikan dalam rangka kerja budaya dan sosial yang unik di China. Kajian ini berdasarkan teori budaya organisasi Schein dan teori feminis, dan menggunakan kaedah kualitatif untuk meneroka faktor-faktor yang menjejaskan keberkesanan kepimpinan pengajar perempuan, strategi mereka untuk mengatasi halangan jantina dan organisasi, dan interaksi faktor demografi seperti usia, pengalaman, dan jenis sekolah. Data dikumpulkan melalui tinjauan dan temuduga untuk memberikan pemahaman terperinci mengenai cabaran pelbagai aspek yang dihadapi oleh pemimpin-pemimpin ini. Penemuan penyelidikan menunjukkan bahawa pemimpin wanita menghadapi bias jantina yang biasa, konflik keluarga kerja, dan halangan struktur dalam budaya organisasi yang didominasi lelaki. Cabaran ini dinyatakan dalam peluang terhad untuk mengakses sumber, keraguan mengenai keupayaan kepimpinan, dan jangkaan sosial yang ketat. Walaupun beberapa prinsipal wanita telah mengamalkan strategi seperti menggalakkan kesaksamaan jantina, menyokong rangkaian, dan meningkatkan kemahiran profesional, prinsipal lain menekankan mengimbangkan tanggungjawab kerja dan keluarga melalui pengurusan masa dan membina ketahanan. Pembolehubah demografi, termasuk umur dan lokasi sekolah, telah didapati menjejaskan keparahan cabaran dan keberkesanan strategi mengatasi. Kajian ini menyimpulkan bahawa pembaharuan sistemik, termasuk mempromosikan dasar sensitif jantina dan sistem sokongan yang disasarkan, sangat penting untuk memberi kuasa kepada pemimpin wanita. Penemuan ini menyediakan asas untuk penyelidikan lanjut dan campur tangan praktikal yang bertujuan untuk memupuk kepimpinan inklusif dan menggalakkan kesaksamaan jantina dalam persekitaran pendidikan.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

With an increasing number of female leaders emerging on various stages of today's societal life, the leadership carried by these few female elites is rapidly becoming a new force driving continuous social development. Especially in the field of education, the role of female Principals has become an indispensable and significant part, contributing to the thriving development and innovative progress of the education sector. (Li, 2024)At the same time, as essential figures in the education sector, female Principals play a crucial role in shaping different educational environments under male leadership and promoting school development (Chen, 2016). Their leadership styles, decision-making methods, and leadership philosophies have profound impacts on the culture and atmosphere of schools. As gender segregation gradually diminishes today, not only are more and more women pioneering their path to leadership development in the education field, but men and other women in social life are also deeply influenced by the female leadership brought by female Principals (Jiang, 2011). The successful experiences and leadership styles of some female Principals also serve as role models and inspirations for women in other fields. The continuous increase in the number of female Principals is of great significance in advancing gender equality and promoting the harmonious development of society as a whole.

This study is grounded in the theoretical concepts of feminism and organizational culture. It systematically collects and analyzes several case studies and surveys of Chinese female Principals, as well as reviews and organizes important literature on the topic of women's leadership. By providing a comprehensive discussion and analysis of the current status of female leadership development in the field of education, the study aims to promote the cross-fertilization of feminism and leadership studies, and to advance the development and deepening of research on women's leadership. Importantly, the study will analyze the challenges and obstacles faced by female Principals in leading schools, along with the reasons behind these challenges and obstacles. It will also attempt to explore how they address the challenges they face in their work, providing positive influence and role modeling for other female leaders. The role of female Principals as leaders is not limited to the internal environment of schools; their influence and exemplary role will also permeate into various sectors of society, generating positive effects for the construction of a harmonious society.

1.2 Problem Background

In traditional Chinese beliefs, there are concepts like "men work outside, women manage inside" and "men plow, women weave", which imply that men are responsible for working outside the home while women take care of household affairs. This notion leads to the widespread belief that a woman's focus should be on her family, resulting in misconceptions and biases towards women in the workplace, especially successful ones. However, in today's modern society with increasingly specialized professional roles, the participation and importance of women in the workplace are becoming more prominent (Li, 2020). Especially in the fields of education, culture, healthcare, and services, the role of women is increasingly crucial.

They not only demonstrate outstanding professional abilities and leadership in the workplace but also play a significant role in promoting social progress and development in various fields.

In the field of education, female teachers constitute the primary workforce in China's compulsory education schools. According to statistics from the Ministry of Education, in 2019, there were 5.945 million full-time teachers in ordinary primary schools in China, of which 3.999 million were female, accounting for 67.15% (Development Planning Department of the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2019). As attention is paid to the presence and contribution of women in education, female Principals, as leaders of school organizations, are increasingly recognized for their governance and leadership capabilities. In the stage of basic education, namely primary education, with the strengthening of the professional abilities of the teaching staff, an increasing number of outstanding female teachers have taken up management positions, occupying important positions in the school's management system. Female Principals are the backbone of this team, so more attention needs to be paid to female Principals themselves. Secondly, the Principal is the central system of a school. Under the Principal responsibility system in China, every word and action of the Principal represents the school, which also requires deeper research into the field of female Principals.

Women in leadership positions face many obstacles, and one typical barrier for women's advancement to higher positions is gender-based stereotypical perceptions (Oakley, 2000). In China, this phenomenon is referred to as gender bias, which is particularly evident in the appointment and work process of female Principals. A report on the construction of female leadership in Guangxi Province, China, pointed out that among the 20 primary and secondary school leaders directly appointed by the Education Bureau, only 16 were women, accounting for 8.8% (Zhang, 2013). In the analysis and discussion of the research data, Zhang Lili and other researchers reached

the consensus that factors hindering female teachers from advancing to leadership positions mainly include male biases and stereotypical views of women in traditional culture (Zhang, 2013). Therefore, it can be seen that there still exists bias towards female Principals in the education sector in China, which is also one of the common challenges and obstacles faced by all female primary school Principals.

In addition, the primary issue that female Principals in China face is the conflict between their professional responsibilities and family duties. When discussing female leadership, people invariably consider how she manages to balance her career with family obligations. Researchers have discussed this aspect extensively: Liu (2020) argues that as family demands increase, women may lose enthusiasm for their work. Zhang (2019) identifies gender differences in work-family conflict across different countries, noting that in China, women are more likely to experience interference from family in their work. Xu (2016) suggests that compared to male colleagues, women face more severe work-family conflict due to work and family pressures, and are more likely to have work affect their family life. As leaders of schools, they bear significant professional responsibilities while fulfilling their roles as mothers at home. This dual pressure from work and life may adversely affect the efficiency of female Principals and their overall quality of life. Given that this study focuses on female primary school Principals in rural China, it's important to note that the challenges faced by rural school Principals differ from those in urban areas, such as limited educational resources and lower overall cultural levels among residents. Therefore, gender bias against female Principals may be more pronounced in rural settings, posing greater challenges for them in leading schools.

In addition, female Principals face formidable challenges arising from differences in age and school types. Firstly, age differences merit attention as they can yield vastly different leadership outcomes in a profession like school management, which demands prolonged focus, dedication, and high-intensity work. The stages of

youth, middle age, and elderly years each present various issues and challenges. For instance, young female Principals must stand out among numerous competitors(Zhang , 2013), particularly excellent male leaders, to prove their worth, often needing to exert greater effort than their male counterparts. Middle-aged female Principals, as their careers peak and family demands intensify, must resolve the resulting conflicts. Meanwhile, elderly female Principals must maintain effective leadership despite inherent physical and energy limitations compared to men, presenting a significant challenge.

Apart from age-related concerns, differences in school types pose corresponding obstacles. Various school types may entail distinct management needs and challenges (Xu, 2016). For instance, rural and urban schools may require different leadership styles, necessitating female Principals to possess diverse practical coping strategies and professional skills. This implies a continuous need for learning and self-improvement to adapt to the leadership model demands of different school types. Given that this study primarily focuses on rural primary schools in China, only brief discussion on school types is provided.

Therefore, the focus of this study is to explore the challenges and obstacles faced by female Principals of rural primary schools in China when leading schools. The aim is to identify solutions to these issues and apply the findings to enhance the practice of educational management in rural China. This endeavor seeks to contribute to the development of education and female leadership in China, promoting progress in both fields.

1.3 Problem Statement

Ideally, in a rapidly developing China across all sectors, female school Principals should be able to fully leverage their professional skills and personal charisma to achieve effective school management and educational goals. However, in reality, female school Principals face numerous challenges, including pervasive gender bias in the broader environment and the challenge of balancing professional responsibilities with family duties. These various challenges have constrained the development of female school Principals in the field of education, limiting their leadership potential and resulting in deficiencies in school management. The gap between this reality and the ideal scenario has brought about negative impacts on both the personal responsibilities of female school Principals and the overall development of schools (Li, 2020).

Moreover, in China, women are clearly at a disadvantage in the process of entering the leadership ranks of the education system, which has become a notable educational issue and challenge. Data indicates that in recent years, the total number of female teachers in compulsory education schools in China has exceeded that of male teachers, showing a trend of gradual increase. While female teachers have become the primary teaching force in Chinese compulsory education schools, and schools have, in a sense, become feminized organizations, the number and proportion of women responsible for school leadership and management have not correspondingly increased (Su, 2010). Although there is currently no precise statistical data, field surveys conducted in individual schools and locations suggest that the number and proportion of female school Principals are significantly lower than the proportion of women in the entire school organization. The widespread gender bias and male bias in society are manifestations of long-standing discriminatory social culture and gender education traditions. Therefore, the problems

faced by female school Principals in China are undoubtedly deeply rooted (Cai, 2023).

Therefore, the challenges and obstacles faced by female Principals in leading schools have become a complex and pressing issue that urgently needs to be addressed. This topic is still an emerging field in the realm of leadership studies in China, with related research mainly focusing on the leadership abilities of female Principals and the conflict between balancing family and work. This also reflects the distinctive characteristics of research on female Principals in China. Influenced by Western feminist concepts, there is a growing recognition of the importance of female roles in leadership positions. However, research in this area is still very limited and has not yet reached a significant scale, with only a small amount of research exploring this aspect. Despite the significant progress in China's modernization and social civilization, gender bias phenomena are gradually decreasing, but they still persist. Studies have shown that gender discrimination becomes more covert in various aspects such as talent recruitment and hiring processes (Zhou & Song , 2016), which limits the role of female leaders in organizational environments. Addressing gender bias is precisely what feminism emphasizes. Therefore, this study attempts to explore a path suitable for the current situation of female Principals in China based on organizational culture theory and feminist theory.

Therefore, this study takes the role of women in schools as primary school Principals as the starting point to explore the challenges and obstacles faced by female Principals in leading schools, as well as the factors influencing their leadership effectiveness and possible solutions. By focusing on several case studies of Chinese female Principals in the field of education, it helps to uncover the potential of more female leaders, promote the sustainable development of China's education industry, and contribute to overall social progress. Thus, this study primarily highlights the challenges faced by female Principals in leading schools and the development of

Chinese female Principals in the field of education, which is of significant importance and value for enhancing the educational management level of female Principals, advancing the healthy development of China's education industry, and promoting comprehensive social progress.

1.4 Research Objectives

- To identify the challenges and barriers faced by female Principals in leading schools.
- To explore how female Principals handle with these challenges and barriers.
- To explore how different demographic characteristics impact the challenges female Principals face when leading schools.
- To explore whether gender discrimination in the work environment faced by female Principals is decreasing as the number of female leaders increases in China.

1.5 Research Questions

This research sought to answer the research question:

- What challenges and barriers faced by women Principals in leading schools?
- How do women Principals handle with these challenges and barriers?
- How do different demographic characteristics affect the challenges faced by women Principals when leading schools?

- Against the backdrop of an increasing number of female leaders in China, is gender discrimination decreasing in the work environment faced by women Principals?

1.6 Theoretical Framework

1.6.1 Schein's Theory of Organizational Culture

The theory of leadership and organizational culture proposed by Edgar H. Schein (1985) will serve as the primary theoretical framework guiding this study. Schein has been researching organizational culture since the 1980s and continues to be a pioneering author and key theorist in the concepts of culture and leadership (Linn, 2008). Schein (2010) defines organizational culture as "a pattern of basic assumptions invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems" (p. 17). Schein (2010) asserts that when we exert influence over others' behaviors and values, we consider it as "leadership" and create conditions for the formation of a new culture. In addition, he regards leadership as "the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how it can be done effectively, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives."

In the interdisciplinary field of leadership studies and organizational behavior, Schein's theory of leadership and organizational culture provides a significant

framework for this study to understand the challenges and barriers faced by leaders, especially female Principals, in organizations. The primary purpose of this paper is to explore various challenges and obstacles encountered by female Principals in leading schools. By employing Schein's theory of leadership and organizational culture, researchers can gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of how female Principals interact with organizational culture and how organizational culture influences their leadership styles and behaviors.

Organizational culture theory emphasizes the shaping and influence of leaders on organizational culture (Hogan & Coote , 2014). In the longstanding organizational culture context of schools, female Principals may face various challenges from the organizational culture, such as gender bias, preferences for a male-dominated cultural background, and imbalances in power structures. Through in-depth research into these challenges, we can better understand how female Principals cope with and overcome these obstacles to realize the leadership potential inherent in female Principals and promote the development of the school. Furthermore, leadership and organizational culture theory also help analyze how female Principals shape and change the organizational culture of schools to promote gender equality, inclusivity, and diversity in the field of education (Hatch, 1993). By understanding the impact of organizational culture on female leaders, we can provide more targeted recommendations for developing policies and practices that are more suitable for different genders to support and promote the development and success of female Principals.

In other words, the realms of leadership and organizational culture intersect and mutually influence each other. Leadership plays a crucial role in the construction, implantation, and dissemination of organizational culture (Schein, (1983). Similarly, female Principals, as leaders, use their unique styles to create, implant, and disseminate a new organizational culture while overcoming challenges. When female Principals act as leaders in a new group environment, their initial actions reflect

personal motivations and tendencies. Subsequently, group reflections occur, where members collectively experience actions driven by individual leaders. This is followed by the establishment of organizational culture, as leaders imbue their assumptions, such as female Principals spreading their leadership models within the campus to initiate a new group culture (Yin, 2019).

Based on the aforementioned analysis, this study, grounded in the theory of leadership and organizational culture, hypothesizes that female Principals may face various challenges and barriers when leading schools. Firstly, it is hypothesized that there exists gender discrimination and bias in organizational culture, leading to restrictions on female Principals in power structure allocation and distribution of educational resources. Secondly, it is hypothesized that traditional leadership models and preferences for male-dominated cultural backgrounds may influence the leadership styles and behaviors of female Principals, subjecting them to higher expectations and stricter standards. These two points stem from external pressures and internal pressures, including potential conflicts between female Principals' roles in their families and professional responsibilities, negatively affecting their work and increasing the burdens and challenges they face in school leadership.

1.6.2 Feminist theory

Gender is the core concept of contemporary feminist theory and the central content of feminist scholarship. It distinguishes itself from "biological sex," which is marked by physical characteristics, referring instead to socially constructed identities and expectations in a gendered manner (Gross, 2013). Gender cannot be directly equated with the physiological differences between males and females. Gender theory analyzes the essence and root causes of gender inequality in human society, arguing

that the gender roles assumed by men and women are not determined by biology but primarily shaped by societal and cultural constraints. Regarding gender discrimination in employment, gender theory posits that the privileged status of men in the labor market (Dietz, 2003), and even their social recognition exceeding their own worth, are manifestations of traditional cultural gender norms and social arrangements made for them by society, rather than determined by individual factors or behaviors in the labor market. Similarly, the devaluation of women's contributions to labor productivity is not a result of individual discrimination, but rather a form of social discrimination caused by societal and cultural factors.

Opposing gender discrimination and advocating for the elimination of the social foundations that produce such inequalities are at the core of gender theory. Gender theory helps us to correctly perceive certain differences between men and women and strives to eliminate outdated and unscientific stereotypes in traditional gender roles. It also aims to eliminate discrimination and prejudice, promote harmony and unity in the social and family roles of both genders (Allen, 2018), rebuild a gender structure conducive to the full realization of the capabilities of both sexes, and facilitate their maximum potential and comprehensive development based on harmonious coexistence, thus striving for the utmost freedom and progress for both genders.

Gender is the core concept of feminism, originating from the early 20th-century international women's movement. Feminist Ann Oakley first made a distinction between "sex" and "gender" in her work "Sex, Gender and Society". She views sex as the universal, generally unchangeable, innate physiological differences between males and females in terms of their biological structures (Frye, 2015), which do not vary based on race, ethnicity, region, or nationality, and are biologically determined. Social gender, on the other hand, refers to the differences between males and females formed by social and cultural factors, belonging to women or men as group characteristics and behavioral patterns, and is socially and culturally constructed.

Gender discrimination in employment restricts women from equal access to jobs solely based on their gender, rather than their job performance (Hughes, 2002). This discrimination manifests in women being unable to find jobs under equal conditions as men or having to spend more time and effort to obtain the same job. Employers use explicit or implicit means to exclude women from the labor market. Such examples are common in daily life. For instance, some job postings explicitly state "male candidates only", even for positions where both genders are equally capable, such as office clerks, financial auditors, public relations officers, or computer technicians, indicating a preference for male applicants.

In other words, the challenges and obstacles faced by women in leadership positions may be attributed to the societal gender norms prevailing in the broader environment (Cleveland & Barnes, 2013). In such circumstances, these invisible barriers lead female leaders to experience the influence of gender stereotypes or societal expectations on their role as leaders. They may feel the need to overcome or transcend traditional gender role expectations in their leadership roles. This discordance can hinder the effectiveness of women as leaders. According to this theory, social gender theory plays a significant role in helping female Principals navigate the challenges they encounter in school leadership (Bobbitt, 2011), thereby enhancing their leadership effectiveness. A gender identity free from bias can reduce the conflict of being perceived both as a woman and as a leader. When facing the role of school leadership, female Principals may encounter external scrutiny and pressure, suggesting they should conform to traditional gender role expectations rather than their identity as leaders. However, a positive societal acceptance of female Principals can better address these challenges, reducing internal conflicts and pressures. This also helps female Principals integrate their gender identity with their professional roles.

1.7 The Conceptual Framework

In order to construct the conceptual framework of this study, it is necessary to first provide a clear definition of the key concepts and variables that have been identified in the research objectives of this study, and explain in detail the connections contained therein. Through this definition and connection, we can ensure that every key concept in this study is clear and systematically included throughout the entire article. It also helps to clarify the complex relationships between research objects during the research process, thereby ensuring a clear direction for the research. In addition, this structural framework can serve as an overall outline for research, allowing for a more systematic presentation of these core variables (Baker & Baker, 2009). This provides a conceptual foundation and data support for the research results, making them more credible and persuasive, and helps to explore in depth the many challenges that female Principals face when leading schools, providing scientific basis for education and leadership related fields. Through this systematic approach, research can delve deeper into the complex factors that influence female Principal leadership, providing a scientific basis for formulating relevant policies and intervention measures. The research question of this study has the following four key concepts and variables.

1. Challenges and Barriers: It refers to the various difficulties, issues, and challenges that female Principals in China may encounter when leading schools, which may involve gender discrimination, work-family conflicts, organizational culture, resource allocation, and other aspects.

2. Coping Strategies: The coping methods and management skills that female Principals employ when leading schools include establishing support networks and seeking assistance from peers in the education field. They also focus on developing

leadership skills and enhancing their professional competence to improve their managerial abilities. Creating reasonable schedules to achieve a balance between work and family life is also crucial. Advocating for gender equality is another important aspect, where they actively promote gender equality and resist external societal pressures.

3. Female Principals' Demographics: The unfair treatment or actions based on gender criteria. In China, female Principals leading schools may encounter gender discrimination at the societal or individual level, such as doubts about their abilities and biases against their leadership styles. Specific manifestations of this issue include limited promotion opportunities and unfair compensation.

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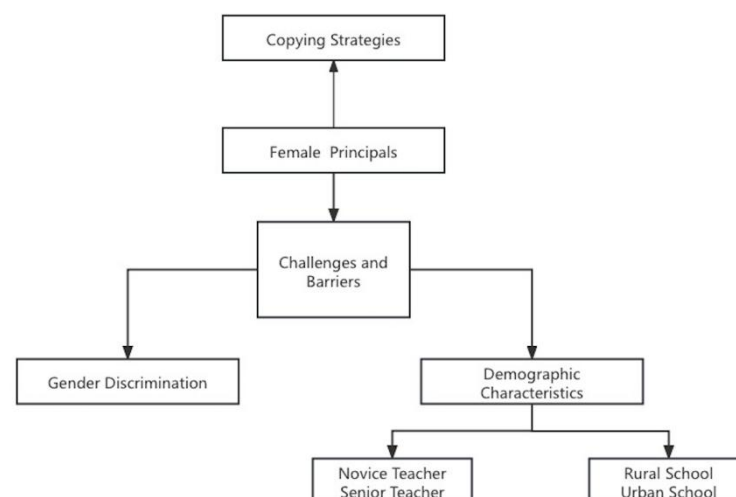


Figure 1.1 The Relationships Between Variables

This study will delve into the variables described above and their interrelationships, establishing a conceptual model to analyze the factors that present challenges to female Principals and how these factors impact them. Through this conceptual model (Figure 1.1), the article can comprehensively and systematically understand how different factors influence the work of female Principals, including gender discrimination, female Principals' coping strategies, challenges and obstacles encountered by female Principals, and their personal characteristics.

Positive influencing factors, such as positive organizational culture support and efficient leadership training, can enhance the leadership effectiveness of Principals by providing them with more effective spiritual support and professional skills (Amagoh, 2009). These resources and skills help them better cope with daily challenges and stress. On the contrary, negative factors such as gender discrimination, work family conflicts, and differences in urban and rural school environments may make Principals feel overwhelmed. These persistent factors not only affect the leadership effectiveness of female Principals, but may also have long-term negative impacts on their career development.

Coping strategies are techniques or methods adopted by Principals to cope with the pressure and needs in their roles. The effectiveness of these strategies directly affects the leadership level of female Principals. Effective coping strategies, such as actively facing problems and seeking support, can improve leadership effectiveness by reducing stress levels and enhancing resilience. On the contrary, ineffective coping strategies such as avoidance and denial may lead to increased conflicts and have a sustained negative impact on the career development of female Principals over time (Tamadoni & Bellibaş, 2024). Therefore, identifying and cultivating effective coping strategies is crucial for Principals to ensure that they can effectively manage their work and maintain good leadership.

The demographic data of Principals (age, gender, and school type) may affect their views, response patterns, and coping strategies towards challenge factors (Campos & Zúñiga, 2022). For example, older Principals may rely on richer experience and more mature coping mechanisms to tackle challenges, but they may also face different age-related life pressures. Gender may also affect the types of challenges experienced by female Principals, as male and female Principals may have different stress experiences due to differences in social expectations and roles. In addition, different types of schools are located in different environments, including resource availability, student demographics, and community expectations, all of which may lead to varying degrees of challenges and pressures for Principals. This diversity indicates that when studying the challenges faced by female Principals, these variables must be considered to comprehensively understand and meet their specific needs.

Through the conceptual model diagram, the interrelationships between these variables can be visually observed. Female Principals will face various challenges and obstacles in the process of leading schools, which may include but are not limited to gender biases, work experience, school distribution areas, school organizational culture, work-life balance issues, and resource allocation. These issues may significantly impact the work of female Principals and could further affect their job performance and career development. Therefore, understanding and addressing these challenges are essential for the professional development of female Principals. Through in-depth research and analysis of these challenges, better support can be provided to female Principals to gain experience in leading schools, thereby promoting progress and development in the field of education and feminism.

1.8 Limitations, Delimitations and Assumptions

There may be some limitations in the process of this study. Among them, sample selection could be a major limiting factor (Berndt, 2020). Because in China, the number of female Principals is relatively fewer compared to male Principals, especially in certain types of schools or regions (such as extremely remote and underdeveloped rural areas or minority ethnic areas, where most women are married or cannot work due to religious beliefs), this may result in a small sample size that is not fully representative. Therefore, the results of this study may be constrained by the factor of sample selection, unable to fully examine and reflect all the challenges faced by all female Principals. Additionally, due to limitations in research time and resources, this study may not be able to include all the possible challenges and obstacles. This may lead to limitations in the results of this study, making it unable to comprehensively reflect all the challenges and obstacles faced by female Principals when leading schools. Therefore, when interpreting the research results, it is important to carefully consider these two limitations and be aware that the scope of this study may not cover all situations. Furthermore, the applicability of the research results may also be affected by sample selection and research conditions (Berndt, 2020), so caution is needed when applying the results of this study in practice, and their applicability should be carefully evaluated.

The scope and definition of this study focus on female Principals in China, primarily within rural elementary schools. Within this scope, the research primarily focuses on the various challenges female Principals face when leading schools and the pathways and methods to address these issues. However, it is important to note that this study has some limitations and boundaries. Firstly, the study will specifically focus on the challenges female Principals face in applying leadership in the field of education, excluding female leaders in other fields. Secondly, the research will be

limited to school environments within China, without considering situations in other countries or regions, and thus lacks global representativeness. Additionally, the research conditions will primarily focus on the elementary school stage of education, excluding other types of middle schools, universities, and other social educational institutions, such as early childhood education guidance or vocational education institutions. These three delineations will help to define the scope and objectives of this study and ensure the credibility and effectiveness of the research results.

In the assumptions of this study, we may assume that the challenges faced by female Principals in different types of schools and regions may vary, depending entirely on factors such as the characteristics of the schools themselves, regional customs and cultures, and social environments (Simon & Goes, 2013). Secondly, we may assume that the leadership styles and personal characteristics of female Principals have a certain influence on the challenges they face. Factors such as age, educational background, and work experience may affect their approaches and effectiveness in dealing with challenges. Additionally, we may also assume that the challenges faced by female Principals in leading schools are closely related to factors such as educational policies, societal expectations, and family responsibilities. Throughout the research process, we will use these assumptions as a basis to validate them through interviews and observations of female Principals, and assess their impact on the research conclusions in the research results to determine their effects.

1.9 Significance of the Study

Undoubtedly, modern society offers women a broader stage to showcase their talents in various fields. Feminist leadership theory posits that women are effective leaders. Women bring a fresh and unique perspective to seek change, and they possess

distinct talents, ideas, attitudes, and approaches that enable them to lead organizations through change to meet the demands of the new economic era (Chen & Wu, 2018). In contemporary society, the role of women in the labor market has evolved as the division of labor between the sexes has changed. Women are now ascending the career ladder based on their abilities, gradually assuming leadership roles traditionally held by men. In the field of education, the presence of female Principals is no longer uncommon. Despite encountering various obstacles in their professional paths, the number and influence of female Principals continue to rise (Eagly & Carli, 2003). The status and power of women have significantly improved, both at the macro level of society and at the micro level of the family. The ascent of women from disadvantaged positions to leadership roles represents a significant social change in China since the new era. In the field of educational management, gender factors have not been a major focus of analysis and content in Chinese research on school leadership. There is still much room for improvement and enhancement to increase the representativeness and discourse power of female Principals. This field requires more academic and policy attention.

Meanwhile, the challenges faced by female Principals in leading schools, particularly in Chinese primary, middle, and high schools as well as universities, constitute an emerging and noteworthy topic of investigation. This research holds significant importance and value.

Female Principals play a crucial role in the field of education. As China's education sector continues to develop and educational philosophies evolve, the status and role of women in school management and leadership are increasingly valued by society (Pittinsky & Zhu, 2005). Female Principals, as leaders of schools, bear the important responsibility of advancing school development, improving educational quality, and nurturing talent for society. Moreover, they represent the status and influence of women in the field of education to some extent. Therefore, studying the

challenges faced by female Principals is of great significance for understanding and promoting the development of women in the field of education. Additionally, this research helps enhance the leadership abilities and management skills of female Principals. By conducting in-depth analysis and research on the difficulties and obstacles encountered by female Principals in their work, better support and assistance can be provided to help them cope with future challenges and improve their leadership effectiveness. Furthermore, researching the challenges faced by female Principals in leading schools can serve as a model and reference for cultivating more outstanding female leaders, thus promoting talent reserves and the development of leadership studies in the field of education (Bush & Haiyan, 2000).

Moreover, the issue of gender inequality in the Chinese education sector is also of great significance for identifying and addressing these issues (Lu, 2020). Although the status of women in the field of education is gradually improving, they still face many challenges and discrimination in their actual work. By studying the work experiences and encounters of female Principals in different types of schools, gender discrimination phenomena existing in society can be revealed, drawing attention and emphasis from society, thereby promoting the gender equality process in China's education sector.

Modern society has provided women with broader opportunities for development, and women have gradually gained leadership power in various fields that was previously dominated by men. This study focuses on the practices of female Principals in the field of education. In China, the number and influence of female Principals are increasing, but they still face numerous challenges. They play a crucial role in school management, which is vital for the development of the education sector (Lu, 2020). Researching the challenges faced by female Principals is of great significance for understanding and promoting the development of women in the field of education. It helps enhance their leadership skills and management abilities.

Additionally, studying the challenges encountered by female Principals in leading schools can serve as role models and goals for cultivating more outstanding female leaders. Furthermore, examining the work experiences and encounters of female Principals in different types of schools can help uncover gender discrimination in society and promote gender equality in China's education sector.

1.10 Definition of Terms

For easier and better understanding of this study, several important terms have been conceptually defined based on the definitions given by other researchers, while also being defined operationally based on the specific circumstances of this study.

1.10.1 Female Principals

In this study, it refers to the school Principal or senior management personnel in charge of the daily operation of the school, leading the school to achieve its goals and objectives (Fullan, 2000). In China, a Principal is defined as the highest administrative officer of a school, serving as its legal representative, appointed by the national education administrative department or other governing bodies of educational institutions. The Principal represents the school externally and manages internal affairs. For the purposes of this study, female Principals of elementary schools are referred to as "female Principals."

1.10.2 Primary School

In China, primary schools are institutions where people receive elementary formal education, forming an integral part of basic education within the nine-year compulsory education system. Children aged 6 to 12 are eligible for primary education, which typically lasts for 6 years (though in some areas, it may be 5 years). Primary education is generally divided into three stages: Grades 1 and 2 are referred to as lower grades, Grades 3 and 4 as middle grades, and Grades 5 and 6 as upper grades. Due to the nine-year compulsory education system in China, primary education is mandatory, and there are no exams for primary students to advance to junior high school. For the purpose of this study, primary schools refer to both public and private institutions providing education from Grade 1 to Grade 6.

1.10.3 Challenges and Barriers

In this study, it refers to the various challenges, issues, and difficulties faced by female Principals in China during the process of leading schools may involve aspects such as gender discrimination, work-family conflict, organizational culture, and resource allocation.

1.10.4 Rural School

If a school's location meets the definition of "rural," which refers to any area not located in urban areas (U.S. Census Bureau), then the school is referred to as a rural

school. In China, rural schools are defined as all schools located in rural areas. The schools involved in the research sample of this study are all situated in rural geographic locations, hence they are referred to as rural schools.

1.10.5 Gender Bias

Gender discrimination refers to differential or unequal treatment of individuals or groups based on their sex or gender. In China, female leaders often encounter challenges such as being labeled, workplace harassment, and misogyny due to gender bias, which undoubtedly adds obstacles and burdens to their work. (Sun Xifang, 2020) Similarly, female Principals in the education sector face similar challenges. One of the challenges faced by female Principals in rural remote areas, which is a part of the research sample in this study, is primarily related to gender issues, termed as gender bias in this research.

1.10.6 Organizational Culture

Schein (2010) defines organizational culture as “the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and that have worked well enough to be considered valid, and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems” (p. 17). In China, the definition of organizational culture refers to the unique cultural image of an organization formed by its values, beliefs, rituals, symbols, and ways of doing things. The ideologies such as values and approaches of the schools where the female

Principals in the research sample are situated are referred to as organizational culture in this study.

1.10.7 Feminism

Feminism, also known as Womanism, is a critical examination of social relationships. Its fundamental purpose is to promote women's rights and equality, and to oppose gender discrimination and oppression. Since the 1990s, the term "feminism" has been used in the academic circles in China. There are many schools of feminist thought, which generally advocate for gender equality for all humanity. (Yu, 2023) The feminism involved in this study is based on theoretical support related to gender bias experienced by female Principals.

1.10.8 Work-Family Conflict

The so-called work-family conflict refers to a type of role conflict that arises from difficulties in reconciling pressures from the work and family domains, leading to conflicts in certain aspects. In this study, work-family conflict is viewed as a form of role conflict, wherein female Principals find themselves in both work and family settings, fulfilling role obligations in each, and encountering conflicts when tasks from one role hinder the completion of tasks in the other role. (Xu, 2023) In this research, the role in the workplace is that of a female Principal, while roles in the family setting can include being a mother, daughter, or wife, among others.

1.11 Summary

This chapter elaborates on the increasingly important position and role of Chinese female Principals in the field of education, emphasizing the multiple challenges and opportunities that female Principals face as educational leaders in promoting educational quality and school development. Firstly, the number of female Principals is gradually increasing, injecting new vitality into the school culture. However, gender bias and traditional beliefs remain the main obstacles to their career development, particularly evident in rural areas. Secondly, this chapter explores the difficulties faced by female Principals in balancing work and family. Female Principals not only need to fulfill their school management responsibilities, but also bear family responsibilities, which may affect their professional performance and personal quality of life. In addition, different demographic characteristics (such as age, qualifications, school type, etc.) also have a significant impact on the challenge experience and coping strategies of female Principals.

This study adopts organizational culture theory and feminist theory as analytical frameworks, aiming to explore the main challenges and coping strategies of female Principals in leading schools, and analyze the influencing factors of their leadership effectiveness. This chapter lays the theoretical foundation for the research and clarifies the research objective, which is to reveal the obstacles and solutions faced by female Principals in the leadership process through systematic case analysis, in order to promote the sustainable development of China's education field and female leadership.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In recent decades, there has been significant progress in the development of female leadership in China's education system and sector (Lu, 2020). The establishment and growth of schools under female Principals have achieved remarkable results. This substantial development demonstrates that China's education system, like those of other countries around the world, is continually advancing and progressing. Despite the incredible growth in the education system and the significant development of female Principals in the field, there are still some related issues that have aroused researchers' interest, specifically the challenges and obstacles faced by female Principals in rural primary schools. This chapter involves literature from other researchers in the relevant fields. The researchers of this study will focus on three aspects related to the research: the challenges and obstacles faced by female Principals in the field of education and school management, the strategies adopted by female Principals to address these challenges, and the causes of these challenges and obstacles. The researchers of this study will also emphasize some theories and models related to organizational culture, feminism, and female leadership.

According Fullan (2002), schools are essentially organisations inundated by current changes; The management and leadership styles of Principals also undergo significant changes influenced by the organizational culture context. However, it is undeniable that Principals bear the primary responsibility for advancing the school to

higher levels of development. So, how do female Principals, as school leaders, ensure that the overall developmental trajectory of the school aligns with the current demands of the education field? As leaders, how do they overcome various roles and responsibilities in different situations while striving to bring progress to the school?

Leaders are defined as individuals perceived as heroes, those who emerge as great figures during crises and times of war (Senge, 1994). In comparison to female Principals, there is a greater number of males in management positions. This finding has been extensively studied for decades. Shakeshaft (1989) confirmed the disproportionately high percentage of women in teaching but low representation in administrative management. This finding was supported by Eagly, Karau & Johnson (1992), who noted that although a large number of women pursue teaching careers, few hold major administrative positions in schools. While leaders have traditionally been associated with male behavior and determination biologically (Abu, 2012), the number of female Principals in school management environments is increasing. Researchers commonly investigate issues such as the gender of Principals, factors influencing leadership effectiveness, and biases related to gender issues in the workplace. This study also analyzes and synthesizes these extensively researched topics, concluding that gender issues among female Principals directly impact job motivation and leadership effectiveness in leading schools.

This study selects female Principals from rural primary schools in Shanxi Province, China, as the sample for this research. This choice is significant because, within the broader context of China, where gender bias still exists, women in remote areas are capable of assuming such a crucial role as Principal. This represents a significant advancement and a noteworthy issue for investigation. From both a gender perspective and considering the unique educational environment, this allows for a more specific understanding of the challenges female Principals face and the

strategies they employ in addressing these challenges. This, in turn, extends to a deeper understanding of the role of female leaders.

2.2 Issues related to organizational cultural background in the leadership process of female Principals

It is not surprising to mention the position of female leaders, especially female Principals, which raises issues related to female leadership organizational culture. Women have become the focus of interest in discussing the impact of gender on leadership organizational culture. Miller, Taylor, and Buck (1991) pointed out that this situation may occur because social perceivers typically focus on atypical elements of categories. Traditionally, the proportion of women in administrative positions is much lower than that of men, and their main role in schools is to serve as school teachers. However, this situation has changed in the Chinese environment of the new era (Pittinsky & Zhu, 2005), as the proportion of women in the field of education administration has been increasing recently, and the number of female researchers has also been increasing. The issue of women in administrative departments has aroused great interest among female researchers in conducting research on related topics. In the end, it once again drew attention to the relationship between the gender of managers and their organizational culture based on their leadership background. Researchers are currently interested in the differences in organizational culture between men and women. In addition, they are also interested in whether male or female leaders are more effective in organizational leadership. Researchers from all over the world have shown interest in gender related issues, particularly in management and administrative environments.

In history, female leaders have always started from junior Principal positions, and the problems that Principals must face in leadership positions can affect their leadership style in higher administrative positions (Grogan, 2005). Some researchers believe that women's leadership effectiveness is stronger and more effective than that of male Principals (Zheng, 2010). Some researchers also claim that there is only a small causal relationship or no relationship between gender and the leadership style and effectiveness of leaders (Zhang, 2014). Although the numerous survey results mentioned above indicate that the number of women holding administrative positions in schools has always been low. However, in a study conducted at a university, most students indicated that male leaders are more suitable for leadership positions in schools. These students believe that the success of male leaders is mostly due to the female Principal's own work ability and knowledge reserves, but the success of female leaders only relies on some accidental luck and effort (Hafizah Binti Haji, 2021). Surprisingly, Sekaran (1994) found that female subordinates trust male leaders more than female leaders.

Even in the professions they engage in, female Principals face some gender stereotypes. Papastamatis&Kantartzi (2006) pointed out that teachers have a skeptical attitude towards female school Principals and believe that male Principals are more suitable for leadership positions in schools. In some previous literature studies, although there were more female participants entering the pre education leadership course compared to male participants, female leaders had to face the greatest challenge in terms of educational leadership status (Chen, 2007). Various studies have shown that the low representation of female leaders in the field of education may be due to the low expectations of society for women as leaders over the long term (Wang, 2014). Some women also find that if they place themselves in the leadership position of the upper echelons, they will be seen as inhumane and more indifferent, as well as unresponsive and irresponsible towards their families. One of the reasons is the

stereotype and solidification effect of society on women's family attributes (Liu, 2011).

2.3 The concept of organizational culture

The theoretical concept of organizational culture originated in the field of anthropology in the early 20th century. Researchers in the field of anthropology have gradually developed the concept of "culture" while exploring behavioral patterns, belief preferences, and the structure of other social systems in different social forms and cultures. Researchers from different fields and directions have different understandings of this concept, and with the development and progress of the times, the concept of culture has been introduced into management and organizational behavior. Different researchers and scholars always interpret the meaning of organizational culture from different perspectives and perspectives in different eras. There are various interpretations of the concept of organizational culture from relevant dictionaries, online encyclopedias, and related works and articles.

In the 1970s, American management scholar Edgar Schein provided a comprehensive and specific explanation of "organizational culture" in his work "Organizational Psychology", which was a significant sign that organizational culture can be formally regarded as a research field. Schein defines organizational culture as a fundamental assumption shared by organizational members, which is considered effective in problem-solving and adapting to the external environment, and is therefore learned by new members. Subsequently, organizational culture has become an important topic in the fields of enterprise management, organizational behavior, and human resource management, and has been widely studied and applied in practical life, mainly to improve organizational work efficiency and employee sense

of belonging and satisfaction. Allaire (1984) proposed that organizational culture is a special symbolic system shaped by the history, leadership, and unexpected events of the surrounding society and organization, which is shared, used, and modified differently by participants in the process of action and understanding of organizational events. From this perspective, organizational culture can be seen as a tool for explaining the lives and behaviors of members within an organization, as well as understanding the process of organizational decline or complete change. Because, no matter what changes occur in the form or content of an organization, it is a very special social creation and an appender of social significance. Since the mid-1980s, the management of organizational culture or symbolic symbols has increasingly become a focus of research in Western organizational theory, and this topic has also sparked heated debate among various parties. Numerous researchers have diligently explored cultural topics within organizations and finally achieved results, spontaneously forming a theoretical school of organizational culture. The establishment of the organizational culture school was marked by the publication of Schein's work "Organizational Culture and Leadership" in 1985. Schein (1985) pointed out that the term organizational culture should actually be a fundamental assumption and creed upheld by an organization at a deeper level. According to Baidu Baike (2023), organizational culture refers to the norms that control behavior, work attitudes, values, and relationship settings within an organization; It is a shared value system among organizational members that makes the organizational structure unique and distinct from other organizations. It has guiding, normative, cohesive, motivating, innovative, and radiating effects. The Oxford Dictionary(2024)explains organizational culture as follows: Organizational culture refers to the shared attitudes and agreed upon ways of working among employees of a company or organization. Changing and reshaping organizational culture is not easy, and a variety of organizational cultures can be found in every industry.

Organizational culture refers to the overall values and behavioral norms within an organization, a shared concept within the organization, and a set of behavioral norms and guidelines that members of the organization follow together. Organizational culture not only constitutes the core of an organizational system, but also the cornerstone of continuous improvement and development of the organization. It is mainly formed and followed by members within the organization, including values, behavioral norms, work methods, and other aspects of an organizational system. Organizational culture is an implicit and powerful force that subtly influences the behavior and thoughts of all members within an organization, as well as the interaction and development between the organization and the external environment. In modern Chinese organizational management theory, the concept of organizational culture is considered a determining factor for the success of an organization. An organizational system with a positive, positive, and objective organizational culture can greatly stimulate the enthusiasm and dedication of employees within the organization, thereby strengthening team cooperation and improving the competitiveness and efficiency of the organization. On the contrary, an organizational system that operates with a negative, negative, and distorted organizational culture can lead to a significant reduction in employee dissatisfaction and sense of belonging within the organization, seriously affecting the normal operation and healthy development of the organization.

2.4 The framework of organizational culture

2.4.1 Schein's definition of organizational culture

Schein pointed out that the word culture has many meanings. When we connect the commonly used word "culture" and "organization" together, we lead to confusion in concepts and semantics. When we talk about organizational culture with colleagues and members of the organization, we often find that we all agree that "it" exists and its role is also important (Hogan & Coote, 2014). However, when asked what organizational culture is, everyone's views are completely different. Sometimes, some colleagues tell me that they don't use the concept of organizational culture in their work, but when asked what is not used, they become confused.

Schein listed the meanings of the term culture in existing literature. Mainly includes: behavioral norms expressed through language and rituals; The standards of the constantly changing homework group; The dominant value recognized by the organization; The philosophy of handling and understanding the relationship between organizations and customers as organizational guidance; The rules that new members in the organization must learn and be able to get along well with other members; The organizational atmosphere that members, customers, and outsiders can feel (Schein, 1990).

Schein pointed out that the significance of all these cultures is only a reflection of culture from different aspects, but they are not fundamental elements of organizational culture. The term organizational culture should actually be a fundamental assumption and creed that an organization adheres to at a deeper level. These basic assumptions and beliefs are shared by members of an organization and

may be applied unconsciously (Schein, 1990). These basic assumptions and beliefs are remembered by organizational members in order to respond to survival issues in the external environment and internal integration issues. Assumptions and beliefs are taken for granted because they can quickly and repeatedly solve problems. Deeper assumptions should be distinguished from "artificial symbols", which are only the manifestation and surface level of organizational culture, rather than the core of culture (Linn, 2008).

Schein believed that culture should be seen as a wealth of an independent and stable social unit (Hogan & Coote, 2014). If you can prove that a predetermined group of people share a significant amount of important experience in solving external and internal problems, you can also assume that these shared experiences have guided them and generated common views about their surrounding world and the world they live in. These shared views must have been effective for a long enough time to be taken for granted and become unconscious (Schein, 1990). In this sense, organizational culture is a product of group experiential habits, and therefore it can only be found in groups with certain boundaries and a glorious history.

2.4.2 Leadership in Schein's Organizational Culture

Leadership plays a significant role in Schein's organizational culture theory, determining the fundamental direction of organizational culture development and playing a crucial role in the emergence and transformation of organizational culture theory (Schein, 1990). Leadership is actually the ability to reveal the limitations of previously eliminated cultures and develop organizational culture to make it more adaptable to the times and practices. The use of this ability by leaders can promote the continuous adaptation of organizational culture to the development of organizational

reality (Linn, 2008). The formation and stable development of organizational systems must be based on a certain positive and positive goal orientation. When more independent individuals discover that people can complete tasks that they cannot complete when working alone through cooperation or coordination, the organization gradually forms. In practical activities, leaders can not only attract the attention of subordinates, but also convey their assumptions and values in a clear and concise way.

Schein summarized three main factors that contribute to the formation of organizational culture: firstly, the beliefs, values, and assumptions of the creators of the organizational system; The second is the learning experience formed by group members as the organizational system develops; The third is the new beliefs, values, and assumptions brought about by new organizational members and leadership (Schein, 1990). Among these three influencing factors, organizational creators are crucial to the formation of organizational culture. For new members of an organization, creators exert significant influence in defining and addressing external adaptation and internal integration issues (Hatch, 1993). It not only needs to consider the overall goals and mission of the new team's normal operation, but also clarify the core tasks and environmental background of the new team, and integrate their shared ideas, so as to smoothly integrate themselves into the new environmental background. Schein believes that organizational leaders should not only have strong self-confidence and determination, but also have a profound insight into the essence of the world, human nature, and interpersonal relationships. They should accurately position the role played by the organization in the world and the truths obtained (Schein, 1990), and make effective assumptions about the organization's management of time and space in practical activities.

For the organization itself, exploring and studying the formation process of organizational culture is a crucial step in analyzing its essence. A company founded

by two leaders with the same learning background, using the same technical means to complete the same tasks in the same external environment, but after several years, it unexpectedly developed completely different operating methods. That is to say, in the process of forming organizational culture, individuals have completely different assumptions about leadership and shared assumptions about defining cultural concepts. Organizational culture can only arise when individuals assume to have shared experiences in solving external survival and internal integration issues within a group (Yin, 2019). Organizational culture is successfully created through shared experiences within the organization, but the process often begins with leaders imposing their beliefs, values, and initial assumptions on the members of the organization in order to be effective.

Schein believes that the creation and management of culture is a dynamic process rather than a static one, which is the best aspect of the role of leadership. Leadership and culture are the opposite of the same coin. While leadership creates organizational culture, organizational culture in turn defines leadership. When the external environment of an organization changes, some shared assumptions will gradually become invalid, and when the organization falls into difficulties, leadership begins to take effect. Leadership plays a crucial role in the process of organizational culture change (Schein, 1990), as it encourages leaders to lead the organization out of the cultural cycle that should have been eliminated and begin a more adaptable developmental change process. Schein believes that leadership is actually an ability to reveal the limitations and developments of old cultures, making them more adaptable.

If we want to have a more comprehensive and clear understanding of the relationship between leadership and organizational culture, we must examine it from a developmental and dynamic perspective. Organizational culture, as an ideology and values within the organizational system (Hatch, 1993), is everywhere and always present. It surrounds us as an ideology, limited and created in our interactions with

others, and then shaped through the behavior and attitude of leaders. Leadership often plays an immeasurable role in the creation, dissemination, and rooting of organizational culture (Tierney, 1988). The source of organizational culture lies in the leader, who applies their own values and assumptions to the organizational group. If the group performs well and achieves remarkable results, the personal assumptions instilled by the leader in the group will be taken for granted, and organizational culture can be generated. This culture provides basic guidelines for defining leadership styles for future members of the organization.

Female Principals face multiple challenges when leading schools, including understanding, shaping, and even changing the organizational culture of the school. She must understand and master the relationship between leadership and organizational culture from a constantly evolving and dynamic perspective (Eagly & Carli, 2003). Because organizational culture reflects the core values and behavioral norms within the entire school (Schein, 1990), which are shaped and disseminated by the Principal. So the leadership style and personal values of female Principals themselves will have a very subtle and far-reaching impact on the school, thereby affecting the overall organizational culture of the school. At the same time, the female Principal should understand that her own leadership style and the school culture are interdependent. By shaping a positive and positive leadership image that aligns with social and public values, she can become a leader in school culture and lay a solid ideological and cultural foundation for the development of the school. In the process of addressing challenges and promoting cultural change in schools, she can also adopt appropriate strategies to promote cultural development and innovation.

2.4.3 The advantages of Schein's organizational culture on the leadership performance of female Principals

The rise of organizational culture theory is essentially a reform of re establishing a "people-oriented" management form (Ouchi, 1985). It reminds organizational systems in various fields not to focus solely on technology as the overall goal and focus of the organization, but to pay more attention to the members who produce organizational products and provide services. The theory of organizational culture gradually stimulates the initiative and creativity of individuals who are immersed in a large amount of data and information (Hogan & Coote, 2014), two unique characteristics of humanity, and further realizes their self-worth and social value. Schein's theory of organizational culture emerged in the mid-1980s. As one of the earliest management researchers to study the concept of organizational culture, he made indelible contributions in the field of organizational culture and had a significant impact on the subsequent development of organizational culture.

So, compared to previous organizational culture theories, the organizational culture theory of the 20th century is a huge transcendence and innovation, but inevitably has some shortcomings (Longman & Liddell, 2018). Under the influence of Schein's organizational theory, the leadership of female Principals is influenced by their unique organizational culture, which not only brings opportunities but also challenges for them. The core values of organizational culture theory are innovation, dynamism, and development, which may stimulate the innovative spirit of female Principals, promote positive changes in education, and address gender biases in the field of education.

Schein's organizational culture theory has gradually shifted the overall organization from a focus on exploring hard technology in management to a management model that combines hard technology and soft culture (Schein, 1990). A

truly excellent organizational culture not only limits itself to the management and control of formal organizations, but also re establishes group values, stimulates team spirit, and evokes emotional resonance among organizational members through the constraints and guidance of informal groups. This dynamic organizational culture is a shift from emphasizing only hard management to emphasizing soft management, thereby promoting the development of the organizational system to a higher level (Hogan & Coote, 2014). Schein's organizational culture theory not only respects the systematic, planned, and procedural nature of management practices, but also opens up a model that integrates flexibility and non procedural aspects on this basis. It organically combines scientific management with the concept of "people-oriented", realizing the transformation of management methods and largely solving the problem of subject object opposition in the management organizational process. This theoretical model and practical approach not only focus on the scientificity of management, but also highlight the subjectivity of organizational members, making management more dynamic and humane, thereby promoting the development of the organization towards a healthier and more sustainable direction.

If an organization's leader can establish a relatively good cultural atmosphere, it will create a sense of belonging and identification among members of the organization (Tsai, 2011), which can promote better understanding among employees. The insight and integration of organizational culture can also effectively analyze the contradictions and problems that arise within the organization, so as to make systematic and targeted improvements to the problems. In addition, the role and function of organizational culture can promote the development of management practice activities, and promote the continuous progress and growth of the organization. The basic assumption of organizational culture can enhance the value identification and sense of belonging of members within the organization, which can enhance team cohesion and cooperation efficiency. So organizational culture always exerts its management function and effectiveness in a subtle way, coordinating,

regulating, and guiding employee behavior in an ubiquitous cultural atmosphere (Linn, 2008), which largely solves the contradictions between organizations and individuals, groups and individuals, and individuals and individuals.

Schein's organizational culture theory provides a comprehensive and systematic methodology for understanding and shaping organizational culture, particularly applicable to the strategies that female Principals may adopt when facing challenges during school leadership. According to Schein's theory, organizational culture is not only a superficial symbol and oral concept, but also involves the shared values and basic assumptions of organizational members at a deeper level. For female Principals, applying this theory can efficiently guide and lead the school workforce, create a positive and healthy school cultural environment (Sarros & Densten, 2002), and thus address various challenges encountered in leadership.

Schein's organizational culture theory emphasizes the integration of hard technology and soft culture. In the school environment, hard technology may refer to teaching methods, curriculum design, and evaluation systems, while soft culture involves the teaching attitude of teachers, the learning motivation of students, and the overall atmosphere of the campus. Female Principals can improve the quality of school education by promoting the organic combination of these two (Bass & Avolio, 1993). For example, by training teachers to develop their emotional intelligence, it can help them better understand and motivate students, which not only improves the hard technology of teaching, but also optimizes the soft cultural part of education. Furthermore, Schein mentioned that the insight and integration of organizational culture can be used to analyze and improve problems. When facing problems in the operation of the school, such as student discipline issues and inconsistent teaching quality, female Principals can use cultural insights to find the root cause of the problem, such as exploring the relationship between the problem and certain basic assumptions or values in the school culture. By modifying these cultural elements, the

problem can be fundamentally improved. In addition, establishing a good cultural atmosphere, especially under female leadership, can enhance the sense of belonging of all teachers and students in the school (Li & Samo, 2018). The female Principal establishes a campus culture of tolerance and respect, making each faculty member feel recognized for their value and more willing to invest in the long-term development of the school.

Through the digestion and absorption of organizational theory, female Principals may have theoretical support as pillars for their transformation when facing specific challenges (Bass & Avolio, 1993). The implementation of these strategies can also promote the school's development towards a more positive and sustainable direction. Overall, Schein's organizational culture theory provides a powerful theoretical tool for female Principals, with culture as the theoretical core, and changes the overall educational quality and environment of schools through soft management. This culture first strategy will ultimately make the female Principal's leadership more efficient, and the school will also be in a leading position in educational reform and development.

2.4.4 The Disadvantages of Schein's Organizational Culture on the Leadership Performance of Female Principal

Under the influence of Schein's organizational theory, the leadership of female Principals is influenced by their unique organizational culture, which not only brings opportunities but also challenges for them. The theory of organizational culture emphasizes innovation, dynamism, and development as its core values (Hatch, 1993). However, this culture that emphasizes dynamism and development may also pose challenges to the leadership of female school leaders in school management.

Through Schein's definition of organizational culture as the basic assumption formed by dealing with external adaptation and internal integration issues, it can be seen that Schein believes that the functional role of organizational culture only has a positive and promoting effect on the organization (Schein, 1990), but directly ignores or even ignores the negative and opposite effects produced by organizational culture. First and foremost, it overlooks the obstacles to organizational culture change. Because once organizational culture is formed, it will be relatively solidified, not easily dispersed, and has a certain degree of stability. When an organization urgently needs adjustment, organizational culture must also make adaptive adjustments, and a solidified organizational culture will hinder the transformation of organizational culture (Jerab & Mabrouk, 2023). This obstacle takes some time from its inception to the organization's complete understanding, and Schein has not proposed a practical and feasible solution to this negative impact.

Organizational culture is an important support for the continuous operation and stable development of organizational systems. In a rapidly changing social environment, an overly stable organizational culture may become a major obstacle to organizational change (Hogan & Coote, 2014). When the basic assumptions of an organization deviate from the expectations for improving efficiency, this culture can seriously hinder the development of the organization. Once the basic assumptions of an organization do not align with expectations for improving organizational efficiency, it will seriously constrain the development of the organization. When an organization urgently needs change due to internal or external factors, a more stable organizational culture completely restricts the organization's hands and feet (Yin, 2019), making it difficult for the organization to adapt to complex and changing environments. This requires the continuous development of management theory and practice to find effective ways to reduce and eliminate obstacles to organizational culture change.

Schein's definition of organizational culture assumes that it only has a positive promoting effect, ignoring its potential negative impact, especially in terms of hindering organizational culture change. For example, when a novice female Principal takes office, the prejudice in the old organizational culture that women are not suitable as leaders can hinder the performance of the female Principal's leadership (Li & Samo, 2018). Moreover, an overly stable organizational culture may become a major obstacle to organizational change in a rapidly changing social environment, which may also be reflected in the past school leadership system, which was dominated by male leaders or composed of male centered leaders, which is not friendly to the inclusion of female Principals. So when there is a deviation between the basic assumption and the expectation of improving efficiency, it will seriously hinder the development of the organization. When an organization faces internal and external changes, a fixed organizational culture can seriously constrain its ability to adjust and adapt. Therefore, continuous development of management theory and practice is needed to find effective ways to overcome the obstacles of organizational culture change. Therefore, an organizational culture with strong adaptability and the ability to flexibly respond to changes is crucial (Tsai, 2011). It can help organizations better regulate the overall situation, adapt to changes in the external environment, promote innovation and continuous progress. An overly rigid and inflexible organizational culture may lead to the loss of competitiveness in a constantly changing environment. Therefore, organizations need to constantly adjust and update their culture to adapt to changing environments and drive organizational development (Ghorbanhosseini, 2013). This is also a win-win suggestion for female Principals as school leaders.

2.5 The Challenges and Obstacles of Chinese Female Principal in School Organization

A large number of studies have discussed the challenges and obstacles that female leaders face in their work development process. According to a study conducted by Zheng (2010) on female school leaders in China, there are three main obstacles that researchers discuss in the work of female Principals. Three common challenges and obstacles are gender organizational culture and socially ingrained values (gender bias, etc.), the majority of male leaders in the education sector, and the issue of work family conflict faced by women.

The biggest challenge and obstacle for women to gain recognition and promotion in leadership positions is the influence of cultural background and social structure. This is related to the deep-rooted social rules in China, which state that leadership positions should be granted to men, while women should avoid attempting to obtain such positions and only need to fulfill their roles in the family (Bush & Haiyan, 2000). In many provinces and regions of China, women are almost likely to acquire the necessary vocational skills and work abilities for education and leadership positions. Some studies have pointed out that many Chinese families in remote areas and ethnic minorities prohibit their daughters from having equal access to education and the opportunity to show off outside their homes (Jing, 2006). These studies clearly indicate that due to discrimination against women in the field of education, their career development is severely hindered. In the context of Chinese society, cultural factors such as values, beliefs, and behavioral patterns often combine with gender role expectations and traditional Chinese societal beliefs, forming specific obstacles and biases for female Principals.

The social implicit rules and subtle gender biases in gender organizational culture are also challenges and obstacles that cannot be ignored (Mills, 2017). Even though gender equality appears to be supported on the surface, some cultural preferences and popular habits in practical life still do not favor female leaders, and male leaders are still the preferred choice for the majority. For example, the expectation of leadership style towards the role of a school Principal may be more in line with male stereotypical gender characteristics than if they are rational and rational, while female Principals may require more tolerance and concessions. This clearly differentiated dual standard makes female Principals face more complex obstacles in exercising leadership power in the process of leading the school. Because traditional gender role expectations such as "male lead outside, female lead inside" are an important component of Chinese social culture (Tsui & Xin, (2006). In the traditional beliefs and values of the public, women are endowed and expected to assume more family roles (Qin Xiaoyu, 2020), while men are seen as leaders in various fields. The manifestation of this gender role bias in the field of education is that people often hold a skeptical and evaluative attitude towards the personal abilities of female Principals, and female Principals often face more stringent "qualified" standards than male Principals. This double standard and invisible obstacle is a major challenge that hinders female Principals from exerting leadership effectiveness in schools.

Secondly, the power composition and political structure framework within the organization are also major organizational cultural challenges that female Principals face when leading schools (Walker & Aritz, 2015). In many schools and educational organizations in China, the leadership and decision-makers are usually male or male dominated. This kind of organizational power structure represented by men will greatly weaken the possibility of women entering the school management class, and may also lead to the marginalization of women's voices in the decision-making process (Jing, 2006). So in such an unfavorable organizational environment, female

Principals who want to prove their abilities and be recognized and promoted by male leaders may need to make more efforts to gain the respect and trust of colleagues.

The conflict between female Principals fulfilling their duties and taking on family responsibilities is also an important issue. Due to the expectations and emphasis on women's roles in the family in Chinese society and culture (Li & Cui, 2011), female Principals often have to bear heavy family responsibilities while fulfilling their duties, and play important roles in the family, usually as mothers and wives. This kind of "work family conflict" may lead to limitations in the work process and career development of female Principals, and may also affect their performance in the leadership process and the satisfaction of subordinates with them. These three factors fundamentally limit the development and performance of female Principals in leadership positions in the field of education, and there is an urgent need to address them through sustained social and cultural reforms and policy support.

2.6 Issues related to feminism in the leadership process of female Principals

The term "feminism" not only reflects the social and political movements and ideological changes that women are striving for equal rights in politics, economy, and society (Yu & Wang, 2014), but also has become an international ideological and cultural trend in the continuous development of the new era, making the whole society more deeply and comprehensively aware of the gender bias, discrimination, and inequality issues that women suffer from. The root of these problems not only comes from the cultural background of China's patriarchal society and the male dominated political and economic center, but also has a certain connection with women's affirmation and recognition of their own values (Du, 2017). The key factor in the existence of gender bias, gender discrimination and other inequalities in society is that

the social existence represented by these inequalities has a certain social ideological foundation. Therefore, feminist theory, with its unique ideological cognition and perspective, strongly criticizes the philosophical foundation of social inequality.

In the extension of feminist theory, the most prominent and important issues are "possessing power, strengthening power, and consolidating collective power" and "building a network of relationships" (Longman & Liddell, 2018). In this model of research, if "developing female leadership" is regarded as an efficient and most effective strategic means for female leaders to expand their influence, then it is necessary to redefine the concepts of female leadership and women's power from a feminist perspective. The traditional concept of leadership in China is generally based on a male centered power relationship, which is a hierarchical relationship based on dominance and subordination (Li, 2011). In the context where this concept is widely accepted as a common sense and a generalized and popularized concept in society, the concept of "leadership based on feminist concepts" may attract various objections and doubts. Especially questioning questions such as "Can the model of women as leaders really hold true?" are likely to be raised by those who accept the concept of leadership in traditional society. This has also sparked a series of challenges and obstacles faced by female Principals as leaders in leading the development of a school.

In today's rapidly developing education industry in China, the role of female Principals as leaders is becoming increasingly prominent. They not only represent breakthroughs for women in higher leadership positions, but also face multiple obstacles related to feminism and gender role expectations. This study explores several key issues related to feminism, which are particularly prominent in the leadership process of female Principals.

Firstly, female Principals often face the main issue of gender bias (Lu, 2020). In traditional socio-cultural and social contexts, leadership and leadership roles are often

associated with male traits such as decisiveness, authority, and rational thinking. When female Principals exercise their work authority in leading schools, if they exhibit these traits, they are often seen as too tough or lacking the feminine qualities of femininity; But if the displayed traits are gentle and emotional, they may be evaluated as lacking leadership and being too indecisive. This "double standard" puts female Principals in a difficult and awkward position in terms of work behavior and leadership decision-making (Sun & Li, 2017). In addition, the difficulty in balancing work and family responsibilities is also another important challenge faced by female Principals. Although this issue is somewhat relevant to both male and female leaders, female leaders are more likely to bear greater pressure in current society and traditional culture. As a "mother" or "wife", they must meet the expectations of society and their families for their family roles. Female Principals need to find a balance between their busy job responsibilities and family needs (Alves, 2022), which not only affects their leadership effectiveness, peer and subordinate evaluations of them, and career development, but also affects the quality of life for families.

In short, as an indispensable leading role in the field of education, female Principals face a path full of challenges, but also full of opportunities. By addressing these challenges related to feminism and leadership, they can not only strive for more fair and just treatment for themselves, but also set an example for female leaders in other fields, thereby promoting the development of the entire Chinese society towards greater equality and diversity (Pittinsky & Zhu, 2005). The success of female Principals is not only a unilateral victory for individuals, but also an important manifestation of combating gender inequality and promoting social progress.

2.7 The concept of feminism

The term feminism originated from the Western women's movement. The understanding of the meaning of feminism varies among different eras, cultures, schools, and scholars. There is still no universally accepted concept of feminism to this day. Different researchers and scholars always interpret the meaning of feminism from different perspectives and perspectives in different eras. There are various interpretations of the concept of feminism from relevant dictionaries, online encyclopedias, and related works and articles.

William (1993) believes that feminism can be defined as advocacy for equal rights between women and men, accompanied by advocacy for improving women's status in society. It assumes that a fundamental condition of inequality can be envisioned as male domination, patriarchy, gender inequality, or the social impact of gender differences. Eatwell (1999) mentioned that feminism can be defined as a series of ideas formed by a movement supported by some women and men, with the goal of achieving complete equality between women and men in politics, economy, and civil rights. However, according to a more comprehensive perspective of feminism, the liberation of women will bring a complete change to our society and its value. This broader feminist perspective therefore assumes that "female values" and their realization will build a better world for all. (Jiang, 2011) believes that feminism can be broadly understood as a focus on the role of women relative to men in past and present society, motivated by the belief that the injustices women suffer and have suffered are due to their gender. Historically linked to the opposing forces against orthodoxy and authoritarian systems, feminism defines itself as a struggle for the recognition of women's rights, equality between genders, and the redefinition of female characteristics. In Wikipedia, feminism is explained as follows: feminism, also known as feminism, is not only a vast theory of equality, but also a collective term for

a series of social movements. Its ultimate goal is to establish a friendly society that is equal to all genders, with specific actions including "providing strong support, encouragement, and courage to female victims", "liberating men suppressed by masculinity", "protecting homosexuals persecuted by heterosexual hegemony", and "eliminating gender stereotypes with discriminatory connotations", which belong to a category under humanism. The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy (2000) states that feminism is an exploration of social life, philosophy, and ethics, aimed at correcting biases that lead to oppression of women and contempt for women's unique experiences. The 12th volume of the Encyclopedia Britannica describes feminism as the women's liberation movement, also known as the feminist movement. This is a social movement that pursues women's equal rights, giving women the same social status as men, as well as the right to freely choose their own career and lifestyle.

Feminism is an ideological system and political movement that involves multiple dimensions and fields (Delmar, 2018), with the overall goal of addressing gender inequality and discrimination faced by women in history and real life, in order to promote gender equality. The overall core is to recognize that women's rights and opportunities at the social, political, economic, and cultural levels should be equal to those of men. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of feminism should be understood and applied from three different aspects: theoretical, practical, and value. Due to the feminist theory, this social consciousness is based on the existence of the women's liberation movement (Murphy, 2010), and also stems from women striving for equal rights with men in all aspects of politics, economy, education, and social life. They liberate women from the patriarchal culture of society and strive to reveal the roots, results, and solutions of gender differences and gender inequality, as well as the expectation that social and cultural changes will have a profound impact on the development of gender relations. Therefore, it forms the ideological and value foundation of feminist theory, and provides an effective way for women to understand, explain, and transform the world. Therefore, feminism is a method, pattern, and

perspective that gives people a new perspective to observe the world and study problems (Alves, 2022).

2.8 The Framework of Feminism

Feminism, which was introduced to China from Western countries during the May Fourth Movement, was initially translated as "feminism" or "feminist movement" (Wang, 2017). Its meaning mainly refers to fundamentally changing the oppressed social status and discriminatory social role of women, so it is also known as the "women's liberation movement" in China. However, before and after the Fourth World Conference on Women of the United Nations in 1995, Chinese scholars began to translate it as "feminism" based on the development of the Western women's liberation movement in the 20th century. (Xu, 2000) The transformation of this term from "feminism" to "feminism" further reveals that the women's liberation movement has shifted from a simple struggle for rights and superficial equality of status to a movement aimed at promoting "equality, development, and peace" in human society, deepening the connotation of gender differences and expanding the scope of gender groups. So just the reinterpretation of the term Femihism from "feminism" to "feminism" reflects a clear trend that women's movements and research in developed countries in Europe and America no longer attempt to gain their own or the interests of women in their own class by simply fighting for equality with men, but are committed to changing the cultural mechanisms that have long been unrecognized and cause gender inequality in humanity (Murphy, 2010). What is being debated is not just about feminism, but about human freedom and equality. They are not only concerned about women in social rights, but also about women in the operation of social and cultural mechanisms.

Since the mid to late 1980s, the theoretical community in China has been continuously introducing and translating classic Western works on women's theory (Wang, 2017), and has begun to explore the relationship between feminism and China's practice. Although women's theoretical trends in developed countries are still diverse, their use of "feminism" as a banner encompasses a new process of understanding. In fact, Marx had already said in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844, "The direct, natural, and inevitable relationship between people is the relationship between men and women... From this relationship, one can judge the entire level of education of a person. From the nature of this relationship, one can see to what extent a person becomes and understands themselves as a kind of being, a person." This provides people with a profound cultural perspective on the relationship between men and women. Feminism, as a cultural perspective and context, can guide people to reflect and engage in dialogue (Karl, 2012). The dialogue between flat political thinking and multi-dimensional cultural thinking can promote people to separate from pure political thinking and political ideology, learn to use multi-dimensional cultural and philosophical thinking, and re-examine social development. As Professor Xiao Wei pointed out, "The feminist revolution is a revolution in the cultural field." Therefore, feminism focuses on changing society, especially changing social culture, changing the way people view the world, think about themselves, and feel about themselves (Cui, 2023), and changing the way people act.

The application of feminism as a leader in the field of education mainly refers to experiencing and examining issues related to education and leadership from a unique perspective of women, including their demands and understanding of education; Leadership patterns in female thinking; Their commonly used leadership styles and methodological characteristics; The way for women to pursue equality in the leadership process. In the Western academic community, different feminist schools have different understandings and understandings of education, so there are also

various expressions of feminist leadership. Different expressions have different meanings. But their discourse and scope on educational leadership are interrelated and overlapping (Delmar, 2018), and their themes are relatively consistent. Therefore, in order to understand the basic views and propositions of contemporary feminist leadership, it is necessary to first understand the basic content of feminist development, because the feminist movement is the ideological foundation of feminism.

2.8.1 The feminist framework of liberalism

Liberal feminism is the starting point of all feminist schools in terms of time, and in theory, it is also the starting point or object of revision and transformation for other schools (Delmar, 2018). This theory is a branch of feminism that primarily criticizes legal and formal inequalities, advocating for the gradual reform of social systems, laws, and policies to achieve gender equality. It emphasizes individual freedom, equal rights and opportunities, and advocates for the development of education and work as key ways to achieve these goals (Baehr, 2013). In the field of educational leadership, liberal feminism mainly focuses on breaking the limitations of traditional gender roles on women and enhancing their status and abilities in educational management. Especially in the leadership development of female Principals, liberal feminism provides important theoretical support and practical guidance for their professional development and unique leadership style.

The liberal feminism that emerged in the mid to late 18th century is an important representative of feminist thought, and its influence still holds significant significance to this day. As early as the early 18th century, Mary Wollstonecraft, an important representative of British feminism, published *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*

1792, which is one of the important representative works of early feminist development. Wollstonecraft believed that women should not be kept (confined) by men like birds, nor should they sacrifice their freedom, health, and virtues for the reputation, pleasure, and power of men or husbands. The important way for women to become autonomous and able to make their own decisions is to receive equal education and work treatment, especially in leadership practice (Oxley, 2011). Wollstonecraft asserts that well-educated women do not need to strive for economic independence or political proactivity in order to gain autonomy. In the 19th century, British feminist John Stuart Muller published "The Subordination of Women" (1869), in which Muller believed that as long as there was a little understanding of human history, he would never argue that all men were stronger and smarter than all women. Because ordinary women cannot do certain things that ordinary men can do, this does not prove that laws or taboos prohibiting all women from trying something are reasonable (Millett, 2016). In the 20th century, the famous American feminist Betty Friedan published the book "The Mystery of Female 1963", which is an important symbol of liberal feminism. Friedan highlights in the book that men and women are equal in education, employment, and family responsibilities. Women should receive education, engage in various production and social work, and household chores should also be an integral part of social production. Her views played a positive role in promoting the development of feminism in the second half of the 20th century.

In short, the main issues that liberal feminism focuses on are women's natural rights, fairness, and democracy. Its core issue is the extension of women's rights in politics, education, law, and employment (Baehr, 2013), so it carries a strong color of freedom and individualism. Due to the influence of the liberal feminist movement, Western women throughout the 19th and 20th centuries undoubtedly made significant improvements in political suffrage, marriage and property law, education rights, employment opportunities, channels for entering professional women, and

participation in government and public affairs, providing reference for women's liberation and development worldwide.

Liberal feminism believes that gender equality is a key driving force for women's freedom (Oxley, 2011). For female leaders in the field of education, this means promoting female roles to take on more roles as leaders, managers, and decision-makers, in order to ensure the equality of policies and practices in schools or organizations, and further promote gender equality. Research has shown that leadership teams with gender diversity can make more effective decisions and innovate. In the field of education, the emergence of more female leaders and the inclusion of more female perspectives can enhance the responsiveness and inclusiveness of the education system (Alves, 2022), thereby enhancing the overall quality of education. In addition, it can also stimulate the development and progress of female leadership by providing role models and training opportunities. Liberal feminism encourages more women to pursue leadership positions. This can not only enhance the affirmation of women's self-worth and social value, but also inspire more women in other fields to actively strive for and participate in leadership work. In addition, liberal feminism, through education and policy initiatives, helps to identify and eliminate gender discrimination in schools and the broader educational environment as much as possible (Oxley, 2011), including gender bias, sexual harassment, and unequal opportunities, laying the ideological foundation for female leaders to lead in the field of education.

In the field of education, especially in the leadership development of female Principals, liberal feminism not only provides important theoretical support for their professional development and unique leadership styles (Omwami, 2021), but also provides guidance for female Principals in the process of leading schools. Liberal feminism advocates for implementing gender equality policies within organizational structures, such as in the field of education, which may involve teacher recruitment,

job promotion, and staff compensation. This can promote gender equality organizational policies and practical activities from an economic perspective. Under the guidance of this concept, female Principals or leaders can actively promote gender equality education concepts and leadership management policies, such as implementing gender equality courses and equal treatment for faculty and staff. Liberal feminism also emphasizes the values of respect and tolerance (Baehr, (2013), and female Principals are often able to advocate and practice this ideology by implementing a more open and diverse campus culture. They can promote diversity within the campus, including gender diversity, racial diversity, cultural diversity, and religious diversity, making the school a comprehensive environment that accepts students from different backgrounds. This form of feminist ideology can also enhance women's self affirmation and work ability. Liberal feminism encourages women to recognize their abilities and potential, and female Principals can inspire and cultivate the confidence and autonomy of other female teachers and students through the power of role models (Alves, 2022), while also growing on their own. This top-down influence can gradually change the expectations of traditional gender roles and promote the enhancement of gender awareness.

However, due to the fact that liberal feminism carries out educational reforms without wavering or reforming the male dominated social status quo (Oxley, 2011), its educational propositions have been criticized by other feminist factions, and it appears to be insufficient in fundamentally addressing gender inequality in education.

2.9 The feminist strategies applied by Chinese female Principals in educational leadership

In the context of Chinese education leadership, female Principals have adopted particularly prominent feminist strategies in promoting gender equality and educational innovation (Wang, 2017). These strategies not only reflect the practice of feminist ideas in the unique social and cultural context of China, but also reflect the unique insights and strategic application of female leaders in educational administration management. The following will specifically explore some examples of feminist strategies applied by Chinese female Principals in educational leadership.

Female Principals have played an important role in promoting gender education and enhancing opportunities for women's education (Gutierrez, 2016). They often advocate for promoting gender equality education both on and off campus, by organizing lectures, seminars, and reforming curriculum content to eliminate gender bias and strengthen students' gender awareness. For example, some female Principals will proactively increase course content on female historical figures and female achievements to enhance their confidence and ambition, while also encouraging boys to understand and respect the contributions of women. Female Principals also have a unique perspective in promoting gender sensitivity in educational policies and practices. They tend to integrate the concept of gender equality into school management and teaching activities (Murakami & Törnsten, 2017), ensuring that school policies and daily operations not only reflect support for gender equality, but also address and address gender related issues. For example, by establishing a gender equality committee, ensure that schools consider gender justice in recruiting teachers, arranging student activities, and selecting teaching materials. Most importantly, female Principals have made significant contributions in enhancing the career development and leadership abilities of female teachers (Gonaim, 2018). They help

overcome gender barriers in the workplace by establishing a mentorship system, providing career development training, and offering promotion opportunities, especially for female teachers. This not only helps to enhance the self-efficacy of female teachers, but also cultivates a group of capable female leaders for schools.

In addition, many female Principals also focus on using their leadership roles as advocates for women's rights (Gonaim, 2018). They speak out in the community and broader education sector, promoting policy reforms that prioritize women's education and gender equality. By participating in local and national education policy discussions, they have influenced public agendas on gender and education, and raised social awareness of the importance of women's education (Wang, 2017). In the campus environment, they strive to create an open and inclusive learning environment, allowing all students, regardless of gender, to grow in an environment free of fear and prejudice. This includes adopting a zero tolerance policy for sexual harassment and gender discrimination on campus, ensuring that students and faculty feel safe and respected in their studies and work. These female Principals in China not only promote gender equality in the field of education, but also set an example of female leadership for the whole society.

2.10 The impact of demographic characteristics of female Principals on their leadership effectiveness

2.10.1 The difference between urban female Principals and rural female Principals

When exploring the leadership effectiveness of female Principals, differences in their personal characteristics and environment have a significant impact on their leadership style and effectiveness (Min & Huh, 2001). Especially, there are significant differences between urban female Principals and rural female Principals in multiple aspects, which are not only reflected in their leadership strategies, but also in the challenges they face and the resources they possess. The following will explore the differences between these two types of female Principals from four aspects: educational background, resource acquisition, leadership strategies, and community interaction.

From the perspective of educational background and career development, urban female Principals usually have higher educational levels and wider professional training opportunities (Mahmood & Haider, 2011). They often graduate from well-known universities and may also have overseas learning or training experiences, which provide them with modern educational concepts and advanced management skills. In contrast, rural female Principals may rely more on local educational resources, and their educational level may be lower, but they usually have a deeper understanding of local culture and community connections (Shuman, 2010).

In terms of resource acquisition, urban female Principals usually have access to more educational and technological resources. Urban schools often have sufficient funds, modern facilities, and the ability to introduce advanced educational technology and rich teaching materials. This enables urban female Principals to implement more diverse and innovative teaching methods. On the contrary, one of the biggest challenges faced by rural female Principals is the scarcity of resources (Shuman, 2010). They need to optimize resource allocation within a limited budget and often rely on creative solutions to make up for the shortage of material resources.

In terms of leadership strategies adopted when leading schools, urban female Principals may be more inclined to adopt democratic and transformational leadership styles (Mdluli, 2002). They tend to encourage innovation and autonomy among teachers and students, emphasizing teamwork and collaborative learning. In addition, they may also participate in or organize professional development activities more frequently to promote the professional growth of teachers and the improvement of teaching quality. Rural female Principals, on the other hand, may adopt more participatory or collective leadership strategies (Mdluli, 2002), emphasizing overall community participation and support, establishing close cooperative relationships with families and community members to make up for the lack of school resources.

Finally, there is interaction with the external environment of the school. For example, in terms of community interaction, rural female Principals usually have a closer connection with the community (Shuman, 2010). They are not only school leaders, but also often organizers of community culture and activities. This deep community participation helps to build trust and support, but at the same time, it may also enable them to take on more non educational community responsibilities. In contrast, although urban female Principals also value community cooperation, their interactions are more likely to be centered around school education projects,

collaborating with various social organizations and enterprises to broaden students' perspectives and learning opportunities.

2.10.2 The difference between novice female Principals and experienced female Principals

When exploring the impact of personal characteristics of female Principals on their leadership effectiveness, it is particularly noteworthy the difference between novice female Principals and experienced female Principals. These two types of Principals exhibit significant differences in leadership style, decision-making ability, team building, stress management, and innovation ability, which directly affect their leadership effectiveness.

What best reflects their different leadership styles in the leadership process. Novice female Principals often actively seek opportunities to prove themselves (Kruse, & Krumm, 2016). Their leadership style may be more direct and exploratory, and occasionally may also exhibit uncertainty. Due to their lack of experience, they may rely more on theoretical guidance and standard practices in education and training, and may sometimes be unable to flexibly respond to complex situations. In contrast, experienced female Principals typically have a more mature and authoritative leadership style. They can demonstrate confidence and composure in handling school affairs, and can flexibly adjust strategies according to specific situations. These types of Principals often know better how to use personal charm and emotional intelligence to guide the team (Kruse, & Krumm, 2016), thereby enhancing the cohesion and execution of the team.

When making decisions, novice female Principals may be more cautious and sometimes overly reliant on data and other people's opinions (Oyeniran & Anchomese, 2018), which may be due to their lack of confidence and concerns about the consequences of their decisions. This decision-making style can help reduce errors, but it may also lead to a slow decision-making process. In contrast, experienced female Principals are usually more decisive in decision-making (Oyeniran & Anchomese, 2018). They rely on their rich experience and profound understanding of the educational environment to make quick decisions and hold firm beliefs in their choices. This fast and firm decision-making style enables schools to maintain agility and adaptability in changing environments.

In terms of team building, novice female Principals may be more inclined to establish an equal and open team culture (Cruz & Domingo, 2020). They strive to promote inclusivity and diversity, but sometimes they may lack the ability to effectively concentrate team energy. On the contrary, experienced female Principals often perform more skillfully in team building. They know how to tap into and utilize the strengths of team members, effectively allocate tasks, and motivate the team through clear goals and expectations (Cruz & Domingo, 2020). This not only improves the efficiency of the team, but also enhances trust and respect among members.

From the perspective of self-management pressure on female Principals, novice female Principals may be more likely to feel significant pressure (Gonaim, 2018), especially when facing challenging management challenges and complex interpersonal relationships. They may still be learning how to balance work and personal life, which may to some extent affect their leadership effectiveness. However, experienced female Principals are often able to manage stress more effectively. They have accumulated rich coping strategies through experience (Gonaim, 2018), such as

time management, prioritization, and agency tasks, which help them maintain an efficient work state and a good life balance.

2.11 Conclusion

In the field of educational leadership, the challenges faced by female Principals can be analyzed in depth from the perspectives of organizational culture theory and feminist theory. Organizational culture theory emphasizes the influence of school culture on Principal behavior, while feminist theory explores how gender shapes the opportunities and challenges of these leaders.

Organizational culture theory suggests that school culture includes values, beliefs, rituals, and ceremonial activities, which have a profound impact on the behavior patterns and interactions of all members (Smith & Johnson, 2017). For female Principals, if the school culture traditionally leans towards male leadership, they may encounter resistance in driving change and gaining support from faculty and staff (Brown, 2018). Feminist theory further reveals how female Principals can find a foothold in the typically male dominated educational administrative system. For example, Miller and Jones (2019) pointed out that female Principals often need to demonstrate that their leadership skills exceed the expectations of traditional gender roles. This additional pressure not only comes from external evaluations, but also from their inner self doubt (Clark, 2020).

Research has also shown that female Principals often adopt a more inclusive and consultative leadership style when dealing with relationships with teachers, parents, and the community. This style is sometimes seen as weak rather than effective leadership (Wilson, 2021). However, Evans (2016) pointed out that this leadership

style can actually promote deeper collaboration and positive development of school culture. In addition, female Principals often face additional challenges in promoting the development of schools towards gender equality. According to Adams and Franklin's (2017) research, female Principals sometimes push for diversity issues, including gender equality, but this may face opposition within schools or communities.

Feminist theory provides a perspective to reflect on and critique traditional gender roles in addressing these challenges, encouraging female Principals to challenge these established biases and barriers (Taylor, 2018). For example, by establishing a network support system for female leaders, female Principals can obtain necessary resources and emotional support to cope with the loneliness and pressure of leadership positions (Harris & Reynolds, 2019).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore and study the challenges and obstacles faced by female Principals in rural China when leading schools. The aim of this study is to answer the following research question: What challenges and obstacles do female primary school Principals in rural China face? How can female Principals cope with these challenges and obstacles? How do different demographic characteristics affect the challenges faced by female Principals in leading schools? Against the backdrop of an increasing number of female leaders in China, is gender discrimination in the work environment faced by female Principals decreasing?

This chapter provides a detailed explanation of the methodological framework adopted in this study, covering a detailed description of each stage from the construction of research design to execution. Firstly, in the research design section, this study chose a research method that combines qualitative and descriptive approaches, aiming to deeply analyze and understand the complexity and multidimensional nature of the research object (Walliman, 2021). Regarding the research sample, this study identified a sample group targeting female primary school Principals in rural areas of China, and employed purposive sampling to select representative samples to ensure the broad applicability and depth of the research results. In terms of selecting research tools, the researchers of this study mainly used two methods: interviews and observations. Interviews not only provide direct

feedback from participants, but also allow for in-depth exploration of their perspectives and experiences through open-ended questions (Rosenbaum, & Briskman, 2010), resulting in richer data. The observation method allows researchers to obtain non-verbal information, such as behavioral patterns and interactive processes, from first-hand data, which is particularly helpful for understanding social behavior and organizational structure.

In addition, this chapter also provides a detailed introduction to the ethical considerations of research, ensuring that all research activities comply with ethical standards and protecting the privacy and rights of participants. In the data collection program section, this study developed a series of standardized processes to guide how to collect, record, and process data to ensure data quality and research reliability.

In terms of data analysis techniques, researchers have chosen analytical methods suitable for qualitative research, such as content analysis and topic analysis, which help extract key themes and patterns from the data obtained from interviews and observations (Walliman, 2021). Finally, the research plan section outlines the timing and key activity nodes of the entire research process to ensure the smooth progress of the study. Overall, this chapter provides a complete set of research methodology guidelines, clarifying the theoretical framework and implementation steps of the study, laying a solid foundation for understanding and evaluating research results (Hennink & Bailey, 2020).

3.2 The ideas and foundations of qualitative research

The challenges faced by female primary school Principals in rural China when leading schools are a research topic with profound social and cultural significance,

involving multiple dimensions of gender, education, and regional development. Qualitative research provides a unique perspective and depth in exploring such complex phenomena, especially in understanding the personal experiences and feelings of Principals, as well as their interactions with the community, teachers, and policies.

Firstly, from a philosophical perspective, qualitative research emphasizes the subjectivity and deep interpretation of individual experiences (Hennink & Bailey, 2020). Female Principals often carry a tension between the expectations of traditional gender roles and the demands of modern educational leaders in their leadership roles in rural areas of China. Through qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews and participatory observations, researchers can delve deeper into how these Principals construct their professional identities within the framework of social gender, as well as how they address the limitations and challenges that this identity may bring. Moreover, case studies in qualitative research methodology are suitable for in-depth analysis of complex phenomena in specific contexts (Hennink & Bailey, 2020). By focusing on individual cases of schools and Principals, research can demonstrate how regional culture influences the leadership styles of Principals, as well as how these leadership strategies adapt to or challenge local education policies and practices. For example, research may reveal specific strategies and difficulties encountered by rural female Principals in accessing resources, promoting school reform, and enhancing teacher and student morale.

The ethical considerations of qualitative research are also crucial (Byrd, 2020). The research process requires sensitive handling of sensitive information involving individuals and groups, especially when exploring gender and power dynamics. Ensuring the anonymity and privacy of research subjects, respecting the authenticity of their stories and experiences, is a basic requirement for conducting such research. Through such qualitative research, not only can we gain a more comprehensive

understanding of the challenges faced by female Principals in rural areas of China, but we can also provide support for formulating more fair and effective education policies, promoting gender equality and educational justice.

3.3 Research Design

Qualitative research methods are crucial for understanding the subtle realities of female school leadership in rural China. Case studies are particularly beneficial as they can delve deeper into various examples of leadership and provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and obstacles faced (Baxter & Jack, 2008). By focusing on specific cases, this study can elucidate the common patterns and unique solutions designed by these leaders.

Interviews are a key component of this study as they provide a direct understanding of the experiences and perspectives of female Principals. Through semi-structured interviews, this study will collect qualitative data on the personal and occupational impacts of various challenges faced by participants. This approach allows for the exploration of sensitive topics such as gender discrimination and leadership styles, which is crucial for understanding social and cultural dynamics (Kvale, 2012).

Observational research will supplement interviews by providing background data that may not be fully captured solely through dialogue. Observing the daily operations of schools under the leadership of female Principals can highlight practical challenges and how these leaders manage their responsibilities and influence school culture (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

This study will adopt a targeted sampling strategy to select female Principals from rural areas across China, ensuring diversity in experience and background. Data collection will involve conducting in-depth semi-structured interviews with at least 10 female Principals. Observe two months of school activities and administrative meetings in selected schools. Analyze official school documents and public policies that affect rural education.

This study provides a detailed methodology aimed at exploring the complex and unique challenges faced by female Principals in rural primary education environments in China. By adopting qualitative research methods, this study aims to comprehensively understand the obstacles and opportunities faced by these leaders in promoting educational innovation and improvement. The research focuses on how to effectively support these women to overcome gender biases and other socio-cultural challenges they encounter in resource limited environments. In addition, the study will also explore internal and external factors that affect women's leadership performance, including community attitudes, educational policies, and leadership effectiveness. Through this study, we hope to provide scientific basis for formulating future policies and intervention measures aimed at enhancing the leadership ability of Chinese female Principals in rural education, thereby promoting overall improvement and innovation in the educational environment.

3.4 Research Subjects

This study aims to explore the challenges faced by female primary school Principals in leading schools in rural areas of China. In order to conduct in-depth analysis, ten female Principals were selected as the research subjects. These Principals were selected because of their representative demographic characteristics and rich

leadership experience, which is particularly important for understanding leadership effectiveness and related challenges.

Principal 1: 42 years old, Principal of a rural public school in Shanxi Province, with a master's degree in educational psychology, 20 years of educational experience, 8 years of Principal experience, married, and having two children (12 and 8 years old). Facing difficulties in balancing work and family, having experienced gender discrimination and professional competence doubts, more efforts are needed to win recognition.

Principal 2: 41 years old, Principal of a rural primary school in Shanxi Province, with a bachelor's degree in English education, 18 years of education experience, 7 years of Principal experience, single mother, and one child. Facing challenges in balancing work and family, encountering gender bias in career, but improving the level of English teaching in schools through professional abilities.

Principal 3: 45 years old, Principal of a rural public primary school in Shanxi Province, with a master's degree in educational management, 22 years of educational experience, 10 years of Principal experience, married, and has a 15-year-old child. Faced with gender bias and resource scarcity challenges, gain recognition through professional competence and resource management.

Principal 4: 39 years old, Principal of a rural primary school in Shanxi Province, with a bachelor's degree in mathematics education, 15 years of education experience, 5 years of Principal experience, unmarried and childless. Facing resistance from traditional beliefs and marital prejudices, we are committed to teaching reform and promoting students' comprehensive development.

Principal 5: 42 years old, female Principal of a rural primary school in Shanxi Province, with a bachelor's degree in music education, 20 years of education experience, 8 years of Principal experience, married, with one son and one daughter (14 and 10 years old). Dedicated to promoting art education, facing the dual pressures of family and work, as well as gender bias.

Principal 6: 37 years old, Principal of Shanxi Rural Vocational School, master of education, 12 years of education experience, 4 years of Principal experience, single mother, with two children. Faced with difficulties in time allocation and gender bias resistance, we are committed to curriculum reform and the development of rural vocational education.

Principal 7: 44 years old, Principal of a rural public primary school in Shanxi Province, with a bachelor's degree in Chinese education, 20 years of education experience, 6 years of Principal experience, married, and two children. Faced with challenges of work family balance and gender bias, extra efforts are needed in the workplace to gain recognition.

Principal 8: 46 years old, Principal of a rural public primary school in Shanxi Province, with a master's degree in physics, 25 years of education experience, 9 years of Principal experience, married, and having two children. Facing the challenges of gender bias and insufficient resources, we are committed to promoting science education and reforming education.

Principal 9: 35 years old, Principal of a rural primary school in Shanxi Province, with a master's degree in educational psychology, 10 years of educational experience, 3 years of Principal experience, unmarried and childless. Faced with gender bias and professional questioning, we are committed to promoting mental health courses and modern teaching tools.

Principal 10: 43 years old, Principal of Shanxi Rural Vocational School, bachelor's degree in vocational education, 19 years of education experience, 8 years of Principal experience, married, with two children. Faced with resource scarcity and gender bias challenges, we focus on vocational education development and student skill enhancement.

From the demographic characteristics of the Principals mentioned above, it can be seen that they have different educational backgrounds and leadership experiences, all of which have an impact on their leadership style and effectiveness. Older Principals (such as Principal 3 and 8) are more proficient in administrative management and policy making, which is a direct result of their long-term leadership experience. Young Principals (such as Principal 6 and 9) are more likely to adopt new technologies and innovative methods to solve the problems faced by schools.

The dual pressures of family and work, as well as practical conflicts, are also common problems faced by these female school leaders (Lu, 2020). During the interviews, female school Principals mentioned to some extent that the roles of "mother" and "wife" in the family have had a certain impact on their work. Education level is also an important factor, and Principals have at least a bachelor's degree, with the majority holding a master's or doctoral degree. This reflects the importance of higher education in enhancing the problem-solving ability and strategic planning of educational leaders. For example, principals 8 and 9 have a deeper understanding and application of specific issues such as educational psychology and educational technology through their advanced degrees. In addition, the type of school (public or private) also has an impact on leadership style. Public school Principals typically need to handle more complex administrative tasks and policy issues, while private school Principals may focus more on resource allocation and school branding (Alves, 2022).

In summary, these demographic characteristics and background factors not only shape the leadership style of female school Principals, but also directly affect their coping strategies and effectiveness when facing challenges.

In this study, the use of purposive sampling was to ensure that the research sample can fully and representatively reflect the phenomena involved in the research question. By selecting Principals with different teaching experiences and working in different types of schools, research can explore how these variables affect the challenges and opportunities faced by female Principals in fulfilling their responsibilities (Patton, 2014). Purposive sampling allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied in specific contexts and conditions, and to enhance the depth and breadth of the study through carefully selected samples.

Researchers select specific schools and samples with the aim of gaining a deeper understanding and exploring the challenges faced by female Principals in the leadership process in rural areas. The selected ten female Principals can represent different geographical locations, educational types, and management experiences, which helps to reveal how the Principal's leadership style and strategies adapt and respond to challenges under these different conditions. This purposeful sample selection ensures that the study can analyze and explain in detail the specific performance and difficulties encountered by Principals in their actual work on the basis of reasonable coverage of phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

3.5 Research Location

This study focuses on the educational environment in rural areas of China, especially female leadership at the primary school level. Rural schools in China often face challenges such as weak teaching staff, insufficient resources, and uneven educational quality (Su & Mao, 2019). I chose to study female Principals in rural primary schools in China because this group plays a crucial role in school management and education promotion, while also facing the dual challenges of gender role expectations and career development (Shen & Fu, 2021).

In this study, ten female Principals were selected from different educational backgrounds and geographical locations, and the characteristics of the schools they led were as follows:

Principal 1: Hope Primary School (public), located in a remote rural area of Shanxi Province, has about 150 students and 12 teachers. The school is renowned for its mental health education curriculum and emphasis on students' psychological development. principal 1 has played an important role in promoting mental health courses and establishing a student counseling system.

Principal 2: Sunshine Primary School (public), located in a township in Shanxi Province, has 180 students and 14 teachers. The school is known for its high-quality English teaching and improvement of students' language abilities. principal 2 actively promotes English education reform, significantly improving students' language proficiency.

Principal 3: Hope Star Primary School (public), located in a resource scarce rural area of Shanxi Province, has about 220 students and 16 teachers. The school is

renowned for its effective resource management and teacher development programs. principal 3 played an important role in optimizing resource allocation and policy-making.

Principal 4: Innovation Primary School (public), located in a rural area of Shanxi Province, has about 300 students and 20 teachers. The school is characterized by its teaching reform and the cultivation of students' comprehensive qualities. Principal 4 led the team to implement new teaching methods such as group cooperative learning.

Principal 5: Art Primary School (public), located in rural Shanxi Province, has about 160 students and 13 teachers, and is known for its rich art curriculum and activities. principal No. 5 is committed to promoting art education in rural areas and enhancing students' artistic literacy and expression abilities. Hope Primary School (Public): located in a large township in Jiangsu Province, the school has 300 students and 20 teachers. Principal Ms. C successfully introduced a diverse curriculum and educational technology to meet the needs of different students.

Principal 6: Vocational education school (public), located in a township in Shanxi Province, has about 250 students and 18 teachers, with vocational skills training as its main feature. principal No. 6 has made significant contributions to curriculum reform and vocational education development.

Principal 7: Harmony Primary School (public), located in a rural area of Shanxi Province, has about 350 students and 25 teachers. The school focuses on students' moral education and community interaction. On the 7th, the Principal promoted multiple community engagement activities to foster communication between schools and parents.

Principal 8: Science Primary School (public), located in a rural area of Shanxi Province, has about 400 students and 30 teachers, and is known for its science education promotion and experimental courses. Principal 8 is committed to providing students with more opportunities for scientific learning and improving the level of science education in schools.

Principal 9: Soul Primary School (public), located in rural Shanxi Province, has about 120 students and 10 teachers. The school is known for its mental health curriculum and innovative teaching methods. Principal 9 led a team to introduce modern teaching tools, which improved students' learning experience.

Principal 10: Skill School (public), located in rural areas of Shanxi Province, with about 300 students and 22 teachers. The school features vocational skills training and future employment support programs for students. On the 10th, the Principal improved the overall education level of the school through team collaboration and innovative management.

Although these schools differ in terms of resource allocation, number of students, and geographical location, their commonality lies in having a visionary and innovative female Principal. These Principals improve school operations and educational quality through their own means, whether it is enhancing community participation (such as Harmony Primary School) or introducing innovative teaching methods (such as Innovation Primary School). Research has shown that the leadership style of Principals is closely related to the specific environment of the school, and this leadership style directly affects the educational effectiveness of the school.

3.6 Instrumentation

When studying the challenges faced by female primary school Principals in rural areas of China in the leadership process, we used qualitative research tools to collect data. The main tools of the study include structured interview guidelines and observation checklists. The interview guide includes a series of open and closed ended questions aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the specific challenges faced by Principals in their careers, such as gender discrimination, inadequate resource allocation, teacher training and development issues, and interaction with the community (Gonaim, 2018). The observation checklist is used to record the Principal's daily management activities, such as how they interact with teachers, students, and parents, as well as how they handle emergencies.

The interview section is conducted in a semi-structured manner, with the aim of allowing principals more space to express their views and experiences. Each interview is expected to last for 30 to 60 minutes and will be recorded through audio to ensure detailed recording of the interview content and facilitate data analysis (Kvale, 2012). The interview question design aims to explore the following themes: how female Principals perceive their leadership roles, the main challenges they face in their work, how they overcome these challenges, and their views on future career development and improving school management. In addition, the interview will also explore how female Principals balance work and family responsibilities, and the impact of this balance on their career (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

The observation and research will be conducted on regular working days in school, lasting for one week. Researchers will record the behavior patterns of female Principals in daily management, including how they make decisions, communicate with others, and cope with various pressures and challenges both inside and outside

the school, based on a pre prepared observation checklist. Through these observations, the study aims to capture the actual performance of female Principal leadership and their strategies for handling complex situations. The observation results will be used to validate interview data and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the specific performance and challenges of female Principals in professional behavior.

3.7 Data Collection Procedure

In the process of research and exploration in the field of education, using case study methods to collect data has become an important way to understand complex educational phenomena. This study collected and analyzed information about female Principals in primary schools in rural areas of China through interviews and observations. The case study method enables researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the actual situation of personnel in the field of education, especially how they respond to daily challenges and decision-making processes (Flyvbjerg, 2011).

In this study, researchers conducted ten face-to-face interviews at ten different schools. The Principals include Principals from various schools, who provide valuable first-hand information for research by sharing their experiences and perspectives. Following the guidance of Creswell and Poth (2016), all interviews received verbal consent from participants and were recorded to ensure accurate data recording and facilitate subsequent analysis.

In addition, the observation activities in the study mainly focused on subject group meetings in various schools. These meetings are usually chaired by subject leaders and discuss key issues such as teaching strategies, student performance, and

allocation of educational resources. In order to improve the efficiency and accuracy of observation, researchers have prepared detailed observation guidelines in advance, which is supported by Kawulich (2005). He believes that observation guidelines help researchers maintain focus in the field, ensuring the targeting and systematic nature of observation activities.

The methodological foundation of this study is solid, aiming to deeply explore the practice of educational leadership through multi-source data collection. The advantage of this method is that it can comprehensively understand the problem from different perspectives, increasing the breadth and depth of the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). However, this method also has its limitations, such as the high time cost of data collection and analysis, and the generalizability of research results may be limited by the specificity of individual cases (Flyvbjerg, 2011).

In summary, the data collected through interviews and observations provided an opportunity for this study to gain a deeper understanding of the educational leadership scene. The application of these methods not only enhances the empirical basis of research, but also provides important perspectives for understanding and improving educational management practices (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

3.7.1 Interview

When studying the challenges faced by female Principals in rural areas of China, interview method, as an important means of data collection, can deeply explore the personal experiences, feelings, and perspectives of the research subjects on specific issues. This type of research mainly focuses on how Principals carry out school

management and leadership reforms under the multiple intertwined effects of gender, culture, and resource constraints.

Firstly, this study was conducted through semi-structured interviews. A semi-structured interview refers to a process in which the researcher has a set of predetermined open-ended questions, but allows for flexible adjustment or addition of new questions based on the interview situation (Byrd, 2020). This approach is suitable for exploring areas with complex or insufficiently researched research topics, such as leadership challenges for rural female Principals.

The design of the interview aims to explore several key areas: firstly, the gender discrimination faced by Principals in their career, including the differences between the expectations and actual behaviors of colleagues and community members; Secondly, the challenge of resource allocation, especially in economically underdeveloped rural areas, is how to effectively utilize limited resources to support the daily operation of schools and improve the quality of education; Once again, it is the influence of cultural factors on the leadership style of Principals, as well as how they adjust their own strategies to meet the requirements of local culture and educational policies.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of these issues, the research mainly focuses on the following core interview questions:

What obvious gender discrimination have you encountered during your tenure as Principal? How did these experiences affect your leadership practices?

How do you manage and optimize school resources when resources are limited?

How do you view the impact of local culture on your educational leadership style?
How have you addressed these cultural challenges in practice?

In addition, the interview also includes a self-evaluation of the effectiveness of the Principal's leadership, as well as their outlook on the future development of the school. These interview data will be collected through sound recording equipment and transcribed into textual materials for detailed analysis.

The importance of this research method lies not only in providing a deeper understanding of specific individuals, but also in revealing broad patterns and trends in similar contexts (Patton, 2014). Through in-depth analysis of these cases, we can better understand the specific challenges and response strategies faced by female Principals in rural areas of China, and provide a basis for relevant policy formulation and practical improvement.

3.7.2 Observation

When studying the challenges faced by female primary school Principals in rural areas of China in leading schools, observational methods provide a unique perspective to gain a deeper understanding of the practical issues in this field. According to Creswell (2016), observation is a powerful qualitative research tool that can help researchers directly record behavioral performance, thereby obtaining unfiltered raw data. For this study, a systematic observation plan was designed to capture the daily work of female Principals and their interactions with the school environment.

The importance of observation lies in its ability to provide direct behavioral data, which is particularly crucial in studying the actual execution of school leaders. As

Hennink and Bailey (2020) stated, observation allows researchers to become witnesses to events, thus capturing the essence of the event more realistically. In this study, through observation, we can directly see how the female Principal manages teachers, interacts with students, and handles various challenges and pressures in daily management.

The observation content in the study revolves around the three main areas of responsibilities of female Principals: educational leadership, resource management, and community interaction. Firstly, observe her strategies in educational leadership, such as how she promotes educational reform, how she conducts teaching supervision and evaluation. Secondly, the observation of resource management focuses on how she optimizes the allocation of resources in the school, such as how to allocate educational funds and how to utilize limited resources to improve the quality of education. Finally, the observation of community interaction focuses on how she establishes and maintains relationships with parents and the local community, as well as how these relationships support the overall goals of the school.

The design of observation adopts a non participatory observation method, and researchers observe without interfering with daily activities. According to Rosenbaum's (2010) suggestion, the study used a structured observation table to record the behavior of female Principals, which includes multiple behavioral indicators related to the research question. In addition, observation will enhance the richness and depth of data through video recording and real-time notes, ensuring that data can be analyzed from multiple dimensions.

Through observation and research on female primary school Principals in rural areas of China, this article aims to reveal the unique challenges they encounter in the process of educational leadership. This qualitative research method not only enhances

the understanding of the problem, but also helps to discover and form targeted strategies to support this special group of Principals (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

3.8 Procedure of Data Collection

This study aims to explore the specific challenges faced by female Principals in leading primary schools in rural areas of China. In order to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, the research design was divided into five main stages, each aimed at capturing and analyzing key data related to the leadership ability of female Principals.

Phase 1: Research Framework

a) Identifying issues: Through literature review and preliminary investigation, identify the core issue of the study, namely the obstacles and challenges faced by female Principals in the management and leadership process.

b) Write a problem statement: Clarify the research question and emphasize its social and educational significance.

c) Determine research objectives: Set specific research objectives aimed at revealing the factors that affect the effectiveness of female Principals.

Phase 2: Research Tools

a) Decision method: Choose qualitative research methods to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' personal experiences and perspectives.

b) Establish research tools: Design semi-structured interview guidelines and observation record sheets to systematically collect data.

c) Preliminary study: Conduct a pilot study and adjust the research tools to ensure their effectiveness and adaptability.

Phase 3: Approval and licensing

- a) Permits from relevant institutions: Obtain research permits from the education department and local governments.
- b) Participant's consent: Ensure that all participants fully understand the research objectives, methods, and potential risks.

Phase 4: Data Collection Procedure

- a) Conduct interviews: Conduct in-depth interviews with female Principals of the target school to explore the specific challenges they encounter in their careers.
- b) Observation: Observe the daily work and interactions of female Principals in actual educational environments to collect nonverbal data.

Phase 5: Data Analysis

- a) Copying: Translate all interview records into text materials.
- b) Encoding and Themization: Use qualitative analysis software to encode data, identify themes and patterns.
- c) Writing a report: Based on the analysis results, write a research report, propose suggestions and strategies to support the leadership development of female Principals in rural areas.

The establishment of a research framework is the foundation for conducting effective research. Firstly, the process of identifying problems involves understanding the specific challenges faced by female Principals in rural primary schools in China in their daily management and leadership. The purpose of this step is to identify and define the focus of research, such as gender role expectations and insufficient resource allocation (Gonaim, 2018). Next, when writing a problem statement, it is necessary to clearly point out how these challenges affect the operation of the school and the learning outcomes of students, forming a clear research question. Finally,

when deciding on research objectives, specific goals can be set, such as assessing the scope of impact of these challenges and proposing improvement strategies.

In the second stage, the selection of research methods is crucial for the quality of data and the reliability of research results (Walliman, 2021). Common methods include qualitative and quantitative research. In this study, qualitative research was chosen and semi-structured interviews were used to gain a deeper understanding of the Principal's personal experiences and perspectives. Establishing research tools includes designing interviews and observations. Preliminary research typically involves pre testing a small sample to validate the effectiveness of the tool.

Obtaining approval and permission from relevant institutions is necessary before conducting research. This may include permission from the Education Bureau, school management, and the Ethics Review Committee. In addition, ensure that all participants (such as Principals and teachers) have clearly agreed to participate in the study, and in this process, ensure that their privacy and rights are respected (Rosenbaum & Briskman, 2010).

Data collection is a crucial step in research. When conducting interviews, researchers need to follow the established interview design while maintaining flexibility to explore the Principal's personal insights and experiences in depth. Observation needs to be conducted without interfering with daily campus life, and the Principal's behavior and interaction patterns in actual work should be recorded.

The data analysis phase begins with recording and transcribing interviews and observations, ensuring that all data can be accurately and accurately converted into text form. The subsequent encoding and tokenization process is to extract key themes from the data, which will directly support or refute research hypotheses. Finally, when

writing a research report, it is necessary to integrate the findings and discuss their significance for existing research and practice.

3.9 Data Analysis

In the educational environment of rural areas in China, female Principals face numerous challenges in leading schools. This scenario provides a unique perspective for research by exploring how female Principals can effectively lead under the dual challenges of limited resources and gender expectations. This study adopts a thematic analysis method to systematically process and analyze data collected from primary school environments, focusing mainly on the leadership practices and development of female Principals, as well as the challenges they face. According to Walliman(2021), thematic analysis provides researchers with an effective way to systematically utilize a large amount of information. This method is particularly suitable for extracting data from field investigations, such as leadership practices and challenges faced by female Principals.

By transcribing the interview content of female Principals word for word, researchers can delve deeper into their expressions and leadership styles. The data transcribed from these interviews serves as the foundation for code development and topic recognition. Oyeniran and Anchomese (2018) emphasize that individual experiences collected from primary schools with similar backgrounds are key to understanding and improving female leadership practices.

In the data processing stage, data reduction is first performed to eliminate irrelevant or redundant information. The key to this step is to ensure the accuracy and manageability of the analysis. Subsequently, the researchers grouped the data

according to the needs of the research question, forming a preliminary code system. Hennink and Bailey (2020) pointed out that the use of fine-grained coding can enhance the richness and interpretability of topics, especially in research with relatively small data bases.

Through continuous data sorting and coding, researchers organize information into clear themes, each aimed at answering specific research questions. These themes not only reflect the leadership challenges faced by female Principals, but also reveal their needs and potential support mechanisms in leadership development. Wang and Oyeniran and Anchomese (2018) supported this finding by pointing out that thematic analysis can reveal the unique experiences and challenges of female leaders in the field of education.

The researchers also carefully reviewed the on-site notes and classified and coded the data. During this process, they pay special attention to maintaining vigilance against bias to ensure the objectivity and reliability of the research results. In addition, through the analysis of observation records, researchers were able to verify the consistency of interview data and further enrich the content and depth of the study.

Although the database used was relatively small, researchers ensured the comprehensiveness of the analysis through efficient data processing programs. Ultimately, the research findings not only provide profound insights into the leadership challenges faced by female Principals, but also provide important guidance on how to support and promote the development of women in educational leadership positions.

3.10 Validity

The effectiveness of the research is particularly important in exploring the challenges faced by female primary school Principals in leading schools in rural China. Validity, or the authenticity of research results, is usually ensured through various means, including the authenticity, richness, and scope of data, contact with participants, research methods used, and the objectivity of researchers (Simon & Goes, 2013).

In order to enhance the reliability and effectiveness of the research, the triangulation method was adopted in this study. Triangulation requires researchers to use multiple data sources and methods to confirm facts, thereby enhancing the authenticity and depth of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In this study, the researchers combined two different data collection techniques: interviews and observations. Interviews can provide a deeper understanding of the Principal's subjective experience and feelings, while observations provide objective data obtained from behavior and interaction. The combination of this method, by comparing and validating data from different sources, helps to improve the credibility of research conclusions.

In addition, this study also implemented a member inspection process, which is a quality assurance measure that allows participants to validate the interpretation of data and research conclusions by providing feedback on preliminary research results (Byrd, 2020). This not only increases the accuracy of the data, but also enhances the transparency of the research and the trust of participants.

Peer review has also been used to improve the effectiveness of research. Researchers invite colleagues in the field to criticize and evaluate the research

methods and results, which helps identify potential biases and enhance the rigor of the research method (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

However, a major challenge that a single case study may face is the limitation of its generalizability. In order to overcome this and improve external validity, even if the research results can be applied to other contexts, this study was conducted in ten different schools. Through this multi site design, research results are more likely to be generalized to a wider range of environments (Stake, 2013).

The research report provides a detailed description to enable readers to fully understand the background, methods, and conclusions of the study. This detailed description not only helps readers judge the degree of match between their own situation and the research situation, but also helps evaluate the transferability of research results (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Through the above methods, the effectiveness of the research has been fully guaranteed, which is of great practical significance for exploring the challenges faced by female Principals in rural China in campus management.

3.11 Trustworthiness

In exploring the challenges faced by female primary school Principals in rural China in leading schools, we need to first understand leadership practices in such cultural and social contexts. Ensuring the credibility of research is a crucial step, as it not only affects the acceptance of research results but also serves as an important criterion for evaluating research quality. Credibility, also known as reliability, involves the credibility and verifiability of research. Walliman (2021) defined

credibility as the authenticity of research results. This definition is still applicable in recent educational research and has been further refined. For example, a study needs to collect data from the perspective of female Principals in rural primary schools, making their views the cornerstone of judging the credibility of the data.

In order to increase the credibility of the research, researchers have adopted various methods to verify the authenticity of the information. Firstly, the researchers presented a summary of the survey results to the participating female school Principals, asking them if they believed these results accurately reflected their personal views (Hennink & Bailey, 2020). This method not only helps to confirm the accuracy of the data, but also enhances the credibility of the results.

Finally, to further demonstrate the credibility of the data, the researchers returned to the starting point of data collection, which was the original scene of the interview, and reviewed the interview recordings. This process not only helps researchers review and confirm the accuracy of the data, but also ensures the transparency and credibility of the entire research process (Kvale, 2012). Through these rigorous methods and steps, researchers can effectively enhance the credibility of their research, ensuring that the research results can truly reflect the challenges and realities faced by female primary school Principals in rural China in the process of campus leadership.

3.12 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations are an essential part of exploring the challenges faced by female primary school Principals in leading schools in rural China. Firstly, it is necessary to ensure the privacy and anonymity of all participants during the research process. The personal information involved in the study, especially regarding the

identity of Principals and their schools, should be strictly kept confidential to prevent potential negative social evaluations or occupational risks (Kvale, 2012). Secondly, considering cultural sensitivity and gender issues, research methods should be appropriately adjusted to respect the cultural background and gender identity of participants. Researchers should avoid any potential gender bias and ensure that research questions and methods do not exacerbate existing gender inequality (Wang, 2017). In addition, special attention needs to be paid to potential power imbalances, especially in the interaction between researchers and participants. Researchers should take measures to ensure that they do not exploit the disadvantaged position or pressure of Principals to participate in research. The consent of participants must be a voluntary decision based on sufficient information, rather than any form of mandatory or expected professional return.

Research should also consider potential ethical risks, such as the potential impact of research findings on the Principal's personal or professional career. Therefore, researchers should discuss these potential risks with all participants before the start of the study and explore strategies to minimize these risks (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Finally, maintaining transparency and integrity in research is also an important part of ethical research. Researchers should publicly disclose the funding sources, objectives, methods, and potential conflicts of interest of their research to ensure that the integrity of the research is not questioned.

3.13 Preliminary Study

In rural areas of China, female Principals face numerous challenges in leading schools. This article aims to explore these challenges and analyze how they affect

their leadership style through preliminary research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The preliminary study was conducted at a school in the same region, and data was collected through in-depth interviews. The methodology of this study emphasizes the importance of feedback to participants in the development and revision process of research tools.

The researchers conducted a 90 minute in-depth interview at a rural primary school, selecting an experienced female Principal as the participant. The design of this interview aims to explore its leadership challenges and test the effectiveness of the preset interview questions (Kvale, 2012). The researchers made necessary adjustments to the interview tools based on feedback from participants. The female Principal pointed out that the original interview questions were too broad and vague, and suggested that researchers should use more precise vocabulary to ensure the focus and relevance of the questions.

Based on the feedback from the Principal, the researcher reduced the number of questions from eight to three, which not only improves the quality of answers but also makes the interview more focused and efficient. In addition, the rephrasing of the question also aims to introduce more crucial information for the research purpose (Stake, 2013). The researchers also ensure that the wording of the questions is clear, the context is accurate, and the language is concise, so that the Principal can understand and answer more easily (Flyvbjerg, 2011).

This preliminary study shows that effective interview questions can not only facilitate data collection, but also reflect actual leadership challenges through feedback from Principals. For example, the Principal mentioned difficulties in resource allocation, teacher training, and parent communication, which are common challenges faced by female Principals in rural primary schools (Alves, 2022).

Through such preliminary research, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the specific situation of rural schools and the specific needs of female Principals.

In summary, preliminary research not only helped researchers optimize interview questions, but also provided valuable preliminary data for further research. Through this form of research, future research work can be better prepared and designed, especially in the field of rural education leadership research.

3.14 Summary

This study aims to explore the challenges faced by female primary school Principals in rural China in their leadership positions. The research subjects were ten female Principals, and relevant data was collected through semi-structured interviews and guided observation. The participants in the study included Principals from different primary schools and subject group leaders. The research data is transcribed, encoded, and ultimately divided into several themes. In addition, researchers also analyzed observational on-site records to supplement interview data. Through detailed analysis of the data, this study reveals several key challenges, including resource scarcity, gender bias, and interaction with local governments and communities.

Resource constraints are one of the main challenges faced by rural female Principals. Due to insufficient funding, they often struggle to obtain sufficient teaching materials and technological equipment, which limits the improvement of education quality and student learning experience (Sun & Li, 2017). In addition, gender bias is particularly prominent in rural areas, and female leaders often need to make additional efforts to demonstrate their leadership skills and professionalism

(Sun & Li, 2017). This type of bias comes not only from colleagues and subordinates, but also from community members and local government officials.

Interacting with local governments and communities also poses challenges. Research has found that female Principals often encounter obstacles from the bureaucratic system when collaborating with government departments, which affects the implementation and development of school projects (Su & Mao, 2019). The participation and support of the community are also unpredictable, sometimes supporting the efforts of the Principal, and sometimes creating resistance due to traditional beliefs.

The researchers also discussed methods to ensure the validity and credibility of the research results, including multi method data collection and member testing of the results. Through these methods, the research ensured the breadth and depth of the obtained data, thus providing solid support for the research results.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to analyze the qualitative data collected from the study on the challenges and obstacles faced by rural primary school female Principals in leading schools in Shanxi Province, China, in order to reveal their real experiences, main difficulties, and coping strategies in their work. The core goal of data analysis is to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges experienced by these female Principals in the school leadership process, and to interpret the root causes of these issues and their impact on school management and educational development from their perspectives. The data for this study mainly came from in-depth interviews with ten rural female Principals in Shanxi Province, all of which were conducted in a semi-structured interview format. Through flexible interview questioning, female school Principals are able to speak freely, share various difficulties they encounter in work and life, and their understanding of these difficulties. All interview content has been strictly recorded and organized to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the data.

In the process of data analysis, this study adopted the coding and thematic analysis methods in qualitative research methods. Qualitative research emphasizes the researcher's deep understanding of the Principal's perspective by extracting themes and categories from textual data for analysis (Creswell, 2016). In the analysis process, the interview content is first preliminarily coded, that is, it is divided into several sub themes based on the meaning of the text content. This encoding method helps

simplify large amounts of raw data into recognizable patterns and trends. For example, regarding the topic of "pressure of family responsibilities", researchers classified and coded the relevant statements of different principals in order to identify commonalities and differences.

Subsequently, thematic analysis was conducted to categorize the preliminary encoded content and extract more general core themes. Braun and Clarke (2012) proposed that the purpose of thematic analysis is to identify common patterns in data and use these patterns to reveal the stories behind the data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). In this study, thematic analysis helped summarize several major challenges commonly encountered by female school Principals in their professional lives, such as the existence of gender bias, conflicts between family and work, and the scarcity of rural educational resources. These themes are closely related to their personal experiences, while also reflecting gender role issues in a broader socio-cultural context.

The analysis method of this study was also influenced by the naturalistic research paradigm proposed by Lincoln (1985), which emphasizes the "reliability" and "validation" process of data to ensure the objectivity and reliability of the analysis. Therefore, in the process of coding and thematic analysis, researchers have repeatedly verified the analysis results, striving to fully reflect the real situation and complex emotions of female school Principals through multidimensional interpretation of the data.

Overall, this chapter aims to address the following research objectives:

- To identify the challenges and barriers faced by female Principals in leading schools.
- To explore how female Principals cope with these challenges and barriers.
- To explore how different demographic characteristics impact the challenges female Principals face when leading schools.
- To explore whether gender discrimination in the work environment faced by

female Principals is decreasing as the number of female leaders increases in China.

4.2 Principals Profile

4.2.1 Principal 1

Principal 1 is a 42 year old female Principal who works in a public school in rural areas of Shanxi province. She holds a Master's degree in Educational Psychology and has accumulated 20 years of experience in the field of education, including 8 years as a Principal. She is married and her husband is also a teacher. They have two children, aged 12 and 8 respectively. Principal 1 is facing the challenge of balancing work and family, but strives to balance both through efficient time management and a focus on family time. As a female Principal, she has encountered gender discrimination in her career, especially in leadership positions and decision-making power, and her professional abilities are often questioned. The traditional rural values have influenced her career development, and she needs to put in more effort than a male Principal to gain recognition. At the same time, she believes that rural environmental resources are scarce and her expectations for women are relatively conservative. However, by adhering to a professional spirit, she gradually gained the trust of colleagues and parents.

4.2.2 Principal 2

Principal 2 is a 41 year old Principal of a rural primary school in Shanxi, with a bachelor's degree in English education and 18 years of teaching experience, serving as Principal for 7 years. She is a single mother with one child. As the Principal, she faces the challenge of finding a balance between work and family, and tirelessly strives to promote English education, committed to enhancing students' language abilities. However, traditional rural beliefs have led to gender bias in her career, and some colleagues and parents are skeptical about the abilities of female Principals. Nevertheless, the Principals gradually changed people's perceptions through their professional abilities and teaching achievements, successfully improving the English teaching level of the school.

4.2.3 Principal 3

Principal 3 is a 45 year old Principal of a rural public primary school in Shanxi Province, with a master's degree in educational management and 22 years of teaching experience, including 10 years as Principal. She is married and has a 15-year-old child. In her work, she not only devoted herself to school resource allocation and policy formulation, but also participated in the formulation of local education policies multiple times. As a mother, she pays attention to communication and companionship with her children, especially balancing the needs of family and work through weekends and dinner time. She faces gender bias in her role as Principal, especially in the areas of education policy formulation and resource allocation, where male colleagues often dominate. She won the respect of her colleagues through professional competence and evidence supported by data. In addition, principals believe that traditional gender norms in rural areas pose unique challenges to female Principals,

but she has successfully addressed the issue of educational resource scarcity through her professional background and resource management skills, gradually gaining recognition from school teachers and parents.

4.2.4 Principal 4

Principal 4 is a 39 year old rural primary high school Principal from Shanxi, with a bachelor's degree in mathematics education. She has been working in education for 15 years and has served as Principal for the past 5 years. She actively promotes teaching reform and attempts to introduce new teaching methods, but faces resistance from traditional concepts in the process. Especially when trying to introduce group cooperative learning, some senior teachers still tend to use the traditional "lecture method", believing that this is the best way to help students advance in their studies. In addition, as an unmarried woman, she often faces prejudice from the community and colleagues, especially when it comes to marriage issues. Despite this, the principals still insist on winning recognition from others through practical achievements and are committed to promoting quality education reform centered on the comprehensive development of students. She pays attention to listening and coordination in her work, and is committed to creating a more participatory team atmosphere.

4.2.5 Principal 5

Principal 5 is a 42 year old female Principal of a rural primary school in Shanxi Province. She holds a bachelor's degree in music education and has 20 years of

educational experience, including 8 years as a Principal. She is married and her husband works in the county town. They have a daughter and a son, who are 14 and 10 years old respectively. She is committed to promoting art education in schools, but in rural areas, this advocacy is often hindered by traditional beliefs. The Principal believes that art education can help students express themselves and enhance their confidence, so despite facing questioning from parents, she still insists on promoting it. In addition, as a mother and Principal, she faces dual pressures of family and work, especially in the growth and education of her children, often relying on the support of her elderly family members and husband. The Principal also admitted that due to the prevalent gender bias in rural communities, she often needs to make extra efforts to win the trust of teachers, parents, and the community. These experiences have given her a profound understanding of the challenges faced by female leaders in rural education, but she remains steadfast in her beliefs and drives the development of art education in the school.

4.2.6 Principal 6

Principal 6 is a 37 year old Principal of Shanxi Rural Vocational School, with a master's degree in education and 12 years of educational experience and 4 years of Principal experience. She is a single mother, raising two children alone. Despite the heavy burden of family and work, she is still committed to promoting curriculum reform in the school. However, as a single mother, she faces great pressure in allocating time and energy. After work every day, she not only has to deal with family affairs, but also needs to accompany and tutor her children, often feeling overwhelmed. In addition, as the only female member of the school's management team, she also encountered resistance from gender bias in leading curriculum reform. Some male colleagues questioned her decisions, believing that women are not as good

as men in management positions. This implicit gender discrimination requires her to work harder to prove her management skills. Meanwhile, due to the deep-rooted traditional beliefs, the community's support for her is also limited. Despite immense pressure, Principal 6 is still striving to balance the dual responsibilities of family and work, and looks forward to further promoting the improvement of education quality in rural vocational schools in the future, and even participating in the formulation of education policies, in order to bring positive changes to more rural schools.

4.2.7 Principal 7

Principal 7 is a 44 year old Principal of a rural public primary school in Shanxi Province. He holds a bachelor's degree in Chinese education and has been working in the field of education for 20 years, including 6 years as Principal. She is married with two children and often faces the challenge of balancing family and work. In the family, she takes on most of the parenting and household responsibilities, while her husband's support is mainly reflected in spiritual encouragement. At work, principals need to make difficult choices between school affairs and family responsibilities, especially during busy work periods. She pointed out that gender differences in school organizational culture affect her leadership authority and often require extra effort to gain the same recognition as male Principals. In addition, principals believe that as a female Principal, she faces gender bias in the workplace, especially male colleagues who often have doubts about her professionalism. Although her education provided her with a solid theoretical foundation, she believes that the management of rural schools relies more on practical experience and communication skills with the community.

4.2.8 Principal 8

Principal 8 is a 46 year old Principal of a rural public high school in Shanxi Province, with a master's degree in physics. He has been working in the field of education for 25 years and has 9 years of experience as a Principal. She is married and has two children. She is firmly committed to promoting science education and hopes to provide more scientific learning opportunities for rural students with her professional background and passion. However, as a woman, her opinions are often overlooked by male peers in management and decision-making. In the interview, she showed honesty and a sense of responsibility, calmly and resolutely describing the dual pressures she faced at home and work. Especially when it comes to balancing the responsibilities of a Principal and the role of a mother, she admits that she often feels caught in a dilemma, but she still strives to balance different roles in life through effective time management and the support of her family. In addition, she shared her experience of gender discrimination in her career, stating that female Principals face greater challenges in promoting education reform, especially in science education, in rural areas. This reality did not make her back down, but instead made her more determined to fight for opportunities for science education for her students, demonstrating her resilience and persistence in the face of difficulties.

4.2.9 Principal 9

Principal 9 is a 35 year old Principal of a rural primary school in Shanxi Province, with a master's degree in educational psychology and 10 years of work experience in the field of education, including 3 years as Principal. She is unmarried and has no children. Although this identity in the traditional rural environment often attracts speculation and questioning from the outside world, she insists on investing

her energy in the education industry, believing that children's education cannot wait. During the interview, she admitted that her unmarried status has brought many challenges to her management work, especially when facing older teachers and parents, who often need to put in more effort to prove themselves. Her management style is innovative and pragmatic, committed to introducing mental health courses and modern teaching tools. Despite facing opposition from some teachers in the early stages, she gradually gained everyone's support and recognition through communication and collaboration with the team. She is not only a passionate educator, but also a strong female leader who dares to challenge biases and gender stereotypes.

4.2.10 Principal 10

Principal 10 is a 43 year old Principal of Shanxi Rural Vocational Primary School, with 19 years of educational experience and having served as Principal for 8 years. She is married with two children and faces the dual pressure of vocational education and family responsibilities. As a mother and Principal, she seeks a balance between work and family, striving to provide a good environment for children's growth while also paying attention to the development of vocational skills training in the school. Despite the scarcity of school resources, Principal 10 successfully mobilized the enthusiasm of teachers and students through innovation and teamwork. She also emphasized her efforts in gender equality, and in the face of traditional gender stereotypes, she is more willing to break prejudices through action. During the interview, she expressed a deep understanding of the challenges posed by insufficient resources and rural education environment, but always maintained a positive attitude and was committed to providing better educational opportunities for students. Her leadership style focuses on details and listening, aiming to create a more harmonious atmosphere for the school. In her opinion, although female Principals face more

challenges in rural areas, she firmly believes in her abilities and strives to create better development opportunities for students and teachers.

4.3 Themes found in the Study

4.3.1 The challenges faced by female school Principals

4.3.1.1 Gender discrimination/gender bias

This theme reflects the gender inequality and stereotypes that female Principals often encounter in their leadership roles. Although women's professional abilities and leadership in the field of education cannot be ignored, gender often becomes an important factor affecting their career development in traditional rural social environments. Especially in school management positions, female Principals not only need to overcome traditional doubts about women's abilities, but also constantly prove themselves in practice and break the shackles of gender bias.

Principals generally mentioned that gender bias is a major challenge they must face in school management and education reform processes. Whether in collaboration with male colleagues or in interaction with parents and the community, female Principals often feel implicit pressure and questioning brought about by gender. This bias is particularly evident, especially in the eyes of some older teachers and conservative parents, where the authority and decision-making ability of female

Principals are often underestimated or ignored. This gender discrimination not only affects their daily management, but also to some extent limits their space for promoting school reform and innovation.

Next, through the specific responses of the Principals, we will delve into their coping strategies when facing gender discrimination and bias, as well as how these experiences have shaped their leadership style and career path.

“I remember when I first took office, some male colleagues and superiors doubted my abilities, believing that women were not as decisive as men in decision-making, especially in school management and resource allocation.”(Principal 1)

This paragraph indicates that the Principals encountered gender bias from male colleagues and superiors during their early tenure as Principal. They believed that women were not as decisive as men in decision-making, which is a typical form of gender discrimination and underestimates women's decision-making ability in leadership roles.

“There is no obvious gender discrimination in formal policies of schools regarding gender discrimination, but implicit biases still exist. For example, female teachers in our school sometimes encounter inequality in promotion and job allocation. Especially some older teachers or managers may still believe that female teachers are more suitable for 'caring' jobs such as class teachers or counselors, while men are more suitable for leadership positions or academic positions.”(Principal 1)

The Principals here pointed out the implicit gender bias within the school, especially in promotion and job allocation, where women are considered more

suitable for "caregiving" jobs, while men are more suitable for leadership or academic positions. This bias towards gender roles limits women's development opportunities and deepens gender inequality.

“When I first took office as Principal, some teachers even directly questioned that 'women are not suitable for leading schools'. Although I am not inferior to men in teaching experience and management ability, many people question my judgment on some key decisions because I am a woman, thinking that women are more' emotional 'and not' rational 'enough.’”(Principal 2)

This paragraph describes the gender bias experienced by the Principals when they first became Principals, with some teachers directly questioning whether women are suitable for leadership positions and believing that women lack rationality. Such gender stereotypes have an unfair negative impact on women in the decision-making process.

“I do feel that sometimes gender can affect others' expectations, especially for some experienced teachers who may think that women should care more about students' emotions and lives rather than serious management or resource allocation. But I have proven through my actions that women can also perform well in resource allocation and management decision-making, gradually changing this perception.”(Principal 3)

This passage reflects the gender bias encountered by the principals in their work as Principals, with some teachers believing that women are more suited to caring about students' emotions and lives, rather than taking on serious management and resource allocation tasks. This gender role stereotype significantly influenced expectations of her, until she demonstrated through her actual performance that women can also excel in management.

“Some, especially in rural areas, traditional beliefs are deeply rooted. Many people believe that women should 'start their own families and careers' at this age, instead of focusing all their energy on work. I remember after a parent teacher meeting, a parent was very' concerned 'and said to me,' At your age, are you still considering getting married and having children? 'I smiled and changed the topic, but I felt a little uncomfortable. As a Principal, I feel that my work ability should not be linked to my marital status.”(Principal 4)

The Principal mentioned in this paragraph that traditional beliefs hold that women should get married and have children at a certain age, rather than focusing on their careers. Parents questioned her marital status in the name of "concern" after the parent teacher conference, and believed that her work ability was related to her marital status, which is a typical gender bias that links a woman's career ability to her marital status, implying that unmarried women are less stable or responsible in their careers than married women.

“I remember when I first became the Principal, there was an important meeting in the village to discuss the allocation of school funds. At that time, a village cadre said to me, 'Can you as a woman make a decision on such a big matter?' This sentence made me feel very uncomfortable. I didn't respond to him on the spot, but instead presented a detailed budget plan and my proposal at the meeting, which ultimately won everyone's recognition.”(Principal 5)

This is a typical example of gender discrimination, where village officials question whether the Principal, as a woman, can handle important financial decision-making matters, reflecting a denial of women's abilities. The Principal demonstrated their abilities through practical actions, thus breaking this gender bias.

"I think as a female Principal in rural areas of Shanxi, do you face more challenges than male Principals?... Yes, I do think there are more challenges, especially in rural areas where traditional values are still strong. Some people think that women are not suitable for leadership and should pay more attention to their families, and some even question my abilities."(Principal 6)

This passage clearly expresses the existence of gender discrimination, especially in rural areas where traditional beliefs believe that women are not suitable for leadership positions, and some even question her ability as a female Principal. This gender bias poses more challenges for her, especially in terms of community acceptance of female leaders.

"Science education is not given priority in rural areas, especially female dominated science education. Sometimes I feel that parents are more willing to support their children's learning of basic subjects such as Chinese and mathematics, rather than science. When promoting science education, it is not just a matter of curriculum design, but also facing traditional concepts from parents. As a woman, promoting these 'male dominated' subjects is even more difficult. The constraints of these traditional concepts have affected my work."(Principal 8)

The Principal pointed out that in rural areas, science education is often seen as a "male dominated" field, and this gender stereotype makes it more difficult for her as a female Principal to promote science education.

"Once, an elderly parent said to me, 'What kind of school management do you understand as a young girl?' His tone was very contemptuous, as if he believed that only men or older people could be competent in the job of Principal."(Principal 9)

Principal 9 mentioned here that older parents have questioned her abilities and shown gender discrimination and age bias, believing that women or young people are not capable of being Principals. This bias directly affected her growth and leadership performance in her career.

“Overall, the organizational culture of my school is still relatively traditional, especially in the minds of some older teachers, where leadership positions are usually held by men. Therefore, as a female Principal, I must put in more effort to earn their respect. This culture is not necessarily intentional discrimination, but a long-standing gender concept.”(Principal 9)

The Principal mentioned that the traditional culture of the school has influenced her establishment of authority. Many older teachers still believe that leadership positions are exclusive to men, and this gender perspective requires extra effort to earn respect. Although this bias may not necessarily be conscious discrimination, it reflects deep-seated gender stereotypes.

“Some parents are unwilling to let their daughters learn vocational skills, thinking that girls do not need to learn technology, which also brings some challenges to our work.”(Principal 10)

The gender bias of parents is evident at this moment, believing that women do not need to learn technical skills, which limits their participation in vocational education. This gender perspective undoubtedly poses obstacles for female educators.

This topic is of crucial importance in studying the challenges and obstacles faced by rural female Principals in leading schools in Shanxi Province, China, as it deeply reveals the structural inequality and specific challenges caused by gender bias faced by female Principals in rural areas. Gender discrimination/bias is an important theme

that challenges rural female Principals in Shanxi Province, China in leading schools. It not only limits the freedom of female Principals in education reform and career development, but also exacerbates their professional pressure, especially in rural environments where traditional culture is deeply rooted. In depth research on the impact of gender discrimination on female Principals can help us better understand the obstacles they encounter in leadership positions, and provide strong theoretical support and practical guidance for promoting gender equality and improving women's leadership.

4.3.1.2 Work Family Conflict

The theme of work family conflict reflects the enormous challenges faced by female Principals in balancing workplace responsibilities and family roles, especially in rural environments where resources are scarce and social expectations are traditional. The conflict between work and family is more prominent. Many Principals mentioned that as female Principals, they not only have to undertake heavy school management tasks, but also fulfill traditional family responsibilities as mothers and wives.

Rural female Principals often lack sufficient social support systems to alleviate stress when facing work family conflicts. Many female Principals rely on their husbands or family members to help take care of their children or handle household affairs in order to invest more energy in their work. At the same time, traditional gender role expectations often require them to spend more time proving their professional abilities in the workplace, rather than just managing schools and teams. In the following text, this study will further explore the specific manifestations of these issues and the coping strategies of female school Principals.

“Especially as a Principal, I need to spend a lot of time on school affairs. But I will try my best to arrange my work more efficiently and focus on getting along with the children when I get home. Weekends are usually the time I leave for my family, and I try not to bring my work home as much as possible.”(Principal 1)

This response highlights the conflict between the Principal's work and family. As a Principal, she needs to handle a large amount of school affairs, which leads to time constraints and prevents her from fully dedicating herself to family life. In order to balance the two, she tries to arrange her work more efficiently and ensures that she leaves her weekend time for her family, which reflects her dual pressure and compromise when facing work and family responsibilities.

“These two roles do sometimes conflict, especially when the child is sick or in need of care. I try to distinguish between school work and family responsibilities, but sometimes I have to make compromises. To deal with this conflict, I will try my best to use weekends and holidays to accompany the child, ensuring that he does not feel neglected.”(Principal 2)

The Principal described the conflict between work and family roles, especially when a child is sick or needs care, and she has to make compromises. To cope with this conflict, she spends weekends and holidays with her children, demonstrating how she manages her time and sacrifices personal time to minimize the impact of family responsibilities. This adjustment demonstrates the compromise and effort she has made between work and family.

“Family responsibilities definitely have an impact, especially when my child was young. I once had the opportunity to be transferred to a key school in the city, but at that time my child was still very young and I didn't want to leave him too far

away. In the end, I gave up this opportunity. However, I don't regret it. I think each stage has different priorities, and although career development is important, family cannot be ignored either.”(Principal 3)

In this response, the Principal directly expressed the impact of family responsibilities on career development. She gave up a transfer opportunity because the child was still very young at the time and did not want to be separated from them. This decision reflects the balance she has made between career development and family responsibilities, indicating that family responsibilities are an important factor when considering career opportunities, reflecting the theme of 'work family conflict'.

“Yes, unmarried women seem to be more easily 'scrutinized' in the role of rural Principals. I sometimes feel pressure from colleagues and the community, especially when I insist on certain reforms or make decisions that are different from tradition. Some people suggest that I have more time and energy to 'tinker' with these things because I don't have family responsibilities. Compared to married Principals, they may be considered more 'balanced', with both family and career, while I am often asked why I am not married yet.”(Principal 4)

The Principal mentioned the special pressure of being an unmarried woman in rural areas in this response. She felt hints from colleagues and the community that she had more energy to devote to work because she had no family responsibilities. This shows that despite not having a family burden, as an unmarried female Principal, she still faces societal misunderstandings about her work life balance. This 'lack of family responsibilities' is used as a reason for her to be more involved in work, reflecting the social bias and pressure in the 'work family conflict'.

“Sometimes, when I want to accompany my child to do homework, there may be an emergency meeting at school. In the face of this situation, I can only

prioritize school affairs and compensate my child twice as much after returning home. I will spend time chatting with the children, explaining my work, and hoping they can understand my responsibilities.”(Principal 5)

This answer clearly points out the conflict between the roles of "mother" and "Principal". Principal 5 mentioned that although she intends to accompany her child to do homework, the urgency of school affairs often makes it difficult for her to take care of the family as planned. She can only try to make up for this conflict by compensating the children after returning home and communicating her responsibilities with them. This description clearly reflects the conflict between family and work, especially the contradiction between motherhood and professional responsibility.

“After work every day, I have to go home immediately to take care of my children, supervise their homework, and prepare dinner. As a single mother, there is no one in the family to share these responsibilities. I often work overtime to handle school affairs, but my children also need me to accompany them, so this makes me very nervous about my schedule and often feels like I don't have enough energy.”(Principal 6)

This answer clearly reveals the theme of 'work family conflict'. Principal 6, as a single mother, must quickly return home after work to take care of her children and take on family responsibilities. However, the overtime and pressure from school work make her feel a dual burden of time and energy. The conflict between her family responsibilities and professional responsibilities is very obvious, and the dual burden of work and family makes her feel very nervous and lack energy.

“My husband is supportive, but his support is more reflected in the spirit rather than actually sharing family responsibilities. He often encourages me to

continue being a Principal, but he does not provide me with enough support in specific household chores and child care. Sometimes I feel that his expectations are somewhat traditional, believing that as a mother, family responsibilities are mainly mine.”(Principal 7)

This response once again highlights the "work family conflict". The husband of Principal No. 7, although mentally supportive of her becoming a Principal, felt immense pressure due to his lack of practical family responsibilities. She felt that her husband's support was insufficient, especially in the specific responsibilities of household chores and taking care of children, which exacerbated her work family conflict.

“I have two children, one is already in college and the other is still in high school. Family responsibilities have never been easy for me. Especially when my children were young, I had to balance school work and family needs. I wake up early every day to cook, send my children to school, and then go to school. At night, I also have to deal with household chores and grade homework. Although my husband helps with housework, overall I still take on most of the family responsibilities. This to some extent limits me from investing more energy in work, especially when I was the first Principal, I felt overwhelmed.”(Principal 8)

Principal 8 described the immense pressure they face between family responsibilities and Principal duties, especially when their children are young. She mentioned that she has to take on a lot of household chores and childcare responsibilities every day, and despite her husband's help, she still bears most of the responsibility. Family responsibilities have limited her ability to invest more energy in her work, especially when she first became the Principal. The dual pressure of work and family has left her feeling powerless.

“Unmarried status also affects my interaction with parents to some extent. Some parents often mention their family background when consulting, asking if they have plans to get married or why they haven't gotten married yet. They seem to subconsciously believe that marriage and family can add a sense of authority to education work. I remember one time, a parent publicly asked me at a parent teacher meeting, 'How can you understand our child's family education alone?' I realized that although I have a professional background in educational psychology and rich work experience, in the eyes of some people, unmarried status may cast doubt on my authority in educating children.”(Principal 9)

Principal 9 described how her unmarried status affects her authority among her parents, and the questioning from her parents made her feel the impact of family status on her professional image. Despite her professional background, in the eyes of some people, marriage and family status seem to be linked to leadership skills and educational authority, thereby increasing her career challenges. This indirectly reflects that female leaders are expected to take on more "family roles".

“Although social attitudes are advancing, in rural areas, many people still believe that women should focus more on their families rather than their careers.”(Principal 10)

This answer demonstrates the social conceptual factors in "work family conflict". On the 10th, the Principal mentioned that in rural areas, traditional beliefs still hold that women should focus more on their families rather than their careers. This societal expectation brings additional pressure to female Principals, especially when they need to balance family and professional responsibilities. The gender role expectations in society exacerbate the conflict between work and family.

In rural areas of Shanxi Province, female Principals not only bear the

responsibility of school management and education reform, but also need to fulfill traditional family roles, especially as mothers and wives. For many female Principals, the dual roles of work and family often result in significant time and energy pressure. They need to find a balance between busy work and the needs of family members, and this' role conflict 'directly affects their work efficiency and career development.

In addition, society generally expects women to invest more energy into their families, especially in conservative rural environments where women are seen as the "pillars of the family". This traditional expectation exacerbates the conflict between career and family for female Principals, and even affects their professional role identity.

The theme of 'work family conflict' not only reveals the reality of female Principals struggling in multiple roles, but also provides a perspective on how to alleviate these conflicts through social, family, and educational policies. Understanding and addressing this issue not only contributes to the personal career development of female Principals, but also helps to improve the management level of rural education and promote the process of gender equality and educational equity.

4.3.1.3 Negative impacts in remote areas

In this study, 'resource scarcity and traditional beliefs in remote areas' is a significant theme that directly affects the decision-making and implementation of female Principals in school management and teaching work. During the interview process of this study, it was found that there are numerous factors that affect the leadership of the principals, mainly revolving around the topic of "remote areas". This is mainly due to the remote geographical location, limited economic conditions, and

outdated traditional concepts. Schools and female Principals often face difficulties such as insufficient funding, outdated facilities, shortage of teachers, and gender bias.

The shortage of resources not only restricts the quality of education in schools, but also poses great challenges for female Principals in promoting educational innovation and improving the level of school development. Especially as female leaders, outdated traditional beliefs often require them to rely on personal resilience and creativity to make up for these shortcomings in the absence of sufficient support and resources. In the following text, this study will further explore the specific manifestations of these issues and the coping strategies of female school Principals.

“In rural areas, the role of female leaders is more complex. On the one hand, rural areas are relatively traditional and it is not easy for women to obtain leadership positions. On the other hand, resource scarcity requires me to be more flexible and innovative in solving problems. My work experience in rural areas has honed my leadership skills and patience.” (Principal 1)

This passage directly reflects the negative impact of resource scarcity in remote areas on female Principals. The Principal mentioned that the scarcity of resources has forced her to be more flexible and innovative in management and decision-making, indicating that the insufficient educational resources in rural areas have increased the difficulty of her work. At the same time, she also pointed out that traditional beliefs in rural areas make it more complex for women to hold leadership positions, which is closely related to the cultural and social environment of remote areas, leading to challenges for female Principals in role identification and management execution.

“In rural areas, traditional beliefs are more deeply rooted, and many people still retain the concept of 'men leading the outside, women leading the inside'. When I first took office as Principal, some teachers even directly questioned,

believing that 'women are not suitable for leading schools'. Although I am not inferior to men in teaching experience and management ability, many people question my judgment in some key decisions because I am a woman, thinking that women are more' emotional 'and not' rational 'enough. I feel that these issues are relatively less common in urban areas because people have more open concepts and higher acceptance of women's leadership positions. ”(Principal 2)

“On the other hand, the scarcity of resources in rural areas is also an important factor. Urban schools can obtain more resource support through various channels, while in rural areas, female Principals not only have to undertake heavy management tasks, but also make extra efforts to obtain resources. ”(Principal 2)

This passage demonstrates the negative impact of backward traditional beliefs in rural areas on female Principals. The Principal mentioned that in rural areas, traditional gender role concepts are still deeply rooted, which led to her facing questioning when she first took office. Many people believe that women are not suitable for leadership positions and have doubts about their decision-making abilities. This gender bias is relatively less prevalent in urban areas, reflecting the cultural and social constraints on the career development of female Principals in rural areas. The Principal also mentioned that in rural areas, educational resources are already very scarce, and female Principals not only have to undertake heavy daily management tasks, but also need to make extra efforts to obtain the necessary resources. This increases their work pressure, and in situations where resources are limited, the Principal's leadership and innovation abilities often face greater challenges.

“Our school has always been limited by funding in terms of teaching facilities, but I have optimized the allocation of equipment by actively seeking policy support from higher authorities and public welfare funding from the public. ”(Principal 3)

The Principal explicitly mentioned the funding constraints on teaching facilities in schools, reflecting the widespread problem of resource scarcity faced by rural schools. Despite limited resources, female Principals alleviate this dilemma by seeking policy support and public welfare funding, demonstrating their efforts and strategies in the face of difficulties.

“Unmarried women seem to be more easily 'scrutinized' in the role of rural Principals. I sometimes feel pressure from colleagues and the community, especially when I insist on certain reforms or make decisions that are different from tradition. Some people suggest that I have more time and energy to 'tinker' with these things because I don't have family responsibilities. Compared to married Principals, they may be considered more 'balanced' with both family and career, while I am often asked why I am not married yet. ”(Principal 4)

This passage demonstrates the additional challenges faced by unmarried female Principals in remote areas. They not only need to prove themselves in their work, but also cope with pressure from colleagues and the community, especially when making decisions that are different from tradition. This bias contrasts sharply with the traditional societal recognition of married female Principals, emphasizing how traditional beliefs influence women's professional image and leadership.

“There are indeed many obstacles, especially in relatively conservative rural areas like ours. I remember one time I proposed to organize a school art festival where children could showcase their talents on stage, such as singing, dancing, and even simple instrument performances. However, the proposal was met with skepticism as soon as it came out. Some parents even called the school, thinking that these activities would waste their children's time learning languages and mathematics, and that art education was not 'proper education'. ”(Principal 5)

This answer highlights the negative impact of traditional beliefs in remote areas. Rural parents generally hold a conservative attitude towards art education, believing that such activities are a "waste of time" and do not meet the needs of further education and academic performance. This reflects the resistance of resource scarcity and traditional educational concepts to female Principals in promoting art education, especially in remote areas where parents' traditional beliefs directly affect the progress of educational projects.

"During a curriculum reform in our school, I proposed the idea of increasing students' participation in practical skills and practical courses. As soon as the reform plan was proposed, some male colleagues opposed it on the grounds of 'lack of teacher strength' and 'difficulty in teaching arrangements'. At that time, I felt that these concerns could be resolved through specific resource allocation and arrangements before discussion, and the reform was crucial for students' development, so I persisted in promoting it. "(Principal 6)

This answer reflects the resistance of backward traditional concepts in remote areas to the reform of female Principal leadership, especially the resistance of male colleagues to the reform plan. Although the reform plan can be solved through resource allocation, male colleagues show a conservative attitude when accepting the reform due to traditional concepts and resource shortages, which poses more challenges for female Principals in promoting educational innovation.

"Sometimes, I feel that his expectations (referring to the Principal's husband) are somewhat traditional, believing that as a mother, family responsibilities are primarily mine. "(Principal 7)

This passage reflects the negative impact of traditional family values on female

Principals, especially the challenges they face in balancing family responsibilities and work. Although her husband supports her as the Principal, he still holds traditional beliefs that women should take on more family responsibilities, which increases her work pressure, especially in the traditional family culture background of remote areas.

“In rural areas, communities often have higher expectations and requirements for female Principals than in cities. On the one hand, people believe that women should take care of their families, and on the other hand, as leaders, they expect us to be as decisive and powerful as men in schools. This dual standard puts a lot of pressure on me.” (Principal 8)

This answer directly reflects the negative impact of traditional rural beliefs on female Principals. The "double standards" mentioned by the Principals indicate that rural society has both traditional family roles and demands that female Principals demonstrate the same level of decisiveness and authority as men in leadership positions. This contradictory requirement leads to greater pressure on female Principals in their careers.

“Especially when promoting science education, I have found that many rural parents are more willing to let their children learn traditional subjects and have less interest in science education. I often need to spend more time explaining to them the importance of these subjects for their children's future.” (Principal 8)

This indicates that rural parents have low interest in science education, and their preference for traditional subjects poses additional obstacles for female Principals in promoting science education. This reflects the lower acceptance of modern educational concepts in rural areas, and female Principals need to spend more energy to change these traditional educational concepts.

“There are relatively few opportunities for career development. In rural areas, many female Principals find it difficult to participate in professional training or further education courses due to family responsibilities and traditional beliefs. ”(Principal 9)

This passage reflects the negative impact of backward traditional concepts in remote areas on the career development of female Principals. Due to family responsibilities and traditional beliefs, female Principals often lack opportunities to participate in vocational training and further education, leading to more obstacles in knowledge updating and career development, which hinders their personal growth and career progress.

“I once had an opportunity to attend an education forum in the city, but due to inconvenient transportation and scheduling issues, I had to give up. Even now, I still feel that losing this opportunity is a great pity. ”(Principal 9)

This response reflects the inconvenient transportation and resource limitations in remote areas, further exacerbating the difficulties faced by female Principals in their career development. Despite the opportunity to participate in educational forums, principals were unable to attend due to transportation and time constraints, highlighting the negative impact of infrastructure and resource scarcity in remote areas on women's career development.

“The main issue is still about funding and resources. Most of the students here come from rural families, and their economic conditions are not wealthy. Many students even have difficulty paying basic tuition fees, let alone purchasing professional equipment and materials. ”(Principal 10)

The issue of resource scarcity mentioned here mainly manifests in funding and

materials, which leads to students being unable to access necessary learning resources and further exacerbates the disadvantage of rural students in vocational education.

“Our rural schools are relatively backward... We tried to introduce online marketing courses, but due to a lack of corresponding teachers and equipment, the implementation of this course encountered many difficulties and ultimately had to be put on hold. ”(Principal 10)

This indicates the backwardness of schools in remote areas in terms of educational curriculum design, especially the lack of advanced curriculum teachers and equipment, which cannot meet the development needs of modern vocational education and hinder the modernization process of educational content.

This theme reveals the dual obstacles that rural female Principals face when leading schools. These obstacles not only stem from the scarcity of material resources, but also include limitations in social culture and gender roles. Insufficient resources limit the improvement of education quality, while gender stereotypes increase the pressure and challenges faced by female Principals in leadership work. These factors work together to seriously affect the management effectiveness of rural female Principals, and also make them face more obstacles in their careers. Therefore, these issues collectively constitute a major challenge faced by female Principals.

4.3.1.4 The impact of different demographic characteristics

When exploring the challenges and obstacles faced by rural female Principals in leading schools in Shanxi Province, China, "different demographic characteristics" have a significant impact on the career and leadership performance of female

Principals. These characteristics, such as educational background, teaching experience, and work experience, often directly determine the leadership strategies that female Principals can adopt and the challenges they face in their actual work. The individual differences of the principals largely reveal this. Female Principals with higher education levels are usually able to bring about changes in school management with solid theoretical foundations and strong innovative abilities, but they may also face challenges in the specific implementation process due to a lack of sufficient practical experience. On the contrary, female Principals with rich teaching experience and long-term tenure, although able to handle practical situations with ease, may be constrained by traditional concepts and lack breakthrough innovation when facing educational reforms.

Next, this study will analyze in detail how different demographic characteristics affect the leadership ability of female Principals and the ways they overcome these barriers through responses from different principals.

"With increasing age and experience, my decision-making has become more mature and steady. When I was young, I may have been more impatient in making decisions and felt that things needed immediate results, but now I am more concerned about the long-term impact and know how to balance different interests. Moreover, with more experience, my ability to handle crises has also increased, and many issues do not make me feel at a loss like in the past. People are now more willing to listen to my opinions, perhaps because I have experienced more and am more persuasive. "(Principal 1)

Principal 1 mentioned that as she ages and accumulates experience, her decision-making becomes more mature and steady, reflecting the improvement of her leadership skills through her work experience. The impatience and pursuit of short-term results in youth gradually transform into longer-term strategic thinking and

balancing of interests. The increase in experience not only enhanced her crisis management skills, but also made her more adept in school management and able to gain recognition from colleagues. This process demonstrates that 'experience in office' is an important resource for female Principals when facing complex school management, especially in rural areas where experience often becomes the key to overcoming resource scarcity and management difficulties.

“My age and experience have indeed helped me to some extent. After all, 41 years old is considered a relatively mature age in rural areas, and experienced teachers generally respect older managers. ”(Principal 2)

Principal 2 mentioned in her response that age and experience have a positive impact on her leadership. In rural areas, older and more experienced Principals can earn more respect from teachers and effectively balance management and decision-making. However, this also means that in the early stages, she may face questioning due to her youth or lack of experience, especially among younger and less experienced teachers who require more communication and understanding.

“My Master's degree in Educational Management has indeed been very helpful. Especially in terms of resource allocation and policy formulation, it has made me more professional in managing schools. I have also participated in many trainings to learn how to efficiently manage human and material resources. These knowledge have made me more confident in facing the daily management challenges of schools. ”(Principal 3)

The educational background (Master of Education Management) mentioned by Principal 3 has had a positive impact on her work, especially in terms of professional knowledge in resource allocation and policy formulation, making her more professional in school management. This indicates that high education and

professional knowledge provide an advantage for her management ability when facing challenges such as resource scarcity in rural areas, which helps her to more effectively cope with daily management and decision-making difficulties.

"I think so. Young female Principals may face more questioning from lack of experience, while Principals in my age group may face more challenges in balancing management and family. As I grow older, my leadership style becomes more inclusive and flexible, and I am no longer as eager to prove myself as I was when I was young. "(Principal 3)

Principal 3's response indicates that age and experience have had an impact on her leadership style. As she grows older, especially with 10 years of experience as a Principal, her main challenge shifts to finding a balance between work and family, and her leadership style becomes more inclusive and flexible. Her mature age and experience enable her to better cope with complex situations in her work, especially in the special challenges of managing in rural areas, where she appears more composed.

"My educational background helped me secure the position of Principal to some extent, but in practical work, I have found that education is not the determining factor. Firstly, my educational background has equipped me with solid professional knowledge. When I first started teaching, the curriculum provided me with a comprehensive understanding of Chinese education. I remember taking courses in linguistics and educational psychology in college, which played an important role in my understanding of students' learning processes, psychological development, and how to effectively design courses." (Principal 7)

The Principal 7 emphasized the help of their educational background for their position as Principal, especially in the design of teaching content and understanding

of students' learning processes. However, despite the solid professional foundation provided by education, principals believe that practical education management experience and communication skills with the community are equally important, especially in leadership positions in rural schools. The advantage of education may be limited by educational resources and environment in remote areas, making management experience and adaptability more critical.

4.3.2 Female Principal's Attitude towards Coping with These Challenges

In rural areas of Shanxi Province, China, female Principals face multiple challenges when leading schools. This article found through qualitative analysis that these female Principals not only face the pressure of gender discrimination and bias in their work, but also face the contradiction of difficult balance between work and family responsibilities, as well as the negative impact of resource scarcity and traditional beliefs in remote areas. In addition, their coping strategies also vary depending on demographic characteristics such as age and marital status. In the face of these difficulties, female school Principals have demonstrated various positive attitudes and strategies, mainly reflected in the following three aspects: they will enhance the school atmosphere through active communication and team collaboration, demonstrate their leadership with firm beliefs and actual achievements, and also develop innovative management strategies tailored to local conditions. The following section will further illustrate these coping attitudes and strategies through specific cases of the principals, demonstrating their actions and effectiveness in addressing various challenges.

4.3.2.1 Actively communicate and enhance team collaboration

“By adhering to professionalism and transparent communication, I gradually gained their trust, but building this trust took more time and effort than male Principals. ”(Principal 1)

This answer reflects that the female Principal builds trust through active communication and gradually gains support from teachers and parents, belonging to the theme of "active communication and enhanced teamwork".

“I decided to start with the teacher team. We organized some art education training and invited experienced music teachers from the city to give lectures, instilling the significance and long-term value of art education in our teachers. ”(Principal 5)

Principal 5 demonstrated her attitude of overcoming resistance and promoting teamwork through communication and collaboration by organizing training and sharing the importance of art education with teachers.

“I took the initiative to organize several team meetings, allowing everyone to speak freely and share their thoughts and concerns. After thorough discussion, we jointly adjusted the evaluation plan to better meet the actual needs of the teachers. ”(Principal 7)

Principal 7 organized a meeting to let teachers express their views and adjust plans in cooperation, demonstrating her practice of strengthening team cooperation through active communication in challenges.

4.3.2.2 Firmly uphold beliefs and demonstrate leadership

“By adhering to professionalism and transparent communication, I gradually gained their trust, but building this trust took more time and effort than male Principals. ”(Principal 1)

Principal 1 has continuously demonstrated their leadership skills through adherence to professionalism and transparent communication, demonstrating firm beliefs and gradually gaining the trust of parents and colleagues, demonstrating leadership.

“Faced with these doubts, I persist in my beliefs and prove the value of foreign language education through actual achievements. ”(Principal 2)

When facing questioning from colleagues and parents, she persisted in her beliefs and proved herself with results, demonstrating a firm belief and leadership ability.

“Despite facing these challenges, I still choose to persevere. ”(Principal 8)

Principal 8, despite facing gender bias and resource scarcity, chose to persist in promoting science education, demonstrating her strong beliefs and leadership.

“I believe that confidence and a firm attitude are the key to breaking these stereotypes... proving oneself through action. ”(Principal 10)

Principal 10 responded to gender bias with confidence and a firm attitude, proving herself through actions and demonstrating her unwavering beliefs and extraordinary leadership when facing challenges.

4.3.2.3 Innovation Management Strategy

“After becoming the Principal, I made improving students' English proficiency one of the key focuses of the school's development and took several specific measures. ”(Principal 2)

Principal 2 implemented innovative management in the curriculum by introducing new teaching methods and English activities, demonstrating her innovative strategies for optimizing English education in the face of limited resources.

“I decided to start with the teacher team. We organized some art education training... and played a collection of children's art works at parent teacher conferences. ”(Principal 5)

Principal 5 adopted a two-way guidance strategy for teachers and parents, gradually changing her perception of art education through innovative display and promotion methods, reflecting her innovative management strategies.

“In order to motivate students, I designed a 'Vocational Skills Challenge'. ”(Principal 10)

“We have launched a 'Teacher Mutual Assistance' project... which has enhanced everyone's team spirit. ”(Principal 10)

Principal 10 stimulated students' interest in learning in an innovative way by organizing a student skills competition, demonstrating her proactive innovative management strategies in resource limited environments. In addition, she also innovatively mobilized the enthusiasm of teachers in remote areas with insufficient resources by organizing teacher mutual assistance activities, demonstrating effective innovative management methods.

4.3.3 Unique advantages of female Principals

In school leadership positions in rural areas of Shanxi Province, female Principals have demonstrated some unique advantages, which not only enable them to perform well in the face of complex educational management challenges, but also bring positive changes to the school. Female Principals often have a attention to detail and caring management style, focusing on the needs of teachers, students, and parents, and committed to creating a warm and inclusive campus environment. At the same time, the female Principal pays special attention to the comprehensive improvement of students' qualities, not limited to academic performance, but promoting the development of various aspects such as art, sports, and mental health, in order to cultivate students' diverse abilities. In the following analysis, this article will use specific cases of the Principals to demonstrate how these unique advantages can play a role in practical work, creating a better educational atmosphere for students and teachers, and laying a solid foundation for female Principals to overcome many challenges in the leadership process.

4.3.3.1 Attention to detail and caring management style

“I think women's resilience and meticulousness have become an advantage in rural environments. I will carefully handle the needs of each student and try my best to ensure that they receive the attention they deserve. ”(Principal 3)

Principal 3 demonstrates a caring management style, as she makes students feel cared for in school through careful observation and attention to their needs. Her meticulousness and resilience give her a certain advantage in resource limited rural environments.

“In school management, I will try my best to pay attention to details and frequently communicate with teachers to understand their specific needs. Through this approach, I can better help them solve problems. ”(Principal 6)

Principal 6 demonstrated her attention to detail and caring management style towards teachers in management. She not only focuses on the specific execution of management, but also understands and meets the needs of teachers through communication. This meticulous and supportive style helps enhance team cohesion.

“As a female Principal, I believe that women tend to pay more attention to details and communication when dealing with problems, which is very useful in school management. I also tend to listen to the opinions of teachers and students, and try to take into account the needs of more people in decision-making. I believe this is an advantage, not a disadvantage. ”(Principal 7)

Principal 7's response reflects her attention to detail and caring management style in management. She handles school affairs with meticulousness and empathy by listening and paying attention to the needs of teachers and students. This management

style enables her to balance the interests of all parties when making decisions, demonstrating a more inclusive leadership style.

“I believe that women have unique advantages in educational leadership, such as being better at handling details and communication. I usually discuss specific school affairs with teachers to ensure that their ideas are taken seriously. ”(Principal 8)

Principal 8 demonstrated a caring management style through meticulous communication and listening to teachers' opinions. This style not only makes teachers feel valued, but also enables school management to be more humane and meticulous, which is a typical advantage of female leaders.

“I think women pay more attention to details in management, especially when dealing with student issues, and may be more patient than male Principals. At the same time, I am also more willing to listen to the opinions of teachers and students and provide them with support as much as possible. ”(Principal 10)

The principal's answer on the 10th indicates that she pays attention to details and cares about the needs of teachers and students in management. She not only focuses on handling specific issues, but also shows a supportive attitude, which helps to enhance the harmonious atmosphere of the school. This management style can better establish trust relationships and help her win the support of faculty and staff.

4.3.3.2 Committed to the comprehensive improvement of students' quality

“When I was promoting art education in school, these life experiences actually gave me more motivation to change the situation. I deeply understand that many rural children also have artistic talents and need more learning opportunities.” (Principal 5)

Principal 5 focuses on students' artistic talent and comprehensive development through their own life experience. This promotion of art education reflects her commitment to the comprehensive improvement of students' qualities, hoping to create more growth space and opportunities for students.

“In the process of leading the school curriculum reform, I have implemented more practical courses and increased the cultivation of students' practical skills to help them adapt to future career needs.” (Principal 6)

Principal 6 focuses on cultivating students' practical skills in curriculum reform, which not only supports their academic performance but also helps them improve their practical application abilities, reflecting her intention to promote students' comprehensive quality development.

“I hope to encourage young girls to believe in themselves and bravely pursue their dreams by holding lectures and scientific activities for female scientists.” (Principal 8)

Principal 8 motivates students, especially girls, through science lectures and activities. This approach not only enriches science education, but also inspires students to explore the field of science through role models, demonstrating her efforts to improve students' overall quality.

"I encourage teachers to utilize natural resources in rural areas, such as rivers and hills, and organize a 'rural exploration' activity to allow students to exercise in nature. "(Principal 9)

Through rural exploration activities, Principal 9 encouraged students to exercise and learn in nature, enhancing their collaborative and practical abilities. This reflects her concern for the comprehensive development of students' qualities.

"I organize students to intern at nearby enterprises to enhance their skills and increase their employment competitiveness through practical experience. "
(Principal 10)

Principal 10 cultivates students' vocational skills through corporate internships, laying the foundation for their future career development and demonstrating her emphasis on improving students' overall quality.

4.4 Summary

In the analysis of this chapter, female school Principals in rural areas of Shanxi Province face various complex challenges and obstacles in their daily work. Data analysis reveals the pressure they face in areas such as gender discrimination, work family conflicts, and working in remote areas with limited resources. Multiple Principals stated that as female Principals, they are often questioned by traditional gender stereotypes, such as not being considered suitable for leadership positions, especially being frequently overlooked in management and decision-making. At the same time, they also need to find a balance between heavy school affairs and family

responsibilities, often requiring double efforts to gain recognition from colleagues, parents, and the community.

Faced with these challenges, female school Principals have demonstrated positive coping strategies and firm beliefs. By actively communicating and enhancing team collaboration, they have promoted team cohesion and improved the overall development of the school through continuous learning and innovative management strategies (Preston & Kooymans, 2013). For example, some Principals compensate for the lack of resources and promote the improvement of students' practical abilities and comprehensive qualities by organizing teacher training and increasing student internship opportunities. At the same time, they have created a harmonious atmosphere in the teacher-student relationship through a meticulous and caring management style. This management style not only effectively improves work efficiency, but also brings more stable development to the school (Oyeniran & Anchomese, 2018).

In addition, the unique advantages of female school Principals are also evident in the data. They not only focus on students' academic performance, but also pay attention to their comprehensive development, such as enhancing students' confidence and teamwork ability through art, science education, and social practice. This focus on improving the overall quality of students demonstrates their unique perspective and educational philosophy in management, enabling students to grow in both academic and life skills (Yu & Wang, 2014). These coping strategies and educational philosophies reflect that female school Principals are still able to lead schools towards positive progress through their own strengths when facing gender bias and resource constraints.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

This study conducted an in-depth analysis of the challenges and obstacles faced by rural female Principals in school leadership in Shanxi Province. The main findings were summarized and compared with research questions and hypotheses to verify the support of the hypotheses.

Firstly, female Principals mainly face challenges such as work pressure, resource scarcity, gender bias, and family responsibilities. This is consistent with the feminist theories of "glass ceiling" and "double burden", especially in rural environments where gender bias is more pronounced. Although the participation rate of women in the field of education has increased, the solidification of cultural concepts and unequal distribution of rural resources still limit their career development (Eagly & Carli, 2003).

In terms of coping strategies, female Principals tend to enhance communication skills, seek external support, and develop cooperative networks (Du, 2017). This is consistent with the view in organizational culture theory that "collaborative networks and organizational change" are more effective, especially in situations where resources are scarce and manpower is limited. This study also found that demographic characteristics have a significant impact on challenges. Older female Principals are more effective in addressing challenges due to their professional experience and

social network support (Cruz & Domingo, 2020), while younger female Principals are more susceptible to gender bias. This validates some of the assumptions made in Chapter 1 and further reveals the complex interactive relationship between social role expectations and individual adaptability.

In addition, gender discrimination has not significantly decreased with the increase of the proportion of female leaders, especially in rural areas. Although the number of female Principals has increased, it has not significantly changed gender attitudes in society, which contrasts with the analysis of "structural power distribution" in feminist theory.

In summary, this study has validated some hypotheses and revealed the complexity of the research question, providing a foundation for further exploration.

5.2 Summary of Findings

The main findings of this study provide a detailed presentation of the various complex challenges faced by rural female Principals in Shanxi Province in leading schools, as well as their unique strategies and approaches in addressing these issues. These findings not only reflect their leadership abilities and adaptability skills in specific socio-cultural contexts, but also highlight their resilience and wisdom in resource scarce and gender biased environments (Mataboge, 2024). Next, a more in-depth analysis will be conducted on these research results, exploring the social and cultural reasons behind them, as well as the practical significance of these phenomena for school management and educational development.

Firstly, the study clearly points out that gender discrimination and gender bias

remain the core issues faced by rural female Principals in Shanxi Province. These biases not only limit their leadership authority, but also create hidden obstacles in their career development (Oyeniran & Anchomese, 2018). principals generally mentioned that traditional beliefs in rural areas are more deeply rooted, and the stereotype that "men are more suitable for management positions" has a negative impact on the work of female Principals. This phenomenon can be explained by feminist theory, as mentioned in the article, gender bias and discrimination are rooted in the cultural foundation of patriarchal societies, and their core lies in the unequal distribution of power (Du, 2017). This study further found that as the number of female Principals increases, the explicit manifestations of gender discrimination decrease and are replaced by implicit biases, such as underestimation of female leadership abilities and higher expectations of their family responsibilities. This also reflects the "gender role double standard" emphasized in feminist theory, where women face high expectations of family roles while taking on professional responsibilities, thereby exacerbating their leadership challenges.

Secondly, work family conflict is one of the common challenges faced by female Principals (Qin, 2020). Research has shown that family responsibilities place significant pressure on the time and energy of female Principals, especially in resource scarce rural areas where such conflicts are more pronounced. According to the feminist theory mentioned earlier, traditional expectations of gender roles impose disproportionate family responsibilities and work pressure on women. This phenomenon can be explained as a result of women being oppressed in patriarchal societies - men are seen by society as the main economic pillar of the family, while women are expected to take on more family responsibilities (Xu, 2000). Under this framework of gender role division, female Principals need to find a balance between busy school affairs and family life, while dealing with multiple obstacles from traditional gender concepts. Radical feminism believes that women should achieve more equitable social relationships by challenging and redefining gender roles,

providing theoretical support for female Principals to explore solutions to conflicts between family and work.

The dilemma of work family conflict also confirms the phenomenon of "double burden" mentioned earlier, that is, women need to perform well in both family and work, while men often contribute less in family affairs, thus exacerbating gender role inequality (Tang & Udang, 2024). These realities once again demonstrate that the career development of female Principals is not only influenced by the internal power structure of the organization, but also constrained by gender norms deeply rooted in cultural and social structures.

In addition, the scarcity of resources in remote areas and the constraints of traditional beliefs pose multiple challenges to the leadership of female Principals (Qin, 2020). Research has found that insufficient facilities, funding, and teaching staff in rural schools pose significant obstacles for female Principals in promoting educational innovation and policy reform. Some principals have made up for the lack of resources through creative management strategies, such as introducing school enterprise cooperation and conducting practical courses. These practices demonstrate that female Principals exhibit a high degree of resilience and adaptability when facing challenges, which is consistent with Fullan's (2001) theory of transformational leadership.

This study also revealed the impact of different demographic characteristics on female Principals. For example, high education and rich work experience can effectively enhance the authority and management ability of female Principals, but younger or unmarried Principals often face more challenges due to a lack of social recognition. This result enriches Smith and Andrews' (2018) research on women's educational leadership and provides a new perspective for better understanding how individual characteristics affect the leadership of female Principals.

This study reveals the multiple challenges faced by rural female Principals in Shanxi Province in leading schools through specific cases, such as gender discrimination, work family conflict, resource scarcity, and the impact of demographic characteristics, while showcasing their unique contributions. These findings not only validate relevant theories, but also enrich research in the field of gender and educational leadership.

5.3 Discussion

This chapter aims to further deepen the understanding of the research results and analyze them in a larger theoretical and practical context. In the previous chapters, we summarized the research objectives, methods, and main findings, pointing out the multiple challenges faced by female Principals in rural primary schools in Shanxi Province when leading schools, including gender bias, cultural and institutional barriers, and resource scarcity. These issues not only affect their work efficiency, but also limit their career development (Zhang & Guo, 2011). Therefore, a more detailed discussion will be conducted around these issues.

In order to analyze these issues more clearly, this chapter will divide the discussion into four main parts. Firstly, we focus on the challenges faced by female Principals in the leadership process; Secondly, analyze the specific strategies they adopt to overcome these obstacles; Thirdly, explore the impact of demographic factors such as age, educational background, and work experience on the challenges they face; Finally, examine the changing trends of gender dynamics in the workplace. This classification discussion not only helps clarify the complexity of the problem, but also provides logical support for summarizing the significance of this study and subsequent research.

This study will also compare the research results with existing literature to analyze their unique contributions and shortcomings. Firstly, it is necessary to combine feminism with organizational culture theory for analysis. According to the feminist theory mentioned earlier, the gender bias and role expectations faced by female Principals in rural environments are closely related to patriarchal culture. The male dominated power structure requires women to put in more effort in their work to demonstrate their leadership effectiveness (Murakami & Törnsten, 2017), and this phenomenon is also influenced by the basic assumptions and beliefs of Schein's organizational culture theory. These assumptions have formed cultural norms of gender inequality within organizations, leading female leaders to challenge traditional organizational culture, reshape the core values and behavioral norms of schools, and enhance their leadership authority.

This study also found that female Principals demonstrate personal resilience and flexibility when dealing with work family conflicts. This manifestation can be understood through the feminist advocacy of "enhancing women's consciousness". From a feminist perspective, female Principals have redefined their roles in the dual challenges of family responsibilities and career development, challenging the constraints of traditional gender roles (Tang & Udang, 2024). Meanwhile, Schein's organizational culture theory emphasizes the core role of leadership in transforming organizational culture, which aligns with the strategy of female Principals to optimize resource management by shaping inclusive culture and promoting teamwork.

However, despite some progress in advocating gender equality in recent years, research results indicate that implicit gender discrimination is still prevalent, especially in rural areas. Feminist theory holds that gender oppression is the fundamental form of social inequality (Delmar, 2018), and true equality can only be achieved by challenging existing cultural norms. In addition, the "cultural change"

viewpoint in Schein's organizational culture theory points out that when an organization is trapped in a cultural situation, the role of leaders is particularly important. Female Principals are promoting cultural change in rural schools, attempting to break gender biases and create a more equitable environment for female leaders, which reflects the intersection of two theories.

Finally, this study also revealed the important role of personal resilience and social support demonstrated by female Principals in coping with challenges. Their coping strategies are largely influenced by cultural backgrounds, but also demonstrate their persistence and flexibility in the face of difficulties (Alves, 2022). This discussion not only describes these phenomena, but also attempts to delve deeper into the underlying reasons and provide suggestions for possible intervention measures in the future. This analysis has laid a solid foundation for summarizing the significance of subsequent research and providing practical guidance.

5.3.1 Leadership Challenges for Female Principals

Primary school female Principals face many challenges in their leadership work in rural areas of Shanxi Province, mainly reflected in gender discrimination, conflicts between family and work, and resource scarcity. Through the interview analysis of this study, it can be seen that female Principals not only need to cope with the inherent bias of society towards their gender roles, but also need to overcome the lack of educational resources in rural areas and the limitations of traditional concepts. These factors work together to make the leadership work of female Principals complex and stressful.

Firstly, there is the implicit and explicit existence of gender discrimination. Many Principals mentioned that they often face gender discrimination in leadership positions. Despite progress in gender equality at the policy level, traditional beliefs still have a profound impact on female Principals. For example, some male colleagues or parents often question women's abilities in decision-making and management (Principal 1, 5). This implicit or explicit gender bias forces female Principals to invest more time and energy in proving themselves. Previous studies have also supported this phenomenon, such as Schein's (1985) organizational culture theory, which suggests that organizational culture, as a fundamental assumption and value shared by organizational members, will invisibly influence the behavior and interaction patterns of internal members within the organization. This culture not only has a guiding role, but may also reinforce inherent gender roles, making female leaders face greater cultural resistance in the leadership process. Female Principals, in this organizational cultural context, need to adapt to the existing culture and promote cultural change through their own leadership, in order to change people's inherent biases towards gender roles.

The most commonly mentioned issue is the dual conflict between the family and work of female Principals. The interview revealed the pressure for female Principals to seek a balance between family and professional responsibilities. Especially in rural areas, women are often expected to take on the main household responsibilities (Principal 7, 8). Some Principals mentioned that they often have to make difficult choices between work and family when their children need care (Principal 2, 6). This role conflict 'not only affects work efficiency, but may also limit their career development.

This phenomenon can be analyzed in conjunction with the organizational culture theory mentioned earlier. According to Schein's (1985) theory of organizational culture, organizational culture is not only the superficial behavioral norms and rituals,

but also the fundamental assumptions and beliefs shared by organizational members at a deeper level. These cultural assumptions have a subtle influence on the behavior and attitudes within schools. In rural areas where gender bias is deeply rooted, traditional organizational culture often emphasizes the primary role of women in the family and associates leadership positions with masculinity. This rigid cultural assumption limits the leadership effectiveness of female Principals and increases their pressure to balance work and family.

Finally, there is the impact of regional differences, which is the limitation of resource scarcity on the leadership ability of female school Principals. The lack of educational resources in rural areas is another major challenge faced by female Principals. Multiple Principals mentioned that they often encounter difficulties in promoting educational reforms or improving teaching facilities due to insufficient funding or lack of policy support (Principal 3, 10). At the same time, traditional beliefs about education among rural parents also hinder reform efforts, such as believing that art or science education is a "waste of time" (Principal 5, 8). From the perspective of feminist theory, this unequal distribution of resources and the obstacles posed by traditional beliefs also reflect the systemic limitations of gender bias and role expectations on women's leadership in patriarchal societies. By establishing innovative networks and enhancing the diversity of leadership teams, female Principals can not only alleviate resource shortages, but also promote cultural changes in schools and break the limitations of traditional gender biases on educational reform.

Overall, gender discrimination, conflicts between family and work, and resource scarcity collectively constitute the main challenges for female Principals in leadership work in rural areas of Shanxi. These challenges not only limit their career development, but also highlight the long-term and complex nature of gender equality and education resource allocation issues in rural areas. To address these issues,

measures need to be taken from multiple levels, including policy, society, and individuals, to provide a more equitable environment and support for female Principals.

5.3.2 Coping Strategies for Overcoming Barriers

In the interview data of Chapter 4 of this study, female Principals demonstrated diverse coping strategies to address gender bias, resource scarcity, and conflicts between family and work. Their strategies mainly focus on three aspects: team collaboration, belief support, and innovation management. These strategies not only help them overcome many difficulties in practical work, but also reflect their unique resilience and leadership as education managers.

Their first strategy is to build trust through teamwork and communication. Female Principals often emphasize enhancing team cohesion through active communication in the management process. For example, principal 1 stated that she gradually gained the trust of teachers and parents through transparent communication and professional performance. This is consistent with the viewpoint in feminist theory that "feminism not only focuses on the advancement of women's rights, but also on the collective strength through cooperation and communication" (Wang, 2017). Wang believes that feminism emphasizes the establishment of supportive networks and the sharing of experiences, which is of great significance for the growth of female leaders in the field of education. In the context of scarce educational resources in rural areas, this proactive communication strategy is particularly important. In addition, principal 5 mentioned that she injected faith into the team through organizing art education and training, which reflects the core concept of feminist theory emphasizing "overcoming traditional gender biases through empowerment and collaboration" (Jiang, 2011).

Through cooperation and communication, female Principals have gradually shaped a more inclusive and supportive school culture environment, demonstrating the unique advantages of female leadership in educational management.

At the same time, female Principals also adhere to firm beliefs to demonstrate leadership. When faced with doubts, female Principals demonstrate outstanding leadership skills through firm beliefs and outstanding performance. For example, Principal 8 mentioned that no matter how big the challenges she faces, she always insists on promoting science education reform. This persistence is consistent with Bandura's (1982) theory of self-efficacy, indicating that leaders who believe in their own abilities are more likely to tackle complex problems. In addition, principal 2 responded to others' doubts through the actual results of foreign language teaching, demonstrating the importance of firm beliefs in breaking through gender bias. This kind of action not only helps the Principal overcome personal obstacles, but also enhances the vitality of the school's development.

At the same time, female Principals also adhere to firm beliefs to demonstrate leadership. When faced with doubts, female Principals demonstrate outstanding leadership skills through firm beliefs and outstanding performance. For example, Principal 8 mentioned that no matter how big the challenges she faces, she always insists on promoting science education reform. This persistence is consistent with the "Organizational Culture and Leadership" theory proposed by Schein (1985), indicating that leaders can better adapt to external changes and lead the organization towards development by shaping a positive organizational culture. According to Schein, leadership plays a crucial role in creating and transforming organizational culture. As the shaper of school culture, the Principal's firm beliefs can guide the school towards positive development. In addition, principal 2 responded to others' doubts through the actual results of foreign language teaching, which reflects the importance of integrating personal values and a sense of mission into organizational

culture. This kind of action not only helps the Principal overcome personal obstacles, but also promotes the reform and development of school culture.

The data analysis section of this study also revealed practical cases of female Principals using innovative management to address resource scarcity. For example, principal 10 designed a "vocational skills challenge" to stimulate students' interest in vocational education, which is consistent with Kim and Mauborgne's (2014) innovation theory in blue ocean strategy. Meanwhile, principal 2 has elevated the status of art education by organizing two-way teacher training. These innovative strategies not only improve the learning environment for students, but also further broaden the development path of the school.

The data analysis section of this study also revealed practical cases of female Principals using innovative management to address resource scarcity. For example, principal 10 designed a "vocational skills challenge" to stimulate students' interest in vocational education, which is consistent with Schein's (1985) view in organizational culture theory that "leadership and culture are the opposite of the same coin". Schein emphasized that leaders drive organizations forward by revealing the limitations of existing cultures and developing new cultural adaptations. At the same time, principal 2 elevated the status of art education by organizing two-way teacher training. These innovative strategies not only improve the learning environment for students, but also further broaden the development path of the school.

5.3.3 The impact of demographic characteristics on leadership

When exploring the challenges faced by female primary school Principals in rural areas of Shanxi Province in school leadership, demographic characteristics such

as educational background, teaching experience, and years of work experience have a significant impact on their leadership performance and the challenges they face. Through the interview data of this study, it can be seen that different individual characteristics to some extent determine the coping strategies of female Principals in school management and the difficulties and breakthrough directions in practical work (Oyeniran & Anchomese, 2018).

Firstly, the relationship between educational background and leadership ability. Female Principals with higher educational backgrounds often demonstrate strong theoretical foundations and innovative abilities in school management. For example, the third Principal mentioned in the interview (with a master's degree in educational management) is more adept at managing schools through their professional resource allocation and policy-making abilities. However, this high level of education also brings practical challenges in the implementation process, such as the possibility that theoretical knowledge may not fully solve specific problems when facing resource scarce rural environments. This situation is consistent with previous literature observations. Schein (1985) pointed out that organizational culture is a product of collective experiential habits, consisting of fundamental assumptions and beliefs shared by members at a deep level. In resource scarce environments, highly educated female Principals may need to adjust their theoretical knowledge to suit specific cultural backgrounds, as resource limitations and cultural differences may become obstacles to knowledge application in remote areas.

Secondly, it should be noted that work experience enhances crisis management skills. Long term work experience has made female Principals more stable and mature in management. Principal 1 mentioned that with the accumulation of experience, their decision-making ability has become more comprehensive and they can better balance various interests within the school. According to Schein (1985), organizational culture has a subtle influence on the behavior and decision-making of members within an

organization. Experienced female Principals can better integrate and influence the school culture through long-term learning and adaptation within the organization, making it more in line with the needs of school development and easier to gain the trust and support of the team. In contrast, young Principals (such as principal 9) may need to put in more effort to establish credibility in their interactions with older teachers due to insufficient understanding and influence of organizational culture in management.

Although age and work experience have a positive impact on the management of female Principals, they can also be a source of challenges. For example, older female Principals (such as principal 8) need to find a better balance between work and family, while younger Principals are more constrained by lack of experience and community trust. In addition, marital status is also a significant influencing factor. Principal 4 mentioned that as an unmarried woman, she is often questioned by the community for her lack of support in promoting reforms, believing that she lacks family responsibilities. This limitation reflects the influence of traditional beliefs on the professional role of female Principals, which can be explained by feminist theory.

As Du (2017) stated, the root causes of gender bias, gender discrimination, and inequality come from the cultural background of China's patriarchal society and the male dominated socio-economic structure. This social ideological foundation has led to stereotypes about female leaders, causing women to face more skepticism and challenges in their professional roles. Especially in the organizational environment of rural schools, gender role expectations and socio-cultural concepts have strengthened the limitations on the abilities of female Principals, requiring them to make more efforts in the leadership process to gain recognition and support.

That is to say, demographic characteristics to some extent determine the leadership performance and challenges faced by female Principals. In practical

applications, these features can be both helpful and hindering. In the future, more policy support and social awareness enhancement are needed to help female Principals better unleash their leadership potential.

5.3.4 Evolving Gender Dynamics in the Workplace

In recent years, with the increase in the number of female leaders, gender dynamics in the workplace have undergone certain changes, and female Principals have demonstrated strong resilience and innovation in rural education leadership. However, according to the interview data of this study, this change is not significant in rural areas, and implicit gender discrimination still exists widely. For example, multiple Principals mentioned that although gender discrimination has decreased in formal policies, implicit biases still deeply affect their career development (Principal 1, Principal 2). Traditional beliefs associate female leaders with "emotionalization" or "lack of decision-making power," and this stereotype is particularly evident in school management and resource allocation. This phenomenon is also consistent with research findings mentioned in the literature, such as Du's (2017) point out that feminist theory criticizes the root causes of gender bias and inequality, emphasizing that women's unique leadership and coping strategies in the face of male dominated culture and power structures can have a positive impact on changing the status quo. This theory strongly echoes the actual experience of rural female Principals, reflecting the deep-rooted nature of gender bias.

Nevertheless, female Principals have gradually changed the gender dynamics in the work environment through their own efforts and strategies. For example, Principal 3 and Principal 5 gradually gained the trust of colleagues and the community through their outstanding leadership skills and professional knowledge. Principal 3

emphasized her professional background in educational resource management and policy-making, while Principal 5 provided students with comprehensive development opportunities by promoting art education. The display of this ability gradually changed the gender stereotypes of some colleagues and parents. This is consistent with the viewpoint of feminist theory, which emphasizes that "through the redefinition of female traits and the consolidation of collective power, female leaders can effectively break through gender bias" (Du, 2017). However, such changes often require more time and effort, and implicit gender discrimination remains one of the main challenges faced by female Principals.

In addition, the influence of traditional rural beliefs still exists in the evolution of gender dynamics. Principal 6 mentioned that due to the deep-rooted traditional beliefs, there are often conflicting expectations from communities and colleagues towards female leaders. On the one hand, they are expected to demonstrate leadership similar to that of men, while on the other hand, they are required to fulfill traditional family responsibilities. This double standard increases their pressure and further limits their leadership space. This phenomenon is consistent with the analysis of gender role expectations in feminist theory. For example, the traditional Chinese culture concept of "men leading the outside world and women leading the inside" mentioned earlier deeply influences the allocation and expectations of gender roles. Women are given more family responsibilities, while men are seen more as representatives of power and leadership (Qin, 2020). The continuation of this concept indicates that although the evolution of gender dynamics suggests that women have gained some recognition in leadership, there is still a long way to go before true gender equality can be achieved.

5.4 Implications

5.4.1 Theoretical Implications

This study explores the challenges and obstacles faced by rural female Principals in school leadership in Shanxi Province, expands existing theories on gender and leadership, and verifies the impact of gender bias and traditional beliefs on women's career development. Braun and Clarke (2012) proposed that gender discrimination and bias in leadership roles are the result of long-term cultural shaping, and this study further confirms the applicability of this viewpoint in rural China. In addition, the research findings indicate that although education and professional background have a certain positive effect on the career development of female Principals, traditional culture and resource limitations often weaken their actual effects. This finding provides an important supplement to leadership theory and educational management research.

In terms of cross disciplinary impact, this study provides a new perspective on the intersection between gender studies and educational management. The study reveals the dynamic impact of gender roles in educational management, supporting Kanter's (1977) "critical minority theory" that simply increasing the number of female leaders is not enough to eliminate gender bias and requires deeper cultural change (De & Paci, 2021).

5.4.2 Practical Implications

The practical significance of this study lies in providing specific improvement suggestions for educational administrators, school communities, teachers, and students. Firstly, for educational managers, research has shown that female Principals often require higher abilities to compete for resources and manage school affairs in resource scarce rural environments. Organizing professional training can enhance the resource acquisition and management capabilities of female Principals (Eagly & Carli, 2003). For this purpose, education authorities can regularly organize professional training and capacity building projects, such as conducting specialized training on resource acquisition, policy formulation, and innovation management. These trainings can not only help female Principals improve their own abilities, but also enhance their recognition in the education management system, thus more effectively addressing the special challenges in remote areas.

Secondly, for school communities, encouraging diverse leadership styles can help improve the current situation of gender bias (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This study found that gender bias in traditional beliefs still exists, especially in school management environments in rural areas. So encouraging diverse leadership styles and shaping a campus culture of gender equality is an important response measure. Schools can organize diverse leadership display activities, such as themed lectures or story sharing sessions for female leaders, to help teachers, students, and parents better understand the unique advantages of female Principals. In addition, by promoting and implementing gender equality education policies, communities can gradually change stereotypes about female leadership, enhance acceptance of diverse leadership styles, and create a more inclusive school atmosphere.

Finally, for teachers and students, open communication and collaborative education can enhance their support for female leaders and improve the cultural

atmosphere within schools (Fullan, 2001). By actively interacting and collaborating with female Principals, teachers can not only deepen their understanding of their leadership style, but also work together to improve the campus cultural atmosphere. Schools can regularly organize team building activities to enhance the cohesion of teacher teams and promote collaborative relationships with Principals. For students, conducting relevant thematic education on campus, such as gender equality and inclusive leadership courses, can help them establish correct values, enhance their sense of identity and support for female leaders. This educational practice not only helps to improve gender bias within schools, but also cultivates stronger tolerance and diverse perspectives for students' future entry into society.

Overall, the practical significance of this study provides a multi-level improvement path for optimizing the rural school education system, promoting the joint efforts of education managers, school communities, teachers, and students, and creating a more fair and supportive working environment for female Principals.

5.4.3 Policy Recommendations

To improve the working environment and career development of female Principals, this study proposes multiple policy recommendations. Firstly, the government should increase resource investment in rural schools and provide more vocational training and professional development opportunities for female Principals. This will help balance the resource gap between women and male colleagues in educational leadership positions. At the same time, by implementing policies to promote gender equality education and reduce implicit or explicit gender biases, especially in rural areas with strong traditional beliefs, this policy can long-term change social culture by cultivating gender equality awareness among the next generation of students (Eagly & Carli, 2003).

5.4.4 Educational and Learning Implications

The study also emphasized the special value of female Principals in promoting the development of rural education, especially in enhancing students' overall quality. Through innovative educational methods and focusing on cultivating students' practical abilities, they have injected more vitality into traditional exam oriented education. For example, female Principals have broken through the limitations of traditional education models by increasing art education and social practice activities to equip students with more comprehensive development abilities. Meanwhile, research has shown that the caring leadership style of female Principals can help cultivate a more positive campus culture, providing new practical ideas for improving the rural education environment (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

5.4.5 Socio-Cultural Implications

This study reveals the limitations of gender bias and traditional beliefs on the career development of female Principals, highlighting the importance of cultural change. Research shows that successful cases of female Principals not only inspire more women to enter leadership positions, but also gradually change society's stereotypical image of female leadership. By deepening the understanding of gender equality, rural communities and education systems can promote broader equity and inclusivity at the cultural level. These findings provide new empirical data for gender studies and practical support for achieving gender equality (De & Paci, 2021).

5.4.6 Academic Contributions

From an academic perspective, this study has made significant contributions to the development of gender studies and educational management theory. By analyzing the coping strategies of female Principals, this study supplements empirical data on the performance of female leaders in educational management, while verifying the applicability of existing theories in specific cultural and regional contexts. The research findings demonstrate the resilience and creativity of female Principals in the face of resource constraints and gender bias, providing important insights for educational management research.

5.5 Limitations and Suggestions of the Study

This study explores the challenges and obstacles faced by rural female Principals in school management in Shanxi Province from a qualitative analysis perspective, and delves into their coping strategies and unique advantages. However, there are still some limitations in the research that cannot be ignored, which may have a certain impact on the interpretation and generalizability of the research results.

5.5.1 Limitations

Firstly, there are limitations to the sample. This study is based solely on in-depth interviews with ten rural female Principals in Shanxi Province, and this small-scale sample may not fully reflect the actual situation of rural female Principals in other regions of China. As Creswell (2016) pointed out, qualitative research has depth in explaining specific phenomena, but its external validity is weak. Therefore, the results of this study may not be generalizable to regions with different socio-cultural backgrounds or resource conditions.

Secondly, there are limitations to the data collection methods. This study used a semi-structured interview method, which, although able to gain a deeper understanding of the Principal's personal experiences and perspectives, may be influenced by the Principal's expressive ability, emotional state, and social expectation bias. For example, some principals may tend to provide socially accepted answers rather than genuine inner thoughts. This phenomenon may inadvertently lead to data bias (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

In addition, there is a singularity in the gender perspective of this study, mainly focusing on the experiences and challenges of female Principals, without fully incorporating the perspectives of male Principals or conducting comparative analysis between the two. The lack of exploration of gender differences may limit a comprehensive understanding of how gender discrimination and gender roles specifically affect leadership. By incorporating the perspective of male Principals, future research can reveal the similarities and differences between genders in career development and school management, providing a more balanced analytical framework for gender issues. In addition, as this study focuses on female Principals, the specificity of its theme may overlook the deeper impact of broader socio-cultural or institutional issues on the career development of Principals, which deserves further exploration.

Finally, regarding the impact of the unique characteristics of remote areas. Due to the focus of the research on rural areas in Shanxi Province, the results may not be applicable in urban or resource rich regions. The themes of resource scarcity and traditional gender perspectives have a significant impact in this study, but it is unclear whether they are equally important in urban or international environments. Lincoln (1985) emphasized that the research results of the naturalistic paradigm often have strong contextualization, which also limits the generalizability of the conclusions of this study.

5.5.2 Suggestions for Future Research

Firstly, future research should focus on expanding the size and diversity of research samples to improve the representativeness and universality of research

results. By increasing the number of principals, it is possible to expand from the originally limited sample to include a larger group of female Principals, ensuring that the data is more comprehensive and rich. And it is suggested to expand the research scope to different geographical regions, including not only remote rural areas but also school leaders in urban areas, to compare the differences between urban and rural areas. In addition, Principals of different types of schools (such as regular primary and secondary schools, vocational schools, and international schools) should also be included in the study to explore the impact of school nature on women's leadership challenges. Diversified samples can help to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the commonalities and differences among female Principals from different backgrounds, while also revealing the impact of regional culture and education systems on gender equality. This expansive research will provide scientific basis for formulating more targeted policies and practices, and further promote gender equality and leadership development in the field of education.

Secondly, a mixed research approach is adopted, combining qualitative and quantitative methods to comprehensively and deeply analyze the challenges and obstacles faced by female Principals. For example, collecting more extensive data through large-scale questionnaire surveys to explore the universal trends affecting the leadership of female Principals; At the same time, combined with in-depth qualitative interviews, explore the reasons and significance behind the data from the specific experiences of the Principals. Quantitative research can verify the reliability and universality of research conclusions, while qualitative research provides detailed background analysis. The combination of the two can complement each other and provide a richer and more comprehensive perspective for research. In this way, a larger range of data is collected through questionnaire surveys, combined with in-depth analysis through qualitative interviews, to validate and supplement research conclusions. This approach helps to improve the external validity of research (Creswell, 2016).

In addition, future research can also start from the perspective of gender comparative analysis, incorporating the perspective of male Principals into the study to comprehensively explore the role and influence of gender in school leadership and management. By comparing the similarities and differences in career development, management styles, and challenges faced by male and female Principals, we can more clearly reveal the specific impact of gender discrimination or gender role expectations on their career development. In addition, this comparative analysis can also help identify whether male Principals also face other forms of workplace challenges, providing more empirical support for promoting gender equality and policy optimization in the field of education management.

In the theoretical framework, future research can introduce more diverse theoretical perspectives, such as critical gender theory and organizational behavior theory, to comprehensively analyze the profound impact of gender roles and organizational culture on the career development of female Principals. Critical gender theory can help reveal how social gender roles influence the career paths of female Principals through the interaction of culture, institutions, and policies; The theory of organizational behavior can analyze the potential constraints of implicit culture, power distribution, and resource flow within organizations on gender equality. The combination of these theories will help to reveal in depth the institutional and structural issues faced by female Principals in leadership roles, providing theoretical support for proposing targeted improvement strategies.

Finally, future research should focus more on how to improve the working environment for female Principals and promote gender equality through policy interventions and innovative practices. For example, we can delve into the role of reforming resource allocation policies in narrowing the gender gap, or study the support effect of specialized training programs for gender equality and leadership

enhancement on the development of female Principals. In addition, it is necessary to evaluate the actual effectiveness of diversified support mechanisms, such as flexible work arrangements and family support policies, and how to alleviate work family conflicts for female Principals. Based on the limitations of the sample size and insufficient research methods in this study, it is recommended that future research be conducted in a wider range of regions and school types, combined with mixed methods to explore relevant issues in depth, in order to supplement and deepen existing conclusions.

5.6 Conclusion

This study focuses on the multiple challenges and coping strategies faced by female Principals in rural areas of Shanxi Province in school leadership. The aim is to explore the impact of factors such as gender discrimination, resource scarcity, and the dual pressures of family and work on their career development, as well as the resilience and innovation they demonstrate in this environment. The study used qualitative interviews to reveal the true experiences and socio-cultural backgrounds of ten female Principals through in-depth communication.

Research has found that gender discrimination remains a core issue affecting the career development of female Principals, and although explicit discrimination has decreased, implicit bias is still prevalent. In addition, the deep-rooted traditional concepts and unequal distribution of resources in rural areas further exacerbate the difficulties faced by female Principals in school management and education reform. However, these female Principals have demonstrated strong coping abilities, achieving positive changes in school development in a resource limited environment through teamwork, firm beliefs, and innovative management strategies. For example,

they have filled the gap in educational resources and provided more opportunities for students' comprehensive development by introducing vocational skills courses and promoting art education.

The significance of this study lies in revealing the leadership characteristics of female Principals in challenges, while proposing policy recommendations to improve gender equality and support the development of female leaders. The research results not only validate the applicability of relevant theories such as social role theory and transformational leadership theory, but also provide a new perspective to understand gender issues in rural education management. Future research can be conducted on a wider geographical scale, combined with quantitative and qualitative methods, to provide scientific basis for a more comprehensive exploration of the career development and gender equality of female Principals. By continuously improving policies and practices, creating a more fair and supportive working environment for female Principals will further promote the overall progress of rural education and society.

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Appendix A Interview Protocol

Interview Questions:

1. Can you briefly introduce your family situation? For example, the situation of your spouse and children?
2. As a principal, what impact do you think family responsibilities have had on your work?
3. How do you find a balance between family and work?
4. How do family members, especially spouses, support your career choices and development as a principal?
5. As a mother and principal, have you ever felt a conflict between these two roles? If so, how would you respond?
6. What is the organizational culture of your school? Is there a gender difference or gender discrimination?
7. Do you think there is a difference in authority between a female principal and a male principal in school?
8. Do the school management or colleagues have any specific expectations or prejudices about your gender?
9. What is your opinion on feminism? Do you think this is related to your role as a female principal?
10. Have you encountered gender discrimination in your career? Can you give a specific example?
11. Do you think that in rural areas of Shanxi, the situation of women in educational leadership is more challenging than that of men?
12. Do you think the pressure and responsibility at work affect the time and quality of your time spent with your family?
13. How do you usually handle conflicts between work and family?
14. As a principal working in a rural area, what do you think is the impact of the rural environment on female educators?

15. Do you think the role of a female principal is more difficult or unique in rural areas than in urban areas?
16. Do you feel that there are biases or stereotypes towards female leaders in rural communities?
17. What impact do you think your education and major have had on your work as a principal?
18. Has your educational experience, especially as a principal, helped you better cope with challenges? Can you give an example? (For senior principals)
19. Do you think the challenges faced by female principals in different age groups are different? Does your own age have an impact on your leadership style?
20. Have you ever felt that changes in age or experience have impacted your role and decision-making in school throughout your career?
21. In summary, what do you think are the main challenges as a female principal? How did you overcome these challenges?

Appendix B Interview Transcription

Interview Transcription in English

Principal 1:

Name	Principal 1
Gender	Female
Age	42 years old
Type of School	Rural public primary school
Years of Experience	8 years of principal experience, 20 years of education management
Educational Background	With a master's degree in educational psychology

List of Acronyms: P1=Principal 1, IN=Interviewer

Interview Transcription :

SPEAKER	INTERVIEW
IN:	Hello, thank you very much for accepting my interview invitation. Could you please introduce some basic information about you, such as your age, the type of school you are working in, the years of teaching experience and your family situation?
P1:	Well. I am 42 years old and have been engaged in educational administration for 20 years, with 6 years of experience as a principal. I am married and have two children, aged 12 and 8 respectively. My husband is also a teacher, although his job is quite busy, we try our best to support each other and share family responsibilities.
IN:	How do you find a balance between family and work?
P1:	This is indeed a challenge. Especially as a principal, I need to spend a lot of time on school affairs. But I will try my best to arrange my work more efficiently and focus on getting along with the children when I get home. Weekends are usually the time I leave for my family, and I try not to bring home my usual work.
IN:	Have you encountered gender discrimination in your career?
P1:	Gender discrimination is not uncommon in my career, especially when I first started as a principal. I remember when I first took office, some male colleagues and superiors doubted my abilities, believing that women were not as decisive as men in decision-making, especially in

	<p>school management and resource allocation. Despite my master's degree in educational psychology and extensive teaching experience, there are still people who believe that women are not suitable for such important leadership positions. At the beginning of the meeting, my opinions were often ignored and even interrupted. This bias made me realize that as a female principal, I not only have to prove my management skills, but also constantly strive to break gender stereotypes. In addition, I have also encountered some doubts from parents of students, especially when it comes to decisions regarding school discipline and safety. Some parents believe that female principals are too 'gentle' and not strong enough when dealing with problems. However, by adhering to professionalism and transparent communication, I gradually gained their trust, but building this trust took more time and effort than a male principal.</p>
IN:	<p>As a principal working in a rural area, what do you think is the impact of the rural environment on female educators?</p>
P1:	<p>In rural areas, the role of female leaders is more complex. On the one hand, rural areas are relatively traditional, and it is not easy for women to obtain leadership positions. On the other hand, the scarcity of resources requires me to be more flexible and innovative in solving problems. My rural work experience has honed my leadership skills and patience.</p>
IN:	<p>What is the organizational culture of your school? Is there a gender difference or gender discrimination?</p>
P1:	<p>Our school's organizational culture is still quite traditional, and there are some inherent ideas about the division of labor between men and women. Although there may not be obvious gender discrimination on the surface, sometimes I feel that women's voices are not easily taken seriously, especially in important decision-making where male colleagues are more proactive and I need to work harder to make my opinions heard.</p> <p>And in the interaction between teachers and students, I believe that traditional gender roles are still deeply rooted. For example, some teachers may assume that girls are more suitable for humanities, while boys excel in science, which is reflected in teaching methods and classroom interaction. Although we have been striving to cultivate an atmosphere of gender equality, changing these deeply ingrained beliefs requires time and patience.</p> <p>There is no obvious gender discrimination in formal policies of schools regarding gender discrimination, but implicit biases still exist. For</p>

	<p>example, female teachers in our school sometimes encounter inequality in promotion and job allocation. Especially for some older teachers or managers, they may still believe that female teachers are more suitable for 'caring' jobs such as homeroom teachers or counselors, while men are more suitable for leadership positions or academic positions. I personally have been working hard through training and seminars to help teachers become aware of these implicit biases and promote a more fair work environment.</p>
IN:	<p>Do you think that as a female principal, there is a difference in authority between you and a male principal in school?</p>
P1:	<p>I feel there is. Male principals may be inherently perceived as more leadership, while women often have to earn everyone's trust through more job performance. At the beginning, I had to spend more time than the male principal to get teachers and parents to approve of my decisions. However, my work experience and achievements have gradually gained recognition from everyone, but this process is indeed slower than my male counterparts.</p>
IN:	<p>What is your view on feminism? Do you think this is related to your role as a female principal?</p>
P1:	<p>I think feminism is about giving us more choices and fair opportunities. I didn't specifically label myself as a feminist, but I do feel that as a female principal, I hope my efforts can give more female teachers the confidence to pursue leadership positions and not be bound by traditional ideas. As long as one has the ability, gender should not be a barrier.</p>
IN:	<p>Do you think that in rural areas of Shanxi, the situation of women in educational leadership is more challenging than that of men?</p>
P1:	<p>I believe that in rural areas of Shanxi, female education leaders face much greater challenges than men. Because traditional beliefs are still deeply rooted in rural areas, women are expected to take on more responsibilities in the family, especially in taking care of children and the elderly. This makes it difficult for many potential women to fully devote themselves to work or have to make a difficult balance between career and family. In addition, rural areas often have low expectations for female leaders. People tend to believe that men have stronger leadership abilities, especially when dealing with complex management tasks. As a female principal, I often need to put in more effort than my male peers to gain equal recognition and respect. In addition, men often have more resources and support on social and professional networks,</p>

	<p>while women are often excluded, especially in some informal discussion and decision-making circles.</p> <p>But I always believe that through hard work and perseverance, women can overcome these challenges and become outstanding leaders. We need more female role models and support systems to help women speak out and grow in educational leadership in rural areas.</p>
IN:	As a principal working in a rural area, what do you think is the impact of the rural environment on female educators?
P1:	The conditions in rural areas are definitely more difficult than in cities, with fewer resources and opportunities. As female educators, in rural areas, one not only faces work pressure, but also has to deal with the burden brought by family and social expectations. Sometimes, people think that women should take on more responsibilities in the family and cannot work less, so our pressure will be greater.
IN:	Do you think the role of a female principal is more difficult or unique in rural areas than in urban areas?
P1:	I think it must be more difficult. In cities, the proportion of female principals is relatively higher, and the surrounding support system is also more sound, such as better educational resources and more training opportunities. But in rural areas, often it is one person who shoulders all the responsibilities, especially in management, where many decisions rely on oneself and lack external support. In addition, people's attitudes are more conservative, and their expectations for female principals are also different. They need to work harder to prove themselves.
IN:	Have you felt that changes in age or experience have affected your role and decision-making in school throughout your career?
P1:	Yes, as I age and gain experience, my decision-making becomes more mature and steady. When I was young, I may have been more impatient in making decisions and felt that things needed immediate results, but now I am more concerned about the long-term impact and know how to balance different interests. Moreover, with more experience, my ability to handle crises has also increased, and many problems will no longer leave me feeling at a loss like in the past. People are now more willing to listen to my opinions, perhaps because I have experienced more and am more persuasive.

Principal 2:

Name	Principal 2
Gender	Female

Age	41 years old
Type of School	Rural primary school
Years of Experience	7 years of principal experience, 18 years of education experience
Educational Background	With a bachelor's degree in English education
Goals and Challenges	Dedicated to improving students' foreign language proficiency, she has encountered gender bias.

List of Acronyms: P2=Principal 2, IN=Interviewer

Interview Transcription :

SPEAKER	INTERVIEW
IN:	Hello, thank you very much for accepting my interview invitation. Could you please introduce some basic information about you, such as your age, the type of school you are working in, the years of teaching experience and your family situation?
P2:	Well. I am 41 years old and have been engaged in education for 18 years, with 7 years of experience as a principal. And I am divorced and have a child. As a single mother, I do feel a lot of responsibility and pressure. I need to find a balance between work and family, which has indeed affected my role as a principal. I must arrange my time more effectively to ensure that I can both complete my work and take care of my children.
IN:	How do you find a balance between family responsibilities and principal work? Do you sometimes feel difficult?
P2:	This balance is difficult to achieve, especially as a single mother. I need to balance the needs of school and the responsibilities of my family. There are often conflicts, such as when there is an emergency at school and I have to temporarily set aside family matters. Nevertheless, I also manage both by setting a strict schedule, striving to achieve a balance between the two.
IN:	Does your school have gender differences or discrimination? How did you deal with these situations before?
P2:	Yes, I have indeed encountered some gender bias in my career. For example, some colleagues or parents once believed that women were not suitable for leadership positions, especially in rural areas like ours. I break these biases by continuously improving my professional abilities and showcasing my achievements in school management and teaching.
IN:	Do you think the role of female principals is more challenging in rural

	areas than in cities?
P2:	Indeed. In rural areas, traditional beliefs are more deeply rooted, and many people still retain the concept of 'men lead the outside, women lead the inside'. When I first took office as principal, some teachers even directly questioned that 'women are not suitable for leading schools'. Although I am not inferior to men in terms of teaching experience and management ability, many people question my judgment on some key decisions because I am a woman, thinking that women are more 'emotional' and not 'rational' enough. I feel that these issues are relatively less common in urban areas because people have more open-minded attitudes and a higher acceptance of women's leadership positions. On the other hand, the scarcity of resources in rural areas is also an important factor. Urban schools can obtain more resource support through various channels, while in rural areas, female principals not only need to undertake heavy management tasks, but also make extra efforts to obtain resources.
IN:	How do you view the conflict between your roles as a mother and a principal? How did you respond?
P2:	These two roles do sometimes conflict, especially when a child is sick or needs care. I try my best to distinguish between school work and family responsibilities, but sometimes I have to make compromises. To cope with this conflict, I will try my best to spend weekends and holidays with my child, ensuring that he does not feel neglected.
IN:	As a principal with a background as an English teacher, how do you promote foreign language education in your school? Do you feel that you have encountered obstacles during this process?
P2:	As a principal with a background as an English teacher, I always believe that foreign language education is very important for students to broaden their horizons and understand the world, especially in rural areas where children have limited opportunities to interact with the outside world. Therefore, it is even more necessary to open up their horizons through language learning. Therefore, after I became the

	<p>principal, I made improving students' English proficiency one of the key focuses of the school's development and took several specific measures. Firstly, I have strengthened teacher training. Due to limited training resources for English teachers in many rural primary schools, many teachers' teaching methods are relatively traditional and lack vitality. I have accumulated some new teaching methods through online courses and off campus training, so I regularly organize internal training for English teachers to share new teaching concepts and interactive teaching methods. In addition, I actively contacted the county education bureau, hoping that they can support teachers to participate in high-quality training courses outside. Although the resources of the county education bureau are limited, through my efforts, we have still managed to secure some training opportunities.</p> <p>Then I also made adjustments to the course design. Our school used to have only two English classes per week, and students had limited exposure to English, making it difficult for them to develop language learning habits. I proposed to increase the number of English classes on campus and introduced English corner activities to encourage students to practice speaking after class. In addition, we are also trying to set up English broadcasts on campus to allow students to hear more English and cultivate their language sense. I found that this can stimulate children's interest and make them have a more positive attitude towards English.</p> <p>Of course, I encountered many difficulties in promoting these reforms. Firstly, there is a scarcity of resources. Due to the school's location in rural areas, educational resources are already scarce, and there is a shortage of teaching aids and learning resources needed for English teaching. In order to overcome this problem, I bought some simple teaching aids and books at my own expense, and used Internet resources to make up for the shortcomings. And I also faced some conceptual resistance. Because many parents in the village believe that English is not helpful for their children's actual lives and that learning Chinese and mathematics well is the most important. They will question why I have to spend energy on English education. Faced with such doubts, I organized a parent teacher conference to explain in detail the significance of English learning for children's future development, and invited some students who have graduated from our school to share their learning experiences and talk about how English can help them gain better opportunities in their studies and work in the city or out of town. Through these efforts, parents' attitudes have greatly improved.</p> <p>As for gender discrimination, I have personally encountered some issues of gender bias. Some colleagues and superiors have questioned my work, believing that female principals are not as 'decisive 'or'</p>
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	authoritative 'as men, especially since I come from an English teaching background. Some people may think that English is not important in rural schools, which has led to resistance to my decision. Faced with these doubts, I persist in my beliefs and prove the value of foreign language education through actual achievements. In recent years, our school's English grades have indeed significantly improved, and these achievements have gradually changed everyone's perception of me.
IN:	What impact do you think gender bias has had on your career development? How did you respond?
P2:	Gender bias has indeed affected my career development, especially when I first became a principal. I found that many people questioned my leadership abilities. I think the best way to deal with these biases is to speak through one's own work achievements. I have made efforts to achieve success in school management and teaching improvement, gradually changing others' prejudices against female leaders.
IN:	How do you think your experience working in rural areas differs from that in urban areas?
P2:	I believe that the working environment in rural areas is more challenging, with limited resources and relatively conservative educational beliefs among parents. In addition, the acceptance of female leadership in rural communities is relatively low, and traditional beliefs are stronger. I think working in the city may be easier to obtain support and understanding, but rural areas also have their advantages, with closer communities and more direct connections between principals, parents, and students.
IN:	Do you think that as a principal, your gender brings different perspectives in decision-making?
P2:	I believe that women tend to pay more attention to details and communication when dealing with problems, which is very useful in school management. I am also more inclined to listen to the opinions of teachers and students, and try to take into account the needs of more people in decision-making. I believe this is an advantage, not a disadvantage.
IN:	As a principal, do you feel that your age and experience are helpful in dealing with challenges?
P2:	My age and experience have indeed helped me to some extent. After all, 41 years old is considered a relatively mature age in rural areas, and

	<p>experienced teachers generally respect older managers. During my years as principal, I have accumulated a lot of practical experience, especially in handling emergencies and communication. Because I have previously served as a homeroom teacher and academic affairs director, I am able to understand the difficulties faced by teachers and gain their trust more easily. Although some teachers may have doubts about my decisions because I am only a few years older than them, when I explain the reasons behind my decisions with my own experience and patience, most people will ultimately support me. In addition, I feel that my experience has also helped me better balance work and family life. Although I am a divorced single mother, I have become accustomed to dealing with various changes and pressures in life, so I can maintain calmness and focus in my work as a principal.</p>
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Principal 3:

Name	Principal 3
Gender	Female
Age	45years old
Type of School	Rural public primary school
Years of Experience	22 years of educational experience, and 10 years of principal experience.
Educational Background	With a master's degree in educational management
Goals and Challenges	Has participated in the formulation of education policies multiple times and is skilled in resource allocation.

List of Acronyms: P3=Principal 3, IN=Interviewer

Interview Transcription :

SPEAKER	INTERVIEW
IN:	Hello, thank you very much for accepting my interview invitation. Could you please introduce some basic information about you, such as your age, the type of school you are working in, the years of teaching experience and your family situation?
P3:	Well. I am 45 years old and have 10 years' experience as a school principal. My child is currently 15 years old and in junior high school. To be honest, as a principal, I am very busy with work, especially in the process of resource allocation and policy formulation, often working overtime. But I try to spend more time with my child on weekends, such as cooking together, taking walks, and listening to what he's doing at school. I will arrange dinner time every night, even if we are busy with

	work, at least this meal must be eaten with our family to ensure our communication time.
IN:	Do you think there is a conflict between your role as a mother and your identity as a principal? How to resolve these conflicts?
P3:	I have indeed felt a significant conflict between the role of a mother and the identity of a principal. As a mother, I want to provide my child with sufficient companionship and education, especially during their primary school years. I hope to help them establish good study habits. However, as the principal, I sometimes have to work overtime on weekends or holidays to develop the school's development plan, solve unexpected problems, and even attend training or meetings. In this regard, I need to constantly balance between parent-child companionship and job responsibilities. In order to reduce conflicts, I gradually learned time management and arranged my life more systematically. For example, I will plan important family activities and school affairs in advance to ensure that both parties are taken into account. In addition, I also rely on the support of my family, especially my husband, who has helped me a lot in family education. The support of this family division of labor allows me to feel more at ease in my work.
IN:	You mentioned that you have participated in the formulation of multiple education policies. As a female principal, have there been any special challenges in this process?
P3:	There are indeed some challenges. Firstly, in the process of policy-making, discussions are often led by experienced male principals, with fewer voices from female principals. As a female participant, I occasionally feel that my opinions are not easily taken seriously, especially in discussions with deeper traditional values. For example, in discussions about resource allocation and budgeting, some male colleagues believe that I may pay more attention to the details of the school and overlook the overall situation, which is actually a bias. So in order to address these challenges, I will try my best to prepare sufficient evidence when speaking, demonstrating my professionalism and management experience. I also pay special attention to the collection of actual data, using it to prove my point of view. In addition, I actively establish connections with other female principals, exchange experiences in participating in policy-making, and support each other. Although difficulties still exist, I have found that through persistence and accumulation, I have gradually gained some respect.
IN:	Do you think that during your years as principal, your gender has

	influenced the expectations of the school management or colleagues towards you?
P3:	I do feel that sometimes gender can affect others' expectations, especially for some experienced teachers who may believe that women should be more concerned about students' emotions and lives rather than serious management or resource allocation. But I have proven through my actions that women can also excel in resource allocation and management decision-making, gradually changing this mindset.
IN:	After working in rural areas of Shanxi for many years, what unique challenges do you think the rural environment poses for female principals?
P3:	In rural areas, traditional gender roles are still deeply rooted, and communities sometimes believe that women are not suitable for leadership positions. In addition, resources are relatively scarce, and principals not only have to manage internal school affairs, but also have to deal with many community affairs, which is an additional challenge for women. However, I believe that women's resilience and meticulousness have become an advantage in such an environment.
IN:	As a principal, what impact do you think family responsibilities have had on your work? Has it affected your career development?
P3:	Family responsibilities definitely have an impact, especially when my child was young. I once had the opportunity to be transferred to a key school in the city, but at that time my child was still very young and I didn't want to leave him too far away, so I eventually gave up this opportunity. However, I do not regret it. I believe that each stage has different priorities, and while career development is important, family cannot be ignored either.
IN:	Do you feel gender differences or discrimination in the organizational culture of rural schools?
P3:	When I first became the principal, there were indeed some experienced teachers who were not convinced and felt that a female principal was unlikely to manage the school in an orderly manner. I spent a long time proving myself through my achievements. Nowadays, the organizational culture of schools has become much more open than before, and gender differences are no longer so obvious. People are more focused on abilities and performance.
IN:	Do you think that as a female principal, your authority in school is

	different from that of a male principal?
P3:	At first, I did feel that my authority was not as strong as that of a male principal, for example, in some major decisions, my opinions were sometimes questioned. Later, I realized that authority must be established through a firm attitude and effective decision-making. Now, everyone highly recognizes my decision-making ability and leadership style.
IN:	Do you think the challenges faced by female principals in different age groups are different? Does your age have an impact on your leadership style?
P3:	I think so. Young female principals may face more questioning from lack of experience, while principals in my age group may face more challenges in balancing management and family. As I grow older, my leadership style has become more inclusive and flexible, no longer as eager to prove myself as when I was young.
IN:	During your tenure as principal, how did your education and major benefit your work?
P3:	<p>My Master's degree in Educational Management has indeed been very helpful. Especially in terms of resource allocation and policy formulation, my knowledge has made me more professional in managing schools. I also participated in many trainings to learn how to efficiently manage human and material resources. These knowledge have made me more confident in dealing with the daily management challenges of school.</p> <p>From a professional theoretical perspective, studying educational management has equipped me with a more systematic management mindset. In the course, we learned about educational psychology, teaching evaluation, educational law, etc., which helped me better understand how to think about the development and management of schools from the perspectives of teachers, students, and parents. For example, when formulating a school development plan, I will consider various factors comprehensively, not limited to local improvements in a certain field, but try to promote the continuous progress of the school through overall improvement.</p> <p>In rural areas, educational resources are relatively scarce, and I need to make the most of limited funds and equipment to provide a better educational environment for teachers and students. For example, our school has always been limited in funding for teaching facilities, but I have optimized the allocation of equipment by actively seeking policy</p>

	<p>support from higher authorities and public welfare funding from the private sector. This experience is closely related to my professional training, especially the courses on resource management and allocation, which have taught me how to make decisions through scientific analysis and data support, which are very useful in practical work.</p> <p>And my professional background makes it easier for me to gain the trust of teachers and parents. Due to my higher educational background and rich educational experience, teachers are more willing to communicate with me and they also appreciate my suggestions in teaching and management. For example, when I am promoting new teaching methods, teachers do not feel that it is a blind policy, but can trust my judgment and decision-making. In this way, our school can carry out various tasks more smoothly.</p>
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Principal 4:

Name	Principal 4
Gender	Female
Age	39 years old
Type of School	Rural primary school
Years of Experience	5 years of principal experience, 15 years of education experience
Educational Background	With a bachelor's degree in mathematics education
Goals and Challenges	Actively promoting teaching reform, but facing challenges from traditional concepts.

List of Acronyms: P4=Principal 4, IN=Interviewer

Interview Transcription :

SPEAKER	INTERVIEW
IN:	Hello, thank you very much for accepting my interview invitation. Could you please introduce some basic information about you, such as your age, the type of school you are working in and the years of teaching experience?
P4:	Well. I am 39 years old. I have been working in education for 15 years and have 5 years of experience as a principal.
IN:	As a principal, have you encountered resistance from traditional concepts when promoting teaching reform? Can you share a specific example?
P4:	Yes, there have been some obstacles in promoting educational reform. For example, I tried to introduce new teaching methods such as group

	cooperative learning, but some experienced teachers believe that the traditional "lecture method" is more effective, especially in mathematics subjects. I remember one time, I was discussing with an old teacher who had been teaching for more than 20 years about introducing this method in the second year of junior high school. He said, "If you do this, can children get into good high schools?" This made me realize that many teachers still prefer the traditional high-pressure teaching mode, believing that this is the only way to ensure students' further education. To change this mindset, I need more data and successful cases to show them the effectiveness of the reform.
IN:	Have you felt isolated or in need of more support in the process of promoting these reforms?
P4:	Sometimes I do feel isolated, especially when the organizational culture of the entire school tends to be conservative. Most colleagues are unwilling to take risks and try new methods, and more often they prefer to 'maintain the status quo'. In order to promote these reforms, I have to spend a lot of time outside of teaching searching for new teaching resources and learning new educational concepts. Sometimes I feel like I am a lone traveler. Fortunately, I have some young teachers who support me and are also interested in educational reform, willing to try together.
IN:	As an unmarried female principal, have you ever encountered any prejudices or expectations from colleagues or the community regarding your personal life?
P4:	Some, especially in rural areas, have deeply rooted traditional beliefs. Many people believe that women should "start a family and career" at this age, rather than focusing all their energy on work. I remember one time after a parent teacher meeting, a parent was very "concerned" and said to me, "At your age, are you still considering getting married and having children?" I smiled and changed the topic, but felt a little uncomfortable in my heart. As a principal, I believe that my work ability should not be linked to my marital status.
IN:	What special challenges do you think the rural education environment poses for female principals?
P4:	I think one of the biggest challenges is traditional beliefs, especially regarding female leaders. In rural areas, male principals seem to be more regarded as "natural" leaders, while women need to prove themselves. Rural communities sometimes feel that women are not suitable for managing schools, especially female principals like me who do not yet have a family. They may think that I am "too young" and not mature

	<p>enough. Perhaps there is less gender bias in cities, but in rural areas, it is still a relatively common phenomenon.</p>
IN:	<p>Do you feel that as an unmarried female principal, you face more challenges than a married female principal?</p>
P4:	<p>Yes, unmarried women seem to be more easily scrutinized in the role of rural principals. I sometimes feel pressure from colleagues and the community, especially when I insist on certain reforms or make decisions that are different from tradition. Some people suggest that I have more time and energy to 'tinker' with these things because I don't have family responsibilities. Compared to married principals, they may be considered more "balanced" with both family and career, while I am often asked why I am not married yet.</p>
IN:	<p>Do you feel that your educational background and major are helpful for your work when promoting teaching reform?</p>
P4:	<p>Of course, my background in mathematics education has provided me with more solid theoretical support in teaching reform. For example, when introducing group teaching, I can more convincingly explain its application in mathematics learning. I also participated in many training sessions related to teaching reform, learning some new teaching techniques and methods. However, education and professional knowledge are not everything, and practical operation also needs to be combined with the specific situation of the school and the acceptance level of the teaching team.</p>
IN:	<p>Do you feel that as a woman, your style of managing schools is different from that of male principals?</p>
P4:	<p>I think women may pay more attention to details and be better at listening and coordinating in management. Male principals may prefer a "directive" management style, while I prefer to discuss with teachers, listen to their ideas, and try to make everyone feel involved. Although this may slow down the efficiency, I believe it can better unite the team, especially when implementing new policies and teaching reforms.</p>
IN:	<p>How do you usually cope with the pressure of work and life?</p>
P4:	<p>As an unmarried woman, I have relatively less family responsibilities, but sometimes the pressure of work still makes me feel anxious. I will relax myself through exercise and reading, and sometimes go on trips with a few friends to unwind. I think finding a balance between work and life is important, especially for us principals who have been in a</p>

	high-pressure environment for a long time. Our physical and mental health cannot be ignored either.
IN:	Do you think there has been a change in attitudes towards female leaders in rural communities?
P4:	<p>I think the attitude of the community towards female leaders has indeed changed in recent years, but this change is gradual, and even slow. At first, when I first became the principal, many people were not optimistic, and even some parents and community members openly expressed doubts, believing that women would 'lack authority' in leadership positions and could not effectively manage the school. But with the improvement of school performance and overall education quality, especially the success of some educational reform projects, people gradually began to recognize my abilities. Nowadays, many parents take the initiative to communicate with me and provide suggestions for school teaching reform, which was unimaginable a few years ago.</p> <p>However, the influence of traditional beliefs still exists, and sometimes I can still feel gender bias. For example, in some major decisions, many people subconsciously question my judgment and believe that male leaders may do better. But I did not give up because of this, instead, I proved to everyone with practical work results that women can also be qualified or even excellent leaders. I believe that through one's own efforts and continuous achievements, these biases can gradually be changed. Overall, although challenges still exist, I see hope and believe that over time, rural communities will become more tolerant and supportive of female leaders.</p>
IN:	What do you think is the direction of future education reform? As the principal, how do you plan to further promote reforms?
P4:	<p>I believe that future education reforms should focus more on the comprehensive development of students, rather than just grades. I plan to further promote quality education and enhance students' critical thinking and practical abilities. This requires our school to improve its teaching resources and strengthen teacher training to better adapt to new teaching concepts. Although the road to reform is long, I believe that as long as we persist, we will definitely see results.</p>

Principal 5:

Name	Principal 5
Gender	Female
Age	42 years old

Type of School	Rural primary school
Years of Experience	8 years of principal experience, 20 years of education experience
Educational Background	With a bachelor's degree in music education
Goals and Challenges	Promoting art education is limited by traditional concepts in rural areas.

List of Acronyms: P5=Principal 5, IN=Interviewer

Interview Transcription :

SPEAKER	INTERVIEW
IN:	Hello, thank you very much for accepting my interview invitation. Can you briefly introduce your family? For example, the situation of your spouse and children?
P5:	I am married, and my husband works in the county town and needs to commute regularly. We have two children, a 14-year-old daughter in junior high school and a 10-year-old son in elementary school. As parents, we all care about our children's education, but because my husband and I are both busy with work, especially as a principal, our children often rely on the help of the elderly for their studies and daily life.
IN:	As a principal, what impact do you think family responsibilities have had on your work?
P5:	<p>Family responsibilities have indeed had a significant impact on my work. As a mother of two children, especially when they were still young, I had to constantly switch between school and home. Every weekend, I take them to the city to attend art interest classes because the conditions in rural areas are limited and many high-quality educational resources are difficult to reach us. After school on Friday afternoon, my family of four will pack up and take a two-hour drive to the city. At night, our family often stays at cheap express hotels so that the children can attend class on time the next day. This arrangement is not easy for us, and children sometimes complain, but I also hope to give them the opportunity to explore a broader world.</p> <p>When I was promoting art education in school, these life experiences actually gave me more motivation to change the status quo. I am well aware that many rural children also have artistic talents and need more learning opportunities. But on weekdays, as a principal, the busy workload sometimes makes it difficult for me to fully take care of my family. My family, especially my husband, also raises the question of whether I have spent too much time in school, which sometimes leads to</p>

	<p>conflicts. I know this is a challenge that every working mother will encounter, but for the career I love, I can only try to find a balance between family and work.</p>
IN:	<p>How do you find a balance between family and work?</p>
P5:	<p>Balancing family and work is really not easy. Usually, I try my best to arrange my daily schedule and spend time with my children at night and on weekends. However, sometimes it's really impossible to achieve complete balance, especially when school is busy. I usually try to divide the workload and cooperate with my husband or elderly family members to ensure the basic operation of the family. Fortunately, my husband understands and supports my work, especially when I am promoting art education projects, he always encourages me to persevere.</p>
IN:	<p>Have you encountered any obstacles in promoting art education?</p>
P5:	<p>There are indeed many obstacles, especially in relatively conservative rural areas like ours. I remember once I proposed to organize a school art festival where children could showcase their talents on stage, such as singing, dancing, and even simple instrument performances. However, the proposal was met with skepticism as soon as it was put forward. Some parents even call the school, thinking that these activities will waste their children's time learning languages and mathematics, and that art education is not 'proper education'. A parent told me, 'My son should study diligently. What's the use of dancing and singing? Can he get into college in the future?' His words made me realize that in the minds of many parents, art education is still seen as an unproductive activity. This made me feel somewhat helpless, but it also strengthened my belief in promoting art education.</p> <p>In order to change parents' minds, I have decided to start with the teacher team. We organized some art education training and invited experienced music teachers from the city to give lectures, instilling in our teachers the significance and long-term value of art education. Then, we also played a collection of children's art works at the parent teacher conference and invited them to personally watch their performances. Many parents gradually understand and accept the significance of art education when they see their children bravely showcasing themselves on stage. Despite the resistance, whenever I see shy children in the classroom showing confidence in art activities, I feel that everything I do is worth it. Promoting art education is not only about teaching music and painting, but also about teaching children to express themselves and have confidence. It is these small changes that support me to overcome difficulties and continue on this path.</p>

IN:	As a mother and principal, do you feel conflicted in these two roles? If so, how did you respond?
P5:	Yes, the roles of mother and principal often conflict. Sometimes, when I want to accompany my child to do homework, there may be an emergency meeting at school. In the face of this situation, I can only prioritize school affairs and compensate my child twice as much after returning home. I will spend time chatting with the children, explaining my work, and hoping that they can understand my responsibilities.
IN:	What is the organizational culture of your school? Is there a gender difference or gender discrimination?
P5:	In our school, gender differences are not particularly significant, but occasionally we still feel that colleagues have different expectations and requirements for female principals. For example, sometimes when facing parents and superiors, I need to handle relationships more carefully, especially on some decision-making issues, and some people may think that as a woman, I may not be decisive enough. Fortunately, I have gradually gained everyone's respect through years of work.
IN:	Do you think that as a female principal, there is a difference in authority between you and a male principal in school?
P5:	<p>To be honest, I do feel that there are some differences in authority. Although I have been a principal for eight years, there are still some teachers and parents who have doubts about my management style, especially in key decision-making and management styles. Sometimes I hear them privately discussing, 'A female principal in charge is different from a man.' In rural areas, people generally identify with men as leaders and believe that they are more 'backbone'. This often makes me feel the need to spend more energy proving myself. And I have observed that male principals are often able to quickly gain support from parents and teachers when proposing reform suggestions, even if the content is similar to my plan, they are more likely to be recognized. Perhaps because they believe that 'what the male leader says must be authoritative', they will not easily question it. This gender bias has indeed posed some challenges for me in daily management. Sometimes, if I were a male principal, I may only need to explain something once, but I have to explain it three times, and I need to be extra careful in how to express it to avoid unnecessary questioning.</p> <p>However, I also see that gradually, people will recognize my professionalism in art education, especially some parents who have seen their children make significant progress both on and off campus, and</p>

	begin to recognize my educational philosophy. Over the years, although the process has been difficult, I have always believed that female principals can also have their own unique leadership styles, but it may take more time to gain this trust and support.
IN:	In the process of promoting art education, what challenges have the traditional concepts of the community brought to you?
P5:	In rural areas, many parents believe that learning music and art is a waste of time. They prefer their children to spend their time on main classes, which puts a lot of pressure on me. To change this mindset, I need to spend a lot of time explaining the importance of art education to parents. I still remember one time when a parent bluntly asked me, 'Can studying music get into a good university?' At that moment, I felt a deep sense of powerlessness, but I didn't give up. Instead, I organized more art activities to allow children to showcase their talents, gradually changing my parents' minds.
IN:	Do you feel that there are biases or stereotypes towards female leaders in rural communities?
P5:	There are indeed some biases. Many people still believe that leaders should be male, while female leaders are often seen as "weak" or "lacking in leadership". Especially during parent teacher conferences or interactions with village officials, they initially had doubts about my leadership abilities and even subconsciously delegated major decisions to male colleagues. But through persistence and practical actions, I gradually made them realize that women can also be strong leaders.
IN:	Have you encountered gender discrimination in your career? Can you give a specific example?
P5:	Yes, I remember when I first became the principal, I had to attend an important village meeting to discuss the allocation of school funds. At that time, a village cadre said to me, 'Can you as a woman make decisions on such a big matter?' This sentence made me feel very uncomfortable. I did not respond to him on the spot, but presented a detailed budget plan and my proposal at the meeting, which ultimately won everyone's recognition. Since then, I have proven myself with facts and gradually gained more respect.

Principal 6:

Name	Principal 6
Gender	Female

Age	37 years old
Type of School	Rural Vocational School
Years of Experience	4 years of principal experience, 12 years of education experience
Educational Background	Master of education
Goals and Challenges	Leading school curriculum reform, but facing immense family pressure.

List of Acronyms: P6=Principal 6, IN=Interviewer

Interview Transcription :

SPEAKER	INTERVIEW
IN:	Hello, thank you very much for accepting my interview invitation. Could you please introduce some basic information about you, such as your age, the type of school you are working in, the years of teaching experience and your family situation?
P6:	Well. I am 37 years old and have been in education for 12 years, with 4 years of experience as a principal. Regarding my family situation, I am quite unique. I am a single mother and have two children.
IN:	As a single mother with two children and managing a school, do you think family responsibilities have a significant impact on your work?
P6:	Yes, the impact is indeed significant. After work every day, I have to go home immediately to take care of my children, supervise their homework, and prepare dinner. As a single mother, there is no one in the family to share these responsibilities. I often work overtime to handle school affairs, but my children also need me to accompany them, so this makes me very tight on my schedule and often feels like I don't have enough energy.
IN:	As a mother and principal, do you feel that there is a conflict between these two roles? How to deal with it?
P6:	Conflicts definitely exist, especially when I need to attend important off campus meetings or handle school affairs in emergency situations. My eldest son is currently in junior high school and needs more emotional support, while my youngest son is still in elementary school and his studies cannot be separated from my help. I sometimes have to ask my elders at home to help take care of my children, but it also makes me feel guilty. I will try my best to spend more time with my children at night and continue to handle school work after they fall asleep.
IN:	Is there a gender difference in the organizational culture of your school?

	As a female principal, have you ever felt this difference?
P6:	<p>There are indeed gender differences, especially in rural vocational schools like ours. As the principal, I am the only female member of the school management team, while all other management members are male. This gender difference is not always obvious, but it can have subtle impacts in daily management decisions, meeting speeches, and even daily activities on campus.</p> <p>Let me give you a specific example. During a curriculum reform in our school, I proposed the idea of increasing students' participation in practical skills and practical courses. As soon as the reform plan was proposed, some male colleagues opposed it on the grounds of "lack of teacher strength" and "difficulty in teaching arrangements". I thought at the time that these concerns could be addressed through specific resource allocation and arrangements before discussion, and that reform was crucial for students' development, so I persisted in promoting it. However, during the discussion, I gradually noticed that some male colleagues had a 'scrutinizing' attitude in their tone, and some even expressed on the spot that 'school management should still listen more to the opinions of us' old comrades!'. I am well aware that as a female principal, the standards by which my suggestions are scrutinized are different from theirs. Sometimes I have to provide more facts, data, and even other ways to 'convince' them to accept my ideas.</p> <p>I often think that this gender bias is not only rooted in personal beliefs, but also deeply embedded in our organizational culture. As a female principal, I always remind myself to be more professional and rational to prove my abilities. This kind of effort is almost a part of my daily life, but it also puts greater pressure on me. Especially as a single mother of two children, the heavy burden of work and family makes me feel overwhelmed. Children occasionally ask me why I am so busy, constantly shuttling between school and home, and sometimes I really don't know how to answer them.</p> <p>It can be said that although the organizational culture of schools does not have obvious gender discrimination on the surface, in reality, female principals do face greater difficulties in striving for authority and trust. I can only demand higher standards of myself, constantly proving that I am not only a 'qualified principal', but also a manager capable of handling various tasks.</p>
IN:	How do you find a balance between family and work?
P6:	<p>Actually, it can't be said to be a complete balance, it can only be said to strive for the best. I try to be efficient in my work and avoid working too much overtime. In terms of family, try to spend weekends</p>

	wholeheartedly with your children, taking them out to play or tutoring them. Sometimes I arrange my work schedule in advance, such as alternating between household chores and work at night, to ensure that neither side falls behind.
IN:	As a single mother, have you encountered pressure from your family regarding career choices and development? How does your family support you?
P6:	There is pressure, especially when my parents initially felt that I should spend more time at home instead of being busy with work. They are worried that as a single mother, I work too hard and my body won't be able to handle it. But later on, seeing my grades at school, my family gradually changed their views, especially now that I am the principal and have a stable income, they will also help take care of the children, especially when I am on business trips or busy with work.
IN:	Do you think as a single mother, I face more challenges than other principals?
P6:	Yes, single mothers experience greater pressure. Other principals have the support of their spouses outside of work, while I can only rely on myself. I must work harder at work because the financial pressure of my family is completely on me alone. I can't relax myself because I have to take responsibility for my two children.
IN:	What challenges have you encountered in leading the school curriculum reform? Especially in rural vocational schools, is curriculum reform more difficult than in urban schools?
P6:	The challenges are significant, especially in rural vocational schools where our resources are limited, teachers' professional levels vary, and students' foundations are relatively weak. The reform I am implementing requires everyone's cooperation, but some old teachers are unwilling to change their traditional teaching methods, which gives me a headache. However, I have been persuading them with actual achievements and gradually advancing the reform. Compared to urban schools, we do face more difficulties, especially in terms of hardware facilities and teacher training.
IN:	Do you think that as a female principal in rural areas of Shanxi, you face more challenges than male principals?
P6:	Yes, I think there are indeed more challenges, especially in rural areas where traditional values are still strong. Some people think that women

	are not suitable for leadership and should pay more attention to their families, and some even question my abilities. I sometimes feel isolated, especially in more conservative situations where male principals are more likely to receive support from the community. However, I believe that through my efforts, I can gradually change these concepts.
IN:	What coping strategies do you think you have when facing pressure at work?
P6:	I usually set clear work plans for myself and prioritize the most important things. I also take my children out to relax on weekends and try to adjust my mindset as much as possible. When facing pressure, I will communicate with other principal friends, listen to their advice and experience, and try to find solutions to problems.
IN:	As a single mother and principal, what are your career plans for the future?
P6:	I hope to continue promoting curriculum reform and improving the teaching quality of schools, especially the practicality of vocational education, based on the existing foundation. I also hope to participate more in the formulation of education policies and help other rural schools improve their educational level. In the future, I will continue to pursue further studies and strive to acquire more knowledge and skills in education management.
IN:	What do you find most difficult when facing conflicts between family and work?
P6:	For me, the most difficult part is the allocation of time and energy. As the principal of a vocational school, my daily affairs are very busy, especially as we are promoting curriculum reform. I not only need to consider adjustments in teaching, but also pay attention to students' employment directions to ensure that our courses can actually meet the needs of the market. These things require a lot of my time and focus. As a single mother, most of the burden in the family falls on me alone. My two children are still young and in need of their mother's company. So whenever I invest a lot of energy in school, I worry about my shortcomings in terms of family. This inner conflict makes me feel very painful, as I hope to achieve success in my career but also fear neglecting my child's growth.
IN:	Does this affect your confidence in future career development?
P6:	To be honest, it does have a certain impact. Although I am passionate

	about promoting curriculum reform and it is gratifying to see students learn truly useful skills, sometimes I ask myself if this persistence is worth it, especially when children feel disappointed because of my overtime. In this situation, I inevitably doubt my choices and even have thoughts of giving up. However, as an educator, I also feel responsible for providing students with the best educational resources and future development opportunities. This sense of responsibility sometimes makes me hesitant to give up easily, but family pressure does make me feel conflicted about career development. I hope to find a balance in the future that allows me to balance my child's growth while continuing to promote the development of the school.
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Principal 7:

Name	Principal 7
Gender	Female
Age	44 years old
Type of School	Rural public primary school
Years of Experience	6 years of principal experience, 20 years of education experience
Educational Background	With a bachelor's degree in Chinese education
Goals and Challenges	Difficulty balancing work and family often requires taking on more family responsibilities.

List of Acronyms: P7=Principal 7, IN=Interviewer

Interview Transcription :

SPEAKER	INTERVIEW
IN:	Hello, thank you very much for accepting my interview invitation. Could you please introduce some basic information about you, such as your family situation? What impact do your spouse and children have on your work?
P7:	My family includes my husband and two children. My husband is a civil servant with a stable job, but he is not very involved in household chores and taking care of children. Most of the family responsibilities, such as taking care of children and doing household chores, are usually undertaken by me. This situation sometimes makes me feel very tired, especially during busy work periods. I often find it difficult to balance the time allocation between family and work.
IN:	What impact do you think family responsibilities have had on your work as a principal?

P7:	The impact is very significant. Sometimes I feel like I'm playing the role of a full-time mom at home, while also dealing with school affairs. For example, when a child is sick or needs companionship, I have to choose between school affairs and family responsibilities. Especially during exam season or major school events, conflicts in time allocation are very prominent.
IN:	How do you find a balance between family and work?
P7:	Finding a balance between family and work is not easy for me, but I have been working hard. As a principal, my job is not only to manage the school, but also to communicate with teachers, students, and parents, which requires me to invest a lot of time and energy. Every day, I have to face various challenges, such as developing teaching plans, handling emergencies, participating in school activities, etc. Especially at the end of the semester, the workload becomes even heavier and overtime is often required. In such situations, I usually strive to create a reasonable schedule to ensure that I can spend as much time as possible with my family. For example, I will try not to bring work home on weekends and instead leave this time for my children and husband. Sometimes, children invite me to play their favorite board games or take a walk in the park together. I found that these small activities can help me relax and make my children feel cared for.
IN:	Do your family members, especially your husband, support you in taking on the position of principal?
P7:	My husband is supportive, but his support is more reflected in his spirit than in actual sharing of family responsibilities. He often encourages me to continue being the principal, but he doesn't provide me with enough support in terms of specific household chores and child care. Sometimes I feel that his expectations are somewhat traditional, thinking that as a mother, family responsibilities are primarily mine.
IN:	As a mother and principal, do you feel conflicted in these two roles? If so, how would you respond?
P7:	Yes, I often feel conflicted. Sometimes school requires me to give it my all, especially at the beginning or end of the semester when I have almost no time to spend with my children. This conflict makes me feel guilty and feel like I haven't fulfilled my responsibilities to my family. But I will try my best to make up for it on weekends or holidays, take my children out to play, or accompany them to do homework, trying not to make them feel missing.

IN:	Do you think there are gender differences or discrimination in the organizational culture of the school?
P7:	Gender differences exist in our school, especially in the management level. For example, in some meetings, male colleagues are more likely to express their opinions, and sometimes they even subconsciously think that my views are not professional or authoritative enough. Sometimes I need to work harder to prove myself in order to earn the same respect as male principals.
IN:	As a female principal, do you feel that you are facing more challenges in school management?
P7:	Male principals generally dominate in the management of schools. Although the proportion of women in the education sector has increased in recent years, women's voices are still relatively weak at the decision-making level. For example, at a meeting on school funding allocation, I put forward some suggestions, hoping to pay more attention to students' mental health and art education. However, several male colleagues tend to prioritize projects in mathematics and science, considering them as the "more important" direction. At that meeting, my suggestion was put on hold, which made me feel frustrated and powerless. This situation is not an isolated case, and often I need extra effort to ensure that my opinions are taken seriously.
IN:	In your opinion, do women face more challenges in education leadership in rural areas of Shanxi than men?
P7:	Undoubtedly, women face more challenges in rural areas. On the one hand, society often has higher expectations for female principals, believing that we should not only do a good job in school, but also take care of our families. On the other hand, traditional beliefs are still deeply rooted, believing that women should not take on too many public positions. This requires us to constantly prove our abilities in our work. And under the influence of traditional beliefs, many people still believe that men are more authoritative and capable in leadership positions. Although I have worked in the field of education for over 20 years and have accumulated rich experience, sometimes I find that male colleagues are more easily valued when I make suggestions at school meetings. For example, once we were discussing the annual budget allocation of the school. Although I proposed specific resource optimization plans, the suggestion of a male colleague received more support and attention in the final decision. This phenomenon made me realize that as a woman, I must work harder to prove my abilities and

	<p>value. And I believe that the challenges faced by women in educational leadership are not only personal, but also societal as a whole. Although there has been some improvement in society's understanding of female leadership in recent years, deep-rooted gender discrimination still exists, especially in relatively underdeveloped rural areas. This often makes me think that we need to emphasize the importance of gender equality more and promote more supportive policies both inside and outside the education system to help women gain greater development opportunities in the field of education.</p>
IN:	<p>Do you feel that as a female principal, there is a gap in authority between you and a male principal?</p>
P7:	<p>In some cases, this is indeed the case. For example, when I need to make some major decisions, I feel that my colleagues and parents around me sometimes question my judgment, especially those who are accustomed to male leadership. In order to gain their recognition, I need to be more cautious and ensure that every decision has sufficient basis. Because in daily life, there are indeed some parents who question my abilities because of my gender, especially when dealing with student discipline issues. Once, a father questioned me in front of many parents at the school gate, 'How can you manage my son well? He needs a teacher with authority!' I felt very embarrassed at the time, but I knew I had to remain calm, refute his viewpoint, and emphasize my professionalism and sense of responsibility as the principal. This gender discriminatory attitude has strengthened my determination to demonstrate outstanding abilities in management, in order to break people's stereotypes of female principals.</p>
IN:	<p>What impact do you think education has had on your work in your career?</p>
P7:	<p>My educational background helped me secure the position of principal to some extent, but in practical work, I have found that education is not the determining factor.</p> <p>Firstly, my educational background has equipped me with solid professional knowledge. When I first started teaching, the curriculum provided me with a comprehensive understanding of Chinese education. I remember the linguistics and educational psychology courses I studied in college, which played an important role in my understanding of students' learning processes, psychological development, and how to effectively design courses. For example, in teaching, I can adjust the teaching content according to students' interests and cognitive levels, making it easier for them to accept and understand. I once explained</p>

	<p>ancient poetry to senior students and compared it with popular culture that they were interested in. This method stimulated their enthusiasm for learning and made them more willing to participate in classroom discussions. And before becoming the principal, I held various teaching and management positions. Every promotion is closely related to my educational background. For example, when participating in the evaluation and policy-making of some educational projects, my undergraduate degree enables me to make well founded suggestions at meetings, which enhances my voice and influence. I remember once, the county education bureau held a meeting on education reform, where many principals and education experts gathered together. Due to my academic background, I was invited to participate in the discussion, which allowed me to better advocate for resources for my school.</p> <p>But in rural schools, more challenges come from practical management experience and communication skills with the community. Although my education has given me a solid theoretical foundation, I believe that experience and adaptability are equally important when dealing with practical problems.</p>
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Principal 8:

Name	Principal 8
Gender	Female
Age	46 years old
Type of School	Rural public primary school
Years of Experience	9 years of principal experience, 25 years of education experience
Educational Background	With a master's degree in physics
Goals and Challenges	Emphasis is placed on promoting science education, but it is often overlooked by male peers.

List of Acronyms: P8=Principal 8, IN=Interviewer

Interview Transcription :

SPEAKER	INTERVIEW
IN:	Hello, thank you very much for accepting my interview invitation. Could you please introduce some basic information about you, such as your age, the years of teaching experience and your family situation?
P8:	Well. I am 46 years old and have been working in education for 15 years, with 4 years of experience as a principal. I am married and have two children.

IN:	What are your responsibilities in family life? What impact have these responsibilities had on your work as a principal?
P8:	I have two children, one is already in college and the other is still in high school. Family responsibilities have never been easy for me. Especially when my child is young, I need to balance the needs of school work and family. I wake up early every day to cook, send my children to school, and then go to school. In the evening, I also have to deal with household chores and grade homework. Although my husband helps with household chores, overall I still take on most of the family responsibilities. This has to some extent limited me from investing more energy in my work, especially when I first became the principal and felt powerless.
IN:	As a mother and principal, how do you handle the conflict between these two roles?
P8:	As a mother and principal, these two roles often put me in a dilemma. Sometimes, when there is an emergency at school and the child needs me by their side. I remember one time, there was a major event to prepare for at school, and my child had a fever that day. In the end, I chose to stay in school, but I felt very guilty in my heart. In order to alleviate this conflict, I try my best to plan a daily schedule and arrange work and family reasonably, but in reality, this conflict is still difficult to completely avoid.
IN:	Do you think gender has had an impact on your authority in school management? Can you give an example?
P8:	Sometimes, as a woman, I feel that my opinions are not as valued as those of my male counterparts in some meetings. For example, at a school facility update discussion meeting, I proposed to increase the equipment of science laboratories, but at that time, many male leaders were more concerned about sports facilities. Even though my proposal met the actual needs, it did not receive priority consideration in the end. This made me realize that in a male dominated environment, the voice of female principals is often easily overlooked.
IN:	Do you think the rural environment has an impact on the career development of female principals?
P8:	In rural areas, communities often have higher expectations and requirements for female principals than in cities. On the one hand, people believe that women should take care of their families, and on the other hand, as leaders, they expect us to be as decisive and powerful as

	men in school. This double standard puts a lot of pressure on me. Especially when promoting science education, I have found that many rural parents are more willing to let their children learn traditional subjects and have less interest in science education. I often need to spend more time explaining to them the importance of these subjects for their children's future.
IN:	Have you ever encountered gender discrimination in your career? Can you share a specific example?
P8:	Once, the Education Bureau organized a principal training program, and I went with several male colleagues to participate. In the discussion session, I proposed an innovative teaching method related to student science learning, but some male principals interrupted me directly, saying that these things should be 'left to men to handle', which made me very angry. This obvious gender discrimination made me realize that even in leadership positions, women still face many intangible obstacles.
IN:	As a female principal, what unique challenges do you think you face in promoting science education?
P8:	Science education is not given priority in rural areas, especially in female dominated science education. I sometimes feel that parents are more willing to support their children in learning basic subjects such as Chinese and mathematics, rather than science. When promoting science education, it is not only a matter of curriculum design, but also a matter of facing parents' traditional beliefs. As women, it is even more difficult to promote these "male dominated" disciplines. The constraints of these traditional beliefs have affected my work. In our rural areas, many parents still believe that science education is not suitable for girls, and some parents even do not encourage their daughters to study science courses such as physics. I remember at a parent teacher conference organized by the school, a father opposed my suggestion and believed that girls should learn more "appropriate" subjects, such as literature or art, rather than physics. I tried to communicate with him about the importance of science education and the achievements of girls in the field of science, but he still insisted on his own views. The deep-rooted concept has made it difficult for me to promote science education.
IN:	How does your education and physics background affect your job? Especially in the school leadership, how do you think your professional background can help you?
P8:	My background in physics gives me more confidence in promoting science education. I can provide professional guidance to teachers and

	<p>help them improve their teaching methods. In some decision-making situations, I will make more reasonable judgments based on scientific data. However, on the other hand, as a woman, my professional knowledge is often not fully valued. I need to spend more time proving my abilities.</p>
IN:	<p>Do you think the challenges faced by female principals vary among different age groups? Have you ever felt the impact of age on your work?</p>
P8:	<p>In the early stages of young principals, usually under the age of 35, they may face dual pressures from both family and professional roles. For example, I once talked to a 35 year old young principal who often felt anxious at work because she still needed to prove her abilities in the workplace. In terms of family, she has just given birth and is facing a difficult balance between work and parenting. She told me that sometimes in meetings, male colleagues tend to ignore her opinions, thinking she lacks experience, which undoubtedly increases her pressure.</p> <p>As they age, female principals may enter a relatively mature stage, such as between the ages of 40 and 50. At this stage, although they may have accumulated rich experience in educational management, they often have to face the expectations of society for female roles. For example, in my communication with peers, I found that some older female principals are often required to find a balance between work and family. For example, as a married principal with two children, I am often expected to play multiple roles in both family activities and school work. Once, I had to attend an important parents' meeting, and at the same time, my child was also having a sports meet at school. Finally, I had to ask my husband to attend the sports meeting on my behalf so that I could focus on handling school affairs.</p> <p>I personally deeply feel the impact of age on work. Over time, I have accumulated more knowledge and experience in the field of education, but I have found that there are still biases in society towards women, especially older women. In many important decision-making meetings, I often hear male colleagues disdain my suggestions and sometimes even interrupt me directly. When I proposed new ideas about promoting science education, some male colleagues would respond to me with an attitude of 'Can women of your age understand these complex issues?', which made me feel very frustrated. However, despite facing these challenges, I still choose to persevere. In school, I also try my best to encourage young girls to believe in themselves and bravely pursue their dreams by holding lectures and scientific activities for female scientists. This experience made me realize that age is not a limitation of ability,</p>

	but rather a driving force for my continuous growth.
IN:	Do you have any special methods for dealing with conflicts between school work pressure and family life? Can you share some coping techniques?
P8:	I usually prioritize the most important things and try to separate family and school time, trying not to let them interfere with each other. At the same time, I will regularly take vacations with my family, spending time with my children and husband during the holidays to reduce the impact of work pressure on the family. Although conflicts cannot be completely avoided, stress can be alleviated through effective time management and the support of family members.
IN:	Do you think it is more difficult for female leaders to promote school education reform compared to male leaders?
P8:	Indeed. Male leaders often receive more resources and support, while female leaders need to work harder to strive for the same opportunities. Especially in the promotion of science education, I need to constantly prove to the education bureau and community that my plan is feasible and crucial for the development of students. As a female leader, I must demonstrate greater determination than men in order to earn the respect and support that I deserve.

Principal 9:

Name	Principal 9
Gender	Female
Age	35 years old
Type of School	Rural primary school
Years of Experience	3 years of principal experience, 10 years of education experience
Educational Background	With a master's degree in educational psychology
Goals and Challenges	Innovative management methods, but often questioned due to youth and gender.

List of Acronyms: P9=Principal 9, IN=Interviewer

Interview Transcription :

SPEAKER	INTERVIEW
IN:	Hello, thank you very much for accepting my interview invitation. Could you please introduce some basic information about you, such as

	<p>your age, the years of teaching experience?And can you briefly introduce your personal life situation? For example, your marriage and family situation?</p>
P9:	<p>Well. I am 35 years old and have been working in education for 10 years, with 3 years of experience as a principal.</p> <p>I am currently unmarried and have no children. Many people think that a woman of my age, especially in rural areas, who has not yet married, will attract a lot of speculation. My family members also face pressure, especially my parents who often worry that my busy work schedule may delay their marriage. But for me, now my energy is more focused on school and students. I think marriage can wait a little longer, but children's education cannot wait.</p>
IN:	<p>Do you think being unmarried has had an impact on your work as a principal?</p>
P9:	<p>Yes, this has indeed brought many challenges. Many people will question whether I can find a balance between family and career, because they believe that a woman's ultimate destination is still the family. Sometimes, I feel like I have to work harder than a married female principal to prove myself, especially when facing older teachers or parents who may doubt whether I have enough life experience to manage the school.</p> <p>In the work environment, I often feel prejudice from colleagues and parents. Many people will question my ability and authority, believing that unmarried women are not mature enough to take on important roles such as principal. For example, at a school affairs meeting, I proposed some innovative ideas about teaching reform, but some male colleagues expressed doubts on the spot, thinking that "such a young principal may not have enough life experience to understand the needs of children". This kind of questioning makes me feel very frustrated. I am trying my best to prove myself with my management achievements, but I still need to spend more time to win their trust.</p> <p>My unmarried status has also affected my interaction with my parents to some extent. Some parents often mention their family background when consulting, asking if they have plans to get married or why they haven't gotten married yet. They seem to subconsciously believe that marriage and family can add a certain sense of authority to educational work. I remember one time, a parent publicly asked me at a parent teacher conference, 'How can you understand our child's family education alone?' I realized that despite my professional background in educational psychology and extensive work experience, in the eyes of some people, being unmarried may cast doubt on my authority in educating children.</p>

	But I believe that with the passage of time and my continuous efforts, people will pay more attention to my abilities rather than my marital status.
IN:	Do you think as a young female principal, you face authoritative challenges in school?
P9:	Absolutely there will be. Many people initially thought that I was young and lacked sufficient experience, especially those teachers and parents who were older than me. At the beginning, my suggestions were often ignored, and even in school meetings, sometimes I felt like my voice was not being taken seriously. To overcome these, I spent a lot of time communicating with the teachers, understanding their ideas, and proving that my management style is effective.
IN:	Can you give an example of the gender discrimination you have encountered in your career?
P9:	Once, an elderly parent said to me, 'What kind of school management do you understand as a young girl?' His tone was very contemptuous, as if he believed that only men or older people could be competent in the job of principal. I was very angry at the time, but I didn't immediately refute it. I have proven through practical actions that I am capable of fulfilling the duties of a principal. Now that parent is very supportive of my management and even actively helps me organize school activities.
IN:	Do you think the organizational culture of the school is friendly to female principals?
P9:	Overall, the organizational culture of my school is still relatively traditional, especially in the minds of some older teachers, where leadership positions are usually held by men. Therefore, as a female principal, I must put in more effort to earn their respect. This culture is not necessarily intentional discrimination, but a long-standing gender concept.
IN:	As an innovative principal, do you feel that your young management style has been questioned?
P9:	Yes, I have implemented some new teaching methods and management systems, such as introducing more mental health courses and modern teaching tools. At first, many older teachers did not understand and felt that these changes would bring them additional burdens. They may even complain that my innovation is meant to showcase my abilities, rather

	<p>than for the long-term development of the school. But I persisted and spoke with actual grades. Now the school's teaching achievements and students' mental health have significantly improved, and everyone has gradually accepted my management style.</p>
IN:	<p>How do you usually respond or handle doubts?</p>
P9:	<p>I attach great importance to communication with teachers. When facing doubts, it is very important to unite the team. Once, I implemented a new teaching evaluation system in school, but some teachers opposed it, fearing it would increase their workload. I took the initiative to organize several team meetings, allowing everyone to speak freely and share their thoughts and concerns. After thorough discussion, we jointly adjusted the evaluation plan to better meet the actual needs of the teachers. This approach not only resolves conflicts, but also enhances team cohesion. In addition, I will constantly reflect on myself and learn to enhance my professional abilities. As a young principal, I am well aware of my shortcomings, so I often participate in educational training and industry seminars to learn from the management experience of other successful principals. Every time I return to school, I share with my colleagues the new knowledge and ideas I have learned, encouraging everyone to progress together. This not only helped me improve my management skills, but also made the team feel my passion and sense of responsibility for the education industry.</p>
IN:	<p>Do you think your career as a young female principal is more challenging than that of a male principal?</p>
P9:	<p>Undoubtedly, women face more challenges in leadership positions than men. Society's expectation for women is often to play a greater role in the family rather than in leadership positions. Many times, people unconsciously question my abilities, especially when faced with complex decisions, and I often feel more pressure. I not only need to prove that I am competent for this position, but also break gender stereotypes.</p>
IN:	<p>What do you think of the attitude of rural environments towards female leaders?</p>
P9:	<p>Gender attitudes in rural areas are relatively conservative, and female leaders are often seen as less dominant than men. Especially when I make decisions, some community members may think that I am not decisive or tough enough because of my youth and femininity. But I believe that leadership is not just about being strong, but also about having empathy and communication skills. I changed this perception by</p>

	establishing a good teacher-student relationship.
IN:	Do you think the role of young female principals in rural areas is more difficult than in urban areas?
P9:	<p>I think so. In rural areas, traditional beliefs are deeply rooted, and it is even more difficult for young women to earn respect here. I sometimes feel that if I were working in the city, I might receive more understanding and support. But precisely because of this, I hope to change these prejudices through my efforts and bring better education to rural children.</p> <p>In addition, the scarcity of resources is also a huge challenge we face. Compared to urban schools, our school is very lacking in funding, equipment, faculty, and other aspects. As a young female principal, I often need to engage in innovative management to maximize the utilization of existing resources. For example, our school used to lack sports facilities, and students could only do some simple activities on the playground. So, I encouraged teachers to utilize the natural resources in rural areas, such as rivers and hills, and organized a "rural exploration" activity for students to exercise in nature. This activity not only enriched the students' extracurricular life, but also enhanced their teamwork ability. Although parents initially expressed concerns about this, the successful hosting of the event earned me their trust.</p> <p>And there are relatively few opportunities for career development. In rural areas, many female principals find it difficult to have the opportunity to participate in professional training or further education courses due to family responsibilities and traditional beliefs. This limits our knowledge updates and career development. I once had an opportunity to attend an education forum in the city, but due to inconvenient transportation and scheduling issues, I had to give up. Even now, I still feel that losing this opportunity is a great pity. This situation is not uncommon among rural female principals, and we often have to strike a difficult balance between family, work, and personal development.</p>

Principal 10:

Name	Principal 10
Gender	Female
Age	43 years old
Type of School	Rural Vocational School
Years of Experience	8 years of principal experience, 19 years of education experience

Educational Background	Master's degree in vocational education
Goals and Challenges	Focusing on vocational skills training, but lacking resources.

List of Acronyms: P10=Principal 10, IN=Interviewer

Interview Transcription :

SPEAKER	INTERVIEW
IN:	Hello, thank you very much for accepting my interview invitation. Could you please introduce some basic information about you, such as your age, the years of teaching experience? And how is your family situation? As a principal, how does your family role affect your work?
P10:	Well. I am 43 years old and have been working in education for 19 years, with 8 years of experience as a principal. I am married with two children. The eldest is in high school this year, and the second is still in elementary school. As a mother and principal, my family has indeed brought a lot of pressure to my work, especially regarding the education of my two children. I need to find a balance between work and the needs of my children, especially in rural areas where the working hours in vocational schools are not short, and sometimes I have to sacrifice time spent with my family.
IN:	How do you find a balance between handling your child's education and your own vocational education work?
P10:	No matter how busy my work is, I will not neglect my child's education. After school, I will try my best to spend time with them. Last week, I worked on a handicraft project with my children, and they were very interested in this activity. Through such interaction, not only can we deepen our relationship, but it also allows me to understand their learning progress and difficulties encountered. Every time I see their enthusiasm in learning, I feel immensely gratified. In terms of educating children, I also strive to combine my professional experience with family education. For example, I often share with children the importance of vocational skills. I will tell them how mastering skills can help them stand out in their future careers. I even invite them to visit the school to see different vocational courses and workplaces, so that they can have a clearer understanding of their future choices. And I will also seek the support of my family. My husband plays an important role in family education. He is responsible for picking up and dropping off children and tutoring their homework during my busy work days. We will also hold regular family meetings to discuss children's learning and future plans, involving everyone and

	<p>creating a supportive environment.</p> <p>Although finding a balance between vocational education and family education is not easy, I strive to make the two complement each other through family support. With such efforts, I hope not only to achieve success in my career, but also to provide a good environment for my children's growth.</p>
IN:	As a vocational high school principal, how do you think the lack of resources affects your work?
P10:	Our school has been facing the problem of insufficient resources, especially in terms of teaching equipment and faculty. Vocational skills training requires practical experience, and we lack advanced equipment and sufficient funds to upgrade old equipment. Many times, we can only rely on the experience of teachers and the hands-on ability of students to make up for this deficiency.
IN:	In the situation of insufficient resources, how do you mobilize the enthusiasm of teachers and students?
P10:	<p>Through discussion, we launched a project called "Teacher Mutual Assistance", which allows teachers to share their teaching experience and resources with each other, creating a collaborative atmosphere. This not only enhances everyone's team spirit, but also makes teachers feel that their opinions are valued. We have established a "Teacher Star Rating Selection" system to encourage teachers to recommend excellent teaching methods and courses to each other. Once a month, award-winning teachers will receive small rewards such as books, stationery, etc. This approach effectively enhances teachers' sense of participation and honor, while also stimulating their creativity. Many teachers have begun to share their teaching experiences and even spontaneously organize small workshops to exchange and learn.</p> <p>For students, I have adopted some more innovative ways to stimulate their interest. Most of our students come from rural areas with relatively limited family backgrounds and resources, but they are eager to learn new skills. To motivate them, I designed a 'vocational skills challenge' where students compete in skills within the school. For example, we held cooking competitions and electronic production competitions, where students were divided into groups and used the limited equipment and materials available in the school to create their own unique works. I think through this approach, students not only enhance their teamwork skills, but also learn a lot of new knowledge in practice. During the competition, I invited representatives from some local companies to judge, and the winning team not only received small prizes but also had</p>

	<p>the opportunity to intern. This opportunity to connect with practical work greatly enhances students' enthusiasm for participation and learning motivation.</p> <p>In short, in an environment with limited resources, I always believe that through cooperation and innovation, we can mobilize the enthusiasm of teachers and students, create more learning opportunities and growth space. Although there are many challenges, our joint efforts have shown me hope and possibility.</p>
IN:	Do you think as a female principal, you face gender discrimination or stereotypes in school management?
P10:	Yes, I believe that gender does indeed influence some people's perceptions at the management level. Especially in vocational schools, many people still feel that women are not suitable for managing schools that emphasize technology and practice, and feel that women are not strong enough or have insufficient decision-making power.
IN:	How do you deal with these stereotypes of "women not being strong enough" and "women lacking in decisiveness"?
P10:	<p>I don't like to explain too much, but rather prove myself through actions. I believe that confidence and a firm attitude are the key to breaking these stereotypes. I remember at a school affairs meeting, I proposed a suggestion to improve vocational skills training courses. At that time, some male colleagues expressed doubts about this, believing that my ideas were too radical and difficult to implement. Faced with such doubts, I did not back down. Instead, I prepared detailed data and cases to demonstrate the effectiveness of other schools successfully implementing similar courses. Through this approach, I not only showed my colleagues my professional abilities, but also made them realize that women can also possess strong logical thinking and decision-making skills in decision-making.</p> <p>When faced with external stereotypes, I also choose to speak up bravely. I once participated in an education forum where some male guests mentioned "women's vulnerability" and "lack of competitiveness" when discussing female educators. I unhesitatingly put forward my own views, emphasizing the important contribution and influence of women in the field of education. I shared my experience of promoting reform in vocational education and how I led a team to achieve results even in the face of resource scarcity. My speech received recognition from many attendees and even sparked a discussion about gender equality.</p> <p>In short, I hope that through my actions, not only can I pave the way for my career, but I can also set an example for more female educators to</p>

	believe in their abilities and courageously pursue their career dreams.
IN:	Do you think there would be a conflict between the roles of mother and principal? How to deal with it?
P10:	There must be conflicts, especially when my child requires me to participate in school activities or tutoring classes, while I have to deal with urgent school affairs. At this time, sometimes I can only rely on my husband or elders in the family to help take care of the children.
IN:	How much support has your spouse provided in your work?
P10:	My husband is still quite supportive of my work. Although he also has his own work pressure, he understands my responsibility as a principal. Especially when resources are scarce and work is busy, he will take on more family responsibilities.
IN:	What do you think are the impacts of rural environment on female principals?
P10:	Female principals do face more pressure in rural environments. Parents and communities here often have traditional expectations for female leaders, believing that women should focus more on their families. Moreover, some parents are unwilling to let their daughters learn vocational skills, thinking that girls do not need to learn technology, which also brings some challenges to our work.
IN:	What are the main obstacles you face when promoting vocational skills training?
P10:	The main issue is still funding and resources. Most of the students here come from rural families with limited economic resources. Many students even struggle to afford basic tuition fees, let alone purchase professional equipment and materials.