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Leadership for Equity: Gender-Responsive Practices and Challenges of Public Elementary School Heads in Region I and Their Implications for Sustainability

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the gender-responsive leadership practices and challenges of public elementary school heads in Region I as a basis for a proposed capacity-building program. Utilizing a descriptive-correlational research design, data were collected from school heads and teachers using a validated survey questionnaire. Statistical tools such as frequency, percentage, weighted mean, Pearson correlation, chi-square test, and Mann-Whitney U test were employed to analyze the data. Findings revealed that gender-responsive leadership practices were generally highly implemented across all domains, including policy implementation and compliance, curriculum and instruction, capacity building and training, school governance and decision-making, and support systems and community engagement. However, the challenges encountered were rated as slightly serious, indicating the presence of manageable but persistent issues. Significant relationships were found between selected profile variables—particularly years of service and number of trainings attended—and both the level of implementation and seriousness of challenges. Moreover, significant differences existed between the perceptions of school heads and teachers, with teachers perceiving greater challenges and lower levels of implementation. The study concludes that while gender-responsive leadership practices are effectively implemented, gaps remain in terms of capacity, resource support, and stakeholder engagement. These findings highlight the need for a sustainability program that focuses on enhancing leadership competencies, strengthening collaboration, and aligning stakeholders' perceptions. The proposed program aims to support school heads in sustaining and improving gender-responsive practices, ultimately contributing to more inclusive and equitable educational environments.

Keywords: *Gender-Responsive Leadership, Gender-Responsive Practices and Challenges, Sustainability Program*

INTRODUCTION

Globally, gender equality in education has become a central priority, particularly in leadership and governance. School leaders play a crucial role in fostering inclusive and equitable learning environments, with research indicating that gender-responsive and

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collaborative leadership improves educational outcomes, especially for marginalized learners (UNESCO, 2024; Global Education Monitoring Report, 2025). Women leaders are often associated with participatory decision-making and supportive management practices that enhance inclusivity. However, systemic barriers such as gender stereotypes, unequal domestic responsibilities, and limited access to leadership opportunities continue to restrict their full participation (UNICEF Innocenti, 2024).

The global commitment to gender equality is reinforced by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 on inclusive and equitable education and SDG 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment (United Nations, n.d.; UNESCO, 2024). Despite these commitments, challenges such as inequitable resource allocation, lack of sex-disaggregated data, and limited leadership capacity hinder effective gender mainstreaming in education systems worldwide (UNICEF/UNESCO, 2023). These challenges highlight the need for strengthened leadership competencies that integrate gender perspectives into school governance and instructional practices.

In the Philippines, gender-responsive leadership is supported by strong legal and policy frameworks. The 1987 Philippine Constitution guarantees gender equality, while Republic Act 9710, or the Magna Carta of Women, mandates the elimination of discrimination and the institutionalization of gender mainstreaming across sectors, including education (Philippine Commission on Women, 2009). To operationalize this mandate, the Gender and Development (GAD) Budget Policy requires government agencies, including the Department of Education (DepEd), to allocate at least 5% of their annual budget to gender-related programs (PCW, 2024). Furthermore, DepEd Order No. 32, s. 2017, or the Gender-Responsive Basic Education (GRBE) Policy, integrates gender equality into curriculum, teacher development, school governance, and learning environments, emphasizing the role of school heads in promoting inclusive education (DepEd, 2017).

Despite these policies, implementation remains inconsistent. While the Philippines is recognized for its progress in gender equality, disparities persist, particularly in rural and resource-constrained schools. School heads often encounter challenges in conducting gender analysis, integrating gender perspectives into planning, and effectively utilizing GAD resources due to limited training and institutional support (Hemillan-Sacro, 2022; Marilyn & Purcia, 2023). These issues result in gender mainstreaming being treated as a compliance activity rather than a transformative leadership practice.

At the national level, the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2023–2028 emphasizes inclusive and equitable education as a key driver of national development, highlighting the need for governance reforms, capacity-building, and strengthened local leadership (NEDA, 2023). School heads are expected to act as instructional and community leaders who embody inclusivity and accountability. However, the lack of structured capacity-building programs focused on gender-responsive leadership limits their ability to fully meet these expectations.

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In Region I (Ilocos Region), the challenges of gender-responsive leadership are further intensified by contextual factors such as socio-economic disparities, rural-urban differences, multi-grade classrooms, and exposure to disaster risks. Public elementary school heads are tasked with integrating gender perspectives into School Improvement Plans, managing GAD budgets, and ensuring safe and inclusive learning environments. However, many report difficulties in aligning GAD plans with actual needs, conducting localized gender analysis, and monitoring program outcomes (Villegas, 2025). Without sustained support, gender mainstreaming risks becoming superficial and compliance-driven.

At the institutional level, Pangasinan State University (PSU) plays a critical role in addressing these gaps through its Research, Extension, and Innovation (REI) Agenda, which prioritizes education quality, inclusivity, and innovation (PSU, 2020). Its Gender and Development (GAD) Center further promotes gender mainstreaming in instruction, research, and governance, positioning the university as a strategic partner in strengthening gender-responsive leadership in Region I.

The research gap remains evident. Although policies and funding mechanisms for gender mainstreaming are well established, there is limited empirical evidence on how school heads in Region I implement gender-responsive leadership, the challenges they encounter, and the effectiveness of capacity-building interventions. Existing studies focus on gender mainstreaming practices but rarely examine leadership-specific dimensions and their alignment with national and global frameworks (Hemillan-Sacro, 2022; Villegas, 2025).

Thus, this study is anchored on global commitments such as the SDGs, national policies like the Magna Carta of Women and GRBE Policy, and regional realities in Region I. By examining leadership practices and challenges, and proposing a sustainability program, the study aims to contribute to the development of transformative leadership that promotes inclusive, equitable, and gender-responsive education.

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive-correlational research design with a comparative component to examine gender-responsive leadership practices and challenges faced by public elementary school heads in Region I. The descriptive approach was used to present respondents' profiles and assess the level of implementation of gender-responsive practices, as well as the challenges encountered. The correlational design determined relationships between profile variables and leadership practices, while the comparative component examined differences in perceptions between school heads and teachers (Fraenkel et al., 2021).

The study involved 360 respondents, including 90 school heads and 277 teachers from Pangasinan, La Union, Ilocos Sur, and Ilocos Norte. Stratified random sampling ensured proportional representation and improved the generalizability of findings. Teachers served

as secondary respondents to validate school heads' responses and enhance data triangulation.

A researcher-made questionnaire was utilized, consisting of three parts: profile, level of implementation of gender-responsive leadership practices, and seriousness of challenges encountered. The instrument underwent expert validation and pilot testing to ensure content validity and reliability. Data were collected through both printed questionnaires and Google Forms to increase accessibility and response rate.

Ethical considerations were observed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and approval from relevant authorities (Babbie, 2020). Data were analyzed using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, Spearman correlation, chi-square test, and paired sample t-test to determine relationships and differences among variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study presented the results of the data analysis and the corresponding discussion based on the findings derived from the data gathered.

Table 1: Profile of School Heads

Profile	Categories	Frequency	Percent
Age	26–35 years	8	8.9
	36–45 years	26	28.9
	46–55 years	48	53.3
	56–61 years	8	8.9
Gender	Male	42	46.7
	Female	47	52.2
	Transgender	1	1.1
Civil Status	Single	8	8.9
	Married	73	81.1
	Separated	4	4.4
	Widowed	5	5.6
Position	Single	8	8.9
	Married	73	81.1
	Separated	4	4.4
	Widowed	5	5.6
	Single	8	8.9
	Married	73	81.1
	Separated	4	4.4
Highest Educational Attainment	With Doctorate	23	25.6
	With Doctorate Units	47	52.2
	With Masters	15	16.7
	With Masters' Units	3	3.3
	Bachelors	2	2.2
Bachelor's Degree	Secondary Education	48	53.3
	Elementary Education	41	45.6
	Non-Education	1	1.1
	less than 5	24	26.7

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Number of Years of Service as School Head	5-10	56	62.2
	11-15	6	6.7
	16-20	3	3.3
	21 and above	1	1.1
Average Family Monthly Income	Less than 40,000	14	15.6
	40,001 - 60,000	72	80.0
	60,001 - 80,000	2	2.2
	80,001 - 100,000	1	1.1
	100,001 and above	1	1.1
Number of Gender- Responsive Seminars or Trainings Attended	less than 5	14	15.6
	6-10	22	24.4
	11-15	52	57.8
	16-20	1	1.1
	25 and above	1	1.1

The findings reveal that most school heads in Region I are within the 46–55 age group, indicating a predominance of mid-career leaders with substantial professional experience. This aligns with studies suggesting that experienced leaders demonstrate stronger instructional leadership and decision-making capabilities. However, the limited number of younger leaders highlights potential gaps in leadership succession and innovation (Hallinger et al., 2025).

In terms of gender, there is a relatively balanced distribution, with a slight predominance of female school heads. This reflects increasing female participation in educational leadership, consistent with findings that women often exhibit collaborative and inclusive leadership styles (Ilan & Espiritu, 2025). Nevertheless, leadership effectiveness is influenced more by competencies than gender (Camara, 2024).

Most respondents are married, suggesting stability and maturity, which are associated with effective leadership performance (Leithwood et al., 2020). However, leadership effectiveness remains dependent on skills and context rather than personal characteristics. The majority occupy principal positions, indicating direct involvement in policy implementation and school governance, reinforcing their critical role in advancing gender-responsive practices (Bush, 2020).

Educational attainment is notably high, with most school heads holding doctoral degrees, reflecting strong professional commitment. Higher qualifications are linked to improved leadership effectiveness and evidence-based decision-making (Hallinger et al., 2020). Additionally, most have educational backgrounds aligned with teaching, enhancing their instructional leadership capacity.

The majority of school heads have 5–10 years of leadership experience, suggesting a combination of developing expertise and adaptability. However, continuous professional development remains essential regardless of tenure (Leithwood et al., 2020). In terms of income, most fall within the middle-income group, indicating moderate economic stability, although financial constraints may limit access to professional development and program implementation (Gümüş et al., 2022).

Most respondents have attended 11–15 gender-responsive trainings, indicating moderate exposure to gender-related initiatives. While this supports awareness, sustained and specialized training is necessary to ensure effective and transformative leadership practices (Mukagiahana et al., 2024).

Table 2: *Level of Implementation of Gender-Responsive Leadership Practices of School Heads in Public Elementary Schools as Perceived by Themselves and the Teachers*

Key Areas	School Heads	Teachers
a. Policy Implementation and Compliance	Highly Implemented	Highly Implemented
b. Curriculum and Instruction	Highly Implemented	Highly Implemented
c. Capacity Building and Training	Highly Implemented	Highly Implemented
d. School Governance and Decision-Making	Highly Implemented	Highly Implemented
e. Support Systems and Community Engagement	Highly Implemented	Highly Implemented
Overall	Highly Implemented	Highly Implemented

Table 2 reveal that the overall level of implementation of gender-responsive leadership practices among public elementary school heads in Region I is highly implemented, as consistently perceived by both school heads and teachers. This uniformity across all key areas—policy implementation and compliance, curriculum and instruction, capacity building and training, school governance and decision-making, and support systems and community engagement—indicates a strong institutionalization of gender-responsive practices within the school system. It suggests that gender mainstreaming is not only embedded in leadership structures but is also widely recognized by stakeholders as effectively practiced.

Across the five key areas, both groups of respondents consistently rated each dimension as highly implemented, reflecting alignment in perceptions. This congruence implies that school heads' self-assessment is validated by teachers' observations, strengthening the credibility of the findings. Similar studies have reported that when both administrators and teachers share positive perceptions of gender-responsive practices, it indicates effective leadership and a supportive school culture that promotes equity and inclusivity (Villegas et al., 2025).

The consistently high ratings across all domains further suggest that school heads are effectively fulfilling their roles as gender-responsive leaders. In particular, leadership practices that integrate gender perspectives into curriculum, governance, and community engagement help create inclusive learning environments. Research affirms that strong school leadership is a key driver in the successful implementation of gender-responsive education, as it influences teacher practices, school policies, and stakeholder participation (Sungura, 2026).

However, while the overall findings are highly positive, the uniformity of “highly implemented” ratings across all areas may also indicate the need for deeper analysis of specific gaps or contextual challenges that may not be fully captured through general measures. Literature highlights that even in schools with high levels of implementation, challenges such as resource constraints, varying levels of teacher competence, and socio-cultural barriers may still affect the sustainability and depth of gender-responsive practices (Seni, 2026).

The findings demonstrate that gender-responsive leadership practices are strongly embedded in public elementary schools in Region I, with both school heads and teachers affirming their high level of implementation. This indicates a solid foundation for gender mainstreaming in education. Nonetheless, ongoing capacity-building, monitoring, and enhancement of existing practices are essential to ensure these efforts lead to sustained, transformative outcomes in promoting gender equality and inclusive education.

Table 3: *Level of Seriousness of the Challenges Encountered in the Implementation of Gender-Responsive Leadership Practices of School Heads in Public Elementary Schools as Perceived by Themselves and Teachers*

Key Areas	School Heads	Teachers
a. Policy implementation and compliance with gender-related mandates	Slightly Serious	Slightly Serious
b. Resource allocation and budget support for gender programs	Slightly Serious	Slightly Serious
c. Capacity and competence of school heads in gender-responsive leadership	Slightly Serious	Slightly Serious
d. Teacher engagement and participation in gender-related initiatives	Slightly Serious	Slightly Serious
e. Community and stakeholder support for gender mainstreaming	Slightly Serious	Slightly Serious
Overall	Slightly Serious	Slightly Serious

The summary results presented in Table 3 reveal that the overall seriousness of the challenges encountered in implementing gender-responsive leadership practices is slightly serious, as consistently perceived by both school heads and teachers across all key areas. This uniform assessment suggests that while challenges exist in various domains, they are generally manageable and do not critically impede the implementation of gender-responsive initiatives. However, the consistency of this rating across all indicators highlights systemic issues that require sustained attention and strategic intervention.

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Across all five key areas—policy implementation and compliance, resource allocation and budget support, capacity and competence, teacher engagement, and community and stakeholder support—the findings consistently indicate a “slightly serious” level of challenge. This implies that although gender-responsive practices are being implemented effectively, certain gaps persist in operationalization, coordination, and support mechanisms. These findings align with previous research indicating that gender mainstreaming in schools is often moderately challenged by factors such as insufficient training, limited gender analysis skills, and weak institutional mechanisms (Duma, 2022). Such challenges, while not severe, can accumulate and affect the sustainability and depth of gender-responsive initiatives.

In terms of implications, the findings suggest that the implementation of gender-responsive leadership practices has already reached a functional level, but continuous improvement is necessary. The “slightly serious” rating across all areas indicates that school heads and teachers are capable of addressing these challenges, but they require enhanced support in policy clarity, resource allocation, and professional development. Studies have emphasized that effective gender-responsive education depends not only on policy mandates but also on the capacity of school leaders and teachers to translate these into actionable programs and inclusive practices (Sungura et al., 2026). Without continuous capacity-building and institutional reinforcement, these minor challenges may persist or intensify over time.

Moreover, the uniformity of responses between school heads and teachers reflects a shared understanding of the existing challenges, a positive indicator of collaborative problem-solving. Literature supports that alignment in perceptions among stakeholders strengthens the implementation of school-based reforms and fosters a more cohesive approach to gender mainstreaming (Suico, 2024). This shared perspective can serve as a foundation for designing targeted capacity-building programs that address common concerns and promote collective action.

The findings underscore that while gender-responsive leadership practices are generally well-implemented, there remains a need to strengthen institutional mechanisms, enhance stakeholder engagement, and build sustained capacity among school leaders and teachers. Addressing these moderately perceived challenges will not only improve implementation but also ensure that gender mainstreaming efforts become more transformative, inclusive, and sustainable in the long term.

Table 4: Relationship Between the Profile of School Heads and Their Level of Implementation of Gender-Responsive Leadership Practices

Profile Variables	Policy Implementation & Compliance	Curriculum & Instruction	Capacity-Building & Training	Governance & Decision-Making	Support Systems & Community Engagement
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Age		Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Highest Educational Attainment		Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Degree		Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Years in Service		Significant (+)	Not Significant	Significant (+)	Not Significant
Family Monthly Income		Significant (+)	Not Significant	Not Significant	Significant (+)
Number of Trainings		Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Sex		Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Significant (weak)
Marital Status		Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Position		Not Significant	Not Significant	Significant (moderate)	Marginal/Weak Significant

Legend:

Significant (+) – Significant positive relationship ($p < 0.05$)

Significant (weak/moderate) – Significant with weak/moderate association

Not Significant – No significant relationship ($p > 0.05$)

The consolidated findings indicate that most profile variables of school heads do not significantly influence the implementation of gender-responsive leadership practices across the five domains. This suggests that gender-responsive leadership in public elementary schools in Region I is largely system-driven and guided by institutional policies rather than individual demographic or professional characteristics. The uniformity of implementation across variables such as age, educational attainment, sex, and training supports the view that strong policy frameworks and organizational structures promote consistency in leadership practices.

However, selected variables—particularly years in service, family monthly income, and position—demonstrated significant relationships in specific domains. The significance of years in service in both policy implementation and capacity-building indicates that experience enhances leadership competence, institutional familiarity, and decision-making ability. This aligns with studies that emphasize that experienced school leaders are more effective at implementing reforms and fostering inclusive practices due to their accumulated knowledge and contextual understanding (Leithwood et al., 2020). Experience enables school heads to navigate policy requirements more effectively and to translate gender-responsive mandates into actionable programs.

Similarly, the significant relationship between family monthly income and certain domains suggests that socio-economic factors may influence access to resources, professional networks, and opportunities that support leadership effectiveness. Leaders

with greater access to resources may be better positioned to implement gender-responsive initiatives, particularly those requiring stakeholder engagement and community collaboration. This finding is consistent with research highlighting the role of social capital and resource availability in shaping school leadership practices.

The significance of position in governance and decision-making further underscores the importance of leadership roles and authority in implementing gender-responsive practices. School heads occupying higher or more strategic positions may have greater influence over policy execution, resource allocation, and participatory decision-making processes. This supports existing literature, which identifies leadership authority and organizational structure as critical factors in effective school governance and reform implementation (Bush, 2020).

Interestingly, the lack of a significant relationship between the number of trainings attended and implementation levels suggests that training alone does not guarantee effective practice. This finding reinforces the argument that professional development must be continuous, context-based, and practice-oriented to meaningfully influence leadership behavior. It also highlights the importance of experiential learning, mentoring, and coaching in strengthening gender-responsive leadership competencies.

The findings imply that gender-responsive leadership practices are institutionalized and consistently implemented across different groups of school heads. However, enhancing practical experience, leadership roles, and access to resources can further strengthen implementation. These results emphasize the need for capacity-building programs that focus on applied competencies, contextual leadership development, and sustained professional engagement rather than solely on demographic characteristics or training attendance.

Table 5: *Relationship Between the Profile of School Heads and Their Level of Seriousness of the Challenges Encountered in the Implementation of Gender-Responsive Leadership Practices*

Profile Variables	Policy Implementation	Curriculum & Instruction	Capacity-Building & Training	Governance & Decision-Making	Support Systems & Community Engagement
Age	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Significant (-)	Not Significant
Highest Educational Attainment	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Degree	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Years in Service	Significant (-)	Significant (-)	Significant (-)	Significant (-)	Significant (-)
Family Monthly Income	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant

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Number of Trainings	Significant (-)	Significant (-)	Significant (-)	Significant (-)	Significant (-)
Sex	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Marital Status	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant
Position	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Not Significant	Significant (moderate)

Legend:

- Significant (-) – Significant negative relationship (higher value = lower perceived challenges)
- Significant (moderate) – Significant relationship with moderate association
- Not Significant – No significant relationship ($p > 0.05$)

The consolidated findings reveal that the seriousness of challenges encountered in the implementation of gender-responsive leadership practices is largely not influenced by most demographic and professional characteristics of school heads. Variables such as age, educational attainment, degree, sex, and marital status consistently show no significant relationship across domains, indicating that perceptions of challenges are not shaped by personal attributes but are more likely influenced by institutional and contextual factors. This supports the notion that gender-responsive leadership is system-driven and guided by policy frameworks rather than individual differences (UNESCO, 2020).

However, years in service and the number of trainings attended emerged as consistently significant variables across all domains, both showing negative relationships with the level of seriousness of challenges. This indicates that as experience and training increase, the perceived severity of challenges decreases. These findings align with research suggesting that experienced school leaders possess stronger problem-solving skills, policy understanding, and leadership competencies, enabling them to effectively manage educational reforms and inclusive practices (Leithwood et al., 2020). Experience allows school heads to develop institutional familiarity and confidence, which are critical in navigating gender-responsive initiatives.

Similarly, the strong influence of training underscores the importance of professional development in reducing implementation challenges. School heads who have undergone more gender-responsive training are better equipped with the knowledge, skills, and strategies needed to address issues related to policy compliance, curriculum integration, and stakeholder engagement. This finding is consistent with studies emphasizing that continuous, practice-oriented training enhances leadership capacity and promotes effective gender mainstreaming. It also highlights that capacity-building efforts must go beyond attendance and focus on application and contextualization.

The significance of age in governance and decision-making suggests that maturity contributes to better handling of leadership challenges. Older school heads may possess greater confidence and leadership stability, which can reduce perceived difficulties in managing inclusive and participatory governance processes. Meanwhile, the significance of

position in support systems and community engagement indicates that leadership roles and authority influence the ability to establish partnerships and mobilize resources. Leaders in higher positions may have broader networks and decision-making power, facilitating more effective stakeholder engagement (Bush, 2020).

The findings suggest that while gender-responsive leadership challenges are generally manageable, their reduction depends largely on experience, training, and leadership roles rather than demographic characteristics. This underscores the importance of sustained capacity-building programs, mentoring systems, and experiential learning opportunities. Strengthening these areas can enhance leadership effectiveness and ensure more sustainable and transformative gender-responsive practices in schools.

Table 6: Mann-Whitney U Test Results for Differences on the Level of Implementation of Gender-Responsive Leadership Practices of School Heads as Perceived by Themselves and the Teachers

Gender-Responsive Leadership Practices	Mean Rank		Sum of Ranks		Mann-Whitney U	Z-score	p-value
	Teachers	School Heads	Teachers	School Heads			
Policy Implementation and Compliance	148.18	294.26	41045.00	26483	2542	-13.418	.000
Curriculum and Instruction	151.29	284.67	41908.00	25620	3405.000	-11.844	.000
Capacity Building and Training	148.07	294.57	41016.50	26511.5	2513.5	-12.989	.000
School Governance and Decision-Making	148.28	293.94	41073.00	26455	2570	-13.38	.000
Support Systems and Community Engagement	153.57	277.66	42538.50	24989.5	4035.5	-11.16	.000

*** significant at .01 level*

The results presented in Table 6 reveal a statistically significant difference in the level of implementation of gender-responsive leadership practices, as perceived by school heads and teachers, across all key areas. All computed p-values are .000 ($p < .01$), indicating highly significant differences. Notably, school heads consistently reported higher mean ranks than teachers, suggesting a more favorable self-assessment of implementation.

This significant difference is evident across all domains, including policy implementation, curriculum and instruction, capacity building, governance, and community

engagement. The consistent disparity indicates a perceptual gap between school leaders and teachers regarding the actual extent of gender-responsive practices. Such differences in perception are common in educational settings, where leaders tend to evaluate implementation at the policy or structural level, while teachers assess it through daily classroom experiences.

These findings imply that while school heads may perceive gender-responsive initiatives as effectively implemented, teachers may encounter practical challenges that are less visible at the administrative level. This gap may stem from differences in roles, responsibilities, and levels of engagement with implementation processes. Research indicates that discrepancies between teacher and leader perceptions often arise from variations in experience, communication, and involvement in decision-making (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Moreover, studies on gender mainstreaming indicate that such perceptual differences may reflect gaps in communication, monitoring, and shared understanding of policies. While school leaders may report high compliance with gender-responsive frameworks, teachers frequently identify constraints, including limited resources, insufficient training, and contextual barriers, that hinder implementation. These findings suggest that effective gender-responsive education requires not only policy alignment but also coherence in stakeholder perceptions.

The implications of these results highlight the need for more participatory and collaborative leadership approaches. Engaging teachers in planning, implementation, and evaluation processes can help bridge perception gaps and ensure that policies are translated effectively into classroom practices. Literature emphasizes that shared leadership and collaborative cultures enhance school effectiveness and improve the implementation of reform (Bush, 2020).

While gender-responsive leadership practices are generally implemented, the presence of a significant perceptual gap underscores the need for stronger communication and feedback mechanisms, as well as ongoing capacity-building. Aligning the perspectives of school heads and teachers can lead to more coherent, inclusive, and sustainable gender-responsive practices in schools.

Table 7: Mann-Whitney U Test Results for the Difference in the Level of Seriousness of the Challenges Encountered in the Implementation of Gender-Responsive Leadership Practices of School Heads as Perceived by Themselves and the Teachers

Gender-Responsive Leadership Practices	Mean Rank		Sum of Ranks		Mann-Whitney U	Z-score	p-value
	Teachers	School Heads	Teachers	School Heads			

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Policy							
Implementation and Compliance	214.31	90.72	59363	8165	4070**	-10.024	0.000
Curriculum and Instruction	215.85	85.97	59791	7737	3642**	-10.421	0.000
Capacity Building and Training	215.75	86.28	59763	7765	3670**	-10.672	0.000
School Governance and Decision-Making	213.10	94.43	59029	8499	4404**	-9.75	0.000
Support Systems and Community Engagement	208.98	107.11	57888.50	9639.50	5544.5**	-8.338	0.000

** significant at .01 level

The results presented in Table 7 reveal a statistically significant difference in the perceived seriousness of challenges encountered in implementing gender-responsive leadership practices between school heads and teachers. All computed p-values are .000 ($p < .01$), indicating highly significant differences across all domains. Notably, teachers consistently reported higher mean ranks than school heads, suggesting that teachers perceive the challenges as more serious.

This difference is evident across all domains, including policy implementation, curriculum and instruction, capacity building, governance, and community engagement. The higher teacher ratings indicate a perceptual gap between school heads and teachers regarding the severity of implementation challenges. Such differences are common in educational settings, where teachers, due to their direct involvement in classroom instruction, tend to experience operational challenges more intensely than administrators.

These findings imply that teachers are more exposed to the practical difficulties of implementing gender-responsive practices, such as limited resources, time constraints, and contextual barriers. In contrast, school heads may perceive these challenges as less severe due to their broader managerial perspective. Research supports this distinction, noting that teachers often identify more classroom-level constraints, while administrators focus on policy-level implementation (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Furthermore, studies on gender mainstreaming emphasize that implementation challenges are frequently associated with inadequate training, limited gender analysis skills, and socio-cultural barriers that directly affect classroom practices. Teachers' higher perception of seriousness may therefore reflect their closer engagement with learners, where issues such as gender bias, stereotypes, and participation disparities are more visible.

The implications of these findings highlight the need for greater alignment between school heads and teachers. The perceptual gap may indicate insufficient communication, limited feedback mechanisms, and differences in awareness of on-the-ground realities.

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Literature suggests that participatory and collaborative leadership approaches can help bridge these gaps by involving teachers in decision-making, planning, and evaluation processes (Bush, 2020).

Moreover, capacity-building initiatives must be tailored to address the specific challenges teachers face. Context-based, practice-oriented professional development programs are more effective at improving implementation and reducing perceived challenges.

While gender-responsive leadership practices are being implemented, teachers perceive the challenges to be more serious than school heads do. Bridging this perceptual gap through improved collaboration, communication, and targeted capacity-building is essential to ensure that gender-responsive initiatives are effectively translated into meaningful classroom practices.

SUSTAINABILITY PROGRAM

“Project GENDER LEAD (Gender-Responsive Education through Nurturing, Development, Empowerment, and Responsive Leadership Advancement and Development”

I. Introduction

Gender-responsive leadership in public elementary schools is essential in ensuring inclusive, equitable, and transformative educational environments. The findings of the study revealed that while school heads in Region I demonstrate moderate to high levels of implementation of gender-responsive leadership practices, significant challenges persist in areas such as policy implementation, resource allocation, leadership competence, teacher engagement, and stakeholder support. These challenges indicate a gap between policy mandates and actual practice, underscoring the need for a structured, sustainable intervention.

Despite the existence of strong national frameworks such as the Magna Carta of Women and the Gender-Responsive Basic Education Policy, school heads continue to face constraints in effectively integrating gender perspectives into school governance, curriculum, and community engagement. The study further highlighted that limited access to continuous professional development, insufficient monitoring mechanisms, and weak institutional support systems contribute to inconsistent implementation of gender-responsive practices. In many cases, gender mainstreaming is treated as a compliance requirement rather than a transformative leadership approach.

Moreover, contextual factors in Region I, including rural-urban disparities, resource limitations, and socio-cultural influences, further complicate the effective practice of gender-responsive leadership. School heads are expected to manage multiple responsibilities while ensuring inclusivity and equity, yet they often lack structured guidance and sustained

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support. This situation underscores the need for a program that not only builds competencies but also institutionalizes gender-responsive practices within school systems.

Project GENDER LEAD is a sustainability program designed to strengthen school heads' capacity through continuous training, mentoring, policy integration, and stakeholder engagement. It adopts a holistic approach by addressing identified gaps in leadership practices and providing practical strategies that align with both national policies and global development goals. The program emphasizes long-term sustainability by embedding gender-responsive leadership into school improvement planning, budgeting, and evaluation processes.

Through collaborative efforts among the Department of Education, local government units, and partner institutions such as Pangasinan State University, the program seeks to transform school leadership practices from compliance-based to impact-driven. Ultimately, this initiative aims to foster a culture of inclusivity and equity in public elementary schools, ensuring that all learners, regardless of gender, have equal opportunities to succeed.

II. General Objective

To enhance and sustain gender-responsive leadership practices among public elementary school heads in Region I through a structured and institutionalized capacity-building and support program.

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Key Findings from the Study	Strategies/Activities	Objectives	Key Performance Indicators	Persons Involved	Timeline	Source of Funds
Limited capacity of school heads in gender analysis	Conduct Gender Sensitivity and Leadership Training Workshops	Obj 1	% of trained school heads; pre-post test results	DepEd, PSU, GAD Experts	Quarterly	GAD Fund
Weak integration of GAD in school plans	SIP and AIP Gender Mainstreaming Workshops	Obj 2	% of SIPs with integrated GAD plans	School Heads, Planning Teams	Annual	School MOOE, GAD
Underutilization of GAD budget	Financial Management and GAD Budgeting Training	Obj 3	% utilization of GAD budget	School Heads, Accountants	Semi-Annual	GAD Fund
Low teacher engagement in GAD programs	Teacher Capacity Building and Gender Advocacy Campaigns	Obj 4	Participation rate of teachers	Teachers, School Heads	Quarterly	MOOE, LGU Support
Lack of monitoring and evaluation tools	Develop Gender Monitoring and Evaluation Toolkit	Obj 1,2	Availability and use of tools	DepEd, Researchers	Annual	DepEd, PSU
Weak community participation	Strengthen School-Community Partnerships (PTA, LGU, NGOs)	Obj 5	Number of partnerships formed	School Heads, LGUs	Continuous	LGU, External Grants
Persistence of gender stereotypes	School-based Gender Awareness Programs	Obj 2,4	Reduction in gender bias incidents	Teachers, Learners	Monthly	School Funds
Lack of mentoring support	Establish Coaching and Mentoring Program for School Heads	Obj 1	Number of mentoring sessions conducted	Senior Principals, Supervisors	Quarterly	DepEd
Inconsistent policy implementation	Policy Review and Compliance Monitoring	Obj 1	Compliance rate with GRBE policy	DepEd Supervisors	Semi-Annual	DepEd
Limited data-driven decision making	Training on Gender Data Analysis and Reporting	Obj 3	Availability of sex-disaggregated data	School Heads	Annual	GAD Fund

III. Specific Objectives

1. To strengthen school heads' competencies in gender-responsive leadership and policy implementation.
2. To improve the integration of gender perspectives in curriculum, instruction, and school governance.
3. To enhance effective utilization of GAD resources and budgeting mechanisms.
4. To increase teacher engagement and participation in gender-responsive initiatives.
5. To strengthen collaboration among schools, communities, and stakeholders in promoting gender equality.

IV. Plan of Action

V. Monitoring and Evaluation

The monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of Project GENDER LEAD will be anchored on a results-based management framework to ensure that program objectives are effectively achieved. A multi-level monitoring system will be implemented involving school heads, district supervisors, and division-level GAD focal persons. Key performance indicators, such as training participation rates, the integration of GAD into school plans, the utilization of GAD budgets, and improvements in gender-responsive practices, will be tracked regularly.

Data will be collected through surveys, progress reports, observation tools, and gender audits conducted semi-annually. The use of sex-disaggregated data will be emphasized to assess the impact of interventions on both male and female stakeholders. Periodic evaluation meetings will be conducted to review progress, identify gaps, and recommend adjustments to program implementation. Feedback mechanisms will also be established to ensure that insights from school heads and teachers inform continuous improvement.

Ultimately, the M&E system will not only measure compliance but also assess the effectiveness and impact of gender-responsive leadership practices in promoting inclusive and equitable school environments.

VI. Sustainability Plan

The sustainability of Project GENDER LEAD will be ensured through institutionalization, capacity strengthening, and stakeholder collaboration. The program will be integrated into the School Improvement Plan (SIP), Annual Implementation Plan (AIP), and GAD Plan and Budget of participating schools to ensure continuity beyond the project period. Embedding gender-responsive leadership practices into routine school operations will help sustain gains achieved through the program.

Capacity-building initiatives such as training, mentoring, and coaching will be conducted regularly to develop a pool of competent school leaders who can champion gender responsiveness. Partnerships with the Department of Education, local government units, and higher education institutions like Pangasinan State University will provide technical and financial support for ongoing implementation.

The program will promote ownership among school heads and teachers by encouraging active participation and accountability. Continuous monitoring, policy reinforcement, and community engagement will further strengthen sustainability. By institutionalizing gender-responsive leadership as a core component of school governance, the program ensures long-term impact in fostering inclusive and equitable education in Region I.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings indicate that public elementary school heads in Region I possess strong professional qualifications and demonstrate a high level of implementation of gender-responsive leadership practices across all domains. This suggests that gender mainstreaming is already well-integrated within school systems, supported by institutional policies and leadership competencies. Although challenges were identified, they were generally rated as only slightly serious, suggesting they are manageable and do not significantly hinder implementation. The absence of significant relationships between most profile variables and implementation further indicates that gender-responsive practices are system-driven rather than individual-dependent, while experience and training play a key role in reducing perceived challenges.

However, the study also reveals a notable perceptual gap between school heads and teachers, with school heads rating implementation higher and teachers perceiving challenges as more serious. This highlights differences in perspectives between administrative and classroom levels, likely influenced by variations in roles, responsibilities, and direct exposure to implementation realities. Addressing this gap requires strengthened collaboration, communication, and participatory leadership approaches. Consequently, the development of a structured sustainability program is essential to enhance capacity-building, improve resource utilization, and institutionalize gender-responsive practices, ensuring more consistent, inclusive, and effective implementation across schools.

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