Proceedings of ICGPSH 2024 Workshop: Industry 5 and Society 5 – A Study from The Global Politics and Socio-Humanity Perspective
DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.LC20374

Leadership, Gender, and School Culture: Navigating Power and Resistance in Education

Shiyu Lin[1,a,*]

[1]*School of Education, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia*
a. shiyu.lin@student.uq.edu.au,
**corresponding author*

Abstract: This paper investigates the ongoing gender inequalities within education systems, influenced by globalization and entrenched power dynamics that often limit gender inclusivity. Global initiatives aimed at gender equality frequently adopt a universalist approach, yet this can mask intersectional disparities and reinforce hegemonic masculinity, especially through the spread of Western masculine ideals. Within educational institutions, heteronormative and cisnormative school cultures frequently marginalize non-heterosexual identities, creating challenging environments for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ+) students. Although anti-discrimination policies exist, many teachers lack adequate training to address gender and sexuality issues, leading to adverse academic and social outcomes for marginalized students. The study reveals that traditional educational leadership often reinforces conventional gender norms, while transformational leadership grounded in social justice is essential to fostering inclusivity and addressing intersecting inequalities. The findings underscore the need for structural reforms to establish supportive and equitable school settings that acknowledge and celebrate diverse gender identities.

Keywords: Gender issues, transnational pressure, social norms, education, leadership.

1. Introduction

Gender inequalities in education remain pervasive despite global efforts to promote inclusivity and equality. Educational institutions often perpetuate traditional gender roles and hierarchies, reinforced by both local cultural norms and global influences. The globalization of Western masculine ideals, characterized by individualism and competitiveness, has further entrenched hegemonic masculinity in many societies, overshadowing the diverse challenges faced by marginalized groups. In China, the negotiation between traditional Confucian values and modern global masculinity creates unique tensions in both school culture and educational leadership.

Schools, as powerful social institutions, shape not only academic outcomes but also the gendered identities of students. Through policies, practices, and disciplinary measures, schools reinforce heteronormativity and cisnormativity, marginalizing non-heterosexual identities and contributing to a hostile environment for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ+) students. Despite the existence of anti-discrimination policies, many educators lack the training or support needed to address these issues effectively. This results in negative social and academic outcomes for marginalized students, underscoring the need for more comprehensive and inclusive educational practices.

© 2025 The Authors. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License 4.0 (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.LC20374

Leadership plays a critical role in either maintaining or challenging these systemic inequalities. Traditional leadership models, often rooted in patriarchal values, fail to address intersectional disparities related to gender and sexuality. However, transformational leadership, informed by social justice and equity principles, offers a pathway to dismantling existing power structures. By fostering inclusivity and embedding positive representations of diverse gender identities in curricula, school leaders can create environments where all students feel recognized and valued. This paper examines how leadership and school culture contribute to gender inequality in education and explores strategies for creating more inclusive and equitable learning environments.

2. Literature Review

The persistent failure of education systems to address gender equality stems from a universalist approach that overlooks the unique challenges faced by women and marginalized groups, especially in diverse sociocultural contexts [1]. While globalization has introduced new forms of masculinity rooted in individualism and competitiveness, these global trends continue to reinforce traditional gender hierarchies, privileging Western, upper-class men [2]. In educational policy, the focus often remains on metrics like enrollment, which, though important, fail to account for the deeper, intersectional inequalities faced by marginalized groups, including gender and sexual minorities [3]. These challenges are especially evident in the Chinese context, where masculine identities are negotiated between traditional values and modern influences. Tsang's study on Chinese badminton players, for instance, illustrates how "Wu" (aggressive) and "Wen" (thoughtful) traits reflect a complex blend of Western ideals and China's promotion of traditional masculinity, thereby reinforcing gender norms within educational and athletic environments [4].

The transition from discussing masculinity to the broader school environment is natural when considering how educational institutions are shaped by these gender norms. Schools, especially those influenced by neoconservative and patriarchal values, reinforce dominant forms of masculinity, often normalizing heterosexuality and marginalizing non-heterosexual identities in their policies, practices, and staff development. This perpetuates a culture of heteronormativity and cisnormativity, where safer social justice topics, such as multiculturalism, take precedence, and issues of sexuality are either ignored or treated negatively [5,6]. The framing of LGBTQ+ topics is particularly problematic, as non-heterosexual identities are often pathologized or positioned as health risks, further stigmatizing these identities within the school environment.

Furthermore, the way schools masculinize certain subjects and emphasize traditionally masculine sports reinforces hegemonic masculinity. This is evident not only in physical education but also in the disciplinary structures that align with traditional masculine ideals of authority and control. Teachers, often ill-equipped to address LGBTQ+ topics due to inadequate training, reinforce these norms through superficial inclusion efforts, which fail to address the deeper cultural assumptions about gender and sexuality [7]. As a result, LGBTQ+ students frequently experience marginalization, leading to poorer academic performance, higher absenteeism, and increased exposure to bullying and harassment [8].

To mitigate these issues, it is essential that schools provide comprehensive support for LGBTQ+ students, addressing not only the symptoms but the root causes of discrimination. Despite the existence of anti-discrimination laws, many teachers hesitate to intervene in harassment due to a lack of proper training or fear of backlash, revealing a critical gap in professional development. A more robust focus on gender and sexual inclusion in teacher education and ongoing professional development is necessary to foster truly supportive and inclusive school environments [9].

At the leadership level, the persistence of traditional gender roles further perpetuates exclusion and heteronormativity. Many educational leaders, while superficially acknowledging diversity, fail to engage deeply with global movements toward gender inclusivity, resulting in schools that maintain

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.LC20374

exclusionary practices [10]. There is often a significant gap between the global ideals of gender inclusivity and the local implementation of these ideas. Leadership, in particular, plays a crucial role in either challenging or perpetuating these systemic inequalities. Therefore, leadership must not only acknowledge diversity but also critically address the intersectional issues of gender, race, and class, moving beyond tokenistic approaches [11,12].

To enact meaningful change, transformational leadership rooted in social justice and equity is required. Such leadership can deconstruct existing power structures, integrating gender and sexual orientation into all aspects of school life. This would involve embedding positive representations of LGBTQ+ identities into curricula and moving away from traditional masculine leadership models towards more inclusive and intersectional practices [13]. A truly transformative approach to leadership in education must prioritize inclusivity, not just as an abstract goal but as a practical, ongoing commitment to equity [14].

3. Foucault's Perspective on Subjectification

Taking Foucault's perspective on subjectification, individuals are constituted as subjects through mechanisms of control and dependence, engaging with themselves via a conscious relationship [15]. This illustrates the operation of power. Schools, as social institutions, play a pivotal role in this process of subjectification. Through disciplinary practices, regulation, and surveillance, institutions shape and standardize individuals' behaviors and thoughts, aligning them with societal expectations. Here, knowledge functions not merely as a repository of information but as an instrument of power. As individuals acquire and internalize knowledge, they are unconsciously shaped by the dynamics of power, which they observe, analyze, and interpret. This process drives the formation of specific subject identities. Crucially, individuals internalize societal norms and rules, which leads to a form of self-surveillance and self-discipline. Even in the absence of external oversight, they regulate their behaviors and thoughts in accordance with these internalized standards.

4. The Impact of Gender Issues in Education on Teachers' Professional Identity and Vocational Learning

Gender issues in the field of education intersect with other factors, creating a complex situation for both teachers and students. In China, gender has a significant impact on teachers' professional identity and professional learning. Research indicates that female teachers often demonstrate a higher sense of professional identity and active engagement, dedicating more emotion and time to teaching activities [16]. They not only show greater concern for students' learning but also exhibit a stronger commitment to their teaching roles. However, this enthusiasm is not directly related to biological gender itself but is more closely linked to socially assigned gender roles and traits [17]. In fact, female teachers who possess traditional 'masculine traits' often display higher levels of professional engagement and teaching effectiveness. Therefore, viewing teachers' professional identity and commitment solely from a biological gender perspective is insufficient. It is noteworthy that this emotional labor in teaching, although crucial for students' growth and learning, is often excluded from evaluations of teachers' professional value, leading to the contribution of female teachers being overlooked or undervalued [18]. This also reflects a lack of adequate attention and support for the role of women in teaching within educational policies and systems.

5. The Effects of Gender Stereotypes on Students' Self-perception and Academic Achievement

Gender stereotypes also have a significant impact on students' self-perception and academic achievement in terms of subject performance. Data from the China Education Panel Survey (CEPS)

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.LC20374

indicate that female students generally outperform male students in core subjects such as Chinese, English, and mathematics, with particularly strong performance in language-related subjects [19]. However, despite their higher actual performance, female students often rate their mathematical abilities lower and receive less praise and fewer opportunities for interaction in the classroom compared to male students. Female teachers play a crucial role in positively influencing female students' self-perception and mathematics performance, as they tend to offer more questions and praise, which helps female students achieve better academic outcomes and improve their self-assessment of their abilities. Nonetheless, female students still perceive mathematics as less important for their future lives and careers than male students do, suggesting that they view mathematics as less relevant to their own development. This phenomenon indicates that, although support from female teachers can contribute to immediate academic improvement, the long-term effects of gender stereotypes remain difficult to eradicate [20]. Further research has also found that teachers' gender stereotypes influence their expectations and evaluations of students, thereby affecting students' actual performance [21]. Teachers who hold strong stereotypes tend to have higher expectations for female students in reading, leading to more attention and opportunities in these areas, while male students may be overlooked or perceived as less capable compared to female students.

Gender issues are also highly evident in language learning and education. Research shows that female learners tend to provide more comprehensible input and actively engage in dialogues and learning activities, while male learners are more focused on output and demonstrating their abilities. This gender difference is continuously reinforced in classroom interactions, where male students are usually more talkative, while female students participate more earnestly and diligently in language learning activities. However, the process of language learning is not merely about mastering language skills; it is also about the construction and identification of gender identities. Language learning can serve as an opportunity to challenge traditional gender constructs, helping learners find a balance between different cultural and gender identities. Nevertheless, many teaching materials and methods subtly reinforce traditional gender norms, failing to effectively guide students in critically reflecting on gender differences. This further hinders the promotion of gender equality and diversity within the education system.

Moreover, neoliberal education reforms have had a significant gender impact on literacy practices in education, further reinforcing traditional gender binaries. Literacy practices are often positioned as neutral skills, but in reality, they are imbued with masculine traits such as competitiveness and individualism, which are given a privileged status. This positioning often leads to female students being seen as passive recipients in literacy activities, while male students are perceived as more creative and proactive producers. This gendered interpretation of literacy practices limits students' potential and reinforces the established roles of boys and girls in learning environments, further entrenching gender inequality. Additionally, the education system often places greater emphasis on measurable outcomes, such as standardized test scores, while neglecting a broader pursuit of gender equality and social justice. This overemphasis on individual achievement overlooks systemic inequalities, especially for students who occupy marginalized positions in society. For example, the education system often focuses on improving girls' performance in science courses but fails to consider how they interact with science and how they identify with the subject. These phenomena suggest that merely focusing on academic achievement cannot resolve gender disparities in science education. True gender equality requires a transformation of the educational environment to reflect the diverse life experiences and perspectives of different genders.

6. The Profound Influence of School Culture on Students

School culture, under the global trends of gender cognition and norms, has a profound impact on students' identity formation, academic performance, and overall well-being, particularly for

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.LC20374

LGBTQ+ students. Gender issues within schools are often overlooked, becoming an implicit 'invisible' force, primarily because school priorities are frequently dominated by the discourse of 'school efficiency,' which marginalizes gender-related topics. In such an environment, students' gender identities and expressions are often shaped and constrained by the school culture.

In the classroom, femininity is often devalued, with male students typically dominating the production and dissemination of knowledge and culture. This is reflected not only in the systemic neglect and marginalization of female students' perspectives by male peers, teachers, and the entire school system but also in the glorification of masculine traits in textbooks and teaching content. Schools not only mirror the gender relations present in society but actively reproduce these relations, maintaining and reinforcing gender divisions and inequalities. Male students often enjoy higher status and attention, with teachers more likely to attribute their success to innate talent, whereas female students' achievements are typically seen as the result of effort. For example, male students exert control and dominance over female students by utilizing cultural texts, gender narratives, and linguistic advantages, thereby establishing their male identity. This gender discrimination and stereotyping even influence teachers, who often adopt a neutral stance on gender issues and fail to effectively challenge gender biases in the classroom. As a result, teachers' instructional methods further reinforce gender inequality and consolidate the authoritative position of male students in the classroom.

The establishment and maintenance of this power structure not only affect female students' subjectivity formation and self-expression but also limit the possibilities for male students to explore diverse gender roles. Although some female students are willing to experiment with male roles in the classroom, male students are rarely inclined to take on female roles, illustrated the disadvantaged position of femininity within school culture and the constraints that gender norms place on male students' engagement in cross-gender identification. Furthermore, the maintenance of this gender order is not solely determined by interactions among students; school regulations, organizational management, disciplinary measures, and other factors also play a role. As a result, gender norms become a deeply ingrained part of school life, influencing students' identity formation and behavioral expression.

Ferfolja and Ullman have pointed out, the notion of heterosexual and cisnormativity are deeply entrenched into school culture and practice, leading to widespread gender- and sexuality-based harassment and bullying, which intensifies the sense of marginalization among LGBTQ+ students [9]. In America, approximately 70% of LGBTQ+ students face harassment based on their sexual orientation, which could also find out in England and New Zealand. This virulent school environment usefully leads to decreased academic performance, reduced school engagement, truancy, and psychological health challenges for LGBTQ+ students. This 'restrictive culture,' which disregards gender and sexual orientation diversity, makes it difficult for LGBTQ+ students to find recognition and support within the school environment. What's more, schools often address these issues through general anti-bullying frameworks rather than directly confronting the systemic issues of gender and sexual orientation bias. Such an approach overlooks the root causes of discrimination and fails to effectively address the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ students within the school culture.

7. Leadership As a Solution

Educational leadership plays a crucial role in shaping and transforming gender norms within schools; however, many school leaders still unconsciously reproduce and reinforce traditional gender roles, hindering the development of diverse gender expressions and identities. To achieve genuine change, leaders must first engage in deep reflection and understanding of gender issues and take proactive steps to alter existing cultures and practices. Although women make up the majority of the teaching workforce globally, their representation in senior educational leadership positions remains

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.LC20374

significantly lacking. This phenomenon not only reflects the persistent gender inequality in the education sector but also further entrenches traditional gender norms and patriarchal values within schools. Research indicates that this imbalance is due to the ongoing impact of gender discrimination and stereotypes on women, while factors such as the lack of mentorship, support networks, and career development opportunities further hinder women's advancement to leadership roles. Additionally, societal expectations of women's dual roles in family and work make it challenging for them to achieve equal progress in their careers.

Promoting more women into educational leadership positions is of great significance. Research has found that female leaders typically adopt a more collaborative, relational, and inclusive leadership style, emphasizing communication, teamwork, and connections with others. This leadership style contrasts with the traditional masculine leadership style, which tends to focus more on authority and control. Female leaders place greater emphasis on teaching and learning, support teachers' professional development, and focus on student learning outcomes. This shift in leadership style contributes to fostering a more inclusive school culture and provides a better learning environment for students.

Support from educational leaders is crucial for teachers' professional identity and development. The study by Qin & Liu points out that principals' support for teachers' professional development, especially in resource-limited schools, can significantly enhance teachers' sense of professional identity and their enthusiasm for participating in professional learning [16]. By providing resources, promoting collaboration, and building trust, principals can motivate teachers to engage in professional development, thereby fostering a school environment conducive to teacher growth. To effectively address gender issues, educational leaders need to recognize the influence of gender within school culture and implement targeted strategies to promote gender equality. Traditional leadership models often emphasize male traits such as authority, control, and competition, overlooking the importance of gender diversity. Adopting a more collaborative and relationship-oriented leadership style can help create an inclusive and supportive school culture. Leaders need to cultivate a school environment that is sensitive to gender issues and proactive in addressing them, ensuring that all students and staff are treated fairly and have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

8. Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the persistent gender inequalities embedded within educational systems, influenced by both local cultural norms and global trends. Despite the introduction of anti-discrimination policies and global movements toward inclusivity, traditional gender roles and hegemonic masculinity continue to dominate school cultures, reinforcing heteronormativity and cisnormativity. These systemic issues disproportionately affect marginalized students, particularly LGBTQ+ individuals, contributing to adverse academic and social outcomes. Schools, as key sites of socialization, have the capacity to either perpetuate or dismantle these inequalities through their policies, practices, and leadership.

The role of leadership in education is crucial in driving structural change. Traditional models of leadership, often shaped by patriarchal values, fail to adequately address the intersectional challenges faced by diverse gender and sexual identities. In contrast, transformational leadership, grounded in principles of social justice and equity, offers a more inclusive framework. By embracing intersectionality and fostering a culture of diversity, educational leaders can create learning environments that not only recognize but celebrate the identities of all students.

However, achieving genuine inclusivity requires more than superficial reforms. It necessitates a deep, critical reflection on the power dynamics within educational institutions and a commitment to addressing the root causes of exclusion. Through comprehensive leadership development and a focus on gender-inclusive policies, schools can evolve into spaces that empower all students, regardless of

DOI: 10.54254/2753-7048/2025.LC20374

gender or sexuality, to thrive both academically and personally. Only through such transformative efforts can true equality in education be realized.

References

[1] *M. Arnot, (2006)Gender equality, pedagogy and citizenship: Affirmative and transformative approaches in the UK, Theory and Research in Education, vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 131–150.*

[2] *J. Elias and C. Beasley, (2009) Hegemonic Masculinity and Globalization: "Transnational Business Masculinities" and Beyond, Globalizations, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 281–296.*

[3] *E. Unterhalter and A. North, Girls' Schooling, Gender Equity, and the Global Education and Development Agenda: Conceptual Disconnections, Political Struggles, and the Difficulties of Practice, Feminist Formations, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 1–22, 2011, Accessed: Sep. 04, 2024. [Online]. Available: https://www.jstor.org/stable/41301670*

[4] *L. T. Tsang, (2023)Multiplicity, diversity and individualization behind shuttlecock play: Chinese sportsmen's masculinities in today's China, Global Media and China, vol. 8, no. 4, pp. 462–479.*

[5] *J. Ullman and T. Ferfolja, (2015)Bureaucratic constructions of sexual diversity: "sensitive", "controversial" and silencing, Teaching Education, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 145–159.*

[6] *T. Zook, (2017) Promising Pedagogy: Advancing the Educational Experience of Queer Students Through Transformative Leadership, Journal of Homosexuality, vol. 64, no. 13, pp. 1755–1777.*

[7] *T. Ferfolja and J. Ullman, (2017) Gender and sexuality diversity and schooling: progressive mothers speak out, Sex Education, vol. 17, no. 3, pp. 348–362.*

[8] *E. Indermaur and C. Simpson, (2020) Case Study: Centering Queer Students, in Transformative Leadership in Action: Allyship, Advocacy & Activism, J. A. Bruce and K. E. McKee, Eds., Emerald Publishing Limited, pp. 139–145.*

[9] *T. Ferfolja and J. Ullman, (2020) Schooling and a Culture of Limitation: Implications for Gender and Sexuality Diverse Students and Their Classmates, in Gender and Sexuality Diversity in a Culture of Limitation, Routledge.*

[10] *H. J. Nichols, (2023) School principals' responses in creating an inclusive schooling space for gender and sexual diverse learners, African Journal of Career Development, vol. 5, no. 1, Art. no. 1.*

[11] *L. M. Shore and B. G. Chung, (2022) Inclusive Leadership: How Leaders Sustain or Discourage Work Group Inclusion, Group & Organization Management, vol. 47, no. 4, pp. 723–754.*

[12] *K. Pollock and P. Briscoe, (2020) School principals' understandings of student difference and diversity and how these understandings influence their work, The International Journal of Educational Management, vol. 34, no. 3, pp. 518–534.*

[13] *V. E. Sojo, M. A. Wheeler, and M. K. Ryan, (2023) Accelerating gender and sexuality inclusion in organisations: Introduction to the special issue and academic agenda, Australian Journal of Management, vol. 48, no. 4, pp. 683–692.*

[14] *D. Knights, (2022) Disrupting masculinities within leadership: Problems of embodiment, ethics, identity and power', Leadership, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 266–276.*

[15] *M. Foucault, (1982) The Subject and Power', Critical Inquiry, vol. 8, no. 4, pp. 777–795.*

[16] *X. Qin and S. Liu, (2023) The relationship between principal support, teacher professional identity, and teacher professional learning in China: Investigating gender differences, Psychology in the Schools, vol. 60, no. 12, pp. 4871–4884.*

[17] *I. Moses, W. F. Admiraal, and A. K. Berry, (2016) Gender and gender role differences in student–teachers' commitment to teaching, Soc Psychol Educ, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 475–492.*

[18] *V. Restler, (2019) Countervisualities of care: re-visualizing teacher labor, Gender and Education, vol. 31, no. 5, pp. 643–654.*

[19] *D. Xu and Q. Li, (2018) Gender achievement gaps among Chinese middle school students and the role of teachers' gender, Economics of Education Review, vol. 67, pp. 82–93.*

[20] *L. Doornkamp, L. D. Van der Pol, S. Groeneveld, J. Mesman, J. J. Endendijk, and M. G. Groeneveld, (2022) Understanding gender bias in teachers' grading: The role of gender stereotypical beliefs, Teaching and Teacher Education, vol. 118, p. 103826.*

[21] *F. Muntoni and J. Retelsdorf, (2018) Gender-specific teacher expectations in reading—The role of teachers' gender stereotypes, Contemporary Educational Psychology, vol. 54, pp. 212–220.*