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Women in Learning Leadership in Ghana: Barriers, enablers and policy pathways

A mixed-methods study to advance gender equality in education



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Executive summary

Ghana has a strong policy commitment to gender equality. Equal participation of women and men is mandated in all spheres of life through Article 17 of the 1992 Constitution and the National Gender Policy (2015). Despite these commitments, gender disparities persist across sectors, including education. Women make up a large share of the teaching workforce, yet they hold only 19 per cent of leadership positions in basic schools and 12 per cent of faculty posts at tertiary institutions. Regional disparities are particularly marked, with women in rural and northern regions facing compounded challenges such as limited resources, distance and entrenched social expectations. Understanding these intersecting factors is essential for more equitable leadership.

This study explores women's representation and experiences in school leadership across Ghana, identifying barriers and enabling factors shaping their progression into headteacher and other senior roles. The study utilized a mixed-methods design guided by a socio-ecological framework to explore the structural, institutional and individual influences on women's access to leadership roles. It aims to provide evidence and inform practical strategies for advancing gender equality and strengthening leadership development within the education sector.

Key findings

Both women and men headteachers report similar day-to-day challenges – financial management, resource constraints, poor infrastructure and student absenteeism, particularly in rural areas. Yet they experience these challenges differently: women carry the additional weight of domestic responsibilities, financial dependence, and community resistance, which compound the systemic pressures that men are less likely to face. Notably, despite these added burdens, women report lower stress levels, higher job satisfaction, and are less likely to consider leaving the profession than their male peers – a striking indicator of their commitment and resilience.

Although men and women hold comparable qualifications and experience, women remain significantly underrepresented in school leadership. Data provided by Ghana's Education Management Information System (EMIS) reveal that only 6 per cent of the gender gap in headship is explained by observable factors such as age or qualifications, while 90 per cent remains unexplained, pointing to systemic inequality rather than differences in merit or ability.

Gendered perceptions of leadership persist among both male and female headteachers, who tend to rate their own gender more favourably across leadership traits, reflecting broader societal norms that shape selection processes and expectations.

The barriers women face are systemic and deeply interlinked, operating across three dimensions:

- Gender norms: Stereotypes that cast leadership as a male domain, community scrutiny and moral judgment, disproportionate domestic burdens, and internalized self-doubt that discourages women from applying – even when equally qualified;
- Mobility and safety: Limited safe housing and transport in remote areas, making rural postings disproportionately difficult for women with family responsibilities; and
- Institutional processes: Opaque recruitment, heavy administrative workload with limited financial incentives, and insufficient mentorship or structured support within the system.

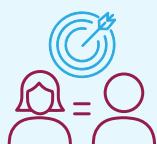
Where women do progress into leadership, key enablers include spousal and family support, mentorship from district officials and peers, and prior leadership experience. Support from both men and women is critical, underscoring the importance of inclusive efforts in advancing equality.

Recommendations for the Ministry of Education

Based on the evidence, the following recommendations for the Ministry of Education of Ghana are highlighted below. They require a coordinated and comprehensive approach, with adequate resourcing and sustained commitment, to support women in school leadership.



1. Strengthen and professionalize school leadership: Standardize and formalize clear and transparent recruitment criteria to reduce bias and political interference, establish national competency standards for headteachers, and invest in regular, needs-based training. Critically, equip School Improvement Support Officers with the resources and training needed to shift from compliance-focused supervision towards genuine mentoring and coaching of school leaders.



2. Introduce targeted gender-equality measures: Pilot progressive, context-sensitive quotas (temporary at the start) for women in school leadership, aligned with Ghana's existing 40 per cent representation commitments. Complement quotas with gender-sensitive workplace policies such as parental leave, childcare services, flexible working, and protections against harassment and discrimination to ensure women can succeed once in post. Scholarships and structured mentorship programmes are particularly important in districts with low women's representation.



3. Improve rural and remote teaching and living conditions: With 64 per cent of schools in rural areas, progress on gender equality in leadership will depend heavily on making these postings viable. Practical, relatively low-cost measures, including safe housing partnerships, transport stipends, childcare support and local recruitment, can meaningfully improve retention and expand the pool of women leaders.



4. Transform harmful gender norms through system-wide engagement: Sustainable change requires action at every level. This includes reviewing curricula and teaching materials to remove stereotypes, building educators' capacity to apply gender-responsive pedagogy, and implementing school-based programmes that engage students – particularly boys – in dialogue about gender equality. Community outreach involving parents, religious leaders and local authorities is equally essential, as is early intervention beginning at pre-primary level.



CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Why focus on women school leaders?

International literature, including studies conducted in sub-Saharan Africa, shows effective school leadership and management play a vital role in improving education outcomes (Bush et al., 2022; Grissom et al., 2021). The evidence recognizes leadership as the second most important factor influencing student learning, after classroom teaching (Leithwood et al., 2004). School leaders¹ shape the environment in which teaching and learning take place. They strengthen school organization and culture, motivate and support teachers, enhance the quality of pedagogy, and contribute to student well-being. School leaders also foster positive relationships between schools and communities, reinforcing improvements in student learning and development (Anand et al., 2023).

¹ In this report, the terms ‘school leader’ and ‘headteacher’ are used interchangeably to refer to the administrative and pedagogical heads of schools in Ghana.

Ghana’s Ministry of Education (MoE) also identified school leadership as a strategic lever for enhancing basic education quality. The Education Sector Plan 2018–2030 identified that “School leadership and management, particularly in relation to the oversight and mentorship of teachers, ensuring time-on-task, and the administration of the capitation grant, is poor.” The plan refocuses on strengthening school leadership capacity to better support teachers and students.

Recent studies from low- and middle-income countries show that women in school leadership positions is associated with improved education outcomes in many contexts (Bergmann, et al., 2022). In Kenya, students in women-led schools had higher scores in oral reading fluency in both English and Kiswahili compared to students in schools led by men (Freudenberger and Davis, 2017). Similarly, in Togo, primary students in women-led schools achieved better national examination results and higher promotion rates. The positive influence of women leaders is particularly pronounced for girls, contributing to a reduction in gender disparities in learning outcomes (UNICEF Innocenti and Ministry of Education Togo, 2023). These findings hold after accounting for contextual and geographical factors. Women school leaders are also associated with improvements in student well-being (Global School Leaders, 2021). Where outcomes do not differ by gender, women-led schools perform on par with men-led schools, reinforcing women’s effectiveness and readiness for school leadership roles.

Increasing the representation of women in school leadership reinforces role model effects and challenges restrictive gender norms. Evidence shows that exposure to female role models narrows the gender gap in parents’ and girls’ aspirations (Beaman et al., 2012), modifies beliefs and attitudes around gender equality (Kipchumba et al., 2021) and can decrease girls’ vulnerability to sexual harassment and abuse while supporting educational outcomes in contexts where girls are isolated or face greater threats of violence (Sperling et al., 2015).

In Ghana, evidence highlights the importance of women leaders. A study found women-led schools performed better in the Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), particularly in English, in 2021 (UNICEF Innocenti, 2023). Better performance linked to women leaders was even stronger in rural schools. While the study couldn’t disentangle why women-led schools performed better, this factor, coupled with other regional

evidence, suggests that women leaders perform as well as or better than their peers. Their presence can also unlock a cycle of female role models, challenging gendered norms about a woman's place in society.

Yet women remain underrepresented in basic school leadership and upper grade teaching. According to Ghana's 2021 EMIS data, 19 per cent of basic schools were led by women: 13 per cent of rural schools versus 28 per cent of urban schools. This is despite 50 per cent of basic school teachers being women, near parity at the primary level (46 per cent women), and 28 per cent at junior high school (JHS) level.²

Why is this the case? This research addresses the MoE aim to understand and address women's underrepresentation in school leadership. It identifies barriers women face in reaching and succeeding in leadership roles to inform programmes and policies that can enable more women leaders.

1.2 Research purpose and scope

Despite women's underrepresentation in school leadership in Ghana and other countries of sub-Saharan Africa (Alban Conto et al., 2023; Bergmann et al., 2022), limited evidence exists on the systemic and personal barriers contributing to women's underrepresentation and, more importantly, on levers to help women better access and succeed in school leadership.

This research, conducted by UNICEF Innocenti and Global School Leaders with the MoE of Ghana, addresses this gap by generating contextual evidence and identifying avenues for policy action.

The study combines a nationally representative phone survey of school leaders,³ with qualitative insights from a smaller sample of school leaders, teachers and district staff. It was co-created and co-implemented with MoE officials and national technical experts. National consultations at the launch and during the research refined hypotheses about potential barriers for data collection tools, identified sampling variables, and validated and contextualized key recommendations.

² Although EMIS data for senior high schools were not available for this study, external sources indicate that female representation drops further at this level, with women comprising just 24 per cent of senior high school teachers in 2021 (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, n.d.).

³ Primary data collection included a nationally representative phone survey with 665 school leaders, comprising 419 men and 246 women. More information can be found in Annex 2.

The remainder of the report is divided into four sections. Section 2 presents the country context and research rationale. Section 3 presents findings on gendered differences between school leaders and the barriers and enablers that women face. Section 4 presents conclusions and policy recommendations. Annexes 1–5 detail the research design, including research questions, analytical framework, empirical strategy, data and limitations.



CHAPTER 2

Country context

2.1 The education system in Ghana

The Government of Ghana, guided by Vision 2057 and aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4, has prioritized equitable, inclusive and high-quality education through strategic initiatives including the Education Strategic Plan (2018–2030) and the National Education Reform (2019–2030).

These policies, supported by constitutional guarantees such as Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education, the Free Senior High School policy and the Pre-Tertiary and Complementary Education Act of 2020, have expanded access significantly. Primary and JHS gross enrolment rates reached 107 and 98.4 per cent respectively by 2022/23 (Ministry of Education Ghana, 2023).

Ghana has achieved gender parity in enrolment across basic and secondary levels; however regional and district inequalities persist.

In 2022/23, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) across levels (kindergarten [KG], primary, JHS, senior high school [SHS]) ranged between 0.99 and 1.05.

However, at regional level, GPI for primary was low for Northern (0.93), Volta (0.93), and Northeast (0.97) regions (Ministry of Education Ghana, 2023).

Ghana has made progress retaining boys and girls in basic school, but challenges remain with secondary completion. Overall completion exceeds 100 per cent for KG and primary, and reaches 94 per cent for JHS but only 59 per cent for higher secondary. While most primary-aged children are enrolled, out-of-school rates escalate at lower and upper secondary levels. By age 17, 30 per cent of children are not enrolled. However, once enrolled, girls complete schooling at higher rates than boys at JHS and SHS levels (Ministry of Education Ghana, 2023).

More girls than boys remain out of school at secondary levels, translating into lower female literacy rates. The upper secondary out-of-school rate for girls was 29 per cent versus 21 per cent for boys in 2020 (MICS Eagle 2020). Girls drop out for reasons linked to social inequalities with distinct gender dimensions, including pregnancy, early marriage, family relocation, long commutes to school, and caring for younger or sick family members (Ministry of Education Ghana, 2023).

The 2021 Ghana Population and Housing Census shows literacy remains a challenge, especially for women. Female literacy stands at 50 per cent, compared to 60.2 per cent for men. At subnational level, disparities are more pronounced. Female literacy rates vary widely across regions, with a 55.1 per cent percentage point (pp) gap between Greater Accra (87.9 per cent) and Savannah (32.8 per cent). Northern and North East regions also show low rates at 35 per cent and 31 per cent, respectively (Ghana Statistical Service, 2022).

Gender inequalities in education are more pronounced in rural and poorer areas, where traditional gender norms and poverty strongly shape girls' schooling opportunities (Nartey et al., 2023; Francis and Laube, 2025). Girls from the poorest rural backgrounds average only four years of schooling, whereas peers from wealthy urban families can expect up to 13 years (MICS Eagle, 2020). Studies show rural girls shoulder a disproportionate burden of domestic chores compared to boys, reducing time available for study and contributing to absenteeism and dropout (Kyei-Gyamfi, 2025; Senyametor et al., 2021).

Despite legal frameworks such as the Children's Act (1998, amended) and the Marriage Act, setting 18 as the legal minimum age for marriage, child marriage remains a significant barrier to girls' education: 19 per cent of Ghanaian girls marry before age 18 and 5 per cent before age 15 (UNICEF, 2020). Teenage pregnancy and early unions are leading reasons for dropout in lower- and upper-secondary school.

Infrastructural barriers also play a key role. Many rural schools lack adequate water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) facilities, privacy for menstrual hygiene management, and functioning school canteens (Duah, 2024; Mensah et al., 2022), influencing attendance and retention for girls, especially adolescents.

Finally, while Ghana has successfully increased enrolment, low student learning levels persist. The 2022 National Standardized Test found only 21 and 17 per cent of grade 4 students met proficiency thresholds for mathematics and English, respectively (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2022). Foundational learning outcomes vary by region, student gender and school ownership (Ministry of Education et al., 2025). BECE and the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) results also indicate poor performance in English and mathematics and significant regional disparities, often to the detriment of girls (Ministry of Education, 2023).

Basic Education System in Ghana

The Ministry of Education (MoE) and Ghana Education Services (GES) jointly manage basic education provision. Basic education follows a 2-6-3 structure: two years kindergarten, six years primary, three years junior high school.

Beyond basic education, second-cycle education includes three years of senior high school and tertiary education encompasses a four-year degree. At secondary level, students choose either the academic track or the technical/ vocational track. Basic education is free and compulsory for all children since 1994, and for senior high school since September 2017.

Most basic schools in Ghana are rural. EMIS (2022/23) data show 64 per cent of schools were rural; 36 per cent urban.

The system is highly decentralized. The MoE develops education policies and sector plans, while GES implements policies through a decentralized network of 16 Regional Education Offices and 261 Metro, Municipal and District Education Directorates.

At national level, the MoE and GES headquarters oversee policymaking, strategic coordination and teacher management, linking national policy to regional and district

operations. Regional Education Offices and Metro, Municipal and District Education Directorates manage policy implementation and coordination. Schools deliver teaching and learning, provide school meals, oversee building maintenance, and handle other essential tasks.

District Directors hold significant authority, managing district education offices, adapting national policy and ensuring schools are running effectively.

They manage resources and planning, engage with schools, and facilitate training and performance appraisals (including for headteachers) ([Boakye-Yiadom et al., 2023](#)). Additional responsibilities include monitoring and data collection, and teacher promotions.

Semi-autonomous central agencies provide specialized services and are accountable to the MoE. The National Teaching Council is mandated to promote teacher professionalism in Ghana, the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission regulates tertiary education institutions (including where teachers and school leaders undergo pre-service training), and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment manages curriculum development and assessment standards.

2.2 Women's leadership and gender equality

Ghana's commitment to gender equality is enshrined in Article 17 of the 1992 Constitution, which guarantees gender equality and freedom from discrimination based on social or economic status (Republic of Ghana National Gender Policy, 2015). This constitutional commitment is reinforced through international instruments⁴ and has produced several National Development Plans/ Frameworks.⁵

The Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection provides policy direction on gender issues. The National Gender Policy provides policy strategies, guidelines and an institutional framework to embed gender equality into national development, particularly for women, girls and children.

A core policy commitment (Policy #3) is enhancing the participation of women in leadership, governance and decision-making at all levels.

Recently, the Affirmative Action (Gender Equality) Act, 2024 was enacted to address gender disparities across sectors, including education.

Despite this framework, challenges persist with women being underpaid and underrepresented in leadership. In 2024, only 14.5 per cent of seats in the National Parliament were held by women, despite a 40 per cent national quota,⁶ and significantly lower than the average of 26.9 per cent for sub-Saharan Africa ([World Bank Gender Data Portal](#)). According to the Ghana Statistical Service (2019), 51.4 per cent of employable women and 48.6 per cent of employable men with an average of basic education joined the labour market between 2016 and 2017. Yet, 93 per cent of senior leadership positions are held by men and only 7 per cent by women (Nartey et al., 2023). After adjusting for age, experience, education levels and other relevant factors, women in Ghana earn on average 34.2 per cent less than men (International Labour Organization, 2022).

4 Notably these include the Sustainable Development Goals, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) 1979, including the optional protocol (1999), and United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 on, respectively, the representation of women in conflict resolution and the recognition of sexual violence as a weapon and tactic of war, among many others.

5 Notably these include an Affirmative Action Policy of 1998 that provides for a 40 per cent quota of women's representation on all government and public boards, commissions, councils, committees and official bodies and the free maternal health policy, among various others.

6 The quota is enshrined in the National Gender Policy but is weakly enforced, resulting in lower actual representation.

Ghana's broader gender equality indicators reflect persistent structural inequalities. The Africa Gender Index (African Development Bank, 2024) ranks Ghana in the lower-mid range of African countries for gender parity in education, economic participation and political empowerment. In the Global Gender Gap Report 2024, Ghana ranked 107th out of 146 countries, behind many regional peers (World Economic Forum, 2024).

In education, women remain underrepresented in school leadership and upper-level teaching roles, especially at secondary and tertiary levels. While women comprise a significant proportion of pre-primary and primary teachers (as in many countries), their presence declines at higher levels of education (see section 3.2). In 2021, women held 19 per cent of leadership positions in Ghana's basic schools (Ministry of Education, EMIS 2020/21).

Women's underrepresentation in leadership roles is often shaped by sociocultural and institutional barriers, including gender stereotypes, limited mentorship and persistent norms positioning men more naturally in leadership. Societal expectations around women's domestic responsibilities, combined with unpaid care work, constrain women's economic and leadership participation (Bramucci et al., 2025; Bush et al, 2022; OECD, 2025).

Religious and traditional gender norms, particularly in Northern and some Central regions, further limit women's mobility and access to decision-making spaces. In parts of Northern Ghana, early marriage and conservative interpretations of gender roles persist despite legal prohibitions (Girls Not Brides, 2023). Local studies and development programming evaluations (e.g. Campaign for Female Education, Global Partnership for Education) suggest that women who pursue leadership or political roles often face social rejection, resistance from community leaders, and limited institutional support, especially in rural or more patriarchal areas.



CHAPTER 3

Key research findings and discussion

3.1 Headteacher recruitment and management

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- **Central but complex role:** Headteachers manage all aspects of school operations, guided by extensive MoE manuals but facing high responsibility.
- **Selection is semi-structured:** GES-led processes (applications/interviews) dominate, with direct postings used in rural areas when candidates are scarce.
- **Shift toward merit, but inconsistencies remain:** Appointment criteria are becoming more objective, though some political influence and informal factors persist.
- **Encouragement drives applications:** SISOs and senior staff play a key role in prompting qualified candidates to apply.
- **Major training gap:** Most headteachers receive little formal leadership preparation, relying on orientation, ad hoc training, and informal support.

School leaders in Ghanaian basic schools are responsible for mobilizing human, financial and material resources to manage all aspects of basic education in the school, including community engagement.

They are critical for school functioning, financial administration, record keeping, teacher guidance and school-community relationships. The MoE headteachers manual – a document of over 300 pages – is the main resource guiding them on expectations and strategies for successfully managing schools.

No formal policy or legislation governs headteacher selection and appointment in Ghana, although Ghana Education Service (GES) provides administrative guidelines. GES appoints headteachers for all basic education schools through District Education Offices (DEOs). District Directors appoint headteachers for schools within their districts.

Selection is done in two primary ways.

- 1. Most commonly, DEOs circulate vacancy announcements, shortlist qualified candidates, and conduct interviews.** The DEO (or occasionally the Regional Education Office) posts vacancies and solicits applications (*Figure 1*). After screening applications and interviewing candidates, some districts also administer written tests. Applicants must meet minimum criteria: a bachelor's degree, at least 5 years of teaching experience, and being at Assistant Director 1 grade or higher.⁷ Additional criteria such as certificates (Dampson, 2019) and basic IT skills (mentioned during study interviews) are receiving greater consideration. Selection criteria beyond rank and academic qualifications vary slightly.

⁷ The salary structure in Ghana's Civil Service is determined by the Single Spine Salary Structure, which was introduced in 2010 to streamline salaries and reduce disparities in public sector pay. Salaries are dependent on grades, which range from Grade 1 to Grade 20. Assistant Director 1 is equivalent to Grade 13.

Figure 1: Sample headteacher requirements, Ghana Education Service Central Region vacancy announcement

REQUIREMENT/QUALIFICATIONS

Applicants must strictly satisfy the following list of qualifications:

a. Must be a Graduate Professional Teacher with at least five (5) years of teaching experience in a Second Cycle School. A Second Degree is an advantage.

b. Must be on the grade of an Assistant Director I or above and must have been on the grade for a minimum of two (2) years.

c. Must be able to serve at least four (4) years before he/she retires from the service.

d. Must have held any one or a combination of the following positions for a minimum of two (2) years.

- Unit Head at Metro/Municipal/District Education Directorates
- Head of Department
- Senior Housemaster/Housemistress
- Guidance and Counselling Coordinator
- In addition to the above, an applicant must have a satisfactory conduct and work history with the Ghana Education Service
- Applicant must be ready to accept appointment and postings to any school within the Region where vacancy may exist for Assistant Head

Source: Drawn from an online vacancy announcement posted on [CoverGhana](#)

“When we started, you would go to a school and the senior teacher would become the head. That means the person with the highest qualification. For the initial ones [headteachers], it wasn't based on high qualifications, it was the years, the number of years you have been in the system or the service. So, that was what we were dealing with until they introduced the application. [Today] when you reach a certain rank, you are qualified to apply. So, when you apply, they will take you through an interview and if you are successful, then they will give you an appointment as a substantive head.”

Male headteacher, urban school n°2, Northern Region

Objectivity in headteacher appointment criteria has improved in Ghana over the past decade.

Studies indicate appointments historically prioritized seniority, political, religious, or tribal affiliations over merit or leadership capabilities (Bush and Oduro, 2006; Donkor, 2015). A systematic review found that long service and political affiliation to the ruling government were previously considered criteria (Dare et al., 2025). A 2008 study found that 59.1 per cent of basic school headteachers were appointed based on long service (Dampson, 2019; Afful-Broni, 2008).

Surveyed headteachers and officials in this study rarely cited such criteria, indicating positive developments. While experience is considered, long service alone carries less weight today, although some respondents mentioned age as a consideration for commanding staff respect.

Some District Directors, headteachers, and teachers shared that political interference can influence headteacher placement or management, although the extent of the prevalence is unclear.

Examples included a District Director instructed by a politician to halt a headteacher transfer, and a Director who negotiated with the spouse of an underperforming headteacher's Member of Parliament. Such influence erodes both DEO ability to adequately staff schools and headteacher professionalization, and may affect men and women differently.

Interviews reveal that School Improvement Support Officers (SISOs)⁸ and DEO staff actively encourage qualified candidates to apply for vacancies. Headteachers and teachers shared that SISOs and headteachers regularly urge teachers to apply. Several noted that they had not initially planned to apply but were prompted by encouragement from a SISO or senior colleague.

2. Direct posting is another approach, more common in rural areas with limited qualified candidates.

While generally the process is open, when district officers receive insufficient qualified applications, they may directly recommend and appoint candidates, particularly in rural or remote contexts where positions are less appealing. This has also been documented in previous studies (Dampson, 2019).

Headteachers receive no formal leadership training before assuming their role. The GES does not offer a structured leadership programme for new headteachers (Dare et al., 2025; interviews in this study). Most headteachers reported that they received an orientation focused on administrative matters: financial record-keeping, personnel management, and the preparation of School Performance Improvement Plans. Indeed 71 per cent of headteachers – men and women alike – felt that they had received insufficient training to prepare

“So, you go to the deprived areas and the headteachers there, most of them don't even attend interviews. Yes. Most of them don't even attend interview, you are looking for somebody to look after the school for you. So, you check the active person in the school and then at times [you] don't even look at the rank. And plead with the person to take care of the school for you. The young guys who are very strong, energetic and active, so that they take it for you. Whether it's Senior Superintendent 2 or Principal.”

**Male District Director, urban area
n°3, Ashanti Region**

⁸ SISOs are frontline GES staff, overseen by District Directors, who serve as the link between DEOs and schools (Eghan, 2016). They supervise teaching and learning, mentor teachers, monitor school performance and ensure the effective implementation of education policies. Each SISO typically oversees 10–30 schools within a circuit.

them for their job, with rural headteachers more likely to feel this way. This presents a missed opportunity, as headteachers are ultimately responsible for fulfilling the MoE quality learning goals. Without evidence-based guidance, many navigate the complexity of school leadership independently. As one headteacher described, *“Initially, there was no training. So, you have to call on your mentors to guide you whenever you are facing problems in your school.”*

Professional development workshops, or short in-service trainings, are available after appointment, but are limited and ad hoc. Beyond initial orientation, interviewed headteachers described attending workshops for teachers and school leaders throughout their careers, including paid trainings run by GES, district offices, non-governmental organizations (Donkor 2015, interviews) or through large-scale government programmes like the Ghana Accountability and Learning Outcomes Project (GALOP).⁹

Our survey shows that 72 per cent of headteachers participated in trainings or workshops within the past year, with most finding sessions helpful. However, their irregular and topical nature means they are not consistently available. Moreover, trainings are rarely tailored to headteacher needs and are often scheduled without sufficient notice or consultation. In interviews, several headteachers expressed frustration with unpredictable timing, which disrupts planned activities and adds to a heavy workload. In general, basic school headteachers receive administrative training necessary to do their job, but exposure to leadership and management training is limited, and the quality of existing programmes is unclear.

9 GALOP, launched in June 2020 is a US\$214 million World Bank-funded education reform programme implemented with the MoE and GES. It aimed to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes in basic education, initially targeting the 10,000 lowest performing schools and later extended to all low-performing schools. Interventions included financial support, teacher training and support, learning assessments, and provision of teaching and learning materials, among others. More available at: [Development Projects : Ghana Accountability for Learning Outcomes Project - P165557](#)

3.2 The representation of women in school leadership¹⁰

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Basic Education System in Ghana

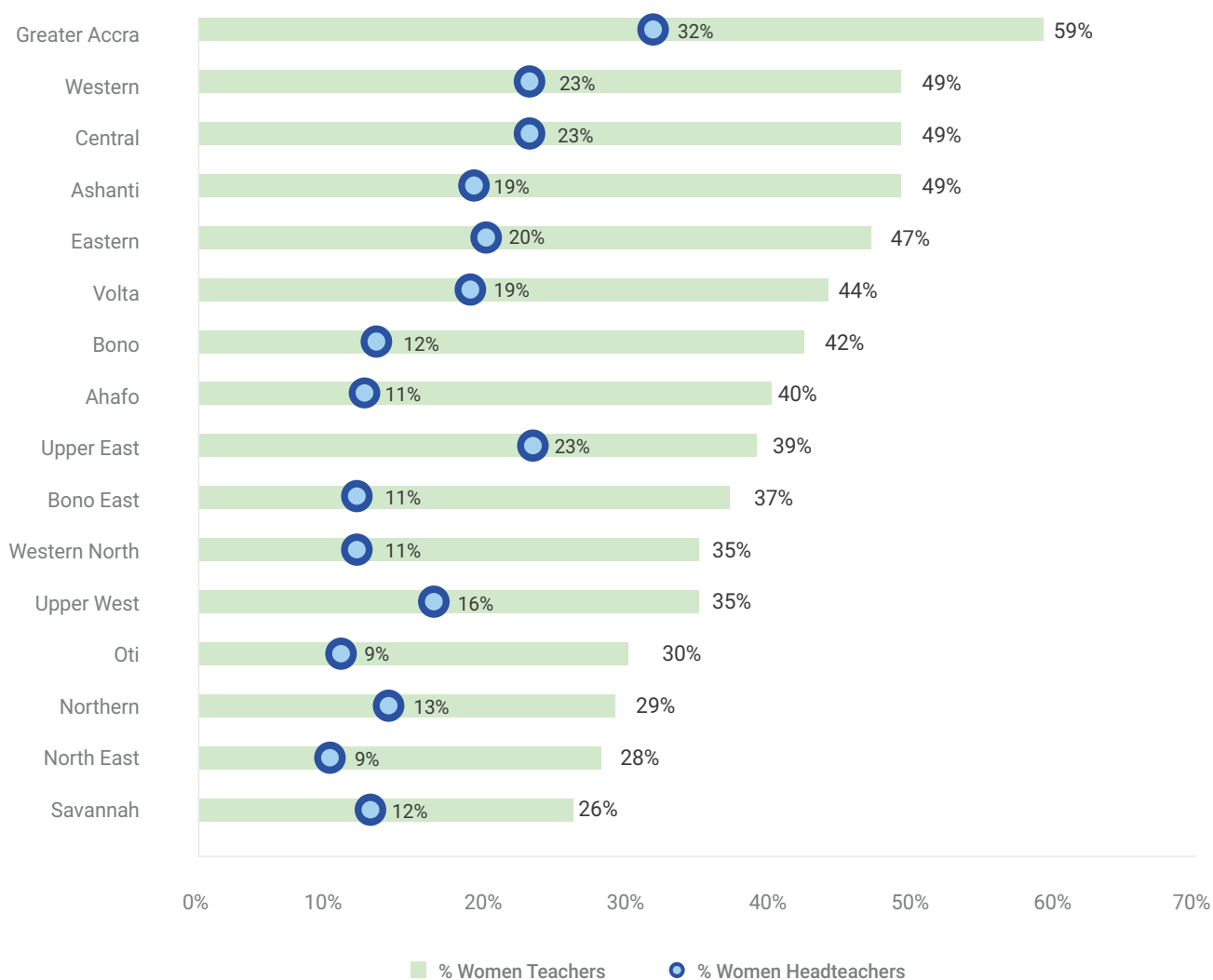
- **Women remain significantly underrepresented in school leadership:** only one in five basic schools is headed by a woman.
- **Regional disparities are wide,** with women more likely to be in urban than rural schools.
- **Women take two years longer** on average to reach headteacher positions, despite having higher qualifications.
- **Most of the gender gap in school leadership cannot be explained by experience or qualifications:** observable factors account for just 6 per cent, while 90 per cent remains unexplained – suggesting barriers to the appointment of women.

Women are underrepresented in school leadership positions, with wide regional variation. Nationally, only one in five basic schools are led by a woman, despite women comprising 50 per cent of basic schoolteachers (EMIS 2020/21). Women concentrate in lower grades: 87 per cent of KG teachers are women, compared to 46 per cent in primary and 28 per cent in JHS.

Regional variation is substantial. Women-led schools range from 9 per cent (Oti) to 32 per cent (Greater Accra) (Figure 2). Regions with higher proportions of women teachers tend to have more women in leadership. Greater Accra (59 per cent women teachers), Ashanti (49 per cent), Western (49 per cent), Central (49 per cent), Eastern (47 per cent), and Volta (44 per cent) are closest to gender parity among teachers and have the highest shares of women headteachers. This correlation reflects the headteacher appointment process, whereby inspectors select heads from existing teaching staff (see Section 3.1).

¹⁰ The key descriptive statistics quoted in this section were drawn from the Ghana EMIS data from years 2020/21 or 2022/23, depending on the specific variables and available data. The EMIS dataset includes rich data on all schools in the country.

Figure 2: Share of women teachers and headteachers in basic schools by region, 2021



Note: Graph is sorted in descending order of women's representation in the teacher workforce across regions.
Source: Authors' calculations using Ghana MoE EMIS Data, 2020/2021.

Women school leaders are more likely in urban than rural schools

(Figure 3). Only 13 per cent of rural school leaders are women, compared to 28 per cent in urban areas. As most Ghanaian children live in rural areas, this limits girls' exposure to women in leadership roles, which research shows shapes educational and career aspirations (Bramucci et al., 2025; Evans et al., 2023).

Figure 3: Proportion of women headteachers in rural and urban schools by region, 2021



Note: The graph is organized in descending order of urban-rural gap in the representation of women as headteachers. For example, Western region has the largest gap (23pp) and Greater Accra has the smallest (6 pp).

Source: Author's calculations using Ghana MoE EMIS Data, 2020/21. Graph originally created using Datawrapper.

Some districts have acute shortages of women in leadership. In 28 per cent of districts, 10 per cent or fewer of schools had women leaders (Annex 4). In two districts – Sene East and Yunyoo Nasuan – not a single school had a woman headteacher in 2021.¹¹

Despite higher qualifications, women take longer than men to reach headteacher positions (Table 1). On average, women headteachers have over four more years of teaching experience than men. They are also more qualified: 16 per cent hold master's degrees compared to 8 per cent of men. Yet, according to our survey, compared to men women took two years longer on average to reach the position of school leader (19 per cent more time). This gap persists after controlling for school and individual characteristics, indicating that the delay is not explained by women's higher qualifications.

¹¹ Sene East district is in Bono East region and Yunyoo Nasuan is in the North East Region.

Table 1: Characteristics of Ghanaian headteachers by gender, 2021

	Average age	Average years of teaching experience	Have a diploma or lower	Have a bachelor's degree or equivalent	Have a master's degree or above
Men headteachers	44.5	17	35%	57%	8%
Women headteachers	47.1	21	27%	57%	16%

Source: Author's calculations using Ghana MoE EMIS data, 2020/21.

Statistical analysis shows only a fraction of the gender gap in school leadership is explained by observable factors. The Oaxaca-Blinder Decomposition, a statistical method that helps explain why an outcome (such as being a headteacher) differs between two groups (here men and women) was applied to EMIS 2020/21 data revealing only 0.3 pp (6 per cent) of the gender gap is explained by differences in age and qualifications. The largest share, 4.8 pp (about 90 per cent), remains unexplained, indicating women with similar experience and qualifications face lower chances of appointment. This points to unobserved factors including biases or other barriers (Annex 3).

While EMIS data do not reveal the underlying reasons for women's longer progression and lower representation, qualitative evidence suggests several contributing factors, detailed in Section 3.3. Family responsibilities and social expectations can delay women's progression as they balance qualifications with marriage and childcare (Section 3.3.1). Some women are less likely to apply without encouragement (Section 3.3.2). Vacancy location is a further barrier: interviewed women shared that they are often less able to relocate, especially to remote or deprived areas, due to family constraints and limited spousal mobility. Consequently, qualified women may delay applying until suitable posts become available, while men are more likely to accept relocation. Indeed, the survey shows that men are 18 pp more likely to lead rural schools. A male District Director (urban area n°1, Tamale Region) explained, *"You may be the most senior female teacher, but if there's a vacancy in a deprived area and you can't take it, a junior male colleague who is willing will get the opportunity."* In some extreme cases, women avoid applying to be a headteacher altogether fearing later transfer far from home.

Where are women headteachers concentrated?¹

After controlling for qualifications, experience, school location, type and size, survey data reveals notable differences in schools led by men and women.

Public schools: Women are approximately 10 percentage points (pp) more likely than men to lead public schools.

Urban locations: Women are 18 pp more likely to head urban schools.

Junior high schools: Women are 11 pp less likely to head junior high schools.

Proportion of women teachers: On average, women-led schools have a 15 pp higher proportion of women teachers. This partly reflects women's concentration in public, urban and primary schools, which employ more women teachers. However, the relationship remains after controlling for these variables: women-led schools have 18.2 pp more female teachers in rural areas and 12.4 pp more in urban areas, relative to schools led by men.

Larger schools: Women lead schools with 52 more students enrolling, on average. This reflects their higher presence in public, urban and primary schools, which typically have larger student populations. Once these characteristics are controlled, the difference in school size is no longer statistically significant.

These findings show contexts in which women school leaders operate, but do not allow for causal interpretation. For the proportion of women teachers, several mechanisms could explain the association: (i) women school leaders may attract and retain more female teachers; (ii) they may apply to schools with higher shares of women teachers; or (iii) female teachers may prefer working under women leaders. These mechanisms are explored further in the report.

¹ Results based on nationally representative survey data; only statistically significant findings reported. Similar analysis using 2020/21 (complete) and 2022/23 (incomplete) EMIS data confirms these trends, deepening the findings' robustness.

3.3 Gendered patterns

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Basic Education System in Ghana

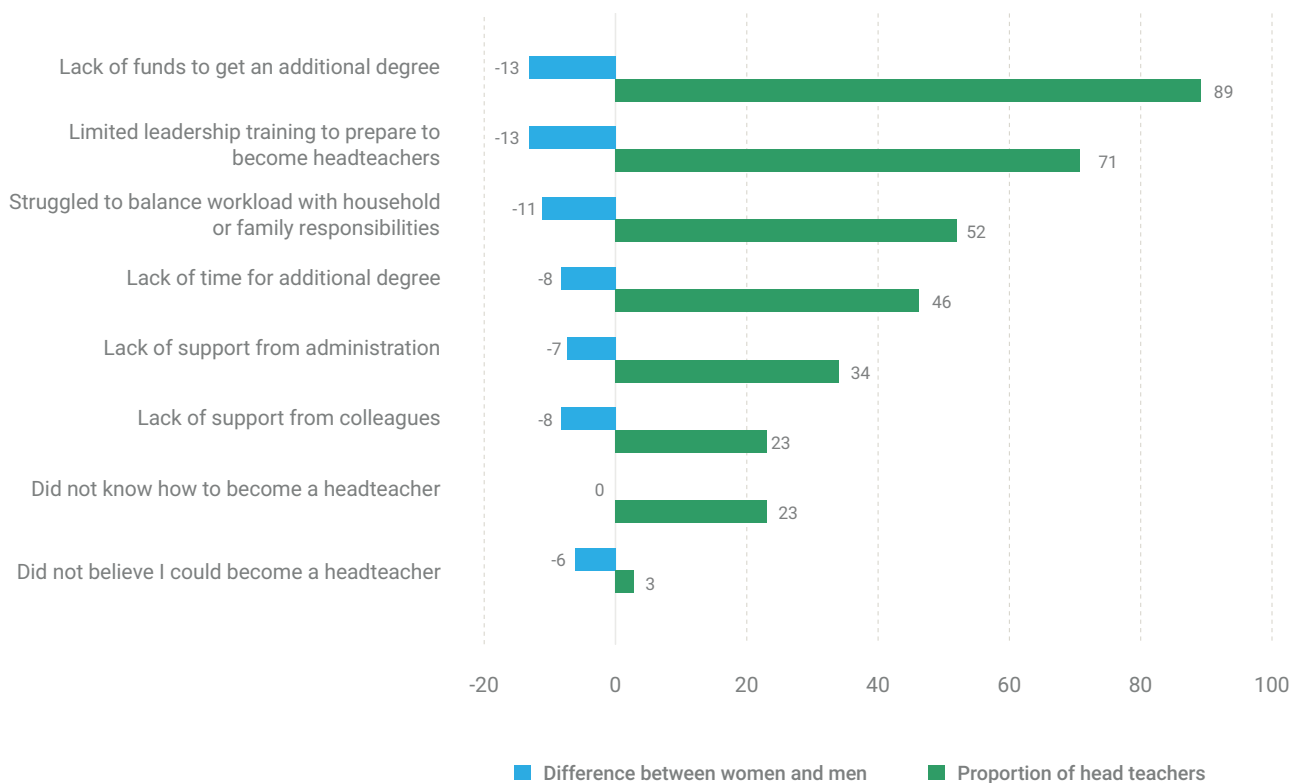
- **Women school leaders did not report greater hurdles than men in becoming headteachers.** Both pointed to the same issues: financial constraints in pursuing additional degrees (89 per cent); lack of leadership training (71 per cent); and work-life balance (52 per cent).
- **Women report slightly lower stress and greater job satisfaction than men,** despite facing similar challenges. Available data do not explain men's higher stress, though gendered expectations – such as norms positioning men as primary providers – may contribute and warrant further investigation.
- **Gender biases persist in leadership perceptions.** Education stakeholders describe women headteachers as more organized and communicative. Headteachers themselves display biases: men rated themselves more highly across leadership traits, as did women, pointing to gendered self-perception patterns.



3.3.1 Barriers on the path to becoming a headteacher

Common difficulties in becoming a school leader, as reported by both men and women, included lack of funds and time for obtaining degrees, limited leadership training, and difficulties balancing workload with family responsibilities (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Challenges affecting the professional journey of Ghanaian headteachers



Note: The blue bars represent differences in responses between men and women. A negative value suggests that men reported that issue at a higher rate. Only the dark blue bars represent statistically significant results (at 95% confidence interval).

Source: Nationally representative survey, 2024. N= 248 school leaders who faced challenges in professional journey.

Women headteachers did not report greater challenges than men across any survey categories. In most areas, men reported higher challenges, although these differences were generally not statistically significant. The only statistically significant difference was that men were **13 pp more likely** to report challenges accessing funds for additional degrees.¹² Men's greater reported challenges could link to gendered expectations that position men

¹² An additional degree refers to either a bachelor's or a master's. While a bachelor's degree is now the minimum requirement for most headteacher positions, preference is often given to candidates with a master's degree. This survey item assessed the extent to which access to any degree is perceived as a barrier. The analysis controlled for respondents' current qualifications.

as primary household providers, placing greater pressure on them (Nartey et al., 2023). This trend warrants further exploration.

Both men and women report lack of work life balance, highlighting the demanding nature of the headteacher role. Over half reported struggling to balance workload with household or family responsibilities, with no statistically significant gender differences. This contrasts with qualitative interviews where women and men both said that women bear a heavier share of household tasks.

Several factors may explain this discrepancy. Female headteachers may have different family arrangements or support systems that enable them to better manage domestic responsibilities. Alternatively, men and women may perceive or even report challenges differently. Men may prioritize fulfilling a financial provider role, while women may face strain from household and caregiving tasks but regard these as natural or expected – rather than professional – constraints. When asked about career challenges, a woman headteacher (urban school n°8, Ashanti Region) explained: *“No. If that would be a family challenge, I wouldn't say it is a challenge. I would say it happens to anyone or any female who is in her growing stage. That is, it comes at a time that a woman will give birth.”*

Most headteachers understood the process and requirements for becoming a school leader and felt confident performing the role effectively. However, about one third felt they lacked adequate administrative support during their journey into leadership.

The survey reflects headteacher perspectives. Conversations with teachers not in leadership reveal additional barriers, detailed in Section 3.4.

3.3.2 Headteachers' time across tasks

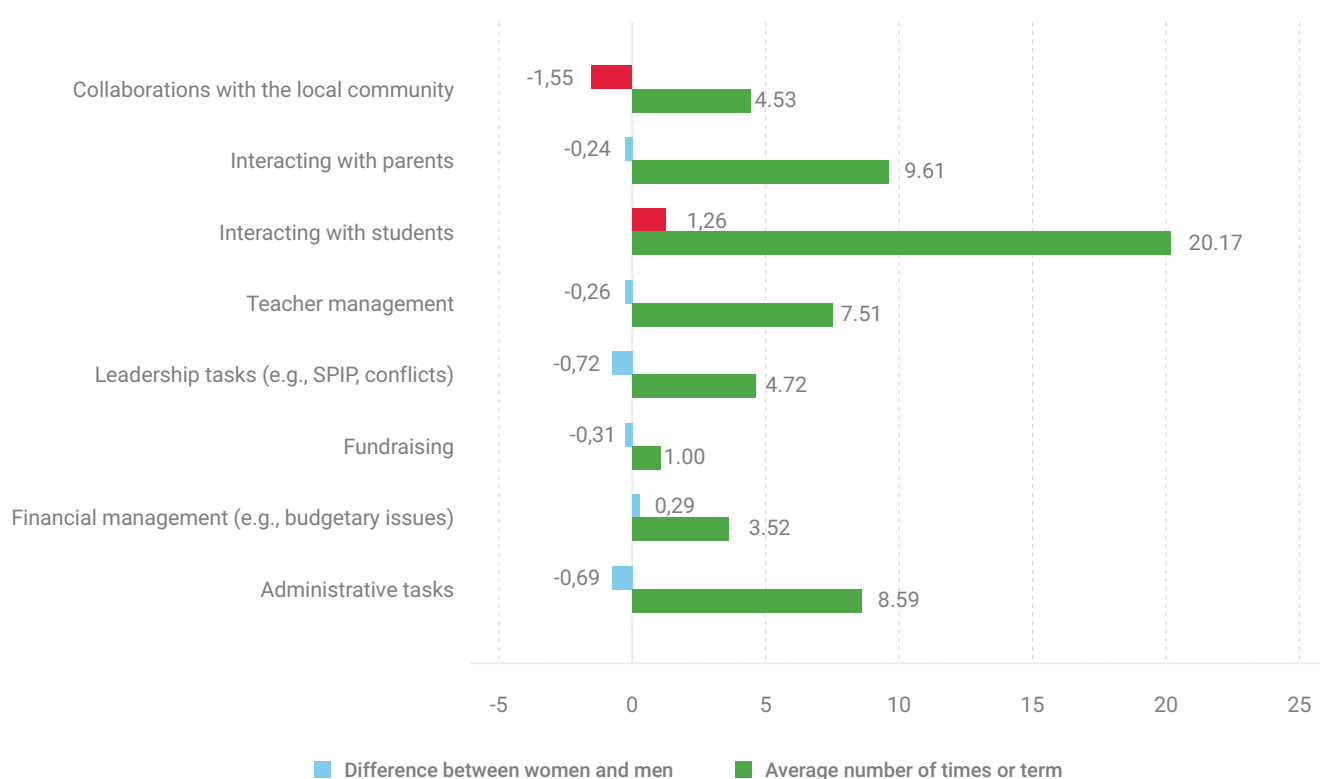
To understand school leadership in Ghana, the study asked headteachers how they distributed time on key activities (*Figure 5*): administrative tasks, financial management, leadership tasks (school planning and vision setting), staff management, and student interactions.

All headteachers report regularly interacting with students. They also frequently (approximately bi-weekly) spend time on administrative tasks, teacher management and staff meetings. Interestingly, headteachers also

reported relatively regular engagement with parents – formal and informal – bi-weekly. While the survey does not provide precise time estimated per activity, it offers useful insight into how headteachers balance responsibilities.

Time-use patterns were broadly similar for men and women, with few statistically significant differences. Women spent slightly more time interacting with students (about 1.26 times more per term), but less time collaborating with the wider community (1.55 times fewer interactions per term) compared to men. Women were also less likely to teach than men, even after accounting for school characteristics. No other notable gender differences emerged.

Figure 5: Frequency of different activities by headteachers



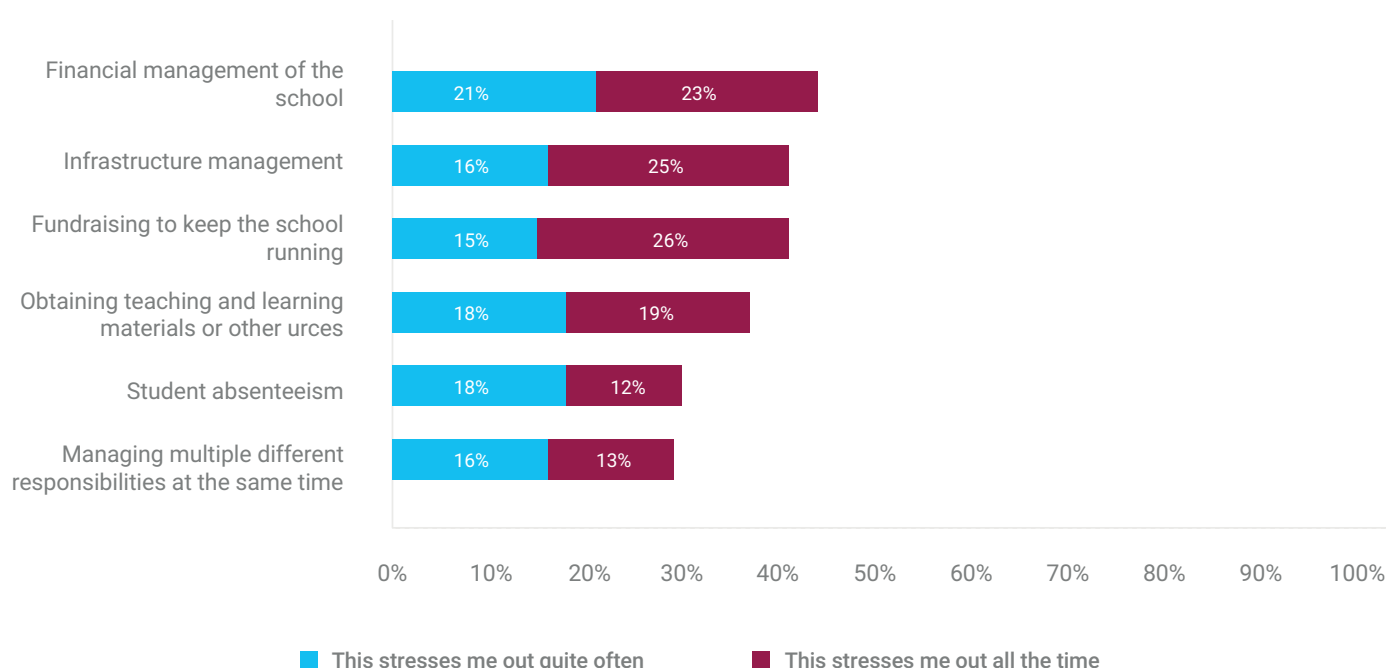
Note: The blue bars represent differences in responses between men and women. A negative value suggests that men engaged in that activity more frequently than women. Only the red bars represent statistically significant results (at 95% confidence interval).
Source: Nationally representative survey, 2024. N= 665 school leaders.

3.3.3 Challenges in the headteacher role

Key challenges headteachers face centred around managing insufficient resources, poor infrastructure, a lack of teaching and learning materials (TLMs), and low student enrolment and absenteeism (*Figure 6*).

Women headteachers report slightly lower job-related stress than men, but all headteachers face challenges. Women’s stress levels were lower for 4 out of 16 assessed stressors, even after controlling for school location and individual characteristics. Specifically, women were less stressed about students’ physical safety and security, student attrition, teacher attrition, and managing multiple responsibilities simultaneously. These differences may reflect variations in management approaches, unobserved school characteristics, or differences in experience addressing such issues.¹³ No other statistically significant gender differences emerged.

Figure 6: Biggest job-related stressors for headteachers



Note: Headteachers were asked to rank on a 4-point scale a list of 16 issues to indicate the extent to which these were stressors in their role. This figure lists the top six issues identified (those reported by ~ 30 per cent of respondents) as stressful often or all the time.

Source: Nationally representative survey, 2024. N= 665 school leaders.

*This factor is statistically significantly different for men and women at the 95% confidence level.

¹³ The analysis controlled for observable factors that could drive these differences such as school location (urban/local), school type (public/private/other), school size, and experience level and qualifications of school leaders. However, the analysis cannot rule out other unobservable factors driving the differences between women-led and men-led schools.

Financial management is the most reported challenge, consistent with other studies about school leadership in Ghana. Both novice and veteran headteachers find financial management challenging (consistently cited as a major challenge facing basic schools (Dampson, 2019; Afful Broni and Dampson, 2008; Bush and Odoro, 2006). In the survey, 44 per cent of headteachers reported that financial management stresses them always or quite often.

Qualitative interviews revealed headteachers must stretch limited financial resources to cover a wide range of needs but are often unable to address major challenges such as poor infrastructure and TLM shortages. These constraints can negatively affect student enrolment and, in turn, further shrink available finances (since capitation grants are tied to enrolment numbers). At least one third of headteachers reported using personal funds to supplement school budgets for basic operations. Others generate additional income by renting out school premises for worship or selling items. For eligible schools, GALOP funding provides the biggest financial relief.

Financial burdens detract headteachers' focus from their key objectives (Mullainathan and Shafir, 2013), or their professional development (Dare et al., 2025), forcing them to prioritize short-term solutions, potentially undermining overall school performance.

Headteacher interviews revealed persistent challenges related to student attendance and parental engagement. Over half of surveyed respondents (52 per cent) identified student absenteeism as pressing, reported more frequently in rural than urban schools (61 per cent versus 40 per cent). Causes are diverse: children may assist with family farming, market activities, or, in certain areas, illegal mining (Child Rights International, 2025). Late admissions, sometimes at term's end, further complicate integrating students into classroom routines.

Parental engagement remains uneven. Some headteachers spoke of repeated unsuccessful attempts to involve parents. A woman headteacher (urban school n°9, Ashanti Region) explained, *"You call parents, they will not come. You call meetings, they will not come, for us to know how to take good care of your children. So, that one is a challenge."* Other studies in Ghana have also documented similar trends (Appiah-Kubi and Amoako, 2022). In rural

settings, poverty compounds difficulties. Families may lack the resources for exercise books and stationery, so students attend without materials. This limits learning and motivation (Yankyerah et al., 2023).

In response, headteachers employ a wide range of strategies including home visits, phone calls, written letters and progress updates. School feeding programmes are seen as one of the most effective enrolment and attendance incentives (Tagoe 2018). Where absent, particularly in low-income areas, attendance often suffers (Acosta and Bedasso, 2024). Some schools offer co-curricular activities, designating Fridays as an “entertainment day” and pairing high attendance students with those who are frequently absent to provide encouragement. Teachers also monitor absentee students to identify underlying issues and possible solutions.

Teacher shortages and attrition are also key challenges in rural and remote areas. While Ghana does not face a teacher shortage at national level for primary and JHS education, interviews highlight a disconnect between national averages and local realities, consistent with recent evidence (Herman, 2026).

In 2022, the national average pupil–teacher ratio for basic schools was 32:1, better than the MoE target of 35:1 and the Global Partnership for Education’s 40:1 recommended benchmark. However, aggregate figures mask significant subnational disparities (Herman, 2026). Many schools – especially rural – have too few teachers to adequately cover all grade levels or key subject areas. A rural school may enrol relatively small numbers per grade, but without enough teachers to staff all classes (KG through Primary 6), headteachers face difficulties ensuring effective day-to-day operations.

Teacher attrition is particularly acute in rural regions, driven by inadequate housing, poor infrastructure, and limited professional development opportunities. Rural schools struggle to fill vacancies, especially when newly assigned teachers fail to report for duty (Herman, 2026; Ministry of Education 2023).

To adapt, headteachers employ strategies including multigrade teaching, taking on teaching duties themselves, and recruiting unqualified community volunteers. Where headteachers assume additional teaching responsibilities, their substantial workload becomes heavier and unsustainable.

"One of my science teachers traveled, was it last year? Past a year now and I have not had a teacher as of now, so I had to step in and teach because I was once a science teacher. So, combining being a teacher and the headship is a herculean task. So, these are some of the challenges."

Woman headteacher, urban school n°7, Ashanti Region

"Sometimes, they [children] need a sense of belongingness, they are lacking it. So, when you bond with them, the indiscipline will reduce, but if you are kind of shouting at them, then when they look at you the head teacher, they can't even talk to you. At least when you smile, then you are inviting them into your office. Sometimes you will be sitting at the office, and they will come and say 'Good morning' to you and then run away smiling. So, a child cannot come near the office? Why? ... You are a mother to them so behave as such."

Woman headteacher, peri-urban school n°3, Northern Tamale Region

"So, now I have one professional teacher for KG 1. So, I'm left to [staff] KG 2, but I have somebody who is taking care of them. Though the person is also a trained teacher but he has not been satisfied [not licensed]. He does not have a certificate but he is managing the students."

Woman headteacher, rural school n°14, Greater Accra Region

Headteachers reported that their job is often hectic and unpredictable, making it difficult to effectively plan and manage their responsibilities. Nearly one third (29 per cent) indicated that balancing multiple demands causes stress always or most of the time. Headteachers revealed impromptu meetings or last-minute requests – often requiring travel – are common and particularly disruptive.

"Attending meetings here and there. Most of the meetings disrupt our supervision and other things, some teachers go to school because the head is there. The meeting is just impromptu, sometimes you are not even aware, and you will be on your way to school, and they will call you to ask if you saw the notice for the meeting last night or this morning. They can just [be] posted on short notice that we have to come for a meeting. But I have already programmed or scheduled today's [day]. So, I had to call everything off and then attend the meeting."

Headteacher, peri-urban school n°3, Northern Tamale Region

These challenges, especially resource shortages and unplanned demands, can limit headteachers' ability to apply leadership and management practices in which they have been trained. In many cases, school environment constraints reduce professional development impact, as headteachers are unable to fully implement learned strategies and approaches.

3.3.4 Gendered differences in leadership styles

Many respondents – district officials, SISOs, teachers and headteachers – highlighted differences in leadership styles during qualitative interviews. These perceived differences were often linked to traits seen as 'natural' for each gender.

- Women headteachers were often praised for good management and administrative skills. Several respondents described women running schools like their homes, keeping finances in order and maintaining clean, welcoming environments. This was almost always seen as a strength.
- Perceptions of strictness were mixed. Some suggested women faced greater challenges asserting authority, while men were described as more autocratic or commanding. However, women were often characterized as stricter overall and better able to maintain staff discipline.
- Women were described as more collaborative and nurturing. A common view was that they led in a 'motherly' way, seen as positive when working with children.

These perceptions reflect broader insights from literature on gender and leadership. Individuals tend to behave in ways that align with social expectations, including those related to gender roles. Eagly and Wood (2012) explain that such expectations shape behaviour by defining what is considered appropriate for men and women, while van Dijk and van Engen (2019) highlight how these norms become self-reinforcing, influencing both individuals' actions and how others respond.

In Ghana, expectations that women are more caring and relationship-oriented may influence how leadership is enacted and interpreted. As qualitative findings illustrate, women's leadership was often described – by others and by women headteachers themselves – in ways that mirror socially constructed gender roles.

While these perceptions can enhance women's legitimacy in certain aspects of school leadership, they may also have unintended consequences. Viewing women primarily as nurturing, alongside beliefs that decision-making and authority are inherently masculine attributes, risks reinforcing gendered divisions of labour. This can contribute to women being concentrated in supportive or administrative roles, while men are more readily associated with strategic leadership and formal authority.

Survey findings further reinforce how headteachers hold gendered views about leadership. Headteachers were asked whether they associated 11 leadership traits (such as being assertive or collaborative) with men, women, or both (*Figure 7*).¹⁴ While 40 per cent of respondents said these traits were not linked to gender, the remaining majority of 60 per cent made gendered associations.

Women were rated less favourably than men on 7 of 11 leadership traits, including approachable, hardworking and intelligent, suggesting gender bias favouring men. The four traits in which women received higher average ratings were good communicator, kind, organized and strict. This aligns with international research demonstrating that certain leadership qualities are often unconsciously associated with masculinity, resulting in biases against women (Eagly and Karau, 2002; Rudman and Glick, 1999).

Notably, perceptions differed sharply by respondent gender: women headteachers were more likely to associate leadership qualities with women; men associated most traits with men, except being a good communicator, kind and strict.

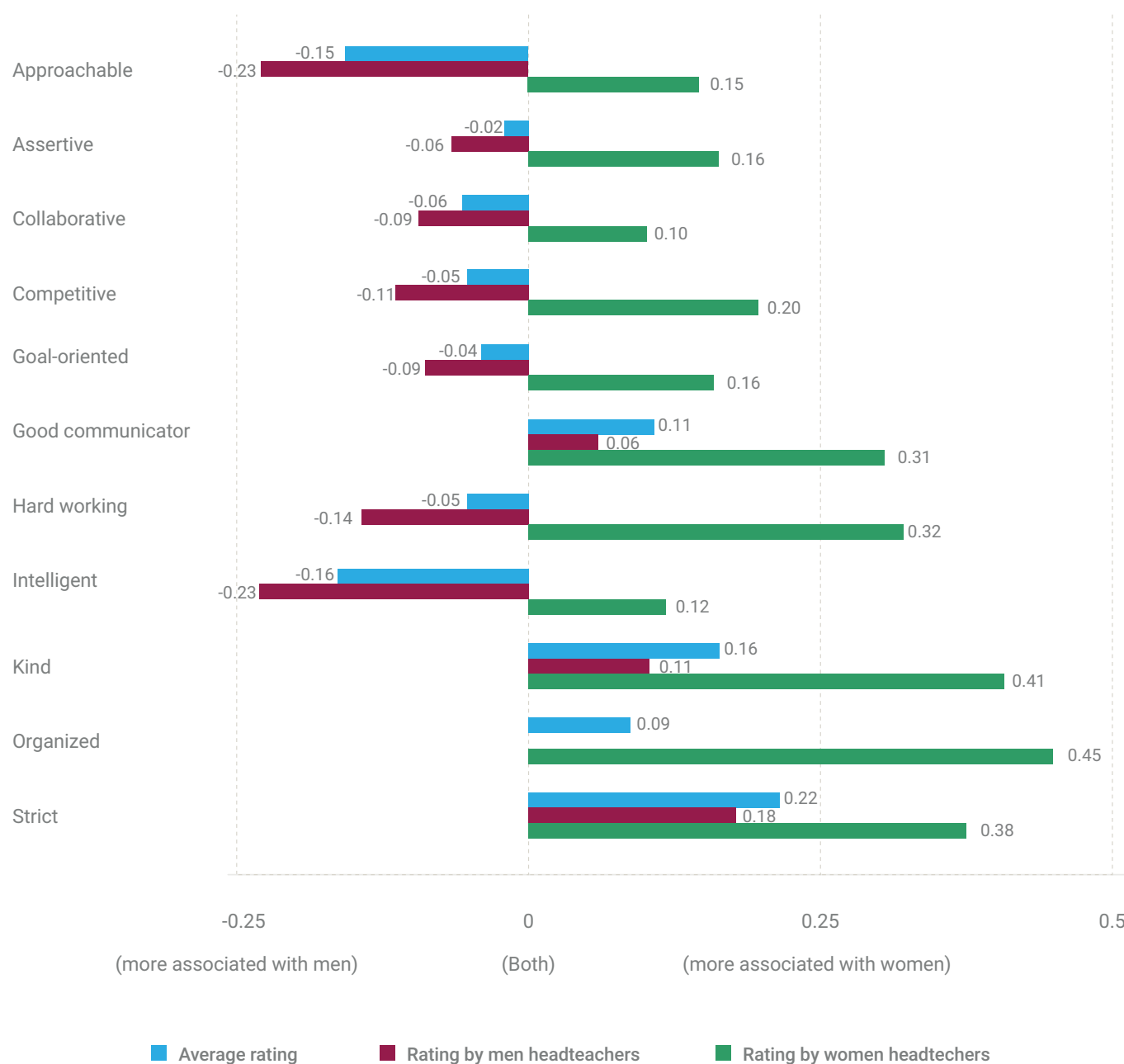
¹⁴ Survey traits included: approachable, assertive, collaborative, competitive, goal-oriented, good communicator, hardworking, intelligent, kind, organized and strict. This list of traits was identified from literature (Abudu and Quansah, 2026; Nantwi et al., 2025) and further refined based on conversations with the Consultative Group (composed of MoE representatives and other development partners) for this research.

In most cases, the gap between male and female perceptions was substantial – 31 pp apart on average. For example, while respondents overall rated men as slightly more hardworking than women (5 pp higher), male headteachers rated men as 14 pp more hardworking, whereas women headteachers rated women as 32 pp more hardworking – a 46 pp difference (*Figure 7*).

These survey findings reflect how personal experience, strongly mediated by gender, shapes leadership perceptions. Men rating men higher may also reflect opinions of stakeholders involved in headteacher appointments, pointing to broader implications. In Ghana, where men dominate appointment and promotion processes, gendered assumptions about leadership are likely to influence selection decisions, contributing to the continued underrepresentation.

Gaps in institutionalization of school leadership roles and limited access to structured leadership training may further reinforce these biases. When leadership responsibilities are poorly defined and professional development is limited, appointment processes tend to rely more heavily on perceived personal traits. In such contexts, gendered assumptions about competence become more influential, often disadvantaging women and restricting their access to positions of authority.

Figure 7: Perception of headteacher traits, by gender



Note: This graph illustrates the difference in ratings assigned to women relative to men across each assessed trait (x-axis). The blue bars represent overall averages; the green bar is the average scores given by women school leaders and the orange bar is the average scores of men school leaders. A negative value indicates that respondents perceive men as displaying the trait more strongly than women, whereas a positive value indicates the opposite.

Source: Nationally representative survey, 2024. N = 665 school leaders.

3.3.5 Headteacher satisfaction

Despite challenges, headteachers reported relatively high job satisfaction, with women expressing greater satisfaction. Seventy per cent of respondents strongly agree that they are satisfied with their job. Despite this, almost a third of headteachers (29 per cent) somewhat or strongly agreed they often consider changing their profession. Women were 0.43 pp less likely to consider a career change, 0.21 pp less likely to consider moving to a different school, and 0.14 pp more satisfied with their job.¹⁵ These findings may be influenced by social desirability bias or self-justification processes,¹⁶ which could lead respondents to report higher satisfaction despite significant challenges.

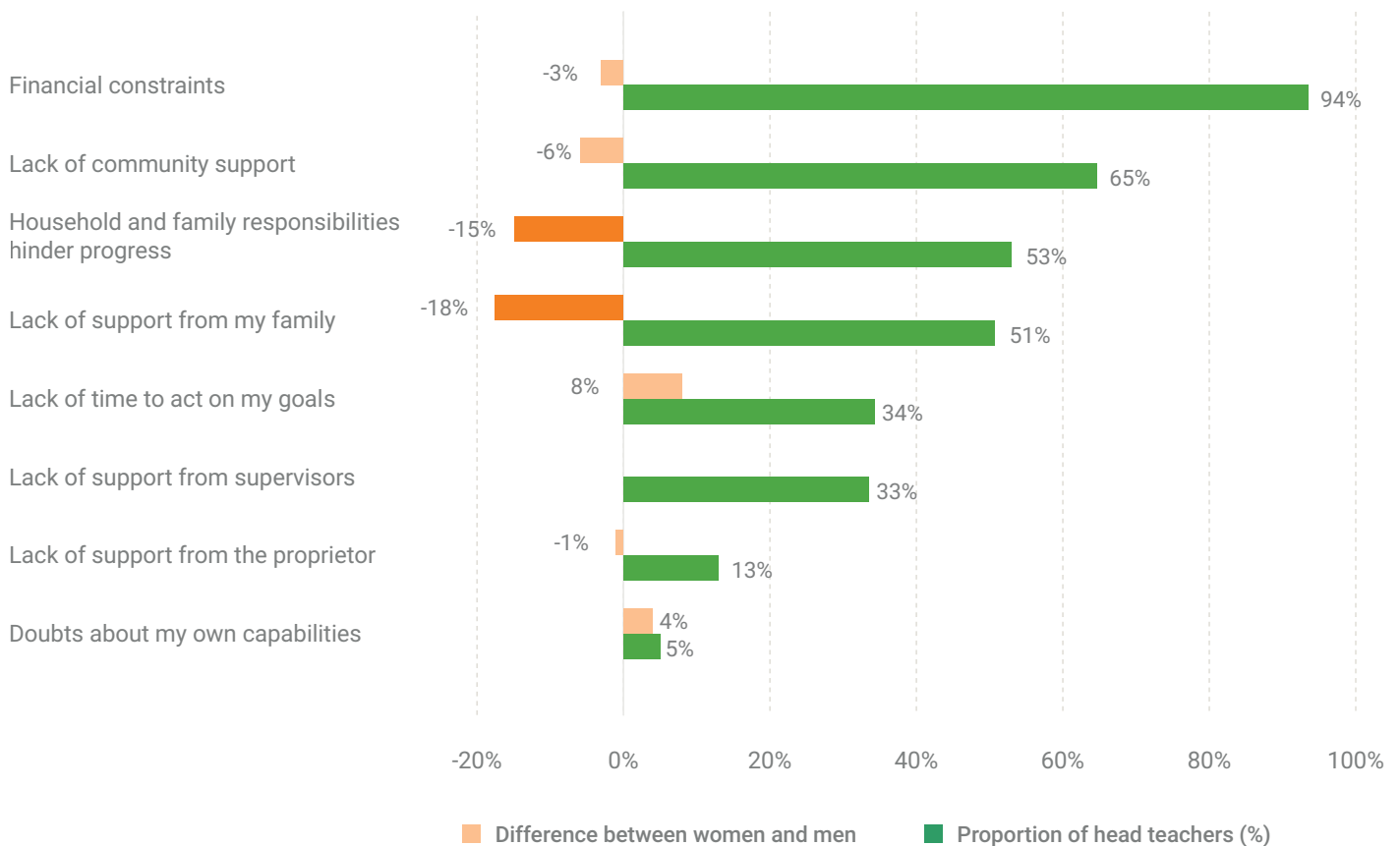
Ambition for personal and career growth is high among both men and women. The vast majority expressed a desire to enhance their education and skills: 97 per cent report they wish to attend skill training programmes, 87 per cent aspire to move into more senior roles, and 78 per cent want to earn another degree. The only gender difference: women were less likely to want to change career paths.

About half of all headteachers (51 per cent of women and 59 per cent of men) reported barriers in achieving their professional goals (Figure 8). Financial constraints topped the list, cited by nearly all respondents who reported barriers. Other common challenges included lack of community and family support, and household responsibilities. Notably, and contrary to expectations, men were likelier than women to identify household responsibilities and lack of family support as obstacles.

¹⁵ Headteachers were asked to rate their satisfaction on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (lowest) to 4 (highest): a 0.43 point difference is a 10 pp difference on this scale; 0.21 point is a 5 pp difference, and 0.14 is a 3.5 pp difference.

¹⁶ The self-justification process is a psychological mechanism people use to rationalize or defend their thoughts, feelings, or behaviours, especially when those actions conflict with their beliefs, values, or self-image. In simple terms, it's how we convince ourselves that what we are doing is right to reduce feelings of guilt, shame, or cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957; Tavis and Aronson, 2007)

Figure 8: Barriers to meeting professional goals for headteachers



Note: The orange bars represent differences in responses between men and women. A negative value suggests that men reported facing that barrier at a higher rate. Only the dark orange bars represent statistically significant results (at 95% confidence interval).
 Source: Nationally representative survey, 2024. N = 665 school leaders.

3.4 Barriers facing women to becoming school leaders

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Basic Education System in Ghana

Women face various interconnected barriers in their journey towards school leadership:

- **Family responsibility and domestic burden:** Gendered expectations around unpaid care and domestic work create significant time poverty for women, limiting their ability to pursue qualifications, professional development and leadership roles.
- **Internalized gender norms affecting self-confidence:** Social expectations lead many qualified women to self-select out of leadership, perceiving it as incompatible with prescribed roles, undermining confidence and aspirations.
- **Financial constraints affect all teachers, but women are disproportionately impacted:** Limited control over household finances, caregiving costs, and competing household priorities can delay progression into leadership.
- **Mobility concerns:** Safety, housing, transportation, and family proximity concerns reduce willingness and opportunities to take remote postings, narrowing women's leadership pathways.
- **Perceived workload and stress of the role:** The headteacher role is viewed as demanding, high-stress, and poorly compensated. These pressures conflict with caregiving responsibilities and compensation is insufficient to offset demands.
- **Gender bias in the community and education system:** Persistent gender norms shape how women leaders are perceived, scrutinized and respected. Within the education system, although promotion processes are generally seen as fair, underlying social norms and occasional irregular practices can discourage women's advancement.

Section 3.3 shows that once women become headteachers, they are generally satisfied with their job and face similar challenges as men.¹⁷ All stakeholders spoke positively of women's leadership in schools. Yet, the path to becoming a headteacher has hurdles for women, with the result that they are underrepresented in leadership positions (Section 3.2).

¹⁷ It is important to remember, however, that the women who reach positions of school leadership represent a selective group with specific characteristics and do not necessarily represent the wider pool of women who could reach these roles if fewer barriers were present. Additionally, this conclusion is based on self-reported data and therefore reflects only observable characteristics and issues that respondents feel confident and comfortable disclosing.

Qualitative data from stakeholders at national, district and school levels identify key constraints to women's participation in school leadership. This section examines these barriers in detail.

3.4.1 Family responsibilities and the domestic burden

From an early age, Ghanaian women are expected to shoulder a wide range of domestic responsibilities such as household chores, caregiving and childrearing. These expectations significantly shape women's decisions and professional trajectories and constitute a foundational barrier to school leadership.

Across communities, managing the home is widely expected to be primarily a woman's responsibility (Nartey et al. 2023; Gender Equality Index, 2021; OECD, 2025; Brown, 1994). This includes cooking, cleaning, caring for children, supporting siblings and elderly parents, and running daily errands. On average, Ghanaian women and girls aged 15 and older spend 15.5 per cent of their time on unpaid care and domestic work, compared to 5 per cent for men (UN Women, 2023). These tasks demand considerable time and energy, often before and after formal working hours. A male District Director (urban area n°9, Ahafo Region) explained, *"Just look at a female teacher, we say married woman and she has children to manage them as the husband. So, she gets up in the morning, she has to at least put one or two things in place before going to work. You see – unlike men. We get up in the morning and we may not have much to do."*

Balancing household duties alongside a demanding leadership role (see section 3.4.5), leaves many women with limited time for career advancement and professional development. Even when women progress in their career, family commitments were consistently described as a major responsibility, giving them no time for themselves. Examples of how domestic responsibilities interfere with women's professional prospects are outlined below.

Interviews with women teachers show that continuing education is particularly difficult after childbirth, which often occurs early in women's careers. According to the 2022 Demographic and Health Survey, the median age at which Ghanaian women have their first live birth is 22.1 years. Interruptions at this formative stage can delay qualification attainment required for career advancement. As shown in Section 3.1, women take 19

per cent longer than men, on average, to reach headteacher positions after entering teaching. The recent introduction of Ghana's new teacher licensing scheme (2018)¹⁸ which mandates updated qualifications and the completion of a licensure exam, adds another layer of complexity. While this affects all teachers, it disproportionately impacts women who are more time poor and thus participate less frequently in continuous professional development (Ministry of Education Ghana, 2023).

A second consequence relates to women's ability to engage in essential activities required under the leadership role. In interviews, many women shared that they didn't have sufficient time to participate in meetings or training sessions, which are key expectations for those in headteacher roles. As a result, headteacher positions are often seen as less feasible or appealing, particularly when supportive schemes such as flexible scheduling, accessible childcare, or spousal support are absent.

"It can happen that childbirth is a problem because as a female if you have three kids, every morning you have to care for them and make sure they go to school before you can get the chance as a mother to go to school yourself. So, it would make female teachers always late to school. A headteacher that goes to school late, we have a book we sign in so if the males are always punctual and you as a female headteacher is always late it can put your position at risk since there would be some qualified males as well."

**Woman teacher, rural school n°12,
Western North Region**

Third, women shared how domestic responsibilities affect their job performance and long-term career prospects. Women may arrive late to school due to morning housekeeping chores or be absent to attend to their children. This can affect their work and be reflected in their performance evaluations. Although there is limited direct evidence of gender-based discrimination in hiring, some women teachers expressed concern that these challenges may hinder their progression into leadership, particularly when they have young children. For those in or aspiring to headteacher roles, frequent lateness or absences, even when justified, could undermine their authority and credibility.

Women emphasized that familial responsibilities typically take precedence over professional ones. When children are ill or require support, women leave work to respond. Although widely recognized at school

¹⁸ Teacher training and development programmes in Ghana underwent a significant reform in 2018. Around this time, the minimum teaching qualification for professional basic teachers was changed from a three-year diploma to a four-year bachelor's degree. Once student-teachers have completed their four-year B.Ed. degree at a College of Education, they are required to then spend their one-year National Service teaching in a public school and required to sit a license examination, termed the Ghana Teacher Licensure Examination, at a registered centre.

level, responses remain largely informal. Many headteachers and colleagues accommodate women balancing work and family responsibilities, but support depends on individual leadership styles rather than formalized policies. As a result, women's experiences vary considerably across locations.

For instance, a headteacher described how he considered the domestic schedules of his female staff and found flexible arrangements that supported their dual responsibilities. Several teachers noted that having an empathetic and supportive school leader enabled managing both home and work duties effectively. Conversely, where such understanding is lacking, women reported difficulties maintaining professional responsibilities and prioritizing career growth.

Regional differences also shape these dynamics. In the Northern regions, where social norms on gendered roles and women's responsibilities tend to be more deeply entrenched, expectations around women's domestic responsibilities are stronger (Eliasu and Odame, 2015). These norms influence both the level of support women receive at work and the degree to which their dual roles are accommodated.

The gendered division of labour, driven by persisting social norms which result in time poverty, constitutes a central constraint shaping women's trajectories. This foundational barrier interacts with financial constraints, mobility limitations, perceptions of leadership stress and gender bias – explored below – to limit women's progression into school leadership roles.

3.4.2 Internalized gender norms and self-confidence

Despite having the qualifications and professional experience, many women hesitate to pursue school leadership roles. Their reluctance stems from social expectations, internalized doubt and limited structural support.

People behave in accordance with societal beliefs about their gender role (Eagly, 1987), and in Ghana, women are widely expected to be caretakers and homemakers (Nartey et al., 2023). In this context, leadership roles are frequently perceived as incompatible with women's expected responsibilities, shaping how women assess their own ambitions and capacities.

Many respondents observed women teachers were less likely than men to pursue leadership, even when they met the formal requirements. Leadership is seen as demanding, requiring longer hours, administrative

work, and dealing with male staff, leading some women to prioritize the relative stability of a teacher's workday over career advancement. Some leadership positions might require relocation, particularly to rural areas, but women are often unable to move due to family responsibilities, resistance from husband or concerns about working conditions. Without explicit encouragement from superiors or family members, many women do not put themselves forward for promotion. This reluctance is sometimes interpreted as lack of ambition or confidence, reinforcing gendered assumptions about women's leadership suitability.

Sociocultural expectations influence both how women are perceived by others and how they perceive themselves. Several women

described underestimating their abilities or doubting their readiness to lead, particularly when supervising male colleagues. Internalized beliefs that leadership is 'men's work' can make it difficult for women to imagine themselves as decision-makers. A woman headteacher (rural school n°14, Greater Accra) reflected: *"And then sometime, the society should also support in creating equal opportunities for both men and women in the society where the women or the women's work will also be seen in the same way as the work of the men because sometimes even some of us women, we think there are certain things that should not be changed. A man is a man. This is a man's work. Sometimes even when we go for meeting and they need some people to do things, we call on the men. You see, sometimes we even willingly offer roles to them."*

"Sometimes when the males are, the age, when they are older than you, you can't control them. Sometimes they will do something wrong, and you can't talk, because they are just males."

Woman teacher, urban school n°2, Northern Region

These attitudes are shaped early. In Ghana, girls and boys are socialized into distinct gender roles through household responsibilities. In another study, a secondary analysis of a nationally representative survey of children in Ghana shows marked gender differences in domestic chores: 68.1 per cent of girls compared to 35.7 per cent of boys cook or assist with cooking; 90.4 per cent of girls versus 73.4 per cent of boys clean the house; and 91 per cent of girls compared to 55 per cent of boys fetch water (Kyei-Gyamfi, 2025).¹⁹ Girls and boys learn to emulate

¹⁹ Kyei-Gyamfi (2025) utilize data drawn from a survey of 5,024 children aged 8–17 conducted in 2018 by the Department of Children, Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, covering 43 districts across all ten of Ghana's administrative regions.

socially and culturally defined roles, which shape professional aspirations into adulthood and affect each in different ways.

Among women teachers, the internalization of these norms can translate into reduced confidence in leadership. District officials and school leaders noted that some women exhibit hesitation or anxiety when faced with decision-making roles, particularly in high-stakes or visible contexts. A male District Director (peri-urban school n°6, Eastern Region) described this as, *"Some of them too [women school leaders], they have some phobia, some fear when they have to take certain decisions – are you getting me?"*

Lack of self-confidence is less pronounced among women who have become headteachers, compared to teachers aspiring to the role. Only 9 per cent of women headteachers cited low confidence in their abilities as a barrier to achieving their goals. Most expressed strong belief in their leadership abilities, suggesting that they either possess exceptional qualities, have overcome these barriers, benefited from supportive schemes or circumstances, or developed greater assurance through leadership experience. Nonetheless, deciding to pursue leadership remains a significant challenge for many women teachers.

Gendered stereotypes about women and men's roles in society affect both differently and can be harmful for men. Men reported high rates of stress around work-life balance, likely related to the pressures of being household financial providers. This could be driven by the need to undertake additional work to supplement salaries. A woman headteacher (urban school n°15, Greater Accra) shared, *"Most of the male teachers are into their own business, especially the transport business. In the morning, they would like to do some "trotro" [local name for a commercial bus] before coming, so they are always late."*

Internalized gender norms and confidence-related barriers play a significant role in shaping women's leadership aspirations. Interviews with women teachers underscore the importance of targeted mentorship, encouragement and confidence-building initiatives that support women in envisioning and pursuing leadership.

3.4.3 Financial constraints

Limited access to financial resources is a major barrier to pursuing leadership roles for all teachers. However, the constraints and implications differ in important ways for women.

Financial constraints were the most frequently cited barrier to pursuing additional qualifications required for leadership (such as a bachelor's or master's degree), with 89 per cent of headteachers surveyed citing this challenge. Men were significantly more likely than women to report this challenge (91 per cent compared to 78 per cent). This difference may reflect men's greater likelihood of being primary financial providers within households, as well as the possibility that women who reach leadership may represent a more selective group with stronger support systems.

Though both face financial challenges, the ways these affect women and men differ. Women, rarely primary decision-makers over household finances (Nartey et al., 2023), may need approval from parents or husbands to make career investments. Moreover, investing in women's advancement is not always consistent with social norms, particularly when investments compete with household or other family needs. As a result, women often need to engage in careful negotiation or take assertive steps to overcome social and familial resistance. One District Director described this tension:

"You know, when I wanted to go and do my master's, he was talking, talking, and talking that there was no money. I didn't mind. I went and took my loan. Went for it. Then he met his friend and said my wife has her master's. She did her master's in MBA finance. Then I said, wow. That's what I said. The day he was talking, I said, isn't it this man who didn't want me to go and do it? So, he refused to give me even a pesewa to pay for my school fees. He said, no money and I said, no problem. I also insisted I would do it. If I didn't do it, by now, I would not be here. Because it has given me an advantage."

Woman District Director, urban area n°5, Greater Accra

A second dimension is women's greater prioritization of children's needs over their own professional development. Many women described delaying their own studies to pay school fees and meet household expenses. For some, this meant delaying further studies until their children were older and they could save enough to return to school. Respondents perceived women prioritize children's education and health needs more than men. Evidence from Ghana and other low- and middle-income countries suggests mothers place greater value on these outcomes than fathers (Ralitza and Fielding, 2025; Christian et al., 2023; Dadzie et al., 2021).

One woman teacher (urban school n°1, Northern Region) explained, *"The only barrier that made me not pursue my master's [degree] was the financial challenge, if I was financially sound enough to be able to take care of my children and continue, I think I would have continued."*

Teachers reported that their salaries are insufficient, making it difficult to save and compounding financial challenges when trying to upgrade qualifications.²⁰ Income reportedly barely covers personal and family expenses, leaving little room for future needs or further studies. As a result, it can take years to complete an education degree. Some begin their studies, then run out of funds, pausing until they can secure financing.

Although these salary challenges affect all teachers, for women, low savings combined with prioritization of children's needs and delays due to childbirth and rearing, significantly slow career progression. Some women wait until their children are older before restarting their studies, slowing career progression. In addition, women may choose to live far from their assigned school or commute back to their family home on weekends, both of which add transport costs and place further strain on already limited finances.²¹

20 Aspiring teachers in Ghana receive tuition-free training and an allowance. However, since 2018, the minimum qualification was raised from a three-year diploma to a four-year degree, requiring many serving teachers to upgrade qualifications. It remains unclear whether the MoE provides financial support for these upgrades, but interviews point to widespread funding constraints. Tuition for master's degrees – often required for headteacher appointments – are not covered.

21 Interviews indicate that women are more reluctant than men to work far from their families, largely due to gendered expectations around domestic responsibilities. Women are expected to ensure that their husbands' and families' needs are met, requiring co-habitation or frequent travel, which limits their willingness and ability to accept distant postings.

“...there are some remote areas and sometimes when the vacant places, when they are in the remote areas and lady heads are posted there, they find it difficult in terms of transport, accommodation, etc. Sometimes, most of them. And then there are some people too, where they stay already, they have their accommodation or their families there, they are established over there. So, when it comes to that situation, you either leave your family or then be transporting every day, commuting every day on and off.”

Woman teacher, rural school n°17, Eastern Region

Women teachers have developed various strategies to cope with financial constraints, including taking loans from financial institutions or family members and engaging in income-generating activities. Many borrow to cover essential expenses, while others sell goods in local markets. While these strategies help bridge income gaps, they can have unintended consequences, including increased fatigue, absenteeism and reduced focus on teaching and professional development.

“I will be absent from school on some of the days, not only weekends, so that I can toil and do petty trade to care for the younger ones that my parents have left in my care and he understood me. So, every Friday, I didn’t go to school. I had to cross the river and go to market and that market day is every Friday.”

Woman teacher, rural school n°5, North East Region

Financial constraints operate not only through limited income, but also through gendered patterns of financial control, social expectations and competing household priorities. These dynamics shape women’s ability to invest in their own professional development and, in turn, constrain their progression into leadership roles.

Ama's journey



This box presents the profile of a woman headteacher in Ghana. Names and identifying details have been changed to maintain confidentiality. However, the experience and details remain true.

Ama is a woman headteacher in a peri-urban school in Ghana. She spent nearly 20 years as a classroom teacher before being appointed to a headship position, which she has held for six years. She is married and the mother of four young children.

Ama's dream is to be an official within the Ghana Education Service and a role model in her community. This has been her professional goal ever since she became a teacher, and she worked hard to get promoted into leadership.

Her posting as a headteacher was to a junior high school in an unknown area. After her first visit, she hesitated as the distance, isolation and unfamiliar faces at this school made her doubt her ability to lead. However, she knew she needed exposure and experience to progress, so steeled herself to continue.

As a woman leader, Ama's arrival stirred unease among the staff and community. Some questioned the criteria for her selection; others doubted her ability to lead. Her circuit supervisor (SISO) cautioned her to *"be on her feet"* to be able to manage the staff.

She first met her staff and community opinion-leaders to win their trust and respect. She introduced herself and explained the rigorous selection process. She shared her teaching record of almost two decades, perfect attendance, and a passion for professional discipline. She demonstrated transparency and competence to address suspicions of favouritism. As she explains: *"I know they see me as a young woman coming to mentor them or to lead them, but I know what I am capable of."*

Things that helped Ama in her journey:

- **Role models:** Her mother and father were both teachers, with her father pursuing higher education and pushing his daughter to do the same. As she explains *"My parents motivated me, and I will not lie about that, my parents were the key, they were my role models, especially my mother."*
- **Mentors:** Ama shared: *"Yes, my former headmistress. Miss X. She is also now retired, she was the one who was also pushing me and giving me leadership roles when we were in school. When they posted me to JHS, first she was my mentor."*
- **Patience and resilience** in dealing with doubt and questioning throughout.
- **Supportive husband:** Helps look after their children so she can perform her duties.
- **Instructional leadership:** Deeply interested in training and supporting teachers, Ama prides herself in providing pedagogical instruction (such as preparing quality lesson notes). Her support and feedback won staff respect.

- **Financial support:** She formed a savings club (susu club) with women teachers to help pay for qualification upgrades.

Ama's inspiring journey lays out the challenges she faced and the confluence of enabling factors that helped her progress: role models and mentors stoked her professional ambitions, a supportive husband enabled her to work longer or odd hours, a financial support system for enhancing qualifications, and unwavering

patience in the face of doubt and scrutiny.

However, not everyone has the same support systems, role models and personal traits. Success in school leadership should not depend on individual circumstances or exceptional resilience. Rather, there is a need for systematic and institutionalized support structures to enable more women to progress and succeed in leadership roles.

3.4.4 Mobility constraints: transportation and accommodation in remote areas

Women's preference to be near family – driven by their gendered role – can result in them opting out of leadership roles in remote areas. In

most districts, when a teacher is promoted to headteacher, they are posted to a different school based on vacancy. District officials explained that this strategy aims to avoid difficulties associated with leading former peers. However, for women, such transfers frequently require relocation far from home, making it harder to juggle work with expected family responsibilities.

"I have one female teacher who qualifies to be a head, but she is afraid and always tells me that: 'Sir, I am afraid that if get appointed as a head, I will be transferred to a different place of which my family will be affected.'"

Male SISO, rural area n°4, Western North Region

Accommodation and transportation challenges further exacerbate these constraints. Interviews reveal most schools do not provide staff housing, and access to safe, reliable and affordable transport is limited, particularly in remote areas. These conditions affect both men and women, but women reported feeling their impact more acutely due to safety concerns and greater exposure to risk during travel and with inadequate accommodation.

Gendered access to transportation also shapes mobility. Men are more likely to own or operate motorbikes, which are often necessary to reach rural schools, while many women depend on walking or public transport, which are less reliable and perceived as less safe. These differences influence both women's willingness to accept postings and district-level placement decisions.

District officials acknowledged that they frequently avoid posting women in remote schools where accommodation and transport challenges are particularly severe. In interviews, all stakeholders universally cited poor housing and transport infrastructure in rural areas as a critical challenge. As a result, to limit women's greater exposure to safety risks, women are often not prioritized for such postings.

One District Director described the considerations involved in transferring women headteachers:

"You see, especially the female teachers, if you are to repost a female headteacher from one place to another, definitely you have to look at one or two things. Is she married? If she's married, is she staying with her husband? Where are you taking her to? Is she going to rent a room there? So those things are taken into consideration. If you repost the headteacher far away from where the husband is and she's to go there and rent a room, that's definitely going to create some challenges in their marriage. So yeah, those things are there, we'll look at those things and when she's to be transferred, it will not be far away that you have to go and rent a place."

Male District Director, urban area n°9, Ahafo Region

While these gender-sensitive placement practices are believed to be protective and pragmatic, they also limit the amount of promotion opportunities available to women, particularly as most schools in Ghana are in rural areas.

3.4.5 Awareness of the headteacher workload and associated stress

The headteacher role was widely described as hectic with a large workload, often requiring longer hours and availability outside work schedules. A third of the headteachers surveyed reported that managing multiple responsibilities simultaneously was a major stressor in their roles and

53 per cent said their job leaves little room for personal life or hobbies. This has been documented in other studies from Ghana and is similar to experiences of other countries such as United States and Australia, where the headteacher role is considered onerous (Dampson, 2019).

"I think the challenges sometimes will be combining headship with family duties, it wouldn't really permit you to have time. Most at times, headship is in such a way that you would be there at any time, and you would be called for a meeting whereby you have to also run your family affairs as well. It doesn't really let you have time as such."

**Woman teacher, urban school n°3,
Northern Region**

For women, this expansive role clashes with domestic responsibilities, keeping some from applying. Many women shared that they particularly struggle with aspects requiring long distance travel for ad hoc meetings, or operating outside the formal working hours, as these infringe on the domestic sphere. Women teachers who are in the leadership pipeline felt that they already had too much on their plates and could not add headteacher responsibilities.

Women teachers also reported observing the high levels of pressure and stress experienced by current headteachers, which further discourages them from aspiring to the role. The additional financial benefit of

promotion is small, and according to teachers, insufficient to overcome the additional stress. As a woman teacher (urban school n°1, Northern Region) shared, *"I have been telling my head, even if they put money and say I should head, I will rather be in the classroom, because it is hectic, the workload."*

Some women were open to being headteachers later in life, once their children were older and they had more time and childcare options.

"When I see my headteacher like this, sometimes, you see this woman, going here and there doing all that. As I said, after three o'clock, I have to run for my kids. Sometimes, you see this woman going here and there even after classes ... I look at her and I say this is too much because I don't have anyone to take care of my kids for me. How can I combine these two? ... So I have not thought of it. As I said, I have not thought of it yet but the right time..."

Woman teacher, urban school n°7, Ashanti Region

Women also spoke about the stress of managing schools with limited material and financial resources. Beyond the daily challenge of operating under such constraints, they observed many current headteachers often use

personal funds to keep schools running while waiting for capitation grants. This practice, while reflecting deep commitment, is not a situation women wish to find themselves in, especially as they often have limited control over household finances.

3.4.6 Gender bias in the community and the education system

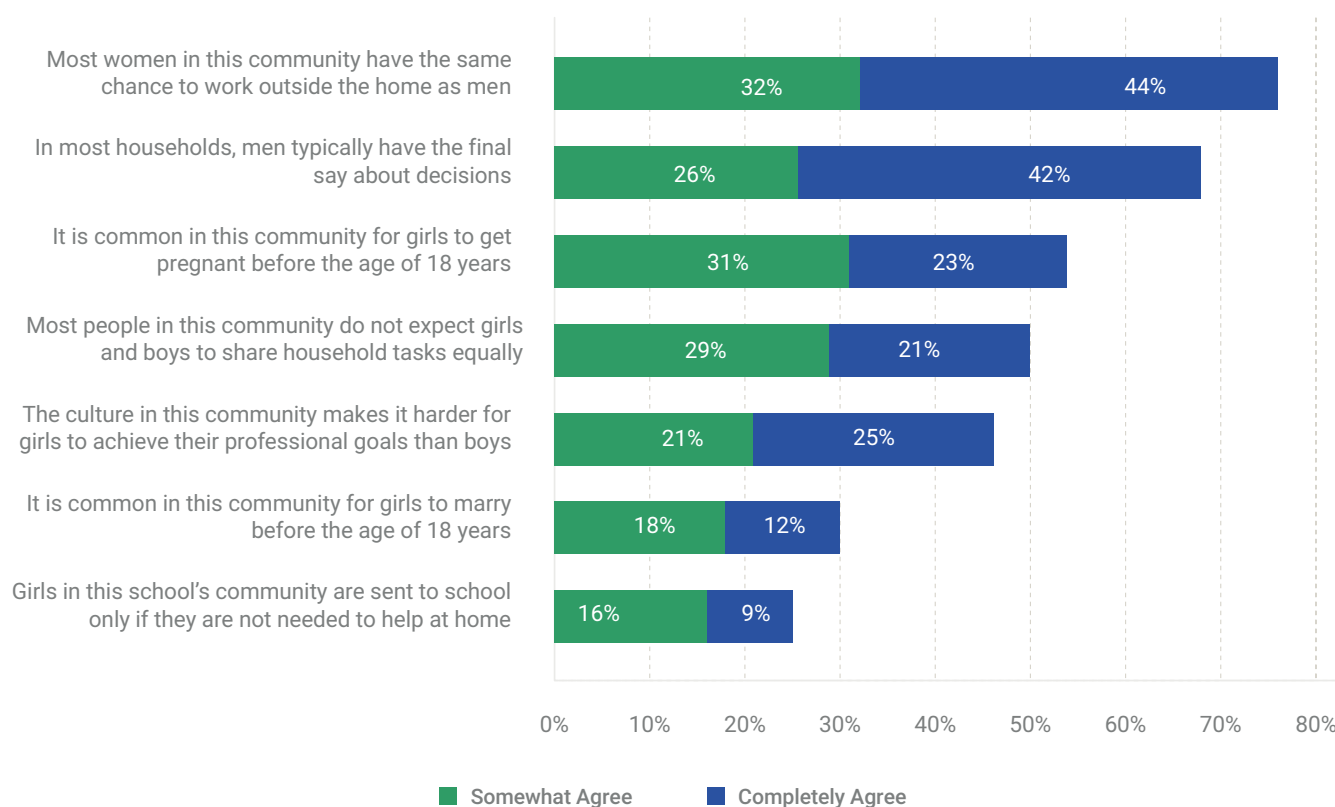
Perceived gender bias by communities

While this study did not engage community members directly, yet headteachers, teachers and education officials shared their perceptions of how communities receive women school leaders.

Research in Ghana shows that gendered social norms are widespread

(Dampson, 2019; Francis and Laube, 2025). Most surveyed headteachers confirmed this in their communities (*Figure 9*). For instance, 68 per cent of headteachers (both men and women) somewhat or strongly agreed that men typically have the final say in household decisions, and 50 per cent acknowledged that most people do not expect girls and boys to share household tasks equally.

Figure 9: Headteachers' perceptions of gendered social norms in their community in Ghana



Source: Nationally representative survey, 2024. N= 665 school leaders.

Despite these norms, most headteachers and district officials reported communities were generally supportive of women headteachers.

Among interviewed headteachers, 14 of 18 believed that women heads were accepted by their communities and did not perceive gender as a major issue in their day-to-day leadership. Similarly, most women teachers reported feeling accepted within their communities. No clear regional patterns emerged. However, when preferences for school leader gender were mentioned, they tended to favour men.

At the same time, women leaders described contending with underlying sexist perceptions about how they attained their positions.

Several respondents noted the persistence of suspicion suggesting that a woman's advancement must have been secured through inappropriate relationships with men in authority. A woman headteacher (rural school n°17, Eastern Region) shared, *"At times, people think maybe you got that opportunity by sleeping with an officer or getting an engagement with the director or something of that sort. Of which to me, I would say it's no, but people do say it."*

In addition, women leaders are more closely scrutinized for their behaviour, such as interacting with male staff and colleagues, in ways their male counterparts do not experience. Such persistent questioning about women's 'merit' or 'virtue' is taxing and creates an additional mental burden. It generates concerns among women about their reputation and potential implications for their marriage and relationships – pressures that men do not face. Evidence from other contexts similarly associates such discrimination with adverse effects on mental health and life satisfaction (Hackett et al., 2024).

Perceived gender bias in the education system

Findings related to gender bias and discriminatory attitudes within the education system were mixed, reflecting variations in stakeholders' experiences and regional differences.

While few women headteachers reported experiencing discrimination or gender bias, this was not the case for women teachers.

Most women headteachers did not report perceiving government officials at district or central levels as systematically making biased decisions against women's advancement or applying policies in a

discriminatory manner. On the contrary, they described their relationships with SISOs and district supervisors as positive and supportive (see section 3.5). Men headteachers shared the same perception, suggesting those who have attained leadership positions do not perceive gender bias in recruitment.

The one notable exception was placement decisions, particularly the assignment of women leaders to rural or remote schools. As discussed in section 3.4.4, **District Directors often consider gender when assigning headteachers, preferring not to post women to remote locations.** This practice is intended to increase retention, address safety concerns, and accommodate women's preferences to remain closer to families. While gendered, these measures are perceived as necessary by all stakeholders interviewed, men and women alike. Meaningful changes appear unlikely without structural improvements in rural school infrastructure, enhanced security and shifts in social norms shaping gendered expectations. However, there are exceptions, with some women willing to be based in rural areas.

While headteachers generally view the promotion process as unbiased, women can face gendered challenges once they assume leadership, such as managing male staff who are resistant to female authority. Women often need to demonstrate extra patience and resilience to withstand the scrutiny of male colleagues, and sometimes that of older students, that men do not have to face. Research indicates this challenge is particularly pronounced in rural areas where social norms tend to be more rigid (Mbepera, 2017; Ndjama and Ajani, 2025). A woman headteacher (rural school n°6, North East Region) described, *"There are challenges for me as a lady to be in a position like this because you are surrounded by men in particular. So, for you to come out with a decision, for them to adjust to that decision, it's not easy, but in all, I'm good to go."*

Many stakeholders attributed barriers faced by women primarily to social norms and community attitudes, rather than discrimination within the education system. This view often overlooks the close interaction between community-level norms and institutional practices, as well as the potential role of the education system in mitigating these challenges. Treating gender inequality as an issue external to the system, rather than one it can actively address, reflects a limited perspective.

“These days, we use PLC, professional learning community, as an avenue for building the capacity of teachers. And they all have access to it, you can apply for steady leave to go and study. You can do sandwich courses, then the learning program I was talking about, there were a lot of women among us. So, there is no impediment, but maybe, what will help them will come from their homes, the family. The person will say, I'm pregnant, I want to finish giving birth to two or three children before I go, and they are home-based factors. But as far as the work is concerned, the doors are open for everybody.”

Male District Director, urban area n°3, Ashanti Region

In contrast to views expressed by headteachers and district officials, many teachers reported that women headteachers are often not shown the same respect as their counterparts. Approximately one third of interviewed teachers described instances where staff – most often men – undermined women school leaders or ignored instructions. Teachers noted that such behaviour discourages them from aspiring to headteacher positions. Such instances seem to stem from discomfort among some male staff when established ideas about who should hold leadership roles are challenged by female authority.

This challenge appeared to be more pronounced in the Northern regions, where gendered cultural norms are more strongly enforced (Ngulube Z, 2018). A woman teacher (urban school n°2, Northern Region) described: *“The Northerners ... [our] men feel [too] proud for the ladies to talk over them so that's the challenge.”*

Teachers also reported instances of bias in promotion decisions, with women perceived to be disadvantaged due to maternity, caregiving responsibilities, and assumptions about competence. One woman teacher (urban school n°8, Ashanti Region) described: *“... most of the time, they prefer men because women don't have, when it comes to, because we are women, we give birth that time ... so the time for it is a challenge compared to the men and also bias. Sometimes, you may be perceived as less competent in doing the work compared to the men.”*

Finally, all stakeholders reported witnessing occasional irregularities in headteacher recruitment processes, including bribery, nepotism and sexual harassment. While some of these practices (like nepotism or bribery) appear to be non-gendered, others disproportionately affect women. One teacher shared,

“Sometimes some of the leaders want [a] bribe and once you come in and you are a lady, they demand other things instead of the money issue, they rather demand giving yourself to them before getting the promotion. And if you are also a God-fearing person and you refuse, then they will deny you the chance.”

Woman teacher, rural school n°4, North East Region

The extent of these issues is unclear and difficult to measure, although similar issues have been reported by other research (Dampson, 2019). While these practices persist, they don't appear to be the norm. Most respondents described their experience as generally fair and transparent, noting improvements over time, with only a few pointing out some irregularities. Nevertheless, even isolated cases can undermine trust in the system and should be addressed.

3.5 Enablers for women who seek to become school leaders

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Basic Education System in Ghana

- **Family and spousal support are central:** Emotional, practical and financial backing especially from supportive husbands – enables women to pursue and sustain leadership roles.
- **Mentors, role models and networks matter:** Encouragement from SISOs, peers and especially female leaders, builds confidence and aspiration among women.
- **Experience and encouragement drive progression:** Prior leadership roles and consistent support help women overcome self-doubt and step into headship.
- **Male allyship is important:** Support from men across family and professional spheres is a key enabler of women's advancement, underlining the importance of engaging men and boys.

The research also inquired about factors that helped women headteachers advance despite facing the barriers outlined above.

Encouragement and support from family was by far the most mentioned enabler. This ranged from emotional support, to help with domestic duties, and financial assistance. Encouragement from parents and

extended family during youth was an important source of motivation to keep studying and pursuing goals. As adults, support from husbands proved paramount. For some, family members or colleagues served as role models who shaped their aspirations.

"Yes ... I also told her [sister-in-law] that, I cannot do this work again. She said, 'Why can't you do it?' I said, no, the intimidations and what the guys in my school ... And I'm also young ... Some of them are between 25 and 30 years older than me, but I am heading them. So, she told me that it's because they know you can do the work, that's why they put you in that position. So, focus. You will be able to do it. And she said, 'Go for it, go for the headship and you will do it'. And truly, when I went for it, I am able to."

Woman headteacher, rural school n°6, North East Region

Support from husbands was reported as crucial. Women with supportive husbands experienced fewer challenges in balancing work and home life. Having an educated husband, or one who values education, was repeatedly mentioned as a key enabler. Husbands who are also teachers reportedly tended to be more supportive of their wives' career progression, including job transfers, as both partners understand teaching demands. In some cases, women successfully negotiated with their husbands to continue their career, bolstered by decision-making power gained through financially contributing to family finances.

Beyond family, women spoke of support from mentors and others in their networks, including former headteachers, SISOs, or peers. Many women who advanced to district-level leadership cited the influence of female role models in their careers. Seeing others succeed offered motivation and reassurance that they, too, could aspire to such positions. When women doubted their leadership abilities, support from family and mentors was crucial in pushing them to overcome their hesitation.

SISOs are an important resource for women, both before and after becoming headteachers. All headteachers spoke positively about the support received from SISOs, with whom they maintained strong professional relationships. They highlighted the capacity SISO have to advocate for women and encourage them to take on more senior roles. Both men and women SISOs and District Directors reported having supported women to grow in their careers.

"My circuit supervisor (SISO) then, was one, and my husband too urged me when the circuit supervisor was pushing, and I was resisting. I mentioned it to him, and he also said, 'Why not go for it? They know you can do the work that is why they are urging you, so, go for it.' So, my circuit supervisor, and even my colleague teachers too were all urging me to go for it. And when I got it too, my first director. That lady, she did well. In-service training, orientation upon orientation."

Woman headteacher, urban school n°15, Greater Accra

Women also identified that prior leadership experience boosted their confidence and motivated them to apply for headteacher positions.

These experiences ranged from formal roles within the education system (e.g. assistant head or senior teacher) to more informal roles in communities or churches.

This support came from both men and women, underscoring the need to actively engage with boys and men as a key strategy to address women's gender inequality in Ghana.



CHAPTER 4

Conclusions and recommendations

The transition into school leadership in Ghana involves challenges for both men and women, particularly financial constraints in obtaining advanced degrees, limited access to structured leadership training, and balancing heavy administrative workloads with personal and family responsibilities. Resource shortages such as poor infrastructure, insufficient TLMS, and insufficient funding further constrain school leader performance, particularly in rural areas, forcing them to stretch limited funds and often supplement these with their own resources. The role of school leader is demanding and expansive, encompassing multiple responsibilities and competing priorities, which is a source of stress for all headteachers.

Women headteachers encounter multiple intersecting barriers which shape their choices, experiences, and trajectory. Gendered social norms regarding women's role and status interact with broad systemic barriers, disproportionately reducing women's chances to advance and succeed in leadership.

This study analysed barriers at three levels: education system, school and community, and personal. Cutting through these levels and interacting with each were the prevalent and deep-rooted socio-cultural norms.

At the system level, the absence of clear policies and processes for headteacher recruitment, and more precisely for supporting women, hampers their career advancement. Leadership training is limited and sporadic, and the system does not offer sufficient financial resources to enable more women to upgrade their qualifications or pursue advanced degrees. This is particularly challenging when career progression requires costly qualifications and relocation.

At the school level, male-dominated staff environments and attitudes can result in reduced respect for, or even undermining of, women in leadership positions.

Deep-rooted gender stereotypes at the community and society level dictate that women bear primary responsibility for household duties and caregiving, often discouraging or delaying women's pursuit of professional advancement or leadership roles. These expectations, stronger in some locations (e.g. the Northern regions), reinforce perceptions that school leadership is a male domain and drive self-doubt among women regarding their capability to lead.

At the personal level, balancing demanding professional expectations with familial obligations leaves many women overstretched and hesitant to seek advancement; self-confidence is further weakened by limited mentorship, social support and role models.

Collectively, these factors explain why women remain underrepresented in headteacher roles despite high qualifications and a strong presence in Ghana's teaching workforce. However, despite these barriers, the women who do become headteachers report higher satisfaction than their male peers, indicating opportunities to further cultivate and retain women in leadership roles.

In response to these persistent barriers, the following recommendations outline priority actions for the MoE to better support women's progression into school leadership. Effective implementation will require concerted effort, resources and coordination across MoE departments and with other

ministries. Evidence suggests the strongest outcomes are likely to come from a comprehensive approach that addresses multiple barriers simultaneously, rather than isolated interventions (Bramucci et al., 2025).

Recommendation #1: Strengthen the school leadership profession by tackling systemic, gendered barriers.

School leaders – regardless of gender – face major challenges in Ghana. Supporting and empowering them to fulfil their mandate effectively is crucial for education improvement and will particularly benefit women. Concrete measures include:



Standardize recruitment criteria and ensure transparent selection.

Currently, no formal national policy outlines the process, and inconsistencies across regions leave room for political interference. Criteria should be clearly defined, objective and transparent. They should be documented and clearly communicated to all stakeholders across levels to ensure compliance. In the longer term, introducing formal legislation to standardize procedures could further strengthen transparency and equity.



Invest in standardized and contextualized training for school leaders.

Headteacher orientation is largely administrative upon appointment with occasional ad hoc training. Most rely on the headteacher handbook, their teaching experience and peer interactions. Regular, well-designed training aligned to actual needs – covering both soft and hard skills that are core to the role – would make an important difference (UNESCO, 2024).



Establish national standards and a clear set of core competencies to professionalize the headteacher role.

Defining the competencies will help align expectations, ensure coherence across education system levels, and strengthen alignment with national priorities. Regular assessment and formative feedback should guide headteachers' professional growth and improvement. Ghana can learn from peers like Kenya and Rwanda, countries that have invested in stronger, transparent guidelines and selection processes for school leader recruitment (UNESCO, 2024).



Equip SISOs and district officials with the required resources to continuously support school leaders.

As noted in Section 3.5, SISOs are a key enabler of effective women school leadership, providing ongoing mentorship and support to headteachers as part of their mandate. Past studies highlight how some SISOs may focus on compliance with national standards (e.g. ensuring school plan completion, adhering to school standards, collecting EMIS data, etc.) without engaging sufficiently in the

support function (Bell, 2025). Aware of the importance of involving SISOs in these tasks, the MoE announced in 2022 a shift from traditional supervision towards a stronger focus on growth and coaching. However, SISOs need support and resources to make this switch effectively, including training and timely access to funds to cover school visits and carry out responsibilities.

Strengthening school leadership broadly will also benefit women headteachers specifically. Standardizing recruitment and professionalizing the role will increase transparency and reduce biased or opaque selection procedures that tend to disadvantage them. Professionalizing the role through clearer standards and training can help challenge perceptions of women as less capable, build their confidence and strengthen their position to succeed as school leaders.

Recommendation #2: Consider quotas for women, complemented with gender-sensitive workplace policies to support them once they are in the role.

Beyond strengthening the school leadership profession, providing differential support for women is also necessary as the gender-specific barriers interact with and compound broader systemic challenges.

Ghana has made numerous international and national commitments towards gender equality, including those specific to education (Section 2). However, stand-alone commitments are insufficient to drive change. They need to be backed by concrete actions, comprising adequate funding and resources. Good communication and implementation plans are essential to ensure that stakeholders from national to school levels are aware of the measures and their responsibilities.

With this in mind, the MoE could consider the following measures:



Pilot quotas for women, at least temporarily, to improve representation. Evidence shows quotas not only improve representation but also increase the visibility of women's capabilities, and support needs (Pande and Ford, 2012; Revillard and Tuffy 2023). Quotas can also address some women's lack of confidence in taking on roles that are not socially attributed to women. The MoE could institutionalize explicit quotas for women in school leadership and other roles of responsibility (e.g. SISOs or district-level staff) aligned with Ghana's existing 40 per cent quota

for women's representation in decision-making bodies. Quotas could be progressive and context-specific, recognizing that targets may take longer to achieve in districts where only a minority of teachers are women, or few women hold the required qualifications.



Supplement quotas with supportive, gender-sensitive policies that create favourable conditions and a safe workplace environment.

Quotas alone are insufficient in the face of structural barriers and non-inclusive working environments, especially in rural and remote areas. Measures related to parental leave, childcare services, flexible working hours, targeted training and mentoring, and protections against gender discrimination, harassment and violence are essential to fostering an inclusive school culture and motivating women to pursue leadership.



Targeted measures like scholarships could be particularly beneficial in districts with particularly low representation of women (see Annex 4).

Education is an important leverage for catapulting women into leadership. Not being able to get a degree affects women's ability to be competitive for leadership positions, including beyond school headship and towards roles of responsibility within GES. Providing scholarships that cover tuition and related costs for women, particularly those with family responsibilities or residing in underserved areas, can help strengthen the pipeline of women candidates.



Invest in mentorship and promote role models for women, to help build community, self-confidence and networks.

Organizing workshops or meetings facilitated by female mentors can empower women teachers, reinforce their leadership skills and foster their career aspirations. Mentoring initiatives can also provide a supportive network in a male-dominated environment, contributing to women's well-being.

Recommendation #3: Enhance rural and remote teaching and living conditions.

With 64 per cent of schools in rural areas, the success of efforts to support women in leadership positions will largely depend on improving service conditions in these localities. Investments in school infrastructure and living conditions – especially in marginalized and remote areas – are essential to making these postings more appealing for women to teach and lead.

In collaboration with local authorities and relevant ministries, the MoE could explore practical, low-cost incentives that have shown to yield measurable results addressing multiple needs such as safety, housing and transportation

simultaneously (Breeding, Bétéille, and Evans, 2021; UNESCO, 2024; Evans and Acosta, 2023). Examples include:



Housing support: Partner with the Ministry of Rural Transformation and local communities to provide affordable, safe and accessible housing near schools, including repurposing unused spaces for teacher and headteacher accommodation.



Transport stipends: Provide transportation stipends or organized transport services to help women teachers commute to hard-to-reach schools – a relatively low-cost measure that can make remote postings more accessible while enabling teachers to remain connected to their families. It may also yield quick gains in recruitment and retention while longer-term strategies, such as housing support, are implemented.



Childcare support: Where feasible, pilot quality childcare options in rural or hard-to-staff schools. Evidence shows access to childcare improves women's workforce participation and retention and could be a promising strategy to support rural teacher deployment (Devercelli and Beaton-Day, 2020; J-PAL, 2023). Modest arrangements – such as partnerships with local councils or women's groups to establish small childcare centres near clusters of schools – could make rural postings more viable for women teachers with young children.



Local recruitment: Explore measures to prioritize recruiting teachers and headteachers from local communities, as they may be more willing to work and reside in these areas, helping to build a pipeline of future women leaders. Complementary efforts to train and support women from rural communities would further strengthen this pipeline.

Recommendation #4: Promote school- and community-based interventions to transform harmful gender norms, engaging boys, men and community leaders.

Harmful gender norms operate at multiple levels of society affecting all members, and interventions must do the same. For example, school-level policies alone are insufficient to overcome the societal expectations and constraints that limit girls' and women's ambitions and achievements. The MoE, together with the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection and the Ministry of Rural Transformation, could consider piloting and adapting proven measures in the following areas:



Gender-responsive curriculum and TLMs: Review curricula to remove gender biases and stereotypes, sexist language or imagery (e.g. girls are pushed towards home economics while boys engage in physical education). Instead, actively promote gender equality, including regularly revisiting gender roles, emphasizing women's leadership at social and school levels, etc. Existing methodological guides can be leveraged to assess whether textbooks and TLMs promote a balanced representation (e.g. UNESCO or Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development).



Building capacity of school staff and education officials: Equip teachers, school staff and government officials to recognize and address gender stereotypes (conscious and unconscious) – starting from pre-service training and reinforced through ongoing professional development. Training should provide practical strategies for gender-responsive pedagogy, adapted from proven approaches in countries such as Sweden and Viet Nam to the Ghanaian context.



Student-focused programmes: Engaging students at school can shift gender norms. For example, a two-year intervention by the non-profit Breakthrough India engaged adolescents in classroom discussions about gender equality and led to attitudes that were 0.18 standard deviations more supportive of gender equality, particularly among boys, with effects persisting even two years after the programme ended (Dhar et al., 2018). Similar initiatives could be adapted for Ghana.



Early-age interventions: Gender stereotypes form early and are reinforced over time, making early intervention essential. Pre-primary education should be intentionally designed to promote gender equality, drawing on frameworks such as UNICEF's Build to Last Conceptual Framework (Nugroho et al., 2022).



Community-focused interventions: Parents, caregivers, and communities are the primary agents of socialization, and often protectors of institutionalized gendered social norms (UNICEF, 2020). Utilize media and social and behavioural communication campaigns to engage and sensitize parents,²² religious leaders and communities in reflecting on harmful norms and their impacts.

22 See examples from current UNICEF programming here (UNICEF, 2020), including programmes to engage fathers in Nepal and Cuba, supporting working mothers in Bangladesh, and adolescent mothers in Jamaica.

Taken together, the recommendations form a mutually reinforcing agenda: a stronger, more transparent leadership profession provides the foundation; targeted gender measures accelerate women's entry and retention; improved rural conditions support progress possible beyond urban centres; and norm change ensures gains are sustainable over time. No single measure will be sufficient on its own as the barriers women face are interlinked and do not occur in isolation. Progress will require sustained political will, cross-ministerial coordination, and consistent resourcing.

This study also points to questions warranting further investigation. First, longitudinal data to assess the evolution of women's representation in school leadership positions – including tracking progress against any quotas and reforms introduced – would allow for more robust monitoring of change over time. Second, further research into the experiences of women from the Northern regions of Ghana, where patriarchal norms appear strongest and representation is lowest, could inform more contextually tailored interventions. Third, the role of SISOs as enablers of women's leadership merits dedicated study, given their potential reach and the stated commitment by the MoE to reorient their function. Finally, student-level outcomes linked to women's school leadership remain underexplored in the Ghanaian context and could strengthen the evidence base for investment in gender equality at the leadership level.

Acronyms

BECE	Basic Education Certificate Examination
DEO	District Education Office / District Education Officer
EMIS	Education Management Information System
GALOP	Ghana Accountability and Learning Outcomes Project
GCE	General Certificate of Education
GES	Ghana Education Services
GPI	Gender Parity Index
JHS	Junior High School
KG	Kindergarten
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MoE	Ministry of Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PBME	Planning, Budgeting, Monitoring and Evaluation
SHS	Senior High School
SISO	School Improvement Support Officer
TLM	Teaching and Learning Material
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WASSCE	West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination

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Annexes

Annex 1. Research questions and analytical framework

This study focuses on school leadership in Ghanaian basic schools, investigating three research questions:

1. What is the representation of women in school leadership in Ghana?
2. Do men and women report different experiences and challenges as a school leader?
3. What barriers and enablers affect women's progression into and success within school leadership roles?

The first question is addressed descriptively, largely using school-level census data. The second and third draw on primary quantitative and qualitative data, guided by the gender-focused analytical framework described below.

A recent systematic review of studies in Africa (Bush et al., 2022) points to some key barriers to women's school leadership: gender biases and stereotypes, work-life balance challenges, absence of mentors and role models, lack of transparency in recruitment processes, low self-esteem and the need to always have to prove competence.

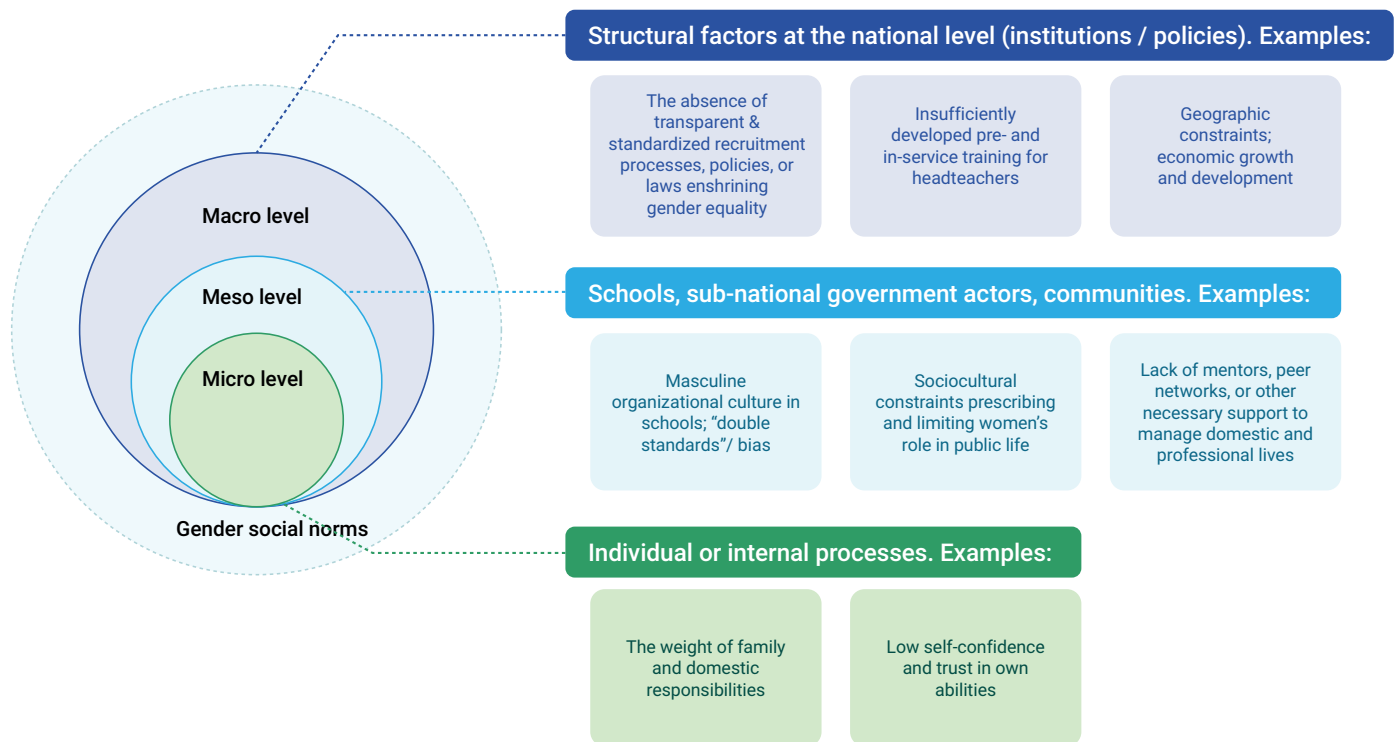
The analytical framework used in this study (*Figure A1*) builds on relevant literature on gender and school leadership, drawing particularly on socioecological models¹ to examine barriers and enablers facing women in professional settings across three interconnected levels: **macro**, **meso** and **micro**.

- **The macro** level encompasses national and structural factors such as labour force composition, legal and policy environments, and economic conditions.
- **The meso** level focuses on sub-national, school and community contexts, including school cultures, social norms regarding women's roles, professional networks and policy implementation such as recruitment practices.
- **The micro** level examines individual experiences, including interpersonal interactions and psychological barriers that affect women's leadership trajectories.

¹ Socioecological models, first developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in the 1970s, are theory-based frameworks for understanding how personal and environmental factors interact to shape human development. These are illustrated by nesting circles, with the individual at the centre surrounded by various systems that influence them (Bronfenbrenner, 1989).

Figure A1 illustrates examples of these factors at each level. Overarching and intersecting all three levels are prevailing social and gender norms that influence how barriers and opportunities are experienced.

Figure A1: Analytical framework



Source: Authors' adapted from different specialized literature, particularly based on socioecological models first developed by Bronfenbrenner in 1970s.

This analytical framework shaped the study's overall approach and tools, informing every stage – from co-designing to developing data collection tools, conducting analysis and underpinning the findings.

Annex 2. Empirical strategy and data

The research was co-created with education and gender experts and key government stakeholders in Ghana. A Consultative Group composed of representatives from MoE, GES, other education agencies, academic institutions, and development partners provided advisory input on the study design, analytical framework methodology, implementation and interpretation of findings.

The research used a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, combining primary and secondary quantitative data with qualitative enquiry.

Secondary data sources included policy and programme documents, academic and grey literature and administrative EMIS data collected by the MoE. EMIS data is sourced from an annual school census that collects rich school-based information such as location, infrastructure, staff characteristics, student enrolment and attendance, etc. EMIS data from 2020/21 were used to understand the status quo of women's representation and to contextualize other primary data analysis.²

Primary data collection proceeded in two sequential stages. A nationally representative quantitative survey examined school leaders' experiences, attitudes and practices. This was followed by qualitative data collection that helped further explore the "why" and "how" behind identified patterns. Together these data provide a holistic picture of school leadership in Ghana.

All quantitative and qualitative tools were piloted in schools not included in the final sample. Quantitative data were collected in February 2024 and qualitative data in June 2024. Data-collection instruments and ethical protocols were reviewed and approved by the Health Media Lab Institutional Review Board before launch.

Quantitative data collection: *Nationally representative phone survey of school leaders*

A nationally representative phone survey was conducted with **665 school leaders**, comprising **419 men (63 per cent) and 246 women (37 per cent)**.³ *Table A2.1* lists key sample characteristics and *Figure A2.1* shows the regional distribution.

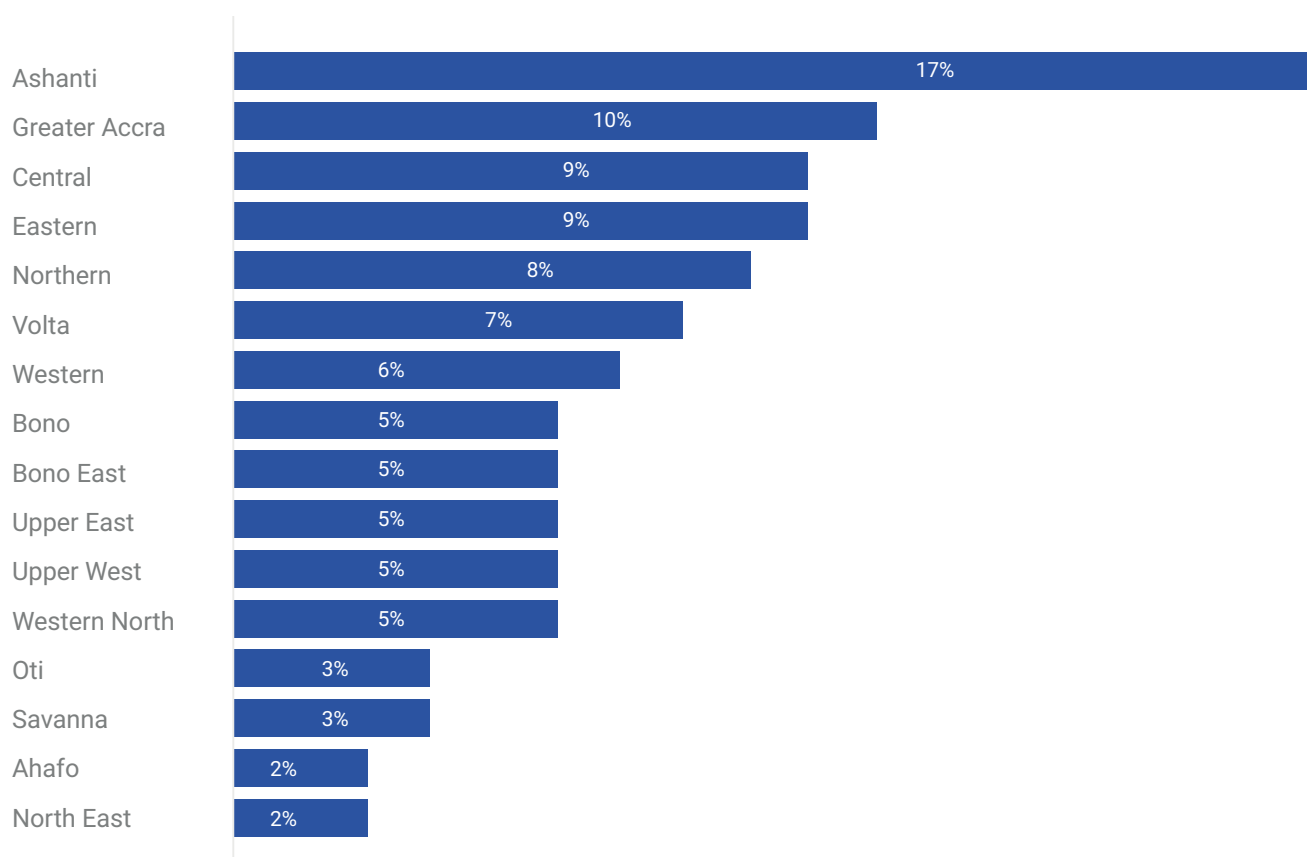
2 More recent 2022/23 data was available, but excluded from the primary analysis due to missing headteacher information for approximately half of the schools in this dataset - likely a reporting or data extraction issue. The analysis therefore relies on the older but more complete dataset. All statistical analyses were also replicated using the incomplete 2022/23 data, yielding broadly comparable results, with minor differences in magnitude but consistent overall trends.

3 Phone surveys were selected as a cost-effective method for reaching a large sample, could easily be replicated as a dipstick in other contexts, and in Ghana again after a few years. The initial sample targeted 783 schools but due to attrition, surveys failed to be implemented in 15 per cent of the schools. Annex 5 discusses the implications of this attrition.

Table A2.1: Characteristics of survey sample

Type	Number of respondents (%)
Men	419 (63%)
Women	246 (37%)
Rural	396 (60%)
Urban	269 (40%)
Public	482 (72%)
Private	183 (28%)
Total	665 (100%)

Figure A2.1: Survey sample distribution by region



The sampling frame for the school surveys was the EMIS 2020/21 database, which includes Ghanaian basic schools. The sample was stratified by geographic belt (northern/middle/south; see belt definitions below), locality (urban/rural), school type (public/private), and school leader gender. It was designed to reflect the population strata proportions, except school leader gender. Women leaders were intentionally oversampled to enable robust gender comparisons. Schools were selected randomly within each stratum.

The survey collected information on leaders' backgrounds, professional experiences, leadership practices, gender norms, perceived barriers and opportunities, and career aspirations. The complete survey instrument is available in the companion practitioner toolkit.

Appropriate weights were added to correct for any differences in the sample composition and the population of Ghanaian schools. Gender comparisons used regression models with controls for relevant contextual factors (e.g. school locality) to account for structural differences between men's and women's postings.⁴

Qualitative data collection: *Interviews at school and district level*

A subsample of 18 schools, equally split across three geographic belts, was purposively selected from the survey sample. Of these, 12 were women-led and 6 were led by men. Women-led schools were oversampled to have a stronger focus on women's experiences, but men-led schools were also included to ensure that both men's and women's perspectives and experiences as well as teachers' views were represented.

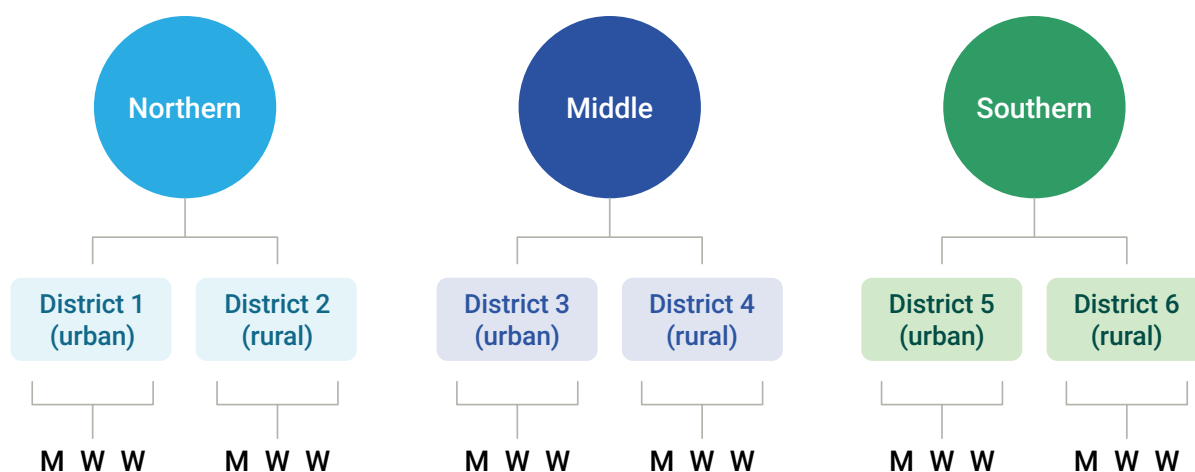
This sampling strategy captured variation across the country considering factors such as demographics, population density, cultural and religious beliefs, terrain and language. The three geographic belts were finalized together with the project's Consultative Group in September 2023:

- 1. The Northern Belt:** Northern, North East, Savannah, Upper East and Upper West regions;
- 2. The Middle Belt:** Ashanti, Bono, Ahafo, Bono East, Oti and Western North regions; and
- 3. The Southern Belt:** Eastern, Greater Accra, Central, Volta and Western regions.

4 Comparisons were done by conducting Ordinary Least Square (OLS) linear regressions with appropriate controls for observable characteristics such as school location, school leader qualifications, experience, age, etc. Note that only observed variables on which data were collected could be controlled for in the analysis. This enhances the robustness of the results, however unobserved factors affecting the outcome cannot be ruled out.

Within each belt, one rural and one urban district were selected (*Figure A2.2*), with three schools per district (two women-led, one men-led).

Figure A2.2: Qualitative sampling design



In each school, data collection included semi-structured interviews with headteachers, teachers and district-level officials. In total, **75 interviews** were conducted (*Table A2.2*).

Table A2.2: Qualitative phase research participants

Stakeholder	Type of data collected	Sample size
Headteacher	Interviews: one per school	18 (women: 12)
Teachers	Interviews: 1–2 per school	33 (all women)
District Directors	Interviews: 6 in-person, 6 over the phone	12 (women: 2)
SISO	Interviews	12 (women: 3)
	Total data collected	75 (50 women)

In the report, respondents are identified by a unique number (n°) assigned during data collection for anonymisation purposes.

Qualitative data were thematically analysed, employing both deductive and inductive coding techniques, using Nvivo software. Deductive coding was based on codes mapped to the analytical framework, with second-level inductive coding capturing emerging themes.

Quantitative and qualitative data were separately analysed according to the analytical framework for this research. Analysis of the qualitative data identified themes in participants' responses that complemented and sometimes contrasted with quantitative findings. Following established norms, quotes from participants highlight complementary findings and discrepancies discussed in the text (Hsieh and Shannon 2005).

Annex 3. Quantitative analyses

This annex provides an overview of the quantitative analyses undertaken for the report.

3.1 Secondary data analysis

The secondary data analysis was conducted using the **2020/21** annual school census.

A more recent dataset was available (2022/23) but had missing data on the headteachers' gender for 52 per cent of the schools and hence could not be used for analysis on women's representation as school leaders. The reasons behind the missing data were not entirely clear but seem to be measurement or extraction error.

These data were mainly used to inform the Oaxaca decomposition analysis in Section 3.2.

Results from an Oaxaca decomposition analysis estimate the extent to which the difference in the likelihood of being a headteacher between men and women can be attributed to observable characteristics versus systematic factors that remain unexplained. The Oaxaca–Blinder model consists of decomposing the gap into portions driven by measurable attributes, conventionally referred to as endowments, such as qualifications, or experience, and a residual component that may reflect structural barriers or other unmeasured influences.

The residual portion is captured through two terms: 'coefficients' (differences in how observed characteristics are rewarded – e.g. one year of experience might increase a man's likelihood of being a headteacher more than a woman's) and an interaction term (the combined effect of differing 'endowments' and those characteristics being rewarded differently). It's the part of the gap that arises when both the endowments and their coefficients interact.

This analysis uses EMIS 2020/21 data. The first step to conduct this analysis is measuring the gender gap in the probability of becoming a headteacher. In Ghana, men's probability of running a school is 5.3 pp higher than women's (8 per cent vs. 2.7 per cent).

The method then consists of decomposing this gender gap difference of 5.3 pp in observed and unobserved components, i.e. the endowments, the coefficients and the interaction terms. The findings reveal:

Only 0.3 pp (6 per cent) is explained by observable characteristics such as age (used as a proxy for experience levels here) and academic qualifications. Men tend to be slightly older (34.1 years vs 33.3 years) and more likely to hold higher academic diplomas, while women are more likely to hold professional diplomas. Equalizing these characteristics would narrow the gap very slightly (by 0.3 pp) but it would not vanish.

Around 5 pp (90 per cent) remains unexplained. The biggest portion corresponds to differences in unobserved characteristics, i.e. coefficients, with 4.8 pp, indicating that women with identical experience and qualifications still face lower chances of becoming headteachers – their characteristics are rewarded less when it comes to appointments. In other words, age and diplomas seem to enhance men’s promotion prospects much more (*Figure A3.1*).

A small interaction effect (0.2 pp) reflects that men both possess slightly stronger qualifications and receive greater returns to them.

Table A3.1 below presents the full decomposition estimates. Column 1 presents the gap and the values associated with its decomposition mentioned above: endowment, coefficient, and interaction. Columns 2 to 4 present the contribution of specific individual variables to each case. Most relevant results include:

- **Age** contributes positively to headship likelihood, with slightly higher returns for men.
- **Academic qualifications** show mixed effects: bachelor’s and master’s degrees slightly increase headship likelihood, while lower or technical qualifications contribute less or even negatively to the gap, indicating that differences in attainment explain little of the gender gap.
- **Professional qualifications** also vary; certificates and other non-degree qualifications generally reduce headship likelihood, while bachelor’s and master’s degrees slightly increase it; however, much of this effect is in the unexplained component, suggesting structural factors influence how these qualifications translate into positions.

These results confirm that most of the leadership gap is not explained by individual characteristics like age or qualifications, but rather by differences in how these characteristics are rewarded.

The Oaxaca–Blinder decomposition is a powerful tool for understanding gaps between groups, yet it has limitations: it relies on observable characteristics included in the model, so unmeasured factors (e.g. informal networks, motivation, discrimination) remain in the unexplained component, potentially overstating structural barriers. The method is also sensitive to the choice of reference

group and the specification of the regression model, affecting the size of the explained and unexplained parts. It is also descriptive and does not establish causal relationships, meaning it cannot definitively show that specific factors cause the observed disparities. Despite this, it provides valuable insight into where gaps arise and can guide further investigation and policy design.

Table A3.1: Gender gap in school leadership: Oaxaca–Blinder decomposition estimates

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
VARIABLES	Overall differences	Endowments	Coefficients	Interaction
Age		0.182***	8.171***	0.188***
		(0.00685)	(0.214)	(0.00821)
Academic qualifications				
BECE certified		0.000340	-0.0311***	0.0159***
		(0.00139)	(0.00710)	(0.00374)
GCE O-Level		-0.0135***	-0.142***	0.0168***
WASSCE certified		-0.0608***	-1.888***	0.362***
		(0.0147)	(0.213)	(0.0416)
GCE A-level		0.0127***	-0.0315***	-0.0220***
		(0.00196)	(0.00526)	(0.00387)
Diploma		0.0628***	-1.298***	-0.198***
		(0.00948)	(0.164)	(0.0260)
Bachelors' degree		0.134***	-0.349***	-0.0668***
		(0.00888)	(0.102)	(0.0197)
Masters' or higher		0.0420***	-0.0524***	-0.00856***
		(0.00657)	(0.0113)	(0.00228)
Other, inc. technical or vocational		-0.00561***	-3.206***	-0.0574***
		(0.00195)	(0.229)	(0.0138)
Professional qualifications				
Certificate		-0.130***	-0.772***	-0.108***
		(0.00927)	(0.104)	(0.0151)
Bachelors' degree		-0.00129	0.818***	0.00888*
		(0.000850)	(0.0622)	(0.00528)
Masters' or higher		0.00341	0.0210**	0.000698
		(0.00229)	(0.00953)	(0.000564)
Other		0.0879***	-1.300***	0.101***
		(0.00974)	(0.216)	(0.0171)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Men (group 1)	8.027***			
	(0.0517)			
Women (group 2)	2.726***			
	(0.0316)			
Men–Women difference	5.301***			
	(0.0606)			
Endowments	0.313***			
	(0.0150)			
Coefficients	4.757***			
	(0.0588)			
Interaction	0.232***			
	(0.0209)			
Constant			4.816***	
			(0.842)	
Observations	541,329	541,329	541,329	541,329
Standard errors in parentheses				
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1				

3.2 Primary data analysis

Original data were collected through a **nationally representative phone survey with headteachers (n=665)**. The sample comprised:

- 63% men / 37% women
- 60% rural / 40% urban schools
- 72% public / 28% private schools

Table A3.2: Headteacher characteristics in the survey sample, by gender

	Average	Men	Women
Years of experience as a school leader	7.7 years	7.8 years	7.6 years
Highest qualification: BECE certified	0%	0%	0%
Highest qualification: WASSCE certified	4.86%	4.86%	4.86%
Highest qualification: Diploma	13.67%	14.78%	9%
Highest qualification: Bachelor's Degree	69.20%	71.43%	59.8%
Highest qualification: Master's degree	12.27%	8.93%	26.36%

Survey data were analysed in two ways: (1) generating averages to examine the prevalence of issues or attitudes among school leaders, or (2) comparing estimates between women and men using simple Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regressions with controls as specified in Annex 2.

Controls adjusted for the fact women leaders are more likely to be present in certain type of schools and included school characteristics (type: public/private/mission; location: urban/rural; level: primary, JHS; region; and size [number of students]). Additionally, individual characteristics (age and qualification of school leader) were controlled for where relevant and teaching responsibility was added when explaining stressors, satisfaction, day-to-day issues and activities.

Post-stratification weights were applied to national representativeness, using strata defined as the combination of female/male-led school, urban/rural, private/public and geographic belt (South, Centre and North). The proportion of schools in each was calculated using the latest available EMIS data.

As a result, the proportion of women participants in the study exceeds their actual representation within the education system. In the survey, this was done to enable disaggregated analysis by gender. Sampling weights were applied in all national-level estimates to adjust for this oversampling. In the qualitative phase, this was done to create a deliberate focus on women-led schools and enable deeper exploration of gender-specific barriers and leadership experiences.

Detailed regression results are included below.

3.3 Regression results: differences between women and men headteachers

Tables A3.3 to A3.12 present the regression results. Only results $p < 0.05$ or lower are considered statistically significant.

In each table, column 2 (mean) indicates the overall average of that variable. For example, in *Table A3.3*, the mean for statement 1, “I did not know how to become a headteacher” is 0.23, which indicates that 23 per cent of all headteachers (men and women) surveyed felt this way. Column 3 indicates the OLS estimate from simple linear regressions with controls (as described above) for the difference between women and men headteachers (women minus men). Negative values indicate men were more likely to report that statement.

Challenges on path to becoming a headteacher

Results from table A3.3 are largely reported in section 3.3.1 of the report. To each statement included in the table, participants could answer “Yes” or “No”.

The following controls were used in the OLS regression conducted for understanding differences between men and women headteachers, reported in column 3: headteacher age and qualifications.

Table A3.3: Before you became a headteacher, did you encounter any personal or professional challenges that affected your professional journey. If yes, could you tell me more about what these challenges might have been?

Challenge	Mean	Difference between women and men headteachers
1. I did not know how to become a headteacher.	0.23	0
2. There is limited leadership training that can contribute to our preparation to become headteachers.	0.71	-0.13
3. Lack of time to get an additional academic degree.	0.46	-0.08
4. Lack of funds to get an additional academic degree.	0.89	-0.13*
5. The administration appointing headteachers was not supportive.	0.34	-0.07
6. My colleagues were not supportive.	0.23	-0.08
7. I struggled to balance the workload with my household or family responsibilities.	0.52	-0.11
8. I did not believe I could become a headteacher.	0.3	-0.06

Source: Nationally representative headteacher survey, 2024. N=248 school leaders who faced challenges in professional journey.

Key: * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Sources of stress

Results from table A3.4 are largely reported in section 3.3.3 in the report. To each statement included in the table, participants could answer along a Likert scale that included the following options: “This does not stress me at all”, “This stresses me sometimes”, “This stresses me quite often”, “This stresses me out all the time”.

The following controls were used in the OLS regressions conducted for understanding differences between men and women headteachers, reported in column 3: age and qualifications of headteachers, school type (public/private; mission) and location (urban/rural; and region), school size, school composition (JHS only or primary and JHS), and if the headteacher had teaching responsibilities.

Table A3.4: I am now going to read about factors that could be sources of stress in your current role as a headteacher. Thinking of your current role, please tell me on a scale of 1 to 4, how much stress each of the following aspects causes you.

Statement	Mean	Difference between women and men headteachers
1. Personal obligations that clash with school work	0.68	-0.08
2. Managing staff and their expectations	0.88	0
3. Pedagogical supervision of my staff	0.74	0
4. Physical safety and security	0.81	-0.19*
5. Student absenteeism	1.14	-0.08
6. Student attrition	0.78	-0.21**
7. Teacher absenteeism	0.52	-0.12
8. Teacher attrition	0.5	-0.2***
9. Teacher recruitment and management	0.82	-0.08
10. Administrative workload	1.05	-0.14
11. Financial management of the school	1.43	0.05
12. Fundraising to keep the school running	1.37	-0.03
13. Students' transportation to and from school	0.72	-0.14
14. Infrastructure management, such as classroom and furniture availability or conditions	1.41	-0.07
15. Supervision from the district level	0.38	-0.1
16. Engaging with parents	0.83	-0.07
17. Engaging with community members	0.74	-0.09
18. Obtaining teaching and learning materials or other resources	1.34	-0.16
19. Ensuring school discipline	0.76	0.01
20. Managing multiple different responsibilities at the same time	1.17	-0.18*

Source: Nationally representative headteacher survey, 2024. N=665

Key: * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Level of satisfaction in role

Results from *table A3.5* are largely reported in section 3.3.5. To each statement included in the table, participants could answer along a Likert scale that included the following options: “Completely disagree”, “Somewhat disagree”, “Somewhat agree”, “Completely agree”.

The following controls were used in the OLS regression conducted for understanding differences between men and women headteachers, reported in column 3: age and qualifications of headteachers, school type (public/private) and location, school size, school composition (JHS only of primary and JHS), and if the headteacher had teaching responsibility.

Table A3.5: I am going to read some statements about your satisfaction with your role as headteacher. On a scale of 1 to 4, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statement	Mean	Difference between women and men headteachers
1. I often consider moving to another school.	0.92	-0.21*
2. I would recommend my school as a great place to work.	2.64	0.08
3. My job leaves little room for personal time and hobbies.	1.46	-0.08
4. I often consider changing my profession.	0.82	-0.43***
5. I feel that I have a positive impact on the staff and students at my school.	2.84	-0.03
6. Overall, I am satisfied with my current job.	2.61	0.14*

Source: Nationally representative headteacher survey, 2024. N=665

Key: * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Day-to-day work at school

To each statement included in *table A3.6*, participants could answer along a Likert scale that included the following options: “*Completely disagree*”, “*Somewhat disagree*”, “*Somewhat agree*”, “*Completely agree*”.

The following controls were used in the OLS regression conducted for understanding differences between men and women headteachers, reported in column 3: age and qualifications of headteachers, school type (public/private; mission) and location (urban/rural; and region), school size, school composition (JHS only or primary and JHS), and if the headteacher had teaching responsibilities.

Table A3.6: I am going to read statements about your day-to-day work in your school. Please relate these statements to your own life. On a scale of 1 to 4, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Statement	Mean	Difference between women and men headteachers
1. My work as a headteacher often clashes with my household duties.	0.89	0.04
2. My supervisors respect and value my work as a headteacher.	2.86	-0.05
3. My teaching staff respects and values my work as a head teacher.	2.88	0
4. Parents have confidence in my leadership.	2.84	0
5. Community members have confidence in my leadership.	2.74	-0.03
6. I question my abilities to perform this role.	0.91	0
7. My decisions are sometimes challenged by colleagues or supervisors.	1.36	0.04
8. I have mentors who have supported me professionally.	2.65	0.04

Source: Nationally representative headteacher survey, 2024. N=665

Key: * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Community norms

Results from *table A3.7* are largely reported in section 3.4.6. To each statement included in the table, participants could answer along a Likert scale that included the following options: “Completely disagree”, “Somewhat disagree”, “Somewhat agree”, “Completely agree”.

The following controls were used in the OLS regression conducted for understanding differences between men and women headteachers, reported in column 3: age of the headteacher, school type (public/private; mission) and location (urban/rural; and region), school size, and school composition (JHS only or primary and JHS).

Table A3.7: I am going to read statements about the community where you work. Can you tell me how much you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Community norms	Mean	Difference between women and men headteachers
1. The culture in this community makes it harder for girls to achieve their professional goals than boys.	1.3	-0.11
2. Girls in this school's community are sent to school only if they are not needed to help at home.	0.69	0.01
3. It is common in this community for girls to get pregnant before the age of 18 years.	1.49	0.04
4. It is common in this community for girls to marry before the age of 18 years.	0.87	-0.1
5. Most people in this community do not expect girls and boys to share household tasks equally.	1.37	0.11
6. In most households, men typically have the final say about decisions.	1.92	0.01
7. Most women in this community have the same chance to work outside the home as men.	2.09	0.06

Source: Nationally representative headteacher survey, 2024. N=665

Key: * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Gender stereotypes about men versus women headteachers

Results from *table A3.8* are largely reported in section 3.3.4 in the report. To each trait included in the table, participants could answer “Men”, “Women”, or “Both”.

No controls were used.

Table A3.8: I am now going to read some statements associated with headteachers. Thinking of the headteachers in Ghana that you know, can you tell me if men, women or both seem more likely to fit the specific statement?

Trait	Average rating	Rating by men headteachers	Rating by women headteachers	Difference (rating by women - rating by men)
Assertive	-0.02	-0.06	0.16	0.23***
Strict	0.22	0.18	0.38	0.2***
Intelligent	-0.16	-0.23	0.12	0.35***
Hard-working	-0.05	-0.14	0.32	0.46***
Competitive	-0.05	-0.11	0.20	0.31***
Kind	0.16	0.11	0.41	0.3***
Approachable	-0.15	-0.23	0.15	0.37***
Good communicator	0.11	0.06	0.31	0.24***
Goal-oriented	-0.04	-0.09	0.16	0.25***
Organized	0.09	0.00	0.45	0.45***
Collaborative	-0.06	-0.09	0.10	0.2***

Source: Nationally representative headteacher survey, 2024. N=665

Key: * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Frequency of engagement in various activities

Results from *table A3.9* are largely reported in section 3.3.2 in the report. To each statement included in the table, participants were asked to provide an answer, which was then categorized in one of the following categories: “Never”, “Once every term”, “Twice every term or more than that”, “Twice every month or more than that”, “Once every week”, “Twice every week or more than that”, “Once every month”.

The following controls were used in the OLS regression conducted for understanding differences between men and women headteachers, reported in column 3: age and qualifications of headteachers, school type (public/private; mission) and location (urban/rural; and region), school size, school composition (JHS only or primary and JHS), and if the headteacher had teaching responsibilities.

Table A3.9: On average, please indicate how frequently you engage in the following activities in the school.

Statement	Mean	Difference between women and men headteachers
1. Administrative tasks, such as preparing records and reports or responding to requests from education officials	8.59	-0.69
2. Financial management, such as working on budgetary issues	3.52	0.29
3. Fundraising	1	-0.31
4. Leadership tasks, such as developing school performance improvement plans, problem-solving or conflict management	4.72	-0.72
5. Teaching management-related tasks and meetings	7.51	-0.26
6. Interacting with students	20.17	1.26*
7. Interacting with parents (both formally and informally)	9.61	-0.24
8. Collaborations with the local community	4.53	-1.55*

Source: Nationally representative headteacher survey, 2024. N=665

Key: * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Confidence in own abilities

To each statement included in *table A3.10*, participants could answer “Not very confident”, “Confident”, “Very confident”.

The following controls were used in the OLS regression conducted for understanding differences between men and women headteachers, reported in Column 3: age of headteachers, school type (public/private; mission) and location (urban/rural; and region), school size, and school composition (JHS only or primary and JHS).

Table A3.10: How confident do you feel about your own abilities to carry out the following tasks?

Statement	Mean	Difference between women and men headteachers
1. Developing school plans and activities	1.57	-0.01
2. Administrative activities	1.58	-0.04
3. Managing extra-curricular activities	1.47	-0.08
4. Pedagogical supervision of teachers	1.47	0.06
5. Managing teaching staff	1.57	0.02
6. Managing school finances	1.41	0.11*
7. Raising funds for the school	0.77	-0.05
8. Building relationships with students	1.72	0.04
9. Engaging with parents	1.62	0.01
10. Interacting with the community	1.46	0.01
11. Carrying out leadership tasks and meetings, such as developing school improvement plans, managing human resources, problem solving and managing conflicts	1.63	-0.02

Source: Nationally representative headteacher survey, 2024. N=665

Key: * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Aspirations

Results from *tables A3.11* and *A3.12* are largely reported in section 3.3.5. To each statement included in the table, participants could answer “Yes”, or “No”.

The following controls were used in the OLS regression conducted for understanding differences between men and women headteachers, reported in column 3: age, school type (public/private; mission) and location (urban/rural; and region), school size, and school composition (JHS only or primary and JHS).

Table A3.11: Which of the following do you aspire to achieve in the next three years? Say Yes or No to each statement.

Statement	Mean	Difference between women and men headteachers
1. Earn another educational qualification/degree	0.78	0.02
2. Secure a promotion or a more senior role within the education system	0.87	0
3. Launch my own school	0.29	0.03
4. Improve my skills as headteacher by attending more training sessions	0.97	-0.01
5. Change career paths	0.23	-0.17***
6. Have the best school in the community	0.97	0
7. Not applicable/retirement	0.14	0.02
8. No aspirations	0	-0.01

Source: Nationally representative headteacher survey, 2024. N=665

Key: * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A3.12: Which of the following barriers are holding you back from achieving these goals? Say yes or no to each statement.

Statement	Mean	Difference between women and men headteachers
1. Lack of support from my family	0.51	-0.18***
2. Household and family responsibilities hinder progress	0.53	-0.15*
3. Doubts about my own capabilities	0.05	0.04
4. Financial constraints	0.94	-0.03
5. Lack of time to act on my goals	0.34	0.08
6. Lack of community support	0.65	-0.06
7. Lack of support from supervisors	0.33	0
8. Lack of support from the proprietor	0.13	-0.01

Source: Nationally representative headteacher survey, 2024. N=375 headteachers who declared they faced barriers.

Key: * = $p < 0.05$, ** = $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Annex 4. District-level women teacher and headteacher representation

Table A4.1: List of districts with low women headteacher representation, 2020/21

District	Region	Proportion of headteachers who are women	Proportion of teachers who are women	# of schools in the district
Asunafo North	Ahafo	8%	41%	189
Asunafo South	Ahafo	8%	39%	155
Tano South	Ahafo	9%	47%	103
Ahafo Ano North	Ashanti	8%	39%	130
Akrofuom	Ashanti	9%	41%	55
Amansie South	Ashanti	5%	38%	132
Ejura Sekyedumase	Ashanti	7%	39%	192
Offinso North	Ashanti	8%	38%	98
Sekyere Afram Plains	Ashanti	2%	34%	61
Sekyere Central	Ashanti	7%	41%	107
Banda	Bono	2%	31%	52
Dormaa Central	Bono	8%	40%	141
Dormaa West	Bono	9%	35%	66
Jaman North	Bono	7%	37%	134
Jaman South	Bono	6%	43%	151
Tain	Bono	8%	38%	152
Wenchi	Bono	8%	45%	120
Atebubu-Amantin	Bono East	9%	36%	171
Kintampo South	Bono East	6%	34%	126
Pru East	Bono East	7%	35%	113
Pru West	Bono East	8%	34%	87
Sene East	Bono East	0%	31%	79
Sene West	Bono East	8%	32%	92
Techiman North	Bono East	9%	48%	133
Ekumfi	Central	8%	43%	73
Upper Denkyira West	Central	9%	38%	79
Achiase	Eastern	6%	44%	70
Fanteakwa North	Eastern	8%	37%	104
Kwaebibirem	Eastern	10%	46%	174
Kwahu Afram Plains North	Eastern	9%	40%	108

District	Region	Proportion of headteachers who are women	Proportion of teachers who are women	# of schools in the district
Kwahu Afram Plains South	Eastern	8%	37%	97
Upper Manya Krobo	Eastern	5%	39%	126
Bunkpurugu-Nakpanduri	North East	5%	32%	139
Chereponi	North East	7%	34%	90
Mamprugu Moaduri	North East	2%	32%	53
Yunyoo-Nasuan	North East	0%	29%	62
Gushiegu	Northern	5%	37%	136
Karaga	Northern	2%	27%	119
Kpandai	Northern	4%	26%	156
Kumbungu	Northern	5%	34%	127
Mion	Northern	2%	22%	98
Nanton	Northern	8%	30%	53
Nanumba North	Northern	9%	31%	175
Nanumba South	Northern	5%	30%	131
Saboba	Northern	5%	31%	130
Savelugu	Northern	10%	36%	124
Tatale Sanguli	Northern	3%	32%	79
Tolon	Northern	7%	32%	110
Yendi	Northern	4%	29%	183
Zabzugu	Northern	6%	26%	83
Biakoye	Oti	9%	39%	128
Krachi East	Oti	9%	36%	131
Krachi Nchumuru	Oti	6%	30%	126
Krachi West	Oti	8%	37%	78
Nkwanta South	Oti	9%	35%	133
East Gonja	Savanna	8%	37%	120
North East Gonja	Savanna	4%	36%	53
North Gonja	Savanna	8%	34%	60
Sawla-Tuna-Kalba	Savanna	8%	38%	154
Tempene	Upper East	7%	31%	94
Daffiama-Bussie-Issa	Upper West	6%	28%	63
Sissala East	Upper West	9%	43%	76
Sissala West	Upper West	7%	35%	76
Wa East	Upper West	3%	31%	138
Wa West	Upper West	8%	38%	193
Nzema East	Western	10%	46%	115
Wasa Amenfi Central	Western	6%	37%	144

District	Region	Proportion of headteachers who are women	Proportion of teachers who are women	# of schools in the district
Bia East	Western North	8%	35%	93
Bia West	Western North	8%	39%	185
Bodi	Western North	6%	33%	106
Juaboso	Western North	8%	39%	147
Sefwi Akontombra	Western North	8%	33%	146
Suaman	Western North	7%	36%	42
Total				8319

Ghana	-	19%	50.48%	33,281
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Source: EMIS 2020/21

Annex 5. Study limitations

This study has limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings.

Attrition during quantitative data collection resulted in the final sample falling short of the original target. The survey aimed to reach 783 schools with 46 per cent women and 54 per cent men; however, due to connectivity issues and limited consent challenges, only 85 per cent of the sample was completed (37 per cent women, 63 per cent men).⁵ As non-random attrition may bias results, the research team tested for systematic differences between respondents and non-respondents and found no consistent patterns. Demographic characteristics of the final sample (e.g. age, qualifications, region) compared to national benchmarks showed no meaningful deviations, suggesting attrition occurred randomly.

Quantitative data were collected through phone surveys, which limited the scope and depth. Surveys were kept as brief as possible (30 minutes) to avoid respondent fatigue and non-completion, and questions were simplified and adapted for phone delivery. While these measures meant some loss in detail and nuance, they ensured higher quality responses throughout the survey and greater respondent compliance and engagement.

⁵ Women's lower response rate primarily reflects their underrepresentation in school leadership. While contacting more schools could have improved gender balance, it would have introduced imbalances across other sampling parameters. The study prioritized balance across key strata and oversampled women where possible, though women still comprise less than the targeted 50 per cent of the sample.

Although the quantitative data provide nationally representative insights, the survey exclusively focused on headteachers. Women headteachers may differ from other women teachers, and their barriers may not reflect those of the broader female teacher population. To mitigate this, survey findings were triangulated with qualitative data from a relatively large, geographically diverse group of respondents and schools, enhancing robustness.

A related limitation of nationally representative surveys is their limited ability to explore highly granular issues affecting specific subgroups, such as certain ethnic, religious, or minority populations.

While qualitative data enabled deeper exploration and triangulation, especially on sensitive topics, they are not nationally representative, and their analysis may be influenced by researcher bias. A mixed-methods design was adopted to balance breadth and depth. To limit potential bias during analysis, qualitative data were double-coded and analysed.

Finally, as social barriers were measured through observational and self-reported data, findings may be influenced by social desirability and recall bias. Men and women's responses are biased in different ways. Efforts were made to build rapport, assure confidentiality and design neutral questions aimed at minimizing these effects, though some underreporting or misrepresentation may remain.

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Special thanks to Global Partnership for Global School Leaders and Jacobs Foundation. We are grateful for their continued partnership and commitment to child rights.



About us

UNICEF, the United Nations agency for children, works to protect the rights of every child, everywhere, especially the most disadvantaged children and in the toughest places to reach. Across more than 190 countries and territories, we do whatever it takes to help children survive, thrive, and fulfil their potential.

UNICEF Office of Strategy and Evidence – Innocenti accelerates progress for children by working to ensure that policies and programming are informed by high-quality evidence. As the global custodian of child-related official statistics, it works closely with governments and partners to strengthen national statistical systems. Through world-leading data, research and foresight, it underpins UNICEF's global leadership on children's rights and serves as the organization's hub for setting strategy and monitoring programmes. With the active engagement of young people and other partners, it supports advocacy and dialogue aimed at improving the lives of children everywhere.

Global School Leaders (GSL) is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving education quality in the Global South by strengthening school leadership. Since 2017, GSL and its local partners have trained 13,000+ school leaders, impacting over 2 million students across more than 20 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. We focus on three strategic areas:

1. Support local partners to drive policy change and implement high-impact leadership development programs.
2. Generate and share evidence on what makes school leadership effective, and its enabling systems.
3. Amplify school leaders' voices to shape programs and influence global education policy.

GSL has developed and tested 39 contextualized training programs, conducted 5 global surveys with school leaders, and published 10+ system-level research studies. Through its global network - including 1,000+ school leaders from 77 countries - GSL advocates for greater investment in school leadership as a key lever for educational improvement.

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Via degli Alfani, 58
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Email: innocenti@unicef.org

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