ORIGINAL ARTICLE

A Multi-Stakeholder Evaluation of Female School Principals' Administrative Competencies: A Case from Türkiye[1]

Gülden Okçu Engin[1] , Halime Öztürk Çalıkoğlu[2*]

[1] MA, Sports Training Specialist, Çanakkale Provincial Directorate of Youth Services and Sports, Çanakkale, Turkiye.
ORCID: 0009-0000-7061-5834

[2] PhD, Educational Sciences, Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Çanakkale, Turkiye.
ORCID: 0000-0003-0121-7124

Ethical Statement

Consent forms were distributed, ethical board approval was granted (No: 14/4, Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, School of Graduate Studies, Ethics Committee), and approval from the Ministry of Education to conduct research in the selected schools was obtained.

Conflict of Interest

No conflict of interest is present in the conduction or the reporting of this study.

ABSTRACT

This study explores how teachers, students, and parents perceive the administrative competencies of female principals in Türkiye. Using a qualitative multiple-case study design, the study was conducted in two public secondary schools selected purposefully because they were led by female principals and represented diverse organizational contexts. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 48 participants (16 teachers, 16 students, and 16 parents). Katz's (1974) three-skill framework guided the analysis of technical, human, and conceptual competencies, while gender-based expectations were explored inductively. Findings indicate that communication emerged as the most frequently emphasized technical competency across stakeholder groups, whereas human competencies were noted primarily in relation to collaboration and school–parent engagement. Conceptual competencies were associated with adaptability, participation in projects, and organization of socio-cultural activities. Gendered expectations also shaped stakeholder views, with female principals often valued for inclusivity and relational orientation yet sometimes perceived as less authoritative. The study highlights both the strengths and constraints of female principals' administrative work in schools and offers implications for educational administration practice, policy, and gender equity.

Keywords: Administrative competencies, gendered expectations, female school principals, school administration

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*Corresponding Author

Asst. Prof. Dr. Halime Öztürk Çalıkoğlu, Educational Sciences, Çanakkale Onsekiz Mart University, Turkiye
Email: ozturkhalime@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Educational institutions play a critical role in shaping individual development and advancing societal progress. The effective administration of these institutions is crucial for enhancing academic quality, promoting student achievement, and cultivating a positive school climate. In this context, the competencies of school principals and how key stakeholders perceive these competencies represent a significant area of inquiry in the field of educational administration (Karakuş & Töremen, 2010; Kılınç & Cemaloğlu, 2018).

Despite the global feminization of the teaching profession, women remain underrepresented in school leadership roles (OECD, 2021; UNESCO, 2025). While women constitute the majority of the teaching workforce in many countries, their representation in school administration remains disproportionately low. In Türkiye, as of 2022, only 9.9% of school administrators were women (UNICEF Türkiye, 2023). This gender gap in educational leadership is often attributed to structural barriers, cultural expectations, and persistent gender norms that continue to shape both access to leadership and perceptions of women's leadership styles (Çelikten, 2004; Çelikten et al., 2019; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Kılınç & Cemaloğlu, 2018; Koşar et al., 2014; Tok & Yalçın, 2017). The UNESCO *Lead for Learning* report (2025) highlights that, despite increased awareness, women still held only 27% of education and higher education ministerial positions globally between 2010 and 2023, signaling enduring gaps in leadership across all levels of education. Martínez et al. (2021) further explain that gendered assumptions embedded in organizational cultures contribute to the exclusion of women from leadership roles, while Harris et al. (2024) underscore the systemic invisibility of women leaders in policy discourse and educational governance.

These patterns are not unique to Türkiye. For example, female principals are often praised for their relational strengths such as empathy and communication, yet at the same time their authority may be questioned, reflecting the persistence of gendered stereotypes in leadership evaluations (Weinstein et al., 2023). Similar findings were reported in South Africa, where female principals' resilience and decision-making were grounded in strong relational and communicative skills, yet their authority was frequently contested within male-dominated school cultures (de Bruyn & Mestry, 2020). Likewise, studies in the Gulf region demonstrated that women leaders often navigate a double bind, balancing expectations of care and inclusivity with institutional demands for assertiveness and authority (Massouti et al., 2024). In addition, research in Saudi Arabia revealed that female principals of schools with gifted classrooms enacted wise, transformative, and educational leadership roles, contributing to teacher motivation, problem-solving, and the shaping of inclusive school culture (Al-Mughyirah et al., 2023).

Such findings emphasize that gendered expectations not only influence leadership styles and competencies but also shape how women leaders are perceived by others in educational environments. In Türkiye, where teaching is also a highly feminized profession, these dynamics provide valuable insights into how cultural norms influence leadership and can inform broader discussions on inclusive and equitable school governance (Kahraman, 2019). This study's localized perspective offers internationally relevant lessons on challenging gendered perceptions and advancing inclusive school leadership.

The current study investigates how teachers, students, and parents perceive the administrative competencies of female school principals. Drawing on qualitative data from two public high schools in Çanakkale province led by female principals, the research explores stakeholder evaluations of three dimensions of administrative competency: technical,

human (interpersonal), and conceptual (Katz, 1974). In Türkiye, scholars also highlight the relevance of Katz's tripartite model, noting that principals are expected to demonstrate technical, human, and conceptual competencies (Kılınç & Cemaloğlu, 2018; Uslu, 2013). In addition, teachers have generally evaluated women administrators as competent in conceptual competencies such as vision building, goal setting, and project initiation (Gökyer & Çiçek, 2016). Beyond the Turkish context, international research has also demonstrated that distributed instructional leadership by female principals can transform schools into learning organizations, fostering collaboration, innovation, and socio-cultural responsiveness (Massouti et al., 2024). Synthesizing such evidence, a recent meta-synthesis emphasized that collaboration, innovation, and problem-solving are increasingly recognized as central dimensions of effective school leadership (Richardson & Khawaja, 2025).

By capturing the perspectives of multiple stakeholder groups, this study addresses the limited research on how teachers, students, and parents evaluate the competencies of female principals. It contributes by situating these evaluations within Katz's technical, human, and conceptual framework and by highlighting how gendered expectations shape recognition of women's administrative capacities. The findings are expected to inform both local educational policies and broader efforts to promote gender equity and inclusive leadership practices across educational systems. This study addresses the following questions:

- What are the views of teachers, students, and parents on the administrative competencies (technical, human, and conceptual) of female school principals in the selected schools?
- What are teachers', students', and parents' views regarding gender-based expectations and assumptions about female school principals?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Gender and Educational Leadership: Global and Local Dynamics

Despite the feminization of the teaching profession, women continue to be underrepresented in school leadership worldwide (UNESCO, 2025). This paradox is often linked to structural barriers, gender-based discrimination, and cultural expectations that restrict access to administrative roles (Asat & Deniz, 2022). International scholarship highlights systemic inequality, organizational bias, and gendered assumptions as key factors shaping women's leadership trajectories (Baloğlu et al., 2009; Eagly & Carli, 2007).

In Türkiye, women continue to be underrepresented in educational leadership, particularly at secondary and tertiary levels, despite ongoing commitments to gender equality. Research shows that patriarchal norms and institutional cultures frequently question women's authority and reinforce perceptions of management as a "male profession" (Ağıroğlu Bakır et al., 2017; Baloğlu et al., 2009; Öztekin Bayır & Dönmez, 2020). Female administrators are often described with relational or nurturing metaphors such as "mother" or "flower," which may express appreciation but also reveal ambivalence and stereotypes (Asat & Deniz, 2022). These cultural framings not only shape how women's competencies are judged but also influence their motivation and willingness to pursue or sustain leadership roles (Kılınç & Cemaloğlu, 2018).

Female principals are frequently associated with empathy, collaboration, and ethical decision-making, which are

qualities that contribute to inclusive and supportive school environments (Bakioğlu & Demiral, 2013). Yet in contexts privileging hierarchical or authoritarian styles, such traits may be undervalued or recast as weakness (Martínez et al., 2021). Understanding how gendered expectations intersect with leadership perceptions is therefore crucial for addressing inequalities in educational administration. This study positions itself within these global and local debates to examine how women's leadership is understood, experienced, and evaluated in Turkish public secondary schools.

Administrative Competencies Framework

Katz's (Katz, 1974) three-skill approach, which groups leadership competencies into technical, human (interpersonal), and conceptual domains, remains one of the most widely used classifications in educational administration (Karakuş & Töremen, 2010). This framework provides a valuable lens for analyzing how principals manage institutions and fulfill administrative responsibilities.

Technical competencies involve knowledge and skills needed to sustain effective school operations, such as resource management, data use, and problem-solving (Katz, 1974; Kılınç & Cemaloğlu, 2018). These competencies are increasingly emphasized in the context of digital transformation and accountability pressures (OECD, 2019; UNESCO, 2025). Female administrators who strengthen their technical expertise have been shown to foster more innovative and sustainable school management practices (Aktan et al., 2023).

Human (interpersonal) competencies focus on empathy, communication, and ethical practice, enabling administrators to build trust-based relationships, support collaboration, and cultivate positive school cultures (Doğan, 2010; Kahraman, 2019; Kılınç & Cemaloğlu, 2018; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Research often highlights the effectiveness of women leaders in deploying these skills, with empathetic and supportive approaches strengthening cooperation within school communities (Karakurt et al., 2022).

Conceptual competencies encompass strategic thinking, systemic analysis, adaptability, and vision-building, allowing principals to anticipate challenges and guide schools toward sustainable goals (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Kazak & Yıldırım, 2022). These competencies are increasingly recognized in international leadership debates that stress innovation and future-oriented school governance (Harris et al., 2024; UNESCO, 2025). Studies show that women leaders' problem-solving and holistic perspectives significantly contribute to decision-making, institutional culture, and staff motivation (Bakioğlu & Demiral, 2013; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Strengthening conceptual competencies through mentoring, professional development, and peer networks is therefore seen as vital to both individual growth and institutional improvement (Kabaklı Çimen & Bağdatlı Sariboğa, 2021; Pont et al., 2008).

Gendered Dimensions of Competence

Although Katz's framework is widely applied in educational contexts, its interpretation is often shaped by gendered expectations. Female leaders are commonly associated with relational competencies such as collaboration, empathy, and "emotional labor" (Hochschild, 1983, p.7), yet they face a double bind in which these qualities are devalued in systems that privilege authority (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Martínez et al., 2021). While such traits are essential for inclusive and participatory school environments, they may be misinterpreted as weakness in hierarchical or patriarchal settings (Harris et al., 2024).

The Turkish context reflects these dynamics. Women in school leadership frequently encounter stereotypes and

resistance, especially at the secondary and tertiary levels (Baloğlu et al., 2009; Öztekin Bayır & Dönmez, 2020). Relational and supportive approaches are often framed as extensions of gender roles rather than professional competencies (Kılınç & Cemaloğlu, 2018). Female principals are associated with empathy, fairness, participatory decision-making, and maternal qualities that help them build strong relationships (Bakioğlu & Demiral, 2013; Karataş & Su, 2016). Yet the same traits may be undervalued in contexts emphasizing discipline, authority, and rigid decision-making (Martínez et al., 2021). Research in Türkiye illustrates this tension: women administrators are praised for inclusiveness and sensitivity but also perceived as less strict or constrained by stereotypes and work–family responsibilities (Köse & Uzun, 2017; Şahin, 2021). Such ambivalence demonstrates how gendered expectations both affirm and limit recognition of women's competencies.

Stakeholders and Gendered Perceptions

Stakeholder perspectives are central to understanding how gender shapes evaluations of administrative competencies. This study considers the views of teachers, students, and parents, reflecting the multi-stakeholder reality of schools. Teachers often emphasize the roles of administrators in professional development and trust-building, which align with interpersonal competencies (Doğan, 2010; Katz, 1974). A survey in Türkiye found that attitudes toward women administrators were most positive in this domain (Asar, 2016). Students value empathetic, participatory, and guidance-oriented relationships that strengthen their sense of belonging and satisfaction (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Şahin & Atbaşı, 2020), while parents prioritize transparent communication and fairness as essential to their children's academic and social success (Akın et al., 2023).

Research in Türkiye shows that school principals often rely on empathy, problem-solving, and cultural awareness to strengthen parent relationships and establish balanced communication networks (Özgenel & Aktaş, 2020). Open and supportive communication with teachers has also been shown to enhance motivation, which in turn benefits students (Erdoğdu Denizer, 2018). These findings underscore the interdependence between administrative competencies and stakeholder perceptions, which are shaped by gendered expectations.

In sum, stakeholder perspectives both affirm and constrain women's leadership: inclusive and participatory approaches are valued, yet patriarchal or authoritarian models may limit their recognition. By examining technical, human, and conceptual competencies through a gender lens, this study contributes to global debates on educational leadership while offering context-specific insights from Türkiye's system.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design, which is appropriate for exploring complex social phenomena within their real-life settings (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). Examining two public secondary schools led by female principals enabled a contextualized and comparative understanding of how different stakeholder groups perceive female principals' administrative competencies. Multiple case designs are widely used in educational leadership research to compare practices and interpretations across settings (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018).

Study Group

The study was conducted in two public secondary schools in Çanakkale, Türkiye. School A operated as a day school, while School B included a boarding component, creating different patterns of daily interaction between the principal and students. Both schools were intentionally selected because they were led by female principals and represented diverse organizational contexts, allowing the research to capture a broader range of stakeholder experiences. Purposeful sampling was used to ensure the inclusion of teachers, students, and parents who interacted directly with the principal in instructional, administrative, and socio-cultural processes (Patton, 2015).

In total, 48 participants took part in the study: 16 teachers, 16 students, and 16 parents. The number of participants was determined to represent the main stakeholder groups across two cases while ensuring data saturation. Equal numbers from each stakeholder group in each school supported balanced representation and meaningful comparison within and across cases. Table 1 presents the distribution of participants by school and stakeholder group.

Table 1. Participant characteristics by school and stakeholder group

School	Stakeholder Group	n	Female	Male	Age Range (years)	Experience/Grade Level
School A	Teachers	8	5	3	28–48	1–15 years of teaching experience
	Students	8	4	4	15–17	Grades 9–12
	Parents	8	6	2	38–52	Children enrolled in grades 9–12
School B	Teachers	8	6	2	30–55	5–20 years of teaching experience
	Students	8	5	3	15–18	Grades 9–12
	Parents	8	7	1	37–50	Children enrolled in grades 9–12
Total		48	33	15		

Teachers represented a range of subject areas and professional experience, including several who served on school commissions or supported extracurricular initiatives such as cultural events, student clubs, or social responsibility projects. Their varied roles offered multiple perspectives on instructional and administrative practices. Students were selected from grades 9–12 and reflected different academic performance levels and involvement in activities such as sports teams, debate groups, Erasmus projects, and cultural programs, allowing insights into administrative practice as experienced both in and beyond the classroom.

Parents included highly engaged stakeholders, such as Parent-Teacher Association members and class representatives, as well as those with more limited or informal involvement in school events or meetings. Their participation varied from attending meetings and contributing to cultural or fundraising activities to more occasional engagement. This diversity allowed for an understanding of how parental perceptions of administrative competency may differ depending on the nature and frequency of their interactions with female principals. Together, the diverse backgrounds and levels of engagement of teachers, students, and parents enabled a comprehensive understanding of how female principals' administrative competencies were perceived across instructional, organizational, and socio-cultural domains of school life.

Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted separately with teachers, students, and parents. Interview forms with eight questions for teachers, six for students, and seven for parents were developed based on literature on administrative competencies, school leadership, and gendered perceptions. The draft forms were reviewed

by two scholars in educational administration and then refined. Pilot interviews with two teachers, two students, and one parent were conducted, resulting in minor adjustments to clarity and wording.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face between March and May 2024. Teachers were interviewed in staff rooms, students in quiet areas such as the library or dormitory, and parents at locations and times convenient for them. Each interview lasted approximately 20–25 minutes. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Participants were assigned anonymized codes reflecting the school, role, and interview order (e.g., AT1 for a teacher at School A, BS1 for a student at School B, AP1 for a parent at School A).

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive analysis, a method frequently employed in qualitative research to organize and interpret data based on predetermined and emergent themes (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2018). The analysis involved repeated reading of transcripts, coding meaningful units, grouping codes under relevant categories, and creating comparative tables for cross-case and cross-group interpretation. The analytical process followed two complementary paths.

1. Theory-driven coding based on Katz's (1974) three-skill framework for administrative and leadership competencies (technical, human, and conceptual) and supported by contemporary administrative competency and school leadership research.

   - Technical competencies include communication, problem-solving, and operational management (Katz, 1974; Kılınç & Cemaloğlu, 2018).

   - Human competencies encompass interpersonal, ethical, and collaborative practices (Doğan, 2010; Kahraman, 2019; Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

   - Conceptual competencies comprise strategic thinking, adaptability, vision building, and engagement with socio-cultural developments (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Kazak & Yıldırım, 2022).

2. Inductive coding for themes related to gender-based expectations and assumptions, allowing new patterns to emerge directly from participant narratives.

Trustworthiness and Ethics

Trustworthiness was ensured in accordance with Lincoln and Guba's (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) criteria. Credibility was supported through expert review of interview questions, pilot interviews, and the use of direct quotations to represent participants' perspectives. Neutrality was maintained during data collection, and interpretations were strengthened through collaborative coding discussions among the researchers. Intercoder agreement reached 98% (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Transferability was enhanced by detailed descriptions of participants, settings, and procedures, including contextual information about the two schools. Although the schools were anonymized to protect confidentiality, both principals granted permission to include contextual descriptors that support the interpretation of the findings.

Ethical procedures were followed throughout the study. Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the School of Graduate Studies of the University (No. 14/4), permission to conduct research was granted by the Ministry of Education, and informed consent was secured from all participants. Confidentiality was ensured through anonymized coding (e.g., AT1, BS2, AP3).

FINDINGS

Stakeholder Perceptions of Female Principals' Administrative Competencies

Technical Competencies

As shown in Table 2, teachers at School A highlighted the female principal's communication skills (f=18) and problem-solving skills (f=4). Within the category of communication skills, the most frequent codes were strong communication (f=7) and solution-oriented (f=5). Other codes mentioned once were peer-like relationship, motherly attitude, empathy, constructive feedback, sense of belonging, and supporting voluntarism. One teacher stated: "Her communication is warm, as if she is one of us. She comes to the teachers' room, shares everything, eats with us, and is always present at school events like matches" (AT1). Another emphasized: "When we said there were not enough social activities, she immediately looked into options like theater or folk dance. Whenever we raised a problem, she researched it and provided quick feedback" (AT3). A further teacher added: "She proceeds in a solution-oriented way. When there is a problem, she asks, 'What do you suggest? What can we do?' She takes my opinion, and if it is related to my field, she supports me and lets me make the decision" (AT8).

At School B, teachers strongly emphasized communication and relationship-building skills, with communication skills (f=51) being the most prominent category. Codes included collaborative approach (f=7), strong communication (f=6), motherly attitude (f=6), and supportive attitude (f=6). Other codes were solution-oriented (f=4), creating comfort, accessibility, and a sense of belonging (f=4), constructive feedback (f=4), active listening (f=2), and student-centered (f=2). Several codes were mentioned once, including empathy, inspirational leadership, supporting voluntarism, not having a strict stance, indecisiveness in crises, weak problem-solving, peer-like relationship, educational coaching, and offering multiple solutions. Reflecting collaborative problem solving, one teacher noted: "She values our opinions and seeks our ideas. We try to make decisions together; she is not the type to act alone but involves us in the process" (BT7).

Table 2. Technical competencies of female principals as perceived by teachers, students, and parents

Stakeholder Group	School	Categories	Codes (f)
Teachers	School A	Communication skills	Strong communication (7), Solution-oriented (5) Peer-like relationship (1), Motherly attitude (1), Empathy (1), Constructive feedback (1),
Teachers	School A	Problem-solving skills	Collaborative problem solving (2), Insufficiency in handling technical tasks (1), Collaborating in problem solving (1)
Teachers	School B	Communication skills	Collaborative approach (7), Strong communication (6), Motherly attitude (6), Supportive attitude (6), Solution-oriented (4), Sense of belonging (4), Constructive feedback (4), Active listening (2), Student-centered (2), Caring commitment (1), Empathy (1), Inspirational leadership (1), Supporting voluntarism (1), Peer-like relationship (1), Multiple solution suggestion (1), Educational coaching (1), Indecisiveness in crises (1), Weak problem solving (1)
Students	School A	Communication skills	Peer-like relationship (7), Strong communication (3), Motherly attitude (2), Caring commitment (1), Empathy (1), Inspirational leadership (1)
Students	School B	Communication skills	Peer-like relationship (12), Motherly attitude (6), Empathy (4), Inspirational leadership (3), Active listening (1), Caring commitment (1)
Students	School B	Problem-solving skills	Collaborative problem solving (13), Educational coaching (1), Multiple solution suggestion (1)
Parents	School A	Communication skills	Caring commitment (7), Motherly attitude (6), Peer-like relationship (5), Strong communication (2), Inspirational leadership (2), Empathy (1), Active listening (1), Constructive feedback (1), Student-centered (1)
Parents	School B	Communication skills	Strong communication (9), Peer-like relationship (7), Encouraging school attachment (7), Motherly attitude (6), Caring commitment (4), Student-centered (2), Inspirational leadership (1), Empathy (1), Supportive attitude (1), Distant communication style (1)

Parents	School B	Problem-solving skills	Insufficiency in handling technical tasks (1), Planning exam dates (1)

Students at School A primarily described the female principal's technical skills through communication abilities. The most frequently mentioned code was peer-like relationship (f=7), followed by strong communication (f=3) and motherly attitude (f=2). Caring commitment, empathy, and inspirational leadership were each mentioned once. One student remarked: "When we see the principal—at the morning entrance or during the day—we can easily chat with her. If we have a problem, we can go to her for help; and if she has a concern, she can comfortably come to us. I think that's really nice" (AS6). Another added: "She's new to our school, but she behaves more like a friend than a teacher, with a smiling attitude toward students. Most students like her" (AS7).

At School B, students similarly emphasized communication skills, especially peer-like relationship (f=12), motherly attitude (f=6), empathy (f=4), inspirational leadership (f=3), and active listening (f=1). Reflecting the motherly attitude code, one student explained: "She also looks at us with a mother's eyes. She sees us as her children. Just as a mother always wants the best for her children, she treats us in that way. It creates a sense of warmth between us" (BS7). Students also emphasized problem-solving skills, particularly collaborative problem solving (f=13), with educational coaching and multiple solution suggestion mentioned once each.

Parents at School A highlighted the principal's communication skills (f=26), often mentioning caring commitment (f=7), motherly attitude (f=6), and peer-like relationships (f=5). They also referred to inspirational leadership (f=2) and, less frequently, empathy (f=1), active listening (f=1), and constructive feedback (f=1). Reflecting the caring commitment code, one parent explained: "Honestly, our principal's door is always open to parents. We have never seen it closed. Whenever we have a problem, she has always been there for us in every matter" (AP8). Another, under the motherly attitude category, observed: "She approaches the children with a maternal and nurturing spirit, while also maintaining professional boundaries. She both loves the children deeply and shows them great respect" (AP6).

At School B, parents likewise emphasized communication skills (f=39), describing the principal as demonstrating strong communication (f=9), peer-like relationship (f=7), encouraging school attachment (f=7), and motherly attitude (f=6). Some also mentioned caring commitment (f=4) and a student-centered approach (f=2). Reflecting the peer-like relationship code, one parent noted: "She handled even those who tried to skip classes without humiliating them, explaining rules in a way they could accept. She said she tells them, 'I explain it like a friend, and they understand me,' which was a great example" (BP3). In addition, parents pointed to problem-solving skills, noting insufficiency in handling technical tasks such as repairs and maintenance (f=1) and in planning exam dates (f=1).

Human Competencies

Compared to technical and conceptual competencies, human competencies were mentioned much less frequently and appeared only at School B, with a small number of codes identified by each stakeholder group. Teachers referred to the principal's group-working skills, particularly her participation in school events (f=1). Students also noted human competencies, mentioning individual work such as preparing programs (f=2) and group work such as spending time together (f=1).

Parents at School B gave relatively more attention to human competencies. Within the category of working

individually, they emphasized collaborating with the parent–teacher association (f=5) and spending time together (f=1). Within the category of working as a group, they mentioned organizing bazaar programs (f=3) and holding meetings or preparing work programs (f=1). Reflecting these practices, one parent highlighted: "Because I am in the parent association, we come together regularly. We discuss projects or charity events and work together" (BP6). Another emphasized the principal's ability to coordinate collective efforts: "Every year, she organizes fundraising events and coordinates resources so that students receive sufficient support" (BP4).

Conceptual Competencies

As shown in Table 3, teachers at both schools placed significant emphasis on the principals' conceptual competencies. At School A, the category of conceptual mastery included participation in school meetings (f=2). Within the category of following socio-cultural and economic developments, codes were organizing socio-cultural and sports activities (f=3), organizing school events (f=1), and informing or updating about developments (f=2). In the category of adaptability and transforming school into a learning organization, codes included encouraging participation in projects (f=3) and informing, updating, or organizing new activities (f=1). Reflecting the code of organizing socio-cultural and sports activities, one teacher explained: "Various activities were organized, such as a volleyball tournament among teachers, and she was present at all of them, supporting colleagues. She also joined dinners and gatherings, showing she is not a principal who stays apart in her office" (AT5). Another added: "She attaches importance to social activities and attends them too" (AT7).

Table 3. Conceptual competencies of female principals across stakeholder groups and schools

Category	Codes	T–A	T–B	S–A	S–B	P–A	P–B
Conceptual Mastery	Participation in school meetings	2	5	-	-	-	-
	Managing school events / addressing deficiencies	-	1	2	2	1	1
	Insufficiency in bureaucratic follow-up	-	2	-	-	-	-
	Insufficiency in maintaining discipline	-	-	5	-	-	-
	Being good at planning	-	1	-	-	-	1
Following Socio-Cultural & Economic Developments	Organizing socio-cultural & sports activities	3	3	2	2	2	-
	Organizing school events	1	1	1	1	-	-
	Informing/updating about developments	2	1	-	-	-	-
Adaptability & Transforming School into a Learning	Encouraging participation in projects	3	1	-	-	-	-
	Planning/implementing /organizing new activities	1	1	-	-	3	1
	Efforts to transform school/new initiatives	-	-	-	3	-	-

Note. T = Teachers, S = Students, P = Parents; A = School A, B = School B

At School B, within the category of conceptual mastery, teachers highlighted participation in school meetings (f=5), insufficiency in bureaucratic follow-up of projects and activities (f=2), managing school events or addressing school deficiencies (f=1), and being good at planning (f=1). Under following socio-cultural and economic developments, they mentioned planning and implementing socio-cultural and sports activities (f=3), planning and implementing school events (f=1), and informing or updating about developments (f=1). In the category of adaptability and transforming school into a learning organization, they referred to planning and implementing new activities (f=1) and encouraging participation in projects (f=1). Reflecting participation in school meetings, one teacher noted: "She is present at all meetings where the principal's participation is required" (BT2). Another added: "She attends all meetings, ensuring that everyone participates" (BT4).

Students in both schools primarily associated conceptual competencies with conceptual mastery and following socio-cultural and economic developments. At School A, the most frequently mentioned categories were conceptual mastery

(f=7), with a strong emphasis on insufficiency in maintaining discipline (f=5), and managing school events or addressing school deficiencies (f=2). Attention to socio-cultural and economic developments (f=3) was also highlighted through organizing socio-cultural and sports activities (f=2) and organizing school events (f=1). At School B, students also emphasized conceptual mastery (f=3), particularly managing school events or addressing deficiencies (f=2). They highlighted following socio-cultural and economic developments (f=3), including organizing socio-cultural and sports activities (f=2) and organizing school events (f=1). In addition, adaptability and efforts to transform the school into a learning organization emerged as a distinct category (f=3).

For parents at School A, conceptual competencies were reflected in conceptual mastery through managing school events or addressing deficiencies (f=1); in following socio-cultural and economic developments through organizing socio-cultural and sports activities (f=2); and in adaptability and transforming school into a learning organization through organizing new activities (f=3). One parent illustrated this broader vision: "Our principal is active in every aspect. From motivating teachers to organizing visual and cultural projects, to establishing workshops and international collaborations with schools abroad—she has broadened the school's horizons and created an environment full of opportunities for students" (AP6). At School B, parents also referred to conceptual competencies. Within conceptual mastery, they mentioned managing school events or addressing deficiencies (f=1) and being good at planning (f=1). Within adaptability and transforming school into a learning organization, they referred to organizing new activities (f=1).

Gender-based Expectations in Perceptions

As shown in Table 4, teachers emphasized gender-based expectations largely in relation to relational and interpersonal qualities, with some references to positive outlooks and a few critical observations. Under the category of inclusive and positive approach, they mentioned an inclusive perspective (f=4) and a positive outlook (f=2). Within role model and relational qualities, teachers highlighted politeness and kindness (f=5), role model (f=3), and closer relationships with students/parents (f=2). Reflecting the politeness and kindness code, one teacher remarked: "When she joined the meetings, we noticed a difference. They were calmer, without shouting or tension. Maybe it is her character, maybe related to being a woman" (AT5). For the emotional awareness and sensitivity category, they described principals as emotionally aware (f=5). One teacher explained: "She seems to notice issues early. Through frequent communication with students and parents, her awareness develops much sooner than expected" (BT1). Another added: "As a female principal, she sometimes struggles to manage large groups, but she succeeds in listening carefully and resolving problems individually or in small groups" (AT8). Within communication and collaboration, teachers noted strong communication (f=4) and collaborative patience (f=2). In the systematic and holistic thinking category, they referred to a systematic and holistic perspective (f=4) and a diverse perspective (f=4). Finally, under critical or limiting views, teachers reported no difference in management (f=2).

Students' views on female principals reflected both positive and critical expectations. Under an inclusive and positive approach, they mentioned an inclusive perspective (f=3) and a balanced approach (f=3). In role model and relational qualities, they emphasized role model qualities (f=3), closer relationships with students/parents (f=3), and being polite/kind (f=1). For emotional sensitivity, one student (f=1) described principals as emotionally aware. In systematic and holistic thinking, they identified one code: a systematic and holistic perspective (f=1).

By contrast, under critical or limiting views, students noted a lack of prior experience with female principals (f=3), perceived managerial weakness (f=2), no perceived difference in outcomes (f=1), and the perception that female principals

are more meticulous than men (f=1). Reflecting managerial weakness, one student stated: "Our former principal was stricter about discipline, like clothing rules, and managed it better. Now, the current principal may not fully maintain that authority, especially regarding dress and appearance" (AS1). Regarding lack of prior experience, students commented: "This is my first female principal. As a woman, I feel she shares many of my perspectives and pays more attention to issues like hygiene and education" (BS2); and "It is the first time I have seen a female school leader. Before, I only had male principals, who were more authoritarian. Our current principal takes a broader view and is more successful compared to them" (BS7). Finally, on the perception that female principals are more meticulous than men, students noted: "I feel more comfortable with a female principal; in our society, male principals can sometimes be more problematic, while women may influence students more positively" (AS5); and "Our principal once sat with us in the gym and chatted. We were surprised, because our former male principal would never have done that" (AS8).

Table 4. Gendered stakeholder perceptions of female principals' competencies

Categories	Students	Parents	Teachers
Inclusive & Positive Approach	Inclusive perspective (3), Balanced approach (3)	Positive outlook (6), Inclusive perspective (2)	Inclusive perspective (4), Positive outlook (2)
Role Model & Relational Qualities	Role model (3), Close stakeholder relationships (3), Politeness/kindness (1)	Close stakeholder relationships (8)	Politeness/kindness (5), Role model (3), Close stakeholder relationships (2)
Emotional Awareness & Sensitivity	Emotional sensitivity (1)	Emotional sensitivity (3)	Emotional sensitivity (5)
Communication & Collaboration	-	Strong communication (2), Collaborative patience (2)	Strong communication (4), Collaborative patience (2)
Systematic & Holistic Thinking	Systematic and holistic perspective (1)	Systematic and holistic perspective (1)	Systematic and holistic perspective (4), Diverse perspective (4)
Critical / Limiting Views	Lack of prior experience with female principals (3), Perceived managerial weakness (2), No perceived difference in outcomes (1), Perceived as more meticulous than men (1)	No perceived difference in outcomes (3), Perceived as more meticulous than men (1)	No perceived difference in outcomes (2)

Parents highlighted gender-based expectations largely through positive outlooks, though some critical observations also emerged. In the category of inclusive and positive approach, they most frequently referred to a positive outlook (f=6), followed by an inclusive perspective (f=2). One parent explained: "Of course, women naturally have this trait. Men look at things superficially, but women see the details, like looking inside the glass of water rather than just at the glass" (BP8). Another added: "I always preferred having a female principal, because women's perspective and approach to children are more positive and caring" (AP1).

Under role model and relational qualities, parents strongly emphasized closer relationships with students and parents (f=8). One parent illustrated this by noting: "Last year with a male principal I had no communication. This year, with a female principal, everything changed—my daughter respects her more, attends ceremonies, wears her uniform properly, and improved academically and socially" (AP8). Parents also attributed emotional sensitivity (f=3) to female principals. In terms of communication and collaboration, they mentioned strong communication (f=2) and collaborative patience (f=2). Within systematic and holistic thinking, one code was identified: a systematic and holistic perspective (f=1). Under critical or limiting views, parents noted no perceived difference in outcomes (f=3) and perceived meticulousness compared to men (f=1).

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study examined how teachers, students, and parents perceive the administrative competencies of female principals through Katz's (1974) three-skill framework and a gender lens. Across groups, communication emerged as the most frequently emphasized technical competency. Stakeholders described female principals as approachable, supportive, and accessible, attributes that align with prior research in Türkiye, highlighting communication as a central strength of female school administrators (Ağıroğlu Bakır et al., 2017; Asar, 2016; Karataş & Su, 2016; Koşar et al., 2014). International research also emphasizes the importance of communication and relational competencies in women's school administration. Al-Mughyirah et al. (2023) found that female principals relied on communication and problem-solving strategies to build collaboration and shape school culture, while de Bruyn and Mestry (2020) showed that resilience and decision-making capacities were strongly connected to relational practices. Within Katz's framework, technical competencies such as communication and problem-solving therefore emerged as essential, and stakeholders' emphasis reflected gendered expectations that closely link women's authority to relational qualities. This suggests that communication functions both as a managerial tool for sustaining daily operations and as a relational means for building trust. This interpretation is consistent with Çelikten et al.'s (2019) study, highlighting the intertwined nature of problem-solving, communication, and leadership in Türkiye's evolving administrative system. Internationally, Richardson and Khawaja (2025) similarly note that technical competencies, including data-informed decision-making and digital innovation, have become increasingly central to effective school administration.

Students frequently associated female principals with maternal qualities such as sensitivity, care, and protective attitudes, reinforcing the view that female principals create safe and supportive school climates. This finding mirrors earlier Turkish studies that identified maternal metaphors (e.g., "mother," "sun," or "flower") as part of gendered expectations for female administrators (Asat & Deniz, 2022; Karataş & Su, 2016; Köse & Uzun, 2017). In the boarding-school context of school B, the principal's involvement in dormitory life was perceived as an extension of her communication skills and administrative presence, reflecting institutional arrangements that place principals in proximity to students. The Ministry of Education (MEB, 2016) regulation assigns these principals the responsibility for dormitory services. In this study, students interpreted these routine interactions as indicators of strong administrative performance and as contributing to their psychosocial and academic development. These findings illustrate how contextual factors can amplify relational expectations: students value emotional closeness, teachers highlight professional collaboration, and parents interpret similar behaviors as signs of care and trust.

Findings on human competencies indicated that female principals were associated with collaborative activities such as Parent–Teacher Association work, fundraising, and group coordination. Parents emphasized these practices as evidence of accessibility and dedication, while teachers and students mentioned them less frequently. Although human competencies received less emphasis than technical ones, the results support previous work underscoring the importance of empathy, collaboration, and ethical decision-making for trust-based administrative practice. Akın et al. (2023) showed that human-centered practices promote stakeholder participation, while Aktan et al. (2023) highlighted participatory decision-making as key to positive school climates. Consistent with these findings, Eagly and Carli (2007) argue that women leaders often adopt relational and collaborative approaches, while Martínez et al. (2021) emphasize that gendered expectations shape how relational skills, as well as the emotional labor underlying them (Hochschild, 1983), are perceived and valued. Turkish research similarly highlights empathy, supportive communication, and ethical behavior as

strengthening schools' relational fabric (Bakioğlu & Demiral, 2013).

Teachers placed the strongest emphasis on conceptual competencies, particularly participation in meetings, ceremonies, and socio-cultural events, which they viewed as strengthening institutional culture and motivation. Teachers at School A more frequently mentioned project involvement, suggesting greater professional development opportunities. Students referred to conceptual competencies less often but acknowledged principals' capacity to follow socio-cultural and economic changes. Parents interpreted conceptual competencies as indicators of adaptability and innovation, highlighting cultural, extracurricular, and international collaborations. These perspectives align with Gökyer and Çiçek's (2016) finding that teachers regard female principals as competent in vision building, goal setting, and project initiation. Internationally, Massouti et al. (2024) demonstrated that Emirati female administrators enacted distributed instructional practices that transformed schools into learning organizations, reinforcing the role of women in fostering collaboration, innovation, and socio-cultural responsiveness.

Despite these demonstrated strengths, the findings also revealed challenges shaped by gendered expectations. Stakeholders sometimes described female principals as inclusive, emotional, or flexible in disciplinary matters, qualities viewed positively in some contexts but as limitations in others. Teachers praised principals' empathy, communication, and attention to detail, yet these attributes were occasionally reframed as weaknesses. This reflects the persistent "double bind" identified by Eagly & Carli (2007), in which relational qualities enhance administrative effectiveness while simultaneously constraining authority. Şahin (2021) similarly highlights how gender-based stereotypes shape evaluations of women's administrative work in Türkiye. Comparable patterns have been documented internationally: Weinstein et al. (2023) reported that Chilean female principals were praised for empathy and communication, yet questioned about authority, underscoring the global nature of these tensions.

Overall, the study suggests that female principals demonstrate strong technical, human, and conceptual competencies, yet their administrative practices are interpreted through gendered cultural norms that shape expectations, evaluations, and perceptions of legitimacy. By situating these findings within Türkiye's institutional context, the study contributes to international discussion on women's roles in school administration and underscores the importance of recognizing relational, communicative, and future-oriented competencies as integral dimensions of administrative practice rather than gendered extensions of care. The results point to the value of professional learning opportunities that support principals in managing gendered expectations while strengthening communication, conflict resolution, and decision-making skills that are central to administrative work. Policies that acknowledge relational and socio-cultural competencies alongside technical responsibilities may foster more equitable evaluations of administrative performance, while mentorship and peer-support networks can help reduce professional isolation and deepen expertise across administrative domains. School-community engagement efforts that address gender stereotypes may further promote competence-based, gender-neutral understanding of principals' administrative roles. These implications reinforce the broader insight that perceptions of administrative competency are shaped not only by demonstrated practices but also by the cultural and organizational contexts in which those practices are interpreted.

Limitations And Further Research

This study has several limitations. The multiple case study design, involving two public secondary schools, limits transferability, and although detailed descriptions were provided, the findings may not represent all female principals or

school contexts in Türkiye. The study relied solely on interviews, and the absence of principals' own perspectives limits insight into how they interpret and navigate expectations; incorporating observations, documents, or principals' narratives would enrich future research. Gendered interpretations may also vary across regions, school levels, and institutional types. Future studies could compare male and female principals to examine how gender shapes interpretations of similar competencies, conduct longitudinal research to trace shifts in perceptions over time, or include district leaders and policymakers to explore structural influences. Expanding research to rural, vocational, or private schools would further illuminate how contextual factors mediate women's administrative experiences.

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