



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Negotiating Domestic and Professional Roles: Defense Mechanisms as Managerial Capital in Women's Leadership of English Course Institution

Aldi Permana Putra

Universitas Islam Negeri Jurai Siwo Lampung, Indonesia

Received: 30 September 2025

Revised: 14 June 2026

Accepted: 16 June 2026

*Corresponding author: Aldi Permana Putra
E-mail: aldipermana.edu@gmail.com

Abstract

Women leaders in non-formal education institutions continue to face various challenges, including gender bias, work-family conflict, and stereotype threats that may affect their leadership effectiveness. This study aims to examine how defense mechanisms function not only as a means of individual psychological protection but also as managerial capital that supports successful women's leadership in educational organizations. The study employed a case study approach at an English course institution in Metro City, Lampung. Data were collected through eight semi-structured interviews involving the leader, teachers, administrative staff, and senior students, complemented by participant observation and document analysis. The data were analyzed using a hybrid thematic analysis. The findings indicate that self-care practices (sublimation), family support (compensation), and religiously grounded meaning-making (rationalization) function not merely as personal coping responses but also as integrated managerial resources. These mechanisms strengthen leadership resilience, maintain organizational stability, and promote institutional development, as reflected in increased student enrollment and the achievement of a high accreditation rating.

Keywords: Women's Leadership; Defense Mechanisms; Managerial Capital; Non-Formal Education; Leadership Resilience.

Abstrak

Pemimpin perempuan di lembaga pendidikan non-formal masih menghadapi berbagai tantangan, seperti bias gender, konflik antara peran keluarga dan pekerjaan, serta ancaman stereotip yang dapat memengaruhi efektivitas kepemimpinan mereka. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bagaimana mekanisme pertahanan berfungsi tidak hanya sebagai sarana perlindungan psikologis individu, tetapi juga sebagai modal manajerial yang mendukung keberhasilan kepemimpinan perempuan dalam organisasi pendidikan. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus di lembaga kursus bahasa Inggris di Kota Metro, Lampung. Data dikumpulkan melalui delapan wawancara semi-terstruktur yang melibatkan pemimpin, guru, staf administrasi, dan siswa senior, serta didukung oleh observasi partisipan dan analisis dokumen. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik hibrida. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa praktik perawatan diri (sublimasi), dukungan keluarga (kompensasi), dan pemaknaan berbasis religiusitas (rasionalisasi) berfungsi tidak sekadar sebagai respons coping personal, tetapi juga sebagai sumber daya manajerial yang terintegrasi. Mekanisme tersebut memperkuat resiliensi kepemimpinan, menjaga stabilitas organisasi, dan mendorong perkembangan Lembaga, dari peningkatan jumlah peserta didik dan capaian akreditasi tinggi.

Kata kunci: Kepemimpinan Perempuan; Mekanisme Pertahanan; Modal Manajerial; Pendidikan Non-Formal; Resiliensi Kepemimpinan.

Published by :
Pusat Studi Gender dan Anak
(PSGA) of Universitas Islam
Negeri Jurai Siwo Lampung

Website : <https://e-journal.metrouniv.ac.id/jsqa>



Introduction

The leadership roles of women in non-formal educational institutions, specifically in English language courses, have become a significant focus in educational and management research. Research on women's leadership in Indonesian educational institutions has grown considerably, with scholars noting that women leaders contribute positively to organizational quality and sustainability (Da Meisa & Prabowo, 2021; Dewi et al., 2023). In Indonesia, English language courses substantially contribute to the development of international communication competencies, which are essential for participation in global contexts. English proficiency functions as a collective resource to strengthen Indonesia's global standing and competitive capacity, making informal English education a strategic investment in society (Andayani, 2022; Syahputra et al., 2024).

The city of Metro in Lampung Province serves as a prominent educational hub, officially recognized as a *kota pendidikan* (educational city). According to (Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Metro, (2025), the city recorded a Human Development Index (HDI) of 80.41 in 2024 categorized as "Very High" and ranked second highest in Lampung Province with an average year of schooling of 11.01 years and expected years of schooling of 14.79 years, reflecting a strong educational culture and infrastructure. Non-formal education in Metro is well developed, with numerous English language course providers operating competitively across the city (Hans, 2023), several of which are managed by women.

An analysis of female leadership in this context is necessary because of the complex social, cultural, and structural barriers encountered. These obstacles include not only persistent gender stereotypes, but also ongoing debates regarding the legitimacy of women leaders in informal education. Investigating the characteristics of female leadership in English language institutes in Metro provides both conceptual and empirical insights into the educational management literature and broadens the understanding of effective leadership within Indonesia's socio-cultural environment.

Research shows that female leaders often face gender bias, which affects the legitimacy of their leadership (Sengupta et al., 2024). In many situations, decisions made by women are not valued equally to those made by men due to persistent institutional bias, a pattern equally observed in non-formal educational institutions, including English language course providers in developing regions such as Lampung (Dewi et al., 2023). In addition, conflicts between work demands and family responsibilities pose a significant challenge. Adisa, Gbadamosi, et al., (2019b) argue that patriarchal norms intensify the double burden faced by women, who are expected not only to excel professionally but also to maintain primary responsibility for domestic

duties. In the context of non-formal English education in Metro City, where course directors often simultaneously manage curriculum, teaching staff, and daily operations with limited administrative support, this dual expectation is particularly pronounced and adversely affects management quality, manifesting in constraints such as reduced time for teacher supervision and delays in program planning (Hans, 2023)

Nevertheless, evidence from across Indonesia suggests that targeted interventions can significantly enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of women's leadership in educational settings. Research on women's leadership in Indonesian educational organizations shows that mentoring programs, effective training, and inclusive workplace culture are key enablers that help overcome gender barriers and develop women's managerial competencies Karim & Sogalrey, (2024). Furthermore, a study evaluating a women's leadership training program at Pusat Pengembangan Sumber Daya Wanita Pasoendan Digdaya found that structured leadership training significantly advances gender equality and strengthens women's institutional decision-making capacity Gouvany et al., (2024). While Metro City differs in scale from larger urban centers, these cases are comparable in that all involve women leading educational institutions within patriarchal social structures making their lessons directly applicable to the Metro City context (Da Meisa & Prabowo, 2021)

Furthermore, female leaders in non-formal educational institutions face the threat of stereotypes. Eagly & Karau, (2002) argue that leadership stereotypes present significant barriers for women, who are frequently perceived as less assertive, less rational, or less suitable for leadership roles compared to men. Such stereotype threats undermine the confidence of female leaders, diminish subordinate motivation, and influence the overall organizational climate. Within educational institutions, stereotypes can lower the quality of educational services, disrupt student relationships, and impede institutional competitiveness. Women leaders do not adopt a passive stance when confronted with such pressure. Instead, they develop defense mechanisms to negotiate their identities and leadership roles. While concepts such as coping, resilience, and emotional regulation describe how individuals manage stress, defense mechanisms are theoretically distinct in that they operate at the intersection of identity protection and role negotiation making them particularly relevant to women leaders who face the specific, identity-threatening pressures generated by role incongruity (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and labyrinth-like structural barriers (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Unlike general coping strategies, which are primarily conscious and reactive, defense mechanisms encompass both unconscious and consciously directed processes that regulate how women leaders manage the tension between their gender identity and the demands of a leadership role that society has

historically constructed as masculine (Cramer, 2015; Di Giuseppe & Perry, 2021).

Contemporary scholarship conceptualizes defense mechanisms not only as unconscious strategies but also as dynamic coping resources that may be consciously recognized and purposefully directed toward resilience and personal growth. Cramer (2015) emphasized that defense mechanisms operate along a continuum from adaptive to maladaptive, where adaptive mechanisms, such as sublimation or rationalization, facilitate problem-solving, emotional regulation, and creative innovation in leadership contexts. More recent studies (Kramer, 2019; Prout et al., 2020) highlight that adaptive defense mechanisms allow leaders to transform stressors into opportunities for organizational learning and innovation, whereas maladaptive mechanisms tend to provide only short-term relief without contributing to sustainable effectiveness. Distinguishing between these two types enables women leaders in non-formal educational institutions such as English language course providers in Metro City to consciously cultivate strategies that enhance resilience, foster inclusive social relationships, and sustain organizational success.

From an educational management perspective, the link between psychological defense mechanisms and institutional leadership can be understood through the lens of Psychological Capital (PsyCap) theory (Luthans et al., 2007), which frames internal psychological resources, including self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience, as developable assets that directly influence leadership effectiveness and organizational outcomes. Defense mechanisms, as theorized by Cramer (Petraglia et al., 2009) and Di Giuseppe and Perry (Di Giuseppe & Perry, 2021), function as layers of the topological structure. While PsyCap describes the positive resources a leader draws upon, and defense mechanisms describe the regulatory processes through which leaders protect and sustain those resources under conditions of identity threat and gender-based pressure.

This distinction is especially relevant for women leaders in non-formal educational institutions, who face not only general organizational stressors but also the specific, compounding pressures of role incongruity (Eagly & Karau, 2002) and structural barriers (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Building on this theoretical foundation and consistent with its intrinsic case study design, the study is guided by three analytic foci (sensitizing concepts) rather than testable hypotheses: (AF1) how adaptive defense mechanisms relate to the quality of strategic decision-making under gender-based pressure; (AF2) how they help the leader sustain harmonious human-resource relationships in high-pressure conditions; and (AF3) how their cumulative use over time relates to organizational resilience and sustainability. These foci orient, but do not constrain, the interpretive analysis presented in subsequent sections.

First, with respect to AF1, the analysis attends to whether and how leaders who regulate psychological pressure through adaptive mechanisms approach strategic decisions with composure, since cognitive resources are less likely to be depleted by unresolved identity conflict (Kramer, 2019b). Second, regarding AF2, it examines how defense mechanisms may support human resource management by helping maintain harmonious relationships with teachers and staff even under pressure, as adaptive regulation can prevent the displacement of internal stress onto interpersonal dynamics (Prout et al., 2020). Third, in relation to AF3, it considers how defense mechanisms may underpin organizational sustainability by fostering a resilient and inclusive workplace culture, as leaders who transform stressors into growth opportunities can model adaptive behavior for the organization (Di Giuseppe & Perry, 2021). Taken together, these foci frame the defence mechanisms of the female leader as potential psychological and managerial capital relevant to the success of the English course institution in Metro City.

This research is necessary to fill a gap in the literature, namely, the lack of studies that explicitly examine how defense mechanisms function as managerial capital that sustains institutional effectiveness among women leaders of non-formal English education institutions in Indonesia. Most previous studies have focused on the obstacles faced by women (Adisa, Abdulraheem, et al., 2019; Oakley, 2000) without addressing the specific psychological strategies through which women leaders maintain management quality, sustain teacher performance, and achieve measurable institutional growth under pressure. Evidence from this study suggests that one such institution in Metro City experienced a marked increase in student enrolment, from approximately 100 students before the COVID-19 pandemic to approximately 300 students afterward, an outcome attributed not solely to increased post-pandemic demand but also to the leader's capacity to sustain and improve management quality and teacher development through adaptive psychological strategies (IM, personal communication, 2024).

By examining this case, the study aims to offer theoretical contributions through the integration of psychological and educational management perspectives as well as practical contributions by providing recommendations to enhance women's leadership in the non-formal education sector. What distinguishes this study from prior research is its explicit focus on defense mechanisms as managerial capital, not merely personal coping tools, within the specific context of non-formal English education in a secondary Indonesian city, where gender norms and local socio-cultural dynamics shape leadership experiences in ways distinct from metropolitan or formal school settings.

Literature Review

Women's Leadership and Gender Barriers

Most research on women's leadership emphasizes discrimination and institutional bias while overlooking the psychological strategies that sustain organizational success. Gender discrimination restricts women's mobility and weakens their participation and decision-making capacity (Sengupta et al., 2024), whereas patriarchal norms impose a dual burden that complicates the balance between professional and family roles (Adisa, Gbadamosi, et al., 2019a). However, these studies do not explain how women navigate such pressures to sustain institutional performance. Eagly & Carli, (2007) capture these structural and cultural obstacles through the metaphor of the leadership labyrinth. However, this framework describes the barriers women face rather than how they overcome them from within. Unlike external supports such as mentorship, defense mechanisms are self-generated regulatory processes that women activate independently of their environment (Cramer, 2015; Di Giuseppe & Perry, 2021), enabling them to regulate identity threat and sustain leadership effectiveness under persistent gender-based pressure (Kramer, 2019a; Prout et al., 2020)

Defense Mechanisms and Coping

This study integrates three frameworks: defense mechanism theory explains the psychological processes the leader activates, coping theory explains how the leader mobilizes resources under stress, and educational management theory explains the institutional effects produced. Contemporary scholarship treats defense mechanisms not as purely unconscious strategies but as adaptive resources that can be consciously directed toward growth (Cramer, 2015; Kramer, 2019). In this study, three observed mechanisms were read as socio-culturally situated expressions of classical processes: self-care as sublimation, religiously grounded meaning-making as rationalization, and family support as compensation. Such adaptive mechanisms are established predictors of resilience and effective leadership under stressful conditions (Prout et al., 2020).

Coping theory functions as a process-level account of how these mechanisms are sustained. The Job Demands–resources model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017) shows how leaders balance demands against resources such as social support and autonomy. Here, family support operates simultaneously as a defense mechanism (compensation) and job resource, reducing the demand load that would otherwise deplete the leader's psychological reserves. Thus, the two frameworks are complementary: defense mechanisms protect identity, whereas coping manages resources.

Educational Management in Non-formal Institutions

Educational management theory has moved beyond Fayol's (1949) classical functions toward transformational and context-responsive leadership

(Bush, 2011; Bush & Sargsyan, 2020; Leithwood & Sun, 2012). This study retains Fayol's functions as a baseline because the research site is a small, owner-managed institution in which a single leader personally performs all of them, whereas modern frameworks explain the quality with which those functions are enacted under gender-based pressure. Contextual and shared-leadership perspectives (Hallinger, 2018) further clarify how a female leader sustains effectiveness through adaptive psychological strategies, allowing defense mechanisms to be reconceptualized as integrated managerial resources rather than merely personal coping tools. In sum, prior studies document structural barriers to women's leadership but treat defense mechanisms as individual coping, while the educational management literature theorizes leadership functions without explaining how women sustain the psychological stability they require. Research linking women's internal defense mechanisms to educational management effectiveness remains scarce. This study addresses this gap by examining how defense mechanisms operate as integrated managerial capital in a woman-led, non-formal English course institution in Metro City.

Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using an intrinsic case study design, as articulated by Stake (1995). An intrinsic case study was selected because the primary aim was to develop an in-depth understanding of this particular case itself, rather than to use it as an instrument for theory testing or as a means of generalizing to a wider population of institutions (Priya, 2021; Stake, 1995). The case was selected purposively on the basis of three criteria that, taken together, render it analytically distinctive within the non-formal English education sector of Metro City: (i) more than a decade of continuous leadership by the same woman; (ii) atypical enrolment growth across COVID-19 (100 → 300 learners) accompanied by staged program diversification building on English as the institution's founding program since 2012 with mathematics and science added in 2024 and a Montessori program launched in 2026; and (iii) self-identified values-based and religiously informed leadership strategies that align with the theoretical lens of defense mechanisms.

Case boundaries were defined explicitly following Yin (2018) and Baxter & Jack (2008): spatially one English course institution in Metro City, Lampung; temporally 2019 (pre-pandemic baseline) to 2026 (post-pandemic consolidation); unit of analysis of the leadership practice of a one-woman leader, with embedded sub-units (leader narrative, staff perceptions, senior-learner perceptions). The findings are not statistically generalizable to other English course institutions in Metro City or to Indonesian non-formal education broadly; instead, they offer analytical and naturalistic transferability (Drisko,

2025; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To enhance the coherence between the research objectives and design, the following research questions were articulated: What are the experiences of female leaders in this educational institution in confronting gender bias? What strategies do these leaders employ to overcome such obstacles? How do these experiences and strategies influence an institution's management?

This study was conducted at a single English course institution in Metro City. Eight (8) participants were purposively selected (Palinkas et al., 2015; Patton, 2015) to enable data-source triangulation across three stakeholder positions: institutional leadership, instructional and administrative staff, and learners (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Pwavra et al., 2025). The final sample consisted of one female leader serving as the key informant, three teachers and two administrative staff as institutional process informants, and two senior students as learner-perspective informants. The composition is detailed in Table 1.

Senior students were defined operationally by three inclusion criteria: (a) continuous enrolment at the institution for a minimum of three (3) consecutive years, ensuring direct experience of the pre- and post-pandemic period during which the institution's growth and program diversification took place; (b) classification at the institution's upper proficiency tier (advanced level); and (c) age 16 years or older at the time of interview, with informed assent obtained from the student and informed consent from a parent or guardian for participants under 18. These criteria were designed to ensure that participating students had sufficient longitudinal exposure to the institution to provide reflective, contextually grounded perspectives rather than impressionistic feedback.

The inclusion of learners as triangulation sources is theoretically and empirically warranted. Within Denzin and Lincoln's (2018) framework of data-source triangulation, which deliberately seeks perspectives from different positions within the same phenomenon, students are not asked to evaluate the leader's competence in a technical management sense, but rather to provide first-hand testimony on the dimensions of institutional life to which they have direct access: the consistency and tone of front-line service delivery, the organizational climate they experience, and the responsiveness of the institution to learner needs. Contemporary scholarship establishes learners as legitimate and necessary stakeholders in the evaluation of educational service quality and leadership effects (Bagur-Femenías et al., 2023; Del Río-Rama et al., 2021), and student-voice literature further recognizes students as active knowledge-makers whose perspectives are essential for triangulating accounts of educational leadership and organizational change (Conner et al., 2022; Holquist et al., 2023). Accordingly, student accounts in this study were used specifically to

corroborate or qualify claims about service consistency, organizational climate, and institutional growth, rather than to assess the leader's internal managerial decisions, which were triangulated through staff accounts and documentary evidence.

To preserve participant confidentiality while maintaining the traceability of evidence, each participant was assigned a coded identifier used throughout the analysis and reporting: L-01 for the leader, T-01 to T-03 for teachers, S-01 to S-02 for administrative staff, and SS-01 to SS-02 for senior students. The full participant profile is presented in Table 1.

Tabel 1. The Full Participant Profile

No.	Role	Code	Gender	Age	Years of experience / tenure	Selection criteria
1	Institutional leader (owner-director)	L-01	Female	41–50	12 years leading the institution	Founder and continuous leader since 2012; key informant
2	Senior teacher (English)	T-01	Female	31–40	7 years at the institution	≥ 3 years tenure; observes daily leadership practice
3	Teacher (English)	T-02	Female	21–30	4 years at the institution	≥ 3 years tenure; observes daily leadership practice
4	Teacher (Montessori / new program)	T-03	Female	21–30	3 years at the institution	New Program; involved in post-pandemic program expansion
5	Administrative staff	S-01	Female	21–30	5 years at the institution	≥ 3 years tenure; direct daily interaction with leader
6	Curriculum & enrolment staff	S-02	Male	31–40	6 years at the institution	≥ 3 years tenure; cross-checks

						enrolment and program data
7	Senior student	SS- 01	Female	16– 18	3 years enrolled (since pre- pandemic)	Continuously enrolled across pre/post- pandemic period; advanced level
8	Senior student	SS- 02	Male	16– 18	3 years enrolled	Continuously enrolled across pre/post- pandemic period; advanced level

Source: compiled by author

Data were collected using three complementary techniques to enable progressive triangulation: semi-structured in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Eight (8) interviews one per participant in Table 1 (L-01, T-01–T-03, S-01–S-02, SS-01–SS-02), were conducted face-to-face in a private room at the institution across three consecutive fieldwork days. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, with English code-switching initiated by participants (Ruslin et al., 2022; Xu, 2024). A thematic interview guide, pilot-tested with one comparable external informant, organized questions into three sections: (a) experiences of gender-based barriers, (b) psychological and managerial strategies used to navigate them, and (c) perceived effects on institutional management. Observation was operationalized into four loci: (a) leader–staff briefings and decision-making episodes; (b) leader–parent and leader–student interactions at the front desk; (c) staff-room interactions in the leader’s absence; and (d) physical and symbolic layout of the institution.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, four strategies were employed in line with the established qualitative criteria: source and method triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and an audit trail. Member checking was conducted in two rounds verbatim Bahasa Indonesia transcripts were returned to all eight participants (L-01, T-01–T-03, S-01–S-02, SS-01–SS-02) in week 2 for accuracy, completeness, and redaction checks, and a four-page summary of emergent themes was returned to L-01, T-01, and T-02 in week 6 for resonance checking and produced three substantive

corrections driven by explicit participant comment: L-01 clarified two pre-pandemic episodes that had been conflated in the initial transcript, T-03 requested anonymization of one identifying geographic detail, and the framing of how the leader's religiously grounded moral authority relates to her perceived legitimacy among internal stakeholders was sharpened after L-01 commented that the initial wording had overemphasized its public-facing aspect at the expense of its inward, devotional dimension.

Peer debriefing was conducted with two external peer researchers, one with expertise in qualitative case-study methodology and one with expertise in gender and educational leadership, across four 60–90-minute sessions held at decision points in the analytic process with three substantive changes: the conceptual distinction between defense mechanisms and coping strategies was sharpened after methodological critique, the "dual roles" sub-theme was reframed with a critical gender analysis after the gender peer flagged the risk of naturalizing women's domestic burden, and the analytic boundary between leader-level psychological resources and institutional-level outcomes was made explicit in the Discussion. Practically, the findings of this study can offer insights for leaders of non-formal English course institutions seeking to better understand and navigate gender barriers in their professional contexts.

Result

Self-Care and Family Support

The leader's account places self-care and family support at the center of how she sustained her career through the demands of early motherhood. She described the mobilization of her extended family as the condition that made continued leadership possible and identified deliberate personal restoration as her response to burnout:

“When I had my children, my whole family helped with the caregiving, so I could still keep my career going. And when I am burned out, I make time for myself with the things I enjoy.” (L-01, interview)

These statements correspond to observable components of self-compassion, as expressed in the leader's own words: because caregiving was shared, she did not confront the demands of leadership in isolation, and her deliberate allowance for rest reflected self-kindness rather than guilt. Staff observation of the leader's day-to-day demeanor corroborated this self-described composure:

“She is always calm and very humane, even when there are problems in the institution.” (S-01, personal communication).

Triangulated across the leader's testimony and independent staff observation, the data indicate that self-care and family support did not remain private coping responses but became resources visible in, and consequential to, their conduct of institutional leadership.

Negotiating Domestic and Professional Roles

The leader did not relinquish domestic responsibilities; she described managing them through a flexible family shared division of caregiving. She reported integrating dispositions formed in the domestic sphere of patience, empathy, and discipline into her leadership approach. Crucially, her capacity to lead was contingent on her extended family's absorption of a substantial share of childcare. Multiple staff members independently characterized the leader's conduct in terms that converged on a single behavioural pattern: she was reported never to raise her voice in others' presence, to consult the most senior staff member when operational problems arose, and to address disagreements through private, direct conversation with the individual concerned rather than through public confrontation (T-01, T-02, S-01, S-02, personal communications, 2024).

This convergent testimony across four informants indicates that the leader's capacity to contain and redirect frustration rather than displacing it onto staff was a sustained behavioural pattern, not situational composure. The dispositions participants described as patience under pressure, empathic atonement, and de-escalatory conflict management correspond closely to the domestic competencies that O'Neil et al. (2011) identify as transferable to organizational leadership, and were made sustainable by the caregiving contribution of the leader's extended family, which preserved the psychological reserves required for measured professional conduct across institutional working hours (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Indicators of Institutional Development

Institutional records and participant accounts provided several converging indicators of the institution's development across the study period. Enrolment rose from approximately 100 learners before the COVID-19 pandemic to approximately 300 afterward. Programme provision expanded in stages, building on English as the founding program (2012). Mathematics and science were added in 2024, and the Montessori program was launched in 2026. Uptake of external assessment also grew: in the current year, 170 learners entered Cambridge assessments, the highest number in the institution's history compared with fewer than 100 in earlier years. Consistent with this growth, the teaching team expanded during the same year (four teachers were added with one resignation). The institution holds a national accreditation grade of B.

As a routine service practice, the institution holds a "Parents' Day" at each level progression, at which teachers report individual learner progress to

families and practice participants linked to the institution's emphasis on close relationships with parents and learners. Senior-student and staff accounts characterized front-line service as consistent and personable; these accounts corroborate the documentary indicators above. Participant accounts triangulate these documentary indicators at the day-to-day service-experience level. Senior students described the pedagogical approach as highly attentive and hands-on, with class sizes small enough for each learner to receive focused individual attention (SS-01, SS-02, personal communications, 2024). One student characterized the relational quality of teaching as resembling friendship rather than formal instruction, while another noted that the limited class size meant being monitored and optimally supported a perception consistent with the institution's emphasis on close learner-teacher relationships.

Staff accounts corroborated this picture from the service delivery side: inquiries and concerns from parents and students were described as responded to promptly, and the institution's willingness to act on feedback quickly was identified as a defining feature of its service culture (S-01, S-02, personal communications, 2024). On the Cambridge programme specifically, participants attributed its growing uptake to the institution's established local reputation and the relative scarcity of internationally recognized assessment opportunities in a secondary city positioning access to Cambridge examinations as a distinctive institutional offer within Metro City's non-formal education market (S-02, personal communication, 2024).

Discussion

Self-Care and Self-Compassion as a Managerial Resource

Interpreted through self-compassion theory, leaders' restorative practices and shared caregiving operate as foundations of stable, empathetic leadership. The composure that staff perceive can be read as the behavioural expression of emotional intelligence across its four domains: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management, whereby self-care underpins the self-regulation that subordinates experience as calmness. This reading is consistent with Gilbert et al., (2010), who argue that self-care and self-compassion buffer against burnout while strengthening the capacity for sound judgement. More recent evidence extends the claim from individual well-being to organizational effect: Klug et al. (2022) showed that leader self-care is associated with health-oriented leadership and, in turn, a more supportive work climate, while Lanaj et al. (2021) demonstrate that leader self-compassion increases helping behaviour and perceived competence among subordinates and stakeholders. Liu et al., (2025) further find that self-compassion mediates the relationship between

leadership and follower job performance, indicating that such practices are not merely protective but performance-relevant.

Finally, Livne-Tarandach et al. (2025) show that the leadership returns to compassion are conditioned by gender and work context a salient qualification in a patriarchal, non-formal education setting, where a woman leader's visibly compassionate, self-regulated conduct may carry distinct legitimating weight. Taken together, these perspectives reposition self-care from a private strategy to a social and managerial investment, whose effects extend across the institution's ecosystem. Critically, the emotional stability that self-care sustained also underpinned composed strategic decision-making during programme expansion and amid competition among local providers indicating that defense mechanisms served a dual function in this case: protecting the leader personally while simultaneously operating as institutional capital for innovation (Karelaia & Guill'en, 2014)

Negotiating Dual Roles: A Critical Gender Reading

The leader narrated her dual-role arrangement as harmonious, yet this account warrants critical reading rather than celebration as evidence of resolved gender equity. Her capacity to lead depended on her extended family absorbing childcare, an arrangement that redistributes care work largely among women (female relatives) rather than dismantling its gendered allocation. The "second shift" or double burden, therefore, remains structurally intact even where it is individually mitigated (Adisa, Abdulraheem, et al., 2019; Hochschild & Machung, 2012), and recent evidence confirms that domestic labor continues to fall disproportionately on women across contexts (Ross-Plourde & Lachance-Grzela, 2025). Reading the leader's "harmony" as a purely personal achievement would risk naturalizing this burden and obscuring the structural support that made it possible.

At the same time, the competencies cultivated in the domestic sphere of multitasking, empathic communication, and conflict resolution were genuinely transferable to organizational leadership (O'Neil et al., 2011), and locally valued dispositions such as kinship, patience, and gotong royong were reinforced rather than diminished her authority. The analytical point is that these strengths coexist with, and do not cancel, underlying structural inequity. Holding both in view avoids two failure modes: a deficit framing that sees only constraint and an uncritical celebration that mistakes individual coping for structural change. This dual reading also responds to the leadership labyrinth thesis (Eagly & Carli, 2007), which locates women's success in their navigation of structural and cultural barriers rather than in the removal of those barriers.

Effectiveness of Human Resource Management

With family support easing the domestic burden, the leader could devote greater attention to interpersonal relations with teachers and staff, and

adaptive regulation (rationalization and sublimation) allowed disagreement to be channelled into productive discussion rather than displaced onto colleagues. This accords with Bush (2011) on the collaborative climate that effective educational leadership creates, and with evidence that women's success in managing organizational conflict is linked to their ability to balance household and professional demands (Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2009), and that domestic support enables a more transformational, inclusive leadership style (Hoobler et al., 2009). The institution's recent expansion of its teaching team is consistent with a human resource environment able to recruit and integrate new staff. Family support thus functions less as a private domestic matter than as social capital sustaining effective human resource management.

Resilient and Inclusive Organisational Culture

The leader's religiously grounded leadership style also colored the institution's culture with empathy and respect for difference, supporting a climate that participants experienced as inclusive. Although Sengupta et al. (2024) examined women of color in Fortune 500 companies, their core finding that spirituality provides women leaders with a resource for negotiating identity and sustaining inclusive practice in gender-biased organizational environments transfers analytically to this Indonesian non-formal education context, where the leader similarly occupies a minority position within a patriarchal local structure. Spiritual value-based leadership has been shown to foster a sense of calling and membership that deepens staff commitment (Benefiel et al., 2014) to promote inclusive workplaces, particularly under patriarchal cultural norms (Pio & Syed, 2013). In this case, the enactment of religiously informed leadership fostered an environment in which teachers, staff, and students reported participating without fear of discrimination, an asset for institutional resilience and public image alike.

Service Quality and Reputation

The claim that leadership stability translates into service quality and reputation rests on triangulated evidence rather than assertions. Documentary indicators record uptake of Cambridge assessments (170 entrants, the highest in the institution's history, against fewer than 100 previously), national accreditation at grade B, and staged programme expansion converge with participant accounts of consistent, personable front-line service and structured parent engagement through the per-level "Parents' Day." Together, these triangulate a picture of sustained service quality, consistent with evidence that leadership consistency shapes learning quality (Leithwood & Sun, 2012) and that quality-oriented leadership has long-term effects on reputation through trust and learner loyalty (Hallinger & Heck, 2010). The growing volume of Cambridge entries, in particular, positions the institution as an internationally oriented English provider within its local market, a claim deliberately bounded to that market rather than generalized.

Perceived Legitimacy among Internal Stakeholders

Because community members were not included among the participants, the study reframes “public trust” as perceived legitimacy among internal stakeholder staff and senior students. Within this boundary, the data indicate that the combination of family support and religiously grounded moral authority strengthened the leader’s perceived legitimacy among those who work and study at the institution, consistent with evidence that women who negotiate leadership identity with social support gain recognition more readily Ely et al., (2011) and that perceived moral integrity, often reinforced by spiritual practice, underpins trust in educational leaders (Alonderiene & Majauskaite, 2016). Whether this internal legitimacy extends to the wider community remains an open empirical question, addressed among the study’s limitations

Conclusion

This study examines how defense mechanisms operate as psychological and managerial capital in a woman-led English course institution in Metro City, Indonesia. In response to its three research questions, the findings indicate that the leader faced gender-based doubt about the legitimacy of a woman leading the institution alongside the competing demands of domestic and professional roles; that she navigated these pressures chiefly through self-care and family support, which functioned as adaptive defense mechanisms complemented by a religiously grounded sense of purpose that the study interprets as a meaning-making dimension of her leadership rather than as a separately evidenced mechanism; and that these strategies shaped institutional management by sustaining the emotional stability behind composed decision-making, collaborative human-resource relations, and staged program innovation.

Theoretically, the study repositions defense mechanisms long treated as individual coping as managerial capital bearing on core educational leadership functions, and shows how, in an Indonesian Muslim context, self-care and family support operate as socio-culturally situated expressions of adaptive regulatory processes enacted by a leader for whom religious conviction provides an overarching frame of meaning. Practically, it points to the value of supporting women leaders through a robust family ecosystem, protected space for self-care, and the cultivation of contextually relevant meaning-making resources.

As a single intrinsic case study, the findings are not statistically generalizable; they offer analytical and naturalistic transferability to comparable non-formal education settings in Indonesia. Because community members were not among the participants, claims about legitimacy were confined to internal stakeholders. Future research should employ multi-site or

comparative designs across different Indonesian cities and incorporate community voices to test whether these mechanisms operate similarly elsewhere and capture the external dimension of women leaders' legitimacy. The study's humanist implication is that a woman leader's success reflects a synergy of personal strength, social support, and personal conviction, a synergy that fortifies her institution within a competitive non-formal education landscape.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the leadership, teachers, administrative staff, and students of the English course institution in Metro City, Lampung, for their willingness to participate in this study and for generously sharing their experiences and insights. The authors also appreciate the support provided by all individuals who facilitated the data collection process and contributed to the successful completion of this research. Their cooperation, openness, and valuable perspectives were essential to the development of this study. Any errors or omissions remain the sole responsibility of the authors.

Author Contribution Statement

A.P. conceived and designed the study, developed the research methodology, conducted data collection and analysis, interpreted the findings, and prepared the original manuscript draft. A.P. was also responsible for the literature review, manuscript revision, and final editing. The author reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript and takes full responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of the research

References

- Adisa, T. A., Abdulraheem, I., & Isiaka, S. B. (2019). Patriarchal hegemony: Investigating the impact of patriarchy on women's work-life balance. *Gender in Management*, 34(1), 19–33. <https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-07-2018-0095>
- Adisa, T. A., Gbadamosi, G., & Osabutey, E. L. C. (2019a). Patriarchy and women's career progression in Nigeria. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 34(1), 19–33. <https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-01-2018-0007>
- Adisa, T. A., Gbadamosi, G., & Osabutey, E. L. C. (2019b). Work-Family Balance: A Case Analysis of Coping Strategies Adopted by {Nigerian} and {British} Women. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 34(8), 696–709. <https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-01-2019-0014>
- Alonderiene, R., & Majauskaite, M. (2016). Leadership style and job satisfaction in higher education institutions. *International Journal of*

- Educational Management*, 30(1), 140–164.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-08-2014-0106>
- Andayani, S. A. (2022). Implementation Of The Use Of Song As A Method Of Learning English For Children. *Jurnal Education and Development*, 10(1), 289-293. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.37081/ed.v10i1>
- Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Metro. (2025). *Human Development Index ({HDI}) of Metro Municipality 2024*.
<https://metrokota.bps.go.id/en/news/2025/03/04/223/---ipm-kota-metro-2024--peringkat-kedua-tertinggi-di-provinsi-lampung-----.html>
- Bagur-Femenías, L., Llach, J., & Buil, M. (2023). {BS-QUAL}: Measuring student perceptions of service quality in business schools, an exploratory study. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 29(2), 161–187. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11233-023-09118-x>
- Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2017). Job demands--resources theory: Taking stock and looking forward. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 22(3), 273–285. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp0000056>
- Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4), 544–559. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2008.1573>
- Benefiel, M., Fry, L. W., & Geigle, D. (2014). Spirituality and religion in the workplace: History, theory, and research. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 6(3), 175–187. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0036597>
- Bush, T. (2011). *Theories of Educational Leadership and Management* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Bush, T., & Sargsyan, G. (2020). Educational Leadership and Management: Theory, Policy, and Practice. *Main Issues of Pedagogy and Psychology*, 3(3), 31–43. <https://doi.org/10.24234/miopap.v3i3.255>
- Conner, J., Posner, M., & Nsowaa, B. (2022). The Relationship Between Student Voice and Student Engagement in Urban High Schools. *The Urban Review*, 54(5), 755–774. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-022-00637-2>
- Cramer, P. (2015). Defense Mechanisms: 40 Years of Empirical Research. *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 97(2), 114–122. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00223891.2014.947997>
- Da Meisa, E., & Prabowo, A. (2021). Perspektif Feminisme dalam Kepemimpinan Perempuan di Indonesia. *Jurnal Integrasi Dan Harmoni Inovatif Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial*, 1(6), 711–719. <http://journal3.um.ac.id/>
- Del Río-Rama, M. de la C., Álvarez-García, J., Mun, N. K., & Durán-Sánchez, A. (2021). Influence of the Quality Perceived of Service of a Higher Education Center on the Loyalty of Students. *Frontiers in Psychology*,

- 12, 671407. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.671407>
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2018). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (5th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Dewi, N. K., Suroso, A. I., Fahmi, I., & Syarief, R. (2023). The Influence of Women's Leadership on Corporate Sustainability in Indonesia. *Cogent Business & Management*, 10(3), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311975.2023.2262706>
- Di Giuseppe, M., & Perry, J. C. (2021). The Hierarchy of Defense Mechanisms: Assessing Defensive Functioning with the Defense Mechanisms Rating Scales {Q}-Sort. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 718440. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.718440>
- Drisko, J. W. (2025). Transferability and Generalization in Qualitative Research. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 35(1), 102–110. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10497315241256560>
- Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (2007). Women and the Labyrinth of Leadership. *Harvard Business Review*, 85(9), 62–71. <https://hbr.org/2007/09/women-and-the-labyrinth-of-leadership>
- Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review*, 109(3), 573–598. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.109.3.573>
- Ely, R. J., Ibarra, H., & Kolb, D. M. (2011). Taking gender into account: Theory and design for women's leadership development programs. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 10(3), 474–493. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amle.2010.0046>
- Ezzedeen, S. R., & Ritchey, K. G. (2009). Career advancement and family balance strategies of executive women. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 24(6), 388–411. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17542410910980388>
- Fayol, H. (1949). *General and Industrial Management*. Pitman.
- Fry, H., Ketteridge, S., & Marshall, S. (2009). *A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education: Enhancing Academic Practice*. Routledge.
- Gilbert, P., McEwan, K., Mitra, R., Franks, L., Richter, A., & Rockliff, H. (2010). Self-compassion and self-care in the context of stress and burnout prevention. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 17(2), 137–145. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12529-010-9075-4>
- Gouvany, A. L., Siregar, H., & Darmawan, D. (2024). Penerapan Model Kirkpatrick dalam Evaluasi Program Pelatihan Kepemimpinan Perempuan di Pusat Pengembangan Sumber Daya Wanita Pasoendan Digdaya. *Nusantara: Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia*, 4(3), 879–897. <https://doi.org/10.14421/njpi.2024.v4i3-19>
- Hallinger, P. (2018). Bringing context out of the shadows of leadership.

- Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 46(1), 5–24.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143216670652>
- Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. H. (2010). Collaborative leadership and school improvement: Understanding the impact on school capacity and student learning. *School Leadership & Management*, 30(2), 95–110.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13632431003663214>
- Hans, D. M. (2023). Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris pada Lembaga Kursus dan Pelatihan ({LKP}) Ambisco Metro Lampung. *ANTHOR: Education and Learning Journal*, 2(1), 69–75.
<https://doi.org/10.31004/anthor.v2i1.101>
- Hochschild, A. R., & Machung, A. (2012). *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home* (Updated). Penguin Books.
- Holquist, S. E., Mitra, D. L., Conner, J., & Wright, N. L. (2023). What Is Student Voice Anyway? The Intersection of Student Voice Practices and Shared Leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 59(4), 703–737. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X231178023>
- Hoobler, J. M., Wayne, S. J., & Lemmon, G. (2009). Bosses' perceptions of family–work conflict and women's promotability: Glass ceiling effects. *Academy of Management Journal*, 52(5), 939–957.
<https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2009.44633700>
- Karelaia, N., & Guill'en, L. (2014). Me, a woman and a leader: Positive social identity and identity conflict. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 125(2), 204–219.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2014.08.002>
- Karim, & Sogalrey. (2024). Peran Kepemimpinan Perempuan dalam Pendidikan. *NOKEN: Jurnal Pengelolaan Pendidikan*, 5(2), 63–77.
<https://ejournal.uncen.ac.id/index.php/NOKEN/article/download/4477/3063>
- Klug, K., Kaluza, A. J., & Spurk, D. (2022). Does Self-Care Make You a Better Leader? A Multisource Study Linking Leader Self-Care to Health-Oriented Leadership, Employee Self-Care and Health. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(11), 6733.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19116733>
- Kramer, U. (2019a). Adaptive and maladaptive defense mechanisms in psychotherapy: A systematic review. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 75(8), 1454–1470. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jclp.22781>
- Kramer, U. (2019b). Why Should We Study Defense Mechanisms and How? An Integrative Review of Promising Prospects. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 30, 74–79. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2019.03.009>
- Lanaj, K., Wang, M., Brooks, M. E., & Rose, K. (2021). When Leader Self-Care Begets Other-Care: Leader Role Self-Compassion, Leader Helping, and Stakeholder Perceptions of Competence. *Journal of*

- Applied Psychology*, 106(12), 1870–1887.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000952>
- Leithwood, K., & Sun, J. (2012). The nature and effects of transformational school leadership: A meta-analytic review. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 48(3), 387–423.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X11436268>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. SAGE Publications.
- Liu, J., Chen, X., & Zhang, Y. (2025). Gender, caregiving, and leadership effectiveness in educational institutions: A cross-national review. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 13, 1478221.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2025.1478221>
- Livne-Tarandach, R., Pychlau, S., Grotto, A. R., & Arora, P. (2025). Unpacking the Differential Effects of Compassion at Work on Leadership Emergence: The Role of Gender, Compassion Type, and Work Context. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 46(8).
<https://doi.org/10.1002/job.70030>
- Luthans, F., Youssef, C. M., & Avolio, B. J. (2007). *Psychological Capital: Developing the Human Competitive Edge*. Oxford University Press.
- O'Neil, D. A., Hopkins, M. M., & Sullivan, S. E. (2011). Do women executives have unique career paths? A balanced career anchor approach. *Career Development International*, 16(4), 297–316.
<https://doi.org/10.1108/13620431111158753>
- Oakley, J. G. (2000). Gender-based Barriers to Senior Management Positions: Understanding the Scarcity of Female CEOs. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 27(4), 321–334.
<https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1006226129868>
- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful Sampling for Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis in Mixed Method Implementation Research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 42(5), 533–544. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods: Integrating Theory and Practice* (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Petraglia, J., Thygesen, K. L., Lecours, S., & Drapeau, M. (2009). Gender differences in self-reported defense mechanisms: A study using the new defense style questionnaire-60. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 63(1), 87–99.
<https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.psychotherapy.2009.63.1.87>
- Pio, E., & Syed, J. (2013). Our bodies, our minds, our men: Working South Asian women. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 28(3), 140–162. <https://doi.org/10.1108/GM-01-2012-0003>

- Priya, A. (2021). Case Study Methodology of Qualitative Research: Key Attributes and Navigating the Conundrums in Its Application. *Sociological Bulletin*, 70(1), 94–110. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038022920970318>
- Prout, T. A., Malone, A., & Hoffman, L. (2020). Defense mechanisms as predictors of psychological resilience: Implications for leadership under stress. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.02020>
- Pwavra, J. B. P., Iddrisu, M., Poku, C. A., Yawson, A. O., Mensah, E., Oppong, S. S., Aarah-Bapuah, M., & Aziato, L. (2025). A qualitative exploration of balancing family, work, and academics among female graduate nursing students in a lower-middle-income country. *Scientific Reports*, 15(1). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-025-90724-7>
- Ross-Plourde, M., & Lachance-Grzela, M. (2025). The Gendered Division of Housework in North America: A Systematic Review From 2014 to 2024. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 17(3), 1–30. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.70000>
- Ruslin, R., Mashuri, S., Rasak, M. S. A., Alhabsyi, F., & Syam, H. (2022). Semi-Structured Interview: A Methodological Reflection on the Development of a Qualitative Research Instrument in Educational Studies. *{IOSR} Journal of Research and Method in Education*, 12(1), 22–29. <https://doi.org/10.9790/7388-1201052229>
- Sengupta, A., Follmer, K., & Louis, D. (2024). Leadership, spirituality and empowerment: examining the experiences of women of color in fortune 500 companies. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EDI-11-2023-0380>
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The Art of Case Study Research*. Sage Publications.
- Syahputra, E., Nasution, S., & Firdaus, M. (2024). English as a Vital Tool for Global Communication: Implications for Indonesian Education. *Al-Ishlah: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 16(4), 5313–5324. <http://www.journal.staihubbulwathan.id/index.php/alishlah/article/download/5204/2647>
- Xu, J. B. (2024). *Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews in Social Service Research: A Practical Guide*.
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.