

Vietnamese gender paradox: human rights education policy for sustainable development goal 4.7

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ABSTRACT

The research evaluates whether gender predicts teachers' perceived gender inequality (PGI) and whether employee experience (EX) mediates this association in Vietnam's feminized teaching workforce. An online cross-sectional survey involved 283 in-service teachers nationwide, administered between March and August 2025. Sample adequacy was confirmed before data collection using a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA-based) structural equation modeling (SEM) power approach. Data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) with 5,000-resample bootstrapping to test direct and indirect effects. Findings indicate that female teachers report higher PGI and less favorable EX than male teachers. EX strongly predicts perceived inequality and partially mediates the gender inequality relationship. The mediation pattern highlights practical evaluation targets in workload allocation, professional voice climate, and promotion feasibility. These results support substantive-equality reforms in school governance and institutionalized human rights education aligned with sustainable development goal (SDG) 4.7.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development goal (SDG) 4.7 positions education not merely as knowledge transmission but as a public institution expected to advance equity, human rights, and gender equality through policy, governance, and everyday school practice [1]–[3]. In many systems, the “feminization” of teaching is widely documented: women constitute the numerical majority of the teaching workforce, particularly in basic education [4], [5]. Yet, this numerical dominance often fails to translate into commensurate authority, voice, and leadership representation, an outcome commonly framed as a gender equality paradox [6]. This paradox becomes especially pronounced where occupational patterns are shaped by enduring cultural norms and hierarchical organizational arrangements that distribute opportunities and recognition unevenly [7], [8].

In Vietnam, the paradox persists despite formal legal commitments to gender equality, including constitutional provisions and the Law on gender equality [9], [10]. Women represent a substantial share of the teaching workforce [9], [10]; however, leadership and decision-making remain disproportionately male, particularly at higher administrative levels and in promotion pipelines [11], [12]. In highly feminized school environments, inequality can operate subtly through opportunity structures, workload allocation, and the recognition of competence and contribution, processes that shape teachers' professional voice and participation in school governance even when formal equality is publicly affirmed [13].

Prior research has explained this paradox through interlocking socio-cultural and organizational factors. First, gender stereotypes and Confucian legacies often position men as leaders and women as caregivers, shaping expectations about authority, ambition, and “appropriate” professional roles [14]–[16]. Second, teaching is frequently characterized by the tension between high moral respect and economic devaluation, alongside intensified workload and the gendered “double burden” of professional and domestic responsibilities [17]–[19]. Third, hierarchical school cultures may discourage participation, constrain professional autonomy, and penalize voice, thereby producing structural disadvantage even in institutions that formally endorse gender equality [20], [21]. Collectively, these studies suggest that the central issue is not representation alone but substantive equality, whether institutional conditions enable equitable outcomes in participation, recognition, and advancement [22], [23]. However, the existing literature still leaves a critical evaluative gap. While feminization and leadership disparities have been widely described, fewer studies have systematically evaluated organizational mechanisms through which gendered inequality is reproduced in everyday school life, particularly by examining teachers’ work experiences as a mediating pathway that translates gendered structures into perceptions of gender inequality [24]–[26]. In the Vietnamese context, empirical evidence remains limited regarding whether and how teachers’ employee experience (EX) covering workload, interpersonal relations, governance processes, professional development access, and remuneration, functions as an organizational mechanism linking gender to perceived gender inequality (PGI) within feminized schools [24]–[26]. This gap matters for educational evaluation and policy because without identifying which institutional conditions shape perceptions and constrain participation, interventions risk remaining symbolic, compliance-oriented, or limited to numerical targets rather than improving substantive outcomes [27].

The research aims to evaluate gender differences in teachers’ perceptions of gender inequality and to test whether EX mediates the relationship between gender and PGI among Vietnamese teachers. Specifically, the study examines: i) whether gender predicts PGI; ii) whether gender predicts EX; and iii) whether EX mediates the gender–perceived inequality association. To guide this evaluation, the research is anchored in the substantive equality framework, which shifts attention from equal treatment to structural and systemic conditions that produce unequal outcomes in practice [22], [23].

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

2.1. The substantive equality framework and human rights education

The concept of substantive equality has shifted the analytical focus of gender research from formal legal parity to the evaluation of structural outcomes in practice [22], [23]. Unlike formal equality, which assesses compliance with legal provisions, substantive equality evaluates whether institutional arrangements enable equitable participation, recognition, and advancement. Within educational systems, this distinction is critical. Schools may publicly endorse gender equality while maintaining organizational routines that reproduce asymmetrical authority and constrained professional voice. Fredman’s multidimensional framework—anti-discrimination, redressing disadvantage, participation promotion, and norm transformation—provides evaluative criteria for examining how governance structures shape lived outcomes [25]. Human rights education (HRE), aligned with SDG 4.7, extends this framework into institutional practice. While many studies treat HRE as curricular content, fewer conceptualize it as a governance mechanism that influences participation norms and professional interactions [1], [26]. Thus, the evaluation of gender equality in schools requires indicators that move beyond policy rhetoric toward organizational enactment.

2.2. Feminization of teaching

The feminization of teaching has been widely documented across Europe and Asia [4], [5], with women constituting the majority of the teaching workforce. However, vertical segregation persists, with leadership and decision-making roles disproportionately occupied by men [6], [7]. Existing studies predominantly rely on descriptive workforce statistics or leadership distribution analyses. These approaches effectively document representation gaps but provide limited explanatory insight into the institutional processes that sustain them. Systematic reviews of principal promotion patterns identify structural barriers and informal gatekeeping, yet often stop short of modeling internal school mechanisms [7], [8]. In the Vietnamese context, scholarship highlights the coexistence of feminization and male-dominated leadership pipelines [12], [23]. Nevertheless, most analyses remain macro-level or discourse-oriented, emphasizing cultural legacies rather than empirically evaluating school-level processes. As a result, representation has been monitored, but organizational transmission mechanisms have not been systematically assessed.

2.3. Organizational mechanisms and inequality reproduction

A growing body of research shifts attention from representation to institutional climate and work conditions. Studies on workload intensification, time poverty, and emotional strain suggest that inequality may operate through daily organizational routines [18], [20], [28]. Similarly, research on organizational ostracism and obstruction demonstrates that participation constraints and voice suppression shape teachers' perceptions of fairness [27]. These studies identify plausible mechanisms but often treat them as correlates rather than mediating pathways. Gender stereotypes further interact with organizational structures. Empirical evidence indicates that leadership competence is implicitly masculinized, while relational or caregiving roles are feminized [12], [14], [29]. Such norms may shape evaluation practices and promotion feasibility even in systems committed to equality. Methodologically, however, many of these studies rely on bivariate comparisons, qualitative interviews, or regression models that do not explicitly test mediation. Consequently, while mechanisms are discussed conceptually, they are rarely evaluated as structural transmission processes linking gender to inequality perceptions.

2.4. Employee experience as an evaluative construct

EX provides a coherent construct for operationalizing institutional mechanisms. It conceptualizes work as a structured interaction between governance systems, workload conditions, interpersonal climate, professional development access, and remuneration [29]. Grounded in self-determination theory, EX captures autonomy, competence, and relatedness as embedded in organizational practice rather than individual traits. In education research, EX-related dimensions have been linked to occupational well-being, participation quality, and professional sustainability [18], [28]. EX may function as a diagnostic indicator of substantive equality. Disproportionate after-hours workload, constrained leadership aspiration, fear of negative evaluation, and limited promotion feasibility may signal structural disadvantage rather than individual deficiency [18], [30]. Previous research has yet to systematically model EX as a mediating mechanism within gender-equality evaluation frameworks. Moreover, its applicability as a structured set of school-level evaluation indicators has received limited scholarly attention.

2.5. Evaluation gap and hypothesis development

Across the literature, three patterns emerge. First, feminization and leadership disparities have been well documented descriptively. Second, organizational constraints and cultural norms have been identified as contextual explanations. Third, mediation-based evaluations of institutional transmission mechanisms remain limited. What has not been adequately evaluated is whether everyday work experiences function as measurable pathways through which gendered structures translate into perceived inequality in schools.

In the Vietnamese context, empirical research has not systematically evaluated whether teachers' work experiences function as measurable indicators of how gender-equality commitments are enacted within school governance. As a result, evaluation has largely focused on representation statistics rather than institutional processes. To address this gap, the present study advances a mechanism-based evaluation model grounded in substantive equality theory. The model conceptualizes EX as an organizational pathway linking gender to PGI. Rather than treating inequality perceptions as solely attitudinal differences, the model assumes that they are shaped by structured workplace conditions. Specifically, the model proposes three theoretical linkages. First, gender may directly influence perceived inequality due to differential exposure to bias and promotion constraints. Second, gender may shape EX through workload allocation, leadership aspiration feasibility, and evaluation climate. Third, EX may influence perceived inequality by structuring how institutional fairness is interpreted and experienced. Accordingly, EX is modeled as a mediating mechanism that transmits gendered structural conditions into perceived inequality outcomes. Figure 1 is introduced here to clarify the hypothesized structural pathways prior to empirical testing.

- Hypothesis 1: gender has positive and statistically significant effect on PGI. Researches identifies gender differences in perceptions of workplace equality. Male educators often perceive institutional equality as largely achieved, whereas female teachers report lower perceived fairness due to structural constraints and implicit bias [31], [32]. In contexts shaped by Confucian norms and restricted female leadership pathways, these perceptual gaps are expected to be more pronounced [12], [13].
- Hypothesis 2: gender has positive and statistically significant effect on EX. Gender is a central determinant of EX [29]. Women's work experiences are shaped by career barriers [13], organizational constraints [27], and "double burden" of professional and domestic roles [30]. In Vietnam, high workloads combined with care responsibilities generate emotional exhaustion and limit professional advancement [18]. Together with insufficient well-being support [30], these conditions produce less supportive EXs for women.
- Hypothesis 3: EX positively mediates the relationship between gender and PGI. Gender influences PGI both directly and indirectly through EX. Accumulated negative experiences such as unrecognized labor and limited development opportunities heighten women's awareness of systemic injustice [29].

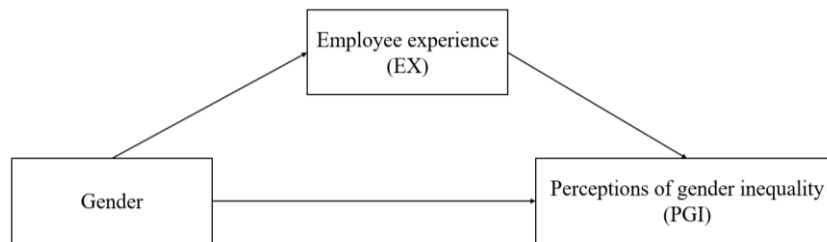


Figure 1. Research model

3. METHOD

3.1. Research design

The research employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the mediating role of EX between gender and PGI. The design was explanatory and evaluation-oriented. It tested structural relationships using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM).

3.2. Development of questionnaire

The measurement instrument was developed through an evidence-based item construction process integrating the substantive equality framework with empirical findings on gender bias and organizational mechanisms in educational contexts. Two latent constructs were measured: PGI was measured using six items adapted from prior research examining teachers' perceptions of gender equality, discrimination, and promotion barriers in school environments [13], [26], [27], [32]. EX was operationalized using items reflecting workload intensification, leadership aspiration constraints, fear of negative evaluation, and promotion hesitation, grounded in studies on teacher occupational well-being, hierarchical school cultures, and gendered professional trajectories [18], [20], [22], [23].

Item adaptation was conducted to reflect the Vietnamese institutional context, where Confucian-influenced norms and hierarchical leadership structures shape teachers' professional voice and advancement opportunities [12], [14], [23]. All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree). Measurement items are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Factor loadings, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR) of constructs

Item	Scale item	Outer loadings (more than 0.70)	Cronbach's alpha (more than 0.70)	CR (more than 0.70)	AVE (more than 0.50)
EX3	I often bear a heavy burden of after-hours work and duties outside of my core expertise.	0.839	0.875	0.914	0.728
EX4	I have previously forgone or hesitated to pursue promotion opportunities due to work pressure or insufficient time for personal/family matters.	0.810			
EX5	I feel that female teachers are discouraged from expressing aspirations for leadership or management positions.	0.904			
EX6	I fear negative evaluation if I express the ambition to assume leadership or management roles.	0.857			
PGI1	Gender inequality persists within the contemporary teaching profession.	0.810	0.895	0.919	0.656
PGI2	I feel that gender bias is related to career advancement opportunities.	0.783			
PGI3	I have strong prospects for career progression.	0.820			
PGI4	Gender bias affects how teacher competency is evaluated.	0.833			
PGI5	I feel that gender bias affects the way teacher competency is evaluated.	0.811			
PGI6	I have witnessed or am aware of cases of gender-based discrimination against teachers in the school environment.	0.799			

3.3. Sample and data collection procedure

3.3.1. Data collection procedure

Data were collected through an anonymous online survey administered between March and August 2025. The study was conducted in full compliance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. The questionnaire link was distributed through official school communication channels and professional teacher networks across multiple regions (Northern, Central, and Southern Vietnam). Participation was entirely voluntary.

3.3.2. Sample size determination

Sample size was determined prior to data collection using a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA-based) SEM power estimation procedure [33]. Model assumptions included anticipated degrees of freedom, target RMSEA, alpha level, and desired statistical power. The estimated minimum required sample ranged between 180 and 250 respondents. The final sample (N=283) exceeded this threshold. The sample size therefore met contemporary SEM recommendations for stable estimation in moderately complex structural models [34]. Sample characteristics: participants' demographic and professional characteristics are presented in Table 2. The table summarizes the distribution of respondents by gender, age group, and years of teaching experience. These characteristics are important because they describe the demographic structure of the sample and provide contextual information for interpreting gender-related perceptions and EX among teachers.

As shown in Table 2, female teachers constitute 80.9% of the sample, reflecting the feminized structure of the teaching profession documented in prior research [4], [6], [10]. The majority of respondents are between 30 and 49 years of age (75.3%) and have more than 10 years of professional experience (73.5%), indicating substantial exposure to institutional promotion systems and organizational practices. Such experience is particularly relevant for assessing perceptions of gender inequality and EX within hierarchical school environments.

Table 2. Characteristics of the survey respondents

Classification criterion		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	54	19.1
	Female	229	80.9
Age	Under 30 years old	38	13.4
	30–39 years old	97	34.3
	40–49 years old	116	41.0
	Over 50 years old	32	11.3
Experience (years)	Under 5 years	39	13.8
	5–10 years	36	12.7
	11–20 years	115	40.6
	Over 20 years	93	32.9
Total		283	100

3.4. Data analysis methods

Data were analyzed using PLS-SEM. The analysis proceeded in two stages: i) the measurement model was evaluated for reliability and validity. Indicators not meeting threshold criteria were removed. Second, the structural model was assessed. Path coefficients were estimated using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples. Statistical significance was evaluated at $p < 0.05$; and ii) mediation was tested using bootstrapped indirect effects and examination of the persistence of direct effects after including the mediator [34], [35].

4. RESULTS

4.1. Measurement model assessment

The measurement model was first assessed by examining the outer loadings of each retained indicator and the reliability and convergent validity of the two latent constructs. Table 1 presents the retained measurement items, their outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, CR, and AVE. This table provides evidence that the remaining indicators adequately represent the constructs of EX and PGI after the removal of indicators with insufficient loadings.

Two EX indicators (EX1 and EX2) were removed because their loadings fell below the recommended 0.70 threshold. Their removal strengthened indicator reliability and improved construct coherence. All retained indicators exceeded acceptable loading criteria. EX loadings ranged from 0.810 to 0.904, while PGI loadings ranged from 0.783 to 0.833. These values indicated stable measurement performance across constructs. From an evaluative perspective, the refined model demonstrated adequate operationalization of organizational experience and perceived inequality. However, the initial removal of two indicators suggested that some proposed experience dimensions required conceptual refinement in future studies.

4.2. Constructs reliability and validity assessment

CR was evaluated through Cronbach's alpha and CR. Convergent validity was assessed using the AVE index. Table 3 reports the reliability and convergent validity statistics for the EX and PGI constructs.

The table is used to determine whether each construct meets the recommended thresholds for internal consistency and convergent validity before proceeding to structural model assessment.

Table 3. Measurement scale reliability and validity assessment results

Construct	Cronbach's alpha (more than 0.70)	rho A (more than 0.70)	CR (more than 0.70)	AVE (more than 0.50)
EX	0.875	0.886	0.914	0.728
PGI	0.895	0.897	0.919	0.656

Cronbach's alpha values were 0.875 for EX and 0.895 for PGI. CR values were 0.914 and 0.919, respectively. All reliability coefficients exceeded the recommended 0.70 threshold, indicating strong internal consistency [35]. The AVE values were 0.728 for EX and 0.656 for PGI, both surpassing the recommended minimum value of 0.50. These results indicate that each construct explained more than half of the variance of its indicators, thereby confirming adequate convergent validity [35]. After confirming reliability and convergent validity, discriminant validity was assessed to ensure that the two constructs were conceptually and statistically distinct. Table 4 presents the Fornell–Larcker discriminant validity results, in which the square root of the AVE for each construct is compared with the inter-construct correlation.

The square roots of AVE were 0.853 for EX and 0.810 for PGI, which were greater than the inter-construct correlation coefficient (0.644). This finding satisfies the Fornell–Larcker criterion. Additionally, the HTMT value was 0.717, well below the conservative threshold of 0.90, further supporting discriminant validity [35]. The measurement model demonstrated adequate reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. The constructs therefore exhibited sufficient measurement stability and distinctiveness to justify subsequent evaluation of structural relationships.

Table 4. Discriminant validity assessment results

Construct	EX	PGI
EX	0.853*	
PGI	0.644	0.810*

*The square roots of the AVE.

4.3. Structural model assessment and hypothesis testing

Before testing the hypothesized structural relationships, multicollinearity among predictors was examined using inner variance inflation factor (VIF) values. Table 5 presents the inner VIF values for the structural paths involving EX and PGI. This assessment is necessary to confirm that the estimated path coefficients are not affected by excessive predictor redundancy.

Multicollinearity was examined using inner VIF values. VIF values ranged from 1.000 to 1.338, substantially below the conservative threshold of 5 [35]. These results indicate the absence of multicollinearity concerns and confirm that the structural estimates are not biased by predictor redundancy. The direct structural effects were tested using 5,000-resample bootstrapping. Table 6 presents the direct path coefficients, standard deviations, t statistics, p values, and hypothesis decisions. These results provide the statistical basis for evaluating whether gender predicts PGI, whether gender predicts EX, and whether EX predicts PGI.

Table 5. Inner VIF values

Construct	EX	PGI
EX		1.338
Gender	1.000	1.338

Table 6. Direct effects assessment results

Hypothesis	Relationship	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics	P values	Conclusion
1	Gender→PGI	0.208	0.208	0.046	4.485	0.000	Supported
2	Gender→EX	0.502	0.503	0.038	13.118	0.000	Supported
	EX→PGI	0.540	0.543	0.052	10.421	0.000	Supported

The findings show that gender had a positive and statistically significant effect on PGI ($\beta=0.208$, $p<0.001$), indicating that female teachers reported higher levels of perceived inequality. This coefficient confirms the presence of a measurable gender-based perceptual gap within schools. Gender also demonstrated a substantial positive effect on EX ($\beta=0.502$, $p<0.001$). The magnitude of this effect suggests meaningful gender differentiation in workplace conditions and organizational experiences. Furthermore, EX exhibited a strong positive association with PGI ($\beta=0.540$, $p<0.001$). Notably, this coefficient exceeded the direct effect of gender on perceived inequality, indicating that organizational conditions constitute a more powerful explanatory pathway than gender alone. The structural paths were statistically robust and theoretically coherent. The results highlight the central role of EX as a key explanatory mechanism linking gender to perceived inequality in school governance contexts.

4.4. Mediation results

The bootstrapping results demonstrated a statistically significant indirect effect of gender on PGI through EX ($\beta=0.271$, $p<0.001$), with the magnitude of this indirect pathway exceeding that of the direct effect. Although the direct relationship between gender and PGI remained significant after the inclusion of EX in the model ($\beta=0.208$, $p<0.001$), the pattern of findings indicates partial rather than full mediation. The comparatively stronger indirect effect suggests that gender-based differences in perceived inequality are primarily transmitted through differentiated workplace experiences. Dimensions such as workload burden, leadership feasibility, and evaluation climate operate as institutional transmission mechanisms that structure how inequality is experienced and interpreted within schools. These factors reflect practical implementation gaps embedded in school governance processes. Overall, the mediation model offers mechanism-based explanatory evidence, strengthening the theoretical interpretation of how gender influences perceived inequality in educational settings.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Gender predicted perceived inequality despite workforce feminization

The results demonstrated that gender significantly predicted PGI within a predominantly female teaching workforce. Female teachers reported higher inequality perceptions despite numerical dominance. This pattern confirmed the persistence of the feminization paradox documented in prior scholarship [4], [6]. From a substantive equality perspective, representation did not guarantee equitable institutional outcomes [22], [25]. Persistent perceptual disparities indicated that structural arrangements continued to distribute recognition and advancement unevenly. These findings aligned with research identifying vertical segregation and informal promotion barriers in educational leadership [7], [8]. In Vietnam, hierarchical governance norms likely reinforced authority asymmetries despite formal equality commitments [12], [23]. Therefore, inequality should be interpreted as an institutional enactment deficit rather than a demographic imbalance.

5.2. Gender differentiated employee experience across institutional conditions

The findings further indicated that gender significantly predicted EX. Female teachers reported heavier workload burdens and constrained leadership feasibility. These patterns were consistent with studies linking workload intensification and gendered professional strain to structural disadvantage [18], [20]. However, earlier research often treated these factors descriptively rather than evaluating them as transmission mechanisms. The present analysis demonstrated that organizational routines structured inequality perceptions through measurable workplace conditions. From an evaluation standpoint, EX functioned as an observable governance process. These findings suggested that formal equality commitments were filtered through institutional routines embedded in daily school operations. Governance enactment therefore shaped how gender differences became experienced and interpreted.

5.3. Employee experience functioned as the primary transmission mechanism

The mediation results revealed that EX partially transmitted the relationship between gender and perceived inequality. The indirect effect exceeded the direct effect in magnitude. This pattern indicated that institutional conditions explained a substantial proportion of the observed gender gap. Previous studies emphasized stereotype-based evaluation and promotion disparities [14], yet rarely quantified institutional transmission explicitly. The present model therefore advanced mechanism-based empirical evidence. Gender influenced perceived inequality primarily through differentiated workplace experiences rather than identity alone. From a substantive equality framework, workload allocation, evaluation climate, and leadership feasibility emerged as structural determinants. These institutional dimensions shaped how fairness was interpreted within professional contexts.

5.4. Contribution to educational evaluation practice

The research contributed to educational evaluation by demonstrating that EX dimensions functioned as practical indicators for assessing gender-equality policy implementation at the school level. Workload distribution, leadership feasibility, and evaluation transparency operated as measurable governance markers. The mediation findings showed that these institutional dimensions transmitted gender disparities into perceived inequality outcomes. This evidence shifted evaluation from demographic representation monitoring toward institutional enactment assessment. By operationalizing substantive equality through observable organizational conditions, the study provided a structured mechanism-based evaluation model. These indicators allowed evaluators to identify implementation gaps embedded in daily governance routines despite formal equality commitments under SDG 4.7.

5.5. Limitations informing interpretation

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting these findings. First, the cross-sectional design limits causal inference about the directionality of relationships. Second, self-reported measures may introduce common method bias and reflect perceptual differences rather than objective inequalities. Third, the sample size and online recruitment—while adequate for PLS-SEM—may constrain generalizability across all regions and school types in Vietnam. Finally, the model focuses on one mediator (EX); other mechanisms suggested by substantive equality such as institutional discrimination routines, leadership selection norms, or professional network access may account for additional variance and should be incorporated in future models [24], [25].

6. CONCLUSION

Vietnamese gender paradox is sustained not merely by disparities in representation but by institutional conditions embedded in everyday school life. By integrating the substantive equality framework with an empirical mediation model, the research moves beyond descriptive accounts of feminization and provides a structural explanation of how inequality is reproduced within a predominantly female profession. The findings underscore that gendered perceptions of inequality are shaped primarily through differentiated professional experiences, thereby reframing the paradox as a question of organizational governance, participatory equity, and advancement feasibility rather than numerical imbalance alone. In doing so, the study advances substantive equality from a normative principle to an empirically operationalized evaluative framework within educational research.

The implications extend beyond the Vietnamese context. For policymakers and educational leaders, the results indicate that achieving SDG 4.7 commitments requires institutional transformation rather than symbolic adherence to formal equality provisions. Organizational routines related to workload distribution, promotion pathways, evaluation practices, and professional voice must be systematically examined and restructured. Positioning human rights education as an institutional strategy—embedded in leadership training, professional development, and governance culture—offers a pathway to translate equality commitments into practical change. Thus, the study highlights the importance of aligning educational governance with rights-based and participatory principles to ensure that feminized systems do not inadvertently perpetuate structural disadvantage.

Nevertheless, important issues remain unresolved. The cross-sectional design limits temporal interpretation, and the reliance on self-reported perceptions leaves open questions regarding how structural mechanisms operate longitudinally and across diverse institutional contexts. Future research should therefore employ longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to trace the evolution of professional experience and inequality perceptions across career stages and policy reforms. Expanding the analytical model to incorporate additional institutional mechanisms, such as leadership selection norms, informal professional networks, and organizational climate would deepen understanding of how substantive equality can be realized in practice. By continuing to refine mechanism-based explanations, future studies can further strengthen the evidence base for transforming educational institutions in line with gender equality and human rights commitments.

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C : **C**onceptualization

M : **M**ethodology

So : **S**oftware

Va : **V**alidation

Fo : **F**ormal analysis

I : **I**nterpretation

R : **R**esources

D : **D**ata Curation

O : **O**riginal Draft

E : **E**diting

Vi : **V**isualization

Su : **S**upervision

P : **P**roject administration

Fu : **F**unding acquisition

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest.

ETHICAL APPROVAL

The study was conducted in accordance with all relevant national regulations and institutional policies and complied with the tenets of the Helsinki Declaration. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

DATA AVAILABILITY

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, [XNT], upon reasonable request.




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