

**THE LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE SECONDARY SCHOOL  
PRINCIPALS IN SEKHUKHUNE DISTRICT, LIMPOPO**

by

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I declare that *The leadership experiences of women principals of secondary schools in Sekhukhune district, Limpopo Province* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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SIGNATURE  
(Mrs)

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DATE

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## **ABSTRACT**

Studies on women principals and leadership have been conducted in both developed and developing countries. Not much research on women leadership has been undertaken in Sekhukhune region in rural Limpopo, South Africa. The study's interests were in the representation of women in leadership in this region. It sought to explore leadership experiences of women principals working in secondary schools in rural areas. In addition, the study sought to understand what led to their appointment, particularly in a deeply traditional and patriarchal society such as Sekhukhune region, considering both barriers as well as enhancers and how they impacted on their progress to principalship.

Data were collected by means of qualitative methods; semi-structured interviews were held with six women principals from public schools only. Structured observation was also conducted during school visits, as well during interviews wherein field notes were also taken. School documents such as SGB and minute books, some policy documents, noticeboard documents, time-books, attendance registers were analysed. Existing literature on women and leadership was reviewed. Data collected was transcribed, analysed, interpreted, and findings were presented.

Women principals spoke of their everyday work experiences within the context of sharing challenges and strengths in their careers. The study found out that women are their own motivators, which serves as a strong enhancer. However, women still face organisational barriers particularly in the selection procedures where gender discrimination is evident. Findings revealed that women principals continue to face myriad administrative and personal challenges when caring out their managerial duties. These include resistance from communities and staff often displayed by stereotypical attitudes and discrimination. In order to cope with some of the challenges, participants in this study innovatively employed various leadership styles such as care and nurturing, collaboration, androgynicity and spirituality. Stereotyping still exists as leadership is viewed from a male perspective. In conclusion, this study discovered that women principals displayed some values of liberal feminism in their leadership experiences; they demonstrated that they can do great things by taking part in the public sphere.

## **DEFINITION OF KEY WORDS AND ACRONYMS**

**Educator-** means any person, excluding a person who is appointed to exclusively perform extra-curricular duties, who teaches, educates or trains learners or who provides professional educational services including professional therapy or educational psychological services at a school.

**Experience-** this means everyday experiences of a person in the discharge of their primary functions which the person reflects on, perceives, feels, endures or enjoys.

**Leadership-** is defined as a major way in which people change the mind set of others and move the organisation forward to accomplish identified goals.

**Public school** – According to the South African Schools Act 84 (1996) a public school refers to an ordinary public school or a public school for learners with special education needs. In this study, a public school may be an ordinary school; primary or secondary.

**Principal-** means an appointed educator or someone acting as the head of the school.

**Secondary school-** means a public school which enrolls learners from Grade 8 to Grade 12.

**Women leaders-** this term is used interchangeably for the context of this study; women leaders, female principals, female head teachers and women managers.

**DoE-** Department of Education

**HOD –** Head of Department

**SGB-** School Governing Body

**SMT –** School Management Team

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

From 1994 the South African government implemented principles of equity, redress and social empowerment in the broader society and in education. A central theme that dominates most studies on gender and leadership is the emerging tendency towards mitigating pervasive forms of discrimination against females. Ever since the enactment of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, discriminatory laws were eliminated from society. The Bill of Rights contained in the Constitution for Republic of South Africa Act, 1996( Act 108 of 1996) section 9 (1)-(5) distances the state and its institutions from any forms of discrimination against people on the grounds of race, sex, religion, gender, disability, language, HIV status, conscience and belief. The constitution of the Republic of South Africa clearly indicates that everyone is equal before the law, and has the right to equal protection and benefit before the law. Equality means the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms.

Chapter two of the Employment Equity Act of 1998 requires the employer to take steps towards promoting equal opportunities in the workplace by eliminating discrimination in any employment policy. Yet women are still, for the most part, a minority within leadership positions in education. Despite policy initiatives emphasising gender equity, prejudice and stereotyping continue to perpetuate the myth of women's submissiveness and remain a formidable barrier for impending women in acquiring leadership positions (Mestry & Schmidt, 2012).

#### **1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM**

This study focused on women and school leadership through the experiences of female principals within the context of rural areas of Sekhukhune District in Limpopo Province. A lot has been written about women and leadership in South Africa, but too little about the experiences of women in Sekhukhune district. The under-representation of women in South African secondary schools education management, given the dominance of women in the teaching profession, indicates that "women in promotional positions have faced and continue to face more deterrents than men do, otherwise they would have a more equitable gender distribution as secondary school principals" (Moorosi, 2006: 2). This is the reason that prompted this study; the interest to explore women in secondary schools and their leadership

experiences. Most African societies continue to discourage ambitious women from engaging in politics, leadership positions in education. Women's marginalised positions remain a shared phenomenon in the continent.

The researcher has extensive experience in the teaching profession as she started teaching in the heartland of Sekhukhune in an Anglican private school. Due to financial constraints, the school was forced to change from being private into a public school under section (14) of the South African School act of 1996. As years went by, the researcher became aware of the complex world of school leadership and then realised that women also play a significant role as leaders. From the researcher's observation, men were mostly recommended to act or were appointed in key leadership positions in the school. Women were only recommended to serve as deputies, in many instances. With policies such the Employment Equity Act and Gender Equity Act 1998, there has been an improvement in balancing the numbers. However, Lumby and Azaola (2011: 73) maintain that "gender in the workplace is a socially constructed phenomenon and remains a potent influence on the career and experience of women, because it is influenced by other factors such as language, poverty, race, and size of the school". The above information supports the fact women are grossly under-represented as secondary school leaders. The concern raised here is of social injustice within educational leadership with regard to gender inequality.

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

In view of the above -mentioned information, the study was underpinned by this research question:

What are the experiences of women principals in secondary schools in Sekhukhune district?

To provide the context and direction of the study in order to answer the research question, specific sub- questions and objectives are necessary. They are indicated as follows:

Sub- questions

- (a) What are the factors that may have led to these women principals being appointed into these positions?
- (b) What management styles do these principals use in their schools?
- (c) What are the administrative challenges they face?
- (d) What are the personal challenges they face?

- (e) What is the extent to which these challenges affect them and further affect the whole school management of these women principals?
- (f) What are the perspectives of stakeholders towards these women principals?

## **1.4.AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **1.4 1. Aims**

The research aimed at investigating the leadership experiences of women principals in secondary schools with the intention to explore factors that may have led to their appointment as principals, as well as their management styles. The other intention was to highlight challenges women principals encounter in their careers; and to an extent how these challenges impact on their personal and professional lives. It was also aimed at providing information as to how these women are being perceived by other stakeholders.

### **1.4.2. Objectives**

The objectives of the study were as follows:

- To identify factors that may have led to women principals being appointed into principalship posts;
- To explore the management styles of women principals in secondary schools in Sekhukhune District of Limpopo Province;
- To find out about the administrative challenges these women face;
- To understand the personal difficulties they experience and highlight the impact on their careers; and
- To make recommendations to other researchers and anyone interested in women in educational management studies.

## **1.5 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The aim of this study was to conduct a literature study in order to be able to describe and address the challenges female principals face in Sekhukhune District Secondary Schools. Again, the study aimed to explore and recommend strategies that can be used to address problems pertaining to female principals' leadership and management styles, and how to overcome these workplace challenges.

All stakeholders in the education department will benefit from this study. The quality of learning and teaching will also improve because the roles of all stakeholders will be positively

influenced. The research outcomes could also be useful to policy makers and implementers to provide a basis for policy guidelines. Teachers and unions could also benefit from this research because by realising the policy discrepancies, they can make amendments. This could help government organisations to revisit their policies on gender equity. Perhaps the outcomes could also help to close the gap between gender and education management. Oplakta (2006) emphasises that the study on women leadership could also contribute to the body of knowledge on women and leadership in developing countries. The study could also be significant to female teachers in leadership positions as it calls on their roles as mentors to other young female teachers in the profession. It could again contribute to ongoing studies on women in leadership and development (Barmao, 2013).

Finally, the study could help in highlighting the influence that social, economic and political practices may have on women so that they lead effectively in their positions.

## **1.6 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section will discuss different feminist theories to understand how they view gender issues. These are liberal, radical, African and black feminism.

### **1.6.1. Introduction**

This study is rooted in feminist paradigms which draw attention to the oppression of women in most societies. This paradigm highlights how previous images of social reality have often come from and reinforced the experiences of men. Feminist paradigms call attention to the social aspect of life that is not revealed by other paradigms. It plays an important role in establishing a theoretical paradigm for social research. Again, it focuses on gender differences and how they relate to the rest of social organisation. Lastly, “feminist paradigms challenge the prevailing notions concerning consensus in society. Most descriptions of the predominant beliefs, values and norms of a society are written by people only representing portions of society” (Olesen, 2011: 130).

The literature intended to give a variety of theoretical frameworks that have been used universally and locally in the analysis of women studies in educational management. A lot of feminist writers such as Fenwick (2006), Palestini and Terosky (2012) and Goldberg (2012) acknowledge that the concept feminism is too complex and diverse. According to Palestine and Terosky (2012) feminism is a collection of movements aimed at defining and establishing equal opportunities for women at work. They both emphasise that the feminist theory emerged from

the feminist movement with the aim of understanding the nature of gender inequality by examining women's gender roles and lived experiences. It has developed theories in a variety of disciplines including education, in order to respond to issues such as the social construction of sex and gender.

This study is rooted in a feminist perspective that looks at women's experiences in educational management from a disadvantaged standpoint. Feminism has different perspectives such as liberal, black, radical, African and post structural. A feminist framework was relevant for this study because it brings about awareness of the injustices women suffer because of their gender and further attempts to suggest ways to improve women's lives. Fenwick (2006) argues that this implies social action. It should be noted that one cannot understand women's lived experiences without addressing the issue of women's subordination to men.

Cox (2010: 6) says that "we need to start revisiting what we mean by feminism because there are still gross inequalities". She highlights that "women are not socialised to be real leaders, but expected to behave in a lesser role than men in equivalent jobs. They still have to be good women and are often rewarded for being nice and aware of others' needs" (ibid). This means that women are less able to make themselves heard in groups, and their ideas may be overlooked until expressed by someone else, and usually a male. Thus, real leadership is still seen through a masculine viewpoint.

Furthermore, Cox (2010:8) sees feminism as "creating societies that recognise and value roles, tasks, knowledge and skills without gender-based assumptions". She emphasises that "if the choices we make are not to be limited, encouraged or penalised just because we are male or female, it means that all spheres of life should be assessed and valued on the basis of what they contribute both to the common good and to particular group and individual well-being, not on gender grounds" (ibid).

According to Smith (2013:99) feminist theorists "acknowledge the importance of giving voice to inequities, but they suggest that more criticism of men, society or values produces little movement to a better place". She further argues that feminism did not raise the status of women despite decades of activism. More recently women's studies research maintain that women continue to be generally seen as less worthy and valuable than men. Some scholars argue that more is needed other than activism and traditional analysis of statistics and other social facts to make sense of the conditions that women face.

## **1.6.2 Theories for analysing gender**

### ***1.6.2.1 Liberal feminism***

Fenwick (2006) asserts that the liberal feminist theory says that women and their uniqueness as gender beings can be understood rationally, within traditional western modes of thought and analysis. This approach contends that if women are given the right access and opportunities as men they will, to the same extent as men, be free to determine their own course in life. Chabalala (2006) emphasises that many others in South Africa have gained legal rights in the present democratic dispensation. Nevertheless, women teachers are left out of formal leadership roles in schools. Patterns and practices that relegated and held women to the margins of leadership continue to contradict the democratic ideals enshrined in the constitution. By this, we end up having a low percentage of women leaders in schools; mostly the numbers of female principals in secondary schools. This feminist approach argues that women have as much potential as men and should therefore be given equal rights to exercise their capabilities in order to remedy the injustices done to them.

Liberal feminism is based on the political philosophy of liberalism which commences from the belief that all individuals have rights to freedom and autonomy. It aims at altering women's status and opportunities within the existing economic and political framework. It further concentrates on removing all stumbling blocks that prevent women from attaining their full potential in schools (Fenwick, 2006). Lastly, liberal feminists argue that any law, traditions and activities that hinder equal rights and opportunities between men and women must be terminated. However, it should be noted that liberal feminism is based on contradiction. This is that by nature men and women are different. It identifies rationalism as a masculine trait and suggests that women's lack of it is part of their nature.

### ***1.6.2.2 Black feminism***

This approach acknowledges that black women, in general, have different experiences from those of white women. Collins (2002) argues that black women are positioned within structures of power in fundamentally different ways than white women. Black women experience a different and more intense kind of oppression. In addition, it argues that sexism, class oppression and racism are inextricably bound together.

Black feminism was more relevant for this study because it examines the multifaceted personal and professional lives of black women who are leading secondary schools in South Africa, Limpopo Province. The study also acknowledges that a lot of research has been conducted in this field, but there is lack of women's voices in the literature on educational leadership, particularly those of minority women. Furthermore, black feminism acknowledges that black women principals have different experiences from that of white and Indian female principals on the bases of race, class and sex without attempting to homogenize black African women.

### ***1.6.2.3 African feminism***

Norwood (2013) says despite culture and diversity between and within geographies, there are commonalities in African women's lived experiences under colonialism and slavery. It is these shared experiences that helped shape and develop this distinct brand of feminism which is universally concerned with the ways in which women manage and challenge oppression. Additionally, the feminism that emerged out of these experiences is fundamentally commissioned with the task of breaking down and deconstructing racist and sexist ideologies that devalue their humanity. Across Africa and her Diaspora, African women share a powerful history of resistance, despite attempts to silence and make them invisible.

However, Arndt (2002: 34) highlights that "African feminism does not assume homogeneity in women; the assumption that all problems of all women in Africa can be solved with one universal solution". The aim is to upset these deeply rooted social practices in order to transform gender relationships and conceptions in African societies and improve the situation of African women. African women in this context should not be understood to mean black South African women, but in this context, the term African women is used to refer to all women living in Africa. African women have all been impacted upon and affected by colonialism, apartheid and patriarchy whether positively or negatively. Most importantly, to note is that African feminism "acknowledges the existence of "woman on woman" discrimination" (Arndt, 2002: 38).

### ***1.6.2.4 Radical feminism***

Rowland and Klein (2013: 271) maintain that radical feminism "create a new apolitical and social theory of women's oppression, and strategies to end that oppression, which comes from women's lived experiences". They continue arguing that sexism is the root oppression, which needs to be uprooted, because if not, it can lead to other problems such as class hatred, racism, ageism and economic exploitation. She further explains that this approach is the only theory

by and for women. Radical feminism stresses that emancipation or equality on male terms is not sufficient. Radical feminism says that any woman in the world has more in common with any other woman regardless of class, race, age, ethnic group, and nationality than with any man. As a result, the concept of sisterhood is important within this approach. Sisterhood is a moving and potentially radicalizing concept of united women.

Radical feminism holds the view that women are oppressed primarily because they are women and because of the difference in our lives created by, for example culture and class. Women experience this oppression differently, and it expresses itself differently. To concur with this Charlotte Bunch cited by Rowland and Klein says (2013:274):

“Women oppression is rooted in the structures of society, which are patriarchal, and in the sons of patriarchy: capitalism and white supremacy. The term patriarchy refers to all these forms of oppression and domination, all of which must be ended before all women will be free.”

#### ***1.6.2.5 Theories underpinning this study***

All of the above mentioned feminist perspectives have strengths and limitations. However, they all contribute to the understanding of women in education management. Out of these perspectives, African feminism underpinned this study based on the following reasons. Firstly, this is a perspective that best explains the women principals' experiences who participated in this study as they are African. Arndt (2002) posits that African feminism does not assume homogeneity in women, the assumption that problems of all women in Africa can be solved with one universal solution. Secondly, African feminism attempts to discuss gender relations both in the context of patriarchy and other oppressive mechanisms of women and people in Africa such as apartheid, socio economic exclusion, and this is the context in which participants of this study find themselves in. Lastly, Arndt (2002:38) further argues that “African feminism does not hold only men as responsible for discrimination against women, but also acknowledges the existence of woman on woman discrimination”. The second feminist perspective used in this study is liberal feminism, firstly because it is based on the belief that women have as much potential as men and should therefore be given equal rights to exercise their potential in order to remedy the injustices done to them. Furthermore, liberal feminism aims at altering women status and opportunities with the existing economic and political frameworks. Lastly, liberal feminism posits that any law, traditions and activities that inhibit equal rights and opportunities between men and women must be abolished (Fenwick, 2006).

### **1.6.3 Conceptualising women in educational leadership**

The second part of this review is divided into the following categories: Representation of women in educational leadership and management; Women leadership styles and strategies; Perspectives about female principals in secondary schools; and The challenges women principals face in their career paths.

#### ***1.6.3.1 Representation of women in educational leadership and management***

A number of writers have indicated in their studies that women are underrepresented in secondary school management positions in South Africa and Africa in general Lumby & Azaola (2011), Moorosi (2006); and Wrushen and Sherman (2008). Lumby (2010) further indicates that a focus on women and equity representation within the workplace has been attacked as inappropriately essential, seeing women as redundant in the light of advances in gender equity. However, Moorosi (2006) suggests that we should learn from women experiences, social structures and cultural practices that hamper greater representation of women in school leadership and management posts in South Africa. Coleman (2007) maintains that there is still a continuing imbalance in the proportion of female to male appointees whereby the underlying attitudes to women as senior managers are also slow to change irrespective of the increasing number of representation of female secondary school principals.

Much has been said about the barriers to women in administrative roles, the stereotypes about female secondary principals, the personal and professional challenges. However, not much has changed as far as women status is concerned. According to Smith (2013:158), “women studies have hardly begun to find answers to burning questions of inequality of the sexes and degrading harm of sexism, racism, homophobia and other forms of discrimination”.

#### ***1.6.3.2 Women leadership styles and strategies***

According to Thakhathi (2001) women managers in the rural context experience cultural barriers to communication as women are expected not to talk much and should appear to know little in the presence of men. The author maintains that a woman manager emerges as a good communicator and who overcomes cultural barriers by even practicing what is not traditionally acceptable. She further asserts that the woman principal prefers personal encounters as channels of communication by using her mother tongue when speaking with staff and students. In addition, Lumby and Azaola (2011) indicate that a mothering leadership style was self-reported by over half the participants in their study.

However, Gaetane and Martinez (2007) claim that research is needed on how female principal's practices embrace social justice, democratic schooling and issues of equity. They believe that these leaders can make a change in education through the development of certain leadership styles. On the other hand, Blackmore (1999) claims that there is a clear statement of leadership dilemma for feminists. She emphasizes that those women may be in leadership positions, but their leadership practices, languages and more are still masculine. Furthermore, transformational leadership is regarded by some as particularly suited to times of change, and likely to be adopted by women principals. She says that women are apparently identified with male gender paradigms and displayed male type leadership behaviours, whilst men showed female paradigm leadership styles (Young 2004).

It does not really matter whether these managers use masculine or feminine gender types of leadership styles. Damon (2008) confirms that women principals are competent and possess the necessary skills to manage secondary schools effectively.

Again, Arar and Queder (2011: 415) reveal that "women's struggle in leadership begins with stubbornness and bitterness". The findings show that these women principals used authoritarian leadership styles in their first career years to counter the expectations of local society, whereas later on as they became more confident, resorted to more participatory and interpersonal styles. Lastly, Guramatunhu-Mudiswa and Bolt (2012) write that women in instructional and administrative roles had higher scores on leadership than males, but females had lower scores than males in other roles.

### ***1.6.3.3 Perceptions towards female secondary school principals***

Arar (2013) examines the attitudes of teachers towards the appointment of women principals. The findings indicate that women principals were perceived as creating a good atmosphere at school, yet all teachers agreed that women had inferior abilities to conduct relations with external bodies. He also declares that male teachers significantly expressed more patriarchal attitudes than female teachers. In addition, the teachers with a higher level of education expressed more resistance to female leadership than those without academic degrees. Arar (2013) emphasizes that women find it difficult undertaking school principalship in rural remote schools because parents and the community members still view this role through the stereotype of an authoritarian married male. It is revealed that even though the number of female secondary principals is increasing, the underlying attitudes towards women as senior managers are slow to change (Dawn, 2005 & Amondi, 2011).

Eagly and Karau (2002) assert that a role congruity of prejudice toward female leaders proposes that perceived incongruity between female gender roles and leadership roles lead to two forms of prejudice which are stipulated as follows:

- Perceiving women as less favourable, and men as potential occupants of leadership roles,
- Evaluating behaviour that fulfils the prescriptions of a leader role less favourably when enacted by a woman, and
- Attitudes are less positive towards female leaders than male and potential leaders.

As a result, Eagly and Karau (2002) emphasize that it becomes more difficult for some women to become leaders and achieve success in their leadership roles.

#### ***1.6.3.4 Experiences of women secondary school principals***

Female principals are faced with administrative challenges which include the grievances of parents, limited resources, time management and handling of staff. On the other hand, there are personal challenges such as wavering self- confidence, problems trying to balance work and social lives as well as home conflicts (Parsaloi, 2012; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008; Moorosi, 2007 & 2010). They also confirmed that the lack of women's voices in the literature on educational leadership and management, particularly those of minority women, and the following concerns were mentioned:

- In their principal positions they faced personal, organizational challenges related to race, gender, and accent.
- It was important to examine experiences of the visible minority female secondary principals from their own perspectives in order to gain a better understanding of their work life in education.

The above-mentioned concerns were the reason behind this research project; to collect the personal narratives of lived experiences of minority female secondary school principals in Limpopo Province, Sekhukhune District.

## **1.7 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **1.7.1 Qualitative Research Approach**

“The approach is based on a naturalistic- phenomenological philosophy that views reality as multi-layered, interactive and a shared experience explained by individuals” (Mcmillan & Schumacher, 2006: 315). Further than that, most expressions and descriptions are portrayed in

words rather than in numbers. The study investigated the experiences of female principals in secondary schools using their own words; which are inherently determined by meaning in people's lives. Experiences cannot be quantified. In addition, the approach was also concerned with understanding the social phenomenon from the participants' perspective. The researcher aimed at getting in-depth understanding and experiences of these principals using interactive strategies such as interviews, observations and document analysis.

According to Olesen (2011: 127) "the arena for policy analysis has been largely quantitative and male dominated and as a result has not been receptive to feminist qualitative research". He sees this as a gap that needs to be addressed by feminist researchers as feminist research has failed to do so in the past. "Qualitative research can make an important contribution to our understanding of the framing and making of policy" (*ibid*). Qualitative research is a field of research that consists of data collection over a period of time. She further explains that qualitative researchers become immersed in the situation and the phenomenon under study. Lastly, the research approach uses multi-method strategies which are flexible with various combinations of participant observation, in depth interviews whereby open-ended questions are used and document analysis such as school minutes books, school policies and time books are analysed. So, the method of triangulation is fully utilised.

### **1.7.2 Research Design**

Cohen and Manion (2007: 102) define research design as "a plan for selecting subject, research sites and data collection procedures to answer the research question". The design shows which individuals will be studied and when, where, and under which circumstances. Qualitative research uses a case study design; meaning that the data analysis focuses on the one phenomenon which the researcher selected to understand in depth regardless of the number of sites, participants or documents for the study. In addition, Cohen and Manion (2007:252) describe a case study as a "specific instance that is frequently designed to illustrate a more general principle, "it is the study of instance in action."

Case study is more suitable for this study because it examines a bounded system; one group of female secondary school principals and the study is interested in understanding one phenomenon which is "the experiences" of this group in selected schools. The case study could be a person, a classroom, an institution, a programme or a policy system. Simmons (2009: 23) emphasises that "qualitative case study methods enables the experiences and complexity of

programmes and policies to be studied in depth and interpreted in the precise socio-political contexts in which the programme and policies exist". She further maintains that a case study is flexible; that it is neither time-dependent nor constrained by method. It can be conducted in a few days, months or over several years and be written up in different forms and lengths appropriate to the time scale. It has the potential to engage participants in the research process.

### **1.7.3 Sampling procedure**

Sampling refers to the population on which the research will focus. There are different types of sampling, but for this study purposive sampling was considered. This sampling method is defined as selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study (Cohen & Manion, 2007). The main goal of this sampling is to focus on particular characteristics of population that are of interest, which will best enable the researcher to answer the research questions. One of the major benefits of purposive sampling is the wide range of sampling techniques that can be used across qualitative research designs. Criterion based and typical case sampling techniques also fit this study. The researcher searched information from people with relevant knowledge. In other words, these samples were chosen because they were knowledgeable and informative about the specific phenomena the researcher was investigating. These female school principals are experts in their own field, and they shared their knowledge and experiences.

Typical sampling is a purposive sampling technique where one is interested in the normality of the units. For example people, cases, events, settings or context, and places or sites that the researcher is interested in. However, with this technique, the researcher cannot use the sample to make generalisations to a population. It is a type of sampling in which subjects are selected who are likely to behave as most counterparts would. This enabled the researcher to know the typical characteristics of a group of female secondary principals. Both poor and good performing schools with female principals were purposefully chosen.

Criterion based sampling suited this study because it involves selecting cases that meet a predetermined criterion of importance. It is like picking up all cases that meet some criterion, for instance in this study female secondary principals with certain qualifications and with at least five years' experience in their positions. This method can be useful in identifying and understanding cases that are information rich. Secondly, it can provide an important qualitative component to qualitative data (Crabtree, 2006).

The following criteria were considered:

- Selection and setting of schools: four public schools in Sekhukhune District were chosen according to their overall academic performance, the initial plan was to select two good or excellent performing schools, and two average or poor performing schools.
- Selection of participants: these were female secondary principals with relevant qualifications and having being in their positions for at least more than five years.
- Entrance into the field: permission to conduct research was requested from relevant stakeholders such as the Department of Education (DoE), Sekhukhune District senior managers and circuit managers.

## **1.8 DATA COLLECTION**

Data are any kind of information that researchers can identify and accumulate to facilitate answers to their research questions. Data collection plans set out in detail a strategy for collecting data, which includes the general methodological orientation, the research parameters and research instruments. Since the research approach was qualitative, this also meant that research instruments used qualitative strategies to collect data in the form of words rather than numbers. Three qualitative methods often used in case study research to facilitate in-depth analysis and understanding are interview, observation and document analysis (Mcmillan & Schumacher, 2010: 347).

### **1.8.1 Triangulation**

Methods of data collection were triangulated. Cohen and Manion (2007:141) define triangulation as “the use of two or more methods of data collection in a study on some of the aspects of human behaviour”. Sometimes it is referred to as a multi method approach which is a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity more especially in qualitative research. This study used interviews, observation and document analysis as stated earlier. Bouma, Ling and Wilkinson (2009:130) state that triangulation is “a way of guarding against the researcher’s bias and checking out accounts from different informants by conducting interviews and analysing written documents”.

### **1.8.2 In-depth Interviews**

This is sometimes referred to as semi structured interviews. It is a one on one interview and merely extends and formalizes conversation. It is described as a conversation with a purpose. According to Simmons (2009:43) interviews have “a strong preference because they enable the

researcher to get to the core issues more quickly and in greater depth, to probe motivations, to ask follow-up questions and to facilitate individuals telling their stories”. In-depth interviewing has four major purposes as stipulated by Simmons (*ibid*):

- To document the interviewee’s perspective on the topic.
- To promote engagement and learning for the interviewer and interviewees in identifying and analysing the issue.
- Has the potential to uncover and represent unobserved feelings and events that cannot be observed.

The role of the researcher during interviews was firstly to establish a rapport so to make the participants more comfortable and also to make them more open. Secondly, the researcher listened attentively to hear exactly what was being said. Active listening leads the researcher to making follow up questions. This was followed by more focused questions which were relevant to the study. Lastly, Simmons (2009:53) indicates that “a proactive interview will definitely assist the researcher to analyse more deeply”. The interviews focused on specific issues regarding female principalship. In addition, the researcher prepared a list of open-ended questions because they gave the researcher an opportunity to ask follow up questions.

### **1.8.3 Observation**

Formal observation is declared as a companion to interviews in case study research. According to Simmons (2009:54), observation serves the following purposes:

- To gain a comprehensive picture of the site; a sense of setting.
- To provide rich description and a basis for further analysis and interpretation.
- To discover the norms and values which are part of an institution’s culture.
- Observations offer another way of capturing the experience of those who are less articulate.
- To provide a cross check on data obtained in interviews.

### **1.8.4 Unstructured observation**

Unstructured observation helped the researcher to understand the behavioural pattern of the female principals in their physical settings. This involved visiting the office of the principal, reading school notices on the board, and more.

### **1.8.5 Document analysis**

It dealt more with the explanation of the status of some phenomenon at a particular time or its development over a period of time. Documents such as record books, minute's books for teaching staff, school management team and school governing body, time register books, correspondence documents from circuit and provincial department, school policy documents and government documents or gazettes, work allocation and learner statistics were analysed. Field notes were taken throughout the study including the researcher's personal thoughts and reflections. Field notes served as evidence of an ongoing process (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:442).

## **1.9 DATA ANALYSIS**

Qualitative data analysis involves organising, accounting for and explaining the data; in short, making sense of data in terms of the participants' definition of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities (Cohen & Manion, 2007: 461).

This was an ongoing process which included certain distinct phases such as discovery, coding data and discounting data. During the discovery phase, the researcher identified concepts and themes by reading and rereading the data. She collected all field notes, transcripts, documents and other materials and carefully read them through. Researchers are advised that it is a good idea to have somebody else read through collected data.

- Keeping track of themes, hunches, interpretations and ideas: always making sure that as you read through your data you make connotations and record any new ideas (Cohen *et al.* 2007:463) [source](#))
- Looking for emerging themes: the researcher searched through the data for more emerging themes, conversation patterns, vocabulary, feelings and recurring topics.
- Construct typologies: this was based on the researcher's own classification scheme. It applied to an institutional study whereby the researcher listed all participants and observed them based on a number of factors such as length of

time they work, the type of relationships they have with each other and with their subordinates.

- Reading the literature: other studies were very important because they provided fruitful concepts and propositions that assisted the researcher in data interpretation.
- Develop a storyline: this was an analytical thread that unites and integrates the major themes in the data. This phase was followed by a second phase called coding.

Coding refines the researcher's understanding of the subject matter. The researcher did this by developing coding categories whereby she started by listing all the themes, interpretations, typologies and propositions developed during the initial stage of analysis. The number of coding categories depended on the amount of data the researcher had collected and the complexity of the analytical scheme. Secondly, coding all data means that all field notes, transcripts, documents and other material were coded including both positive and negative incidents related to a category. This was followed by sorting data into the coding categories. This is a non -interactive, mechanical operation, and is done manually. Each category went into a separate file folder. Finally, the researcher refined her analysis. It should be noted that there were always contradictions and negative cases in the data. It was the duty of the researcher to analyse negative cases to deepen her understanding of the people she was studying. Negative cases are said to be fruitful cases for insight.

The third phase was discounting data, which is all about understanding the data in the context in which they were collected. Researchers are advised to take note of the following aspects: Researcher's influence on the setting: participant observers should try to minimize their effects on the people they are studying until they have grasped a basic understanding of the settings. They must try to become sensitive to and perceptive to how one is perceived and treated by others .Who was there during observations means that the researcher must be alert to the difference between what people say and do when they are alone as opposed to when others are around. Coding direct and indirect data based on the theme and interpretation statement. The researcher should be careful to distinguish between his or her participants, what the perspectives held by one person are and those of the broader group. "The researcher's own assumptions and presuppositions are drawn from their own theoretical assumptions and cultural knowledge to make sense of their data" (Cohen *et al.* 2007:463).

## **1.10. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY**

### **1.10.1. Validity**

According to Simmons (2009:126) validity is concerned with “how the researcher establishes the warrant for his or her work, whether it is sound, defensible, coherent, well grounded, appropriate to the case and worthy of recognition”. She further emphasizes that researchers need to be able to justify the truth of their accounts as more likely or more credible.

Since this study used qualitative case study research, there were two strategies advocated in this approach; triangulation and respondents’ validation which were used to validate accounts and experiences. Bouma *et al.* (2009:64) mentions the types of validity which are internal and external; “external validity is how closely the researcher’s variables produce scores or observations that are consistent with what we observe in real life, and internal validity refers to the absence of errors in the research”.

### **1.10.2. Triangulation**

Triangulation was also conducted in a way that the researcher did the cross checking of relevance and significance of issues. According to Bouma *et al* (2009:129) “arguments and perspectives from different angles were tested to generate and strengthen evidence in support of key claims, and this helped in the elimination of bias from anyone”

### **1.10.3 Respondent validation**

This refers to the accuracy, adequacy and fairness of observations, representations and interpretations of experiences with those whom were interviewed. This is a good evaluation because it allowed individuals to see if they have been represented accurately and fairly, and allowed audiences to decide whether their interpretation was credible (Bouma *et al.*2009:65).

### **1.10.4 Reliability**

According to Cohen and Manion (2007: 149) reliability in qualitative research study refers to “the researcher’s ability to be transparent, consistent and dependable on the research activities so that bias is minimized”. This is defined as a measure of consistency over time and over similar samples. It means the ability to provide replicable data when similar data collection methods are utilized by different researchers at different research settings. In addition, it is emphasized that reliability can be regarded as a fit between what the researcher records as data

and what actually occurs in the natural setting that is being researched. They (2007:150) maintain that reliability is “construed as dependability which involves the following factors; member checks, debriefing by peers, and prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, reflexive journals, negative case analysis and independent audits”

Cohen and Manion (2007:144) mention some of the steps researchers must actually take to minimize threats to validity which are as follows:

1. Choosing an appropriate time scale.
2. Ensuring that there are adequate resources for the required research to be undertaken.
3. Selecting an appropriate methodology for answering research questions.
4. Choosing relevant instrumentation for gathering data.
5. Using the appropriate sample.

## **1.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION**

Research in social sciences always involves dealing with people, organisations and groups. Dealing with people raises ethical issues, so researchers must be considerate and part of being considerate is being careful about the manner in which researchers seek permission from those they wish to study. Mcmillan and Schumacher (2010: 15) maintain that “the researcher is ethically responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of the participants in the study”. This is all about how the researcher behaves before and during fieldwork which includes informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, deception, privacy, access and acceptance.

### **1.11.1 Informed consent**

Informed consent concerns the decision to participate in the study based on knowledge of what the study involves, what is demanded in terms of time, activities and topics to cover, what risks are involved, and where to lodge a complaint should that become necessary. This was provided by means of a consent form which was written in the language that was well understood by all participants. It was advisable for the researcher to explain details to everyone; so that where there were questions answers could be provided immediately. It was also very important that upon deciding to participate in the study, the participants did so in writing. Furthermore, Bouma *et al.* (2009:170) highlight that “participants must be informed that taking part in the study is purely on a voluntary basis, and that it is important not to coerce compliance by offering overly enticing rewards for participants such as large sums of money or holidays”. However, it should be noted that in some cases, participants may be reimbursed for transport

costs. Lastly, it was the duty of the researcher to always remind all participants that they were free to withdraw at any time without penalty and that they did not need to offer any reason for doing so.

### **1.11.2 Getting access and acceptance**

This was the first stage of gaining official permission to undertake the research into the targeted community. Firstly, this started with the Unisa Ethics Research Committee who granted the researcher permission to collect data; to start with fieldwork. The District Senior manager approved my application to conduct research project in Sekhukhune district. When writing to different stakeholders, certain aspects were considered which included the title of the project, names of the supervisor and student, contact details, date, purpose and background of the study, procedures to be followed, risks involved, protection of identity, and a space for participants and researcher 's signature. Bouma *et al.* (2009:172) strongly emphasize that “consent forms are always stored in locked filing cabinets, in secure offices, and are stored separately from collected data to protect the identities of the informants”.

### **1.11.3 Confidentiality**

This is a principle of research; to gain trust and encourage participants to speak openly and honestly. It assures them that any information they reveal, which is sensitive, personal or problematic that they wish to keep confidential will be respected and that it will not be divulged. This also means that although the researcher knows who has provided the information, or is able to identify participants from the information given, they will in any way make the connection known publicly. “The idea is to give the participants assurance that the boundaries surrounding the shared secret will be protected” (Bouma *et al.* 2009:172).

### **1.11.4 Anonymity**

Anonymity is described by Bouma *et al.* (2009:170) as a “principle in research reporting to anonymize individuals and offer them some protection of privacy”. Ways of achieving anonymity and confidentiality are as follows:

1. Using imaginary locations and disguise features of settings in such a way as to make it appear similar to several possible sites.
2. Routinely code names of people and places.
3. Doing participant review of each individual's case study.
4. Reviewing of the research report before its final release.
5. The use of aliases.

#### 6. The use of password-protected files.

Since the number of rural schools with female principals is considerable low, the schools under study could be easily identified. Pseudonyms for participants and their schools were used. The features of the school setting were disguised ... “in such a way as to make them appear similar to several possible sites” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:421).

#### **1.11.5 Deception and privacy**

Deception is viewed as violation of informed consent. This may lie in not telling people that they are being researched, not telling the truth, and using people in a degrading and dehumanizing way. Bouma *et al.* (2009:167) suggests some ideas on how researchers can try to avoid deception and violation of privacy, emphasising that “researchers must always have respect for human dignity, for vulnerable people, and for justice and inclusiveness”. Lastly researchers are advised to balance the harms and benefits by minimising harms and maximising benefits. The researcher drafted an interview schedule and presented it to her colleagues for review before it was finalised.

### **1.12 DATA COLLECTION PHASES**

#### **Phase One: Planning**

The researcher started by analysing the problem statement and the research questions. This study considered triangulation, which used two or more strategies of data collection. These were interviews, individual interviews, observations and documents analysis.

#### **Phase Two: Beginning data collection or pilot interviews**

It was of vital importance for the researcher at this stage to establish rapport, trust and reciprocal relations with the individuals and groups. During this phase, data were collected primarily to become oriented to the field and to gain a sense of the totality of the setting for purposeful sampling.

#### **Phase Three: Basic data collection**

The researcher carried out the actual data collection and was no longer caught up in the adjustment to the newness of the field. It was during this phase that the researcher began to hear, see and read what was going on.

#### **Phase Four: Closing data collection**

As the researcher left the field, data collection was drawn to a close. Ending data collection was directly related to the research problem and the depth and richness of the data collected while the researcher realised that further data collection would not yield any more relevance to the research problem.

#### **Phase Five: Completion**

This was the final stage of data collection; and this simply means that the researcher was now ready to commence with data analysis.

### **1.13. CHAPTER DIVISIONS**

#### **Chapter one**

This was a general introduction to the research study. It provided an orientation to the whole research which included the title, background to the research problem, problem statement, aims and objectives and the significance of the study.

#### **Chapter two**

A literature review was presented in this chapter, which shared the results of other studies that are closely related to the study under research. This chapter also provided a framework for establishing the importance of the study.

#### **Chapter three**

The researcher's chosen design and methodology were fully discussed in this chapter. This involved how data was collected. Relevant aspects such as sampling procedure, data collection strategies and research ethics were displayed in this chapter.

#### **Chapter four**

Data were analysed and interpreted, issues concerning validity and reliability and all the findings were revealed in this chapter

## **Chapter five**

Both summary and conclusion of the study as well as future recommendations on the study were provided in this chapter.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

The first chapter in this study provided the background and motivation for this study on women in leadership and management positions. This chapter focuses on a review of literature related to women and leadership positions. It seeks to focus on the actual experiences and perceptions of a selected group of women principals. It investigates how women principals' lived experience may clarify the reasons for their underrepresentation in positions of educational leadership. Key barriers are highlighted as well as constraints faced by these educational leadership women. These include: organisational, cultural as well as personal factors. The study was based on both international and South Africa literature. The thematic review of the literature of the core themes were presented in the literature discussed. Themes included women and leadership style, and the challenges they face in their positions. An overview of these key barriers aims to facilitate an understating of the complexities involved in terms of gender and leadership. Theories of feminism were used to highlight how women have been marginalised in locally and internationally.

The second part of the chapter examines factors that hinder women from reaching top management positions. These are followed by factors that have led to the principals' appointment into these positions. Research has shown that women are underrepresented in secondary school management positions, as few as they are. The next section will discuss the styles and strategies they use to manage and lead. Leaders have power and authority to exercise their leadership rights and this cannot go without challenges. Female principals face both personal and administrative challenges in their career path, which affect them and the way they manage their schools. The last section of this chapter will elaborate on how other stakeholders perceive these female principals.

#### **2.2 WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS**

Much of the question about women's leadership has often arisen in a number of studies. Undoubtedly, there are still a large number of committed women educators who are not interested in climbing the promotion ladder. Gradually, this group is to be replaced by a new

generation of women educators who believe that all women who wish to seek advancement should be offered the opportunity to do so. This is an aspect where feminism comes in.

“The underrepresentation of women in educational administration has long been receiving significant attention in terms of race, gender and equity through the world since the beginning of the twentieth century” (Aslanargun, 2012:1). This has been debated in developed and developing countries such Turkey, Mid-western state, China, Greece, England, Canada Spain, Australia, and United States of America as well as in the many parts of the African continent.

The numbers of women in leadership is low when considering both gender and ethnicity. The lack of women’s voice in the literature on educational leadership, particularly those who are marginalised, grounded this qualitative research project that collected personal narratives of lived experiences. An interesting question to ponder on is exactly how many women are in educational leadership roles across South Africa? Gender plays a significant role in employment patterns of senior educational management positions in this country. Female education managers are still in the minority, despite many changes over the last few years.

This was also confirmed by Motshekga (2013), Basic education Minister in South Africa, in her speech during the launch of a support network for female principals in Pretoria. She emphasised that even though women constitute the majority in society and the education sector, men continue to occupy most principal posts. According to her, there are 8 210 female principals and 41 337 male principals. This shows a discrepancy within the sector. She further highlights that the situation is worse in public high schools whereby most principals, deputies and heads of departments are male. She calls for government intervention to redress gender equity. The next session will present theories for analysing gender which explore issues of gender women experience in schools.

### **2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

A lot of research has been conducted on women and educational leadership both locally and internationally (Akao 2008; Peters 2012; Ballard 2010; Blackmore 2010; Coleman 2002; Correll *et al.* 2007; Gaetane 2008; Sinclair 2013; Shakeshaft & Grogan 2011; Vassiliki 2012; Wrushen & Sherman 2008; Priola & Brannan 2009; Bartling 2013; Wallace & Smith 2011; Kanjere *et al.* 2011; Botha 2013; Ncgobo 2010; Moorosi 2007 & 2010; Van Wyk 2012; Mestry & Schimdt 2012; Parsaloi 2012; Arar & Queder 2011; Chabaya *et al.* 2009; Barmao 2013). Most of these researches were influenced by feminism. Just like other studies, this piece of work is entrenched in feminism, because feminism conveys awareness of the consciousness

females undergo because of their sex, and the effort to propose systems to develop women's lives. The first section will discuss feminist theories which draw attention to the oppression of women in most societies. According to Olesen (2011) feminist theories have fundamentally played various roles in the following manner. Firstly, in social investigation whereby exposing gender differences that exist in relation to social organisation; are confirmed. These theories have confirmed major traditional concepts and practices of few people in the society. The theories also communicate cognisance of social aspects of life that is not revealed by other theories. Lastly, they presented how previous accounts of social reality have commonly developed and reinforced the experiences of males.

The literature intends to give a variety of theoretical frameworks that have been used universally and locally in the analysis of women studies in educational management. Palestin and Terosky (2012) assert that feminism theory emerged from a movement intended to establish equal work opportunities for women; thus investigating their gender roles as well as their lived experiences. Feminist theories are classified into three waves which help in explaining the development of its history. The first wave came into existence between the early 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe and the United States of America (USA). The first wave focuses on equal opportunities and access to leadership positions for women. The second wave of feminism emerged between 1960 and 1970 as a result of other oppressed groups such as blacks, and homosexuals. The third wave of feminism challenges the notion of universal womanhood, which came to be seen as oppressive in the sense that women from different backgrounds did not share the same experiences. This wave aims to overcome the theoretical question of equity and political question of revolution (Peet & Hartwick 2009).

Furthermore, Cox (2010) maintains that there is a need to reconsider what feminism is because according to her, there are still unrefined inequalities. She underlines that women are not socialised to be real leaders, but expected to behave in a lesser manner than men in equivalent jobs. They still have to be good women and often rewarded for being nice and aware of others' needs. This means that women are less able to make themselves heard in groups, and their ideas may be overlooked until expressed by someone else, and usually a male. So, real leadership is still viewed through the male perspective. It becomes difficult for women to fit in because if they are too firm, they are condemned. According to Cox (2010) feminism creates societies that identify and discern and rate roles, tasks, knowledge and skills without gender-based assumptions. She emphasizes that:

“if the choices we make are not to be limited, encouraged or penalized just because we are male or female, it means that all spheres of life should be assessed and valued on the basis of what they contribute both to the common good and to a particular group and individual well-being, not on gender ground. (p.10)

In her article entitled *From undoing gender: gender as we know it*, Risman (2009) explains the concept of undoing gender as first introduced by Butler (2004), and recently offered a slightly different twist to Gender and Society readers by Deutch (2007). Risman (2009) explains the concept of structuration in relation to gender, which is embedded in the society. She indicates that every society has a gender structure, and that society creates behaviour and also limits it. In other words, men and women have ascribed roles and behaviour expectations to fulfil. Secondly, she further highlights that gender structure has effects on both individual as well as institutional levels, in a sense of performing gender roles designed by society which are transferred to institutions that act as monitors of social groups.

According to Risman (2009) the universal practice of “doing gender” creates a theoretical misconception due to the fact that the world is busy changing, and not static. She upholds that the fact that sometimes people are not aware that they are doing gender could be deceitful. Young people are unrestricted as compared to the past, as far as traditional roles of femininity and masculinity are concerned, thus impacting on the gender structure created within the society. She further emphasises that there is no point in defining new kinds of femininities or masculinities that develop, because we will be doing or undoing gender at that moment. She instead proposes that if feminists believe gender structure as the origin of inequalities, then they should aim at a move to a post gender society. She argues:

We must know what we are looking for when we are looking for gendered behaviour and then be willing to and ready to admit when we do not find it; and “why label the new behaviour adopted by groups of girls and boys as alternative masculinities and femininities, simply because the group itself is composed of males and females. If young women strategically adopt masculine or feminine behaviours to fit the moment, is it really doing gender or destabilising the taken – for – granted personae that were in the past assumed essentialism to match sex category. (p.80)

Additionally, Smith (2013:99) asserts that “feminist theorists acknowledge the importance of giving a voice to inequities, but they suggest that more criticism of men, society or values

produces little movement to a better place.” She further argues that feminism did not raise the status of women despite decades of activism and more recently women’s studies research maintains that women continue to be generally seen as less worthy and valuable than men.

### **2.3.1 Liberal feminism**

This type of feminism believes that equality for women can be achieved through legal systems and social development. According to Brookes (2008) liberal feminism can be explained as an individualistic form which concentrates on women having their equality through being responsible for their actions and choices. The theory concedes the reality of differences in society that are gender-related, but the responsibility lies in the individuals affected to develop their situations. Brookes (2008) further maintains that transformations must be steady so not to interfere with the status quo, and that education is therefore seen as a means that can be used to improve the situation.

Further, Lorber (2001) argues that gender differences are not based on biology and therefore women and men must be treated equally. They should all enjoy the same rights and they must all have access to work opportunities. Liberal feminism suits this study because female principals in the study are exceptional in their efforts to go against the traditional societal ideas by being female principals in a “male dominated” field. This approach contends that if women are given the right access and opportunities as men they will, to the same extent as men, be free to determine their own course of life. This feminist approach argues that women have as much potential as men and should therefore be given equal rights to exercise their capabilities in order to remedy the inequality and injustices done to them.

Taghreemanmoud (2011:20) cited Betty Friedman, the author of *The Feminine Mystique* who observed that “women are compelled to find meaning in their lives mainly through their husbands and children, thus losing their identity in that of their family”. Additionally, Wollstonecraft also cited by Taghreemanmoud (*ibid*) urged women to become autonomous decision makers and presented the vision of a woman strong in mind and body, who is not a slave to her passion, her husband and children. Thus, the goal that liberal feminists strive for is to free women’s oppressive gender roles; those roles used as explanations for giving women a less important place, or not a place at all especially in the academy, the forum and marketplace.

Liberal feminism has failed to eliminate the belief that men and women are different, but has succeeded in proving the point that even though they are different, women are not inferior.

Stereotypes found in society and socialisation processes have to be changed through education and training. Samkange (2015) emphasises that there may be a need for radical change to support a decree as promoted by liberal feminism.

Based on the above-mentioned declarations, liberal feminism suits this study because the investigated female principals are exceptional in their efforts to go against the traditional societal ideas by being female principals in a “male dominated” field. This approach contends that if women are given the right access and opportunities as men they will be free to determine their own course of life. This feminist approach argues that women have as much potential as men and should therefore be given equal rights to exercise their capabilities in order to remedy the injustices done to them.

### **2.3.2 Black feminism**

This approach acknowledges that black women in general have different experiences from that of white women. Black women experience a different and more intense kind of oppression. Collins (2002) maintains that in South Africa women are exclusively oppressed in three-fold; oppressed as blacks, as workers and as women. She argues that this is based on the history of the country as well as their cultural background. She further explains that patriarchy plays a vital role in the sense that women are associated with private spheres and men’s defined roles are outside the family sexism, thus patriarchy acts as a barrier between the two. Forms of feminism that strive to overcome sexism and class oppression, but ignore race can discriminate against many people including women through racial bias. “Black feminists hold the belief that black women’s life experiences should not go unobserved, but need a broad analysis to redefine what it means for black women to write, express, deliberate and evaluate their life experiences against the framework of the prevalent conversations that silences them” (Collins 2002; Phendla, 2008: 24).

### **2.3.3 Radical feminism**

This theory believes that women oppression is caused by the system of patriarchy; when women are oppressed by the way in which society is organised. Radical feminists argue that women are actually oppressed by patriarchal systems than legal systems and class conflict. Therefore, this theory aims to challenge the structures by discarding standard roles and male oppression. They argue that the supremacy of patriarchy has to be challenged because it creates perceptions and practices which in turn contribute to society accepting discrimination between males and female as normal ( Rowland & Klein, 2013). They sustain that radical feminism

“creates a new apolitical and social theory of women’s oppression, and strategies to end that oppression, which comes from women’s lived experiences” (*Ibid*: 274). They cited Charlotte Bunch (1983) who calls for all forms of patriarchal oppression and supremacy to come to an end, so that women can enjoy their freedom.

Furthermore, radical feminism argues that patriarchy is difficult to eliminate, because it is deeply rooted in the concept that women are different; and therefore declared inferior, emphasising that this is worsened by the fact that the belief is entrenched in male consciousness (Samkange 2015). Additionally, Lorber (2001: 17) contends:

Radical feminism turns male-dominated culture on its head. It takes all characteristics that are valued in male –dominated society such as objectivity, distance, control, coolness, aggressiveness and competitiveness and blames them for wars, poverty, rape, battering, child abuse and incest.

She further asserts that what radical feminism rather did was to applaud women for the feminine traits such as nurturing, caring, cooperating, reciprocating, intimacy, warmth and much more. This theory argues that men could develop these traits too if they too “mothered” but since few do, these are more prevalent in women than in men.

#### **2.3.4 Cultural feminism**

This theory argues that there are personality and psychological differences that exist between men and women which are regarded both as exceptional and superior; emphasising that a woman’s nature is crucial to society. Moreover, cultural feminism induces that the idea of “women’s culture” originated from existing biological differences between men and women in the sense that “women are naturally kinder and gentler than men”. This encouraged cultural feminists to call for an infusion of women into the male-dominated world which would seemingly cause less violence and fewer wars. This theory aims at developing the following: how men and women relate to each other, cultures in general; by celebrating women’s special ways and experiences. Lastly, the theory maintains that “women’s ways are better than men’s ways and recommends that culture needs a balance between masculine and feminine” (Peet & Hartwick, 2009: 240).

#### **2.3.5 Conclusion**

Based on these assertions, the researcher was convinced that liberal feminism is best suited for this study. Additionally, liberal feminism aims to free women from oppressive gender roles; from those roles used as justifications for giving women a lesser place, or not place at all especially in the academy, the forum and the market place. Secondly, liberal feminism stresses that patriarchal society controls sex and gender, considering jobs that are associated with a feminine personality as appropriate for women. Thirdly, unlike with other feminist approaches, liberal feminism offered another approach that used the ideal of androgyny to counteract society's traditional tendency to value masculine traits. Lastly, liberal feminism now aims to achieve a modest goal and that is creating equal employment opportunities for women who will require not only the effort of the individual woman, but the effort of society as a whole. The researcher discovered that the feminist framework was relevant for this study because it brings about an awareness of the injustices women suffer because of their gender and attempt to suggest ways to improve women's lives. Fenwick (2006) argues that feminism implies social action. Research has shown that one cannot understand women's situation without addressing the issue of their subordination to men.

## **2.4 FACTORS THAT HINDER WOMEN FROM ADVANCING INTO SCHOOL LEADERSHIP POSITIONS**

This section is categorised into three groups; firstly, there are individual factors such as family attachments, low self-esteem and self-confidence, internal motivation, qualification requirements, reluctance to apply for leadership positions, women turning down promotional offers, efficacy as well as the lack of managerial experience. The second group is normally termed organisational factors because they arise from the education system in which women work; these include the selection process, lack of transparency, age, lack of mentors, school and school policies. Lastly, social and cultural factors which hinder women from advancing into leadership posts are constituted by gender stereotypes, discrimination and negative attitudes.

### **2.4.1. Personal factors that hinder women from advancing into leadership posts**

Previous studies have cited personal factors as a hindrance for women's advancement into leadership posts. Under this section, factors such as family attachments, lack of self-confidence, pregnancy and childbirth issues as well other related factors will be examined.

#### ***2.4.1.1 Family attachments***

Previous studies in South Africa, Greece, Zimbabwe and Ethiopia revealed that family attachment contributes towards underrepresentation of women in school leadership. Their studies indicated that women teachers in most cases would prefer to choose their families over their career advancement (Chabaya et al., 2009; Bush & Kaparau, 2009; & Gobena, 2014, Lumby *et al.*, 2011). This is attributed to the way women were socially brought up in both developed and developing countries, due to their dual roles in the family, as a wife and mother. In addition, women are still expected to conform and perform other cultural duties in society. Moreover, the findings by Chabaya et al. (2009), Lindo (2012), Lumby and Azaola (2011) emphasize that married participants have admitted their marital status as a disadvantage to their career as compared to single women principals. Husbands are unsupportive in sharing domestic responsibilities with their wives, due to gender roles. On the contrary, Bush and Kaparau' (2007) study conducted in Greece maintains that family responsibilities may even be worse for single women principals because they do not have support from spouses and extended families. They argue that Greek women teachers, married or not must try by all means to balance both responsibilities. In addition, they (p.131) claim that these are potential barriers but should not be allowed; instead such perceived barriers should increase their desire to challenge norms so as to be successful leaders. From these assertions, it is clear that leadership is a personal choice. If women are ready to take up leadership positions, they must rise above all these barriers. Maposa and Mugabe (2013: 3) maintain that "prescription of roles is sociological and so it can be combated". This notion is also mentioned by Msila (2013:467) who cited Ghosh and Haynes (2008) when they spoke of "creations of culture" whereby they argue that couples need to reach a compromise as far as marriage and career are concerned.

#### ***2.4.1.2 Low self- esteem and self-confidence***

Women's underrepresentation in senior leadership positions is also attributed to the way they perceive themselves as well as the way they are being perceived by others (Chabaya et al. 2009; Gobena, 2014; Lumby et al. 2010). Women were trained to be inferior as far as leadership is concerned, whereas men were brought to be self-assured and proficient whereas women were socialised to settle for less in life, hence men dominate most leadership positions. Women's tendency to doubt their confidence in leadership capabilities to some extent may be due to some cultural stereotypes and prejudices (Chabaya *et al.* 2009). They further maintain that "many women have to a certain degree internalised the attitudes and role expectations about women, that they have learnt to fit into the stereotypes, which is the major handicap in the development of their individual personalities, their abilities and career potential" (*Ibid:* 240). Lumby *et al.*

(2010) maintain that many South African women teachers have worked very hard to build qualifications and experience so they really know their job. On the other hand, a few were reported to doubt their abilities, felt inferior and feared that men would be insubordinate due to their gender. They argued that these few may have had good reasons for such fears. However, Uwizeyimana and Mathevula (2014:1205) citing Pirouzima & Sims (2006) that “in order for women to advance to senior management positions, women must first change their negative attitude as well as restrictions they have internalised”. This converges with what Omboko and Oyoo (2011:346) sustain that “male dominance in educational leadership continues to control women; it determines how society views women, which in return influences how they perceive themselves”.

#### ***2.4.1.3 Internal motivation***

Elmuti and Davies (2009:171) maintain that most women are not committed to their professional duties; they always lag behind when compared to men. Annis (2008) and Emroy (2008) emphasise that women tend to lose interest to go the extra mile in their career because of dual roles and other societal discrimination they meet along their career paths. Furthermore, McKenna (2007:604) asserts that “women are socialised to play down their ambitions, to be and listen quietly, which is observed in how boys and girls express their opinions whereby boys show an authoritative tone regardless of the importance of the points they are making.” However, Gobena (2014) maintains that women’s lack of interest and motivation towards seeking leadership positions may be attributed to the fear of success; in a sense that when they admire leaders who succeed but get scared by those who fail in their leadership roles, especially women managers who are supposed to act as role models and mentors for aspirant women.

She argues that the situation is aggravated by the on -going negative attitude towards female principals which is displayed by other stakeholders in disliking and disapproving of them. Another area of challenge for women is competition as compared to their counterparts. When challenged openly, women are reported to switch from their femininity to masculinity, which according to Gobena (*ibid*) can be seen as a hindrance to their advancement to leadership.

#### ***2.4.1.4 Pregnancy and childbirth issues***

These two phases of motherhood were perceived as barriers to women's advancement to leadership positions, in a sense that women have to stay at home while their male counterparts are proceeding to senior positions in the organisation (Maposa & Mugabe, 2013; Bush & Kaparau, 2009). Pregnancy was also perceived as a barrier for advancement to higher educational leadership positions, for example from deputy principal to principal. As a result, pregnant women do not think of advancement during pregnancy due to fears of morning sickness, tiredness which add more stress to their work. In addition, some women principals had to face challenges such as physical limits because they were pregnant. These challenges include, among others, breaking up fights between learners, tenure and promotion. The prospect of not being able to perform expected duties of a physical nature is a challenge (Boldur, 2009:65). This may present issues in the mind of the pregnant woman, as she may feel that her colleagues do not think that she is "pulling her weight" on the job.

According to MacRae (1991) in Maposa and Mugabe (2013), in Sweden British women were only granted the right to remain in fulltime jobs after falling pregnant. The number of women in part-time jobs rose because women chose to spend more time at home, nursing their babies. In the Republic of South Africa (RSA), women lost their jobs when they fell pregnant. Lessing (1990) in Maposa and Mugabe (2013) says the legislation was revised in women's favour in 1991. However, other research such as Uwizeyimana and Mathevula (2014:1203) citing Kiamba (2008) assert that "the development of more reliable and effective birth control experienced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century has given women the choice of whether or not, and when, to have children, thereby making it possible for them to plan and pursue professional careers". As a result, unlike in the past, women in this century have a choice to plan their career advancement into senior leadership posts.

#### ***2.4.1.5 Qualifications requirements***

There seem to be lack of academic credentials, training and skills for promotions and positions of leadership. Time to study, research, and writing are said to be rare for women. Furthermore, Gobena (2013: 35) in her study of Ethiopian women, assert that being deficient in credentials and experience, have often been cited as influencing factors in their underrepresentation in educational leadership, even though time and again research illustrates what a misconception this is. She cited Grady (1992) in her article "*Women and educational Administration: Certified but not employed*" indicating that the number of women in educational programmes approaches or exceeds the number of male graduate students. Grady discovered that a major

impediment was women's unwillingness to apply for administrative positions. Women were also reported to have accepted their status quo as mere educators due to family commitments and lack of confidence. This concurs with Coronel et al (2010) studies in Spain and Hansen 's studies in Utah when explaining that some women principals decided to leave principalship for classroom teaching, meaning they were happy with being mere educators

Furthermore, Sperandio and Kagoda (2010:24) declare that the current minimum requirements for deputy head in a secondary school are a four year university degree and a diploma in education from a recognised tertiary institution. In addition, six years of teaching experience is required, of which two years must be in a position of responsibility at a secondary school. The annual school census data for 2004 indicates that 29% of teachers at secondary school level in Uganda have a first university degree, with less than 2% having postgraduate degrees. Of the remaining 7% of female teachers, 96% had secondary education only, as stipulated by the Ministry of Education Statistics (2004 a, b, c.). This is also despite affirmative action policies which encourage women into tertiary education. This could also imply that a lot of female teachers acquire more leadership and management qualifications while in leadership post since they did not plan to become principals at some stage in their careers. Mbepera (2015: 183) maintains that female principals in her study were "satisfied if their husbands are rich; as a result, women feel no need for further self- development".

#### ***2.4.1.6 Management experience***

Moorosi (2010: 8) signifies that "experience in management is explicitly spelt out as a selection criterion". South African women were not given opportunities to act as managers, and this was confirmed by members of the SGB and circuit managers. However, Moorosi (2010:5) explains anticipation as one phase that women go through before they can be appointed as school managers. She asserts that anticipation is a preparatory phase which includes credentials and qualifications for top positions and to a large extent having the necessary experience. Moorosi points out that women teachers in South Africa lack managerial training in general and principalship training in particular. Her South African study of female principals 'career paths reveals that none of the women principal participants had training in management before they considered applying for leadership positions.

#### ***2.4.1.7 Reluctance to apply for leadership positions***

Research conducted in New South Wales, Kenya, Utah, Spain, South Africa, and Tanzania reveal that due to factors such as low self-confidence, lack of required qualification and family responsibilities women failed to apply for leadership positions. (Hedgecoe (2005); Hansen (2014); Parsaloi, (2012); Coronel *et al.* (2010) and Wachera(2015). Parsaloi (2012: 52) quoted Eddy Lange (2006) in a study of Community College presidents which revealed that they did not have the presidential positions in mind when they started working in higher education. They got the position by either being encouraged by research committees to seek promotions, or simply by following the hierarchy which naturally left 'president' as the next step in their career. The lack of support was also cited as one of the factors that contribute to the persistent underrepresentation of women in school leadership. It was also revealed, by women in the focus group, that women had problems in applying for promotional posts because they needed to consult with their husbands before applying. If a husband does not approve, then the woman will not apply.

#### ***2.4.1.8 Females turn down promotional offers***

Research reveals that women sometimes are offered opportunities to advance to higher positions, but when appointed they turn down the offer based on the following reasons; husbands were reported to be jealous when their spouses advance into senior management positions and this may be attributed to the nature of women's dual role of being a wife and a mother. Secondly, Zimbabwean women participants confirmed not to be ready to compete for leadership positions because they believed it was unfeminine (Maposa & Mugabe, 2013). All this contributed to more men occupying senior positions than women; hence the underrepresentation of women in senior management positions. Personnel management policies were also reported to discourage women from participating in school management positions, because teachers should be ready to work in any state of the country. Therefore women are reluctant to apply for promotional positions because transfers tend to separate couples and families. Again, research shows that women chose families over their career paths. Apart from personal barriers, research continues to reveal that systems and structures within organisations hindered women teachers from advancing to senior leadership positions. The next section will discuss the organisational factors.

## **2.4.2. Organisational factors that hinder women from advancing to leadership positions**

### **2.4.2.1 Glass ceiling**

The glass ceiling concept “ is an American concept popularised in the 1980’s to describe a barrier so subtle that it is transparent, yet so strong that it prevents women and minority groups from moving up in the management hierarchy” (Zulu, 2009:78). Furthermore, Msila (2013) citing Cotter *et al.* (2001) argue that glass ceiling represents unseen obstacles in a sense that women can see opportunities available to them, but struggle to grab even one of those promotional opportunities. Valerio (2009) cited by Msila in her study entitled “ *Obstacles and opportunities in women school leadership: the South African perspective*” (2013) maintains that the idea of glass-ceiling came into existence mainly because it was believed that employing females was dangerous because women as mothers and wives are sometimes unpredictable; therefore can resign from their jobs at any given time. Msila (2013: 464) indicates that the notion of glass ceiling is globally experienced by women; “even in female-dominated fields such nursing” men are abruptly promoted more than women. Additionally, Lumby *et al.* (2010) maintain that the concept of glass ceiling is intensified by the extension of gender stereotypes practiced in many cultures around the world.

### **2.4.2.2 Gender discrimination**

Coleman (2007) assert that research throughout the world indicate the perception that the problem of gender and school leadership have been overcome. This concurs with Reynold, White, Brayman and Moore (2008) when maintaining that Canadian women leaders maintain that gender in school administration has never been or is no longer an issue. Coleman’s study in England revealed that in 2004, women reported gender bias towards them in a sense selection team seemed to have favoured men more, and gender discrimination from colleague heads and supervisors was experienced by participants. However, Coleman (2007) claims that there is a discrepancy as far as gender equity issues are concerned. This is based on the assertion made by women principals when some say there is gender discrimination and others deny the perception.

Further, research by Tshabangu and Mollel (2014); Zulu (2009); Young and Bang (2013) reveals that women face genders discrimination which continues to hinder them from advancing to top senior management positions. Akao’s study (2008:30) finds that:

There was a high degree of discrimination against women by board members in preference for male principals. She further asserts that the effects of these invisible components in political selection are more detrimental to women because there can be an understated preference for male principals, and women are only appointed where there is lack of suitable male candidates.

Kanjere *et al.* (2011) in her study of rural women principals argues that women experienced double oppression as they were oppressed by apartheid policies as well as their communities. Thus, there is discrimination and prejudice with respect to women's ability to lead and manage. In agreement, Mello and Phago (2007:154) assert that "equity demands that public service remove glass ceiling; the development of equity targets in all governmental departments will ensure that line managers implement and are held accountable for ensuring gender-mainstreaming practices when discharging their duties."

#### ***2.4.2.3 Selection process***

One of the reasons why most women don't reach top management in organisations is attributed to organisational employment procedures such as selection processes which involve how posts are advertised, the sifting and shortlisting as well as interviewing. Many schools are guided by departmental rules in this regard. Young and Bang (2013:2) indicate that women are 'handicapped' in different ways; in a sense that most men serve on the selection board and therefore also perform the shortlisting as well as setting biased questions. Kagoda (2012) affirms that Ugandan female heads confirmed that selection procedures are also influenced by the lack of transparency through the process. Wrushen and Sherman (2008: 457) maintain that the "department of education does not seem to deem gender information in regard to school and district leadership as essential enough to be systematically and thoroughly collected." Moreover, Moorosi (2010:15) emphasises that:

The notion of a son of the soil and strong man may be directly related to the law or policy guiding the appointment of school principals, but they are serious cultural issues that affect the implementation of anti-discriminatory policies that need to be addressed in order to improve the situation of women in the management of schools.

Moorosi (2010:15) further shows that the SGB's perspective of strong man is the most overt discriminatory practice in the process of employment, and is done in the auspices of getting the best candidates for the job. According to Reynolds *et al.* (2008:36) "individual participants are affected by district or system level policies and practices concerning leadership succession and rotation". They argue that school principals should be appointed on the bases that are fit to manage particular schools.

#### **2.4.2.4 Age**

Age is another factor that hinders women from advancing quickly into senior posts. A study on Tanzanian women principals Tshabangu and Mollel (2014) is in agreement with Coronel *et al.*, (2010) study on women teachers in Spain. These authors maintain that women consider promotion at a later stage in their lives; once they are over the age of forty. They explain that the reason for an absence of young women in senior management positions may be attributed to pregnancy and childbirth issues which favour men at the expense of women. In their study, Tshabangu and Mollel (*ibid*) interviewed twenty female principals of whom seven were between the ages of 40 and 45, the other seven between 46 and 55 years and then the last four ranging between 55 and 60 years. It takes many years for women to advance to leadership positions. Coronel *et al* (2010) assert that more educational leadership programmes would encourage women to consider leadership positions at an earlier age.

#### **2.4.2.5 Lack of mentors and role models**

Mentoring is described by Shin and Bang (2013) as a process of providing guidance, support, advice and skills for development by someone with higher experience to a less experienced individual in the same professional field. Some of the participants mentioned that the lack of mentors is a detrimental factor to them progressing into leadership positions. Sperandio and Kagoda (2010) explain that the reason behind women's lack of mentoring may be the fact that "women in leadership positions may be breaking new ground", and therefore fail to provide the necessary guidance and support to other women especially those who are still struggling with issues of self-confidence and self-esteem around men. They further indicated that this may be attributed to the negative attitudes displayed by both female and male educators in

disapproving women principals. As a result, they may feel discouraged to serve as both effective mentors and role-models to aspiring women leaders.

Furthermore, according to Nealy (2009) the need for same sex role models is vital to boost other women's self-worth and competency especially when placed in male-dominated areas. Nealy (*ibid*) argues that the more successful women leaders are the more effective mentors and role models they become. Lastly, Sperandio and Kagoda (2010:25) maintain the lack of female role models among teachers of adolescent girls may have contributed to the unpopular decision of choosing teaching as a career choice for girls in the past. They argue that secondary school teaching in Uganda has long been a devalued profession, often taken up as a "last option" by graduates who fail to find positions in the Ugandan limited and highly competitive job market. The different ways that boys and girls are socialised into our culture, and socio-cultural stereotypes in terms of "what is lady like" and "who looks like a leader", as well as social and domestic roles together explains why there exists a lack of female role models. This is in agreement with most research such as by Moorosi (2010), Lumby and Azaola (2011), Onyango *et al.* (2011) and Netshitangani and Msila (2014).

#### **2.4.2.6 Schools and school practices**

According to Onyango *et al.* (2011) structural factors within schools are also detrimental to women's progression to top management positions; in a sense that during selection processes policies on gender equity are considered. For example, their study revealed that according to the Kenyan Equity (2004) at least one third of education managers should be women, yet this was ignored. They further maintain that aspiring women leaders are discouraged from advancing to management positions because of school practices pertaining to school policies such as parents, staff and student meetings which normally take place during the late hours. In this way, women leaders' personal schedules are to an extent inconvenienced. They argue that working class women prefer going home after 5pm to attend to their domestic roles, yet most of these meetings are scheduled for weekends. Furthermore, "women were said not to be ready to attend leadership seminars and tours which take more than one day due to their domestic roles which demand their time, and again their spouses do not like them spending some time out and coming home late"( Onyango *et al.* 2011:1520).

#### **2.4.3. Cultural barriers that hinder women from advancing into leadership positions**

### **2.4.3.1 Gender Stereotypes**

Stereotyping is mainly influenced by cultural practices which in turn play a detrimental factor towards under-representation of women in school management positions. According to Ridgeway (2009), gender stereotypes is all about how men and women are perceived culturally, how this influences the way they behave and to an extent how women are more disadvantaged than men. She argues (2009:148) that “to an extent cultural beliefs about gender do shape behaviour and social relations in an institutional context, either directly through the gender frame acting on individuals or indirectly through biased procedure, the gender beliefs will be re-inscribed into new organisational procedures and rules that actors develop through their social relations in that setting.”

Some previous studies have revealed the misconceptions about African and Arab women such as “women are baby manufacturers and therefore must remain at home, women belong in the kitchen, and women cannot lead” and many more, whereas men are perceived as “public holders of power” (Uwizeyimana & Mathevula, 2014; Oplakta & Tamir, 2009; Lunyolo *et al.* 2014; Muzvidziwa, 2014 and Ridgeway, 2009). Ridgeway (2009:145) maintains that “gender is a primary cultural frame for coordinating behaviour and organising social relations, thus, we frame and we are framed by gender literally before we know it.”

Furthermore, Arar and Abramowitz (2013:32) assert that “the trend towards gender inequality in principalship appointments continues to interest researchers, especially when it appears in traditional societies that maintain patriarchal, anti-feminist attitudes and values.” In addition, Muzvidziwa (2014:237) emphasises that “men are not only socialised as public holders of power, but to own and control the major resources of society in which women are taken to be a critical part of those resources”. Sharing gender roles in both domestic and private spheres and consciousness –raising within the community for people to appreciate women’s work is critical, if the problem of women’s disadvantage and underrepresentation is to be improved or overcome. (Muzvidziwa, 2014)

Thobejane (2015) in her speech entitled *South Africa needs a strong feminist movement to fight patriarchy*, calls for both women and men to fight against patriarchy, explaining that this is deeply rooted in workplaces and continues to discriminate against women. According to the South African Revenue Services (SARS) women still earn 28% less than men. She argues that South Africa cannot claim to practice true democracy whilst its women continue to be dominated by men.

This section has elaborated disturbances to women's progress to leadership roles' attainment in schools. Regardless of the barriers already discussed, some women have managed to become principals more especially in secondary school level. The question is what really motivated these women, thus the motivational factors are discussed in the following section

## **2.5 FACTORS THAT ENHANCE WOMEN TO ADVANCE INTO SCHOOL LEADERSHIP POSITIONS**

Literature both in developed and developing countries has revealed that women principals were largely responsible for their being appointed in leadership roles, and to an extent, some form of support from other sources. Research by Moorosi (2007) and Mestry *et al.* (2012) acknowledged some improvement reforms implemented such as the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), Affirmative Action and Gender Equity Act 1997, yet women educators still have to sweat to get on top of the leadership ladder. The fact that women are still underrepresented leads to the next questions "what are the factors that led to their being appointed?" Factors examined showed that personal factors such as qualifications, experience, as well as intrinsic factors contributed to their appointment (Priola & Brannan, 2009; Lumby *et al.* 2010; Moorosi, 2010; Coronel *et al.*, 2010; Hedgecoe, 2005; & Reynolds *et al.* 2008))

### **2.5.1 Academic credentials and training**

Research by Priola and Brannan (2009: 379) indicates that "the increased education attained and the enhancement of academic credentials of women has subsequently accompanied an increased commitment to professional and managerial careers." They also noted that education and self-determination are perceived to be at the core of a career in leadership. Qualifications play a vital role in boosting women's access into the leadership posts. Moorosi's (2010) study showed that women participants' academic credentials ranged from a professional diploma in teaching to a university degree; whereby 25 of the 28 participants held at least university undergraduate degrees at the time of the interview. Thus, women principals were academically prepared to advance into leadership positions.

In addition, Lumby *et al.* (2010) in their study of South African women indicate that among the participants 39% have an Honours Bachelor's degree, 25% ordinary bachelors, 25% Teachers' diploma, 9% Masters and 2% PhD. So women were declared generally qualified and prepared for leadership positions. This concurs with Montz and Wanat (2008) study of women

leadership experiences in Mid-Western, even though percentages for academic achievement is more than those in South Africa.

### **2.5.2 Management experience**

Experience in the actual management also played a preparatory role in women's management, even though at a lower level. Findings in Moorosi's (2010) study entitled *South African female principals' career path* reveals that most participants went through most stages, from teacher to HOD, from HOD to deputy principal, and then from deputy principal to principal, even though there are few exceptional cases where stages were skipped for various reasons. Most participants attributed their acquired experience to exposure to work, because principals delegated almost everything to them. Zikhali and Perumal (2014:16) in their study entitled *Zimbabwean school principals' reflections on assuming leadership positions* asserted that "another way of orientation noted was through the use of cluster or local supervising team which was an exchange programme whereby a team of local principals would visit each other's schools to share ideas on leadership improvement skills." Participants in the same study confirmed they benefitted from their experience in different capacities as HODs and learnt to develop courage and confidence to lead people and listen to other people and acquire good leadership skills. However, other studies indicate that women principals were mostly engaged in curriculum duties (Lumby *et al.* 2010; Moorosi, 2010).

### **2.5.3 Familiarity with the school community**

According to Moorosi (2010), and Montz and Wanat (2008) another factor accounting for women progression into leadership positions was through their familiarity with the school community (hiring from within), in a sense that familiarity seemed to be predominant for selection. She argues that experience becomes more complex as it is linked to familiarity of candidates to the school community as well as to the age of candidates. The possibility of being appointed as principals depended largely on the candidate's age as well as their experience in South African schools. Furthermore, she argues that "while it may appear to be gender neutral on the surface, it is in fact gendered in the sense that women who spend a long time in any one school tend to be associated with certain caring and nurturing roles" (*Ibid:* 10). Furthermore, Montz and Wanat (2008) claim that recruited women were regarded as competent in their district and on the basis that they maintained good relationships with the superintendent board.

Even though this may seem good, it became problematic for them because they could not be connected to leadership roles. As a result, they were deprived exposure to management experience which was a prerequisite for promotion.

#### **2.5.4 Dedication, self-confidence and ambition**

Research by (Moorosi, 2010; Lumby *et al.* 2010; Priola and Brannan 2009; Zulu, 2009) indicates that policies on equal opportunities such as affirmative action and gender equity act have been put in place for a long time to change the imbalances of gender in workplaces. However, it is revealed that some women did not rely on these policies to progress to top management, rather on the confidence the members of the community and their superiors seemed to have in them. A few of them had always wanted to reach the highest management level in the school. Priola and Brannan (2009) declared that women participants in their study indicated that reasons that motivated them to become principals were among others; the belief that they could initiate change and provide the necessary leadership skills to implement those changes. These women also trusted themselves to bring change in the lives of learners both academically and otherwise. It is also indicated that these women were always willing to help even though they were not necessarily anticipating becoming principals. This became an indirect way of preparing them for management of the schools. Some indicated that they were chosen to act as assistants because of their dedication to their work. Even though they were not remunerated, they never had a sense of being abused or overworked (Lumby *et al.* 2010).

#### **2.5.5 Role of mentors**

Lumby and Azaola (2011:20) maintain that South African women in their study had confirmed “being mentored by their former school principals who encouraged their mentees and gave them opportunities to obtain management skills by including them in the school administration”. They even supported them after their appointment as principals. Moreover, some admitted being mentored by their husbands who are teachers, education managers and managers in other fields. A small number of women reported their mentors as departmental officials and teacher training lecturers while a few cited their mothers as role models.

#### **2.5.6 Role of family**

Lumby and Azaola (2011: 20) assert that findings in their study further indicate that “women principals were motivated by the kind of support they received from members of their families such as children and spouses”. Many reported their spouses to be of great help and supportive, while married principals reported that their partners regularly help out around the school by running errands or assisting with issues of school property security. These married women principals proclaimed their marital status as an advantage to their career.

### **2.5.7 Power and status**

Priola and Brannan (2009) assert that other factors that encouraged some women to become leaders may be attributed to power and status. Their study of women in United Kingdom indicate that with power and status, they could actually influence and prove to others that they can lead and manage successfully in an environment which, “is traditionally male dominated and highly competitive or that may represent difficult challenges.” Priola and Brannan (*ibid*) argue that management contains seductive elements which make it an attractive career path.

Within the South African education system, while women have had access to leadership positions, Moorosi argues (2007: 507) that “although South African policy guarantees equal treatment for everyone before the law, the reality of women principals’ experiences suggests that women fight a constant battle against discrimination at both organisation and social level, which continues affecting their performance in the management of schools as organisations.” However, it does not matter who leads, because leadership roles come with challenges. According to Ita Buttrose in Vukovic (2016: 5) “leadership is without challenges, but anything worthwhile in life comes with challenges”. Indeed research conducted in many countries shows that women principals encounter challenges throughout their leadership. The next section will present various challenges women principals face in their leadership roles.

## **2.6 CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS**

It is clear from most literature reviewed that women principals are faced with both internal and external challenges. Internal challenges identified include aspects from a personal stand such as the lack of confidence, balancing the role of mother and leader and emotional stress. On the other hand, external challenges are explained in two terms; those that are administrative and therefore related to the organisation and those which are society- related (Lumby & Azaola, 2011; Kanjere *et al.* 2011; Boldur, 2009; Moorosi, 2007 & 2011; Van Vyk, 2012; Parsaloi, 2012; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008; Uwizeyimana & Mathevula, 2014).

## **2.6.1. Personal challenges**

### ***2.6.1.1 The lack of confidence***

Wrushen and Sherman (2008) in their study of African- American, Hispanic and Caucasian women maintain that one of the most significant themes that emerged is women's conception and understanding of their own power as school principals. They argue that these women principals seem uncomfortable with the notion of power; being described as powerful. Instead, they prefer to call themselves as servers of the community." Some women, while feeling the power inherent in a school leadership position, did not feel powerful themselves." Furthermore, Parsaloi (2012) asserts that Kenyan women principals in her study acknowledged their lack of confidence in their work particularly during the early stages of their leadership. Women reported that they felt a lack of confidence when dealing with challenging issues as they were unsure as to how to handle them. The majority of the participants explained that it was their first experience leading a school. Parsaloi (2012) indicates that women principals admitted gaining confidence as they continued in their leadership roles.

### ***2.6.1.2 Lifestyle conflict***

According to Irechuckwu (2010:183) "women are more adapted to run household than men, the more they are in management positions, the more stable and dependable the world will become". Women principals who are "working mothers struggle to find the balance in the social construction of their life roles and creating meandering career paths during midlife" (Moorosi, 2007:512). She affirms that women principals find it challenging to balance the two roles; that of being a mother, wife and a career woman. In addition, Mthembu (2013) emphasises that South African women principals in her study confirmed that their social lives were affected by their entry into leadership, in a sense that leadership is too demanding, they arrive home late, and they have less time for family, friends and themselves and also sacrificed their religious obligations. Moreover, Moorosi (2007: 512) posits:

Social practices still appear gender neutral because everyone appears to be subjected to them, while the reality is that these social practices sabotage women who cannot be available for the work all the time. The split makes it even more difficult for women principals who are married and are of reproductive age to balance their public and private responsibilities, since they are still expected to play their cultural roles as mothers and wives over and

above their commitment to their work as school managers. The dual responsibility disadvantages women and produces conditions that make it impossible for them to do both.

She further contends that single women principals have an advantage because they were not negatively affected like married principals; they were able to spend more time on management related duties. However, research by Moorosi (2007), Parsaloi (2012) Mthembu (2013), and Smith (2011) reveals that women adopted strategies to balance their lifestyle conflict. Common strategies such as getting help from relatives, working close with SMT members to make their workload manageable, working after school hours in order to avoid interruptions and working long hours during school terms so that they can spend quality time with family during school holidays. In agreement, Bosch (2015: 14) citing Chisholm when saying that “men in South Africa hardly take on childcare and other domestic responsibilities, while women are left to contend with career and family issues at the same time”.

However, Smith (2011:37) maintains that “even though women principals in the United Kingdom felt supported and encouraged, it remained a near impossible feat to achieve a work-life balance”. Additionally, Parsaloi (2012) upholds that women principals in her study confirmed that despite all the support they got, they still had a feeling of guilt because they could not fulfil their “second shift” as they wished to. This is in agreement with Aja- Okorie (2011) when maintaining that Nigerian women principals’ failure to balance these conflicting roles may also pose a big challenge in service delivery and achieving results. This could apply to all women principals struggling to balance the dual roles irrespective of their context.

### ***2.6.1.3 Emotional pressure***

Blackmore (2010) designates that leadership in times of change is a highly emotionally charged activity. People working in leadership positions are constantly being assailed by the emotional demands placed on them by peers, students and members of the community. Therefore it can be concluded that their experiences, specifically their emotional responses, are shaped by the contextual constraints in which they work in the ethos of the education system. Moorosi (2007:508) declares that it should be noted that “for some women moving into management brings additional stress, since they are associated with inflexibility and restrictiveness as compared to what teaching in the classroom offers them in terms of meeting the demands of their time.” Furthermore, Parsaloi (2012: 31) denotes that participants described their experiences using adjectives such as “stressful” and “demanding” permeating their stories, and

were used interchangeably with the word “challenging”, as they spoke about the issues they face on a daily basis in their jobs as middle-school principals.

Parsaloi (2012) maintains that female principals who serve disadvantaged communities sometimes find themselves in stressful situations as they had to work through all problems to reach solutions. She says (2012:12) “children who come from dysfunctional homes often demonstrate emotional problems that interfered with their performance.” Listening to their problems has an effect on their emotions. A lot of time allocated for teaching and other responsibilities was consumed.

## **2.6.2 Cultural challenges**

### ***2.6.2.1 Devaluation of women***

Wrushen and Sherman (2008) examined the leadership experiences of African American women administrators and reveal that female leaders are under *surveillance* which means being severely analysed. Women leaders are watched in every move they make. As a result, this leaves these female leaders with a feeling of discomfort and fear. The most disturbing themes that emerged were the regular occurrence of hurtful comments and actions directed towards their gender, age and race. Pillay (2005: 71) concurs with Wrushen and Sherman (2008) that “the most significant explanation of resistance to women in positions of power in schools is their devaluation”. She further highlights that the assignment of less value to women takes the form of attitudes that favours males over females for management positions. This proves that women are not valued as much as men are. This then impacts negatively on their self-esteem.

### ***2.6.2.2 Gender stereotypes***

According to Kanjere *et al.* (2011) there is a general impression that women are not good leaders. At this modern age, there are people who still believe that women are incapable of leading. Women in leadership positions in the rural areas are hard hit by prejudices because most men in these areas are staunch custodians of culture. Kanjere and Teffo’s (2011) investigation also probes into the general impression created about women leadership, whereby most individuals quote a northern Sotho proverb: *Tsa etwake e tshadi pele di wela ka leopeng*, meaning if a leader is a woman, disaster is bound to happen. This proverb encourages women discrimination in the community and at their work environment. Kanjere and partners assert that most African families are led by women while their spouses are far away from their homes because of work commitments. This may be proof that families are run smoothly by the very

same women who are described as incapable leaders. In addition, Akao (2008: 93) asserts that “culture and gender have influence on attitudes towards women leaders because the two do not exist in isolation but are intertwined”. These two factors affect how women lead irrespective of age, status and ethnic background. Women in leadership positions also indicated that their roles as mothers helped them to transfer the knowledge of managing a family to the school setting. Mkhize (2012) reveals that female heads experience and internalise negative stereotypes and believe that males do not listen to them, and they also experience gender stereotypes.

Moreover, Azaola and Lumby (2011:83) maintain that “it seems that South African women have adopted two strategies of dealing with gender stereotypes; which is by neutralising gender and unsettling gender”. They elaborate that even though women principals are aware of gender discrimination, they were not prepared to accept its impact. Their strategy of neutralising gender was a way of ignoring it.

### ***2.6.2.3 Discrimination***

Moorosi (2007: 508) argues that “even though South African policy guarantees equal treatment of everyone, the reality of women principals’ experiences suggest that women fight a constant battle against discrimination at two levels based on organisational and social levels”. At the social level, women lack support from their families and they face the fact that principal ship is associated with masculinity. On the other hand, they are oppressed by traditional and patriarchal values and practices that continue to devalue transformation processes aimed at achieving gender equity.

## **2.6.3. Administrative challenges**

### ***2.6.3.1 Pressure to compete with previous managers***

According to Wrushen and Sherman (2008: 463) “female principals are pressurised to compete with the legacy and style of the previous head teacher. They hold the view that these female principals struggle with owning their leadership role in building up the school as principals

because of discomfort with more rigid standards of leadership that were established in previous years”. Aja-Okorie (2011:8) maintains that “the role of leaders such as school principals in today’s education system has transcended the traditional management functions of power, behaviour, style and instructional leadership into more complex indices due to overwhelming students’ population explosions such as handling students’ needs, and accommodating students from diverse socio-political backgrounds”. Moreover, Aja-Okorie (2011:11) proclaims that “the demand of present dispensation principals implies that women as school managers have to deal with students’ turmoil, teacher aggressiveness, curriculum changes as well as dealing with parents who exert too much pressure on the school to perform as they are now aware of the importance of education.” Therefore, women have to be familiar with the objectives of the school as well as bringing positive change to schools.

#### ***2.6.3.2 The lack of respect and negative attitude***

Research conducted by Makhaye (2012), Aja- Okori (2011), Parsaloi (2012) and Kitele (2013) shows that negative attitudes towards female principals is displayed in various ways. It is evident from these studies that female principals encountered resistance from both female and male teachers. Teachers were reported to question the leadership abilities, and values of female principals due to the myths and beliefs they hold against them. Moreover female teachers also feel that female heads are “powerless” so they do not cooperate in most cases. A “*pull her down*” attitude was widely reported in Moorosi s’ (2010) study whereby both male and female teachers do not cooperate, and they indicated that they were scrutinising female principals because they expect them to fail. The lack of respect and recognition is often displayed in attitudes during staff meetings and also by not attending meetings.

#### ***2.6.3.3 Dealing with parents’ attitude and their grievances***

Furthermore, Makhaye (2012) asserts that South African female principals were also stressed by the negative attitude often displayed by some parents especially some male parents who also doubted their abilities. This was also reflected in many ways such as criticising female parents, undermining and calling them names and not taking them seriously. In addition, Moorosi (2010:12) enlightens that “single female principals were referred to as *girls*, which intimidated them”. On the same level, Makhaye (2012: 35) and Kanjere *et al.* (2011) report that “women in these positions have to convince men in their schools and surrounding communities that they are capable”. They have to work extra hard in their schools as compared to male counterparts who are readily accepted as natural leaders in their communities.

According to Kanjere (2009) School Governing Body (SGB) and parents scrutinise these female principals for what they wear especially during parents' meetings. Some communities do not accept women who wear trousers; tribal authorities undermine their leadership by being vocal about their wish for a male leader and some parents refuse to serve in the SGB. Cultural issues become more conspicuous especially if the women work in cultures different from theirs; for example a Sepedi speaking woman working in a Xitsonga speaking area.

Furthermore, women principals admitted that they had to deal with parents' grievances such as complaints levelled against educators whereby parents sometimes demand immediate action, where at times they leave the school discontented. Secondly, female principals reported that parents complained about other parents whereby their children start a fight in the community but end up taking the fight to the school. Principals maintain that sometimes they have to endure insults from angry parents. Sometimes parents report their children's discipline issues they themselves could have resolved at home (Parsaloi, 2012).

#### ***2.6.3.4 Managing school discipline***

According Makhaye (2012) female principals in her study complained about the general behaviour of learners particularly male students. Male students were reported to be uncooperative. They pass threats, intimidate and undermine the ability of female leaders. For example, if they misbehave and are sent home to call parents, they often do not comply. Additionally, some learners are exposed to drugs and violence from an early age, so they bring some of these practices into the school premises; selling and using drugs to other learners. Moreover, teenagers suffer from peer pressure and identity crises, and sometimes boys from initiation school undermine their authority and such boys are associated with using physical power. In addition, female principals posit that they face the challenge of learners who do not perform to their full potential.

Furthermore, Parsaloi's (2012) study revealed that Kenyan female principals were faced with difficult educators. Difficult educators include those who come to school late, are often absent from work without permission, and sometimes come to work under the influence of liquor and smoke within the school campus. The challenge in this regard is that female principals confirmed that most of the difficult educators have proved to be good in teaching their subjects and producing excellent learner performance. They are scared to report them to education authorities because they do not want to risk losing them as they could be deployed; on the same level learners would be without a teacher.

Lastly, according to Parsaloi (2012:78) “a specific category of teachers who were thought to be difficult by participants were those who had stepped down from headship as they kept undermining the school leadership; those who were reminiscing about their days as heads and those who went back to teaching after going through interdiction.”

#### ***2.6.3.5 Knowledge and skills of an administrator***

Ballard (2010: 97) maintains that African American women principals are also faced with legal and political challenges which include lawsuits, whereby they have to be in and out of courts. On the other hand, they also face media and publication of state mandate in which policies have to be implemented and assessments have to be administered. This is confirmed by Kanjere *et al.* (2011) that female principals are also challenged on matters of labour issues as they are regarded to be unknowledgeable on these. Aja-Okorie (2011) declares that female principals should conform to new knowledge, skills and function, current expectations as well as staff management. This concurs with Aja-Okorie (2011: 11) citing Obi (2004) that “rightly observed teachers are the most powerful weapons in the hand of managers in achieving educational objectives; without proper training, the management of staff becomes difficult.”

#### ***2.6.3.6 Management of change***

It is not easy to manage change within the South African education system because of some of the reasons as lack of resources and support from SGB and educational authorities, and the fact that change is sometimes not well understood. Policies are rectified from time to time and this makes it difficult for school managers to successfully implement them. For example, the banning of corporal punishment in schools is still posing some major obstacles for most principals in effectively running their schools. Female principals in Makhaye’s (2012) study admitted that some policies are not easy to implement, and so they face a lot of resistance from educators and some parents in other instances. There are some educators who still continue administering corporal punishment even though it has been outlawed. This shows that change is difficult to get used to (*ibid*). She further indicates that school policies are difficult to implement because people resist change. This is worsened by the fact that some parents are not part of their children’s education (*Ibid*).

### ***2.6.3.7 Limited resources***

Parsaloi (2012) sustains that participants in her study complained about limited resources such as insufficient funds, lack of infrastructure such as classrooms and offices which had impacted negatively on the whole school management. Parsaloi attests that due to lack of principal's offices, she had to conduct interviews under a tree and sometimes in classrooms after school hours to avoid interfering with lessons. Additionally, this created problems for principals because of a lack of privacy in interacting with teachers, parents and visitors individually. Learners had to attend lessons in shifts; one group in the morning and the other in the afternoon.

Shortage of teaching staff was also highlighted by Parsaloi's (2012) participants as another challenge. Female principals in her study explained that they were forced to take the same teaching load as other teachers. They reported that as school managers they also had to attend departmental meetings so as to network with other stakeholders. As a result, they found themselves lagging behind as far as teaching is concerned. Their main challenge was that learners had to be taught; the syllabus had to be completed forcing them to offer extra lessons. Again, this interferes with their personal schedules. Female principals had pressure to perform well and produce excellent results. As result, they adopted various leadership style and strategies helped them manage some challenges they face in their leadership.

## **2.7 WOMEN LEADERSHIP STYLES AND STRATEGIES**

Leadership is defined in various ways and from different contexts. Sinclair (2013: 1) emphasises that "how we define leadership depends on our history, cultural myths and ideologies". Blackmore quoted by Sinclair (2013) states that leadership is both a "problem" and "solution" and that the idea of leadership cannot be ignored because it is the way of power and legitimacy. Furthermore, research suggests that women as a group exhibit different but equal valuable feminine styles of leadership which continues to be controversial. However, Sinclair (2013) asserts that whether women lead differently depends on which population of women were sampled, but also who is doing the research and what and how the responses are measured.

Marumo (2013) posits that even though women in leadership positions still face challenges, they have developed their own strategies for making their voices heard. The findings in this regard indicate that all women identities are influenced by their environment and they also influenced the environment. She highly emphasised that women leaders have to extract cues to be able to make sense of the situations they find themselves in. Women have realised that even though they lack power by not being in top positions where decisions are made, they regain power by empowering themselves and other women through networking and being ambassadors for education. Montz and Wanat (2008) emphasise that even though women and men experience leadership roles differently, women were reported to have lacked both financial and emotional management skills.

Arar and Queder (2011: 420) assert that “Arab women leaders possess skills that enable them to read situations accurately and take in information from all sides; the willingness to see all sides of a situation enhances their persuasive ability”. According to Dr Greenberg in Swan (2014: 4) “women are venturesome, less interested in what has been than in what can be”. They will run the risk of occasionally being wrong in order to get things done, and with their fine abstract of reasoning skills, they will learn from their mistakes (Arar & Queder, 2011:421).

### **2.7.1 Authoritarian leadership style**

However, Arar and Queder (2011) came up with different perspectives from most of the reviewed literature. Their point of departure is quite interesting in that they tell of the experiences of women principals in their initial years and also as experienced principals. Arar and Queder (2011:422) disclose that studied Arab female principals “employed a patriarchal relatively strict managerial style, firstly to meet the expectations of the parents and secondly to be accepted by the school community as women in leadership and thirdly, to deal with teaching staff”. The respondents in this study admitted that most of the decisions were made by them, without consulting with other stakeholders. They further divulged that there are urgent matters that cannot wait for the staff participation, because immediate decisions have to be made. In this way, these participants were able to establish their authority as women leaders in relation with teachers, at the inception of their principalship. The use of an authoritarian style by these women earned them respect from learners, teachers and parents.

Marlene and College (2009: 190) in their analysis of American women’s leadership styles assert that “women principals sometimes adopt an autocratic style of leadership more especially whereby school policies are to be implemented”. In addition, Makhaye (2012: 52)

asserts that “female principals adopted this style of leadership which is authoritative more especially when they conduct staff meetings because some teachers do not take them seriously because they are female”. This shows that women leaders have come to the realisation that control and authority are sometimes necessary (Gaetane, 2007; Swan, 2014).

### **2.7.2 Transformational leadership**

Women adopted leadership styles better suited to the changing culture. Women leaders are said to have transformational leadership styles which emphasise teamwork, fresh values and vision. Marlene and College (2009: 190) explain that “the way these women exercised their leadership was informed by the two themes which they believe in; teamwork and open communication”. In general, women are perceived to adopt a more transformational leadership style that embraces democratic values more than men. These democratic values include collaboration, inclusiveness, accommodation, cooperation, sensitivity, empowerment and concern for the growth of others. Transformational leadership refers to shared influence and cooperation, participative decision – making, teamwork and the concept of power for the empowerment of members of the organisation. It is therefore reflected in the study that women leaders are inclined to a transformational approach because it favours their feminine values of nurturing and caring. This means that women can be agents of change and transformation in South African schools, and therefore can contribute a lot in changing schools from a bureaucratic to a more democratic system. This is reason enough for more women to be appointed in school leadership positions.

Collaboration is a central strategic component utilised by most successful leaders with a perception gap based on gender. Mkhize’s (2012) study revealed that despite the fact that female heads encounter gender-based experiences in management roles and responsibilities, they are engaged in empowering style of involving all colleagues in the decision making processes. Some women leaders manage to perform their official duties effectively and also provide good leadership quality in South Africa, Kwazulu Natal.

### **2.7.3 Curriculum leadership**

According to Joseph (2011) cited by Naidoo (2013) curriculum is a process for transforming educational aims and objectives through inquiry and introspection which encompasses values, vision, interactions and practices. Curriculum leadership puts more emphasis on teacher needs

and development, staff development and empowerment, issues of communication, consultation and involvement of parents and communities in their shared decision-making processes in the school. In addition, women principals in Mid-Western states rated interpersonal skills, curriculum knowledge as well as instruction valuable to their leadership styles (Montz & Wanat 2008). Female principals were reported to focus more on curriculum leadership and nurturing than males, thus affirming gender roles' expectations. On the contrary, Aslanargun (2010) assert that Turkish women principals were underrated on skills such as listening, problem-solving, curriculum and instruction.

#### **2.7.4 Spiritual leadership**

Dryer (2011:1) explains spirituality “as a comprehensive life orientation that determines one’s identity, which includes every dimension of human life, it is also about one’s entire human existence as an authentic person in God’s presence.” Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) and Lindo (2012) emphasise that spiritual leadership is another way for women to lead in education; women use issues of faith to maintain confidence and motivation and also to cope with challenges they encounter. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) further proclaim that women American principals in their study further indicated that this leadership style enhances their personal strength as well the way they connect with others. In addition, Edward and Perumal (2014) emphasise that many leaders in their study possess proclaimed what might be called “higher order” perspective and that might be represented by a particular religious affiliation. Lindo (2012: 60) affirms these assertions when stating that “it is interesting to note that religion plays an important role in the lives of women principals as they perform their duties”. According to Bush’s (2011) study, participants in her study described their leadership underpinned by spiritual leadership, maintaining that it serves as a source of security and motivation for their roles and also boosts their self-confidence.

#### **2.7.5 Servant leadership**

According to Edwards and Perumal (2014) servant leadership is characterised by the leader’s desire and concern for others, and by the leader’s high moral standards which is congruent with the focus on the needs of followers. They maintain that participants in their study reflected the presence of servant leadership as an element of their leadership style which encompasses listening, empathising, serving and practising stewardship. However, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) uphold that servant leadership is also characterised by a component of social justice which is a feminist leadership approach; and this can be used by both female and male leaders

in the sense that it contains no gender bias. They argue that “by virtue of its location within the feminist leadership approach, it is often associated with a stereotypical female style of leadership” (*ibid*). However, Coleman (2007) asserts that men and women in her study rated themselves mainly “feminine” in their style of leadership. Previous studies have shown societal, organisational as well personal challenges that women principal face in their leadership, however, few have embark on how these challenges impact both on women themselves and the whole school management. The next section will discuss the extent to which these challenges affect women principals and the whole school management.

## **2.8 THE EXTENT TO WHICH THESE CHALLENGES AFFECT WOMEN PRINCIPALS AND FURTHER AFFECT THE WHOLE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT**

Women leaders face barriers which operate at all levels of society; individual, organisational and societal. Although women face many barriers in leadership, existing research gives limited insight into how women leaders make meaning of barriers and other adversities they may face. Diehl (2014: 54) maintains that empirical research on how adult aged individuals construct meaning of adversity suggests that adversity leads to both positive and negative meaning. Diehl (2014:57) highlights that “meta-analysis of prior studies of individuals who had endured a variety of adversities found that individuals both benefitted from and were harmed by adversity. Diehl’s study of Mid-Atlantic American women asserts many women spent much time questioning how they could have presented their adverse situations. Some even concluded that they were to blame, despite evidence to the contrary. Some participants did self-examination in this way: “Could I have done better? Should I, did I shoot myself in the foot sometime?” Others felt a sense of disillusionment when outcomes did not match pre-existing beliefs (*Ibid*). All in all, participants experienced confirmation of their beliefs. Adversity also led to positive or negative self-esteem. Positively, adversity led to pride and self-confidence, whereas negatively a feeling of insecurity resulted in self- doubt, shame, inferiority, stress, loneliness, disappointment and failure.

### **2.8.1 Life style conflict**

Boldur’s (2009: 55) study examines the challenges of female leaders who are mothers of infants, toddlers and preschool children “in an effort to understand how they balance their roles, how they manage the challenges they face, how they negotiate their dual roles and the strategies they use to cope with the demands of being a mother and school leader”. From the study’s findings, these women principals are affected by problems they meet in their career. Boldur

(2009: 56) mentions a number of findings from her study as follows: costs to family, self and job. Participants in this study noted that they felt that their children were neglected when they could not do their homework with their children or attend school events with their children. They also admitted that they sacrifice family time due to the time demands of their educational leadership positions. In addition, their social, personal and leisure time was also sacrificed. This sacrificial business resulted in the loss of womanhood in the name of balancing dual roles which also caused them an emotional by product of feeling guilty and angry especially with regard to the responsibility of motherhood. Moreover, these women felt jealous towards some family members who step in to take care of their children's school activities. They reported to be threatened by this action. Some of them admitted to be jealous of their spouses as they spend more time with family than they do. These feelings of inadequacy, anger and jealousy create inner turmoil causing challenges for educational leaders who are mothers.

However, out of the stress to balance conflicting roles emerged some positives such as; in order to cope with the above mentioned challenges, female principals adopted an open door policy, and the strategy of working together with other staff and the sharing power. They were empathetic and fair to their staff members. They shared power in decision making and were less dominating towards colleagues. They were able to establish teamwork and cooperation with learners, and this was to ensure harmony and unity at school.

### **2.8.2 Insecurity**

According to Diehl (2014) insecurity incorporates a variety of feelings such as shame, self-doubt, inferiority, loneliness, stress, disappointment and failure which contributed to most participants losing their self –confidence. Some of the participants confirmed that “insecurity was manifested physically through weight gain, appetite loss, and lack of sleep, stress and slumping posture” (Diehl, 2014: 57). Moreover, some confirmed feeling lonely because they served on teams mostly dominated by males, bringing more feelings of loneliness that emanated from serving on male dominated teams and therefore feeling like they were being excluded from social events. Participants also had a feeling of fear which arises from the fact that everyone was scrutinising their every move. Additionally, women principals were even scared to share their health problems with colleagues so as to avoid criticism.

### **2.8.3 Self-confidence**

Diehl (2014) maintains that positively many participants' challenges boasted many participants' feelings of self-confidence, in a sense that they became strengthened and more resilient. These included taking bold decisions, which saved their institutions, in abolishing programmes, sports teams, and positions to keep the school running. Furthermore, Diehl (*ibid*) mentions that the majority of participants acknowledged experiencing challenges, which in turn brought positive change in women principals' identity, such as self-analysis, self-acceptance, self-definition as well as self-perspective.

In addition, Beaty cited by Diehl (2014: 55) conducted a qualitative study of the same meaning of adversity whereby participants confirmed that:

Adversity led them to serious thoughts about their own character, actions, and motives. In this way women discovered their own identities and strengths. Adversity was also defined as a humbling experience, women leaders acknowledged learning to accept that they could not control or fix everything in their lives; they learnt to accept that sometimes they cannot fix everything.

#### **2.8.4 Mothering skills**

Furthermore, Boldur (2009:204) maintains that "motherhood has an effect on educational leadership". The transference of organisational and leadership skills into the workplace is more required to manage a household as was mostly discussed by participants in the study. The skills set for both roles are similar and can be helpful for success in both cases. This includes organising, delegating and teaching. Although the participants considered themselves to be living fulfilled lives that are multidimensional, they were able to work towards reaching their potential in two areas: role reversal in the household whereby husbands were expected to take on the role of primary care takers, which in the past was a female role. There is now sharing of roles, awareness and appreciation for parenting by both partners. In addition, Brock-Giroux (2013) upholds that South African female principals were said to be motherly wherein in most cases they showed respect to the elders. Those working with them and under them defined women principals as more understanding and easy to interact with.

#### **2.8.5 Financial boost and pride**

Participants confirmed that they felt proud and fulfilled upon realising they have achieved things they planned to accomplish. Some of their achievements were such as being able to have

“managed role conflicts: raising children, working fulltime and completing their studies leading to pride for self, family and the culture” (Diehl, 2014: 57).

### **2.8.6 Power**

Diehl (2014: 57) maintains that “when participants could not control one aspect of their lives as a result of adversity, they focused on what they could control”. Women principals used the power vested in them, they empowered themselves in various ways such as gaining new skills and insight to deal with challenging situations, making bold decisions, becoming firm in policy implementation and becoming resilient in their lives. Moreover, Diehl (2014) explains that relationships with staff were strengthened through motivation, support and mentoring others, building of teamwork, which helped in areas that encountered managerial crisis. Thus, the spirit of “we succeed or fail together” was witnessed. Additionally, adversity was explained to have helped some participants to support others through institutional policy or culture change. “One participant explained that her own experience with salary inequalities led her to push for better salary and benefit policies for employees in her institution” (*Ibid*: 60).

Furthermore, Diehl (2014:60) upholds that adversities helped participants in her study in relation to how they view the world which resulted in disillusionment and optimism. Prior to going through adversity, some participants believed in the goodness of humanity. These participants experienced disillusionment when good did not happen in their lives and when they were mistreated by others. The disillusionment experienced by some participants was an awareness of problems in the world, and they translated this realisation that other people do indeed have serious challenges and difficulties into their obligation to provide assistance and encouragement. Diehl (2014:60) claims that “obstacles either help you grow or help you make a decision about moving onto something else”. Furthermore, participants acknowledged that through their faith, they were able to gain optimism; particularly “when outcomes did not match pre-existing beliefs, and when unexpected positive results occurred” (*Ibid*). Lastly, adversity also created new opportunities for women principals; a chance to experiment new or different things. Diehl (*ibid*: 58) asserts that “participants resolved to define difficult situations not as barriers but rather as a turn “into an opportunity”.

The last section of this literature review presents how stakeholders perceive women secondary school principals. This will cover societal and organisational perceptions towards these women.

## **2.9 STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS FEMALE SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS**

According to Ngcobo (2010), perception means forming of judgement about other people particularly those that concern people as social animals. It is maintained that perceptions are seldom accurate or stable and may be brought about by superficial characteristics like stereotypes such as sex roles, age, race, occupation and appearance and that stereotyping often leads people to judge positively those people that are similar to them and negatively those that are not. Studies done on perceptions held against women are conducted locally and internationally. Researchers used stakeholders such as parents, educators, learners, Department of Education (DoE) officials and School Governing Body (SGB) members to identify perceptions held against women in educational leadership in different educational institutions. A few studies were conducted on perceptions held by women principals about women principals' perceptions of themselves as well as their leadership (Amondi, 2011; Tshabangu & Mollel 2014; and Mestry & Schmidt, 2012).

Elisha (2013) maintains that findings in her study of women principals in Solomon Islands revealed that teachers' perceptions on how they viewed women principals have changed. It was found that teachers valued and appreciated their leadership and that female teachers even aspired for leadership because women principals became their role models. Elisha (2013:57) indicates that "attitude towards traditional role and the status of women are changing among themselves as well as in the whole society". Furthermore, most studies have categorised their perceptions into two categories such as cultural or traditional and organisational. According to Nichols and Nichols (2014) the issue of cultural stereotypes does not revolve around gender inequality but also serves as an obstacle that mainly contributes to underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions in Midwestern , USA.

In their study, Tshabangu and Mollel (2014: 51) indicate that "out of twenty principals, nineteen, equalling 95% agreed that at times their negative self- perception; often times due to societal expectations had adverse effects on their leadership". These women leaders were found to be conscious of this self-perception and tended to avoid negative self-perceptions as these often reinforced gender prejudices, biases, and negative stereotypes, thus impacting on their leadership". In addition, Amondi (2011) observed that Kenyan women principals tend to have fear of failure and tend to avoid criticism. However, out of the participants in her study, one was found to have confidence working with men and leading them and that their internal

evaluation processes appreciated their leadership. Moreover, 75 % of the participants were reported to be afraid to voice their opinions on their self-perceptions as women leaders (Tshabangu & Mollel 2014; Agezo 2010). Lastly, Kitele (2013: 49) claims that “cultural and social beliefs lead to perception that women are seen as inferior to men and therefore cannot manage over men”

Mestry and Schmidt (2012: 547) indicate that “patriarchal culture remains dominant in many communities and schools in South Africa, playing formidable constraints on women’s advancement to principal ship”. This has created an atmosphere whereby women often find it difficult to be accepted as equals by their male counterparts. Their entry point is by defining what culture is, and then show that how people approach a situation is shaped by the work structure yet their range of responses is affected by culture. Cultural perceptions held about women are that they are expected to be submissive to men, and that based on cultural traditions, it is still perceived as a taboo for a woman to be a leader, especially over men especially in African traditional societies. The wider cultural perceptions position women as dependent on men and that a woman’s career should be subservient to her husband and family (Agezo, 2010; Amondi 2011). Cultural perceptions still encourage women to sacrifice their career for the family, since the men are expected to be bread-winners.

However, hesitance to women in management remains an issue in developing countries, and within minority groups in developed countries (Amondi, 2011; Elisha, 2013; Agezo, 2010; Nealy, 2009; Grogan & Shakeshaft 2011; Panigrahi, 2013). Traditional perceptions and patriarchal attitudes towards women’s status still largely prevail, even among the new generation. Research reveals that educated women have little belief in women principals’ ability to cope with external entities, which could be a projection of their own feelings in inadequacy. The attitudes of female Arab teachers differ from those of Arab males; in general they express less negative attitudes toward women principals. It is also indicated that educated men regard women’s appointments in leadership positions at school as a threat to their own progress toward senior positions in school management. However, it seems surprising that a well-educated person can fail to support progressive views and fail to support the trend to gender equality in school management; which are characteristics of education systems in developed societies (Arar, 2013).

### 2.9.1 Organisational perceptions

Mestry and Schmidt (2012) assert that discrimination experienced by South African women principals is often rooted in “power structures and the silencing of non-dominant groups where speech is hierarchically limited by an individual’s space in gender, class, moral and institutional arrangement”. They noted that:

Stereotypes based on gender have historically placed women in submissive roles, and they are also more pervasive and entrenched in developing countries, and can have lasting effects on their career possibilities. The danger about this is that they exert powerful negative influence in the work place. They manifest themselves in the form of low self-esteem, lack of confidence and many more (*Ibid: 537*).

Furthermore, Mestry and Schmidt (2012), and Myeni (2011) posit that staff members were of the view that women principals were incapable of leading based their view on gender stereotypes, societal norms and cultural factors. Women principals experience challenges but despite that, they managed to perform their official duties effectively; and also provided good leadership qualities in these schools. Female principals are not seen by their subordinates to have much authority as their male counterparts. Female principals lack the ability to influence, however, the perceived strength of female principals includes self-discipline, hardworking, committed and reliable, good relations with staff, possessing leadership skills same as men and leading in a more participatory manner than male principals

Arar (2013) conducted a study with two aims; firstly to examine the attitudes of Arab teachers in Israel towards female principals and secondly, to identify what factors influence teachers’ attitude toward the appointment of women principals. The study revealed that Arab women principals were perceived as creating a pleasant atmosphere at school, and teachers confirmed that female principals had inferior abilities to conduct relations with external bodies. They emphasise that the gap between men and women on gender equality in educational leadership has narrowed more especially in western developed countries. Research confirms that prejudice against women principals has lessened, and school management is open to both men and women. Tlais *et al.* in Arar and Queder (2011) posit that in an under- developed society, there is no connection between women’s educational level and their status at work. Women in these societies mainly pursue education to help them undergo a personal change without feeling that they can rebel against the norms of their society.

According to Elisha (2013:12) the majority of respondents in his study admitted that male values and behaviour dominates most corporates and that there is still prejudice in promoting women. There is still the belief that women do not make good leaders, because they are too emotional, are weak, and cannot handle discipline problems, are less competent and less ambitious than men. This explains the reason why women are underrepresented as far as leadership positions are concerned. According to Eagly (2007) in Brock- Giroux (2013) women reported to be undermined by staff, which is shown by defiance, for example refusing to take instructions. This was reported to be the practice by males who were uncomfortable with women in leadership positions.

### **2.9.2 Bias in evaluation of women principals**

According to Ridgeway (2009) there is an indication of anticipation states theory and suggestion that gender differences in influence and leadership befall because people posit that men are more capable and rightful leaders than women. These attitudes raise ranked patterns of social connections through which males utilise more power and exercise more leadership. In addition, Young and Bang (2013: 1) designate that “social norms driven by media perpetuate stereotypes by using images to reinforce gender notion of leadership, often presenting men as experts while females are portrayed as anomalies.” Furthermore, they argue that media displays pictures of women in the home and as younger than men, which interconnects and emphasises acuties of female professionals incapable and inappropriate for management positions. Besides, female principals are further presented as not having precise substance to be leaders.

According to Tshabangu and Mollel (2014:50) “the perception that women lacked confidence and focus, ranked the least, averaging 20% from all participants; meaning that most principals who are afforded the opportunity to lead are fairly comfortable in senior leadership roles since most of them, in view of their age and experience, are mature and have seen it all, hence the confidence”. They further echoed the fact that due to adverse views, most women come into senior positions much later in their career, implying that a few of them, if any, may have a prolonged leadership proficiency of over twenty years before retirement (Tshabangu & Mollel, 2014). Nonetheless, the scholastic credentials and proficiency of women revealed that they earned the leadership positions they occupied and dismisses the concept that women leaders lack education and experience. Lastly, male participants in their study are thought to perceive women as good leaders provided they apply less authority. However, female principals indicated they were rated aggressive in their leadership which was highly perceived negatively

by men. They further indicated that such perceptions intimidate female leaders in honouring their responsibilities successfully thus accomplishing a stereotype that they are leaders of less quality, such as incapable (Tshabangu & Mollel, 2014; Elisha, 2013).

## **2.10 SUMMARY**

The purpose of a literature review is, among other concerns, to examine how certain factors which have possible barriers on the problem under study are interrelated. This sharpens the researcher's conceptual framework and is intended to identify the gaps in knowledge hence create a new entry point to the new study (Randolph, 2009). The literature review highlighted barriers as well as factors that enhance women participation in leadership roles. Different leadership strategies employed generally by women principals as strategies to cope in their management of schools were also discussed. The attitudes which stem from both cultural and organisational perceptions were elaborated. Lastly, the leadership challenges and the extent to which these impact on female principals' management of a school were highlighted. However, the literature review reveals that women will continue to struggle in attaining educational leadership positions unless efforts are made to understand and support their decision to enter educational leadership roles (Moorosi, 2007 & 2010).

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides a description of the research methodology and design, which include the sampling method, data collection method, data analysis procedures, ethics consideration and issues of validity and reliability. The chapter starts by discussing the theoretical basis of qualitative research. The data collection methods, the sampling techniques and ethics consideration will then follow. In addition, an account of the procedures utilised to analyse and interpret data are highlighted. Finally, measures to ensure validity and reliability are comprehensively discussed in this chapter.

#### **3.2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN**

##### **3.2.1. Research approach**

Research methodology is a system of models, procedures and techniques used to discover the results of the research problem. Research methods can be classified into three categories which are quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. This study followed a qualitative research approach.

“Qualitative research approach is based on a naturalistic-phenomenological philosophy that views reality as multi-layered, interactive and a shared experience explained by individuals” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:315). The approach is a complex field of inquiry that draws on assumptions but embraces a few common characteristics and perspectives. Researchers using this approach gather data about sensory experience: what people see, feel, hear, taste and smell. Researchers go to people; they do not extricate people from their everyday worlds. The main reason for this is to explore the leadership experiences of female principals. They maintain that qualitative researchers work in the field, face to face with real people. They try to understand people through multiple- methods which are interactive and humanistic, for example they talk with people, watch and listen to them, read documents and records and then observe the physical space and cues. The researcher used Rallis’s (1998) advice by employing multiple methods. These are conducting interviews, analysing documents and observing the selected sites.

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010:321) qualitative research is “characterised by features such as natural setting, context sensitivity, direct data collection, rich narrative descriptions, process orientation, emergent design, indulgent data analysis and complex understanding and explanations”. A qualitative research approach was selected because with this approach, the researcher interacts with participants being studied through interviews and observations. By so doing, the study extracted experiences of the women participants.

According to qualitative researchers, life occurs in the context, which is the natural setting in which people work, study, play and live. They are interested in individuals and interactions because they seek depth rather than breadth. In other words, the researcher tries to make sense of what she has learned and in ways that are thoughtful, ethical and politically astute. In addition, the researcher’s interest were on the *why* and *how* of women’s school leadership, rather than *how many*? The researcher was only seeking to understand the experiences of women principals, and the context of their situation. A qualitative research approach made it possible for the participants to tell their own stories. Furthermore, in qualitative research, an investigation is conducted, evidence is collected and then a theory is constructed. Qualitative research is mainly interactive and uses face to face methods by interacting with selected individuals in their natural settings. Therefore, in depth interviews, participant observations and analysis of documents were employed by the researcher in addressing the research problem. The study also described the social factors that affect women principals at their workplace.

### **3.2.2 Research design**

Research design is defined as a plan for selecting subjects, research site and data collection procedures to answer the research question. The design shows which individuals will be studied and when, where, and under which circumstances (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:102). It simply includes methods which the researcher planned to utilise in order to gather information relevant to the study. This study requires that information be obtained through a face to face interpersonal situation. Interactive research approach includes ethnography, phenomenology, case study, grounded theory and critical studies (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010:313 -316)

A case study approach will be adopted in this study because it constitutes an important and useful means of data gathering in qualitative research. Cohen and Manion (2007:252) describe case study “as a specific instance that is frequently designed to illustrate a more general principle, it is the study of instance in action”.

Thus case study was more suitable for this study because it examines a bounded system; that is one group of female secondary school principals and it is interested in understanding one phenomenon which is “the experiences” of this group in selected schools. The case study could be “a person, a classroom, an institution, a programme or a policy system” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010: 102). Simmons (2009: 23) emphasises that qualitative case study methods “enable the experiences and complexity of programmes and policies to be studied in depth and interpreted in the precise socio-political contexts in which the programme and policies exist”. She further maintains that the case study is flexible; that it is neither time-dependent nor constrained by method. It can be conducted in a few days, months or over several years and can be written up in different forms and lengths appropriate to its time scale. It has the potential to engage participants in the research process. This research design will also help to address the general aim of this research which states the following objectives:

- To show factors that may lead to women being appointed in principalship posts;
- To explore the management styles of women principals in secondary schools in Limpopo Province’s Sekhukhune District;
- To find out about the administrative challenges these women face;
- To understand the personal difficulties they experience and highlight the impact on their career paths; and
- To make recommendations to other students and anyone interested in the studies of women in educational management.

### **3.3. SAMPLING**

Sampling is used as a procedure for selecting a small number of units from a population to enable researchers to make reliable inferences about the nature of that population. A sample is composed of elements that contain the most typical attributes of the population. It is a small proportion of a total set of objects or persons that comprise that of the study’s population. It is the section of individuals who are considered to be studied in a particular investigation. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2006:119) a sample is “a group of subjects or participants from whom data is collected, and this sample can be selected from a large group of persons called population”. So, in this study the population is public secondary school principals, while the sample is women principals.

#### **3.3.1. Purposeful sampling**

This is a “non-probabilistic sampling method which in contrast is utilized for selecting information which is rich and is used in in-depth study. In other words, the logic of the sample size is related to the purpose of the study, the research problem, the major data collection technique and the availability of information rich cases” (Cohen & Manion, 2007: 307). This sampling method is used in order to access knowledgeable people, because they have in-depth knowledge about a particular issue or experience by virtue of their professional role, power, expertise and experience. They maintain that the group chosen may not be representative and their comments may not be generalised. According to Creswell (2009: 178) qualitative research “purposefully selects participants that will help the researcher understand the problem and the research question”.

### **3.3.2 Selection of participants and site**

The aim of the study was to investigate the leadership experiences of women principals at secondary schools in Sekhukhune District of Limpopo Province. The first step was to contact the District Senior Manager in Sekhukhune region and seek approval for conducting the research. After the approval had been granted, a list of women principals in the district managing secondary schools and their contact details was obtained, together with their years of experience in leadership (See Appendix G.) Thereafter, telephone calls were made to check with all female principals how letters of invitations could reach them. Fortunately many had email addresses, so the researcher emailed participation invitation letters to all of them. A follow-up was made to see which principals were willing and which were not willing to participate in the study. Eight responded positively, but then at a later stage two withdrew due to some personal and professional commitments.

Six secondary schools were selected. These schools were chosen due to the reason that they met the characteristics necessary for this study. Firstly they were declared public schools, and they were located within rural areas of Sekhukhune district. Secondly, these schools were being administered by female principals. Three of these were good performing schools with good matric results and outstanding discipline. The other three schools were poorly performing and with many disciplinary problems. The idea behind these criteria was to get a fair research report, which would help the researcher understand the research problem and question.

The samples in this study were purposefully chosen because the participants live the phenomenon under investigation. Six female principals from six public secondary schools within Sekhukhune district were selected. Sekhukhune district has a fewer representation of

female principals, which is one of the reasons that motivated the researcher to want to listen to their lived stories. These principals had been in their posts for at least five years or more. The participants' ages ranged between 40 to 60 years and were all employed by the Limpopo Department of Education.

### **3.4 DATA COLLECTION METHODS**

Data are any kind of information which researchers can identify and accumulate to facilitate answers to their research questions. Data collection plans sets out in details a strategy for collecting data, which includes the general methodological orientation, the research parameters and research instruments. Since the research approach is qualitative, this also means that research instruments used qualitative strategy to collect data in the form of words rather than numbers. Three qualitative data methods often used to facilitate in-depth analysis and understanding are interviews, observation and document analysis (Mcmillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The process of data collection started at the beginning of June and ended in July 2015. This coincided with schools' mid-year examinations. Thus interviews were conducted before the winter school recess. Most schools were visited after recess for document analysis and observations.

#### **3.4.1 Interviews**

According to Cohen *et al.* (2007:345) qualitative interview is defined as an “interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest; it sees the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production and emphasises the social situatedness of research data”. The interview is a flexible tool for data collection, enabling multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard. Interview is not regarded as an ordinary, everyday conversation. Interviews have a specific purpose, are often question based with questions posed by the interviewer. The interviewer alone may express ignorance and the response must be as explicit and often as detailed as possible. In addition, “the interview is a constructed rather than a naturally occurring situation, therefore the researcher has an obligation to set up and abide by the different rules of the game in an interview” (Cohen *et al.* 2007: 349). There are different types of interviews such as in-depth, individual or face to face, focus group, semi-structured, unstructured, and structured.

##### ***3.4.1.1 Semi-structured interviews***

This study used semi-structured interviews; it is a one on one interview that merely extends and formalises conversation; and furthermore it is described as a conversation with a purpose. This technique was selected to help the researcher understand the women secondary school principals' experiences which require interactive field research. This is "face to face interaction between the researcher and the participants, enabling the researcher to collect data on how the individual makes sense of their world" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:36). It should be noted that semi-structured interviews are prepared in advance along with an interview guide with a list of questions that are based more on the objective of the research questions. This involved translating the research objectives into questions that make up the main body of the interview schedule. The interview schedule consisted of two sections; section A was aimed at gaining demographic details such as age, marital status, level of education and more. Section B consisted mainly of follow-up questions. Questions used were open-ended in order to encourage full cooperation and meaningful responses (See appendix F). According to Cohen *et al.* (2007:357) open ended questions are "flexible; they allow the interviewer to probe so that he or she may go into more depth if she or he chooses or to clear up any misunderstandings". They help to establish rapport, and they allow the interviewer to make a truer assessment of what the respondent really believes. Furthermore, they enable the researcher to test the limit of the respondents' knowledge.

McMillan and Schumacher (2006:361) assert that "it is crucial to keep uppermost in one's mind the fact that the interview is a social, interpersonal encounter, not merely a data collection exercise". An effective interviewer must not only be knowledgeable about the subject matter, but must also be an expert in interaction and communication. The researcher created an atmosphere conducive for participants to feel secure to talk freely. Time and again, participants were assured of confidentiality and informed consent, beneficence and non-beneficence. Moreover, the researcher established a good rapport by being friendly, polite, and respectful without being assertive and without losing the purpose of the interview. Only women principals took part in the interviews. Consequently, both personal and social information was collected directly from the participants.

To make the interviewees comfortable, the researcher started first by introducing and giving a brief background about herself. The participants were invited to do the same. This was a very important exercise because it assisted in dealing with the tension and suspicions that some participants might have had. Interviews were held mainly in English but at times in Sepedi especially during casual talks.

A voice recorder was used during the interviews; as this technique ensures completeness of verbal interaction and provides material for reliability checks. The participants did not show any problem with the recordings. In addition, interviewing different participants assisted in comparing the responses and also encouraged different perspectives of leadership. It was through this exercise that an enriched understanding of female principal leadership would emerge. Moreover, “the use of a recorder does not eliminate the need for taking notes to help reformulate questions and probes, and record non-verbal communication, which facilitates data analysis; as long as it does not interfere with the researcher’s full attention on the participant” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1993; 254).

### **3.4.2 Participant Observation**

All interviews took place at the participants’ workplaces with the main aim of getting a better understanding of the school atmosphere and culture through observation. Observation is a powerful method of gaining insight into different situations. The observation method relies on the researcher’s sight and hearing and recording those observations rather relying on the subject’s self-report responses to questions. This data gathering technique was suitable for this study because the researcher “had no reason to worry much about the limitations of self-report bias, social desirability or responses set, and the information was not limited to what could be recalled accurately by the subjects” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006: 256). It is also important to note that behaviour can be recorded as it occurs naturally. Observation does not rely on people’s willingness or ability to provide information and, it also allows the observer to directly see what people do rather than relying on what people say they do. The researcher’s observations were guided by the Evaluation Brief (2008) as follows: first by determining the focus which in this case was the interaction between women principals and students, educators, parents and other stakeholders. The next step designed was a system for data collection which included an observation schedule that listed the interactions, processes and behaviours to be observed. An observation schedule is an “analytical form or coding sheet, filled out by the researcher during structured observation” (Evaluation Brief, 2008: 10) (See Appendix E). It carefully specifies beforehand the categories of behaviours or events under scrutiny and under what circumstances they should be assigned to those categories. Thirdly, the researcher was the sole interviewer and observer during conversations. Lastly, it was used for observing the participants’ interactions with other stakeholders. The researcher as a participant observer was responsible for the following as advised by McMillan and Schumacher (2006: 42): observing women principals as they interact with people socially outside of a controlled research

environment, and observing them as they engaged in activities that would probably occur in much the same way as if the researcher was not present. The researcher became the participant-observer whereby she attended staff and SMT meetings. However, in some cases the participants were not aware that they were being observed. Days were set aside for school visits and this was arranged with the principals. Observations which needed clarification were discussed with the participants to ensure congruence between reactions and observations made.

### **3.4.3 Documents analysis**

According to Yanow (2007:411) document reading can also “provide background information prior to designing the research documents, before conducting interviews”. This may also help to corroborate observational and interview data, or may refute them. At the end, the researcher would have gained enough evidence that can be used to clarify, or perhaps to challenge what has been told. As a result, document reading suited this study. Various documents such as school policies, attendance registers, learner performance schedules, time book, information books, staff and SGB minutes books were perused and analysed. A brief description of each document, how it was used, who uses it and the aim of using it was given. It was difficult to locate documents in some schools because they did not have principals’ offices. However, for those schools with a principal’s office, most documents were located there. Permission was given to the researcher in some schools to make copies of relevant sections of selected documents. This was done to save time. These documents revealed clues of leadership styles and values of women principals under this study.

### **3.4.4 Field- notes**

Field notes were taken throughout the research project in every contact session. McMillan and Schumacher (2006:442) maintain that field notes “provides an avenue for documenting observations, interviews and other documents by providing an evidence of ongoing data collection”. In addition, Maree (2007:85) maintains that field notes can include “anecdotal notes, running notes and planned observations which are words or phrases that do not capture any reflection of the observer or researcher”. The researcher recorded what was seen and heard. The research sites, the atmosphere and behaviour of the people as they engaged with the participants or vice versa were noted, recorded and described. Their physical reactions in different situations were captured. Personal notes of what the researcher felt about specific events were made.

### **3.4.5 Literature review**

According to Mouton (2008: 65) literature review is “what has been researched and critiqued in literature”. Secondly, literature review helps to identify a gap, a problem, a need in the research. Furthermore, it provides a rationale for doing the proposed study and lastly, literature review informs the design and methodology of a proposed study. Literature review was employed as a data collection method because this helped the researcher to learn as much as she could about the study’s research topic, and to develop the searching and analytical skills necessary in a research project. Additionally, the literature review was used when interpreting and analysing collected data, with the main aim of comparing information. For example, do the findings corroborate with previous research, and if not, what are the gaps?

## **3.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This basically means research should be conducted with honesty and integrity. It also deals more with recognising and protecting the participants’ human rights. This was achieved in this study through informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality, and also by gaining access and acceptance.

### **3.5.1 Access and acceptance**

This aspect deals with getting permission to conduct research in selected schools from various stakeholders. Upon approval by the University of South Africa’s Ethic’s Clearance Committee a month before commencing with field work, the researcher wrote a letter to the District Senior Manager of Sekhukhune, at the Limpopo Department of Education requesting permission to conduct research in schools within the district (See appendix B). Permission was granted with a list of schools led by women principals as well as their contact details (See appendix G). Fifteen women principals were contacted telephonically requesting their email addresses; this enabled the researcher to send letters of invitation to participate in the study. Consent forms were also given to the participants (See appendix C).

Only eight female principals accepted the invitation, and two withdrew before the researcher could set the appointments. Again, procedures were explained during these meetings, and of course those who were interested were informed on matters of their concern. For example that no risks whatsoever that could affect the participants involved in the study.

### **3.5.2 Informed consent**

Informed consent concerns “the decision to participate in a study based on knowledge of what the study involves, what is demanded in terms of time, activities and topics to be covered, what risks are involved, and where to lodge a complaint should that become necessary” Bouma *et al.* (2009: 170). The consent form was drafted in English because all participants were school principals and could understand the language. This consent form explained details to everyone; so that where there were questions answers would be immediately provided. Participants were requested that upon decision to participate, they must do so in writing. Furthermore, the form clearly indicated that participants were free not to answer questions they found uncomfortable, and that taking part in the research was purely on a voluntary basis. Lastly, the participants were always reminded that they were free to withdraw at any time without penalty and that they did not need to offer any reason for doing so (See Appendix D).

### **3.5.3 Anonymity and confidentiality**

Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the study. All participants were promised that the information they provided would not be publicly reported in a way that identifies them.

This challenge has two elements; to protect the privacy of participants and their identities, names, and specific roles and to hold in confidence what they share with the researcher; and not sharing it with others using their real names. A cautionary note to remind participants that their names would be used in direct quotes in a written report was offered. Flick (2007:42) maintains that “even though organisational seniors can recognise who said what, sharing this conditional aspect of confidentiality is more an ethical stance than pretending that one can be omniscient and powerful and can protect their identities no matter what”. In this study, anonymity was ensured by not disclosing the participants’ names and those of their schools. Instead, pseudonyms were used during and after the research publication and written consent forms were detached and kept safe.

Privacy has to do with what personal information is to be communicated or withheld from others. According to Diener and Crandal quoted by Cohen *et al.* (2007) privacy can be seen in three perspectives; the sensitivity of the information, the setting that is being observed and the dissemination of information which concerns the ability to match personal information with the identity of the research participants. The right to privacy helps to ensure both confidentiality and anonymity.

### **3.6 DATA ANALYSIS**

Qualitative data analysis is the mass of words generated by interviews or observational data to be described and summarised. Lacey and Luff (2009:6) highlight that qualitative data “tends to take up many pages of typescript or lots of megabytes on a disc”. It is usually in the form of words and narratives, but may include visual images, videotapes, or other media. Qualitative research is an interpretative and subjective exercise, and the researcher is intimately involved in the process and not aloof from it.

Qualitative data analysis is a time consuming and demanding process. This took more time than the researcher had anticipated. To analyse qualitative data, the thematic approach was used. Themes generated from the interviews were categorised into sub-themes. Interviews were transcribed immediately after every interview session. The researcher had to listen to tapes several times and write down any impressions she came across before the formal analysis.

### **3.7 ISSUES OF RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY**

According to Biggam (2008:143) valid research is research that is “acceptable to the community, academics and practitioners engaged in research because it is based on tried and tested research strategies and data collection techniques; uses of data analysis that are deemed appropriate to the research project and all that are properly implemented”.

On the other hand, central to reliability is the concept of trust: it poses the question can your results be trusted? Biggam (2008: 144) emphasises that research “could be valid but unreliable, and thereby suggests that the way to deal with reliability is to make as many steps as possible and to conduct research as if someone were looking over your shoulder”. To ensure reliability, the researcher provided details on the study such as research approach, site selected, the type and number of interviewed participants in the study, specific issues that were addressed as well as interview questions, methodology strategies employed and data analysis method. Secondly, reliability was enhanced in this study through the presentation of consent forms to all participants which stipulated their rights to decline to respond to certain questions they deemed uncomfortable or inappropriate, the right to withdraw from the research, and that participation was voluntary.

The following methods were employed to enhance validity as advised by Biggam (2008); triangulation, member checking and peer debriefing.

### **3.7.1 Triangulation**

According to Vicent (2014: 277) Triangulation involves “the use of multiple and different methods, investigators, sources and theories to obtain corroborating evidence”. The purpose which is to reduce bias and cross-examine the integrity of participants’ responses. There are three major triangulation techniques. The first one is called investigator triangulation because it uses multiple researchers to investigate the research problem.

This study employed data triangulation that used different sources such as interviews and participant observation; and utilized different informants to enhance quality of data. Data were mechanically recorded using a voice recorder to ensure accurate and relatively complete data. Various documents were analysed and field notes were taken as advised by Biggam (2008: 123). This was a record of the researcher’s daily observation which formed the basis of the researcher’s evidence and analysis.

### **3.7.2 Use of peer debriefing**

Vicent (2014: 276) maintains that a” qualitative researcher during the research process is required to seek from other professionals willing to provide scholarly guidance such as academic staff, post graduate dissertation committee and the department”. Feedback from all these helped the researcher to improve the quality of the inquiry findings. In addition, by attending Unisa’s College of Education postgraduate workshops, together with the close supervision, assisted the researcher in producing reliable research work. Further, the Research Ethics Committee accepted this study’s methodology and therefore granted permission to do fieldwork. This assisted in improving the quality of the research.

### **3.7.3 Member checking**

This is another strategy for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research. It means that data and interpretation are continuously tested as they are derived from various participants from whom data is collected. According to Vicent (2014:277), member checks “establish structural coherence; testing all data to ensure that there is no internal conflict or inconsistencies. This also helped in establishing referential adequacy before the final product was produced”. Vicent (*ibid*) further emphasises that researchers need to include the voices of the respondents in the analysis and interpretation; so that analysed and interpreted data is sent back to the respondents for them to evaluate the interpretation. Within the interviews, the questions were rephrased, and probing was used to obtain the complete meaning and understanding of the responses. The

observations were confirmed with the participants through conversations. Moreover, participants were asked to confirm their responses in the transcript.

### **3.8. CONCLUSION**

This chapter presented a detailed discussion of qualitative research design and methodology as well as qualitative research methodology used to collect data in this study entitled “The leadership experiences of female principals in secondary schools within Sekhukhune district in Limpopo province”. Data collection methods included in-depth- interviews, participant observation and document analysis .The type of study, population and sampling, data analysis procedures, ethical consideration as well as issues of validity and reliability were provided. In the following chapter, research findings, analysis and interpretation will be presented. It will analyse and interpret the collected data.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

#### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter contextualises the investigation. It begins with a brief description of the school and an introduction of each participant. The chapter goes on to describe the themes which emerged from the interviews; which are factors that enhance and those that hinder women's entry into leadership, administrative and personal challenges, positive work experiences as well as future aspirations of women principals. As mentioned in chapter three, data was collected through document review, observations and a series of interviews with six women principals in Sekhukhune District, Limpopo Province.

#### 4.2. CONTEXTUALISATION OF THE INVESTIGATIONS

##### 4.2.1. Description of schools

Six women principals were interviewed in their schools. The six schools were drawn from rural areas in the Sekhukhune District in Limpopo Province. Names of schools and their communities were omitted; instead pseudonyms were used in order to avoid an easy identification and promote anonymity. The table below provides the pseudonyms of participants' and the schools they lead.

**Table 4.1. Profiles of participants and their schools.**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Schools</b>
1. Rose	Fauna Secondary School
2. Lati	Flora Secondary School
3. Emma	Fossil High School
4. Terry	Stones Secondary School
5. Ivy	Butterfly High School
6. Lizzy	Jacaranda Secondary School

Fauna Secondary School is located east of Sekhukhune district, and situated 10km from the village. The main road is tarred, but the road leading to the school is gravel; about 10km away from the main road. Houses in this village have electricity. The type of vegetation between the

village and school is predominantly shrubs; there are no tall trees. However, it was evident that trees were chopped down at some point, probably for firewood.

The school was well fenced with a security guard at the gate. It is a very small school; an old building with only 18 classrooms to cater for Grade 8 to 12 learners. Fifteen classrooms are used for teaching and learning while three other rooms are used as the principal's office, a staffroom and school storeroom for textbooks, stationery, tools and other teaching amenities. The school has electricity and resources such a photocopier and laptops. Next to the gate, a two roomed house is erected for the nutrition programme. Cleanliness is a distinguishing characteristic in the school both inside and outside the classrooms. Learners were also observed to be neat in their uniform. The school has a vegetable gardening project which is well maintained. Many trees are planted within the school yard. The sports ground is outside the school yard.

Flora High School is deeply rural and based in a mountainous area 15km away from the main tarred road. The school is situated right in the heart of the village. This is a newly built school with 14 classrooms. It is a no fee school. There are 14 classrooms and one of these serves as both staffroom and principal's office; with cupboards for keeping school documents and records. The school is fenced, neat, has electricity and the gates are always locked. The school provides food for learners through a nutrition programme. On the down side, the school encounters frequent water shortages.

Fossil High School is situated near the main tarred road. This is a school of its own kind. It is an old school which is not well maintained. It is located just in the centre of the village. The school is big with a learner enrolment of 195 and only 10 educators. Almost all classrooms are without doors and have broken window panes. Even though the school has electricity, some classrooms were without light bulbs, switches and plugs. The explanation given was that school property is stolen because there is no proper fencing around the school and security guards for protection. There is insufficient furniture as some learners were observed sitting on crates; and some on camp chairs they brought along from their own homes. In addition, the school owns a photocopier, and the principal's office had lots of chalk boxes.

There is a separate block with three staffrooms, the principal and deputy's offices, an empty room as well as toilets which were locked due to water shortage. School discipline is described by Emma as a serious challenge which emanates from educators and learners, as well as parents. Educators reportedly spend most of their time in the staffroom instead of in the

classroom teaching learners. Some learners confirmed that the environ-loo was in a shocking condition, so when nature calls they have to leave the school. Learners do not wear proper school uniform; some learners were observed jumping over the school fence in and out of the school yard. No one cares in this school. Again, some parents took their children out of this school to other schools because the DoE was in the process of merging the school with a better school.

Stones Secondary School is located some 30km away from the main tarred road. The school is located between mountains. There are rivers without proper bridges to cross before one can reach the school. The community around the school is intensely involved in farming. This is the only secondary school serving the community. The school's building is made of half brick and stones and the front part of the school fence is built of stones. Classrooms were observed to have enough furniture but walls are full of graffiti. The school has electricity. There is an office for the principal, office for other SMT members, two staffrooms, a kitchen for staff well furnished with necessary appliances such as a microwave stove and refrigerator. The school has SGB paid educators and administrative staff.

Terry describes her school as deeply rooted in its traditions and cultural practices whereby boys and girls take pride in attending initiation school at some stage in their lives. This heavily impacts the school's entire planning. Butterfly High School consists of two blocks or building of four classrooms each and 15 mobile classrooms. There is tall grass behind the buildings with lots of papers and sweets raps trapped in. Livestock was roaming the yard. The school has a tuck-shop, insufficient furniture as some learners were observed seated on their schoolbags while others were seen sharing chairs.

Jacaranda High School has a learner enrolment of 606 and 30 educators. The school is situated right at the entrance of the village along the main tarred road, which makes it easily identifiable. Neighbouring houses also have electricity. Some educators and learners commute from the nearest town. The circuit office is located in this village. The school has old buildings which are well maintained, with a security fence and guards, sufficient classrooms, a big hall which caters for school events that is also available for use by other schools. They also lease it out for memorial services and the DoE workshops and meetings. The school is very busy; there are jacaranda trees around the yard which serve as shade for vehicles. A beautiful garden makes the school outstandingly attractive and is well taken care of by all stakeholders.

#### **4.2.2 Description of participants**

The six women participants were selected by virtue of accepting the invitation to participate in the project and agreeing to the terms and conditions of the project. They were drawn from rural schools in Sekhukhune District, Limpopo Province. Pseudonyms were used as a matter of confidentiality and privacy. The participants' personal and professional attributes vary. Women principals in this study ranged between the ages of 44 to 55. They all have children; four of them were married, one was single and the other one was divorced. They are all South African and speak Sepedi as their mother tongue. Their career paths vary; five of them were appointed at the age of 40 and beyond except for Lati who assumed her leadership role at the age of 38. All of them had been in leadership positions for at least five years, managing between 100 and 626 learners and 10 to 26 educators. Women principals in this study were presented individually based on data provided by interviews, observations and field notes.

### **Rose**

Rose started teaching after completing her Teachers' diploma in one of the Education colleges in the Sekhukhune district. She began her career as a language educator teaching Sepedi in senior classes (FET). Three years later she was appointed HOD for Sepedi and that is when she started her administrative duties. She is 46 years old, married with 4 children; stays with her husband and her nine year old boy. She holds the following qualifications: secondary Teacher's Diploma, Bachelor of Arts (Hons), a certificate in school leadership and management and she is currently pursuing her Master's degree in Folklore studies. She has never worked in any other school except the one she is leading now.

Rose describes herself as a born again Christian, which was also observed as she had requested that the interviews be opened and closed with a word of prayer. She was inspired by the former principal whom she succeeded, who also happened to be a spiritual leader. This is what she said in her interview:

My former principal told me that I must step in and act as a principal, I must not fear anything and must invite God in everything I do or plan.

Rose is an easy going person, humble, and her colleagues call her "ausi" meaning sister. She commands the respect of all her colleagues and is appreciative of the help and support she gets in the school.

### **Lati**

She is the only female principal in her circuit area, and the youngest of the six participants in the study. She was appointed at 38, is married with 3 children, very ambitious and always looking serious. She started her career in Mpumalanga Province and was transferred to Limpopo through a promotion as HOD for commerce in the school she is now leading. She is very active and leads educators older than herself. She has gained a lot of experience in administrative duties delegated to her while she was still a cs1 educator. She explained:

By that time I was a cs1 educator doing grade twelve entries and also drawing the invigilation time table.

Lati manages 426 learners and 20 educators. Her qualifications include a secondary Teachers' diploma. She has enrolled for BA and BEd in leadership and management. She has been serving in the teaching field for 23 years, but was appointed principal in her 18<sup>th</sup> year. She believes in the policy of "Batho pele" meaning people first. She is ambitious and focused:

I think at that time I wanted to lead, I didn't want to listen to any negative things that would disturb me and make me lose focus, or make me doubt myself. I knew in my heart that all I need is a chance to prove myself.

### **Emma**

The longest serving participant in this study is Emma with 30 years' work experience and 13 years as a principal. She travelled a rough and long journey to her leadership. She is married with four children. She has also served in two schools, one in Waterberg and the other one in Sekhukhune district. She is woman principal in the study who advanced to a leadership position within a five year period of her first years of teaching. She was promoted as HOD for History and later as deputy principal within four years. Within two years, she acted as a principal and was finally appointed as the principal in 2002. She had always dreamt of being a leader while still at primary school. She said that she became aware of the fact that African women are undermined while doing her junior degree at university; during a history discussion on how women were devalued. She said she discovered that women are oppressed in all spheres of life. She said during her interview:

All the stereotypes levelled against women made me angry... So when I got into teaching I was assertive and wanted to prove a point and most importantly to be on an equal footing with male educators.

She also indicated that these stereotypes impacted on her leadership style, as she became more serious and aggressive when approaching male educators yet relaxed in her approach towards female educators. She is, however, looking forward to retiring from teaching soon.

### **Terry**

She had never dreamt of leading a school, her post was never advertised. She confirmed this during her interview:

I found myself running the school because people who were due to act as principal rejected the offer. Back then, the school was still small with an enrolment of 300. So I saw an opportunity and grabbed it.

She is the only woman principal in this study without managerial experience prior to her appointment. She never served in any senior position; she went straight from cs1 educator to being a principal. Even though she holds a certificate in management and leadership she was still lacking in many aspects of administrative work. She has, however, enrolled for B.Ed. (Hons) in educational leadership and management. She also confirmed that a series of challenges she faced had actually contributed to her not having a desire to lead. She also confirmed that 90% of the people did not approve of her appointment as principal of the school, based on the fact that she had no managerial experience.

### **Lizzy**

Lizzy was appointed HOD for mathematics, deputy principal and finally a principal. She manages 626 learners and 26 educators. She is very confident, and comfortable with departmental rules and regulations. She is not scarred to take bold decisions. She has problems with negative attitudes towards her as a woman principal and this how she addressed the challenge:

Some male parents are not comfortable to be attended by me saying “Ga re bolele le basadi” (meaning they don’t talk or try to solve issues with women). ... This made me angry and stubborn... and I told them in their faces that I am the principal here, if you don’t want to talk to me... you better go to the circuit office.

She is a PhD candidate and is looking forward to working at a higher tertiary institution as soon she completes her degree.

## **Ivy**

She indicated that she was recruited by her circuit manager to apply for the post. She holds two university degrees and is currently pursuing a Master's degree. She gained most of her managerial experience from volunteering at the circuit office and also serving as HOD and acting as principal before her actual appointment. She has been a principal for 11 years. She is a single parent and has confessed that her home life is not a challenge as it does not interfere with her work. She indicated this during her interview:

I have family commitments just like any parent would, .. yes its difficult raising two boys by myself...but.. all these does not interfere with managerial work.

## **4.3 DOCUMENTS ANALYSED**

### **4.3.1 SGB minute book**

There is an indication that most SGB members hold their meetings on a monthly basis and parents are invited quarterly to attend parents' meeting as per the departmental request. Attendance of these meetings in most schools is satisfactory, and indicates that most parents are interested in the education of their children. It is also evident from the minutes that the SGB contributes funds for enrichment classes or intervention strategy as per management proposal. It is also evident that SGB members are supportive on educational excursions. However, one school out of the six schools shows that the SGB is drafting school policies and is in the process of adopting them after consultation with other stakeholders.

### **4.3.2 Staff minute book**

From the staff minute books reviewed the researcher was able to know how many staff meetings were held, who did the talking and how women principals responded or spoke. Data revealed that schools in this study hold staff meetings; three schools hold them monthly and two hold them quarterly. One school holds the meetings weekly in the form of morning briefing sessions. There is also an indication that women principals in this study often empower some staff members to chair meetings. However, it was also noticed that the school with serious

challenges holds one meeting or none in a term. Furthermore, most challenges highlighted during women principals' interviews were addressed during some staff meetings.

#### **4.3.3 Attendance register**

The attendance register in this case included a variety of other forms of control systems within the visited schools. This includes time off, movement register, leave register and time book and log book. From the documents perused the following were observed: normal sick leave and study leave were noted to be more frequent from female educators. There was an indication of constant movement of educators during their free periods, and this was more common in the schools nearby towns or those located around shops.

Again, there were many time-offs recorded as many educators are Union members therefore are released to attend to union matters. A time book is a register designed for educators, and support staff to indicate both their arrival and departure times at work. They do this by appending times and signatures. Time books were observed to be in the principal's office in three schools for strict control measures and in the staffroom in the other three schools. It must be indicated that records of schools which keep time books in the staffroom showed a minimal record of late arrivals as compared those schools' time books kept in the principal's office. Learners' attendance registers were also perused. It was observed that educators sometimes did not update daily attendance, but sometimes updated it weekly or at the end the of each school quarter.

#### **4.3.4 Information book**

This book is used as another tool by women principals to communicate with educators on a regular basis. Educators are informed on urgent matters like tests to be administered, reminders on deadlines or submissions, workshops to be attended and any other relevant information to educators. Some women principals communicate almost daily with their staff through the information book. Women principals in this study who keep time books in their offices also write important messages for staff to read before the start of the day. This was observed to be a strategy to encourage educators to arrive on time for work. Notices such as urgent matters regarding the DOE such as educators' workshop which interferes with school programmes, educators on leave, sometimes learners absent representing the school in various competitions, death notices, celebrations and congratulatory messages, visitors to the school such community leaders, researchers, motivational speakers and DoE officials were recorded on the information

book. Lastly, educators were also reminded of scheduled meetings, important deadlines to honour in submitting marks and schedules, and were continuously encouraged to observe time.

#### **4.3.5 Policy documents on parental involvement**

Schools visited relied heavily on government policies and legislations such as the South African Schools Act of 1996 (Section 23), White Paper on Education and Training of 1995 and of 1996 as guidelines to involve parents in the education of their children. Policy documents on code of conduct, sports, language, admission and schools' constitution were available at some schools and unavailable at others. However, schools were not in possession of policy documents that initiate and promote parental involvement in their schools. Documents analysed such as the schools' SGB and staff minute books indicated that parents are invited to attend annual general meetings, school events such matric dance, and award ceremonies and to collect their children's progress reports. However, some participants indicated that these school events were poorly attended. Women principals in this study claimed that parents are given a chance, under management reports, to identify barriers to learning and propose strategies to address those barriers. In addition, they also mentioned that SGB members represent parents in the decision making of the school.

### **4.4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

#### **4.4.1 Introduction of themes to be analysed**

Data were collected by means of semi-structured interviews, observations and field notes. The interview schedule appears in Appendix F. The experiences shared by the six participants contributed to the understanding of the nature of their experiences as secondary school principals in the Sekhukhune district. The process of thematic analysis was used to process data. It was utilised in order to get themes relating to the leadership experiences of women. The themes significant to this study included factors which contributed to women principals' appointment, their administrative as well as personal challenges and the extent to which they impact the whole school management , positive work experiences , how they prepared for leadership, factors they think disturb and can enhance participation of women in rural secondary leadership and their future aspirations. Themes generated from interviews are categorised as follows:

#### **Table. 4.4.1. Summary of emerged themes and related sub themes**

<b>EMERGED THEMES</b>	<b>SUB THEMES</b>
<b>4.4.1.1. Theme 1: The Long walk to principalship</b>	4.4.1.1.1. Motivational factors 4.4.1.1.2. Leadership preparation and mentoring
<b>4.4.1.2. Theme 2: Work experiences</b>	4.4.1.2.1. Administrative challenges 4.4.1.2.2. Personal challenges 4.4.1.2.3. Positive work experience 4.4.1.2.4. Factors disturbing women in participating in leadership positions.
<b>4.4.1.3. Theme 3: Stakeholder perceptions</b>	4.4.1.3.1. Perceptions of women principals by stakeholders
<b>4.4.1.4. Theme 4: Future aspirations</b>	4.4.1.4.1. Enhancing women participation in leadership roles 4.4.1.4.2. Future leadership aspirations of women principals

#### **4.4.1.1 Long walk to principalship**

Women principals in the study had a myriad of experiences before their final appointment as school principals. They started off as teachers normally referred to as cs1 educators which means curriculum specialists in level one (lowest rank) in the education system. Data revealed that it took women principals in this study a longer period to advance to their leadership posts, and they confirmed that they had served from 14 to 21 years before their actual appointment as secondary school principals. Lizzy had served the longest years; 21 years, Lati 18 years, Ivy 17, Emma 15 and then lastly Rose and Terry with 14 years. Women principals acquired most of their qualifications through long distance education. It was not easy for these women to end up in management positions; their journey was a struggle, firstly because they had to prepare themselves in terms of qualifications and experience. Secondly, they had to compete for a role that had previously been held by men. This resonates with Moorosi (2006:251) when she argues that “although South African policy guarantees equal treatment for everyone before the law, the reality of women principals’ experiences suggests that women fight a constant battle against discrimination at two different levels; organisational and societal”.

The theoretical framework that underpins this study is liberal feminism. It must be indicated that theoretical framework is only a tool which helps to analyse data to be understood but not the study's main purpose. Liberal feminism originated from a feminist theory which aims to understand the nature of gender inequality by examining women's gender role and their experiences. According to Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy(2007:2) maintains that "liberal feminism conceives of freedom as personal autonomy-living a life of ones' own choosing ,and political autonomy being the co-author of the conditions under which one lives". This theory holds that the exercise of personal autonomy depends on certain enabling conditions that are insufficiently present in women's lives, or that social arrangements fail to respect women's personal autonomy and other elements of women flourishing. Furthermore, they contend that women's needs and interests are insufficiently reflected in the basic conditions under which they live, and that those conditions lack legitimacy because women are inadequately represented in the processes of democratic self-determination. Finally, they claim that autonomy deficits like these are due to the gender system, citing Okin(2003) when saying that the patriarchal nature of inherited traditions and institutions, and that women's movement should work to identify and remedy them. After a thorough evaluation, the researcher found that qualities of women principals' personalities were different from the stereotypes of women.

The next section of this chapter will present women principals who have proved themselves to be progressive, confident and independent, critical thinkers and decision makers which is quite rare in patriarchal societies. The researcher believes these qualities reflect some of the liberal feminism values. These are the qualities of personhood that helped them achieve their personal autonomy.

#### **4.4.1.1.1. Motivational factors**

The under-representation of women in secondary school leadership led to the researcher's interest in what are the factors that boost their appointment as principals. A lot of research has been conducted both locally and internationally by researchers such as Lumby 2010; Moorosi 2010; Arar & Queder 2011; and Parsaloi (2012) which reports academic credentials, dedication and self- confidence, managerial experiences, familiarity with the school community and external motivational factors accounting for representation of women in school management positions, and which were also confirmed by women principals in this study.

- *Academic credentials*

Women principals in this study had acquired qualifications in the form of certificates, diplomas and degrees (Priola & Brannan, 2009; Moorosi, 2006). Most of them received their qualifications in management through private study before their appointment as principals and after they had assumed positions as HODs, deputy- principals and even after their appointment as principals. The fact that some participants had acquired the qualifications through part time study could be attributed to their family's financial constraints. Even though women principals in this study are highly qualified, they did not get into teaching with these qualifications. These were achieved in the course of their careers. Moorosi (2006) maintains that the majority of Black African women's economically poor backgrounds forces them to seek employment first after finishing school. This posed a problem more especially for those who initially aspired to lead because finances became a problem to their acquisition of academic qualifications. This could also be viewed as a stumbling block for leadership advancement. Their qualifications played as motivational factors for them to advance into leadership positions. Four of the participants in the study had acquired university degrees, with the exception of Terry, at the time of their appointments as principals. These women principals confirmed this during their interviews when asked this question: What are your qualifications? This is what they said:

I have BA.Ed. BA (Hons) in Sepedi and ACE in Leadership and Management.  
(Rose)

I have Secondary Teachers' Diploma, BA in Communication Studies and I have just completed a B.ED in Educational Leadership and Management.  
(Lati)

I hold a JSTC (Junior Secondary Teacher's Course), Teachers' Diploma, BA (Hons) in History and B.ED in Education Management. (Emma)

I obtained a teachers diploma from the Sekhukhune College of education and also ACE (Advanced Certificate in Education) in School Leadership and Management. (Terry)

I hold BA (Hons) in Maths, B.ED (Hons) in educational leadership and management and MEd in Leadership and Management. I am currently a PhD candidate. (Lizzy)

In the past, South African requirements for a school principal in a secondary school were REQV 14 which is a university degree, qualification in education at tertiary level, and at least

6 years teaching experience. Currently, anyone who holds a certificate, diploma or university degree in educational leadership and management and has at least 5 years teaching experience may be appointed. This could assist women principals in preparation to fighting for their personal autonomy.

According to Awad and Eldon (2015:8) there is a “strong consistency in which societies have organised themselves into public realms considered male and private realms considered female”. They assert that the private realm is associated with the household and home while the public realm is connected to the broader society, including the political sphere; determining how a society should be run, and the economy including all professional labour. Men have been able to dominate the public sphere while women have historically been confined to the private sphere, which served to underpin their exclusion from full citizenship participation. Based on these descriptions there is no doubt in the researcher’s mind that women principals in this study made their choices to move out of the private sphere into the public sphere. They slowly acquired the required qualifications for the principal’s post. By so doing, they moved away from strengthening the idea of feminine traditional values which is stipulated in the patriarchal culture. They used their academic credentials to become different from the stereotypes by occupying traditional men’s roles. All this reflects boldness, courage, determination and self-confidence. This means that women principals are ready to contribute to their societies and the whole world. All this reflects more on liberal feminism than feminism.

Liberal feminist notion denotes that women have the autonomy to shape their own destiny and achieve any task despite the barriers they face.

- *Managerial experience*

Women principals in this study were not only in possession of qualifications, they also had long service in the teaching profession. The number of years they had spent at secondary school in management positions as HODs (Heads of Department) and deputy principals aided them in gaining managerial experience. They had been principals for at least 5 to 13 years, while their teaching experiences ranged from 21 to 30 years. This is evident in some of the interviews conducted with the participants:

I started teaching in 1985 in Waterberg district, and then I got promoted in 1990 as HOD for History Department in Sekhukhune district. Then in 1994 I was

appointed deputy principal, acted as principal from 1998 until 2002 when finally appointed as the principal in this school. (Emma)

My former principal believed in me... she delegated some of the administrative duties to me... I coordinated Grade 12 examination entries and was a member of the time-tabling committee... And I was good at it. Again when I arrived at the school I am leading now I continued doing the good work I learnt from my previous school. (Lati)

Okay, I started teaching fresh from Sekhukhune College of Education in 1992. I was promoted as an HOD for Sepedi in 1995. And then from 1997 – 1998, I acted as a principal because the principal was on study leave. Then he came back in 1999 and continued with his work as a principal until 2000. The principal left the school for greener pastures in March 2001. I acted again until 2006 when I was appointed permanent principal of this school. (Rose)

I started teaching in 1989 in this school, and then in 1998 I was promoted as an HOD for Mathematics. In 2010 I became the deputy – principal and was appointed the principal in 2012. (Lizzy)

The above-mentioned data revealed that at least five participants; Emma, Rose, Lati, Lizzy and Ivy had shown qualities of leadership in the previous senior positions they held before their appointment as school principals. Women principals had acted as deputy-- principals and HODs and this shows that they had knowledge of administrative duties at secondary schools, and they were afforded an opportunity to run the schools while their principals were on leave. So, they were used to running the schools to such an extent that they accepted the recommendation that they were the most suitable candidates, and they applied for the principalship posts in which they were successfully appointed. This shows that some women are taking charge of their lives and making progress in their career paths. These principals made an effort to be recognised not only as classroom managers but also as school managers.

In addition, women participants prepared themselves for promotion by taking responsibilities in their school; volunteering for activities and seeking advice and patronage from senior administrators. However, Lumby's (2010: 17) study findings indicate that "although women seem generally confident in their abilities and preparatory experience, the majority are primarily occupied in stereotypical female areas such as curriculum, staffing and pastoral care

rather than stereotypical masculine areas of premises and finances”. This resonates with Moorosi (2010: 7) when emphasising that the “on-job-training for some women principals had largely focused on administrative experiences rather than the broader professional experience needed for promotion”.

- *Dedication and self-confidence*

An additional factor that seems to have enhanced women into leadership positions is also reflected by data as women principals were their own motivators. Women principals in the study did not only rely on their qualifications and managerial experiences but on their confidence and determination. Furthermore, the fact that women applied for promotional posts, serves as evidence that they were confident about their leadership skills and therefore qualified as school managers. They were shortlisted, interviewed and finally appointed into those posts. Five participants in this study applied for principalship posts.

When I arrived at this school, the former principal used to tell me that I was good in taking care of my duties and that members of the staff took me more seriously than him, and this made me realised that I can actually lead. I started acting as principal at the age of 39, I was the youngest and most active, I knew at that time all I needed was to lead and to bring my staff together. (Lati)

The post was advertised, my application went through sifting, I was shortlisted and then invited for interviews and ultimately won the post. (Rose)

When the principalship post was advertised I was an acting principal, and members of the community stated clear to me that the school needed a man, “sekolo sa rena se nyaka monna”. Yes they wanted a male principal. ... well I was shortlisted, invited to the interviews ... hey on the day of the interviews the SGB members together with members of the Royal kraal came to the interview venue with the intension to stop the interview because ‘their man’ was not shortlisted. DOE officials in charge overruled them, and interviews proceeded as scheduled. (Emma)

Promotional posts were advertised, I applied, and I was shortlisted and was the only female contender. I went through interviews and was appointed as principal at the end. (Ivy)

Some participants like Emma had always dreamt of leading a school ever since her young age. She admitted that she wanted to lead from her primary school age, to an extent that she was even called names but when she entered the teaching field she realised there were actually few women leaders in secondary school management. This also shows how assertive she became in her career path. Emma asserted this during her interview:

I realised that women were not regarded as leaders.... So ... I told myself that I have to prove a point that women can also lead.

This shows that some participants planned to become principals when they started their teaching career. They worked hard to achieve their dreams and their ambitions could be attributed to them being able to realise their achievement. Parsaloi (2012:22) cited Kelly (2008) when saying women had sought out leadership initiatives as they were compelled to do so by an inherent passion for leadership. As they advanced in their careers, their interest in leadership intensified. The participants emphasized that interest alone is not sufficient, and that leadership is earned by means of an individual's hard work, commitment and dedication. This is in line with what Lindo's (2012:66) study who maintains that "apart from self-actualisation women remained attracted to principalship because of the desire to serve and create positive change". One Jamaican female principal (Marissa) confirmed this "it's a tremendous feeling to see positive changes you are able to bring to young people's lives."

Another value of liberal feminism can be seen in women principals in this study which is independence, because women in a patriarchal culture are too dependent on others and do not have powers to determine anything in their lives. They are also expected to be obedient to their husbands and the husbands control their lives. The decision to become secondary school principals shows independence on their part. This also means that they refused to listen to the stereotypical voices against their choices. Stereotypical voices such as 'women are weak', 'women cannot lead', 'they cry easily' and 'women cannot take bold decisions' and that 'schools need male leaders'. They refused to be influenced by their mothers and sisters who have been oppressed by patriarchy and by their fathers, brothers and husbands who are the carriers of the male dominance theory.

- ***Familiarity with the school environment***

From the collected data, it seemed that women principals' popularity with the community boosted their chances of being appointed as school principals. Interview data revealed that they

were appointed in schools they had served as educators, HODs, deputy principals and acting principals before their actual appointment as principals. When responding to the question, *for how long have you been the principal in this school?* Their responses were:

Okay, I started teaching fresh from Sekhukhune College of Education in 1992. I was promoted as an HOD for Sepedi in 1995. And then from 1997 – 1998, I acted as a principal because the principal was on study leave. Then he came back in 1999 and continued with his work as a principal until 2000. The principal left the school for greener pastures in March 2001. I acted again until 2006 when I was appointed permanent principal of this school. (Rose)

I started teaching in 1992, and I was transferred to another school because I was promoted as an HOD for Commerce in 2006, and in 2009 I acted as principal and then appointed as principal in 2010 March. I have been principal for six years. (Lati)

I started teaching in 1985 in Waterberg district, and then I got a promotional post in 1990 as HOD for History in Sekhukhune district. In 1994 I was appointed deputy- principal. From 1995 to 1998 I acted as principal while holding the post of deputy. The principal was on study leave for three years. He came back but left the school for a higher post as circuit manager in 2001. In 2002, I was finally appointed the principal of the school. I have been in this post for seven years. (Emma)

I started teaching in 1989 in this school, and then in 1998 I was promoted as an HOD for Mathematics; in 2010 I became the deputy principal and was appointed the principal in 2012. (Lizzy)

I started working here in 1994, and was appointed as principal in 2008. So I have been in this field for at least 21 years. (Terry)

A follow up question from the researcher was: *Do you mean you have been at this school for 21 years?*

Oh ... yes... you see I can't go anywhere, I am married in this village, and the school is near... so it will be a waste of energy and resources to shift to another school. (Terry)

However, this could also suggest that chances are very low that these women could lead new schools in which they have never acted as deputy- principals or as principals before. It seemed that they waited for a promotion in the schools they had experience at; otherwise opportunities appeared to be minimal .It is as if they did not feel confident to lead in a new school environment. Again the researcher noticed that three of the participants; Ivy, Lizzy and Emma are in their fifties, which can be concluded that age also played a crucial role in their appointment. This is informed by Moorosi (2010:5) in her conceptualisation of her findings that “the older the candidate, the longer the years of experience mostly in teaching and the higher the likelihood that they would have served in the school”. Moorosi (*ibid*: 10) also emphasised that it seems familiarity to the school community was prevalent as an unspoken criteria for selection.

However, this could also suggest that women were also familiar with the existing challenges ahead of them. Again, women chose to disregard those challenges, and this shows courage on their side. According to Smit (2013:91) “courage is one of the feminist attributes which is the capacity to move ahead into the unknown, teasing new ideas in the world of practice”. She cited Regan and Brooks (1995) who assert that courage also involves a degree of risk-taking for the good of groups or individuals, and a quality of leaving oneself vulnerable in a difficult situation. This, according to the researcher, is not typical of stereotyped women in the patriarchal culture.

- ***Role of mentors and family***

Women principals’ accounts in this study showed that their dedication coupled with their qualifications and managerial experiences gave them confidence to apply for principalship posts. However, data revealed that they were also motivated by external sources. It reflects how others’ perceptions of them played an important role in their careers. Three of the participants received motivation from their senior personnel in the Department of Education (DoE), such as former principals, circuit managers and members of the SGB. They applied for the posts because they were also recommended by others such as those they succeeded, or SGB members. Rose revealed that:

My former principal Mr Mabuza motivated me to step in and act as principal, and he even told me that I was the most dedicated HOD... from that time I considered being a leader.

My former principal Mr Ntake always tell me that I must apply for principalship post because educators take me more seriously than him....and my role model was my former principal; I got so inspired when I saw her succeeding as a school manager. (Lati)

This suggests that these women got into these posts only after recommendation by others, which shows how external motivation contributed to their appointment. However, they could still be applauded for applying which means that they also saw themselves as possible leaders. Data revealed that Rose and Lati were the only participants motivated by male principals, while the other participants were motivated by females. Ivy received a lot of motivation from her circuit manager and SGB chairperson, both of whom were females. She mentioned that when the principalship posts were advertised, they advised her to apply because they said she was the most suitable candidate. Other than that, her sister who was a primary school principal also motivated her.

However, this is different with Lizzy, as she revealed:

My own mother is my role model, she has been a community leader for a long time, and my mother initiated a committee to look after the interests and needs of the community. I then told myself that if my mother can lead what would stop me.

Women principals in this study appreciated these individuals as their motivators and mentors; as those who contributed to their readiness for leadership positions. In addition, the fact that they were encouraged and identified as potential and capable candidates bolstered their confidence before and when applying for the posts. This is in line with what Netshitangani and Msila (2014:262) maintain that “even though for some of the women their promotion came through the interventions of more powerful males, nonetheless, they still explain that they believe that women can be appropriate in these management positions”.

#### **4.4.1.1.2. Leadership preparation and mentoring**

The fact that women principals had academic qualifications and managerial experience could also be added as one way they had prepared for their leadership positions. They seemed well equipped because they had relevant qualifications in leadership and management which enabled them to apply for the principalship posts. They had served as HODs, deputy- principals and some had acted as principals. This concurs with Priola and Brannan (2009:379) who maintain that “education, experience and self- determination could be attributed to the fact that

women principals need to feel well prepared before applying for leadership positions”. Moreover, women principals reported in the interviews that the Department of Education (DoE) organised leadership workshops and conferences for them immediately upon their appointments. In addition, SGB induction workshops were organised by their districts which also guided them to differentiate duties of governance and management. Some participants appreciated their unions for also orientating them in leadership. They also indicated that the DOE rendered workshops to inform school leaders of new policies and changes in the curricula. It could be concluded that the DOE was aware of some of the challenges school managers encounter in their leadership route. Following are extracts from interviews which indicate how women principals in this study prepared for their leadership posts:

Well, I had leadership and management courses, I also attended leadership workshops organised by the DOE. Again, I used to volunteer at the circuit office after hours before my appointment as principal. I learnt a lot while working there. (Ivy)

Ivy had quite an extensive experience of assisting after hours at the circuit office. She admitted that this equipped her more especially on procedures to follow when administering certain tasks.

I attended leadership workshops organised by the DOE, women leadership conferences organised by my teacher union, and I also studied educational leadership and management. (Lizzy)

The DOE organised a few training workshops as well as induction sessions immediately the after the principal appointment. (Emma)

When I acted as principal, I enrolled for ACE in school leadership and management in order to equip myself. I also think some workshops by the DOE has helped me prepare for this post. (Rose)

However, Moorosi, (2010:6) strongly emphasises that “while progression from HOD to deputy-principal, to principal appears to be the normal route of promotion, the significant factor is that preparation happened mostly by default for women principals; most of them never set out to become principals”. Moorosi (2010:5) also indicated that in “South Africa the newly proposed national qualification into principalship is the advanced certificate in education in

school leadership, and this does not include training in education management; and therefore does not play a preparatory role”.

In addition, Lindo (2012:64) asserts that “even though women principals appreciated assistance from other sources such as mentors and role models, there is no formal system of mentorship for women principals”. The findings in this study confirm these assertions because women principals had not mentioned any formal mentoring programmes designed for them, they had informal mentors who consisted mainly of women and two men mentors. Moorosi (2006: 266) quoted Greyvenstein (2000) who confirms the findings when maintaining that “cross- sex role mentoring often results in lack of women role models which is often identified as a big barrier to women aspiring to management positions”. In agreement with Moorosi (2006), Netshitangani and Msila (2014: 264) proclaim that “if we have less successful women managers in rural areas, we will have fewer girls aspiring to be managers”. They also quoted Beaman *et al.* (2012) who avers that ‘exposure to own-gender experts can provide such role models, break down stereotypes regarding gender roles and improve individual women’s aspirations and propensity to enter traditionally male dominated areas”.

Women principals have made progress in their career paths from being cs1 educators who are confined only to the classroom to becoming secondary school principals. They took action to shape their lives according to their desires but most importantly taking part in the public sphere which was chiefly occupied by males. This could serve as an inspiration to other women educators. However, leadership comes with its own challenges. The following sessions reveal leadership experiences as reported by the six women principals in the study.

#### **4.4.1.2. Work experiences**

This section presents work experiences identified by women principals as challenges, how these affected the whole school management, and will concurrently present some coping strategies they employed. Data revealed that women principals experienced different challenges in their different environmental settings. For example women in the study complained about the negative attitude often displayed by some stakeholders, but this varied according to their contextual differences. This is consistent with post- structural feminism because it recognises these differences between women of the same race, in terms of age, religion and social class. This theory also emphasises that there is no universal truth that generalises women’s experience; knowledge produced from women’s experience is historically and culturally specific and is a particular discourse (Fenwick, 2006). Furthermore,

Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011:456) argues that “if we deem gender as a valid way of looking at leadership, women’s voices and experiences are more important and there is a need to draw from them”. Therefore, challenges reported in this study were administrative, personal, societal as well as organisational.

#### **4.4.1.2.1. Administrative challenges**

In public, the school principal is declared an accounting officer, meaning that everything good or/and bad happening in the school they must account for. Even though most of the participants had school management courses backed up by their previous leadership experiences, there were factors that still cropped up in the school which they had to deal with on a daily basis. School principals must manage the school curriculum, people and the school’s resources. This section will explore their experiences with regard to school administration and to an extent show some strategies they employed to deal with their challenges. Challenges are reported to emanate from various stakeholders such as parents and communities, learners, educators and the Department of Education.

- ***Lack of commitment and dedication from educators***

Some participants in the study reported that they had to deal with educators who are not committed to their work. They maintained that they are stuck with educators who always want to be forced to attend learners, fail to discipline learners and do not to meet deadlines for tasks requested. This impacted heavily on the whole school management programme. Emma indicated this during her interview:

I have wheelbarrow educators, they must be pushed at all times otherwise they will remain in the staffroom for the whole day without attending to learners. Educators are not supportive even the SMT members. They can’t handle classroom discipline... I mean they always call me every time they encounter problems with learners, or also send learners to my office with minor offences that they themselves can handle.

Observation data confirms interview data. In Emma’s school, the researcher observed a majority of educators in the staff room during lessons and who were busy with their conversations until one of them came rushing in and alerting “they are here” referring to the DOE officials. They pretended to be working when DOE officials were present, once DOE officials left the school premises educators resumed their style of being passive. The researcher

also overheard one of the educators saying “I will be back in ten minutes; I won’t take long because I just want to give these learners something to keep them busy.” Indeed she came back in ten minutes and joined her colleagues who were relaxed in the staffroom.

Moreover, educators were reportedly unable to take extra lessons as many of them commute. These educators knock off exactly when formal schooling finishes, and there is no sacrifice from their side.

In most instances they come late, and also want to leave earlier, there is no one to perform extra -curricular classes. (Terry)

Some educators do not meet deadlines because they are always absent from work. (Lizzy)

The findings in this study concur with Makura’s (2012) findings in which educators were reported to display negative attitudes through non-cooperation with the principal in official activities. They were alleged to demonstrate half- hearted commitment to the profession. In addition, the researcher observed learners playing outside their classrooms during lesson time and most boys playing soccer in the netball courts. They rushed back when they saw educators coming to class. The researcher noticed that a lot of these learners (those not attended to) were mostly in the Get band (Grades 8 and 9), and this was observed in two schools. Time books confirm that educators were present at work but few of them were actually attending to learners.

- ***Policy implementation***

Participants shared their experiences concerning policy implementation. Emma and Lizzy reported that educators are reluctant to adapt to change in the education system and policies that the DOE applies. This affects the smooth running of the school and also puts her in an awkward situation as she is the accounting officer. Some educators are reported to be uncooperative.

Sometimes educators tell me that I am a dictator when I refer them to departmental policies. (Emma)

Another thing, educators are difficult to change..... For example DoE introduces new policies, some educators take time to change, they resist changes to be

implemented, and as a result we are the last school to implement new policies because some educators want to see it happening in others. (Lizzy)

This suggests that women principals resort to other leadership styles which may also make them unpopular; because they have to follow orders from the department. Women principals admitted that some policies are not easy to implement and they face a lot of resistance from educators and parents in other instances. This affirms findings in Pillay (2005), Makhaye (2012) and Moorosi (2006). However, Eagly and Karau (2002;518) maintain that “women principals face challenges when they display masculine characteristics as they are judged as being counter-stereotypical if they display feminine characteristics; they are also faced with challenges as they do not fit the role of a leader”.

Document analysis revealed that two schools in this study were operating without school policy documents, while four schools had policies which were observed and implemented or adhered to. The researcher attests that some women principals in this study were guided by their school policies drafted from departmental policies. In one school, the researcher had an opportunity to attend assembly wherein learners were reminded of what the school’s code of conduct states concerning uniform; learners were reminded to always put on their school uniform and again to wear it properly at all times. At the very same school, the researcher also noticed that the uniform committee was in the process of designing a new blazer for 2016 Grade 12 learners.

The researcher observed from the staffroom noticeboard a list of different committees such as disciplinary, sports, admission etc. The researcher also managed to attend a staff meeting coordinated by a committee called SAIC which stands for School Assessment Irregularity Committee, at Lizzy’s school. The meeting was actually aimed to workshop all educators on examinations administration in general including how to handle irregularity. In Lizzy’s school, the medium of instruction is English. During assembly, learners and educators were heard making announcements in English but were free to communicate with each other in their preferred language as stipulated in the school’s language policy. Observation data supports interview data wherein women principals were not liked and found to be “dictators” when it comes to policy implementation. Women principals are determined to make their schools effective by implementing policies that are in place. They had taken the decisions to stick to the school policies and departmental rules and regulations in place; the other way to make their schools effective is through policy implementation, which needs both courage and boldness.

- *Negative attitude and unruly behaviour*

Women principals in this study believe that this behaviour is related to their gender because most of them had been in the schools they lead for a long period, and not because they were outsiders. They indicated challenges arising from educators' insubordination, unruly learners, parents with a negative attitude and behaviour towards them as women principals.

There are few educators who are problematic and do not cooperate.... They had once incited learners' to become unruly and disruptive at some point.... Even though it didn't work. (Lizzy)

Some male parents were reported to be uncomfortable when attended by women principals as they believe that school principals are meant to be men. This resonates with Makhaye's (2012: 40) findings whereby one participant declared that "*in my school the male parents prefer to solve problems with my two deputy- principals who are males instead of me*". In addition, the literature review revealed that society has low expectations of women as good managers (Akao, 2008; Moorosi, 2007 & 2010; and Bosch, 2015). These studies show difficulties women in leadership positions experience as a result of masculine characters that permeates organisations.

Some male parents do not want to be attended by me because they say I am a woman, and they don't solve problems with women"... so this makes me stubborn, I always tell them I am the principal here, if they are not prepared to talk me, they must go straight to the circuit office. (Lizzy)

Makhaye (2012: 41) reported that "black female principals find it difficult to particularly work with male students because participants in her study complained about male students who threaten and intimidate them". Female students were also reported to challenge these women principals because they think that they cannot exercise power. This is contrary to what the participants in this study experienced as they did not make any indication of female learners troubling them. In addition, the researcher confirms that instances observed during school visits revealed misdemeanours by some male learners such as not wearing proper school uniform, smoking within the school yard, jumping school fences and bunking classes. In addition, lack of respect by male learners towards some women principals was noticed during school visits because they actually refused to take instructions from their principals; they grumbled when given instructions. This type of behaviour from male learners was also displayed towards other

female educators. The researcher witnessed that male learners were more comfortable and willing to take orders from male educators; especially during assembly time.

One morning, male learners decided to attack .... They started chanting outside my office..... I went out of the office with the intention to calm them down...but instead they became worse...and one of them slapped me on my face, I will never forget that day. (Terry)

Some learners were sometimes observed as not in their proper school uniform because they wore on black training shoes to substitute black formal school shoes. Those in full uniform were not properly wearing it. In one school on the researcher's first visit, the researcher thought that it was an official day for not wearing the school uniform. Furthermore, learners were unruly during assembly time; they made noise throughout, laughing, and always making some strange and hidden comments to interrupt those who were speaking. In Terry's school while in the staffroom having a conversation with educators, an educator came in furiously reporting that two senior boys were playing with a cell phone during her period, and when asked to surrender it the boys refused to hand it in. She actually tried to confiscate the cell phone from the boys but was unsuccessful. When she called the office for some help, the boys quickly got out of the classroom, jumped over the fence and ran away.

Lack of respect for women principals was reported by some participants in this study. From her experience, the researcher confirms that "the practice of calling women a child "was not based on their marital status but rather commonly used by males in the society because society made men to believe themselves as breadwinners. Therefore because patriarchal women were fully dependent on their spouses they were also regarded as dependents like children.

Some male educators here call me a child, because in this area women are undermined and regarded as children. And they even act funny during staff meetings. (Emma)

Contrary to the above explanation, Lumby and Azaola (2011) indicate that one woman principal was referred to as a "girl" because of her marital status while another was called a "child" by other principals in a meeting because she was considered young. Lumby (2010:12) further explained "the lack of acceptance for women as principals within the broader community, which continues to display chauvinistic cultural stereotypes about women as leaders". This could have an impact on how women principals perform in the long-term. The

researcher observed from analysed documents, especially learners performance schedules that most schools with serious challenges were under- forming more especially in matric results. In addition, according to Lumby (2010: 47) South African women in her study complained that “they often experience sexism from male educators who are insubordinate and unwilling to work with female managers”. Observation data revealed educators to be cooperative instead. Instances that were observed did not suggest a lack of respect and negative attitudes towards women principals. The researcher suggests that this could be due to the fact that the staff knew about her visit, and therefore acted consciously.

Some women principals in this study reported that some parents had negative attitudes towards them. Lati indicated that some male parents even claimed that they could lead the school much better than she does. The following instances were picked up during interviews. One male parent said this after a parents’ meeting:

You women are weak, you can’t take bold decisions. (Lati)

Lizzy also maintains that some parents were not comfortable to be addressed by her with regard to the children or their problems. There are still those who believe that women are not capable of solving problems. Patriarchal societies view women as more emotional than rational.

According to Kanjere (2009) and Kanjere *et al.* (2011) there is a general impression that women are not good leaders which is reinforced by the northern Sotho proverb “tsa etwa ke e tshadi Pele di wela ka leopeng” meaning that if a leader is a woman, disaster is bound to happen. This proverb encourages women discrimination in the community and work environment. Emma confirmed to have employed a relatively strict managerial style and ultimately an authoritarian way of leadership. To an extent, Emma adopted discrimination in response to socio-cultural expectations. Women principals are under pressure from the society because they are expected to portray feminine qualities.

I when I became the principal, I got irritated by the stereotypes held on women, such as women are weak, they cry easily.....all this made me stubborn. So I developed an attitude towards male educators and parents with such negative attitude; whenever, I address them I will look so serious, demanding and aggressive, but when approaching female educators I become soft.... I think it worked for me. (Emma)

This is convergent with findings in Arar and Queder (2011) who investigated two women principals in Israel. They reported that women principals adopted an authoritarian leadership style more especially in the initial years as principals, Fatima explains:

A woman principal in Bedouin society need to incessantly prove that she is professional, because she is constantly under society's criticism. You continually need to prove that you are capable because they trap you in order to demonstrate that you are worthless because you are a woman. As you to know, to be a woman in Bedouin is difficult, so how it is to be woman in managerial job.

Lumby and Azaola (2011) uphold that in their study women principals confirmed to use mothering skills to overcome the gender stereotype challenges in their school. Jane, a woman principal confessed that when dealing with resistance from senior men, she applies the maternal role of submitting to them to gain cooperation which makes them feel important.

According to Moorosi (2007), Mestry and Schmidt (2012), Omboko and Oyoo ( 2011) , Marlene and College (2009) and Sinclair (2013), women leaders innovatively employ various management strategies to mitigate the effects of some of the challenges on their ability to manage schools; maintaining that women leaders and managers are likely to adapt to leadership styles better suited to the changing culture. This concurs with findings in this study where women principals were more likely to adopt different leadership styles ranging from feminine leadership style; being more sensitive, nurturing and accommodating, to masculine – authoritarian style, from bureaucratic to democratic, transformational, and servant hood.

However, Mbepera's (2015:130) findings concluded that female principals in her study who used the autocratic leadership style showed lack of confidence. Some participants confirmed this:

Most female heads lack confidence. They use force to show they have authority; one female head of school commands us... saying... I have said so, and when she says so... I have no choice but to do it. (Female teacher)

To be honest, female leaders use force, they do not involve teachers and parents in different issues, they only want to accomplish their goals, and this really discouraging to have females in leadership because we expect them to behave like mothers. (Female teacher 2)

Furthermore, Lumby and Azaola's (2011) study reveals that women principals sometimes use their mothering skills to overcome gender stereotype challenges in their schools. This was confirmed by Jane that when dealing with resistance from senior men, she applies the maternal role of submitting to them to gain cooperation, thus making them feel important.

I tell my colleagues that ever since my appointment as principal I have been relying on God, for the things I planned and I think I have achieved them. I thanked God for being the source of my strength through my leadership journey. Even when I am afraid I know God will never leave. (Rose)

Dryer (2011:1) explains "spirituality as a comprehensive life orientation that determines one's identity, which includes every dimension of human life; it is also about one's entire human existence as an authentic person in God's presence". Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011); and Lindo (2012) maintain that spiritual leadership is another way women use to lead in education. They use issues of faith to maintain confidence and motivation and also to cope with the challenges they encounter. In addition, Edward and Perumal (2014) emphasise that many leaders in their study possess what might be called "higher order" perspective and that might be represented by a particular religious affiliation. This concurs with findings in this study because Rose, one of the participants, presented herself as a born-again Christian and acknowledged the importance of spirituality as a source of personal strength in difficult situations and also to connect with others. Rose was heard during assembly encouraging learners and educators to believe in God so that He can help them in their duties and studies. She also admitted that she prayed for all the decisions taken in the school. Her spirituality helped her cope with some of the challenges she faces in her managerial duties and thus credits her Christian faith for the growth in her job.

- ***Late coming and absenteeism***

Participants in this study reported the challenge of late coming from both learners and educators. From documents analysed such as the time register, a lot of educators missed lessons due to external commitments. They were sometimes absent from work or they knocked off early so as to attend to union matters and personal affairs. In some cases, women principals reported in their casual talk with the researcher that when there are union mass meetings to be held, schools finishes earlier and more so because educators often inform learners they will be attending union meeting so some learners do not even bother to come to school on those days. The challenge of absenteeism more especially from educators' side could be viewed as

another factor that contributes to poor learner performance because syllabuses are not completed in time and learners do not have the opportunity to revise in class with their subject educators. The researcher also noticed, from the information book, that women principals took efforts to remind their staff time and again to observe time and fill in the leave forms. The following interviews confirmed the assertions made above.

Late coming from both educators and learners ... but I have designed registers for both late coming and early departure register just to caution educators.  
(Lizzy)

All learners who come late to school are locked outside the school yard and they have to come back the following day, they will make sure they report earlier.  
(Lati)

As you can see the school is situated far away from the village, so learners walk long distance, and majority of the staff members are commuting from the nearest town, they are come late and also want to leave early. (Terry)

Lati reported that her challenges were late coming from learners and also indicated a strategy to curb the problem. Even though some participants did not mention this; the researcher noted that in some schools most learners arrived late during assembly time, and some continued to arrive late even when lessons were ongoing. In some cases, learners were not attended to because some educators arrived late and this made them miss the morning (first or second) lessons.

Furthermore, late coming from both educators and learners was observed to be more serious than explained by the participants. The researcher observed that it was actually out of control in some schools, especially in Emma and Terry's. Time management in three schools was also dishonoured. The researcher also noticed during school visits that educators were in most cases late for classes apart from coming late to work. There was a trend of mismanagement of time, for example if a period was scheduled for 30 minutes, some educators were observed going to classes fifteen minutes late meaning that they could only attend to learners for the remaining fifteen minutes.

Women principals in this study confirmed that they lock school gates as a measure to address late coming by learners, and this strategy had worked for them. Lizzy indicated during her interview that she has designed registers for late arrivals and early departure for educators. Lati

locks all gates to instil order and discipline on late comers. The researcher confirmed the above assertions as the gates were locked in two schools when she arrived for the interviews. When asked why, the security guard responded:

Gates are locked for late comers

Thus, the researcher had to wait for 20 to 25 minutes to get in the school yard because gates were locked. The security guard had to get the keys from the principal's office which is located quite a distance from the gate. In addition, the periods after break –time were observed to be heavily affected because they were not well attended by both learners and educators. Those few who remained after break revealed that the majority of learners usually leave at break time. The time –off register confirmed that a lot of educators leave during or immediately after break time. Even though absenteeism by educators and learners was not revealed by interview data, it was however observed during the school visits and confirmed by documents analysed such as learners' attendance registers. These attendance registers were mostly not updated, which gave a wrong impression that learners are always absent from school.

On the contrary, Makhaye's (2012:39) findings report that “women in her study preferred a democratic leadership approach; talking to teachers and learners concerned and getting their views of why they are always late”. This is what Mrs Khumalo (one educator participant) says:

We have got policies regarding late coming and absenteeism for teachers and learners. Firstly, we note frequent absenteeism and late coming then we start with an interview. We talk to the person; but for learners we end up calling parents and for teachers we do counselling if necessary.

- ***Shortage of educators***

This challenge was indicated by two participants that they are overburdened with work due to shortage of educators. Women principals complained that sometimes the DOE delays to replace educators on pension, those on leave for example maternity or in some cases deceased educators; as result they have to carry a load of teaching periods at the same time lead and manage the school. Women principals explained their frustrations in this way:

Some members of the community have decided to remove their children from the school; as a result the DOE has redeployed educators due the lower learner

enrolment.... So I am forced to teach some of the classes which weigh heavily on me. (Emma)

I had serious challenges running this school... I am short of three educators, the school is understaffed ... I have a load of 30 periods to teach per week. This is just extra work for me, it is not easy to lead, manage and teach. (Terry)

Observation data confirms the findings because the researcher also observed that some classes were unattended most of the time. This, according to the researcher, indicates lawlessness in the school. What was uttered above suggests that the challenge of understaffing created an environment in which women principals could not address on their own, but needed other stakeholders such as the SGB and the DOE to come on board. Women principals admitted that it is difficult to keep learners in their classrooms if educators are not there. The longer the DOE delays in substituting educators on leave or pension, the harder it becomes for them to keep order in the schools. This could also suggest that women principals in this situation blame the DOE for their worsening their problems. In addition, due to financial constraints schools were unable to employ SGB paid educators or part-time educators while waiting for the DOE to advertise posts or allocate in-excess educators. This also implies the whole school discipline is disturbed and this could add stress to the principals.

Observation data confirms the above mentioned findings. The researcher noticed from the staff notice board that on the main time table some learning areas were not allocated educators. Instead the letters X and Y were written on the board. This means that there was no teacher for those learning areas. In Emma's school, 92 periods were unallocated; they were only allocated to teacher X and Y. In Terry's school, the researcher noted that educators were extremely overworked with 35 to 40 periods per week. The principal tried to allocate educators more learning areas to address the problem, but this did not work because learners played outside their classrooms. Most educators claimed that they were overloaded and always justified themselves by sitting in the staffroom when it was time for them to teach subjects allocated to X and Y.

I try by all means to engage my staff, ...I believe in the policy of "batho pele" all SMT members are involved, one is in charge of registers, and the other is doing exams entries for grade and some responsible educators are helping with time – tabling and others are in charge of student affairs, etc.....I also give some a

chance to chair staff meeting and briefing sessions” .... But sometimes with women, aishh they don’t get things done, they drag their feet. (Lati)

Well my deputy is very supportive. He comes from far, so he stays in the community during the week when I knock off at 4pm he takes over.... And the two HODs... I don’t complain. (Rose)

However, some participants in this study admitted resorting to delegation as way to relieve themselves from other responsibilities. Lati used the idea of delegation as a strategy; and she indicated that male educators take their duties more seriously than female educators. Women principals realised that on their own they cannot make it, so sometimes they delegate some duties to their colleagues. Delegation is explained by Pillay (2005) as an important means which principals can utilise to promote democracy and participation in the schools as an educational organisation with the aim of promoting cooperation, team work and collegiality. However, women principals in this study reported that even though some educators are reluctant, others are willing because they see this as an opportunity to develop themselves. The use of delegation was also observed during school visits. It is fully discussed under positive work experiences of women principals in section 2.3.5. whereby they delegated their deputy principals to chair staff meetings.

- ***Lack of infrastructure and other resources***

Lati faces a different challenge of not having an office to do her work in. She explained that this impacted heavily on her daily organisation and leadership. There is no privacy and the issue of confidentiality is disturbed. She also maintained that sometimes she misplaces documents. Even though this was cited by Lati as a challenge, it also revealed her passion for leadership and management, because instead of being discouraged she was full of optimism, more dedicated and motivated to continue with her job. She actually acknowledged the challenges and the researcher observed that she was optimistic.

As you can see, I don’t have an office, I don’t have privacy... but I cannot wait ... things must happen ... hmmm (Laughter) the office will find us on the way. However, I sometimes misplace important school documents.

The DOE sometimes deposits money late; parents do not pay school fees for their children.... Honestly, you can’t run a school without funds. (Terry)

Women principals in this study lead schools where communities are faced with major socio-economic factors. Community members are largely dependent on farming activities, most parents are unemployed and their source of income is derived mainly from social grants. As a result, parents fail to pay their children's school fees.

Three schools were observed with inadequate furniture for learners; learners were seen seated on crates, and on their school bags during lessons, some learners brought camp chairs from their homes while others shared chairs. Emma's school is the worst with regard to resources; the school does not have a single photocopier or a computer. Women principals reported that sometimes funds for norm and standards are deposited late in the year and this disturbs the smooth running of the school. Observation data is in agreement with the findings because two schools were observed with mobile classrooms used for teaching. In other schools classrooms meant for teaching and learning were turned into offices for the SMT, storeroom for textbooks, stationary and staffroom. At least two schools were observed with classrooms without window panes and light bulbs, switches and plugs, no proper fencing and without security guards. Lati shared the staffroom with her teachers because the school had no office. To deal with the shortage of funds, some schools raised funds for concerts and Award ceremonies whereby learners put on their casual clothes. For wearing casual clothes they pay a certain amount of money, and those who insist on wearing their school uniform are highly charged. Sometimes schools were without water which also affected the toilet system.

- ***Stakeholders' support***

Data showed that sometimes the DOE was not supportive enough and also took time to intervene; for example with the shortage of educators and infrastructure. Apart from this, Emma explained that in the beginning, the circuit manager supported her but as time went on he decided to distance himself from the school and its problems. The findings resonate with what Moorosi (2010: 11) maintains, "that the lack of institutional and professional support which included limited induction also leaves women principals at a loss in the field they are not familiar with". As a result, women principals see themselves visible but without substantial power which leads to undue stress in their leadership duties. Terry also complained that in challenges that involve the community, the DOE distances itself.

Educators here told me in my face that if I report them to the circuit manager I am wasting my time because the circuit manager is their homeboy. (Emma)

I did not feel more support from the DOE, and sometime they intervene late, more so if problems involve the community. ... But if the school is successful, Departmental officers frequent the school because there is nothing to solve.  
(Terry)

On contrary, Rose appreciated the support she has always received from her circuit manager and indicated that he made sure that she was not lost in upholding her managerial duties. She expressed this:

I remember years back when schools were still using “affroaling” machines to make copies. Our machine had serious technical problems which needed a lot of money to repair. The circuit manager brought two machines to our school which were used by “finishing school” then. She even told me that if I need any help I should not hesitate to call her.

All this suggests that while some women principals in this study enjoyed the full support of the DOE, others complained that they were frustrated and felt left alone in their leadership roles, because no one listens to the challenges they face in their schools.

Secondly, some participants indicated the lack of support from parents which was displayed in various ways. Women faced rejection from the community because of the traditional and cultural beliefs that only men are capable to lead. The most striking experience was from Emma who explained that all along while she was the deputy- principal, things were okay between her and the community until the principalship post was advertised. It was then that she realised that the community did not want her as the school’s principal. She revealed this in her interview:

Ever since I was appointed as the principal of this school I was never supported. It has been a tough journey for me, the whole community is up against me.... They told her that “sekolo sa rena se nyaka monna e seng ngwanenyana” Meaning that their school needs a male leader and not a girl like her.

This interview data suggests that women have a serious challenge of fighting for acceptance and approval by society. Emma mentioned that she was not approved and was rejected by the members of the community simply because she was not from the same community; “son of the soil” this concurs with findings in Wrushen and Sherman (2008) who revealed that the most

striking themes emerging were regular occurrence of hurtful comments and actions directed towards their gender, age and race and this resulted in female principals being under surveillance. Additionally, Moorosi (2010: 9) emphasises that “women continue to experience the same prejudicial attitudes from selection committees under the notion of *principalship is for strong men*”. She emphasises that women experience more obstacles than men do, and that central to these experiences is the underlying male norm of who is more appropriate for secondary school principalship.

Moreover, lack of support for women principals was also revealed in parents failing to attend parents’ meetings which showed they did not cooperate. Therefore, women principals find themselves managing, leading and governing the school at the same time, because they have to make timely decisions.

So challenges are so many ..... some are even painful to explain... right now I no longer call parents ‘ meeting because they will not come.... I am just alone, waiting for the school to be closed down or merged with another school, and then I will retire. (Emma)

Yaah, some parents do not attend parents meeting which are normally conducted on Wednesday as per agreement with parents.... So as a school we chase all learners home to go and call their parents, and I must admit that the strategy works. (Rose)

Rose reported that in order to involve parents in the education of their children and also in the decision- making of the school, when parents failed to attend parents meeting, the school always sent learners home to call their parents. This could mean she stuck to decisions collectively taken by both parents and staff. On the other hand, this shows how Rose values and respects them. She reported the strategy to be effective with regard to this challenge. This could be another way to establish a mutual relationship between the school and community.

This converges with what Makhaye (2012:42) maintains that “inadequate support from parents is due to traditional and cultural activities”. Participants in her study confirmed they encountered problems in managing parents’ meetings because some parents did not show up. They also faced a lot of criticism, were called by names and often not taken seriously by community members. Similar cases were reported by some women principals in this study,

which could suggest that not all women principals are supported by parents and their communities.

At the social level, women lack support from their families and communities which is due to fact that principalship is associated with masculinity. On the other hand, they are oppressed by traditional and patriarchal values and practices that continue to devalue transformation processes aimed at achieving gender equity.

Despite the challenges they face at their workplaces, women principals employ a variety of strategies to deal with their complex situation; they act as problem solvers, they have shown a desire to share power and credit through team and relationship building. They have also shown the desire to manage their schools effectively despite all the stereotypes and gender discrimination levelled against them. This, according to the researcher, signifies some elements of the feminist theory.

In conclusion, even though some women principals never had an intention to become principals but it was rather something that had developed as they performed their duties with commitment and diligence. They should be grateful for the progress they have made in advancing to principalship in a patriarchal society. From data collected, women principals brought the greatest joy to the lives of most learners and thus a huge contribution to the society. Moreover, a lot can be learnt from their experiences, and they also serve as better mentors and resources, and for aspiring women teachers they are real motivators.

Women principals in this study paved the way for other women to become effective leaders despite numerous challenges. These women continue to fight their struggles regardless of the challenges they come across; to an extent that they devised some strategies to cope in their managerial duties and so as to become effective managers. Women had to rely on support from family, colleagues and DOE which also helped them to succeed. Women principals are faced with a myriad of challenges even before their appointment. The types of challenges they face imply that they are not in favour of being promoted more especially in secondary schools. They faced gender stereotyping and sexism which are rooted in most patriarchal societies. On the other hand, they had to deal with challenges which were also beyond their control created by other stakeholders such as shortage of educators and lack of infrastructure.

#### **4.4.1.2.2. Personal challenges**

These are personal factors and characteristics that have a negative effects on women practicing their leadership roles successfully. The factors ranges from the lack of confidence, life style conflict to emotional pressure.

- *Home and work conflict*

Research by Wachera (2013) Uwizeyimana and Mathevula (2014), Wrushen and Sherman (2008), Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) documented that women principals experience lots of challenges with family responsibilities and their work demands since they are expected to perform well. Participants in the study also acknowledged that family responsibilities and commitments had a negative impact on their leadership and management of the schools. These women have a role to play as school managers, mothers and spouses. According to Smith (2011:137) “female gender roles imply that women are to be primarily wives and mothers: women are scrutinised from deviating from such norms; they work hard to accomplish professional success”. Data revealed that they all have children to look after. In addition, they have cultural expectations to meet. These factors pose challenges to most of the women principals because both their roles are demanding. Data also revealed feelings of frustration, conflict and inadequacy and devotion experienced both at home and in their career. The following interviews confirm:

Personally, I feel that sometimes my family commitments disturb me in carrying my managerial duties, like I don't have enough time .... Sometimes I wish to stay longer at work but I cannot because of home duties. I also do not manage to come on weekends to supervise grade twelve extra classes. (Rose)

Home is sometimes a problem.... Or let me say that it depends on the type of husband one is married to. I remember when I was attending lesson on weekends with one the universities, hey.... It was tough ... because my husband was then working far from home and comes only on weekends. He didn't like the fact that when he comes home, I am away... he felt neglected. But I handled the challenge with care; like I say challenges come and pass. (Lati)

From the interview it is clear that family responsibilities not only affect the women's leadership roles, but could also be viewed as another reason why there are few women in school leadership posts. The roles of men and women as imposed by society affect women more. These findings concur with literature review in Akao (2008), Parsaloi (2012), Moorosi (2007), Wallace and

Smith (2011), Morojele *et al.* (2013) and Elmuti *et al.* (2009) that as time constraints and demands of the job become more important, promotion forces many women to choose between family and career. Data collected revealed that married women principals staying with their husbands on a full time basis are burdened than those not staying with their husbands or those single or divorced. Bosch (2015:14) cited Chisholm who argued that “men in South Africa hardly take on childcare and other domestic responsibilities while women are left to contend with career and family issues at the same time”. This suggests that their spouses are unable to offer assistance in this regard, and could be attributed to gender role socialisation.

I have no major personal challenges.... Because my husband works far away, so this is an advantage because it gives me enough time to plan and prepare my work. I only stay with my mother in law who is supportive. (Terry)

I am not staying with my husband and my children have grown up... so home is not a problem. (Emma)

This suggests that these two women principals who do not stay with their husbands cope better as compared to those staying with both their spouses and children. Lastly, Lizzy who is a single woman principal admitted that her only personal challenge is that she stays far away from the school, and this forces her to leave work earlier than her colleagues. Similarly, Ivy a single parent said that her home affairs do not disturb her managerial work. This suggests that not all women principals are struggling to balance their work and home responsibilities. Moorosi (2007:512) maintains that “it is even more difficult for women principals who are married and are of reproductive age to balance their public and private responsibilities, since they are expected to play their cultural roles as mothers and wives over and above their commitment to their work as school managers”. This is different with single women as most time is spent on work related responsibilities. Therefore their family status does not negatively impact on their responsibilities as principals.

Well...I am parent raising two boys....but this does not disturb me doing my duties. (Ivy)

This is convergent to findings in Lumby (2010:24) where she maintains that “most women with families view their marriage and children as a disadvantage to their career, while single women and women with without children or grown-up children mostly viewed their situation as advantageous”. They maintained that not having domestic and family responsibilities gives

them free time to invest as much time as they needed in their careers and studies. This concurs with this study's findings because Ivy, a single parent, is pursuing a MEd degree and Lizzy who is divorced has enrolled for her PhD studies, because of less family pressure to perform well at home. Irechuckwu (2010: 183) maintains that women are more adapted to run the household than men; she further argues that "the more women there are in management positions, the more stable and dependable the world will become".

Liberal feminists believe that the societal structure around the nuclear family is ideal and should not be altered by the state. They cited Bryson who asserts that women should maintain their roles as wives and mothers, and attain equality within this structure. They believe this can be achieved by allowing women to gain education, and giving them equal opportunities to pursue their careers. They also cited Margret Thatcher who claims that "with efficient organisation as well as being a house wife, it is possible to put in eight hours of work a day". Liberal feminists uphold that the government should play a role active in society by promoting the idea that women can pursue their career goals while remaining within the nuclear family structure; by subsidizing day care for children and promoting quotas in the amount of women that should be employed in business. Furthermore, Wollstonecraft (2010) argues that equality of rights and opportunities should be extended to women in all spheres of life. Liberal feminists recently criticised family institutions which symbolises patriarchal culture. Women principals in this study reflected values of this liberal feminist notion. Women are not separating themselves from men, and they have proved to have withstood the challenges that come their way. Despite being limited by family structural roles in a patriarchal culture, they have proved that they can take part in the public sphere.

#### ***4.4.1.2.3. Positive work experience***

Despite the challenges women participants faced in the work environment, there were some positive elements that were noticed during school visits through observations and interviews; which principals were aware of and unaware of. These are some strong points noticed by the researcher through observation sessions.

- ***Caring and nurturing***

Bosch (2015:21) citing Grady (1992) affirms that an effective school is "a nurturing, child-centred institution". Schools that are led by some of the participants were observed to be clean and in some schools learners were neat in their school uniform. The fact that the principals are

also mothers could be attributed to this cleanliness within the school. This could suggest that there is order and discipline in the school as uniformity is displayed at all times. They create an atmosphere conducive for effective learning and teaching to take place by enhancing cleanliness in the schools.

One school had a vegetable garden which is normally found in primary schools. This was seen as an unusual thing more especially at a secondary school. This could suggest that women are concerned about the health and wellbeing of learners because the gardens supplement other vegetables that the nutrition programme offers. The principal explained that due to distance, suppliers always deliver vegetables that are not in good condition, so the school and the community members decided to start the vegetable project to relieve the school from its challenge and this saves the school some money which can be used for other projects. This is in line with servant-hood leadership which is explained by Greenleaf in Edward and Perumal (2014: 6011) as commencing with “a natural feeling to serve others, bringing the needs of others to the centre and making the growth of those served its objective”.

Furthermore, women principals were also observed during break-time monitoring how learners were served food. Other than that, one confessed during a casual talk with the researcher that they were also more concerned about hygiene and making sure that every learner is catered for. They also indicated that some help the cooks with new recipes and also eat with learners so that they cannot feel as if they are obliged to eat because of their poor backgrounds. According to Wrushen and Sherman (2008) it was common for female principals to emphasize nurturing and effective change through caring relationships and pastoral work. Women principals were seen taking an effort to organise Award ceremonies to reward, support and encourage learners who work hard and show them that good work pays. This shows that they have the interests of learners at heart by recognising learners’ achievements. This is in line with Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011:34) “approach of prioritising student learning”. Smith (2011: 140) in an attempt to determine the perspectives of female teachers on secondary school leadership found that the strongest theme to emerge was “tremendous satisfaction derived from working with young people and seeing them develop. The main concern for the principals was to promote pupils-first philosophy in their school”.

- ***Positive relationship with stakeholders***

A positive working relationship was also observed between schools and the communities. Women principals also offer help to the community by opening school property for the

community to use for funeral services, community meetings, memorial services and religious conferences. The notion of *Ubuntu* which emphasises sharing was noticed. This suggests that some women principals managed to build good relationships with the communities such as trust and a sense of ownership. In this way, the school protects the school's property because they also benefit from it. In some cases, women principals indicated that community members often offer assistance where needed such as helping with the gardening project and keeping the school clean. In one school, the community leaders and members often come to work in the garden. The researcher also noticed some elements of teamwork and the idea of *Ubuntu*. These findings parallel with Smith (2011:141) who asserts that female principals considered it their role to provide an environment in which staff and learners felt safe and secure and were happy.

- ***Time-management***

Most women principals are sensitive to time management. This was over-emphasised during staff meetings and was also noticed appearing often in the information books. The fact that some women principals lock gates for late-coming learners suggests that they want learners to be conscious of time management. Late and early registers were also designed to caution educators on time management. It was observed that the women principals lead by example in managing time. For example they arrive early in the morning and knock off late after everyone else has left the school. They were also early for meetings and sometimes started the meeting according to time scheduled and not wait for late-comers.

- ***Consultative and democratic***

Chin (2011) explained that women principals tend to be collaborative, cooperative and democratic in their style of leadership. Some participants confirmed they consult with stakeholders before taking major decisions. They consult with parents by inviting them to meetings, educators by holding staff meetings and also learners through LRC committees. Even though not all stakeholders will be on board, women principals take the initiative to consult them. They also keep their staff informed through information books. During staff meetings, educators are encouraged to air their views and participate fully. In one meeting where the researcher was a participant observer, the staff were deliberating on how the spring school should be coordinated, the debate was intense and unending but at the end, the principal decided that the staff must vote to uphold the principles of democracy. Some principals do not impose decisions on their staff; they value their opinions even if at the end their opinions may not be chosen. From the documents analysed, it was evident that educators are free to attend to their

union matters at all times. Lastly, this suggests that they communicate with stakeholders through all channels available. Transformational leadership is evident in some of their activities, because it refers to shared influence and cooperation, participative decision-making, teamwork and the concept of empowerment of members of the organisation (Ngcobo, 2010), Gaetane & Martinez (2007), Lindo (2012); and Bosch (2015). Women principals are able to draw on a repertoire of behaviours covering traditional masculine and feminine paradigms. Smith (2011; 521) found that women had the ability to change their leadership style to the context in question as an essential feature of effective leadership behaviour. According to his study, principals reported no one right leadership style and the emphasis was rather on what would be best for the school and learners in the different situations and environments.

- *Staff development and empowerment*

Educators are developed in various ways; one is through delegation where educators do administrative duties, for example drawing time-tables, administering exams and coordinating a variety of committees that exist within the school. These committees could be disciplinary, sport, awards, uniform, language, admission, cultural, and fund-raising. It was evident from one school that every educator is compelled to coordinate at least one committee. The lists of all committees were appended on the noticeboard in the staffroom with educators as coordinators. This is convergent with Pillay's (2005) finding that delegation is an important means which women principals utilise to promote democracy and participation in schools as an educational organisation with the aim of promoting cooperation, team work and collegiality. This also suggests that some women principals are democratic and work harmoniously with educators.

Even though this may sometimes be seen as delegating all the work to educators, it encourages and motivates the educators to learn different skills in communication and sometimes handling challenges arising in those committees, if it is done in good faith. It also gives them a sense of ownership towards the school. Thus educators engage in constructive competition, hence a positive contribution towards school development.

Furthermore, women principals sometimes delegate their SMT such as deputy principals and HODs to chair staff meetings when they are absent from work; even when they are present at times. The idea here is to empower them as it is also another way of communicating that women principals use. Lastly, educators are also encouraged to honour workshops organised by the DOE by attending and thereafter giving feedback to their various departments. This was

noticed during a staff meeting as educators who attended such workshops were requested to share with their colleagues.

- *Organised and efficient*

Most school principals' offices visited showed a certain level of organisation. Other than being clean, everything seemed to be in order. The researcher noticed that almost all cabinets were labelled. They found it easier to reach out for previous records of learner performance, and they did not struggle to locate documents requested by the researcher. A telephone directory for all stakeholders, management plan, roosters for assembly, SMT and staff meetings, SGB meetings, quarterly school events to take place; were all on the noticeboard in most principals' office

- *Policy implementers*

From interviews held with the participants some confirmed they were being called dictators whenever they reminded educators of the departmental and school policies, rules and regulations. This suggests that some women principals are firm and maintain their standpoint without deviation. The researcher was able to observe, for example, that the language policy in one school declares that the medium of instruction is English more especially in school gatherings. Learners and educators were observed using English to make announcements at assembly. Interestingly when learners' announcements were not clear enough, the principal took over to clarify those announcements. Again, she would first call the learner to get clarity and then simplify the announcement. Admission committees were in place in most schools as stipulated in the admission policy. The uniform policy was also adhered to as well as the code of conduct as learners and educators were encouraged to honour time management. These were some of the positive work experiences observed from visited schools.

Observation data confirms the findings in this regard where at least three women principals were heard emphasising the school policies; reminding both educators and learners to adhere to school policies. For example during assembly, learners were reminded to always put on their proper school uniform. On the other hand educators were always cautioned about time management in the information book. Lastly, in one staff meeting the principal actually told her staff that operating against school policies constitutes serious misconduct.

Positive work experiences of women principals identified in this study as elaborated above prove to be consistent with cultural feminism, a theory explained by Ritzer (2012, 462). It draws away from biological differences between males and females; rather it praises cultural differences because it believes that female attributes of child rearing, nurturing and domestic care; and non-violence in conflict forms the basis for a healthier society. It asserts that women's sensitive and emotional reaction is more beneficial to the society. All in all, the more women are appointed into these leadership roles, the more the benefits for societies.

Smit (2013: 89) in her article entitled "*Female leadership in a rural school: A feminist perspective*", asserts that leadership has been investigated from a male dominated perspective and female leadership has been relegated to the private sphere where attention was focused on family and social relation". Furthermore, Regan and Brooks in Smit (2013: 90) developed relational leadership as a theory based on empirical data sourced from 11 women who resisted socialisation into the prevailing male dominant culture; the account of their practice was described as relational as opposed to controlling. They argue that leadership is the action of influence: it is relational; it does not exist by itself. According to liberal feminists, women are supposed to make variations between good masculine and good feminine qualities. Women principals display good values of femininity which are care and nurturing, collaborating, courage and vision, and the good values of masculinity which are independence, confidence, decisiveness and logical thinking. All in all, the women principals interviewed made the public sphere a part of their lives.

#### ***4.4.1.2.4. Factors disturbing women from participating in leadership positions***

Literature points a number of factors which may have influence on women remaining in the classroom rather than seeking promotional positions. These are the lack of required qualifications for principalship, lack of support, lack of self-confidence, lack of dedication and accountability, role conflict and fear of geographical mobility.

- ***Lack of dedication and accountability***

Lati commented during her interview that women educators do not want to be in the front lines, they prefer to hide behind others. Women educators are also reported to be passive and sometimes drag their feet when allocated duties. Lati also complained that they normally do not volunteer and offer themselves to help in the school. This suggests that women educators

are happy with their roles as mere teachers because then they are only responsible for teaching learners.

Women educators are okay to serve as HODs and deputy- principalship posts, because they said they are afraid of responsibilities.... They are okay to hide behind and not be at the frontline. (Lati)

Most women were scared for me when they heard I am interested in the principal-ship post, they asked me this question, would you manage? (Rose)

This could suggest that women educators are scared of criticism and do not want to be challenged by others, thus settling for middle senior management positions suits them better. This tallies with what Gobena (2014:34) states that “the lack professional goal-setting frequently affects aspirations of females towards leadership positions”. Moreover, Mbepera (2015) maintains that leadership is viewed by many educators as stressful, demanding and time-consuming. The majority of educators are therefore content with being HODs as the responsibility is less than that of leading the whole school.

I don't have serious challenges with male educators because when given duties to perform they are always fast....ahhh but females ... you will have to push them which is not nice. (Lati)

Furthermore, this could suggest that female teachers are not supportive and cooperative towards women leadership in schools; therefore other women aspiring to leadership positions may be discouraged by this kind of attitude. This was also confirmed by observation data, the researcher noticed from the staff notice board a list of educators with subjects or learning areas and grades they teach. She discovered that there was only one female educator in Grade 12, two in Grade 11, while the majority of female educators were placed in the Get Band classes (junior classes). When asked, the researcher was told that female educators refuse to take most senior classes.

Any way it's a relief because female educators are unpredictable and in most cases on leave because of female responsibilities they have. If they are many in senior classes learners' performance will be affected by their absence; which was also observed from time off book with many female educators knocking off early and having frequently taken leave days (Lati).

Findings in this regard concurs with finding by Mbepera (2015: 142) that” women educators as less dedicated to their work, inactive and sluggish and less willing to volunteer for tasks”.

- ***Lack of required qualifications and reluctance to apply for promotional posts***

Emma indicated that most women in her school lack required qualifications, and therefore resort not to apply because they do not meet the requirements for leadership posts. This could imply that even though the majority of women educators acquire university degrees, there are still many more that are lagging behind. Some were reported to lack interest in furthering their studies while others admitted they are comfortable with their qualifications. This suggests that the lack of required qualifications hinders women educators from advancing to leadership positions. Emma indicated that women in her school are satisfied, which could be perceived as women not preparing themselves for future leadership positions, and again that women are okay with being classroom managers. They are happy with their achievements so far and see no need to further their studies in preparation for future leadership positions.

Furthermore, women were heard boasting about their husbands’ positions, further implying that they do not need leadership posts because they are financially stable; their husbands can provide for their material needs. This also gives the impression that leadership positions are only seen as a means of acquiring a better income and for personal development. Mbepera (2015: 183) maintains that” female educators were satisfied if their husbands are rich and feel there is no need for them to develop”. Husbands are seen as the main source of income in the family while women only supplement what the men get.

Women here are satisfied with their Teachers Diploma from colleges of education. They don’t even bother to register for further studies. (Emma)

The lack of required qualifications is a stumbling block for many women here; most of them do not have management and leadership qualifications. (Lizzy)

On the contrary, Lati explained that women educators hold high qualifications but do not apply for promotional posts because they are afraid to be criticised or challenged when things go wrong. This is convergent with the perception that Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) support that women principals tend to receive less constructive criticism than males do in carrying out their duties. As a result, it is suggested that they are less able to deal with negative comments, in effect taking them too personally and allowing their confidence to be unnecessarily damaged.

Women are highly educated but they do not apply for senior positions....  
Because they say they don't want to be challenged by others. (Lati)

Unlike in the past, nowadays women do apply for promotional posts; the problem is that they do not perform during interviews they are always overpowered by males. (Rose)

More coaching sessions for women educators are needed on how to handle interviews. There is contradiction of data; women have qualifications yet are reluctant to apply while on the other hand they apply but do not perform. Perhaps a further enquiry could be finding out who serves on the interview panel?

- ***Lack of support***

Furthermore, it was also reported that some women with qualifications are discouraged to apply for leadership posts by their families especially their spouses. Others admitted that they do not want to travel long distances to their work station as this will financially disadvantage their family. From data collected, women principals are faced with lots of rejection and discrimination and lack of respect from different stakeholders. This could also serve as another discouraging factor for women aspiring to lead. The liberal feminist theory suggests that the lack of support and encouragement is a result of women stereotype that women should not go beyond kitchen chores and should be respectable wives. This assertion is supported by Amondi (2011) that a lot of emphasis is on domestic chores and thus a cause of gender disparity in the education system and leadership.

Women in my area have confessed to me and they are being discouraged from applying for leadership posts because their spouses maintain that posts are demanding and they (women) cannot manage. (Lizzy)

Again issues of cultural stereotypes and gender discrimination seem to prevent women from advancing into leadership posts; because leadership is still associated with masculinity and therefore these women are declared unfit for leadership. Therefore husbands are reported unsupportive towards their wives' career development and progression. Society still expects men to be natural leaders and challenging this stereotype is an uphill task. There is discrimination and marginalisation of women in all forms of leadership. Furthermore, Vassiliki (2012:175) asserts that "cultural stereotypes can make it seem that women do not have what it takes to handle important leadership roles; thereby adding to the barriers that women encounter

in attaining roles that yield substantial power and authority”. The finding is in agreement with Mbepera (2015: 135) when she explains that decisions to pursue studies cause husbands to be humiliated. Some respondents indicated this during interviews:

I dumped my fiancée because she got a scholarship for masters’ degree... While I only have advanced diploma. I did not intend to marry a woman who is above me academically (Male educator).

My wife is certificate holder; I think that level is enough for her, I don’t encourage her to develop her career, she is a women and she should stay at home most of the time and take care of my children rather than wasting time studying (Male educator).

- ***Work and home responsibilities***

Both work and home responsibilities can be demanding, this was also confirmed by some women in this study who indicated that sometimes role conflict could be assumed to be the factor discouraging most women educators from participating in leadership. It is revealed from data that women with fewer responsibilities cope better with their management work. According to Kagoda (2012:10), study “women’s lives are too complex where they are often juggling to be good mothers and competing for leadership with men who are likely to be free from parenting roles”.

Well, I don’t’ know: women have many family responsibilities. (Terry)

One woman here was appointed an HOD for Sepedi but she declined the post, when I asked her why... she told me that she cannot afford to leave her family behind, she has family commitments and her husband will not manage on his own (Rose).

This also suggests that husbands do not share house chores with their wives. Most husbands also depend on their wives to physically take care of them. Husbands are not used to doing chores for themselves. To a certain extent they need to be taken care of as much as children because they cannot fully be in charge of their families except being breadwinners. Husbands cannot single headedly cope with chores and need assistance from their wives.

- ***Fear of geographical mobility***

Women are said to be afraid of working away from their and families, this is due to the heavy load attached to being a principal. It seemed as if husbands are not supportive when it comes to sharing home responsibilities. This makes women doubt if their families would survive if they are not around. The reason for women educators to decline promotional appointments can be attributed to family commitments. The lack of support from their spouses is also evident in the findings. This could also be linked to the fact that all women in the study were promoted at the same school they had been working at for a long period of time. This could mean that if promotional posts include a transfer, then it is likely that most women would not comply.

- *Lack of self confidence*

Participants in this study reported the lack of self-esteem and self-confidence as major contributory factors for under-representation of women in school leadership posts. This is how they responded:

Women are afraid to get into posts like this one, they confessed to me that they cannot make it, they are just undermining themselves. (Rose)

Most women don't believe in themselves. (Lati)

Women here have low self-esteem, I don't know in other places, they are too dependent on their husbands, they don't believe in doing things themselves. (Emma)

Women doubt themselves; they don't feel competitive enough more especially in the presence of males. (Ivy)

It could be concluded, therefore that all these factors contribute to some educators having low self-esteem and ultimately impacting negatively on their self-confidence. This was the common factor that was indicated by the majority of the participants, they felt strongly that their fellow women are not yet ready take up leadership roles because if they do not believe in themselves, who will? This is in line with Akao (2008) who stresses that many women have to a certain degree internalise the attitudes and role expectations society has of them, wherein they have neatly learnt to fit into women stereotypes which can serve as a major handicap in the development of their individual personalities, their abilities and career potential. In addition, Mestry and Schmidt (2012:47) cited Cubillo and Brown (2003) who found that "South African women struggle with internal personal issues such as professional experiences, conflicts,

emotions, ambitions, aspirations and confidence”. When women become weighed down with these issues, they are perceived as lacking self-esteem which is a requirement for successful leaders. Organisational factors also hinder aspirant women from advancing to leadership positions. These were reflected in three interviews held with the female principals; Emma, Lati and Terry.

In South Africa, the selection procedure comprises of various stages which applicants must go through. Firstly, promotions are advertised giving all people with interest an opportunity to apply and submit their applications to the relevant institutions, where the second stage of sifting takes place. In this stage all applications go through scanning (all applications who do not meet the set criteria are checked out) and then sent to their respective districts. The districts then submit these to their circuit offices. Circuit managers will coordinate and facilitate the rest of the procedure; this includes inviting schools and their SGBs to form both the shortlisting and interviewing panel. At the end of the interview sessions, the SGB makes recommendations to the HOD and finally the HOD (provincial education department) makes the final appointment. In some cases, the HOD may go in favour of the SGB’s recommendation or may decide against it.

Interview data revealed that posts were all advertised except for Terry’s. She was promoted meaning that she was not procedurally appointed.

The post was advertised, my application went through sifting and I was shortlisted and then invited for the interviews and ultimately won the post.  
(Rose)

When the post was advertised, I was acting as principal. Some SGB members told me during one meeting that: “sekolo sa rena se nyaka monna”, eng Monna tia, e seng ngwanenyana neh, sekolo se se nyaka monna.” .....meaning that their school needs a male principal and not a girl “Hee.. Eh, they called me ngwanenyana,” meaning a small girl. They did not want me as principal because firstly I was a woman and secondly I was not from their village.

Emma continues:

They wanted someone from their village to lead the school, but the person was not shortlisted. The SGB started to holding meetings at the Royal place. They planned to stop the interviews because their person was not shortlisted. The plan

did not work. They were dismissed, and interviews were conducted, and at the end I was appointed as principal.

The post was advertised and I applied like any other person. I was shortlisted.... Hey and on the day of shortlisting the circuit manager called me to ask me how many months have I been acting as the principal, and I told him I acted for 11 months. The SGB was divided because some members did not want me to be the principal, so they did not want me to be shortlisted. I didn't know why and I did not ask, even up to today. (Lati)

In response to the question: Why did you not ask? The participants gave the following answers:

I think at that time I wanted to lead, and I did not want to hear negative things that would disturb me and ultimately make me lose focus or make me doubt myself. I knew in my heart that all I needed was a chance to prove myself. I was shortlisted. I prepared for the interview. The circuit manager organised the panel for the whole process. Two days before the interviews, I was involved in a car accident but was not injured. So I went for the interview on the 10<sup>th</sup> December 2009, and I was the only female and finally I was appointed the principal in March 2010. (Lati)

You mean during the interviews?...My post was not advertised, I was promoted into the post. And this was supported by the circuit manager. There were some dissatisfaction, that I was a level one educator, and therefore did not meet the requirement. Unfortunately, it was already late because I was appointed. (Terry)

Well..., the post was advertised and my application was successful, I was shortlisted and I attended the interviews and then appointed as the principal. (Lizzy)

Promotional posts were advertised, I applied for two schools and I was shortlisted and interviewed. I was appointed the principal of this school. (Ivy)

Furthermore, the interview with Emma indicated some gender discrimination displayed by the SGB. From the researcher's experience as a onetime school electoral officer, most SGB more especially in rural areas which are patriarchal are constituted mostly by males because women do not accept nominations during elections. One of the key duties of the SGB is to form a panel

and also to recommend. It is more likely that men will not disadvantage their fellow males. The researcher's point is that as long as structures to make recommendations and appointments are still dominated by males, it is still a long way to achieve gender equality. The researcher suggests that women should not only think of leadership positions as principals, HOD and deputy principals, but they must also lobby for SGB senior portfolios. This would be in order to achieve gender equality in school leadership positions. Emma was initially rejected as a school principal simply because she is a woman and the SGB wanted a man to lead the school, secondly, because she was not a local candidate.

Mello and Phago (2007:154) assert that "equity demands that public service remove glass ceilings; the development of equity targets in all governmental departments will ensure that line managers implement and are held accountable for ensuring gender- mainstreaming practices when discharging their duties".

#### ***4.4.1.3. Stakeholders' perceptions***

##### ***4.4.1.3.1. Perceptions of women principals by stakeholders***

Perception is defined as a means of judgement about other people particularly those that are considered as social animals; perceptions are seldom accurate or stable and maybe brought about by superficial characteristics such as stereotypes; sex, roles, age, race, occupation and appearance and that stereotyping often leads people to judge positively those whom they are familiar with and negatively those whom they are not familiar with (Ngcobo, 2010).

Literature research has documented stakeholders' perceptions towards women in education management. Although more of these studies were conducted overseas, it is evident from studies done in South Africa that most of the perceptions towards women in education management are global, and not restricted to one group, nation, ethnic group or specific school. Coleman (2002) suggests that studies not only seek to find out how stakeholders perceive women principals, but how principals' perception of themselves should also be captured. According to Coombs (2004) the different leadership styles of men and women definitely cause perceptions. The differences between men and women are also an origin of perceptions. The traditional, personal and societal views of a person can also cause perceptions.

Gender and culture do not exist in isolation, they are interwoven. Women in this study confirmed that the way in which they were brought up in their culture in which male dominance is highly emphasised in all spheres of life had impacted on the way society views

them as school principals. The school is an extension of the community and cultural beliefs also manifest themselves in the school situation whereby learners, educators and parents bring to school their cultural beliefs. From interviews held, the general feeling of most participants was that women are still perceived as lacking in terms of leadership. It is also revealed that even though they were finally appointed into principalship, they were still doubted by their own colleagues, learners, parents, and therefore the society as a whole. Leadership is still viewed in terms of gender. It can be assumed that women principals have to prove themselves through hard work in order to be taken seriously. Women principals in this study were asked this question: what in your opinion is the perception of society towards women principals?

When I got into this post, many people doubted me, saying many negative things about my leadership style, but the 2007 Matric results turned the situation around, results came out good and from that time they took me seriously.... They could see that I mean business. (Rose)

This suggests that society had doubts about her leading the school but because she proved herself with good quality results, then they started to accept her. She had to work harder to earn society's acceptance and approval simply because she is a woman. This is in line with the notion that leadership is attributed to masculinity, and this tends to favour men as better able than women at discipline, working with predominantly male boards of education and dealing with political influence (Parsaloi, 2012).

The society still looks down on women, let alone women principals... they still think that women are not competent like male principals. As a woman principal ... I am not trusted because I m a woman. (Terry)

I have to prove a point before I could be approved. In this area women are regarded as children. (Ivy)

This resonates with what Moorosi's (2010) that "women are disadvantaged in communities where strength is linked to a male stereotype and where such highly gendered perceptions still reign". Evidence obtained from district official shows that women continue to experience the same prejudicial attitudes from selection committees as the following extract reflects:

When it comes to principal-ship they want a man, they have so many excuses to make that they need a strong man. And I just want to know what they mean when they say "strong. (DOE official)

Women cry easily and therefore cannot lead..... “They are not tough like male leaders, our school needs a man. (Emma)

Women are expected to behave like men, be autocratic and aggressive in tone. Women principals are judged according to certain masculine qualities and if they behave in the opposite manner they are referred to as ineffective managers. Coleman (2002:89) asserts that “the assumption is that there is only one correct way to manage; a male way and that showing emotions and being nice is unacceptable”. Anonymous maintains that men are said to be more rational while women are emotional (2010, Oct).

This converges with male- dominance theory that the ideal manager must be masculine, self-reliant, forceful, and ambitious strong leader. Coombs (2004: 7) argues that “so long as women managers remain in the minority, the male stereotype of management will endure and women in management positions will feel pressurised to behave like men”. Emma highlighted something different which could also imply that women’s emotional maturity is also undermined. This suggests that women are perceived as weak and not fit for management positions, and this could also suggest women principals are not emotionally mature. This concurs with Shakeshaft ‘s (1992:18) findings in Coombs (2004: 6) that “ men had a discomfort in communicating with a member of the other sex because they are afraid of women’s tears when confronting them; and this fear of tears keeps men from giving corrective feedback to women to enable them to be better leaders”.

Interestingly, Lati reported this in her interview:

I think that 70% of the society see me as a valuable asset in their community, because some say that if I could leave their school their children would not survive, but there are still some male parents who think a male principal could do better than me, they mention things like women cannot take bold decisions and they belong at home. “

Firstly, Lati’s response could suggest that the society is slowly changing from their stereotypical cultural beliefs about women in management, because some feel that they contribute a lot to the school and their absence would be felt. Lati is much organised even though she does have not an office, she is one of the women principals who was able to present the school’s learners’ performance schedules for previous years which indicated that learner performance improved ever since she was appointed the principal of the school. Secondly, the

notion of “women belong at home” to take care of their families is noticed is another perception formulated around women principals. She is also comfortable and content with the improvement she has made in the school. Thirdly, the idea that women principals cannot take bold decisions implies women cannot maintain the role of authority in education. This concurs with findings in Panigrahi (2013: 40) study that show that women principals were reported to be too dependent on their staff for decision making.

I think that some men are in denial, they are living in the past, gone are those days when women were only excelling at home.... now I am managing 426 learners and 20 educators and results are good and the school is progressing (Lati).

Women in patriarchal societies were brought up to take everything that comes their way without any questions. Women were brought up in family structures that expect them to listen and follow orders from those in charge which are in most cases males. Literature review indicated that women are regarded as emotional rather than rational as compared to men. Liberal feminists argue that society holds the false belief that women are less intellectually and physically capable by nature than men; thus there is discrimination against women in the academy, the forum and marketplaces. Even though liberal feminism acknowledges the biological differences that exist between men and women, there is an emphasis that women could sometimes be on par with men. A critical person tries to be fair and honest in the judgement of others as well as themselves. Women in this study were not afraid to point out problems that stand in women’s way of fulfilling leadership. Women principals in this study had courage and were brave to be positioned to see positives and negatives in both themselves and others. They analyse every situation they find themselves in.

Lati reflects the liberal feminism value which is analytical thinking; meaning that women principals are in a position to analyse everything that comes to them whether bad or good and can apply their minds objectively. This type of thinking involves fairness and careful judgement. The interview data above shows that women principals in this regard show bravery and are critical. Lati represents women in the 20<sup>th</sup> century who choose what to listen to, unlike patriarchal women in the past who were groomed to listen and follow; never given an opportunity to voice their views. Lati sees herself as a successful leader, mother and wife. She is making efforts to get rid of the traditional role of a home manager to an administrative manager where she deals with curriculum, enhances learner performance and monitors the school’s progress. The fact that she can strike a balance between home and work conflict makes

her a successful leader. She also nullifies the gender stereotypes levelled against her as a woman. This confirms both liberal and radical feminist notions. First, liberal feminism is an individualistic form of feminist theory, which focuses on women's ability to maintain their equality through their own choices and actions. Secondly, radical feminism contends that women are never recognised as positive beings in patriarchal societies where they are oppressed. This theory believes that patriarchy can be defeated if women acknowledge their own value and strength to oppose oppression in private and public spheres. Lindo (2012) argues that "women must be valued for the skills they bring to administration rather than being compared to the traditional concept of administration".

Lastly Emma indicated this during her interview:

They say I am a dictator whenever I refer them to departmental rules and regulations.

This suggests that educators expected Emma to behave in way that describes a woman; she was expected to show feminine characteristics and not to sound ambitious and forceful and authoritative. Emma also confirmed that sometimes when she approaches male educators, she gets aggressive, bold and serious as she wants things done according to departmental rules and regulations and it seems that she is firm on policy implementation. According to Wachera (2013:21) some "female principals see gender as a hindrance; they are compelled to lead the way men do as it is considered the norm. In their view, utilizing men's styles of leadership is the most successful way of attracting promotion and recognition. Emma was accused of lacking feminine qualities as expected from women".

Coombs (2004: 5) refutes that "society does not approve women as managers because most men believe that women lose their femininity when they are appointed as managers". She further states that women do not have to lose their femininity to become good leaders. If women realise this, they can become real role models for future women managers in education once they accept who they are. However, Ngcobo (2010) cited Sharpe and Burton (1983) when emphasising that on the one side of the spectrum some people consider women as poor leadership material if they act feminine, while on the other side if they act masculine they are seen as deviant and condemned as unfeminine. Lastly, Kitele (2013:49) claims that "cultural and social beliefs lead to the perception that women are seen as inferior to men and therefore cannot manage over men". Unfortunately, these perceptions interfere with school management.

Findings in this study revealed that women are perceived negatively due to the culture in their societies as merely wives and mothers who belong in the kitchen; who are not supposed to be leaders, who are weak leaders who cannot take bold decisions because they are not tough like men, as not hard working and competent. They are positively viewed as hard working principals who bring change in the school; for example improved grade results. Women principals are sometimes valued for the contributions they make in the society.

#### ***4.4.1.4. Future aspirations***

The first part of this section presented factors women principals think can help to improve women participation in leadership roles. Women in this study proved themselves not only as problem identifiers but also as problem solvers. They identified problems in their career paths and were able to propose some suggestions that women must change their mentality towards leadership, and that women should view leadership designed for all those who desire to lead and not particularly for women. In addition, women principals such as Rose were able to impart information they gained from a women leadership conference to female staff. The second part will present the participants' future leadership aspirations.

##### ***4.4.1.4.1 Enhancing women participation in leadership roles***

Participants made some recommendations as to what they think could be done to improve women participation in leadership. This question was presented to the participants in this study to establish factors that could enhance women participation in leadership roles: *what do you think would encourage women to participate in leadership positions?* These were their responses:

I think women need motivation more especially from us women principals... after realising this ..... Immediately after attending leadership conference or workshop I call the women educators and give them feedback from the workshop or conference.....just to motivate them to apply for senior posts. (Rose)

Women around her must enrol for leadership and management course in order to prepare themselves for senior positions. (Emma)

A new way of thinking... I think will help. Women must do away with the concept of I am a woman ... therefore I cannot lead because society says so. (Lizzy)

Nothing will motivate them..... you mean women in this school, because they are part of the community which do not approve of female principals. (Terry)

Maybe need to attend more leadership workshops and conferences for all women and not for women in senior positions only. (Lati)

Women principals' networks or support groups may also help motivating other women. (Ivy)

Women principals feel that more workshops on leadership must be organised for all women educators and not only for those in leadership positions. Secondly, women must develop themselves more especially academically; they must take the initiative to enrol for leadership courses. Women educators must be motivated and encouraged to develop the desire to lead. In addition, more networks and support systems for women in leadership were recommended.

In summary, findings revealed that women educators need more encouragement and support in the form of network and support structures and workshops and conferences. They also need to change their negative attitude towards leadership.

#### ***4.4.1.4.2 Future aspirations of women principals***

Women participants' future aspirations for leadership differ greatly. The fact that these women encounter different work environments with a variety of challenges seem to have an impact on the future aspirations of women in leadership. Women principals confessed the following:

I am hoping to become a circuit manager one day..... (Laughter)...or maybe lead a bigger school than the one I am leading now. (Lati)

I am looking forward to working in a Tertiary institution... and probably a university. (Lizzy)

I will retire very soon....will be there for my family and community. (Ivy)

Hmmm... I can't wait to get out of here ... (laughter) .... With these challenges; I don't think I want to lead again. (Terry)

I will be retiring next term and I am going for business...jah I have had enough of the teaching world and its politics. (Emma)

Data suggests that women with lots of challenges at their work places did not show any more interest in taking up leadership roles; Emma and Terry both had a rough career journey. On the other hand, some women are still motivated to remain in leadership; planning to lead in bigger institutions. Lastly, the fact that some women in the study have enrolled to further their studies could suggest that they are getting ready for further promotions.

However, Parsaloi's (2012:84) findings reveal that women principals do not show further interest in leadership posts but desire the following options instead; "early retirement, step down and then go back to teaching in the classroom and lack of an attractive pay package was also stated as a reason for loss of interest in further leadership". In addition, women educators tend not to have specific, well-defined career plans once they start teaching. For them, teaching is their career plan. Women tend to modify their career aspirations due to domestic responsibilities. Later in their lives when their children are grown-ups, then will they start searching for promotional posts?

#### **4.5 CONCLUSION**

The first part of this chapter introduced participants and the schools they lead. The study investigated leadership experiences of women principals in secondary schools of Sekhukhune District in Limpopo Province. Data collection was through observational sessions, a series of interviews with women principals in their respective schools and analysing documents. Thereafter, themes were generated and categorised in order to understand the research questions:

1. What are the factors that led to women principals' appointment as principals?
2. What are challenges that women principals face in their leadership and management roles; and how do these challenges impact on the whole school management, and what strategies do they employ to cope?
3. What are the factors disturbing women principals from advancing into leadership positions?
4. What are the stakeholders' perceptions of women principals?
5. What are the future leadership aspirations of women principals?

Women principals have spoken; and their voices are summarised in this section. Data revealed that factors accounting for their appointment as principals were both external and internal. Participants confirmed factors such as their academic and professional credentials, managerial experiences they gained throughout their careers and training offered by the DOE and unions, self –confidence and dedication, familiarity with the school communities and encouragement by others. Other participants’ leadership journey was not smooth because some took longer periods to be appointed, while others had to fight to be finally appointed into these principal ship posts. Their hard work coupled with dedication and self- confidence aided them to reach the top of the ladder. Their effort to disregard what society predicts for them was also noticed. This was evident in the reviewed literature.

They reached top management positions in schools and were prepared to face the challenges posed to them by their different environments. Similarities were also identified from their responses. Challenges reported ranged from administrative, personal to societal. Most challenges indicated by women principals stem from cultural and traditional belief systems that continue to view women as unfit for leadership positions. The school is a social institution and therefore some stakeholders bring along their beliefs which may pose challenges to these women principals. In addition, most rural communities in South Africa are still patriarchal and therefore do not approve women as managers. Women principals are still faced with discrimination, gender inequality and cultural stereotypes which are displayed in various forms such negative attitudes towards women principals, lack of dedication, respect and support, late coming from educators and learners, unruly behaviour from learners, and the rejection of women principals by the community.

In addition, women principals acknowledged some of the challenges as factors that could disturb other women educators from aspiring to leadership positions. Three schools were underperforming through learner performance schedules which were perused by the researcher. Moreover, schools with serious challenges were the ones under-performing. As a result, women educators may be demotivated when they see schools led by women being unsuccessful.

Lastly, women principals in this study tried their best to deal with some of the challenges by adopting different strategies in order to cope. They delegated duties to their subordinates, used their religious faith and some even resorted to authoritarian way of leadership, while others employed participative and democratic leadership styles. Despite all the efforts women principals took, they are still not taken seriously by the communities they serve because the

theory of male-dominance still prevails; women were not created to be managers. Women are still perceived as belonging in the kitchen, and unfortunately even by other women who are supposed to be supportive. It should not be surprising when women principals aspire not to pursue leadership in future. Data revealed that women encountering many challenges in their schools are demotivated to advance to further leadership roles while those with less challenges acquired more qualifications in preparation for future leadership positions.

This chapter presented data analysis collected from interviews, observations and school documents in order to address the research questions. The next chapter will present findings and discussions from analysed data.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter four presented the essence of the participants' leadership experiences, and how they made sense of them. Chapter five consists of an overview of the study which provides answers to the research questions, identify the theoretical framework and provide the study's policy implication, highlight its limitations as well as provide direction and areas for future research.

##### **5.1.1 Overview of the study**

Chapter one gave the background to the research by highlighting the research problem, the aim of the study and the motivation for undertaking the study. The chapter also indicated how the research would be conducted.

Chapter two opened with a theoretical framework which gives perspectives of feminism theories; liberal feminism, black feminism, African feminism and radical feminism, because the study was rooted in this paradigm. Feminist paradigms have called attention to social aspects of life that are not revealed by other paradigms and aim at understanding the nature of gender inequality by examining women's gender roles and lived experiences. The researcher referred to liberal feminism which rests on themes such as equal opportunities, socialisation and gender-stereotyping, sex discrimination, the impact of structures that disadvantage women and create exclusiveness.

This chapter further focused on literature review in the selected research questions, thus factors accounting for the under-representation of women in management positions as well as barriers to the advancement of women participation in leadership positions. Challenges faced by women were also outlined and the extent to which these challenges impact on their leadership roles. The leadership styles as well as strategies employed by women principals were looked into. This chapter concluded by indicating stakeholders' perceptions towards women principals.

Chapter three briefly explained how the study was conducted, indicating the research method and research design. The method of sampling and data collection strategies were set out. The study employed triangulation which included interviews, field notes from observations and

documents analysed. Criteria for selecting participants as well as procedure for conducting research and gaining access to the field of study were explained.

Chapter four opened with a description of sites where the research took place, followed by descriptions of the participants and then an analysis of selected documents. The last section of this chapter provided an interpretation and analysis of the findings from interviews, observations and documents.

Chapter five is an extension of chapter four which gave an overview of the study and provided a way forward on the topic.

This study was set to explore and describe the leadership experiences of women principals in the secondary schools of Sekhukhune District. The study was also aimed at understanding how women principals were appointed in their leadership positions, the challenges they face as well as the leadership styles they adopt to cope with those challenges. The study was set to answer the six specific questions related to women leadership experiences which were formulated as follows:

1. What are the factors that led to women principals' appointment into leadership positions?
2. What are the factors that disturb women from advancing to leadership positions?
3. What are the challenges they face, and to what extent do they impact on both their personal lives and on the whole school management?
4. What leadership styles and strategies do they adopt to deal with challenges they face?
5. What are the stakeholders' perceptions towards women principals?
6. What are their future leadership aspirations?

To answer the above-mentioned questions, a qualitative research approach was employed using semi-structured interviews, observations and analysed documents in the schools. Additionally, a thematic analysis was used to analyse data which resulted in the study's findings. The researcher discussed the findings and then used existing literature to draw similarities and differences between experiences of women principals in Sekhukhune District and those of others that have been documented. First the findings related to the factors which lead to women principals being finally appointed as principals were discussed. Findings suggest that personal factors contributed more to women being appointed as principals than external factors.

### 5.1. 2 Key findings

Findings in this study seem to reveal that women have travelled a long journey before their actual appointment as principals of secondary schools; that it took them between 14 – 21 years' experience as well as teaching to be promoted to principalship, and that their qualifications played a major role as a motivational factor to advance into leadership positions. Five participants in this study had acquired at least one or two university degrees at the time of their appointment, with the exception of one woman principal with a college diploma. This corroborates with Lumby and Azaola's (2011: 17) findings that participants in their study were in possession of leadership and management qualifications apart from obtaining bachelors' degrees or senior degrees. Among the participants 39% had an Honours Bachelor's degree, 25% had ordinary bachelors, 25% had Teachers' Diploma, and 9% had a Master's degree and 2% a PhD; which could denote that women are generally well qualified. Additionally, women confirmed having leadership and management courses and also attending leadership workshops and conferences. Findings in this study indicated that women principals had also served as HOD and deputy- principals before their appointment; which indicated that they acquired managerial experience. The findings of this study converges with Moorosi's (2010) findings which claim that most participants went through the stages, from teacher to HOD, from HOD to deputy- principal and then from deputy- principal to principal. Moorosi (2010) argues that there are few exceptional cases where stages were skipped for various reasons, which was also evident in this study in Terry's case whereby she was promoted from being a cs1 educator straight to principal.

Furthermore, findings indicated that women principals were appointed as principals due to the fact that the former principals had left the schools and so the post was vacant, and then they acted as principals and eventually were appointed or promoted. To note is that these women were internally appointed, so they were not strangers in these schools. Five women had acted as principals in the schools they now lead. This resonates with Moorosi's (2010:9) findings that "familiarity of individuals to the school community appeared to be prevalent for selection". It seems leadership came unexpectedly because women saw an opportunity to lead and seized it. This study also discovered that the six participants were appointed at a later stage in their career; as three of them were from ages 40 and above, and the other three were at 50 years and above. This converges with what Moorosi (2010: 9) asserts that "experience becomes more complex as it is linked to familiarity of the candidates and to some extent to the age of candidates". She argues that the older the candidates, the longer the years of service and higher

the likelihood that they would have served in the school. Additionally, another previous study by Tshabangu and Mollel (2014) affirms that women in child-bearing age are often discriminated against in senior leadership positions in favour of their male counterparts.

However, it is evident from this study that some women principals such as Lati, Emma and Lizzy had planned to be principals for their entire careers; they had the desire to lead and serve their communities, their ambition and self-confidence added value to their appointment. These assertions concur with previous studies which maintain that the desire to becoming a principal was their own ambition and also declared themselves as their own motivators (Zulu 2007; Brannan & Priola 2009; Lumby 2010; Lindo 2012; and Parsaloi 2012).

Moreover, findings revealed that they were also encouraged by other sources such as former principals, SGB members and circuit managers to apply for principalship positions. Women in this study appreciated these sources as their motivators and mentors who contributed to their readiness for leadership. The findings uphold what Netshitangani and Msila (2014:262) assert that “even though for some women their promotion came through interventions of powerful males, nonetheless, they still explain that they believe that women can be appropriate in these management positions”.

On the other hand, findings revealed that there are no formal mentoring programmes established to assist women principals, which tallies with findings in Lindo (2012). Moorosi (2007) argues that the absence of women in powerful positions suggests that women are seen through traditional theoretical lenses and are measured against ideals that have historically best served men.

Participants in this study revealed the following factors which they perceive as barriers to women’s advancement to leadership roles; these are factors ranging from individual to organisational as well as societal. The study revealed individual factors such as the lack of qualifications which explains why most women educators are stuck as HODs and deputy-principals. Failure to acquire relevant qualifications force women to be comfortable in playing the role of second-in-charge managers. Previous research indicated that women are barred from leadership roles due to lack of academic credentials, training and skills and that time to study, research, and writing are said to be rare for women. This validates findings in Sperandio and Kagoda (2010:24) that the Annual School Census 2004, released by the Ministry of Education, revealed that 29% of teachers at secondary school level in Uganda have a first university

degree, with less than 2% having postgraduate degrees, and the remaining 7% of female educators having secondary education only.

On the contrary, Lati and Ivy confirmed that women educators have relevant qualifications but do not apply for promotional positions. This supports a recent study by Gobena (2014:35) who cited Grady (1992) in her article “*Women and educational administration: certified but not employed*” indicates that “the major impediment was women’s unwillingness to apply for administrative positions, and not necessarily the lack of qualifications”. Reluctance to apply for principal posts is attributed to factors such as the lack of dedication and accountability. Women were reported to be satisfied with their status quo because they claim that both leadership and family roles are demanding. Leadership is viewed by many educators as stressful, demanding and time-consuming. Mbepera (2015) and Gobena (2014) also uphold that there was a general feeling by participants that females are sluggish when performing their professional duties compared to their male counterparts. Contrary Rose, one of the participants, revealed that women with qualifications apply for promotional positions, get shortlisted and interviewed but do not get the posts as they perform poorly during interviews.

The lack of support from other stakeholders and family members, especially spouses, was indicated as another barrier for women advancement into leadership positions. Women said they were scared to accept promotional offers because of fear of geographical mobility, and family attachments. Findings revealed that husbands were unsupportive towards their wives’ career development and progression. This is attributed to the issue of socialisation of gender roles because husbands are not socialised to share house chores with their wives. As a result, women sometimes opt to turn down promotional offers because they do not want to leave their families behind because they know that their husbands will not manage.

Furthermore, findings revealed that women do not feel confident enough to lead schools more especially in the presence of men. Women are also said to still view leadership as a role meant for men. Previous studies have shown that many women internalise the attitudes and role expectations, that they have learnt to fit neatly into the stereotypes which can serve as a major handicap in the development of their individual personalities (Chabaya *et al.* 2009).

Women principals in this study also indicated that they had problems gaining leadership positions in their schools which should not be surprising as most interview panellists are predominantly males. Lati and Emma’s cases provide such evidence that women are discriminated against. For example, Emma was rejected by the community because the SGB

wanted their school to be led by a man and not a woman, and the person to lead the school was to be a resident in the community. The lack of transparency in the selection procedure tends to disadvantage women. This resonates with Moorosi's (2010) notion of the "son of soil" and the SGB's perspective of a strong man display overt discriminatory practices in the process of employment and is done in the auspices of getting the "best" candidates for the job. On the contrary, findings by Akao (2008) reveal that women principals interviewed experienced no problems related to the selection procedure. It is evident from the findings that the selection criteria, as set out by the DOE, are sometimes not adhered to.

This is particularly relevant to this study as the recommendations are entirely influenced by the SGB and the appointment process for principalship posts in the South African government is also dependent on district senior managers. The researcher endeavours to indicate that most SGBs are predominantly male, therefore the argument is that traditional and stereotypical beliefs will not easily change because of policy and legislation. This verifies what Bush and Kaparau (2007) maintain that attitudes change more slowly than the law. Above and beyond, liberal feminism has, through the provision of equal opportunities and other measures, failed to bring about real change and remove the barriers entrenched in an overtly patriarchal and traditional society. As result, the researcher reflects that a more radical approach may be appropriate.

Findings revealed that even though society's perception towards women principals is slowly changing, gender and cultural stereotypes continue to play a major role in how women principals are perceived. Women principals are still perceived as less competent compared to their male counterparts. Women in general are still not taken seriously by the community. There are still wide perceptions that women cannot take bold decisions, are weak, cry easily, belong in the kitchen and cannot lead as men do. The perceptions are that their leadership qualities are doubted, all these were confirmed by women principals in this study. In agreement, previous studies by Ngcobo (2010), Mestry and Schmidt (2012) maintain that how women principals are perceived is influenced by traditional beliefs because the patriarchal culture remains dominant in most school communities. However, they maintain that there is a positive stereotype of identifying women as nurturing, caring, and people-oriented; which is criticised by other researchers who argue that construed meaning of gender stereotypically classifies women's insubordinate roles and identifies them with the domestic arena which is often seen as inferior compared to the public arena.

Furthermore, evidence in this study suggests that women principals' future leadership aspirations differ greatly depending on their different work environments, and is also influenced by the extent of the challenges women face in their managerial roles. This study shows that some women principals confirmed to have lost the desire to further their leadership roles, while others are determined to remain in their leadership positions. It also seems that some participants are preparing themselves to lead in bigger institutions. This corroborates with Parsaloi's (2012) findings that women principals do not show more interest in leadership roles; explaining that some opt for early retirement, while others step down and go back to teaching due to the lack of an attractive pay package.

Findings revealed that women principals are more versatile in their leadership; they adopt a variety of leadership styles to cope with challenges and manage their institutions. Evidence revealed that women principals showed feminine characteristics such as caring and nurturing, interpersonal relationships with stakeholders, good in time management, consultative and democratic, empowering and developing staff which contributes to transformational leadership. Marlene and College (2009), contends that women principals are organised and efficient, are policy implementers and have also shown interest in learner performance. Gura-Mutunhu- Mudiswa and Bolt (2012) and Swan's (2014) findings indicate that sometimes women adopt authoritarian leadership style as strategies to deal with some of the challenges they face Arar *et al.* (2011). Therefore women principals are said to use variations of good values of feminine and good masculine qualities (Gaetane & Martinez, 2007; Ngcobo, 2010; Arar *et al.*, 2011). Spiritual leadership is also evident (Dryer, 2011 & Lumby, 2010).

Work experiences of women principals ranged from personal challenges to administrative. This study found that the experiences of women principals had many similarities and differences over the large number of years they had spent in the teaching profession. Administratively, women spoke of challenges such as shortage of staff, insufficient furniture and classrooms, lack of funds, lack of professional dedication and commitment, negative attitude from stakeholders, unruly behaviour from learners, late coming, absenteeism from both learners and educators, lack of support from DOE and parents, and resistance towards policy changes. All this corroborates literature reviewed from Moorosi (2010), Parsaloi (2012), Makhaye (2012), Akao (2008) and Ballard (2010).

Women adopted strategies such as delegation to relieve themselves from other duties. They involved parents and staff in the decision- making of the school, implemented various school

policies to instil order and discipline, raised funds to alleviate financial problems, locked gates for late coming learners and involved communities in school projects such as gardening, feeding schemes and taking care of the school environment. Some women principals revealed that they relied heavily on the religious faith and the support of stakeholders in some cases to cope with difficult situations.

All in all, women principals are faced with cultural challenges such as gender stereotypes which often result in parents' negative attitude towards women principals, the lack of respect, rejection of women principals and lack of support from parents because society is still attuned to male leaders and the devaluation of women as leaders. Male parents continue criticising women principals declaring them incompetent, calling them girls and to an extent refusing to resolve academic problems regarding their children.

This research also detected that challenges brought both positive and negative impact to the principals' well-being as well as to the whole school management. The negative impact of the challenges women faced include, among others, loneliness from the fact they had no one to share their problems with, humiliation by continued attacks and open criticisms by parents, frustration, stress and failure as leaders. All this contributed to low self-esteem and self-confidence. As in some cases, the DOE declared their schools dysfunctional, and therefore parents ended up removing their children from their schools as the DOE opted to merge them with better performing schools in the communities. This also left the principals with a feeling of insecurity.

On the other hand, women turn challenges into opportunities as they continue to show care and nurturing, develop and empower their staff, improved learner performance, where possible building teams and positive relationships with stakeholders and instilling discipline by encouraging learners and educators to observe time, honour the schools' code of conduct and other school policies. These were some of the changes they brought to their schools. Despite the challenges they have faced throughout their careers, they remain confident and optimistic in their leadership as they experience success in some areas. They manage to overcome some difficult situations and this boosts their morale. This supports Diehl's (2014) findings that participants viewed experiences with adversity through the lens of pre-existing faith or beliefs, because instead of focusing on the negative outcomes of adversity, holding firm to faith enabled participants to focus more on the benefits of adverse experience. Diehl (*ibid*: 60) asserts

“obstacles either help you grow or help you make a decision about moving onto something else”.

## **5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS**

To address the under-representation of women in management and leadership positions, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

1. Women educators should obtain credentials by enrolling for management and leadership courses, which will strengthen their leadership skills in order for them to apply for principalship posts.
2. Women must gain confidence which can only be achieved through knowledge gaining and education.
3. Leadership must be redefined to include feminist perspective so that the process of socialisation becomes broader: this can help by changing the perceptions concerning women principals who lead secondary schools.
4. Preparation programmes which are offered to those already in middle management positions should also be offered to all women educators so as to empower them.
5. Stakeholders should be made aware of the Employment Equity Act 1997 aimed at addressing issues of gender in governance and management and must be encouraged to participate in implementing the strategies set out by the Ministry of Education. This must be regularly monitored.

Women principals need a network and support system per district, whereby successful women principals and women educational officers could serve as self-confidence mentors for beginners, aspiring women educators and serving women principals.

## **5.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

1. Firstly, the study explored leadership experiences of female secondary school principals in rural areas of Sekhukhune District, in Limpopo. Therefore findings in this study may not be generalised to all women secondary and primary school principals in other countries, provinces or urban areas as these may have different experiences. Findings should be regarded as guidelines for better understanding the experiences of women principals in rural secondary schools. However, these findings can assist in understanding issues in women educational leadership in context that are similar to this study's context.

2. The study's central focus was on women principals and not on all educational leaders, so it excluded women serving as HODs, and those in higher institutions. The study also excluded male principals of secondary schools who may have different experiences from the participants in this project. A different perspective of leadership could emerge from them.
3. It is possible that participants were biased when responding to interview questions, based on Netshitangani study (2014:244) ' *Situated accounts: Qualitative interviews with women educational managers* ' when maintaining that the interviewer must be aware of the contextual factors as these have influence on research activities , and particularly on qualitative interviews.
4. The researcher had challenges with one participant which forced her to reschedule time and again. One school was visited only during the examinations period where observation was disturbed as the researcher could not get a clearer picture of the situation. Sometimes there were interruptions during interviews as the principals had to attend to administrative duties concerning examinations.

#### **5.4 AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

1. Research could be conducted on the leadership experiences of women who have been appointed as HODs and deputy-principals and have been unable to progress beyond that.
2. The findings of this research discovered that the leadership experiences of women were from those internally appointed (even though not the aim of research). Thus research could be conducted on women principals who are externally appointed with the aim to establish whether they experience the same challenges. A comparative study between those internally and externally appointed could add value in the education field.
3. Furthermore, a comparative study on women and male principals externally appointed could also be a possible future research area.
4. There is evidence of the relationship between women principals' challenges and women's gender; a study on women principals and gender may be helpful. More research could be conducted on the leadership experiences of women principals in urban secondary and primary schools.

## **5.5 CONCLUSION**

It is evident that women's career pathways to principalship are affected by the prevailing and entrenched patriarchal attitudes within the communities in which they have lived and worked from adulthood. Participants in this study were subjected to discrimination which comes from a traditional, patriarchal assumption that men should be the leaders in schools. They experienced barriers and discrimination to progress. However, some were not deterred from pursuing their dreams. This was the case with Emma, Lati and Terry, and to an extent the other three participants.

From the evidence provided by the participants, it can be deduced that factors enabling women to advance to principalship positions are attributed more to their personal than external factors. Their leadership was marked by their self-confidence, self-esteem and unlimited commitment to their careers. Additionally, their religious faith served as an anchor to their survival. The researcher concludes that even though women principals are faced with a myriad of challenges they, however, challenge the traditional stereotypical beliefs rooted in a patriarchal society. The six women principals are agents of liberal feminism in the career actions and choices they have taken.

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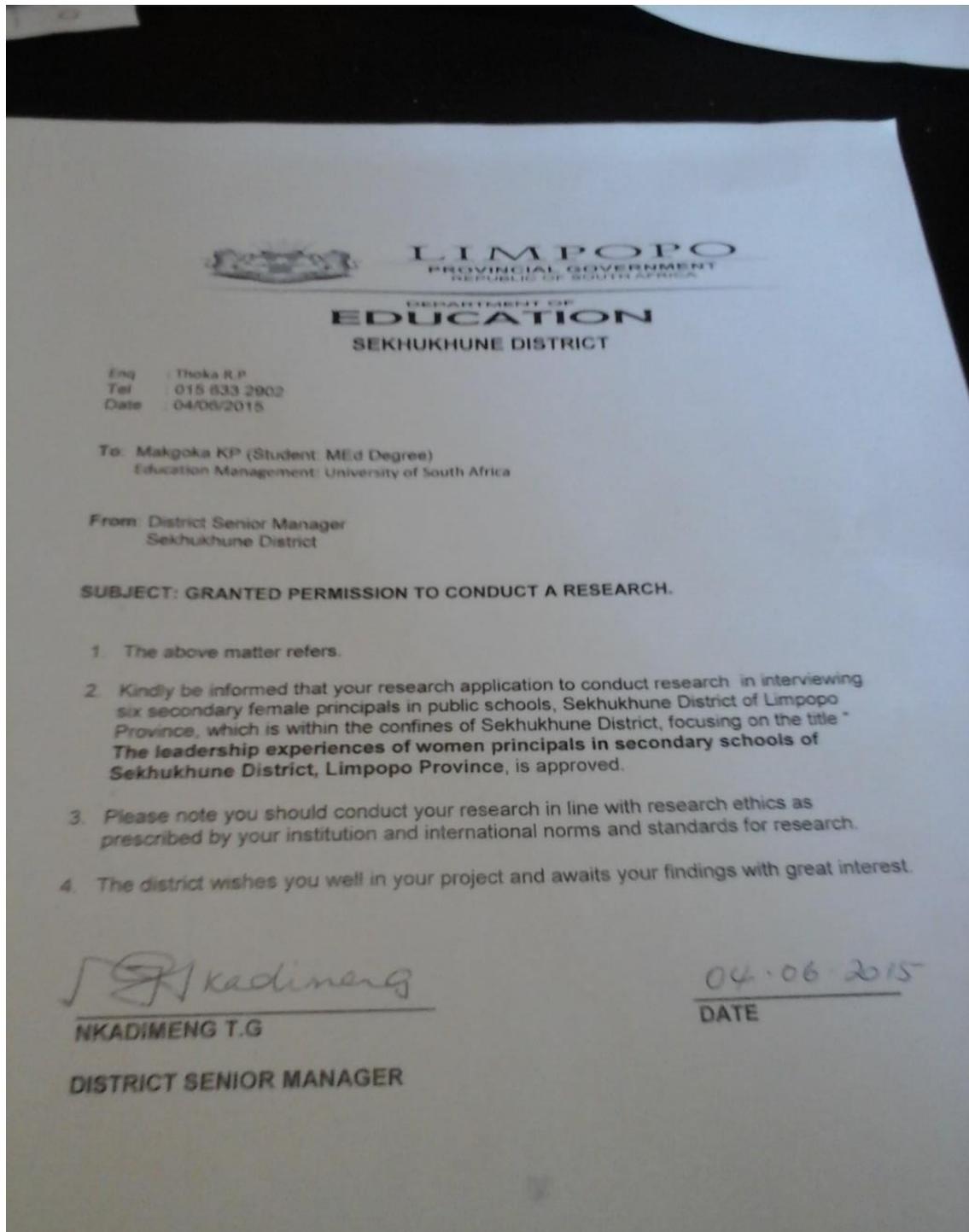
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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: APPROVAL LETTER FROM DISTRICT OFFICE



## **APPENDIX B**

### **LETTER SEEKING PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE DISTRICT OF SEKHUKHUNE, LIMPOPO.**

SEKHUKHUNE DISTRICT

22/02/2014

**Title: The leadership experiences of women principals in secondary schools of Sekhukhune region, Limpopo province.**

Mr TG Nkadimeng  
The District Senior Manager  
SEKHUKHUNE DISTRICT  
Chueniespoort

I Kolobe Philliah Makgoka am doing research under the supervision of Dr Tshildzi Netshitangani, a senior lecturer in the Department of education leadership and management, towards a Master's degree in education (Med) at the University of South Africa.

The study aims to explore the management styles of female principals in the above-mentioned district, and to also understand the personal difficulties they experience, and the impact which these difficulties may have on their career paths.

The study will involve interviews with six female secondary principals working in public schools. This will consist of two sessions. The first interview will have semi-structured questions and follow up interviews with open-ended questions prepared in advanced. There are no potential risks anticipated in this project. I hope that the findings of this research will shed light in issues that challenges female principals in the administration

This research is strictly regulated by UNISA Human Research Ethics Regulation.

Signature of researcher:  
Name of researcher: Makgoka KP  
Position: CS 1educator  
Cell: 0733426 144  
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## **APPENDIX C**

### **LETTER REQUESTING WOMEN PRINCIPALS TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT**

Dear .....Principal.....

This letter is an invitation to consider participating in a study I, Kolobe Philliah Makgoka am conducting as part of my research as a master's student entitled "The leadership experiences of women principals of secondary schools in Sekhukhune region, Limpopo Province" at the University of South Africa. Permission for the study has been given by Limpopo Department of Education and the Ethics Committee of the College of Education, UNISA. I have purposefully identified you as a possible participant because of your valuable experience and expertise related to my research topic.

I would like to provide you with more information about this project and what your involvement would entail if you should agree to take part. . In this interview I would like to have your views and opinions on this topic. The importance of the study is to explore the leadership of women principals in secondary school of Sekhukhune district in Limpopo province. This information can be used to improve overall school performance.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It will involve an interview of approximately 60 minutes in length to take place in a mutually agreed upon location at a time convenient to you. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you so wish. Furthermore, you may decide to withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences.

With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded to facilitate collection of accurate information and later transcribed for analysis. Shortly after the transcription has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcript to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or to clarify any points. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in any publication resulting from this study and any identifying information will be omitted from the report. However, with your permission, anonymous quotations may be used. Data collected during this study will be

retained on a password protected computer for 12 months in my locked office. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at 073 3426144 or by e-mail at [kpmakgoka@gmail.com](mailto:kpmakgoka@gmail.com)

I look forward to speaking with you very much and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project. If you accept my invitation to participate, I will request you to sign the consent form which follows on the next page.

Yours sincerely

.....

**APPENDIX D: CONSENT LETTER TO WOMEN PRINCIPALS**

**CONSENT FORM**

I have read the information presented in the information letter about the study “The leadership experiences of female principals in secondary schools of Sekhukhune district, Limpopo Province”. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and add any additional details I wanted. I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses. I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous. I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher. With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

Participants Name (Please print):.....

Participant Signature: .....

Researcher Name: (Please print).....

Researcher Signature: .....

Date.....

**APPENDIX E: OBSERVATION SCHEDULE FOR WOMEN SECONDARY PRINCIPALS**

**Title: the Leadership experiences of women principals in secondary schools of Sekhukhune district, Limpopo Province.**

Name of the school: -----

Date of observation: -----

Observation	Description
1.Observation during morning devotion	Do learners attend? Are most educators there? How formal/informal is the occasion, Who is keeping order? Is the duty roster? Who is charge?
2. Observation during staff meetings	How is the participation? Who is sharing the meetings? How is the mood? Any facial or non-verbal expression that can be detected?
3. Observation during SMT meetings	How is the participation level? How are decision finalised? How is the relationship? Are responsibilities shared?
4. Observation during SGB/parents meetings	How dedicated are parents, Are they supportive?
5. Observation during RCL meetings and around the school campus	How do the voice their grievances? how do learners behave when they see their principal and, the type of comments they make

## **APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR WOMEN SECONDARY PRINCIPALS**

### **SECTION A**

1. For how long have you been a principal in your school?
2. What factors motivated you to become a school principal?
3. What qualifications do you have?
4. What sort of reaction did you get from other people, when you showed interest in leadership?
5. What was the selection process like?
6. How did you prepare for your leadership ?( in terms of training and mentoring)
7. Tell me about the form of support you got after your appointment as the principal, for example from female, male and the community at large.
8. What are some of your major challenges in the course of your work? ( personal and administrative)
9. What are your future aspirations in leadership?
10. What in your opinion is the perception of the society towards women principals?
11. What do you think are the stumbling block that hinders women from participating in secondary school leadership?
12. What do you think would improve women's participation in secondary school leadership?
13. Is there anything else you would like to add?

**Thank you very much for your time.**

### **SECTION B**

#### **FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR WOMEN SECONDARY PRINCIPALS**

1. Please share your experiences as a woman principal in your work.
2. Talk about the worst day you had at school as a principal
3. Tell me about the best day you have experienced at work as a principal
4. Tell me about the outstanding successes of you professional life.
5. Do men and women lead differently? How?

**Thank you very much for your time.**

**APPENDIX G: CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**



Pho Z

Editing Services

**APPENDIX H: EDITOR'S CERTIFICATE**

75 Tri Star  
Paramount Estate  
Pretoria  
0081

Email: pholilemaseko@yahoo.com  
Cell: 076 103 4817

01 June 2017

**DECLARATION OF PROFESSIONAL EDIT**

I declare that I have edited and proofread the MEd Dissertation entitled: **THE LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN PRINCIPALS OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN SEKHUKHUNE DISTRICT, LIMPOPO by Philliah Kolobe Makgoka.**

My involvement was restricted to language editing, proofreading, sentence structure, sentence completeness, sentence rewriting, consistency, referencing style, editing of headings and captions. I did not do structural re-writing of the content. Kindly note that I did basic formatting as per agreement with the client.

No responsibility is taken for any occurrences of plagiarism, which may not be obvious to the editor. The client is responsible for the quality and accuracy of the final submission.

Sincerely,

Pholile Zengele

Associate Member, Professional Editors Guild

Professional  
**EDITORS**   
Guild

