

**LEADERSHIP ENHANCEMENT AMONGST FEMALE PRINCIPALS OF
SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN VHEMBE DISTRICT OF SOUTH AFRICA**

by

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to all female leaders and all those who are interested in educational matters.

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ABSTRACT

Almost three decades into democracy, a gender imbalance continues to exist in most settings in South Africa. Although the country's Constitution makes a firm stand against gender inequality, women still occupy the most disadvantaged positions in comparison to their male counterparts. The educational sector is not immune to this because most females are concentrated in the middle and lower-level positions in the sector. The few who manage to break this barrier by making it into leadership positions are faced with a lack of support and uncooperative attitudes from colleagues and community members, which affects their ability to perform their duties effectively, manage their schools and advance their careers. Although issues relating to the leadership experiences of female principals have been widely researched in South Africa, a detailed account in particular communities is still missing. Therefore, it is necessary to develop interventions that are tailored to the specific needs of a particular community. Furthermore, the persistence of the issue warrants its in-depth exploration in order to come up with more practical strategies to address the challenges faced by female principals in managing their schools. Therefore, this study explored the experiences of female principals in leading rural secondary schools with the intention of developing a model to improve their leadership of secondary schools in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province. The study was underpinned by an integrated theoretical framework consisting of transformational leadership theory and liberal feminist theory. A qualitative approach was used to guide the collection and analysis of data collected from 18 principals, who were purposefully selected from rural secondary schools in the Vhembe District, a rural area characterised by deeply traditional and patriarchal norms and values. Data were solicited through the use of focus group discussions and interviews with the principals and subsequently analysed using thematic analysis. The findings of the study revealed that patriarchy plays a major role in preventing female principals in rural areas from effectively performing their duties. Although some female principals reported having positive experiences, most of them indicated negative experiences, including lack of support and cooperation from the learners, parents, teachers, the community and the Department of Basic Education (DBE) officials as a result of gender discrimination and societal stereotypes, which consequently made it difficult to lead their schools. Despite this, female principals were found to be selfless and inspirational, serving as role models in overseeing the transformation and change

they desire in their schools. This is a sure way of overcoming the leadership challenges they face. In light of the experiences of the female principals, the study recommends the adoption of the Multi-stakeholder Leadership Model to improve the leadership of female principals leading rural secondary schools. This model promotes the collaboration of different parties at all levels – community, learners, educators, district/provincial authorities and government – in achieving this all-important purpose. All stakeholders should collaborate in initiatives to promote and protect the rights of female principals and ensure gender equality and proper work conditions for both male and female principals in the workplace. The practice of patriarchy which is embedded in culture has to be challenged for the female principals to perform their duties effectively without limitation.

Keywords: experiences; female principals; gender equality; leadership positions; patriarchy; secondary schools; Vhembe District

DECLARATION

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Exact wording of the title of the thesis as appearing on the electronic copy submitted for examination:

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The researcher declares that the above thesis is her own work and that all the sources that the researcher has used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

The researcher further declare that she submitted the thesis to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

The researcher further declares that she has not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

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CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF AND INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This study investigated the experiences of female principals in providing leadership in rural secondary schools in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province. The aim of the study was to understand for recommendation purposes, in the form of a model, how leadership among female principals leading rural secondary schools can be enhanced.

By means of an investigation, this study explored the experiences of female secondary school principals in Vhembe District, identifying the challenges they face from teachers, learners and parents, as well as ascertaining areas of school leadership which female secondary school principals see as requiring development specifically for female principals. The study subsequently makes recommendations to the DBE on how leadership among female principals in rural secondary schools in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province can be improved or enhanced.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Vhembe Education District is one of the five education districts in the Limpopo Province of the Republic of South Africa. It comprises 968 schools, of which 303 are secondary schools. In terms of Grade 12 results, the district has been the best performing in Limpopo for more than five years. Undoubtedly, the contribution of the principals (as well as their teachers) has been enormous.

What is striking though is that there are only 41 women principals of secondary schools, constituting only 13.5% of the total number of secondary school principals (Vhembe District Statistics, 2008). The situation in the primary schools is different, completely the opposite. For a country like South Africa, with a Constitution that promotes equality, it begs the question as to why these disparities continue to exist 27 years after the Constitution has been adopted. Is it that the capacity of woman to lead in secondary schools is in doubt, and if so what are the causes? Most importantly, what are the experiences of those who make it to this level of leadership in secondary schools?

Leadership is a broad concept which involves influencing a group of people to renew their way of thinking and motivating them to be productive (Lumby & Azaola, 2011).

Leadership is not gender-bound and is therefore associated with both men and women, despite the fact that scholars such as Fuller (2016), Steyn (2015) and Kallie (2015) see leadership as a concept that is dominated by males. The assertion of leadership being male dominant is based on the actions of those in power, who, through their own convictions and perceptions, see woman in general as being incapable of leading well.

It is notable that even with government interventions through circulars and an Education Labour Relations Council resolution, the number of woman principals in secondary schools remains very low as compared to men. In this, the Vhembe District in Limpopo is no exception. Mnisi (2015) notes that female principals encounter challenges, predominantly from learners, parents, teachers and the community, as a result of a general perception that female principals are incapable of managing schools in comparison to their male counterparts.

A study conducted by Arar and Abramovitz (2013) among the Arab population in Israel revealed that despite female principals being regarded as good managers and leaders in certain circles, they were described by teachers as individuals who possess an inferior ability to conduct educational business activities with external bodies. This in essence means they are viewed as not having the capacity for stakeholder management. However, in a study conducted by Amondi (2011) at the Ministry of Education headquarters in Kenya, it was found that this negative behaviour by learners, parents and teachers towards female principals is gradually changing. Given this contradiction, as well as female leadership statistics in Limpopo District as earlier indicated, the researcher deemed it necessary to understand leadership issues among female principals, particularly from the standpoint of their experiences, which could be useful for the conceptualisation of a model and the recommendations that would emanate from the study. At this point, the researcher wishes to mention that a model such as that which she aspires to propose is a tabular or graphical, verbal/narrative representation or simplified version of the phenomenon under study, which in this case was based on the findings of this study.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

During the apartheid era in South Africa, females were not given many opportunities to become leaders in the workplace including schools. This was because such posts

were never advertised but were appointed by the authorities. This then meant that stereotypes against female prospective leaders were perpetrated to their detriment. However, when the new government came into power in 1994, a new Constitution was drafted, promoting equality for all.

The aim of the equal opportunity and affirmative action legislation (Republic of South Africa, 1996) implemented in the country was to address the past imbalances in respect of gender bias, discrimination and inequality (Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011). Despite the policies which have been implemented, a number of factors made it rare for females to find themselves in high positions (Harry, 2013). These factors include the cultural dilemma in respect of female capacity to lead, a perception based on gender stereotypes that women are not suited for leadership positions, a lack of support on the part of those in decision-making positions and the uncooperative attitude of community members.

The role of schools governing bodies (SGBs) (composed mainly by parents) in appointing panel members and making recommendations for the appointment of teachers, including principals, is also to a large extent influenced by these gender stereotypes. The cultural stereotypes together with the failure of the system to enforce prescripts regarding gender parity and affirmative action has by and large led to the majority of women being confined to middle or lower positions in the education sector (Johnson & Mathur-Helen, 2011). This has resulted in a significant gap between the number of men and woman occupying the position of secondary school principal.

In the Vhembe District where this study was conducted, woman principals comprise just 13.5% while male secondary principals comprise 86.5% (Vhembe District Data, 2018). The researcher accordingly envisages that, with all the cultural and other stereotypes about woman leadership, females who make it to the top of the ladder in schools face a myriad of challenges. In the light of this, the study sought to understand, for recommendation purposes, in the form of a model, how leadership among female principals leading rural secondary schools can be enhanced

1.4 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was to understand, for recommendation purposes and in the form of a model, how leadership among female principals leading rural secondary schools can be enhanced.

1.5 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Trying to understand how to express the rationale for this study was in itself a challenge because, at some point, the researcher confused it with the purpose, significance and/or objectives of the study. This necessitated further reading of theses, particularly doctoral theses, on gender and woman issues within the educational context. While the researcher was interested in their findings, her detailed focus was on ascertaining the composition of the sector – the rationale for her study. Of the many and meaningful theses the researcher consulted, the researcher most sincerely admired the writing style and aligned narratives presented in Potokri's (2011) thesis, submitted to the University of Pretoria and, as a result, the researcher embraced these in this section because his thoughts and passion are very similar to hers.

The researcher's interest in education dates back to her childhood. This interest may, perhaps, be attributed to her mother who sees education as the best legacy and the greatest inheritance a parent can leave for a child. Her mother was a teacher and, at one time, a departmental head of English. Her example generated in the researcher zeal and passion to pursue a career in education, especially because the researcher had admired her mother's lifestyle as a teacher when the researcher was growing up. Accordingly, the researcher pursued an undergraduate degree in Education, followed by an honours degree and a master's degree, thus increasing both her knowledge and exposure to education while also enhancing her efficiency in the workplace. The researcher has served as a departmental head of English, as a deputy principal, as a principal in post level 3 school and, currently, as a principal in a post level 5 school.

As a teacher with several years of experience and having worked on various promotional levels for more than 20 years, the researcher has noticed that there appears to be serious challenges facing females when occupying leadership positions in secondary schools. Her observation of the challenges confronting female leaders, as arising from their colleagues, learners and the local community, as well as other

stakeholders, kindled her interest in conducting a thorough investigation into this area in order to possibly find solutions to these challenges.

The researcher's observation of the challenges facing female leaders in secondary schools prompted her curiosity and interest in embarking on a wide search for and study of both local and international literature on the experiences of female principals in leading rural secondary schools. The aim was to understand, for recommendation purposes in the form of a model, how leadership among female principals leading rural secondary schools can be enhanced. The researcher has read, noted and appreciated the work of other researchers on this subject. However, the paucity of literature documenting, in detail, the experiences, the challenges and the solutions to these challenges in relation to female principals in secondary schools in South Africa inspired the researcher to conduct this study, further aiming to develop a model to improve the leadership of female principals leading rural secondary schools in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province.

In addition, the researcher's best friend became a principal before she did and disclosed to the researcher the pain she was experiencing and the challenges she was facing as a female principal. The researcher subsequently became convinced that this study would be a worthwhile endeavour. Her friend is a female principal in Vhembe District, Limpopo Province, South Africa and they have been friends for more than five years. The school in which she is the principal is in Hagumbu village, in a rural area in the Vhembe District. The local inhabitants in this village hold deeply rooted cultural beliefs. The researcher started a conversation with her on her experience as a female principal in a rural secondary school – her research interest – and was shocked and overwhelmed by her response:

Friend, if you are a female principal of a secondary school, you will know it's not easy because you have to prove yourself every day because the learners, colleagues, parents and local community have no belief in you from the very first day you start in the school as the principal; they all believe women are not capable of managing secondary schools because they are regarded as weak vessels.

The researcher was speechless throughout her narration. As a woman in a similar position, the researcher also became emotional as she tried to imagine what she was

explaining, knowing she would also experience that if this perception does not change. It took the researcher some time to be able to gather the words to encourage her friend, telling her that things would be better in the long run. Her friend further explained that:

Even the female subordinates from whom the principal expects support as they are of the same gender are not supportive. The SGB members are also not helping while the Department of Education cares little about the pressure we are facing both within the school and outside of it.

She went on to say that she found the position of principal very frustrating and added that the thought of resigning was constantly in her mind.

On reading the existing relevant literature, the researcher became unhappy about the lack of attention given to this issue, especially by the DBE and other stakeholders. Her thirst for knowledge in this area increased tremendously. This thirst for knowledge, as well as the emotions the researcher experienced while talking to her friend and other few female principals (the researcher has not recorded their views here because they are similar to those of her friend and herself), provided the motivation for the researcher's decision to undertake this study.

Several writers such as Johnson and Mathur-Helm (2011), Harry (2013) and Steyn (2015) argue that despite the high number of female teachers compared to males, only a few females have been promoted to the position of a principal, as the researcher's friend also revealed during their conversation.

Naidoo (2013) posits that cultural barriers, gender inequality, prejudice and stereotyping continue to impact adversely on leadership among female principals. Similar to Bonzet's (2017) view, Smith (2012) expresses the opinion that "for many years, women have been excluded from public presence, economically exploited and forced into motherhood because woman are believed to relegate or pre-occupy themselves with family responsibilities only, while men sought out paid jobs". Therefore, this stereotype of male and female responsibilities and capabilities, among the other challenges such as the lifestyle conflicts, emotional pressure and negative attitudes on the part of subordinate or colleagues, faced by women has had a negative impact on their views and opinions of interest in female leadership.

Ngcobo (2015) argues that gender inequality forms a barrier to female leadership. He points out how difficult it is for females to be represented in educational leadership positions in a predominantly male environment, of which Limpopo province/Polokwane city/Vhembe District where this study was conducted is typical. Ngcobo (2015) argues that if females' experiences of leadership in a male-dominated environment are spotlighted, this will draw attention to the unequal social position of females and, hopefully, decrease the inequality.

Mestry and Schmidt (2012) argue that compared to male leadership, female leadership is accorded less recognition in society and by academics. They assert that this challenge stems from the fact that women's experiences are reported from an endocentric or male-dominated perspective. The focus of this study was accordingly to understand, for recommendation purposes in the form of a model, how leadership among female principals leading rural secondary schools can be enhanced.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.6.1 Main question

How can the experiences of female principals leading rural secondary schools in the Vhembe District of Limpopo province be understood for the enhancement of their leadership?

1.6.2 Sub questions

- What are the experiences of female secondary school principals in Vhembe District?
- What are the kinds of leadership challenges that female secondary school principals in Vhembe District face from learners, teachers and parents?
- What are the areas of school leadership which female secondary school principals see as requiring support compared to those required by their male counterparts?
- What recommendations can be made to address the leadership challenges faced by female secondary school principals in Vhembe District?

1.6.3 Objectives of the study

The study will be guided by the following objectives:

- to understand the experiences of female secondary school principals in Vhembe District
- to identify the challenges that female school principals in Vhembe District face from teachers, learners and parents
- to ascertain areas of school leadership in which female secondary school principals see as requiring development as compared to those areas required by their male counterparts
- to make recommendations to the Department of Basic Education that may promote female principals' leadership in rural secondary schools in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province.

1.7 PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTION

In every research study, the researcher espouses a particular point of view and perception, referred to as philosophical assumptions (Potokri, 2011). Nieuwenhuis (2007) refers to such a point of departure as a research paradigm, which is seen as a set of expectations that underlie a research study. Furthermore, Silverman (2010) emphasises that a researcher's basic beliefs are fundamental to the way in which a research study is organised and designed. In line with Nieuwenhuis (2007), Creswell (2009) and Potokri (2011), the researcher admits that this study is positioned within a particular class, gender, background, political view, race and cultural belief and therefore, this research study will be approached using an interpretive frame of reference.

Du Plessis (2012) defines an interpretive paradigm as an assumption that seeks to understand the world/events based on people's experiences and perceptions. An interpretive assumption differs from other assumptions, for example the positivist, emancipatory and postcolonial assumptions. All these differ based on their assumptions about the nature of reality and what is deemed to be knowledge, as well as its sources, the researcher's values and their role in the research process (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). The interpretive assumption may be traced back to Edmund Husserl's philosophy of phenomenology and to the German philosopher, Wilhelm Dilthey's, philosophy of hermeneutics (Eichelberger, 1989; Neuman, 1997).

The researcher was of the opinion that the paradigmatic perspective would guide her throughout the entire research process, especially in the context of ontology,

epistemology and methodology, while also recognising the sensitivity attached to the status and gender of the research participants. Her ontological and epistemological stance, as related to the interpretive assumption, emphasises that human beings are dependent not only on their environment but also on their individual traits, beliefs and experiences (Avis, 2004).

Ontologically, the researcher believes that reality is subjective and that there are multiple realities that may be seen from different perspectives and that those emerged in the study from the respondents' perceptions. Lincoln et al. (2011) posit that reality lies in human experiences and that statements of truth or falsity are culture bound and belief dependent, although some of these beliefs are uniform and universally accepted. In relation to epistemology, the researcher believes that knowledge is intuitive because it is influenced by personal feelings and opinions, which will be dependent on both the participants and the researcher (Dash, 2005). Furthermore, as an interpretive researcher, the researcher perceives reality as inter-subjective, that is, based on the meanings and understandings that depend on socio-cultural background, gender, race and individual experiential levels. With reference to this, the researcher is of the belief that this study was without doubt best suited to the interpretive lens instead of either the post-positivist or naïve positivist approaches. This narrows the research procedure and research design. From her experience, the researcher has come to realise that a single phenomenon may mean different things to different people, that is, people tend to see things the way they are and not necessarily the way others see them.

Identifying herself with the interpretive paradigm in this study indicates that the researcher's focus is on the research outcomes and the circumstances that influence such outcomes, namely, that the research findings that emerge from this study, after the development of a model, may improve the leadership of female principals (see Creswell, 2009; Avis, 2004). According to Kawulich (2011), an interpretivist approach is based on a naturalistic approach to data collection; for example, interviews. The researcher's identification with the interpretive paradigm guided her in collecting data relevant to the study through interviews and focus group discussions. These methods of data collection guided rather than informed the methodology used, that is, the methodological choice or steps followed in the study.

1.8 ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS

This study aimed to understand, for recommendation purposes that could be in the form of a model, how leadership among female principals leading rural secondary schools can be enhanced. In this study, the researcher sought to understand the challenges faced by female principals and their experiences, leading to the development of a model to improve their leadership.

This thesis consists of six chapters and each chapter is briefly discussed below:

Chapter one

This chapter introduces the study and highlights the background to it. The problem statement and the purpose of the study are clearly documented. The objectives, research questions, significance of the study, and the philosophical assumptions are subsequently identified and well documented.

Chapter two

This chapter of the study presents the literature that was consulted. The study focused on literature relevant to the experiences and challenges of female principals, as well as ways in which their leadership can be improved. This includes all the studies that have been conducted at local, regional and international level related to the improvement of female principals' leadership. By consulting various literature sources, the study highlights scientific evidence to show that little has been done to improve the leadership of female principals.

Chapter three

In this chapter, the theoretical framework that guided the study is presented, and how the theory was linked to the topic under discussion. The study was guided by transformational leadership theory and liberal feminism theory.

Chapter four

The chapter presents the methodology that was adopted to assist in meeting the purpose and the objectives of the study. This chapter also provides a detailed rationale for the choice of each method and how it was applied in the study.

Chapter five

This chapter presents the data analysis. The process which was undertaken to analyse the qualitative data is documented and the experiences of female principals are presented in the form of themes and categories. The findings presented in this chapter are supported by various literature sources and are discussed in detail.

Chapter six

In this chapter of the study, the findings are summarised and discussed, and the conclusions drawn from analysed data are presented. In addition, the purpose and objectives of the study are evaluated. The chapter concludes the study by making recommendations and discussing the limitations and significance of the study, as well as future research directions.

1.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter introduced and provided background to the study. The problem statement and the purpose of the study were clearly documented, and the overall purpose of the research was clarified. The objectives, research questions, significance of the study, and the philosophical assumptions were also identified and well documented. Against this background, the thesis proceeds in chapter two with a detailed description of the research, beginning with a review of the literature as it pertains to the experiences of female secondary school principals.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of a literature review is to explain and deepen the theoretical framework selected for a research study and to familiarise the researcher(s) with the latest developments in the field in question, therefore enabling them to identify gaps in their knowledge as well as weaknesses in the studies conducted by other researchers (Monette, Sullivan & DeJong, 2013). In this section of the study, existing literature on leadership enhancement and the leadership of female secondary school principals was reviewed. This was done by reviewing peer-reviewed articles, theses, policy documents, conference proceedings and relevant books containing information about the experiences and challenges of secondary school female principals, as well as the factors influencing the underrepresentation of females in leadership positions in the education sector. The researcher also reviewed other sources, such as newspapers, magazines and other materials, which are non-academic but which the researcher feel are relevant to this study, although little attention was given to these materials.

2.2 EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

According to Wrushen and Sherman (2008), female principals have to deal with issues such as limited resources in schools, grievances of parents, handling of staff, time management, and other administrative challenges. Schmidt and Mestry (2015) posit that the oppression faced by many South African female principals stems from three factors, namely, race, class and gender. Although the Constitution (South African Constitution, 1996) addresses the issue of gender equality, it does not appear that women in the education sector are accorded equal rights in practice, with the predominance of males in leadership posts in education continuing to define South African culture (Cotter, 2004). With reference to the 2014 statistics of the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE), Schmidt and Mestry (2015) indicate that there were 201 male principals compared to just 84 female principals in Gauteng province. This is in direct contrast to the high number of female teachers in relation to their male counterparts in the province (Young, 2004).

Studies conducted by Parsaloi (2012) and Schmidt and Mestry (2015) revealed that women are often perceived as being incapable of leading educational institutions. However, this perception degrades women and contributes to them having to perpetually prove themselves as effective leaders. It is important that women overcome the gender differences by challenging patriarchal dominance and the obstacles confronting them, which may at times lead to emotional turmoil and them doubting their self-worth. It is clear that patriarchy in schools is prevalent, particularly in schools with black or coloured female principals who have to face resistance, insubordination and sabotage (Dzimiri, 2019).

Earlier studies conducted by Dlanjwa (2018) explain that women principals are painfully and powerfully exposed to gender discrimination because leadership is popularly attached to masculinity. She further posits that women principals lack the desired recognition, perceptibility and sustenance from the side of DBE officials. This once more exacerbates worries about motives for male administrators' support for women leaders. It is clear that these women principals are often deprived of support from the DBE because most of the officials are males and they want to demonstrate that women are disempowered by a lack of experience, technical knowledge and managerial capability. The fact is, however, that their male counterparts feel recognised, noticed and reinforced (Dlanjwa, 2018).

Dryding (2018) posits that women often underestimate their own performance while men overestimate theirs. In other words, women's successes are often attributed to luck or hard work, whereas men's successes are attributed to their innate ability. Despite the contradictory evidence, stereotypes about the inadequacy of females as leaders persist and serve to distort the perceptions of male and female performance and potential. One obvious consequence of these perceptions is that a man is more likely to be selected for a leadership position over an equally qualified female because of the gender role stereotypes and cultural beliefs, such as those mentioned by Mestry and Schmidt (2012), that have evolved from the traditional roles that women have played for so long.

In addition, Schmidt and Mestry (2015) report women as experiencing tension between being an agent of change as a female leader and being a bureaucrat, that is, working alongside their black female and male colleagues as well as white females in a diplomatic manner. According to De Jong (2009), this is referred to as "going into

the belly of the beast”, that is, becoming part of the beast as well as functioning according to, or colluding with, the logic of the beast, when necessary. This implies that female leaders have to be diplomatic and courteous in their role as leaders, as well as in their relationships with their colleagues. However, Schmidt and Mestry’s (2015) study confirms that women leaders are able to work through the potentially paralysing effect of this tension, as the women leaders in their study commented that they were able to negotiate these differences in a responsible and productive way without overtly challenging the status quo. Instead, they used peaceful and tactful measures such as working more creatively to overcome the gender and race barriers.

Booyesen and Nkomo (2010) assert that female principals find male teachers uncooperative. They further reported that black men especially, who are used to being adored and respected at home by their wives and children as the head of the family, find it difficult to work under women leadership. This is as a result of the disparity between statutory and traditional law in the majority of the African communities, which results in the inequitable social structures that give more recognition and preference to men in the workplace as well as in society at large. Hence, the overruling patriarchal belief system remains with regard to women’s roles and capability in many African societies. Also, Ntaka (2013) found in her study that women principals faced management challenges owing to gender bias. She found that male teachers who hailed from a society with a patriarchal ethos and religious upbringing were reluctant to accept the authority of female principals, questioning their decisions and challenging them, sometimes leading to hostile confrontations. She further explains that men at the top, that is male principals, are unwilling to accept women principals as their equals (Ntaka, 2013).

Jean-Marie and Martinez (2013) report that gender is a factor embedded in the leadership experiences of the female principals who participated in their study. Several of the women in their study discussed the ineffectiveness of being mentored by other women while in their leadership roles. These researchers (Jean-Marie & Martinez, 2013) interviewed a novice Lebanese American suburban principal who was the first female secondary school leader in suburban America. She stated: “*Women are vicious and backstabbing. Unless women are on your side, they’ll turn on you really quick*”, adding that “*the researcher is under a microscope as the first woman to take on a leadership role*”. This indicates that female principals also experience challenges from

their female colleagues, whom they may have expected would give them moral support, and also that everyone is watching keenly to see them fail. She also said: “*the researcher finds sometimes that females don’t help each other along the way like men do. It’s amazing how the men have such a network of connections, and they get jobs done and do things from that.*”

The views expressed above speak to Potokri’s (2015) assertion in his work, “Exposition of culture and the space of women: An African view for policy consideration”, namely, that women are sometimes a problem for other women. In addition, apart from women being a problem or causing a problem for other women, personal problems for women in leadership also result in challenges that impact on their careers. Venitha Pillay acknowledges in her work *Academic Mothers* (2007) that women face their own personal challenges in handling issues such as balancing work and social life, as well as conflicts that may arise from the home. It is important to note that the near silence of women’s narratives relating to their plight in the workplace does not contribute to a broad understanding of their experiences.

Corroborating Pillay’s (2007) writing is the view of the Lebanese female principal who was interviewed in the study of Jean-Marie and Martinez (2013). Based on her experience, she noted that when women become principals, they envisage that it will be a short-lived experience because they are mothers and it is impossible for them to balance their professional and personal lives owing to the demands and expectations they face (ibid:44). Therefore, to be successful, women have to be assertive, demonstrate firm leadership qualities (Jackson-Dunn, 2018) and seek ways in which to balance their professional and personal lives. Moreover, Mahasha (2016) adds that women principals often feel isolated in management as a result of the so called ‘boys club’, as this presents men with the opportunity to gather and interact informally and provide support for one another. The feelings of isolation experienced by woman principals come from having fewer females in such leadership positions with whom to discuss their problems informally and work with them. Most female leaders are even denied personal social support such as friends and professional social support such as supervisors, mentors or peers in other fields. These supports are needed for women principals to be able to navigate work pressures, advance their careers and balance family demands such as spousal and motherhood issues.

Studies conducted by Ntaka (2013) show that women receive little or no support from their male subordinates and peers. In their study, they further explain that “a particular female principal received no support from her male deputy, as he was also an applicant and did not get the post. The worst part is that there was also no support even from male and female principals in the school district”. A woman leader is treated more like a woman on a privileged pedestal than a capable professional and is the recipient of an attitude of “you still need to prove yourself to us”. This implies that if a woman is a top candidate in an interview for a leadership position it does not necessarily mean that she is the best candidate for the job just because she is a female.

Ntaka (2013) argues that it often happens that the educational leadership structure, deliberately or not, concludes that women are too emotional, weak and fragile, easily manipulated, indecisive, less assertive, and less committed to their careers. This puts women who attain a principal role in a tough position, having to work twice as hard as their male counterparts because they have to start from a negative point, building over the years to convince the stakeholders of their actual capabilities (Ntaka, 2013). Maime (2011) posits that the education system regards teaching and management as two different professions. She further indicates that the teaching profession is regarded as a female duty, while males only are seen as capable of leading and managing. This implies that leadership is fundamentally related to men and not women. It is clear, therefore, that the actual classroom teaching and learning activities are mainly meant for females while leadership positions are perceived to be earmarked for males.

According to Mnisi (2015), women are commonly associated with qualities such as being friendly, accommodating, approachable, sympathetic, compassionate, interpersonally delicate, calm and soft spoken. Conversely, their male counterparts are generically known to be hostile, go-getting, assertive, contending for attention, dominant, self-assured, dynamic, independent, individualistic and egocentric. With these perceived different gender qualities, societal expectations differ as regards female and male behaviour. Ntaka (2013) found that women in leadership positions are expected to act in a particular way and to control their anger and reactions professionally, which is perceived as being in control, effective and acceptable to the members of the community. However, the expression of anger has been seen as a

traditionally acceptable norm for men, but not for women. Women's anger is perceived to be connected to characteristics such as being sharp tongued, unkind, offensive, unpleasant or persistently infuriating, while women showing anger with tears risk being labelled as stereotypically emotional, weak or manipulative.

Furthermore, Zulu (2016) is of the opinion that women and men communicate differently and should be allowed to continue in such a manner. This researcher further asserts that women principals are always encouraged to change their communication styles and adopt the male form of communication, because women are not seen as capable or good enough to take up a leadership position. This is the result of their feminine communication style which is regarded as pathetic and emotional. It is therefore imperative that a female communicative style should not be dismissed as deficient, but attention should be given to the positive aspects of the female ways of communicating (Ntaka, 2013).

Scholars such as Msila (2013), Schmidt and Mestry (2015) and Jean-Marie and Martinez (2013) conclude that women use different coping mechanisms when they face the challenges that appear to be unique to their gender and race. These mechanisms include being on top of things; working much harder than their male counterparts; becoming dogmatic; working long hours; being ambitious; proving others wrong; aligning with sympathetic male teachers; avoiding militant white teachers who feel threatened; not taking things personally; being accommodating, fair and transparent; and having a strong faith. Schmidt and Mestry (2015) found that female principals take courage from small transformations and successes in their careers as leaders and they do not engage in conflict. However, their own feelings of insecurity sometimes affect their (in)ability to deal with conflict.

In short, it would appear the perceptions of the majority of women before they become principals change after they become principals (Naidoo, 2013). For some, it is more challenging than they anticipated, particularly when having to deal with negativity among their staff members, a lack of professionalism and maturity, the realisation that not all of their staff like or trust them, as well as negative comments, discrimination and backstabbing. Parsaloi (2012) believes that the lack of women's voices in the literature on educational leadership and management, particularly those of minority women, is a serious issue.

2.3 UNDERREPRESENTATION OF FEMALES IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

2.3.1 Review of literature on the underrepresentation of female leadership in South Africa and other developing countries

The underrepresentation of women in educational leadership occurs not only in South Africa as it is also found in many other developing countries, including Zimbabwe, Kenya, Nigeria and Sri Lanka, to mention but a few. In addition, Makgoka (2016) notes that “women in educational leadership positions are a minority in developed countries such as the UK, but this is incomparable to the paucity of women in leadership positions in the emerging nations”. It would seem that the common assertion that “women teach, and men lead” in schools still holds true despite all the strategies employed to bridge the gender imbalance in educational leadership (Mathevula, 2014).

Zulu (2016) documented evidence which shows that women are underrepresented in the positions of leadership in secondary schools, indicating that leadership positions are occupied by males while women occupy post level 1 and have fewer opportunities than men to be appointed to senior positions. Lumby (2011) reported that prior to 1994 the South African education system was based on apartheid rules and governance. This system of education was founded on the principle of discrimination and based on gender and racial differences and segregation. Soon after the ending of the apartheid era, the South African government implemented a policy to promote gender equality and empowerment as contained in the South African Commission for Gender Equity (CGE) Act No. 39 of 1996 (Dlanjwa, 2018).

These policies were aimed at phasing out the unfair and unjust practices of the apartheid regime, including the discrimination against women in leadership positions who were the victims of gender-based discrimination. However, it is clear that although the gender equality policies have been established, they have not yet manifested in practice. For example, the Human Resource Management (HRM) Circular No. 62 of 2008 highlights that “the number of males of all races occupying the top level positions in schools such as principals and deputies make up 77%, while females of all races make up 23% in each of these two levels in education”. These statistics clearly reveal that after more than a decade of democracy, very little had changed in the pursuit of gender equality in educational leadership (Uwizeyimana & Mathevula, 2014).

Kayi (2013) reports that despite women comprising more than 50% of the world population, there is still no country in which women are represented in half, or even close to half, of the leadership capacities.

Dryding (2018) mentions that “despite having a South African Constitution that entrenches equal rights, discriminatory practices and structural inequalities, gender inequalities and stereotypes are still at large in the society”. While women dominate the teaching profession in South Africa, very few women occupy school management positions. According to a report issued by the DBE in South Africa, the total number of female educators in public and independent schools combined in 2015 was 285 252 (68%), with only 132 852 male educators (32%) (DBE, 2015). As Mathevula (2014) reported: “Clearly, while women constitute nearly 70% of the teaching profession in South Africa, they only constitute 30% of school managers.”

A review of the studies by scholars such as Chabaya, Rembe and Wadesango (2009). among others, reflects the discourse on the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership in developing countries such as Zimbabwe. The issue of underrepresentation of women has received enormous attention in Zimbabwe in the past years (Mathevula, 2014) with the government of Zimbabwe formulating a number of policies to address the issue of women and leadership in the country. These policies are aimed at increasing the participation of women in decision-making capacities generally, particularly in schools. However, it has not been clearly established why the underrepresentation of women still persists. Diko (2014) reports that in an attempt to address the issue of gender equality in Zimbabwe, the government introduced the Labour Relations Act in 1985. This Act stipulates that “no employer should discriminate against any employee on the grounds of race, tribe or place of origin, political opinion, colour, creed or sex”. Other legislation put in place includes the Legal Age of Majority Act and the Equal Pay Regulations and Sexual Discrimination Removal Act, to mention but few.

The results of such legislation had varying effects on the educational leadership system in Zimbabwe. At the school level, the enrolment of girls in 1993 at the primary level increased by 49.0%, 41.4% at Form 4 level and 34.0% at Form 6 level (Mhlanga, 2016). At the tertiary level, universities saw an increase of 30.2% in the enrolment of female learners while primary teachers’ colleges achieved 50.1% (Oriedi, 2016). Nevertheless, despite both the legislation and the increase in the enrolment of females

in various capacities from the primary level to the tertiary level, women remained glaringly underrepresented in school leadership positions (Oriedi, 2016). Chabaya et al., (2009) report that in June 2004, there were 246 secondary school heads in the Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe, of which 14 only were female. Similarly, in primary schools, there was a total of 693 school heads but 68 only were female. Therefore, the statistics suggest the underrepresentation of females in leadership positions persists, despite all the policies that have been established by the government to arrive at a gender-balanced nation, with the problem of the underrepresentation of female leaders remaining.

According to Ademuson (2016), antiquated and anti-humanist beliefs still prevail in Nigerian society, where women are perceived as the weaker group and are relegated to inferior positions without regard for their mental capacity and competencies. In earlier studies, Mbaya (2019) found that the Nigerian media, especially the film industry, had done more harm than good by misrepresenting and portraying women as a weak and inferior social group. Ademuson (2016) further adds that despite the growing population and educational attainment of women in Nigeria, they are still largely underrepresented in educational leadership positions, among others. Raimi, Shokunbi and Peluola (2016) report that men are dominant in the political, educational, economic and social landscapes in Nigeria while women are underrepresented, therefore resulting in gender inequality and the exclusion of women. In Nigeria, customs, traditions and cultural stereotypes are the prevailing reasons for the exclusion of women from leadership positions (Madauke & Okeye, 2016). Malik (2016) adds that the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in Nigeria is not a constitutional barrier but, instead, more of a societal and cultural stigma which prevents female participation in leadership roles.

Ogbogu and Bisiriyu (2012) assert that in recent years, the involvement of women in white collar jobs has increased significantly, although there are few women in leadership and management positions in these jobs. For example, WIMBIZ (2014) reports that the underrepresentation of women on the boards of the Nigerian banking industry stood at 19% in 2014. Similarly, Olaogun, Adebayo and Oluyemo (2015) argue that women have been marginalised to take up odd jobs and are seen as caregivers, while education is seen as a predominantly male profession. Olaogun et al. (2015) also report that the participation of women in leadership positions in higher

educational institutions in Nigeria is marginalised, with 13.6% only of the top academic staff members being women. Furthermore, Aina, Ogunlade, Ilesanmi and Afolabi (2015) mention that at the time of their study, 12 women only had reached the position of vice chancellor in the more than 138 federal, state and private universities in Nigeria since the establishment of the first university in Nigeria in 1948.

The underrepresentation of women in educational leadership positions in Nigeria is of concern to its government, particularly in view of the many policies that have been implemented. For example, the 1999 Nigerian Constitution made provision for nondiscrimination and equality between male and female, and the National Gender Policy Odiaka, (2013) that made provision for the equality of women, and which guarantees the rights and protects the interests of women by considering the religious, traditional and cultural norms that govern Nigerian society. This is with the aim of reducing the gender gap and discrimination. These however seem fruitless. This was evident in both early and more recent studies, such as those of Acha (2009), Abdul et al. (2011) and Ademuson (2016), which all present evidence that the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions at all levels of the educational system, including primary schools, secondary schools, universities and other learning institutions, is still prevalent in Nigeria. Raimi, Madueke and Okoye (2016) mention that despite the fact that the secondary and primary teaching profession in Nigeria is dominated by female teachers, the school heads and principals are still predominantly male, while the majority of the assistant heads are female. Therefore, an examination of the Nigerian educational sector reveals that the problem of female underrepresentation in leadership positions continues unabated as the leadership and management of education is largely male dominated (Adegun, 2012).

Similarly, Sperandio (2011) and Mapolisa and Madziyire (2012) reveal that the underrepresentation of women in leadership at all levels of the education system, including primary schools, secondary schools, universities and other educational institutions, persists in Kenya. This underrepresentation of women in educational leadership positions in Kenya is of concern to the government, which has implemented several policies, such as the Kenya Education Sector Support Programme (2005), the National Development Plan (2008) and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper – Progress Report (2012), in an effort to reduce the gender gap. However, an examination of the education sector in Kenya reveals that the leadership and

management of education is male dominated and that women are still underrepresented in school leadership (Rarieya, 2011).

Mthethwa (2019) mentions that although the teaching profession is dominated by females, the school heads are drawn from the few males in the profession. Suter (2017) reports that despite the fact that over 60% of the teaching profession in Southern and East Africa, which includes Kenya, South Africa and Zambia, to mention but a few countries, comprises women; nevertheless, there remains a grave imbalance in the proportion of male and female leaders. According to Zulu (2016), this is unfortunate as this gender imbalance has far-reaching consequences for the educational system and affects the younger generation in particular. He further explains that the wrong message could be sent to young female learners that female teachers are unable to be school leaders. In addition, the young learners lack female leaders as a role model in the educational sector. Zulu (2016) found that up to 48% of pupils are taught by teachers at the national level in Kenya but that 15% only of those pupils have a female teacher as head of school. Mbepera (2015) and Zuma (2018) argue that the reasons for the underrepresentation of women in school leadership positions in Kenya include gender discrimination, stereotyping, financial constraints, organisational barriers and the lack of role models as mentors. This underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in secondary schools is a major stigma in respect of gender balance and power equality in developing countries.

2.3.2 Review of the literature on the underrepresentation of female leadership in developed countries

The underrepresentation of women leadership in every major sector, including secondary schools in England and other developed countries, is an ongoing challenge. Fuller (2013) documented the distribution of women as collated by the local authorities in England on more than three different occasions and found that women constitute the largest percentage of the teaching workforce. The DBE (2015) reported that women constituted 62.2% of the secondary school teaching workforce but that 37% only of these women were principals. Fuller (2013) suggests that a change in the roles of the local authority may negatively impact on the distribution of women principals in England especially when so few schools are being led by female principals. This may result in female leadership in secondary schools becoming obsolete.

In England, the fact that girls outperform boys from the age of 5 to 16 years and even at the degree level throughout Britain has revived the focus on the ability of females to take up leadership positions. Nevertheless, despite the fact that females outperform males, the gender gap still persists (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2009), with women continuing to experience the difficulties and stress of gender discrimination and sexual harassment both in society and in the workplace. This also applies to secondary schools where there is a significant gap between the proportion of women in the teaching workforce and the proportion of women principals leading schools in England (Fuller, 2013).

Hargreaves and Flutter (2019) note that the unequal opportunities that exist for women to attain secondary school educational leadership in English are a grave concern. This underrepresentation of women in leadership positions resonates with the feminist theory of equality that sought both equality between men and women in the workplace and career advancement for women (Fuller, 2014). However, in the present generation, the underrepresentation of women in secondary school leadership positions is more of a social injustice than racism or segregation. This social injustice relates to women's lack of parity of participation, which results in a lack of recognition of their capabilities as leaders (Blackmore, 2016). Mathevula (2014) reports that the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in secondary schools in developed countries such as England is related to socialisation, stereotyping, internal barriers, as well as societal, organisational and personal cultural and traditional factors.

The recent findings of Fuller, Cliffe and Moorosi (2015) show that there is a discriminatory attitude displayed by a range of people, including school governors, senior leadership team members, teaching colleagues, learners and parents towards female principals. Showunmi, Atewologun and Bebbington (2015) report in their study that the majority of the females who attain principal positions in England are a few privileged white women, thus leaving the black minority women underrepresented in leadership in the secondary schools.

Similarly, studies in the United States of America reveal that the underrepresentation of women in leadership in all major sectors is still rife (Cook, 2012; Catalyst, 2016; Malyeaux, 2017). According to the US Department of Labour (2015), women account for 57% of the American workforce but with a disproportionate number in leadership

positions. For example, Catalyst (2016) reports that women account for 4% of the chief executive officer positions at Fortune 500 companies, while males account for 96%. Cook (2012) reports that 26.4% only of the heads of educational institutions are women. Despite the high number of women in the teaching workforce in secondary schools, a small proportion of women only hold principalship positions (Farrow, 2020). According to Eagly and Heilman (2016), gender discrimination and segregation are the main reasons for the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in the US. Eagly and Heilman (2016) argue that as long as women and men are available for the same position, men will be chosen in preference to women owing to discrimination and stereotyping. The existence and persistence of role segregation in both society and the workplace continue to foster gender stereotyping which hinders women from attaining leadership positions. It is, therefore, not surprising that Hoyt and Murphy (2015) contend that more women should be hired or promoted to leadership positions, not merely to fulfil the promise of gender equality in business, government and schools but also to foster a prosperous civil society.

2.4 FACTORS INFLUENCING THE UNDERREPRESENTATION OF FEMALES IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

There are various factors that have an impact on the underrepresentation of females in leadership positions in the education system in South Africa. These factors include domestic inspiration, family affections and the absence of self-esteem and self-confidence.

2.4.1 Lack of motivation

A lack of motivation is cited as one of the many factors that result in the underrepresentation of females in leadership positions (Pwadura, 2016). Gobena (2014) believes that when women see other females failing in leadership positions, they become nervous about failing and they lose interest in pursuing leadership positions. Nyangiwe (2015) posits that the lack of motivation in women is shaped by the way in which they have been brought up, as in most cultures girls are not expected to express what they truly want or desire. This view of Nyangiwe underpins culture as a concept. If girls are brought up to be ignorant about what they want, then developing into leaders may be a difficult goal to achieve. While culture expects girls, like women, not to be vocal, this is not the case for boys and men (Potokri, 2015). This stems from the expectation that they will be vocal and also that they know what they want from an

early age. The societal judgement that females face, such as gender bias, discrimination, disbelief and a lack of support from the local community in their career paths, are some of the factors that result in women often losing interest in expending much effort on their careers (Schmidt & Mestry, 2015).

2.4.2 Family affections

According to Makgoka (2016), most of the studies which have been conducted in Africa have provided proof that the majority of women do not advance to leadership positions at their workplaces. One of the factors causing this is their commitment to their families and their inability to balance family life with their professional life. Gobena (2014) and Lumby and Makgoka (2016) have also found that most female educators choose their families in preference to top positions because of their upbringing, with Lumby and Azaola (2011) arguing that the upbringing of girls in most societies plays an important role when it comes to their decision-making about their careers, as they are expected to play the role of a mother to their children and a wife to their husbands.

The findings of Lindo (2012) indicate that female principals who are not married have more responsibilities in their nuclear or extended families compared to those who are married, as they do not have a support structure at home and this affects their performance at work. This finding, however, contradicts the findings of Lumby and Azaol (2011) as, during their study, they indicated that the majority of married female principals had reported that their marriages affect their performance at work as they are expected to perform all the domestic duties without receiving any support from their spouses. According to Maposa and Mugabe (2013), females choose to advance to leadership positions and it is this choice with which so many struggle. However, Ghosh, Shuck and Petrosko (2012) believe that women can attain leadership positions at their workplaces if they choose to rise above all the obstacles that may be hindering them from advancing to such positions.

2.4.3 Absence of self-esteem and self-confidence

Women are taught to be submissive from an early age while men are encouraged to be in control (Makgoka, 2016). Mestry and Schmidt (2012) believe that the way women perceive themselves affects their representation in leadership positions. Gobena (2014) asserts that the inability of most females to express their personalities and realise their career potential also plays a role in their underrepresentation in leadership

positions. Despite the fact that the majority of female teachers are advancing themselves academically, there are still those who believe that they are not capable of assuming leadership roles (Lumby & Azaola, 2011). According to Uwizeyimana, Modiba and Mathevula (2014), most women are scared of assuming leadership positions because they fear that their male colleagues will not take instructions from them owing to their gender. Further to this, Omboko and Oyoo's (2011) revelation that it will be difficult for females to take on leadership positions at the workplaces until they are able to trust themselves and change the way in which they perceive themselves in respect of holding senior leadership positions is a powerful motivation that may mitigate their underrepresentation in leadership positions.

2.4.4 Geographical mobility

Lack of mobility is one of the major factors that influence women to pursue job opportunities in areas where their family resides. This reduces the chances of a woman in obtaining suitable leadership positions because there could be limited numbers of managerial positions in some geographical locations and only those who are willing and able to relocate will obtain such opportunities (Haile, Emmanuel & Dzathor, 2016). According to Mathevula (2014), transfer and geographical mobility also influence the professional life balance of a woman leader. There is a huge tendency for female leaders to relocate with their husbands when the husband receives a transfer at work. This disrupts the woman leader's career. The opposite is generally not true for men. Therefore, this occurrence promotes the superiority of the husband's job and the husband as the head and main breadwinner of the family, and undermines the existence or contribution of the woman and the wife (Delina & Raya, 2016). This is one of the overwhelming reasons why the majority of women do not seek to be represented in leadership posts as they believe it might not last long owing to the possibility of their spouses' relocation at any time.

2.4.5 Lack of mentoring and networking

According to Davis (2012), women possess the potential and capacity to be effective leader but they lack the proper, adequate mentorship, sponsorship or networking that their male counterpart have access to. Pruitt (2015) posits that when a male sponsors a female to take up an educational leadership position, he tends to select and sponsor a woman who seems to be passive and less intimidating, whom he thinks he can

manipulate for his own gains. He further argues that males in leadership positions support and mentor each other and build a network to fill leadership administrative positions with associates and protégés, while ignoring qualified women for those positions mainly to maintain the status quo of keeping males and not females in power. This strategy is one of the dominating influences that males are considered to possess when conducting hiring processes. Based on socio-cultural and traditional beliefs, female leaders expect to face some challenges from their male counterparts but lose sight of the resistance and unwillingness to support that arises from other women who are expected to back them and give them support (Maseko, 2013). This antagonistic attitude on the part of women towards other women is considered highly disadvantageous and complicated to understand by women who seek support and mentoring from those within their own ranks (Allen, 2018). As a result of this, aspiring women do not get the mentoring they need to assume leadership positions and increases the underrepresentation of women in leadership posts.

Allen (2018) argues that most women in leadership positions fail to offer a helping hand and mentorship opportunities to aspiring women, because they are power hungry and only seek to retain the power and keep other women from assuming such positions owing to the perceived threat to their position and authority. These threats stem from the feeling and belief that there are few power positions to circulate for others and the philosophy of shared power is not an option.

Dopwell (2019) indicates that women leaders perceive experiences with other women leaders as negative and undesirable, since men are seen to be more helpful to one another than women. He adds that rather than forming alliances and associations, women draw battle lines, fighting against and disrupting the success of any other aspiring female leader. Some women leaders are considered envious, sabotaging and obstructive which leads to a general reduction in women who attain a leadership position. As a result of this uncooperative behaviour among women leaders, mentoring and networking among them becomes challenging and this impedes the progress of women because they lack the support, backing, inspiration, and connection needed to gain access to such leadership positions (Sperandio & Kagoda, 2010).

2.4.6 Inequitable selection processes

Women are underrepresented in top positions because of the recruitment or promotion and candidate selection procedures in place. Young and Bang (2013) posit that women are disfavoured in several ways, because most of the seats on selection boards are occupied by men and therefore they perform the shortlisting as they see fit, often without proper transparency.

Kagoda (2012) maintains that the process in which leadership positions are filled in educational leadership favours a “gendered” approach which has been designed to maintain a predominant number of males in the school’s leadership to keep the status quo. Similarly, Mbepera (2015) explains conventional appointment procedures and community opinions as rendering acceptable the ways in which the selection procedures remove candidates who seem different as a result of their background, race and most especially their gender. These “filtering methods” are subtle inequitable approaches rooted within recruitment, interview and selection processes and choices.

Moorosi (2010) found that the SGB’s perception of men as strong and capable is the most blatant inequitable practice in the process of recruitment, selection and promotion in employment, and is executed in the most conspicuous manner, arguably on the grounds of getting the best candidate for the job. Furthermore, Makgoka (2016) states that “individual participants are affected by district or system level policies and practices concerning leadership succession and rotation”. In short, school principals should be selected on the basis that they are fit to manage particular schools and not necessarily the perceived belief system that males are the strong, best and most suitable candidate for the leadership post.

2.4.7 Schools structure and practices

Organisational bottlenecks such as the structural factors within a school system are seen to be disadvantageous to women in attaining leadership positions (Onyango, Simatwa & Ondigi, 2011). Onyango et al., (2011) further argue that despite the policies on gender equality in regard to employment, the majority of the favoured candidates are male. Such unfavourable school practices discourage aspiring women leaders from applying for leadership positions or nurturing their interest in attaining leadership positions.

Allen (2018) states that school policies are incidentally unfavourable for women; for instance parents, staff and student meetings usually take place after normal working hours which is unsuitable for a woman who wants to get home early to tend to her family affairs and domestic roles. In this regard, women leaders' personal schedules are disrupted. Furthermore, "women were said not to be ready to attend leadership seminars and tours which take more than one day owing 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). In short, capable women are discouraged from pursuing leadership positions owing to the possible inconvenience and compromise that comes with the leadership post.

2.4.8 Glass ceiling effect

According to Uwamahoro (2011), the concept of a glass ceiling is attributed to obvious traditional, organisational and attitudinal barriers that aim to maintain the status quo of rigid sex segregation in organisations, preventing women and minority groups from attaining a particular top position. Glass ceiling politics is a transparent mentality and fraternity of a generalised male administrative and organisational ethos, which is strong enough to prevent women from moving up the administrative ladder (Faulkner, 2015). The glass ceiling represents a major obstacle, preventing women from moving to a position that has a promotional ladder attached. Archard (2012) argues that the inability of women to rise up the ladder does not necessarily mean they are inexperienced or incompetent; they are merely relegated to remaining at a certain point owing to the unseen obstacles – the glass ceiling effect. Msila (2013) asserts that the glass ceiling came into being primarily because of the notion that placing women in leadership positions would be disastrous because it is believed women as mothers and wives are unpredictable, volatile and impulsive in their decision-making. Therefore, they can quit their jobs any time for maternity or pregnancy purposes among others, which can be chaotic to the management and administrative process of a school or an organisation at large.

2.4.9 Fear of success

Historically, women have been accustomed and trained to believe that success is unachievable in a male-dominated capacity. Many fear that if they were to attain leadership positions where men exist, they would be rejected by many, especially

men, which would impair any chance of their social acceptance and interaction. Ncube (2016) argues that many women believe that intellectual accomplishment is unachievable and therefore unsuited to a female. Therefore, for a woman to have a self-definition which accepts that being a successful leader is not gender based, she must come to terms with the cultural definition that she is not just feminine but a complete individual. Fear is not gender selective, that is, both male and female have fears.

Society has institutionalised men into the role of provider, breadwinner, guardian and leader. According to Dzimiri (2019), the aspiration of a woman to a leadership position threatens the dominating mentality of men and, therefore, men serve as an obstacle to women in attaining a leadership positions by imbedding fear and inferiority mind-set into them, discouraging them from believing that they can achieve success. Dzimiri (2019) further notes that women often back off from leadership roles because they fear that competition would place them in an unfeminine role. Dzimiri (2019) further states that women are often nervous about attaining success, but this does not necessitate that women deliberately or unintentionally resolve to fail, it simply implies that the steadfastness needed to achieve success is threatened and diminished by fear.

2.4.10 Cultural gender roles and expectations

Cultural gender roles are still much more influential in the underrepresentation of females in leadership positions. Women often find themselves acting according to their roles in some levels whether at home or at the workplace. Women are largely affected by the dominant gender roles which reduce their expectations of attaining greater heights, because the cultural norms that dictate that women work less and in less demanding capacities still remain prevalent (Fuller, 2014). Peters (2012) argues that in a situation where there is an opportunity for anyone to fill a leadership role, the vast majority of women are so culturally indoctrinated into believing that leadership roles are for men that they lack the will to pursue such roles. The expectations of women have been relegated to assisting and/or taking less demanding positions because society has institutionalised a hard-working and goal-oriented woman as being unfriendly, tense and greedy.

Lahti (2013) laments that society has labelled women who prioritise career over family, or want to be a leader and still have a family, as strange, weird or even materialistic. This negatively affects women's career choices, expectations and development. Also, women's perceptions that they have to prove themselves far more than men in leadership positions make getting ahead more difficult. Traditionally, in the same leadership role, female leaders are expected to act in a certain way and adapt their behaviours to that of a man, ignoring their own feminine traits. However, women should not be expected to act in a particular way but rather act according to the circumstances at hand (Cleveland, Vescio & Barnes-Farrell, 2013).

2.4.11 Inadequate planning

Researchers such as Crompton and Lyonette (2011) and Mia (2014) believe that women are to be blamed because they fail to plan for leadership possibilities in their careers in the foreseeable future. Chemers (2014) maintains that women need to assess their career goals and interests in greater depth to establish plans for the future. The fact that women often break their careers to have a family may help to explain the differential achievements in the profession between men and women (Crompton & Lyonette, 2011). According to Mia (2014), the majority of women do not plan their lives. Some only aspire to be a wife and have the ultimate goal of being a mother. This is both acceptable and understandable, owing to the societal belief that the best achievement a woman can ever attain is to be a good wife and a good mother but does not necessarily mean women should not plan beyond this. It would be in a woman's own interest to review her present status and spend time considering what she would like her ultimate position to be aside from being a wife or a mother (Parsaloi & Steyn, 2013). He adds that women should perceive themselves as an individual and not just as a woman and they should be more resourceful in seeking recognition and status.

Ford (2016) argues that women who attain leadership positions still appear to lack access to informal training and development such as mentorship, especially from female mentors. This is owing to the fact that women are gravely underrepresented in such leadership positions and, therefore, women leaders have to deal with the male standards upon which access to educational management is defined. Parsaloi and Steyn (2013) add that, "personal and professional mentors can help women overcome society's imprints of self-doubt and poor self-esteem. Because there are few women

in educational management, a mentor may be male or female. Because there are insufficient women to provide mentorship to aspiring women, the job probably will fall to a man”.

2.4.12 Excessive family responsibilities and workloads

It is apparent that given the demanding school context with its associated stress, pressure and workload, balancing personal life and professional life have become a challenging issue for female leaders (Delina & Raya, 2016). Stress in one’s professional life has an adverse influence particularly on female principals, as they often spend more hours at work and less hours at home with families (Savoy, 2017). Furthermore, Mbepera (2015) postulates that female principals find it difficult to strike a balance between managing their careers and their expected role as a mother and wife, making it clear that women still have the primary responsibility for taking care of dependants such as children and elderly relatives, and also handle the household chores and other family obligations.

Uwizeyimana and Mathevula (2014) argue that having spousal or relative support in reducing their workload is necessary for the success of any women leader. However, the spouse’s attitude towards domestic chores and childcare is different in each context, depending greatly on the cultural expectations and traditions (Karamanidou, 2017; Avgeri, 2015). In African countries where a strong patriarchal culture still exists, women are expected to carry out their prescribed roles as mothers and wives after work even if they occupy a leadership position (Mbepera, 2015). Although more women than men believe that women can do both successfully, women principals clearly face many challenges in combining a high-level career with domestic commitments. This results in women losing interest in pursuing a career with a leadership position in sight and thus causes women been underrepresented in leadership posts (Avgeri, 2015).

2.5 STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME THE UNDERREPRESENTATION OF FEMALES IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

It has been largely recorded in the literature that women face more challenges in attaining leadership positions as compared to their male counterparts (Steyn, 2015; Ngcobo, 2015). This is as a result of certain opportunities that are available to men such as mentoring, networking and societal acceptance among others that are not readily available to women in a similar capacity. Hence, women must rely largely on

intrinsic strategies designed to increase their chances of being appointed a leader or attaining leadership positions, and also equip themselves with requisite skills by advancing themselves personally and professionally. Nagan (2013) adds that, for women to gain an edge to attain leadership positions, they must learn to listen to their inner voices of choosing a career of passion and pursuing it to the peak without giving in to any obstacle that can impede their goal achievements. Some of the strategies that can be utilised to overcome these barriers to populate the female leadership spectrum and advance women's careers are discussed below.

2.5.1 Mentoring and sponsoring

The importance of mentoring and sponsorship cannot be over-emphasised. Uthman (2018) states that mentoring and sponsorship are two important strategies employed by women for career development. Lumby and Azaola (2011) report that several female principals underscored the importance of being mentored. Some of these female principals mentioned that they were mentored by their husbands, former principals, departmental officials, educational managers, and managers in other fields. They added that aspiring female leaders were able to overcome the challenges and other glass ceiling effects that could hinder them from attaining the leadership positions they aspire to, because they had support, guidance and sponsorship from people who believed in them. They maintain that a mentoring strategy significantly promotes the chances of an individual achieving a set goal, helps in attracting and retaining capable women to serve in leadership positions, reduces the level at which capable women quit on their desire to attain a leadership position and finally benefits women psychologically and emotionally, giving them a sense of belonging and the feeling that someone cares enough to support them to achieve their goals.

2.5.2 Planning and career development skills

According to Mahmood (2015), to actually attain leadership positions, aspiring women leaders must plan to do so because failure to plan is simply planning to fail. An aspect of this planning is to know which skills should be acquired that will position them in the limelight for a leadership position. According to Parsaloi and Steyn (2013), aspiring women leaders must plan to acquire additional academic qualifications in order to add skills to the ones they already have. They maintain that qualifications play a vital role in boosting women's access to leadership posts. Career development skills enable

women to obtain leadership positions successfully. This is because such skills show that the aspiring women leaders are able and are also seen as able by their counterparts (Moorosi, 2014).

2.5.3 Reconciling personal and professional responsibilities

Female leaders need to strike a balance between their personal and professional responsibilities by handling and managing their emotions. If they receive support from their spouses they will be able to manage their roles as wives, mothers and principals (Maime, 2011). Similarly, Lumby and Azaola (2011) found that women principals are inspired, encouraged and motivated by the support they receive from their spouses and other members of the families. They further reported that the support married female principals receive from their spouses is often unconditional, as some partners are understanding and help out in a number of ways to ease the burden and workload of these women. These married women principals mentioned their marital status as an advantage for their careers. Ngcobo (2015) posits that female leaders in educational management should embrace a “can-do spirit” and develop the confidence to manage both personal and professional pressure.

2.5.4 Access to networks

According to Dlamini (2018), building and having access to reputable networks is a great strategy for increasing employability in order to attain a leadership position. He maintains that women must be able to socialise and build networks with peers and other senior counterparts and also turn negative experiences into positive ones by integrating with professional organisations that will keep them abreast of current trends and practices, and foster relationships that will strengthen professional networks. Similarly, Savoy (2017) concur that a professional network allows women to be able to relate informally and share their experiences with others who might be able to proffer needed help in the form of counsel, support and inspiration.

2.5.5 Positive drive, determination and motivation

Despite the policies on equality and employability that have been established to redress the gender imbalances in the workplace, women still have to show strong drive, dedication and wilful ambition to be able to attain a leadership position (Lumby & Azaola, 2011). Ngambi (2015) argues that some aspiring women do not rely on gender equality policies to progress to leadership positions; they simply have a strong

drive which is convincing enough for the members of the community, educational officials and other superiors to be able to put their confidence in their ability to lead. Knoll and Bolin (2018) assert that the best strategy for women to attain a leadership position is to show it through confidence and strong will, and not through wishful thinking. These researchers further state that women should believe that they are able to initiate transformation and deliver the essential leadership skills required to implement such changes.

2.6 EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY FEMALE PRINCIPALS AT SECONDARY SCHOOLS

There is an array of literature that reveals that female principals encounter various challenges in their everyday running of schools. These challenges include lack of confidence, lifestyle conflict, emotional pressure, gender stereotyping, discrimination, pressure to compete with previous managers, lack of respect and negative attitudes, managing school discipline, management of change and limited resources (Lumby & Azaola, 2011; Arar & Queder, 2011).

2.6.1 The lack of confidence

A study conducted in Kenya by Parsaloi (2012) found that most female principals in Kenya accepted their lack of confidence in their work, particularly during the early stages of their leadership. Participants in Parsaloi's (2012) study reported that they experienced a lack of confidence when addressing challenging issues as they were unsure as to how to handle them. Spicer (2016) conducted a similar study on African American, Asian, Caucasian and Hispanic women leaders in the USA. They argue that the majority of female principals appear to be uncomfortable with the notion of power or being described as powerful. Instead, they prefer to call themselves servers of the community. For example, some of the principals, while experiencing the power inherent in a school leadership position, did not feel powerful themselves, although some of them did gain confidence as they continued in their leadership roles (Steyn, 2015).

2.6.2 Lifestyle conflict

Lifestyle conflict refers to a human state of incompatibility between alternative choices, for example, choices between the career, family and social life, to mention but a few. Such conflict often reflects in an identity crisis, self-definition dilemma and an inability

to accept oneself. Magkoka (2016) believes that women are capable of becoming effective managers in their workplaces because they are accustomed to managing their homes more effectively than men. On the other hand, Bonzet (2017) expresses the belief that female principals find it challenging to balance the two/three roles they have to fill – that of mother, wife and career woman. In agreement with Moorosi's (2007) view, Mthembu (2013) concurs that the social lives of female principals are affected by their entry into leadership in the sense that leadership is often so demanding that they arrive home late, they have less time for family, friends and themselves and they may also have to sacrifice their religious obligations. These assertions by Mthembu (2013) highlight the need to know the link between social practices and gender. Social practices appear to be gender neutral because everyone appears to be subjected to them; however, the reality is that these very social practices sabotage women who are not able to be available for their work all the time (Mbithuka, 2019). The split between social practice and gender makes it difficult for women principals who are married and are of a reproductive age to balance their public and private responsibilities, as they are still expected to play their cultural roles as mothers and wives over and above their commitment to their work as school managers. Accordingly, it has been found in Kajjado, a rural area in Kenya, that single women principals have an advantage because they are not negatively affected in the same way as married principals and they are able to spend more time on management-related duties (Parsaloi, 2012).

2.6.3 Emotional pressure

In the view of Blackmore (2010), leadership in times of change is a highly emotionally charged activity. People working in leadership positions at schools are continuously being buffeted by the emotional demands placed on them by their peers as well as by learners and members of the community. It may therefore be concluded that their experiences, specifically their emotional responses, are shaped by the contextual constraints within which they work within the ethos of the education system.

Msila (2013) established that some of the women who move into management roles bring with them additional stress as they are inflexible and restrictive. The level or degree of pressure in most instances varies from rural settings to urban settings, among others. For example, as Preston, Jakubiec and Kooymans (2013) affirm, female principals who serve disadvantaged communities sometimes find themselves

in stressful situations as they have to work through the problems to reach solutions with little assistance.

2.6.4 Gender stereotypes

Universally, several research outputs show that there is still gender disparity in the appointment of females to leadership positions. Kanjere, Thaba and Teffo (2011) indicate that there appears to be a general impression that women are not good leaders. Hussain (2012) opines that gender is not just a biological classification, but sees it as an array of norms and beliefs at both individual and group level that influences the opinions, feelings, actions, resources and treatment of women and men. Nevertheless, even in this modern age, there are people who still believe that women are incapable of leading. Women in the rural areas are often deeply affected by prejudices because most of the men in these areas are staunch custodians of culture (Potokri, 2015). This suggests that women in leadership positions, especially in rural settings, are often severely affected by this phenomenon. It is, therefore, not surprising that Hussain (2012) contends that culture and gender both have an influence on the attitudes towards women leaders because the two do not exist in isolation but are embedded in one another.

These two factors (culture and gender) affect the way in which women lead, irrespective of age, status and ethnic background. My reading about women in leadership positions has indicated that their roles as mothers help them to transfer their knowledge of managing a family to the school setting and, for the researcher, this gives them an advantage over their male counterparts. Both Kanjere et al. (2011) and Hussain (2012) argue that the majority of African families are led by women while their spouses are far away from home because of work commitments. This supports the claim that women possess an advantage in terms of the managerial experience that they are able to transfer to the workplace. In other words, any discussions which describe women as incapable leaders should involve robust debate.

2.6.5 Discrimination

According to Ndinda and Ndhlovu (2018), “gender discrimination constitutes experiences of people based on their gender, due to unequal power between males and females in society”. They maintain that these gender discrimination experiences, which are caused by organisational and cultural prejudice, tend to undermine the

effectiveness of women, therefore obstructing their self-confidence. Owing to the accepted norm that women are regarded as weak or inferior, and treated as such when compared to men in leadership positions, female leaders are encircled with communal structures that invalidate and demean their efforts to be efficiently operative and powerful (Meeks, 2020). People also respond differently to women who are leaders than to men who are leaders. This could be associated with the historic positions assigned to men and women, where education had a tradition of viewing women as teachers and men as leaders and managers (Kattula, 2011).

Mnisi (2015) reports that despite the South African policy initiatives emphasising gender equity, discrimination and stereotyping continue, and these hamper the efforts of women who are attempting to climb the leadership ladder. Makgoka (2016) posits that work defines an individual's place in terms of social standing, lifestyle and acknowledgment. It is not surprising then that as women fight the battle of discrimination each day and climb the leadership ladder, society continues to regard them as incompetent and inferior to men.

Morojele (2011) argues that gender discrimination is universal although it takes many forms, depending on socio-cultural and economic factors. Discrimination manifests in various ways, for example evaluating the work performance of women as inferior to that of men and giving preference to men over women when hiring (Mestry & Schmidt, 2012). Mestry and Schmidt (2012) emphasise that women have been relegated to homemaking jobs and child-care tasks, and that many women who are employed carry a double burden of responsibility compared to men. Similar to the women in Mestry and Schmidt's research, female principals face continuous discrimination and harassment from their colleagues, learners, learners' parents and the school community. Moreover, Kattula (2011) contends that the present school structure is inexhaustibly graven with the cultural and traditional definitions of the male gender dominating females. Therefore, women are regarded as capable when they occupy the lower positions in a school or as an ordinary classroom teacher, but are seen as incompetent when it comes to top administrative capacities (Kattula, 2011).

2.6.6 Pressure to compete with previous managers

Principals are expected to manage learners who do not behave in the way that they are expected to conduct themselves at schools, manage troublesome teachers,

change curriculum and also manage the parents who expect schools to function in certain ways (Aja-Korie, 2011). While these pressures may require various measures, some principals may not have the liberty to do what is necessary. Makgoka (2016) emphasises that female principals are often expected to continue with the leadership styles of previous principals and that many of them often fail to exercise their own leadership style because of the rigid standards of leadership that were introduced in previous years. Nevertheless, Aja-Korie (2011) advocates for a change of practice when he notes 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, and evolved into more complex indices owing to an overwhelming student population explosion, addressing learners' needs, and accommodating learners from different sociopolitical backgrounds.

2.6.7 Lack of respect and negative attitudes

Jonguxolo (2012) and Kallie (2015) both indicate that female principals are often disrespected by their male and female colleagues, and Kallie (2015) reiterates that female principals are often disrespected by their male and female colleagues. This disrespect is often displayed during school staff meetings, with the staff showing disrespect in the way in which they conduct themselves, while some teachers do not even attend the meetings because they do not believe in female leadership. In Kitele's (2013) study, he found that teachers did not understand the leadership style and approach of their female principal and, hence, they criticised any step or decision taken by her. Similarly, Kanjere, Thaba and Teffo (2011) support the notion that female principals are faced with the challenge of being criticised by the members of the SGB and parents because of their stereotypical beliefs about female leaders. Makgoka (2016) also reveals that male parents often doubt the ability of female principals and often label them with names that are intended to undermine them. It would appear that the female principals who are disrespected the most are the unmarried female principals who are often referred to as girls by the parents. Nevertheless, despite the obvious disrespect, as shown in Parsaloi's (2012) study, female principals tend to tolerate verbal abuse from learners' parents and are also sometimes drawn into family matters which do not require their intervention.

2.6.8 Managing school discipline

School discipline is an important feature in schools if they are to achieve their educational goal. Nxumalo (2013) describes discipline as a required set of actions put in place to reprimand and correct individuals who deviate from a particular course. Naicker (2014) links discipline to school in her work titled “Managing learner-discipline in secondary schools”. She regards school discipline as a measure employed by a teacher towards a student or a group of learners when the student's/learners’ behaviour disrupts the ongoing educational activities or is in contravention of a school rule. Discipline guides a learner’s behaviour and sets limits to help learners achieve the set goals. School discipline may be approached in various ways (Nxumalo, 2013).

Writers such as Kehoe (2017) propose elaborate arguments about the adaptability of the different approaches to school discipline, for example the conventional approach and non-punitive disciplinary approaches. Conventional approaches to school discipline include conduct codes, suspension and corporal punishment. However, education, which is richly rooted in psychology, advocates that there are other means of managing school discipline without adopting the punitive approach, and that the main focus should be on the psychological approach and involve counselling, monitoring, self-discovery/self-awareness campaigns and other non-punitive disciplinary approaches (Kitele, 2013). A lack of school discipline on the part of both learners and teachers may pose a significant challenge to the leadership of a school.

In a study conducted by Parsaloi (2012) in Kenya, female principals were reported as complaining of teachers who do not respect time, who arrive late at school and also leave early, while others come to school drunk or under the influence of certain substances. In fact, some of the teachers were reported to smoke in front of learners which did not set a good example for them. These factors all impede the effectiveness of female principals’ leadership for one reason or the other. Furthermore, most of the principals are hesitant to take action against those teachers because some are good at their teaching jobs and they produce good results despite the fact that they lack self-discipline. The principal may lose a good teacher who improves the pass rate of the learners at the school if such a teacher is reported to the school board, as it could result in the teacher’s dismissal. The principal who reported the teacher may then suffer discrimination, especially if the principal is a female, which could lead to the

creation of enemies within the school environment and community for playing a role in the dismissal of such a teacher.

In her study of female leadership in the Limpopo province of South Africa, Makgoka (2016) reports that female principals are sometimes not taken seriously by some of the learners at schools, particularly the male learners who undermine the principal because of their gender. Some principals are threatened by the “head-bent” learners when they try to take action against them when they are uncooperative. Makgoka (2016) further reveals that some learners come to school under the influence of alcohol and sometimes bring illegal substances to school, while others actually sell drugs on the school premises.

According to Nxumalo (2013) and Naicker (2014), it is possible to manage discipline effectively in schools. This could be by defining problem behaviours in specific contexts, creating a simple predictable process for addressing behaviour problems and defining which problems are classroom managed and which are office managed. This could be done by striving to avoid inconsistencies in the discipline approach, establishing a process for handling repeat minor offences and celebrating learners for their positive behaviour in order to motivate others.

2.6.9 Management of change

Change is viewed as the uncertainties inherent in the certainties among and within people (Potokri, Noah & Perumal 2018). According to Potokri et al. (2018), change is everywhere and, hence, “births, marriages and deaths of friends and relatives, migration, the crisis of schooling or the stages of a career make up the fabric of our individual life-worlds”. To this end, the researcher considers the definition of change management, which is the same as management of change, as important. According to Naicker (2014), management of change is a process that follows a repeatable cycle and uses a holistic set of tools to create change, monitor the change and manage the change in order to promote effectiveness.

Nadim and Singh (2019) argue that the successful management of change is crucial for any organisation if it is to survive and succeed in the current highly competitive and continuously evolving business environment. Therefore, the acceptability of the changes within an organisation such as school is crucial to successful management.

Fink and Markholt (2011) posit that for effective change to happen, it must be well managed; that is, it requires effective leadership to successfully introduce and sustain such change, while the leader promoting such change must possess certain cognitive, spiritual, emotional and behavioural attributes. However, any inconsistency in the policies that affect change is a challenge to the leadership of an educational organisation such as a school.

As a country, South Africa arguably does not have stability in its policies, as the politicians constantly change the policies to suit their political agendas. This, therefore, affects the policies in the education system (Mestry & Schmidt, 2012). It is, then, often difficult for female principals to effectively implement the new policies owing to the lack of support from the SGB members and the shortage of resources, which results in the poor management of schools by the principals. Aja-Korie (2011) argues that it is not only due to the lack of support from SGB members and shortage of resources that female principals fail to implement new policies; it is also a result of the fear of change on the part of the teachers which prevents female principals from effectively implementing the policies.

2.6.10 Limited resources

Resources are a means to an end and are significantly related to leadership (Aina, 2013). According to Potokri (2013; 2014), resources may either be artificial or natural and they may be monetary resources, human resources or material resources, among many others. Therefore, leaders require resources in order to carry out their tasks or responsibilities effectively. School resources include funds, school buildings, school buses, writing materials, students' chairs, furniture and fittings, equipment such as computers, internet facilities and other facilities for extramural activities (Mnisi, 2015). The availability of resources and the level at which success is attained in leadership remains an ongoing debate. According to Preston, Jakubiec and Kooymans (2013), female principals of secondary schools face numerous challenges including the alarming one of limited resources. The challenge of limited resources varies according to location and is predominant in rural-based schools rather than those in urban areas (Preston et al., 2013). According to Parsaloi (2012) and Msila (2013), female principals are also often faced with the challenge of conducting lessons because there is a shortage of teachers in schools as well as a shortage of learning materials. Furthermore, female principals are expected to settle conflict among the teachers and

learners, render administrative services in the school and also attend stakeholder and departmental meetings.

Ballard (2010) also found that a shortage of resources at schools at some point negatively affects the work of principals and the effective management of schools. He maintains that principals sometimes have to attend several meetings outside of the school premises and that the lack of resources such as a school transport system impairs their movement and effectiveness. Ballard (2010) further mentions that after such meetings, the majority of the principals go back to their schools tired and unable to continue with the normal administrative work.

Msila (2013) also mentions that effective leadership is measured based on the level of the learners' success, but that it is impossible to achieve such success where there is a lack of or insufficient learning materials. Glewwe et al. (2011) report that billions of dollars are spent yearly on educational learning materials in both the developing and the developed countries because these materials are seen as an important resource in a school. They further mention that the human resources, that is, developing the educators to a higher level, is another important resource required in schools.

2.6.11 Cultural influences

Women principals experience first-hand cultural challenges that prevent them from performing to their best of their abilities (Carnie, 2019). Many cultures limit women's participation in leadership with a patriarchal system where decision-making authority rests on the shoulders of men. In African society, culture has given more recognition to men at the expense of women. Some African cultures even forbid women speaking in public or going to public places, while some cultures do not consider the life passage of women worth celebrating or recognised (Tundi, 2015). Makgoka (2016) argue that women leaders are always being watched closely and critically analysed, unlike their male counterparts.

As a result, women leaders live in fear and discomfort in their capacity as leaders. Nxumalo (2013) accentuates that "the most significant explanation of resistance to women in positions of power in schools is their devaluation". This implies that assigning lesser value to women adopts an attitude that favours males over females

for leadership positions, proving that women are less valued as regards to men, which has a negative impact on women's self-confidence.

2.6.12 Dealing with parents' attitudes and their grievances

According to Makhaye (2012), female principals face a predominant challenge from the provocative attitudes frequently shown by some parents, especially some male parents who often doubt their ability as females to lead. Moorosi (2010) posits that "single female principals were often referred to as girls, which intimidated them". Similarly, Makhaye (2012) and Kanjere, Thaba and Teffo (2011) report that "women in these positions have to convince men in their schools and surrounding communities that they are capable". This places heavy pressure on female principals who have to work extra hard to prove their capabilities to these parents and the community at large, while this does not pertain to their male counterparts because they are regarded as natural born leaders and readily accepted.

The level of attention and scrutiny parents and the SGB give to these female principals is overwhelming especially during parents meetings. Some parents go to the lengths of criticising the female principals dress (Kallie, 2015). Kallie maintains that many communities do not appreciate women who wear trousers, as tribal authorities use this as a leverage to undermine their ability and respectability in serving in leadership positions. This makes serving as a female principal challenging. In addition, female principals acknowledged that they had to deal with parents' grievances such as complaints levelled against educators where parents sometimes demand immediate action, sometimes leaving the school dissatisfied. Also, female principals reported that parents complained about other parents; for example, their children start a fight in the community but end up taking the fight to school. Female principals maintain that sometimes they have to endure insults from angry parents and sometimes parents report their children's discipline issues that they themselves could have resolved at home (Parsaloi, 2012).

2.6.13 Lack of acceptance

Fuller (2016) argues that some staff members fail to accept their female colleagues when the latter are selected for a leadership position. Similarly, Steyn (2015) postulates that women experience a lack of acceptance by colleagues at work. Often, a female teacher under the administration of a female principal fails to take orders from

them, as do some male teachers who believe a female is not capable to giving them an executable order. This situation frequently leads to lack of a community support. Furthermore, the community sometimes views the promotion of a female to a leadership position as suspicious in terms of immorality or moral standing (Carnie, 2019). Accordingly, such circumstances create challenges for women leadership.

2.6.14 Family member support

Uwizeyimana and Mathevula (2014) report that lack of family member support is another major concern for female principals which adds to their multiple stresses derived from school. They further explain that the lack of husbands' understanding and acceptance that their wives occupy a leadership position in their workplace demotivates and demoralises female principals. It is said that most husbands do not see their wives breaking the domestic caretaker barrier. This points out clearly that support from home, especially from husbands as partners, is significant as it helps women to focus more and cope with the stresses of their office as principal.

Uwizeyimana and Mathevula (2014) further assert that without their husband's support, wives find it challenging to maintain a balance between leadership administrative work and home responsibilities. This makes it very difficult for them to achieve and perform effectively in their roles as principals, as they strive to maintain the pressure of performing well as a wife and as a mother. Therefore, it is obvious that spousal support and acceptance by the family at large is important for female principals in order to carry out their leadership work effectively (Preston et al., 2013).

2.7 THE EVOLVING ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

Motshekga (2014) states that the fundamental purpose of a principal is to provide leadership and management in all areas of school to enable the creation and support of conditions under which high quality teaching and learning take place and which promote the highest possible standards of learner achievement. Cordeiro and Cunningham (2013) assert that the principal is the heart of school improvement, and that all effective schools have one thing in common, which is good leadership. Ncube (2016) opines that the principal's role has evolved in several ways, as a principal is no longer considered a mere manager of people and schools who hoards power and exercises authority over people, but a person who allows interactive discourse

between teachers, learners and other stakeholders to achieve the goal of being an effective and successful principal.

According to the Georgia Leadership Institute for School Improvement both female and male principals must be able to develop and maintain effective teaching and learning programmes within his/her school. The Institute further states that a principal must be able to serve in many leadership roles in order to meet and exceed students' expectations, institute transformation in the school ethos and sustain school improvement. Such roles include, but are not limited to, a data analysis role, a curriculum, assessment and instructional role, a strategic planning role, an operational role, a relationship and communication deployment role, a process improvement role, a learning and development role and a transformational role. These roles are important for improving the quality of education supplied by educational leaders, and women aspiring or preparing to attain a leadership position and principalship post must already have, or be able to learn how to perform in, this role and understand the essential skills and leadership traits that will facilitate the attainment of a school principalship.

Maseko (2013) avers that the dynamism and complexity of a leadership position is on the increase because of the increasingly diverse and inclusive school systems which require a new way of leading. He adds that while it is important for all aspiring principal candidates, it is of more importance for women aspiring for a principal position to understand the roles and new ways of navigating issues as a principal. Understanding of such is important for women in becoming a successful, noticeable and acceptable candidate for a principalship position (Cordeiro & Cunningham, 2013). Other important roles are summarised and discussed under the following headings.

2.7.1 Management roles

The role of school principal entails that the person in charge keeps the school operations running smoothly, giving direction to learners and effectively managing other team members. Potokri et al. (2014) posit that it is the duty of a manager to work with and through people to achieve school and educational aims. He maintains that activities in schools need to be managed. In addition, all members of staff, finances and buildings need to be managed, and the principal at the on top of the hierarchy of anyone entrusted to manage these. According to Ngambi (2015), a manager performs routine operational tasks, thus creating workable systems, and engages others

through delegation to carry them out smoothly. Managers have authority that embeds in them a recognisable status that leads to building interpersonal contacts and relationships, giving them access to valuable information useful in making valid decisions for the success of the school and in representing the school by portraying a good public image (Marishane & Botha, 2011). The principal is also subject to a superior authority, that is, the educational authority. The principal must manage and govern the affairs of the school in line with the mandate of the central education authority.

Msila (2013) posits that the managerial roles of the principal have been widened to cover some other aspects such as governance, teaching and learning, school transformation and resources such as money, teachers, buildings and even other facilities such as school grounds. Hence, the principal must make sure that all resources are effectively and efficiently utilised. Marishane and Botha (2011) explain the managerial roles through the input, process and output management components. Firstly, input management entails the management of resources such as power, information, technology, financial, physical and human resources, including measures of accountability that are expected from outside sources such as the state, educational authority and government. Secondly, the process management component gives the principal the responsibility of utilising the resources, and controlling, coordinating and monitoring such resources so that they are effectively, efficiently and economically utilised within the applicable policies and guidelines. Lastly, the output component allows the principal to evaluate the impact of the allocated and utilised resources. This implies that the overall outcome must be examined when what is achieved is being compared to what was proposed. It is therefore, the responsibility of the principal to give account and feedback to all stakeholders such as the SGB and government officials, among others, by means of reports on whether their investment in the school yielded a positive result or otherwise (Msila, 2013). Therefore, women must be well equipped and prepared to fit in these managerial roles in order for them to excel in their capacity and capabilities as a principal.

2.7.2 Leadership roles

According to Dlamini (2018), leadership relates to vision, direction and plans as to how the school must achieve its set goals. This is done by inspiring all stakeholders to actively participate and engage in order to achieve the objectives. Dlamini (2018)

maintains that it is the duty of a leader to create a vision for their team members and engage all team members to actively participate in achieving the set vision. According to Motshekga (2014), a principal performs several roles in their leadership capacity, such as human relationships, decision-making, governor, mediator, capacity builder, evaluator, role model among many others. Firstly, the human relations role enables the principal to work in relation to other stakeholders such as the SGB, the school management team (SMT) and the school community at large in order to build partnerships and collaboration among all parties (Motshekga, 2014). The principal must be able to encourage the community to support the education and wellbeing of the learners. They also need to make members of staff satisfied and remove any causes of dissatisfaction. This can easily be achieved by making sure that the teachers have good relationships and accessible communication with the principals and that their concerns are being heard (Brumley, 2011). Similarly, Dlamini (2018) contends that “for the principal to bring about sound relationships between administrative staff and teachers, he/she should convince those involved that whatever issue at stake is to achieve the primary objective which is to teach and not to satisfy personal egos”.

Secondly, playing a decision-making role is about being responsible for all the actions, people, resources and inaction that exist under the governance of a principal. The principal, owing to the authority he/she has, makes decisions regarding what should be done and when and how resources should be deployed, as well as deciding on the conditions under which these activities should be performed. As a decision-maker, the principal has a role to manage conflict in the school, and as a power broker, the principal should be at the forefront when it comes to leading negotiations on contractual agreements on behalf of the school (Marishane & Botha, 2011).

Thirdly, as a governor, the principal plays a leadership role as the representative of the larger group, that is, the school. The principal must attend all meetings and voice the needs of the school and give feedback to the SGB on how resources are being utilised. As a representative of a larger body, the principal provides learners, teachers and parents with valuable information in order to make informed decisions which will foster the achievement of the school’s desired goals (Majola, 2013). Fourthly, the principal serves as a capacity builder who inspires others by what he/she does and how he/she behaves. The principal empowers, inspires, advises, mentors, directs and supports the teachers and other subordinates as they face challenges in their

respective capacities. This is instrumental to the career development of other team members. The principal is also expected to assist teachers with personal development, skills and knowledge enrichment which embed a culture of continued, on-the-job learning for everyone in the school (Marishane & Botha, 2011). Onyango et al. (2011) aver that the principal should make everything the teachers engage in worthy of their pride, tenacity, passion and dedication and help them to meet their responsibilities even when it is difficult to do so.

Furthermore, the principal has a leadership role in evaluating the ongoing processes or results of all the utilised resources. The process of evaluation enables the principal to be able to ascertain individual, group or programme performance, and to see whether they are on course or have deviated from the set plans (Majola, 2013). As a result of evaluation, progress made regarding goals will be measured and actions that have deviated from the track can be corrected. The principal evaluates the tasks of staff and also evaluates himself. Careful and well-planned evaluation is key to the development and improvement of any organisation, as evaluation is the key to accountability (Brown & Irby, 2010).

Lastly, the principal must be able to serve in the capacity of a role model to the learners, teachers and subordinates and other stakeholders. According to Ngambi (2015), “modelling is a dimension of transformational leadership that encompasses behaviour on the part of the leader that is exemplary to employees to follow and is consistent with the values the leader espouses”. Such behaviour is said to boost teachers’ and subordinates’ beliefs about their own capacities, their sense of worth and effectiveness. Also, modelling is believed to be a contributing factor to emotional encouragement and support by creating an ethos of belonging and importance. Moreover, aspiring women leaders find sanctuary in modelling, where positive energy such as honesty, trustworthiness, integrity, self-confidence, initiative, creativity, devotion, motivation and persistence can be shared and transferred. Similarly, Motshekga (2014) declares that female principals should demonstrate and model a personal commitment to learning and the maintenance of high standards on the school premises, because they know that teachers, subordinates and the whole school community are paying close attention to what they do and how they behave as compared to their male counterparts.

2.7.3 Instructional roles

According to Marishane and Botha (2011), principals are instructional leaders who are regarded as professionals in their field, whose main aim is to improve the learning environment and the teaching practices in their schools. As an instructional leader, the principal is expected to stand in the front line of making sure that learners receive the best teaching and learning activities they can get (Gumus & Akcaoglu, 2013). Principals are professional teachers who were first employed to teach and therefore they value teaching learners to the highest possible academic achievement. Principals provide leadership services to their team of teachers whose primary area of operation and function is the curriculum and the delivery of the curriculum in an effective and efficient manner.

Motshekga (2014) posits that the principal must ensure that the educators possess full knowledge of the National Curriculum Statements (NCS) and possess associated skills related to teaching, monitoring and evaluation. Maponya (2015) further emphasises that instructional leadership behaviours are critical to teacher instruction, and hence to learner achievement. The principal as the instructional leader of the school should have knowledge of the curriculum and instruction practices, and should be responsible for providing teachers with new educational strategies and technologies, as well as other tools that promote effective instruction (Brown, 2011). Being an instructional leader, the principal must always be informed about current research and theory regarding effective schooling. Hence, he/she continually involves and exposes all staff members to cutting-edge ideas about how to perform effectively and efficiently.

According to Brown (2011), the instructional leadership role is central to the core activities of the school and the coordination and control of curriculum and instruction. He refers to principals as visionaries, problem solvers, resource providers, agents of change and policy implementers who guide teachers and learners towards productive learning experiences and achievement of the overall school goals. For a principal to be an effective and efficient instructional leader, Bogotch (2011) suggests that by means of inspection and examination, the principal should have knowledge of what is taught in each class and how it is being taught.

Wing (2013) explains that the principal as an instructional leader needs to go beyond the earlier days of professionalism and exposure, and be better equipped professionally and internationally with the required skills and competence to handle the dynamic 21st-century challenges. The principal should play an important role in helping the teachers to attain the school's goal, and to promote learner achievement by sharing instructional leadership skills with them and by working side by side with them in every aspect of administration. Hence, for a woman to be successful as a school principal, she must act as a strategic leader who takes the initiative and responsibility for addressing any identified inadequacies in the teachers' skills and capacities. This is to ensure that the teachers are able to respond adequately to their roles and responsibilities as instructors in order to attain a high level of learner academic accomplishment (Mnisi, 2015).

2.8 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the relevant literature that was consulted in this research, focusing on literature related to the experiences and challenges of female principals, as well as ways in which their leadership can be improved. This discussion included some of the studies that have been conducted at the local, regional and international level, as related to the experiences related to, and the improvement of, female principals' leadership. By consulting various sources, the chapter highlighted scientific empirical evidence to show that little has been done to support the leadership of female principals, particularly in rural South Africa. The following chapter focuses on the theoretical framework used in this study.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the paradigmatic and theoretical perspectives that guided the study. Every study has to be conceptualised within a particular theoretical framework, which the researcher believes will contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Multiple theories were considered and discussed to assist in giving meaning to the concept of leadership and in meeting the aim and objectives of the study. Transformational leadership theory and liberal feminism theory were chosen to underpin the study among other theories.

3.2 EVOLUTION OF LEADERSHIP THEORY

Leadership theories evolved gradually over the years, ranging from the ancient theories to the most recent contemporary leadership theories. Previous research on leadership has resulted in different types of leadership theories such as the great man theory, trait theory, contingency theory, behavioural theory, transactional theory, and transformational theory, among others. Each of these leadership theories has their own meaning, explanation, pros and cons. The existence of different types of leadership theories indicate the efforts of previous researchers in the study of leadership. Such theories play an important role in further studies on the leadership (Drescher, Korsgaard, Welppe, Picot & Wigand, 2014). Lyons and Kuron (2014) argue that every leader is different in his/her attitudes, behaviours and management style. Hence, there is no single theory that can work for all leaders. Leaders need to develop their own leadership approach by learning more about the various leadership theories.

All leadership theories are important. One way or another, every leader unifies and mobilises groups of people behind a common cause. For this study, the categories of leadership theories are displayed in order to understand the leadership roles that female principals could employ and assume in managing their schools, learners, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders.

Table 3.1: Cherry’s classification of leadership theories and timelines

Category	Theory	Core idea	Timeline
The early theories	Great man theories	Leaders born with necessary personality traits	1840s–1940
	Personality or trait theory	Identified behavioural characteristics shared by leaders	
	Situational theory	Leadership specific to a situation	
Middle interactive theories	Behavioural theory	Leadership based on what leaders’ life experiences have taught them	1941–1970
	Participative theory	Leaders retain the right to allow members to participate	
	Contingency theory	Determine which leadership style is best suited for a particular work situation	
Contemporary leadership theories	Transactional theory	Based on the premise that a transaction takes place between leaders and followers	1994–2008
	Skills theory	Acquired skills and knowledge are significant factors	
	Transformational leadership	Stimulation and elevation that converts followers into theory leaders	

Source: Cherry (2012:2-4)

3.3 THEORIES

3.3.1 The early theories

The theories discussed in this section start with the great man theory, followed by trait theory and situational theory.

3.3.1.1 The great man theory

The term “great man theory” was first coined by Thomas Carlyle (1841) who postulates that great men are people who possess intelligence and who created the history of the world. Carlyle argues that great man is born with positive personality traits, effective behaviours, and a high degree of knowledge. They are the people who are able to facilitate their power, leadership ability and open mindedness, which leads them to becoming great leaders and allows them to leave their footprints in legends and histories (Spector, 2016).

Additionally, Amanchukwu et al. (2015) contend that the term “great man” was used at the time when leadership was thought of primarily as a male quality. The great man

theory of leadership attempted to explain leaders as exceptional people, born with innate qualities and therefore venerated as heroes (Dowd in Levine, 2000). This theory assumed that the capacity for leadership was inherent – that great leaders are born, not made. It portrayed great leaders as heroic, mythic and destined to rise to leadership when needed.

As proponents of the theory aver, “great leaders are simply born with the necessary internal characteristics such as confidence, intelligence, and social skills that make them natural-born leaders” (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). This means that leadership was related to heredity – the leader was genetically endowed with superior qualities that distinguished leaders from followers. This assumption, which is no longer maintained as the sole explanation, but is nevertheless conceivable, was that if one knows who the “great man” is, one can examine their personalities and behaviour to emulate them. Researchers who support the great man theory believe that people are born with the ability and competency to become leaders (Penn, 2008). According to Daft and Marcic (2008), earlier studies hold that great man theory describes leaders who have achieved greatness in their behaviours and attitudes. Today, in a new era, there are still people who are willing to believe in this theory. Although this theory may sound old-fashioned to some people in management teams today, research suggests that some people naturally possess the intelligence, personality traits and characteristics that catapult them to become good leaders (Penn, 2008; Yaverbaum & Sherman, 2008).

The great man theory became popular in the 19th century when Carlyle (1888) commented: “The history of the world is but the biography of great men”. “Great men were the leaders of men, the settlers, architects, and in a wide sense, creators of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to accomplish. All things that we see standing accomplished in the world are properly the outer material result, the physical realisation and embodiment of thoughts that dwell in the Great Men sent into the world, and therefore, the soul of the whole world's history, it may justly be considered, are the history of these great men” (Penn, 2008). The great man theory of leadership could not be used to underpin this study as female principals have shown from history that effective leadership attributes can be developed through learning and experiences, and are not based on the ideology of gender and patriarchy.

3.3.1.2 Trait theory

Trait theory examines the type of person that makes a good leader and focuses on the personal traits, characteristics, attributes and qualities associated with effective leadership (Rodd, 2013). Green (1994) adds in this regard that the trait theory of leadership focuses on different personality traits with which leaders are endowed. Trait theory postulates that an effective leader can be identified through the recognition of his or her own traits. Bolden, Gosling, Marturano and Dennison (2003) posit that “trait theory often identifies a particular personality or behavioural characteristic shared by leaders, and lists of qualities associated with leadership exist in abundance and continue to be produced”. Traits are the personal characteristics that are possessed by a leader, such as height, weight, appearance, intelligence, knowledge, values, ideas, self-confidence, dominance and initiative (Daft & Marcic, 2008).

This theory assumes that people inherit certain qualities and traits that make them better suited for leadership. Trait theory attempts to formulate the unified personality or behavioural characteristics shared by leaders. Zaccaro (2007) found that leadership was a unique property of extraordinary individuals, and the traits leaders possessed were immutable and could not be developed. Throughout the early 1900s, the study of leadership focused on traits. However, a dilemma baffled the proponents of this theory. If particular traits are key features of leadership, then how do we explain people who possess those qualities but are not leaders? Further, the list of the traits grew endlessly with each leader bringing in additional traits. Often, the traits were contradictory as well.

From a trait theory perspective, leadership or management is seen as something embedded in individuals. Debates continue as to whether particular traits are born or bred, the underlying assumption being that certain people possess innate characteristics that make them better leaders than others (Stogdill, 1974). This search for characteristics that differentiate leaders from non-leaders occupied the early psychologists who studied leadership. The approach entails identifying the traits (psychological and physiological) of successful leaders, often in war situations, and highlighting those qualities that appeared to correlate with their success as leaders. For example, this perspective held that leaders were typically tall, having integrity and good social skills. However, research efforts at isolating these traits were unsuccessful, as it was not always possible to specify which of a large number of traits

were appropriate for effective leadership (Thompson, 2014). Additionally, the traditional concept of leadership is ill fitted to modern organisations in terms of gender, interpersonal relations and roles. Owing to the enormous limitations of the trait theory of leadership, it could not be used to underpin this study because it cannot fully explain why some people possess some range of qualities and yet underperform in leadership positions and vice versa.

3.3.1.3 Situational theory

Situational theory proposes that a course of action based upon situational variables and different styles of leadership may be more appropriate for certain types of decision-making (Cherry, 2016). This view is also held by Ololube (2013), who asserts that situational theory is a theory that views leadership as specific to a situation rather than a particular set of traits. This means that if some of the group members are knowledgeable, experienced and skilled in certain qualities, leadership roles would be more effective. Similarly, Bolden et al. (2003) assert that a “situational theory approach sees leadership as specific to the circumstances in which it is being exercised. It also proposes that there may be differences in required leadership styles at different levels”.

Conger (2004) argues that leadership styles might also need to change depending on the maturity of the group or team, with early engagement potentially requiring more autocratic styles, but with familiarity and experience of working together allowing a more participatory style. This approach may be one that many school principals readily recognise as they seek to mark their authority and establish their new territory in the school but relax and become less autocratic as patterns of work become more established. White, Currie and Lockett (2014) argue that a school is a professional bureaucratic context that significantly influences possibilities for leadership. They attest that leadership in schools is “best described as representing a situational approach” (White et al., 2014). Within the approach enacted by school principals, moral and professional approaches to leadership are evident rather than the policy preferred transformational approach. These sit comfortably with the teaching and learning ethos thoroughly imbued into educational professionals, through training and experience, long before they are charged with leadership responsibilities beyond the classroom. The situational theory of leadership could not fully underpin this study because effective action on the part of leaders is predetermined by a range of

circumstantial factors, such as the situation itself, the followers and the leader involved.

3.3.2 Middle interactive theories

The theories in this section explore the discoveries of researchers on leadership made in the early to middle 1900s. These theories include behavioural theory, participative theory and contingency theory.

3.3.2.1 Behavioural theory

In response to trait leadership theory, behavioural theory offered a new perspective on leadership. This theory focuses on the actions of leaders based on what their life experiences have taught them, not on inborn mental qualities. People can learn to become better leaders through training, development, exposure and scrutiny (Rodd, 2013). Behavioural theory may help principals to develop particular leadership behaviours in schools.

Behavioural theories of leadership are based upon the belief that great leaders are made, not born. Rooted in behaviourism, this leadership theory focuses on the actions of leaders, not mental qualities or interests. Davis and Luthans (1979) state that the underlying assumption of behavioural theories is that the leader's behaviour will evoke specific behaviour in the followers, and the followers' resulting behaviour or action will cause the leader to interpret his/her original action and either reinforce or modify a subsequent similar behaviour (Kurucz & Nicholson, 2019). The behavioural theory of leadership could not fully inform this study because it laid more emphasis on what leaders actually do, rather than their characteristics and their mental efficiency, which is also needed to be an effective leader. In my study, female principals were expected to develop leadership capabilities even in non-leader teachers or learners by instilling leadership qualities in them through coaching, mentoring and facilitating as they also lead by example.

3.3.2.2 Participative theory

According to Grimsley (2017), participative leadership is a style of management where decisions are made with the greatest feasible amount of participation from those who are affected by the decisions. Participative leadership occurs when the leaders retain the right to allow members to participate. It is also suggested that the ideal leadership style is one that takes the input of others into account (Lamb, 2013; Amanchukwu et

al., 2015). Principals, especially female leaders, should understand how this theory works, and allow teachers, learners, parents and other stakeholders to participate in decision-making relating to the school activities and operations. It should be noted that the level of participation may also depend on the type of decision that is being made at the time (Chandra 2016).

Participative leaders encourage participation and contributions from group members and help group members to feel relevant and committed to the decision-making process. A principal who uses participative leadership, rather than making all the decisions, seeks to involve other people, thus improving commitment and increasing collaboration, which leads to better quality decisions and a more successful operation (Lamb, 2013). Hudgins (2016) highlights that a participative theory approach has various dimensions. Moreover, it is embodied by the following common attributes of a leader: the leader facilitates the conversation, openly shares information and knowledge necessary for decision-making, encourages members of the group to share ideas, synthesises all available information and solutions suggested by the team and also comes up with the best possible solution and communicates it back to the group. The participative theory of leadership could not fully inform this study as only few selected matters can be brought forward for mass participation. Also, this approach means that decision-making takes longer which could impair the relevance of such decisions.

3.3.2.3 Contingency theory

Ayman, Chemers and Fiedler (2007) accentuate that the contingency theory of leadership focuses on a set of variables related to the situation that might determine which particular style of leadership is the most appropriate for the situation. According to this theory, no leadership style is best in all situations; it views leadership as specific to a situation rather than to a particular personality type. Anderson and Sun (2017) argue that various situations require different forms of leadership, as leaders cannot always carry one toolkit of leadership practices to deal with varying situations. Mnisi (2015) adds: "Success depends upon a number of variables, including the leadership style, qualities of the followers and aspects of the situation."

According to this theory, no single leadership style is appropriate in all situations. Achieving success is dependent on various factors such as the style of leadership and followers' willingness (Charry, 2012). Therefore, contingency factors need to be

considered in any condition and in any relevant environment when designing an organisation or one of its elements (Amanchukwu et al., 2015). Contingency theory postulates that effective leadership depends on the degree of fit between a leader's qualities and leadership style and that demanded by a specific situation (Lamb, 2013). The contingency theory of leadership cannot underpin this study, as it does not provide for any generalisation or transfer of leadership qualities to similar situations, which was what the female principals were expected to do in building new leaders from their flock of subordinates.

3.3.3 Contemporary leadership theories

Drawing inspiration and improvements from the earlier theories, more recent theories emerged. These theories focused on encouraging and inspiring others to follow. This section explains transactional leadership theory and skills theory.

3.3.3.1 Transactional leadership theory

Transactional theory has been the traditional model of leadership with its roots in the organisational or business perspective (Dartey-Baah, 2015). Transactional theory examines the use of power, influence and transactions to motivate people and achieve goals. According to Rodd (2013), leaders often adopt the transactional approach to ensure that routine tasks are done constantly. It also emphasises the importance of the relationship between leader and follower by focusing on the mutual benefits derived from a form of "contract" through which the leader delivers such things as reward and recognition in return for the commitment or loyalty of the follower (Dartey-Baah, 2015; Cherry, 2016). Transactional theories, also known as management theories, focus on the role of supervision, organisation and group performance and the exchanges that occur between leaders and followers. These theories base leadership on a system of rewards and punishments (Charry, 2012). In other words, a leader's job is to create structures that make it abundantly clear what is expected of followers and the consequences (rewards and punishments) associated with meeting or not meeting expectations (Lamb, 2013). Transactional leadership theory gives the opportunity to the leader to lead the group and the group agrees to follow his/her lead to accomplish a predetermined goal in exchange for something else. Power is given to the leader to evaluate, correct and train subordinates when productivity is not up to the desired level, and to reward effectiveness when the expected outcomes are reached. These leaders give clear instructions to followers about what their

expectations are and, when followers are successful, they are rewarded and when they fail, they are reprimanded or rebuked (Charry, 2012). Managerial or transactional theory is often likened to the concept and practice of management and continues to be an extremely common component of many leadership models and organisational structures (Lamb, 2013).

As part of a “new paradigm”, transactional approaches to leadership are usually based on a clear-cut understanding as regards the reward or rebuke system in place, which is well spelt out between the leader and the subordinates. Leaders therefore promise rewards for effort, with an underlying assumption that individuals will work in their own self-interest.

According to Alfraih (2014), transactional leadership “occurs when one takes the initiative in making contact with others for the purpose of an exchange of valued things”. Each enters the transaction because of the expectation to fulfil their self-interest, and it is the role of the leader to maintain the status quo by satisfying the needs of the followers. Therefore, education leaders such as principals should be able to provide strong leadership while still fulfilling other responsibilities and remaining accountable for teachers and learners (Kallie, 2015). For the purpose of this study, transactional theory is inappropriate and cannot underpin the study, as it involves rewards and punishment. Accordingly, principals are not at liberty to give any major reward or punishment to any teacher or learner. Principals can only merely a recommendation to government authorities for a teacher to be rewarded or punished and likewise for a learner.

3.3.3.2 Skills theory

Skills theory proposes that leaders have a set of skills that they have developed over time; the development of many of these skills is heavily influenced by personal leadership qualities (May, 2016). Furthermore, Burkus (2011) adds that skills theory determines the abilities that made leadership effective and that, “[e]ffective leadership is dependent on how leaders’ competencies are affected by the leader’s attributes, experience and the environment”.

This theory states that learnt knowledge and acquired skills/abilities are significant factors in the practice of effective leadership. Skills theory by no means refuses to acknowledge the connection between inherited traits and the capacity to lead

effectively, but argues that learnt skills, a developed style, and acquired knowledge are the real keys to leadership performance. A strong belief in skills theory often demands that considerable effort and resources be devoted to leadership training and development. Hence, skills theory cannot underpin the study as it does not fully explain how and why skills affect leadership performance, rather, it focuses more on identifying the skills leaders possess.

3.4 THEORIES UNDERPINNING THE STUDY

All leadership theories have value, but the researcher chose transformational leadership theory and liberal feminist theory as the most relevant theories for this study.

3.4.1 Transformational leadership theory

Leithwood, Begley and Cousins (1994) state that transformational leadership is viewed as leadership that “implies major changes in the form, nature, function and/or potential of some phenomenon applied to leadership”. This leadership theory is more appropriate for educational management than others (Denmark, 2012). Bass (1990) emphasises that this leadership theory allows a leader to engage with others to identify areas that need change, and in setting goals that will help them to achieve the desired change. Nielsen, Randall, Yarker and Brenner (2008) assert that leaders need to function as an instrument of change within the organisation, motivate their followers to be effective, and create platforms that will help in advancing leadership skills among those that they are working with.

Furthermore, Burns’ transformational leadership theory was introduced in 1978, while Bass’s transformational leadership theory was developed later in 1985 (Bass, 1990). According to Burns (1978), subordinates must first be motivated and told about the values relating to the goals set by their leaders. The leader must guide followers with the existing goals, values and other resources the subordinates have during these stages of transformation. That is the basic ethical system. Burns (1978) believes that leaders can transform the life of followers by changing their values, aspirations and perceptions, as the leader must lead by example. Through the leader, the subordinates must see the need to push in order to achieve the set goals.

According to Bass (1990), transformational leadership theory is defined as a leadership approach that gives rise to a change in both individuals and the social

system. In addition, Bass (1990) was interested in the extent to which a leader influences followers. According to Bass (1990), the leader can transform subordinates if he/she is trustworthy and honest. The stronger the qualities the more loyal the subordinates become to the leader. Transformational leaders emphasise the intrinsic motivation and positive development of followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Bass's view is that leaders emerge in response to followers' needs. Leaders are able to articulate the needs of people through the language of values. Leaders must know what they believe in and why they believe it (Gentry, 2018:3). Bass explains four aspects of transformational leadership that could be used to describe a leader.

- **Individual consideration:** The leader acts as role model, mentor and facilitator to bring followers into the group and be motivated to do tasks. Leaders spend time teaching and coaching followers, treating others as individuals rather than just a member of a group. Furthermore, a leader helps others to develop their strengths, and listens closely to others' concerns, needs and aspirations, as well as promoting individual self-development.
- **Intellectual stimulation:** The leader seeks ideas from the group and encourages them to contribute and to be independent. Leaders re-examine critical assumptions to question whether they are appropriate or not, seek various perspectives when solving problems, suggest new ways of looking at how to complete tasks, encourage non-traditional thinking to deal with traditional problems, and encourage rethinking of those ideas that have never been questioned before.
- **Inspirational motivation:** The leader gives subordinates a reason for doing a task and resorts to charismatic approaches in encouraging the group to go forward. The leader talks optimistically about the future, and with confidence and enthusiasm about the task to be done. He/she takes a stand on controversial issues and shares a compelling vision with the group.
- **Idealised influence:** The leader becomes a fully-fledged role model, acting out and displaying ideal traits of honesty, trust and so forth. He/she emphasises the necessity of having a strong sense of purpose. More importantly, he/she considers the moral and ethical consequences of every decision. In addition, the leader promotes trust among group members and promotes a strong sense of purpose, preaching and encouraging self-

development, displaying a sense of power and competence, making personal sacrifices for the group's benefit, and giving reassurance that obstacles will be overcome.

Burns' (1978) and Bass's (1990) transformational leadership theories are relevant to this study as they aim at building a working relationship between the leader and followers in order to achieve the set goals (Leithwood, 2005). As an ideal, transformational leaders generate valuable and positive change in their followers with the aim of developing and achieving the set goals (Nielsen et al., 2008). In addition, transformational leaders attempt to and succeed in raising colleagues, subordinates, followers, clients and/or constituencies to a higher level of awareness about issues. They interact with one another to form a strong relationship that is built on trust and which motivates both leaders and followers (Givens, 2008).

Leithwood (2005) posits that transformational leadership theory stresses the emotions and values that foster both capacity development and a high level of commitment to achieving the set goals. In terms of this theory, leaders transform their followers through their inspirational and charismatic personalities because followers tend to obey a leader whom they love on the basis of his/her personality and not through coercion. This provides a sense of belonging among followers as they are able to identify with their leader and the leader's vision (Coleman, 2003). Furthermore, Silins and Mulford (2004) claim that leadership that makes a difference in organisational learning and learner outcomes is transformational. Therefore, if leaders are able to involve their supporters fully, this will facilitate the solving of complex problems (Mbepera, 2015).

Bass and Avolio (1994) argue that transformational leadership theory focuses on leadership in organisations and businesses, while Leithwood (2005) argue that transformational leadership theory is also suitable for overcoming the challenges facing the leadership of educational institutions. Givens (2008) posits that transformational leadership theory stresses the need for an organisation to become less hierarchical and more flexible, team oriented and participative. Therefore, the writings of Leithwood (2005) and Givens (2008) show clearly that transformational leadership theory is relevant to both schools and school leaders. For the purposes of this study, the school is recognised as an educational organisation of which the core business is teaching and learning. In addition to teaching and learning, the school is

expected to relate to or associate with the society in which it is found or its immediate environment; that is, where the school is situated. The principal's leadership and school leadership are, among other things, major factors if transformation is to be done effectively and efficiently.

According to Amondi (2011), in regard to school leadership, either a male or a female is capable of managing the school system effectively, in as much as the necessary skills, competence and facilities are readily available. However, people such as learners, colleagues, local communities and other stakeholders are clearly finding it difficult to accept that women are capable of being good school leaders. A study conducted by Arar and Abramovitz (2013) revealed that women do not find the position of principal easy, owing to the stereotypical beliefs that parents and community members often have about women becoming leaders. In Africa, they often still view the position of principal as suitable for men only because most African cultures do not believe that women are capable of leading where there are men. However, Arar and Queder (2011) and Young (2011) argue that female principals make the best leaders of secondary schools because they are able to adopt various leadership styles effectively, with the transformational leadership style featuring as their leadership style of choice. In relation to gender and transformational leadership, studies suggest that transformational leadership may be seen as the more feminine approach because women are reported to be less hierarchical, more collaborative and more oriented to interpersonal relations than men (Boyd & Meyer 1988; Carless, 1998; Coleman, 2003; Eagly & Wood, 2011; Mbepera, 2015).

In view of the fact that parents and the community generally view the position of principal as more suited to men than women, transformational leadership theory was deemed to be the most appropriate theory for this study on the leadership enhancement of secondary school female principals. The researcher regards transformational leadership theory as suited to this study because it focuses on the ability to build good relationships with subordinates, the ability to advise subordinates, caring about subordinates, advising subordinates regarding career development, building good relationships with all stakeholders and having an interest in the affairs of subordinates. It is my assumption that if female principals use transformational leadership theory, the whole community will admire their leadership style. As the researcher hopes to verify this at the conclusion of this study, it is my view that building

a good relationship with all the school's stakeholders will help both to boost the confidence of female principals and also to increase the degree of acceptance of females in leadership positions, especially in rural settings such as the Vhembe District where this study was conducted.

Additionally, transformational leadership theory guided the study in identifying the critical leadership areas of female principals of rural secondary schools that need to be developed. The areas of leadership that need to be changed gave direction to the type of model that was developed to improve the leadership of female principals. The model suggests ways in which the DBE can work together with the principals to ensure that they get the support they need to perform effectively.

3.4.2 Liberal feminism

According to Potokri (2014), feminism as a field of study began as a fundamental critique of the social world underpinning the ignorance of women's life situations and with men's dominance as its central focus. Following this notion, this study was conceptualised within liberal feminist theory in order to tackle challenges associated with experiences emerging from principalship in South African rural secondary schools. According to Fenwick (2008), liberal feminism focuses on the elimination of all barriers that hinder women from becoming effective leaders, and at the same time strives to alter women's status quo into the existing economic and leadership framework. Chabalala (2006) 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. Fenwick (2008) further points out that if women are given the right platform to express themselves, they can be productive and effective leaders.

Liberal feminist theory is committed to challenging patriarchal, racist power and oppression and producing results that are useful and applicable to social justice. A liberal feminist perspective provides space for the exploration of broader questions of social justice, while simultaneously addressing multiple forms of structural inequality such as gender, race, ethnicity, class and sexuality. Research informed by liberal feminist theory fosters empowerment, liberation and emancipation for women and other marginalised groups, and is consistent with the broader aims of gender justice (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007). Furthermore, Potokri (2014) asserts that following a feminist approach facilitates a "means of listening to the voices of women and

attempting to respond in a way that will navigate their lives towards prosperity”. In the case of this study, liberal feminist theory facilitates positive experiences for female principals which are characterised by gender equality in the South African education system.

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 focuses on removing all obstacles that prevent women from attaining their full potential as leaders in schools or other organisations (Fenwick, 2008). In addition, liberal feminists argue that any law, traditions and activities that hinder equal rights and opportunities between men and women must be abolished. For the purpose of this study, liberal feminism is well articulated under the description of black and African feminism, because the focus is on black African female principals in the Vhembe District of Limpopo province.

Black feminism acknowledges that black women, in general, have different experiences from those of white women, as the former are exposed to certain unpalatable experiences as a result of oppression. Therefore, this is in line with sexism, class operation and racism. Black feminism was more appropriate as a theory underpinning the study, because it examined the dynamic personal and professional lives of black female principals leading rural secondary schools in the Vhembe District of Limpopo province, South Africa. Furthermore, African feminism acknowledges the culture and diversity that exist within the African societies. Norwood (2013) argues that African women have rich experiences of slavery and colonialism, as this exposure shaped their responses in leadership positions and how they manage challenges, discrimination and oppression. In addition, African feminism encourages breaking down and decommissioning racist and sexist beliefs that devalue women. Across Africa, at home and abroad, African women share a powerful history of resistance despite attempts to silence them and make them invisible.

Magkoka (2016) posits that “African feminism does not hold only men as responsible for discrimination against women, but also acknowledges the existence of woman on woman discrimination”.

It is worth noting that feminist theories have their strengths and weaknesses. Nonetheless, they contribute enormously to understanding the shared experiences of

women leaders in education management. The use of this liberal feminist theory under the description of black and African feminism assisted in identifying the challenges that female principals of rural secondary schools in Vhembe District face from the teachers, learners and parents, which serve as a barrier to their leadership. The theory will also assist in ascertaining the areas of school leadership which women see as requiring development as compared to their male counterparts and providing guidance on how the gap can be closed in order to improve the leadership of female principals.

3.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter reviewed the evolution of leadership theory from great man theory to new leadership paradigms that include transformational leadership theory and liberal feminist theory, especially as they relate to the educational system in public schools in developing countries such as South Africa. It was noted that most leadership theories were not applicable to the current study because these theory assumptions involve a social influence process, whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person (or group) over other people (or groups) to structure the activities and relationships in a group or organisation.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter of the study describes the methodology that the researcher employed. According to Potokri (2016), research methodology comprises both the research approach and the research design. Within the context of the methodology that was applied in this study, the data collection and data analysis processes and procedures that were adopted are clearly documented. Therefore, this chapter discusses the research approach and research design procedures that were followed, as well as the ethical considerations. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), research methodology involves the ways in which the researcher collects and analyses the requisite data.

4.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

This study employed a qualitative research approach. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) maintain that “[a] qualitative research approach is based on a naturalistic phenomenological philosophy that views reality as multi-layered, interactive and a shared experience explained by individuals”. Qualitative research seeks to preserve the integrity of the data and attempts to use the data to explain the core themes of a contextual study (Yilmaz, 2013). The choice of a qualitative approach for this study hinged on several factors. Firstly, a qualitative research approach was deemed to be the most relevant approach for the study, as the researcher personally collected the requisite data in the field at the site where the participants were experiencing the problem under investigation in the study. Secondly, qualitative research focuses on the meanings people have constructed, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world (Brink, Van de Walt & Van Rensburg, 2016). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), 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”. It is felt that these characteristic features of qualitative research are suited to the case study research design that was used in the study. Further to this, the researcher felt that a qualitative research approach was suitable for this study because it intends to understand for

recommendation purposes, in the form of a model, how leadership among female principals leading rural secondary schools can be enhanced.

Hence, this research approach enabled the researcher to extract the experiences of the participants by providing them with an opportunity to present their views, the challenges they faced and the support they require with regard to their leadership at the secondary schools.

4.3 PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

A paradigm is a worldview or ideology. A paradigm refers to the principles or measures which are used to assign value or worth to both the processes and the procedures of the discipline, also to the methods employed to improve knowledge within a particular discipline (Chinn & Kramer, 2013). The purpose of the study was to develop a model to improve leadership in female principals leading rural secondary schools in Vhembe District, Limpopo province. Therefore, this study identified three paradigms that would help to achieve the desired goal, namely, meta-theoretical assumptions, methodological assumptions and theoretical assumptions. These paradigms influence the assumptions that are fundamental to the theoretical reasoning of this study.

4.3.1 Meta-theoretical assumptions

Meta-theory is defined as assumptions about reality (Brink, 2012). This study's point of departure was the assumption that female principals are capable of leading secondary schools effectively, and producing the desired results, similar to their male counterparts. Therefore, the spirit of encouraging and developing female leadership should be encouraged in the workplace/schools. Secondly, this was grounded on the fact that the leadership of women, particularly secondary school principals, is undermined by their colleagues and community members who hold the belief that women cannot be effective leaders. This denotes that a model to improve leadership in female principals is necessary. Females could become effective principals if accorded the chance to do so.

4.3.2 Methodological assumptions

The methodological assumptions that guided this study were in line with Poggenpoel's (2018) functional approach, which implies that research should be useful and should add to the existing body of knowledge and the improvement of leadership. This study employed a qualitative approach, using in-depth individual interviews, observation and

focus groups, thus producing data that highlighted the experiences and challenges of female principals leading rural secondary schools, as well as suggestions of what should be done to improve female leadership.

The development of a model to improve the leadership of female principals will assist the DBE in knowing the measures that need to be instituted to improve the leadership of principals in schools in the rural areas of Vhembe District. Improvement of female leadership will also help in making leaders' colleagues, as well as society at large, accept that women are capable of becoming effective school leaders.

4.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design describes the procedures used in conducting a study, including when, from whom, and under what conditions the requisite data will be obtained, analysed and reported upon (Mc Millan & Schumacher, 2010). According to Kratochwill and Levin (2015), a research design refers to the determination and statement of the general research approach or strategy adopted for a particular project. In other words, in their view, a research design is expected to assist in and provide the planning for the research study. Therefore, the research design includes the justification for the study hypotheses and/or the exploration of the research questions which have been formulated, while at the same time presenting a detailed exposition of the research steps to be followed in collecting, choosing and analysing the data.

This study investigated the experiences of female principals at secondary schools in a bid to improve the female leadership in rural secondary schools. The aim of the study was to develop a model to improve the leadership of female principals leading rural secondary schools in Vhembe District of Limpopo province. In other words, the data required needs to be obtained from a specific context or case. The case or context under study, as the title of this study indicates, is the Vhembe District in Limpopo Province. Accordingly, the researcher decided to use a case study design. The main reason for choosing this design was because it facilitates the gathering of data in a qualitative research study (Ngozwana, 2018). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) describe a case study "as a specific instance that is frequently designed to illustrate a more general principle, it is the study of an instance in action", while Flyvbjerg (2011) indicates that a case study is a "detailed examination of a single example". The choice

of a case study design provided an insight into the phenomenon of female leadership in secondary schools. In addition, this design was deemed appropriate because the study examined a bounded system; that is, one group of female secondary school principals. The focus of the study was on one particular phenomenon, namely, the experiences of this group in the selected schools (Flyvbjerg, 2011). The case study design assisted the researcher to formulate and propose a leadership model that will help to improve leadership in rural secondary school principals.

According to Simons (2014), a qualitative case study design “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”. In addition, such a design supports the interpretive paradigm, the worldview or lens adopted for the purposes of this study. Stake (2008) and Yin (2003) support the notion that a case study is based on the interpretive paradigm. Interpretivists believe that truth is based on personal perceptions, ideologies and experiences that are built on the premise of the social construction of reality (Avis, 2004). Lincoln et al. (2011) posit that the interpretive paradigm accepts the subjective nature of meaning provided by the participant(s) in a study. Therefore, through their meanings of reality as described by the participants, the researcher was able to understand their experiences and challenges as they speak to the main objective of the study.

4.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

4.5.1 Population of the study

The study population refers to a big group of several cases or individuals from which the researcher selects a sample and to which the results obtained from the sample are generalised (Neuman, 2011). The population for this study comprised female principals of all rural secondary schools in the Vhembe District.

4.5.2 Participants

The participants in this study comprised only female principals from selected secondary schools in the Vhembe District and were selected by the researcher from the entire target population by using appropriate sampling procedures.

4.5.3 Sample and sampling procedure

In a research context, a sample refers to a portion of the study population that represents the entire population. As McIntosh and Morse (2015) highlight, a qualitative study does not include a large number of participants, and, therefore, the researcher used a sample of ten female principals for the interview and eight female principals for the focus group discussion, making a total of 18 participants from secondary schools in the Vhembe District.

Sampling refers to a method used by the researcher to select participants from the larger target population as the sources of the requisite data for the study (Khan, 2014). For the purposes of this study, the researcher employed purposive, non-probability sampling when selecting the participants. Purposive sampling is also referred to as judgemental sampling (Giddens, 2011). Purposive sampling allows the researcher to make her own judgement about the characteristics which the participants possess and their ability to produce relevant information (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2013; Liamputtong, 2013). In line with the purposive sampling method that was used, the participants were chosen based on the researcher's understanding that they met her desired standard.

4.5.4 Sampling of circuits

Vhembe District, which forms the context for this study, includes 27 circuits, with each circuit comprising both primary schools and secondary schools. Some of the schools in the circuits are managed by female principals. From the 27 circuits, the researcher selected the nine rural circuits that had the highest number of secondary schools managed by females.

4.5.5 Sampling of research sites

The researcher requested a list of all the rural secondary schools that were managed by female principals in the selected circuits from the Limpopo Department of Education. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants. The researcher chose two schools managed by female principals from each of the nine selected circuits and the principals of these schools were requested to participate in the study. In total, the study comprised 18 participants, as two participants were selected from each of the nine circuits.

4.6 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Silverman (2006) describes a data collection method as the part of a research design which provides a clear description of the type of data that should be collected and how this should be done. Therefore, the data collection method gives a clear explanation of the processes and elements that researchers make use of in the field when collecting data from the participants in the sample (Gibbs, 2007). The data collection procedures are heavily reliant on the research instruments which are used for the collection of the data. The researcher selected interviews and focus group discussions as the data collection procedures for this study.

4.6.1 Research

4.6.1.1 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used in this study. Accordingly, the researcher conducted one-on-one, in-depth interviews with the participants. The interviews were conducted in a manner which allowed the participants to share their experiences and coping strategies with regard to their leadership of secondary schools without any limitations. More importantly, the interviews were conducted in places which were conducive to the participants feeling free to express themselves without any fear or doubts. The interviews were guided by a prepared interview schedule which comprised open-ended questions. The interview schedule was constructed under the supervision of the researcher's research supervisor.

4.6.1.2 Focus group discussion

According to Rule and Vaughn (2011), a focus group discussion (FGD) refers to the gathering of information in the form of an interview which is conducted with a group of six to 12 participants. The researcher used this method because it is useful for generating detailed information on the participants' experiences and beliefs. Two sets of FGDs were conducted. The first FGD was conducted after the one-on-one interviews with each of the participants, as this brought together all the participating female principals to enable them to jointly share their experiences on leadership and how their leadership may be enhanced. The second FGD allowed for new and fresh perspectives from new participants who were not part of the interview process. In addition, the FGD allowed participants to share their feelings in more detail than in the one-to-one interview because the FGD brought together people who had similar knowledge, capacity, experience, background and gender.

4.7 MEASURES TO ENSURE TRUSTWORTHINESS

In a qualitative research approach, which this study adopted, trustworthiness is synonymous with reliability and validity and is of optimum importance. Batisani (2015) describes trustworthiness as a measure that embeds credibility, transferability, conformability and dependability.

4.7.1 Credibility

Credibility ensures that the required information is being collected from relevant people who are informed about the phenomenon under investigation. Ways of ensuring credibility include prolonged engagement with the participants, persistent observation and member checks (Babbie & Mouton, 2010).

4.7.1.1 Prolonged engagement

The researcher ensured that she interacted with the participants for a lengthy period of time before collecting information from them, in order to build rapport with them to a point where trust was built. This assisted the researcher in ensuring that the selected participants were relevant and that they possessed information on the subject under investigation. When the interviews commenced, the researcher ensured that the participants were not hurried into sharing information. In other words, the researcher allowed sufficient time for each interview session. Moreover, the contact sessions continued, even after data collection, for a minimum of six weeks in order to ensure that the information that had been provided by the participants was accurate and correctly transcribed.

4.7.1.2 Taking field notes

The researcher observed all the non-verbal communication, feelings, emotions, and body language of the participants during the interviews and the FGD sessions.

4.7.1.3 Member checks

In qualitative research, a member check is also known as informant feedback or respondent validation (Silverman, 2010; Creswell, 2014). The researcher employed this technique to ensure the accuracy, credibility and trustworthiness of the data collected. Member checking was conducted during the interview process and at the conclusion of the study. The researcher engaged the research participants in member checking during the interview process and FGD process by creating a natural rapport environment which enabled the researcher to obtain honest and open responses from

the participants. During the interviews, the researcher restated and summarised information and the questions, then probed the participants further to determine the accuracy of their responses in comparison with their prior responses. Furthermore, at the end of the data collection process, the researcher returned to the participants with the transcribed comments for them to verify the accuracy of the interpretations. Here, the participants had the opportunity to acknowledge and/or correct what the researcher transcribed as their perspectives and meanings.

4.7.2 Conformability

Conformability refers to the extent to which the interpretation of the research study may be traced back to the original source and that it represent the participants' ideas and not someone else's (Babbie & Mouton, 2010). The researcher ensured the information that was in the tape record was transcribed without any alterations. Furthermore, the researcher functioned as a research instrument and did not influence the responses and outcomes of the study.

4.7.3 Transferability

According to Babbie and Mouton (2010), transferability refers to the possibility of the kind of study being repeated by other people and yielding similar results to those the previous researcher obtained. The researcher clearly documented in detail the blueprint that she used for the study, including the research design, research methodology and the instruments that were used. This will allow any researcher to be able to carry out a similar study of this type in the future.

4.7.4 Dependability

Dependability refers to the accuracy of the data presented and whether people may depend on the information for future use (Gibbs, 2007). The researcher sought the help of her supervisor and also elicited the services of others who were experts in the field of research on the experiences of female principals in rural secondary schools. This was done to crosscheck the codes to ascertain whether they would have coded the data in the same way as the researcher would have coded it. In addition, the researcher went back to the participants after analysing the data to ensure that what was written was an accurate representation of what they actually meant.

4.8 DATA ANALYSIS

Monette, Duane and Dejong (2008) define data analysis as a process of assembling and arranging the data collected from the participants and drawing meaning from such data. The data analysis process helped the researcher to reduce the large amount of data collected by taking only what was relevant to the study and then formulating themes in order to classify the data (Wellman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005). The researcher followed the qualitative data analysis steps, as outlined by Creswell (2014), to analyse the data collected from the participants.

Step 1: Organise and prepare

After collecting data from the participants, the researcher transcribed the interview and the FGD recordings and typed up her field notes. The notes were arranged into various types depending on the sources used during the data collection.

Step 2: Reading through the data

The researcher read through the notes in order to understand the overall meaning of the responses from the participants. This helped the researcher to develop a general idea of what the participants were actually saying.

Step 3: Begin detailed analysis process

After the researcher have read through the data collected, the information was then arranged into categories and the categories were labelled in terms of the themes and subthemes that emerged from the actual words used by the participants.

Step 4: Use the coding process to gather themes and sub-themes for analysis

After developing and arranging the data into various categories, the researcher formulated the themes and sub-themes that constitute the major findings of the study. These themes were indicated under separate headings in the findings sections of the study in line with the research questions.

Step 5: Advance how the descriptive and themes will be presented

The researcher used tables to summarise the themes and subthemes that emanated from the data as well as the codes used in the data analysis.

Step 6: Interpret the data

The researcher then interpreted the data by explaining the lessons that had been learnt in order to capture the essence of the responses obtained from the respondents.

The interpretation was based on the researcher's understanding of the research phenomenon. This was integrated with both the findings from the literature review and the theoretical framework.

4.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to De Vos et al. (2013), research ethics may be explained as the normal and acceptable standard of behaviour which governs how a researcher should conduct him/herself when carrying out a research project. Research ethics are designed to protect the rights of participants and to clearly define the responsibilities of the researcher. The researcher identified the following ethical considerations which were applied in this study:

4.9.1 Permission to conduct the study

The researcher submitted and presented a research proposal to the College of Education Higher Degree Committee to obtain approval to conduct the intended study.

After obtaining the approval, the proposal was forwarded to the University Ethics Committee in order to apply for ethical clearance that enabled the researcher to proceed with the data collection.

The researcher further wrote letters requesting permission from the Provincial Department of Education, the Vhembe District Department of Education and the circuit managers to conduct the research and to the participants to request their participation in the study.

4.9.2 Informed consent

Informed consent ensures that the participants fully understand the research project in which they will take part prior to the commencement of the research study (De Vos et al., 2013). The researcher clearly explained the aim of the study to the participants and informed them that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without explaining such action. The researcher further explained the intended duration of the study. In addition, the participants were informed that they would be audio-recorded during the interviews and the FGDs and that their consent would be requested before this was done.

4.9.3 Principle of non-maleficance

The principle of non-maleficance prohibits a researcher from posing any threats to the overall well-being of those who will be participating in a study (Swartz, De la Rey, Duncan & Townsend, 2011). The researcher ensured that she did not ask any questions which could have an adverse impact on the psychological or emotional state of the participants, and the researcher avoided the use of sensitive words throughout the study. Finally, the study did not involve any activities which might have harmed the physical or financial health of the participants.

4.9.4 Principle of justice

The principle of justice strives to ensure that all those who are taking part in a research study are treated equally and fairly (Swartz et al., 2011). The researcher ensured that this principle was upheld throughout the study by not discriminating against the participants based on their socioeconomic status, educational level or age. More importantly, the researcher treated all the participants in the same manner.

4.9.5 Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a research ethic which ensures that the information which has been provided by those who are used as the source of data for the study is available only to the researcher and prohibits the discussion of such data with other people (Monette et al., 2008). The researcher ensured that the data collected from the participants were kept in a safe place which was only accessible to the researcher.

4.9.6 Analysis and reporting

This ethical principle ensures that the researcher does not misrepresent the information or data provided by the participants (Swartz et al., 2011). Accordingly, the researcher did not change the data which the participants provided in order to suit what the researcher wanted and also strived for objectivity throughout the analysis of the data.

4.9.7 Anonymity

Anonymity prevents the researcher from making available any information which may lead to the identification of the research participants (De Vos et al., 2013). The researcher therefore assigned codes to the participants to avoid using their real names; for example, "SCH1/P1". In addition, the participants were not required to write

their names on anything because, if such documents are misplaced, other people may recognise their names.

4.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the methodology that was adopted to assist in meeting the purpose and the objectives of the study. The chapter also provided a detailed rationale for the choice of each method and how it was applied in the study. The following chapter presents the findings that emerged from the data analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter four, the researcher outlined the research design, paradigm and methods, describing the data gathering instruments and the sampling methods and strategies. This chapter discusses the analysis of the data and discusses the findings from the interviews and the FDGs aimed at exploring the experiences of female principals in rural secondary schools in South Africa with the aim of developing a model to improve female leadership in secondary schools. In line with this, Simon (2014) underscores the need to compare and/or synthesise the analysis with other studies; otherwise, other researchers may be impeded in carrying out further research along the same lines in the future.

Creswell (2014) opines that researchers take a large quantity of data and reduce it by observing similar patterns, testing conjectures and categorising the data into themes. They then interpret the analysed data but producing meaningful information for readers to understand the study and to extend the results to future research. This chapter elucidates the researcher's aim to understand experiences through the occurrence of feelings, social interaction and phenomena as they exist in the real world. The pivotal goal of this chapter is to analyse and discuss the research participants' experiences in words and statements. Hence, the researcher used the verbatim responses to enrich the discussions and relate the ensuing themes to the research questions and existing literature.

The words here are those of the research participants at some point in the verbatim representations. The researcher used her own words to further clarify and interpret what the research participants had said. According to Hogan, Dolan and Donnelly (2009), it is imperative for the researcher to further interpret the words of the research participants in order to align the research participants' feelings, emotions and words in an accurate and holistic approach. Therefore, this idea guided the inquiry throughout in a qualitative way, especially as the researcher studied the research phenomena in their natural settings. The researcher also mentions in chapter four that this study employed a thematic analysis of the data, whereby the themes within the collected data were examined and recorded. Rich data were collected using interviews and

FGDs. This was done at the sampled schools where the experiences of female principals were gathered in line with the research questions. The researcher therefore proposes the following supporting sub questions to the main question that guided the interview and the FGD process:

- What are the experiences of female secondary school principals in Vhembe District?
- What are the kinds of leadership challenges that female secondary school principals in Vhembe District face from learners, teachers and parents?
- What are the areas of school leadership that female secondary school principals see as requiring support as compared to their male counterparts?
- What recommendations can be made to address the leadership challenges faced by female secondary school principals in Vhembe District?

In chapter three, the researcher outlined a number of leadership theories and discussed the use of transformational leadership theory and liberal feminist theory as the base theories for her study. Both theories relate to the current study because it focused on the importance of female principals managing, engaging and facilitating governance and leadership within the school context among their learners, teachers, parents and other stakeholders in order to achieve the set goals (Barthold, 2014).

The researcher's investigation of female principal experiences required a deep interview section which inspired the use of two sets of FGDs with the sampled participants. For this purpose, semi-structured questions were formulated to ask during both the interviews and the FGDs. The FGD participants formed a homogeneous group, nonetheless rich data were obtained., as the discussion allowed for a variety of opinions from the participants (Rule & Vaughn, 2011).

5.2 DATA CONTEXTUALISATION

5.2.1 Data composition

To achieve the study objectives and provide answers to the research questions, the researcher interviewed ten female principals from ten different schools. After the interview sessions, the researcher also conducted FGDs with eight female principals. In this research, two different FGDs took place. Firstly, the research participants who had been interviewed formed the first eight FGD participants (FGD 1), and secondly, eight new research participants who had not participated in the interviews constituted

the second FGD (FGD 2). Importantly, for confidentiality reasons, the names of the sampled principals and the sampled schools were not mentioned and suitable codes were used instead to represent each research participant. In addition, the direct words or statements of the research participants are quoted in italics.

5.2.2 Data coding for research participants

The codes below were used to reflect the research participants' information. Tables 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 summarise the coding used in this chapter for information pertaining to the research participants.

Table 5.1: Summary coding of the sampled participants for interview, FGD1 and FGD2

Codes	Explanation	Number
P (Interview)	Principal	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
EP (FGD1)	Existing principal for first FGD	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
NP (FGD2)	New principal for second FGD	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
SCH	School	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10
QTN	Question	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

Table 5.2: Coding for interview research participants

Location	Circuit	SCH	P	Gender
Vhembe district	1	1	1	Female
		2	2	Female
	2	3	3	Female
		4	4	Female
	3	5	5	Female
		6	6	Female
	4	7	7	Female
		8	8	Female
	5	9	9	Female
		10	10	Female

Table 5.3: FGD 1 and FGD 2 Research Participants Coding

<u>Existing research participants FGD 1</u>				<u>New research participants FGD 2</u>			
Location	Circuit	SCH	EP	Location	Circuit	SCH	NP
4 Existing circuits in Vhembe district	1	1	1	4 New circuits in Vhembe district	1	1	1
		2	2			2	2
	2	3	3		2	3	3
		4	4			4	4
	3	5	5		3	5	5
		6	6			6	6
	4	7	7		4	7	7
		8	8			8	8

5.3 DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

5.3.1 Conversation during interviews

At the beginning of the interview with the participants, they all expressed how glad they were to be given an opportunity for their voices to be heard, which they regarded as valuable. Having an opportunity to share their experiences as female principals with the researcher, who is also a female principal, meant a lot to them, because they knew she was in the best position to relate to what they were facing as female leaders and that the research would be able to escalate whatever challenges they were experiencing to the right person for possible solutions. One of the participants, SCH 4/P4, said in this regard: *“When I started as a principal, it was not easy because the former principal was a male and I am a female, learners took me for granted, teachers undermined me and parents treated me like I am insignificant.”*

The majority of the participants had similar experiences in relating with the learners, teachers and parents. Two other participants whose experiences stood out and caught my attention were SCH 6/P6 and SCH 9/P9. SCH 6/P6 said:

Firstly, I have been having problems since I became a principal in the same school where I used to be an educator. Learners find it difficult to take my instructions because they still think I am a subject teacher, also with teacher, because I was formally working with them as an educator. They seem not to understand that it is real that I am now a principal and they found it difficult to take and follow my instructions.

Similarly, SCH 9/P9 said:

The relationship was very bad at first because I am the first female principal in this school, you can imagine, people were saying she can't cope in that capacity and she will bring the result down and all. Learners, teachers and parents were not used to having a female principal at all so they all had negative attitude towards me.

As the interview progressed, the researcher was amazed to find that all the participants mentioned a number of similar challenges that they were facing as female principals with their learners, teachers and the parents. The most prominent challenges mentioned include the following:

- learners' ill-discipline
- learners' unwillingness to learn
- disrespect from learners, teachers and parents
- drug abuse among learners and some teachers
- teachers' unwillingness to work
- threats from male teachers and over-aged male learners
- parents' unwillingness to participate in their children's education
- parents' uncooperative and negative attitudes towards their children's education
- cultural patriarchy
- societal stigma
- discrimination, and
- lack of acceptance within the school context and society at large.

All the participants mentioned these challenges and the researcher could see that the majority became emotional when they were asked this particular question. The researcher also struggled with her own emotions, as she could relate to them as a female principal and had faced the majority of these challenges in her work. Despite the challenges the participants faced in relation to their learners, teachers and parents, they all resolved to normalise negative attitudes on the part of learners, teachers and parents. Many of the participants said they were able to bring their learners, teachers and parents on board by working extra hard and leading by example with tenacity. SCH 9/P9 said:

What I realised is that the moment people see that you are a hard worker, they just follow suit and respect you in the long run. So, learners, teachers and parents have started respecting me because I work very hard. I care about my learners and will go any lengths for them and because of this the parents respect me more and this made them change their negative attitudes towards me and I was able to normalise the relationship between me, the learners, teachers and the parents because they now see the good things and good practices in what I do.

Furthermore, the participants mentioned the following as the steps and approaches they took in normalising the relationship with learners, teachers and parents:

- adopting an open door policy
- accepting people as they are and treating them equally
- adopting the DBE policy by the book
- treating stakeholders like families
- being patient and understanding
- building a close relationship with parents, teachers and learners beyond the superior-subordinate relationship, and
- engaging SMT and SGB to foster good relationships and understanding.

During the interview process, the majority of the participants highlighted cultural beliefs and gender discrimination as the major reasons why learners, teachers and parents behave negatively towards female principals. SCH 6/P6 said:

I think its gender bias and also cultural belief that we have as human being, you know women are being taken as weak and people don't believe a woman can do the work a man can do.

Also, SCH 5/P5 said:

You know there is this thing of culture which makes our mind to be misplaced. Culturally, we know that women are for the kitchen to cook, clean and get water and all and because we are still in the rural area, they come to school with that culture mindset. When they see a female principal, they don't see a leader because culturally women are said to sit down and listen to men when they talk and women are not expected to say a lot. It is because of this cultural belief that is making these people to misbehave towards a female principal.

One of the participants said something unique as regards how familiarity affects the behaviour of learners, teachers and parents towards female leaders.

Maybe it is because I am born here, grew up here, and married here and the parents know me from the beginning. Parents have stories to tell their children whether they are true or not, so student can pick up things that have been said about me and decide to behave in a bad manner (SCH4/P4)

The participants further mentioned how their relationships with learners, teachers and parents had an impact on their role as principals. The uncooperative attitude and lack of support on the part of learners, teachers and parents has a severe impact on the management, instructional, strategic planning, operational, relationship and communication deployment, process improvement, learning and development, and transformational roles of female principals. The following are some of the touching comments made by the participants.

Sometimes, you are faced with this admin and paperwork and you find yourself not doing other work because of time constraints. So, many time I have to work late hours after school to deal with the admin work because during the period or school hours I have to move around to check and monitor so that they don't take advantage thinking because I am a woman. I will get tired of walking around to monitor the class and school activities and because of this they all leave me behind doing other paperwork after school hours. I have to monitor them carefully; if you don't do that it has great negative impact. In the past years when I just got this posts about 2 years ago, the first and second years were so hard for me because

I had to follow-up and monitor the teachers because most teachers don't give proper lessons to the learners they only give them homework to work on (SCH 1/P1).

In addition, SCH 5/P5 had this to say:

It does have a negative impact, because as a woman, I give instructions and they don't do them because the instruction is coming from a woman. For example, parents won't come to school to get their children's report just because the information was passed by a woman principal and this have a negative impact because the parents won't know the progress of their

children or how to intervene. This has reduced our effectiveness and we are not able to reach the performance target that we set for ourselves because of this thing of cultural influence. But if it was a man they would have shown an interest to do what is said by them in order to show some respect for the male but not for the females.

Similarly, SCH 8/P8 expressed her grievances in this regard, saying:

It does have an impact such as learners' indiscipline, uncontrollable teachers and unsupportive parents. Obviously, all these have a negative impact because much of my time should be spent on how learners can perform better, develop the school and my time is being spent solving cases and trying to resolve matters or calling the educators and SMT, SGB in order to normalise the school situation by so doing much of my time instead of planning. I end up spending massive time on resolving cases. For instance, this morning, there was a long queue waiting for me to resolve matters awaiting me, in fact today I had to call the police to resolve the situation that seems to be taking place and affecting the learning activities in our school.

From the participants' verbatim narrations, it is apparent important things have to be delayed because time is wasted on trying to correct incidents of poor behaviour on the part of learners as well as educators' reluctance to work. This lack of cooperation from learners, teachers and educators reduces the effectiveness and efficiency of the female principal in achieving the set goals.

In response to the question of how the participants perceived the support from the department of education, almost all said they had receive good support from the department so far, except for three participants who said the support was not good enough. Indeed, SCH 9/P9 became really emotional at this point and I had to give her about five minutes to pull herself together.

SCH 9/P9 had this to say:

As regards support, you are now trying to open the wounds that already healed; I become emotional because that question touches me. I was appointed in 2015 where parents, educators and SGB didn't like female principal and also the department appointed me last after they have done the appointment for others just because there was a dispute of unacceptance of

female, despite the fact that the policy says the best candidate must be appointed of which I qualified fully for the post. Imagine, I was accompanied by a DMG and the circuit manager came to the school after so many months of my appointment. The circuit manager knows the situation of non-acceptance of a female leader in the school but she didn't even visit to see how I am coping or show support until after so many months. You know it's really painful to have people who regard female principals as inferior despite my commitment to the school especially when it's coming from the department. So as for me when I needed them the most, they were not there and it drops tears from my eye each time I remember it all.

As the interview progressed, participants identified similar yet peculiar areas of school leadership in which they need support as female principals. SCH 2/P2 said:

The first area is the respect area; as a female principal I need to be respected as much as my male counterparts and also be heard by all group of people as much as my male counterparts. The other area is I need motivation from the department and community through recognition of the work I am doing in the school to serve as motivation and lastly, support from the department by showing me the right way to do some things because when the department support me it will also make others such as the parents, teachers and learner to show their support and respect me as a female principal.

Addition, it is worthy of note to air the comments of SCH 8/P8 and SCH 9/P9 because they were unique.

Definitely, we need more support in the area of negative attitude from learners, teachers, and parents towards us as female principal. If we can have inductions, it will be good because if you are experiencing these things I am experiencing on a daily basis and you are not strong and brave enough you can start to lose the strength and focus and end up running the school down. So, we need more training, workshop and facilitation maybe quarterly or bi-annually to get us capacitated and become more knowledgeable as to how to handle some of the challenges we experience on a daily basis. Also these challenging areas will be reduced if the three stakeholders can be sensitised and facilitated on how to work hand in hand and support us to achieve the overall goal" (SCH 8/P8).

Especially in the area of learner discipline, learners disregard us and are not used to female principal especially secondary school learners. So, there is this challenge of indiscipline which wherein if I was a male principal I can see that there are some things the learners won't do, so this area we need support (SCH 9/P9).

At the end of most of the interviews, the researcher realised that the participants were comfortable talking to her and were still prepared to share more of their experiences. Accordingly, the participants made closing remarks on the probable solutions to the challenges they faced and were still facing as female principals. Solutions suggested included workshops, sensitisation, capacity development programmes, female leadership conferences, induction for all the stakeholders, a female acceptance campaign within the school context and society at large and more moral, financial and technical support from the department. On this note, the conversations with the interview participants ended and they were asked to make themselves available for the first FGD where they would get to meet the other participants within a homogenous environment in order to buttress their previously mentioned points.

5.3.2 Reflections and discussions from the first FGD

The FGD was conducted after the one-on-one interviews with the participants were completed, in order to bring the participating female principals together to enable them to jointly share, elaborate and justify their experiences of leadership and how their leadership may be enhanced, as earlier indicated during the one-on-one interview.

What are the significant experiences of female principals? Firstly, participants in the FGD shed light on the good and bad relationship experiences they had had and were still having with the learners, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders. As they narrated their stories, the majority of the participants mentioned that the relationships with these parties were really bad at first because they were female, but as time went by and as they kept working extra hard and proving themselves more than capable of the leadership position, the relationship started to turn around and became better. One of the participants said the community became really supportive and the learners eventually came around and accepted her as the principal. However, some other participants said they were still facing negative attitudes from the parents and a lack of support and loyalty from the teachers.

The participants stressed learners' ill-discipline and unwillingness to learn, disrespect from learners, teachers and parents, as well as the use of drugs and drug abuse among learners. They are also faced with core challenges such as teachers' unwillingness to work, threats from male teachers, negative attitudes from teachers and parents, lack of physical, moral and financial support from parents, cultural stigma and gender discrimination. In particular among these challenges, some participants spoke in detail on the absence of parents in the learners' lives. Four participants mentioned that the majority of their learners were from child-headed families, that is, the parents of these learners live in the cities, leaving the learners alone at a young age where they have to make decisions and take responsibility for themselves and their younger siblings. These learners took up responsibility at a young age and have to fill the space of a child and a parent at the same time. Moreover, these learners do not have anyone they are directly accountable to, neither do they have anyone directly responsible for them. The participants mentioned this as the major cause of learners' lack of focus, ill-discipline and lack of respect, drug abuse and unwillingness to learn.

With this being said, the participants unanimously agreed that they needed more support in the area of learners' discipline, teacher support, parents' understanding of the importance of their involvement in their children's education, societal acceptance of female leadership and stakeholder sensitisation with regard to gender equality and also support from the department in the area of school security and safety. The participants discussed more on the relevance of having more support from the department as regarding the safety and security of the school physical resources, teachers and also the female principals. They further mentioned that the safety and security of the school resources and the human resources were at risk from many learners who were on hard substances, as well as over-aged learners who bullied other learners and even went to the point of threatening teachers and the female principals.

The stories of the sampled participants show that for the aforementioned challenges to be solved and ameliorated, more interventions have to come from the department in the form of extensive capacity building workshops, induction, sensitisation and conferences for the female principals. Also, they suggested that the DBE should give moral support by visiting the school frequently to ensure everything is in order, as well as physical support in the form of infrastructure, and lastly, financial support.

On this note, the FGD came to an end and the participants were all thrilled to have participated and shared their experiences, as they believed that something productive will ensue from the discussion and looked forward to a better future in the profession and the leadership role. The FGD was a significant part of the data collection process, as it became apparent that the participants were not only able to elaborate or justify their points from the interview stage, but were also able to suggest new and relevant points as regards their good relationship experiences, the challenges they faced and areas of school leadership where they needed more support. Some of these new comments are summarised as follows: community became really supportive in the long run; absence of parents in learners' lives leading to child headed families; and requesting support from the department as regards the safety and security of the schools' physical resources and human resources.

5.3.3 Reflections and discussions from the second FGD

This FGD was conducted with new participants who had not participated in the interview or the first FGD. The FGD was conducted mainly for the possibility of gathering new evidence and fresh ideas from the new set of participants in order to test any consistencies or differences from the data earlier obtained from the interview participants. The new participants were able to share their experiences on leadership and how their leadership may be enhanced.

What are the significant experiences of female principals? The majority of the participants' experiences were similar to those of the initial interview and FGD participants. However, new and fresh comments emanated from the participants in relation to the bad relationship experiences that come as a result of competition, jealousy and rivalry among females. One of the participants had the following to say:

Building on what others have said, with a female teacher, when you become a female principal, there is always a bit of war because of competition, saying she's a woman am a woman, I can't be led by a woman because if she succeeds she will be the only one recognised and my contribution will not be taken into consideration, which leads to the Pull Her Down (PHD) syndrome.

The participants stressed the same set of challenges facing them as female principals as highlighted during the interview sessions and the first FGD.

What stood out here was a comment by one of the participants who said:

As for educators, especially the elderly male educators still have that notion that women must not be a principal. When you assign any task to them they drag their feet and do not do their best because they don't want women to be praised in case the school succeeds and also they influence younger male teachers not to do their best or be supportive.

The stories of the sampled participants show that they have similar views as regards areas of school leadership that require more support and also the suggested solutions to the challenges they face as female principals. Nonetheless, they also stressed that more support should be provided in the form of physical resources such as security, equipment and other infrastructure. Lastly, leadership and mentoring programmes should be put in place for female principals as a mentoring programme will provide the moral support and adequate empirical knowledge needed to excel in a principalship position. On this note, the second FGD with the new participants came to an end and the participants were delighted to have participated and shared their experiences.

5.3.4 Research themes that emanated from the study

Data were analysed thematically considering the research questions. The use of thematic analysis resulted in the emergence of themes and sub-themes that are pertinent to the study. These themes and sub-themes emanated from the conversations in the interviews and the FGDs on the experiences of female principals. Subsequently, the themes and sub-themes were discussed in detail in order to answer each of the research questions and to juxtapose the findings with the extant literature. Below is a summary of the themes and sub-themes that emerged in the current study.

THEME 1: EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE PRINCIPALS

Sub-themes

- 1.1 Relationship experiences with learners, teachers and parents
- 1.2 Relationship experiences with other stakeholders and DBE support
- 1.3 Factors influencing the attitudes and behaviour of learners, teachers and parents
- 1.4 Impact of learners', teachers' and parents' attitudes on the effectiveness of principals' role

THEME 2: CHALLENGES FACING FEMALE PRINCIPALS

Sub-themes

- 2.1 Learners' ill-discipline and unwillingness to learn
- 2.2 Drug, alcohol and substance usage and abuse
- 2.3 Lack of respect and negative attitudes
- 2.4 Teachers' unwillingness to work and lack of cooperation
- 2.5 Lack of acceptance within the school context and society at large
- 2.6 Parents' unavailability and unwillingness to support learners' education
- 2.7 Gender discrimination and societal stereotypes

THEME 3: SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AREAS REQUIRING MORE SUPPORT

Sub-themes

- 3.1 Area of learners' discipline and support from teachers and the DBE
- 3.2 Area of school safety and technical understanding of policy documents

THEME 4: MODEL TO IMPROVE THE LEADERSHIP OF FEMALE PRINCIPALS

Sub-themes

- 4.1 Extensive capacity building workshops and conferences
- 4.2 Availability of an intensive induction process
- 4.3 Leadership networking and mentoring programmes
- 4.4 Sensitisation of stakeholders
- 4.5 Extensive support from the department

In the following section, the researcher discusses the themes: experiences of female principals, challenges facing female principals, school leadership areas requiring more support and model to improve the leadership of female principals. The researcher presents evidence from the empirical data to support the themes and sub-themes that emerged.

5.3.4.1 Theme 1: Experiences of female principals

The leadership of a school rests on the shoulders of the school principal. On a daily basis, female principals have to deal with negative attitudes, confrontations and discrimination, among many other things, in the line of duty. Invariably, these have an impact on the effectiveness of the performance of their main roles as principal. This is supported by the study of Naidoo (2013), who asserts that female principals deal with grievances from learners' parents, uncooperative educators and other administrative challenges. Schmidt and Mestry (2015) argue that South African female principals still experience gender discrimination, despite the clear statement of gender equality in the South African Constitution. Female principals in the rural areas of Vhembe District shared their experiences in this regard, which are expressly discussed under the following sub-themes: relationship experiences with learners, teachers and parents; relationship experiences with other stakeholders and DBE support; factors influencing the attitudes and behaviour of learners, teachers and parents; and the impact of learners, teachers and parents' attitudes on the effectiveness of the principal's role.

Relationship experiences with learners, teachers and parents

During the course of the interviews and the FGDs, female principals were able to discuss their relationship experiences with learners, teachers and parents. Accordingly, participants' responses in the interviews and FGDs were similar as regards their experiences and the researcher discovered that the experiences they shared were in line with the experiences indicated in the literature review section.

In regard to their learners, the majority of the female principals were concerned about their lack of focus and ill-behaviour, although some female principals enjoyed the good behaviour and seriousness of their learners. P4 from SCH 4 voiced her undesirable experiences with her learners:

When I started as a principal, it was not easy because the former principal was a male and I am a female, mostly about learner, when I tell them how to

behave in school and give instructions, they take it for granted because I am a female and they believe I am just making it up and it's not a constitutional requirement or stipulated code of conduct. I experienced indiscipline from learners like late coming and other disturbing acts.

Her adverse experience was in line with the experiences of SCH 6/P6 and SCH 9/P9. SCH 6/P6 voiced her view as regards her learners:

I have been having this problem since I became a principal as a female. As for the learners, it was very difficult and I was working firstly at the school as an educator and then promoted into being a principal; learners couldn't understand that easily. They couldn't take my instructions easily because they still think I am a subject teacher; they just couldn't understand what it is being a principal. The bottom line here is the relationship was not that good.

SCH 9/P9 shared a more disturbing experience:

The relationship at first was very bad because I am the first female principal in this school, you can imagine, people were saying she can't cope and she will bring the results down and all. Students were not used to having a female principal at all so they had a negative attitude towards me.

Among the other principals who enjoyed the good behaviour and seriousness of their learners were SCH 1/P1, SCH 3/P3 and SCH 10/P10. SCH 3/P3 and SCH 10/P10 shared similar sentiment as regards their learners because they had learners who were willing and ready to learn and serious about their studies. This made it easy for the female principals to guide and support their learning. SCH 1/P1 emphasised the respect she gets from her learners:

With me here, the relationship is good with learners, they respect me, they listen to me whenever I reprimand them especially when they do something wrong, they listen to me and change their behaviour. So I feel the relationship is good even though you have to work harder than your male counterpart to make this happen.

In support of this, the majority of the FGD participants concluded that in the end, after much effort and strategising, they now have a good relatable relationship with their learners. In regard to their relationships with teachers, a large proportion of the participants had poor relationships with teachers at first, with very few enjoying good

relationships with the teachers. P4 from SCH 4 voiced her experience with the teachers as unpalatable. In her own words

When it comes to the educators, they just undermine the female principal in things which must be done. For example, in our school there is a 3 in 1 sporting facility and when it was under construction there was a tug of war between the educators and the SGB, because all the property in school are controlled and overseen by the SGB. To achieve that construction, it was a war; the educators just don't want to understand your explanation or support you because to them they think you are just making up all the procedure meanwhile it was the right procedure to follow by involving the SGB in all these and that is a problem with the educators.

Similarly, SCH 6/P6 added that her own experience with the teachers was a negative one because she was once working with them as a teacher before she got promoted. She said in this regard"

Because I was working together with them as an educator they seem not to understand that it is real that I am now a principal. Some couldn't take my instructions easily because they still think I am an educator like them and not a leader. The bottom line is the relationship was not that good.

SCH 7/P7 shed more light in the aspect of societal norms and lack of acceptance of female leadership:

The relationship with teachers as a female principal is not that good in the sense that as we know in our society we have this problem of patriarchy, in the sense that men are seen to be the people who are supposed to be rulers and even in schools they still believe that the principal is supposed to be a man. Because of this I am being undermined as a principal and because of this the relationship is not that good.

Dlamini's (2018) study supports the situation reported by SCH 7/P7. Dlamini (2018) argues that female principals find male counterparts or male teachers uncooperative. Dlamini further reported that black men especially who are used to being adored and respected at home as head of the family by their wives and children, find it difficult to work under women's leadership. Similarly, Ntaka (2013) found in her study that women principals faced a challenge of management owing to gender bias. She found that

male teachers who hailed from a society with a patriarchal ethos and religious upbringing were reluctant to accept the authority of female principals, questioning and challenging their decisions, which sometimes led to hostile confrontation.

Nonetheless, SCH 1/P1, SCH 5/P5 and SCH 10/P10 were among the few who enjoyed good relationships with the teachers. SCH 1/P1 said

With my teachers it's a good relationship because I haven't seen any educator with bad or negative attitude because whatever I tell them to do, they do.

Similarly, SCH 5/P5 said:

With teachers everything is fine and good they do the right things like going to class and teaching and all.

The testimony of SCH 10/P10 was also in line with the others:

When it come to the educators we also have a wonderful relationship because we don't regard ourselves as Mr or Mrs we regard ourselves as Brother and Sister like a family.

This kind of relationship appeared to be one of a kind as they were very few, and other participants during the FGD wished they had such wonderful relationships when they assumed the office of madam principal.

As for the relationships with parents, participants were on the edge of their seats when they were voicing their experiences in this regard. It was interesting to hear the experiences of SCH 1/P1 because she had good relationship experiences with both learners and teachers, but appeared to be getting her “share of the pile” with the parents.

With parents when you call them to meetings they don't, most of them don't come.

It's like they are not serious. I am not sure maybe it's because the principal is a woman or not. Thus, the relationship here is not good because there is lack of commitment from the parents' side which in itself can be frustrating.

It did not come as a surprise to hear that the majority of the other participants were also getting negative “vibes” from the parents. On this note, SCH 4/P4 reported that:

As for the parents, they are expected to be called when a learner is late continually.

So, when you call the parents they take it so lightly and say “do you think coming late is an issue?” even though it disturbs the school operations. Learners coming late and not doing their work properly has bad implications on the results and parents are taking this so lightly like it’s insignificant and they don’t care.

Some participants explained that parents do not take them seriously because they were born and bred in the same village where they are currently serving as principals, and also that social stigma, gender discrimination, lack of commitment, negative attitudes and lack of belief that females can perform in the role of a principal are the order of the day.

In the face of the many sour relationship experiences that the participants had with parents, the experience of SCH 10/P10 was notable because her experience with learners, teachers and parents seems to be consistently good and sound. She said:

The relationship with the parents is good, because if not for the support from the parents I won’t have the kind of learners that I have and I won’t have the great relationship that I have with the learners being that I am in a deep rural area. We have got this family kind of relationship which I also emphasise with the learners and the educators. The good relationship with parents gives rise to peace and harmony in the school.

It is apparent that the majority of the female principals who participated in the interviews and FGDs had negative experiences with learners, teachers and parents. This finding is similar to an earlier study by Kallie (2015), who asserts that women principals are painfully and powerfully exposed to gender discrimination because leadership is popularly attached to masculinity. Also, the studies of Parsaloi (2012) and Schmidt and Mestry (2015) revealed that women are often perceived as being incapable of leading educational institutions. This is similar to the struggles faced by the Vhembe female principals who were the participants in this current study.

Despite the poor relationship experiences of the majority of the study participants when they initially assumed leadership positions and in the early stages of their role

as principal, they also shared how they managed to normalise these poor relationships.

From the experiences shared by the participants, the researcher was able to deduce the following as the most relevant points. The majority of the participants said they were able to smooth out their relationships with the learners, teachers and parents through hard work, tenacity, motivation, leading by example, patience, love, kindness, policy adherence, open door policies and joint decision-making processes, among many others.

It is worth noting how these female principals had to do the extraordinary to make sure that good relationships exist between them and the learners, teachers and parents.

Some of the experiences are worth emphasising. SCH1/P1 had this to say:

With learners you will never get tired because you are here for them. I continue with the support during our meetings on the assembly with learners. I always remind them about what they are here for and remind them about the rules and regulations and always tell them the main purpose of them being here and by so doing most of the learners change their behaviour and attitude. Even with teachers during our staff meetings, I always motivate them to do more and do better just to tell them that they can do better and not settle for less. I always tell them to keep a positive attitude because this will determine their attitude. For parents, during parents meeting for those who turn up to meetings, I also tell them I need their support and tell them the positive benefits of supporting their children.

SCH 2/P2 and SCH 5/P5 shared similar experiences:

I know I am going to work with all of them; I create a two-way communication with them where everybody feels comfortable to communicate with me. I and the teachers work together as a team to support our learners and I also lead by example. Communication is a two-way thing – it builds good relationship and that is how I create my relationship with them all (SCH 2/P2).

To normalise the situation I try sometimes to be close to the learners. I call them in group and discuss with them to make them see the need of working together for their own future. Sometimes we play games together so that everything can be normal and help us understand each other well. Even

though I reprimand them, they must know that the principal just wants them to do the right thing and to become better learners. With the teachers, I also have time with them to discuss with them and try to find out from them whatever it is that I may be doing that is not right and then I allow them to come to my office if ever there is something then we discuss about it and we proceed from there. As for parents, meetings are the ones that are making us to meet so we can talk a lot about what is happening and they must also see the school as a place to discuss freely their matter with the principal in case they have something to discuss (SCH 5/P5).

It is apparent that SCH1/P1, SCH 2/P2 and SCH 5/P5 adopted motivation techniques, two-way communication, an open door policy and a feedback system to normalise relationships in their schools.

Furthermore, SCH 3/P3, SCH 6/P6 and SCH 8/P8 said they made additional sacrifices to see things go smoothly and also involved the SMT and SGB to resolve matters relating to the learners, especially as regards bullying. They also adopted SASSA and departmental policy when dealing with learners and teachers. SCH 3/P3 said in this regard:

I also sacrifice my health and time for the sake of the learners. Sleeping on the floor with them during camping so they can study and do well is their studies.

SCH 6/P6 said:

For the parents I had to attend the community gathering like funerals because I just want them to understand that I am still that person just that I have been promoted to another position. But I am still the same person and I didn't change, and I worked very hard because I wanted to set example for the teachers to teach them that being a principal does not mean I still can't do the needed work within the school environment just like I was doing before. I sacrifice a lot even for the educators; if they have funerals at home I attend and support them.

SCH 8/P8 had this to say:

In the case of teachers, obviously teacher has code of conduct in such a way that there shouldn't be any problem with that. What I do is to invite and sit

down with the teachers one by one, most especially the male teachers to show them my plans, vision and mission about the school and my expectation from them and importantly I also show them love because I know they have negative attitude towards me and I try to treat them equally. Even to those I know backbite behind me on a daily basis I still show them love and compassion and try by all means to bring them together and come up with efforts that can make us work as a team and show them the importance of working together. On the side of the parents, in the community, I use to go there and show them direction and develop some skill for some of the parents who are not working to be able to capacitate themselves and to show love to them and tell them to involve themselves in their community activities and in their learners. Also the way I work with their learners also makes the parent to see that I am a leader really, I am trying by all means that I am close to my learners so that the parents will not have any choice than to comply with what the school is in need of them.

It is apparent that SCH 3/P3, SCH 6/P6 and SCH 8/P8 have adopted departmental policies, love, compassion, concern and sacrifices as a system to normalise the relationships in their schools.

As for the other participants, SCH 7/P7 was direct in her approach:

I usually try to be very patient and understanding towards them, at the same time I try to show them that a woman can do what a man can do and even more.

SCH 9/P9 had adopted an open door policy and delegated managerial tasks to the teachers in order to get them to actively participate in the school governance. She added:

I listen to them and treat them equally. I also accept them as they are. People are different; good or bad, fast or slow, either the learners or teachers or parent. I care about my learners and will go any lengths for them and because of this the parents respect me more and this made them to change their attitude towards me and normalise the relationship between me and the learners, educators and parents because they now see good things and good practices in what I do.

SCH 10/P10 said she treats everyone as family and that has helped her to be able to relate well with the learners, teachers and parents. Overall, the female principals were only able to normalise the relationship with learners, teachers and parents by going out of their way to do more than what was required of them as principals.

Relationship experiences with other stakeholders and DBE support

Within the relationship experience context with other stakeholders and the DBE, the focus was to elicit the perceived support received from the community and the DBE. During the FGD and the interview, the participants were able to discuss their support experiences in this regard. The FGD gave the participants an opportunity to voice their experiences with the community, with some of the participants being happy with the support they receive from their community while others were not so impressed. It was somewhat of a relief to receive this feedback from the participants as the vast majority asserted that the community was largely supportive. In light of this, SCH1/P1, SCH2/P2, SCH 6/P6, SCH 7/P7 were impressed with the support they received from the community, while the experience of SCH 8/P8 was outstanding:

I am happy because the traditional leaders in the community are supportive because we also support them during community rituals and other things. It can be deduced that there seems to be a two-way relationship between the community and the school without which the relationship can go entirely sour overnight.

Despite the good support received from the community, as reported by the majority of the participants, a few of them were not impressed with the support they received. During the FGD, SCH 3/P3 and SCH 8/P8 shared similar sentiments, saying that the community gave very little support because community members lacked knowledge about school and educational matters and really did not care whether the school activities ran smoothly or not.

SCH 8/P8 said:

Sometimes during class lessons, or examination some members of the community will be playing loud music and having a bash and when you try to tell them that the learners are learning or writing exams they just turn deaf ears to you like you don't matter and continue with their noise and disturbance anyway. This is so annoying and disrespectful.

The participants were eager to share their experiences with the DBE as regards the support they receive. According to six of the participants, they receive adequate support from the DBE. They acknowledged that in one way or another their support stories corroborated. Most of them described the support they received from the DBE as being through constant visits to the school to check on how the learners and teachers are faring, while others described it as the provision of workshops and seminars, and also by connecting them to other relevant third parties such as social workers and the police when needed. The stories of SCH 1/P1 and SCH 3/P3 were eye catching and worth emphasising:

The support from the department is high for us, our circuit manager is always here to monitor and give support in order to know of any of our challenges. The curriculum advisors are always here to give support to subject educators. Even the district director visits us like twice per term to show us support, if you check our final results, we produce better than our male counterparts in the area because we are always working hard as female principals due to the support which motivate us to work more (SCH 1/P1).

With a funny and uncertain look, she added that she was not sure about the reason or the motive behind the support and the attention they were getting from the department: *“Maybe because they are also worried or fear if they don’t give us support as women the result may fall but yet they are always here with us to support us.”* Similarly, SCH 3/P3 shared her experience as regards her circuit manager who was also very supportive. She said:

The support that I am having now is from the circuit manager and she’s very much supportive and visited us even at night to motivate us during our study camps around 7 p.m and left around half 9. Her presence really motivated us and inspired the learners and the teachers. It was the first time I saw a circuit manager show support to what we are doing.

It was quite painful and sad to hear that some participants did not have a good relationship with the DBE. With a pinch of frustration, SCH 7/P7 said:

The support we get as a female principal from the department is not good enough because they send us educators who are not trained enough especially the novice educators who are fresh from the university and even

the experienced educators still need support through continuous development and training. The support is very little or none at all and at the end of the day they need result from the very same teachers and expect them to perform miracles in the class even with the little or no support from the department.

SCH 9/P9 shared how painful it was for the department officials to believe and behave as if female principals are inferior and cannot perform like their male counterparts. Sadly, SCH 10/P10 shared a similar sentiment:

The support is not there yet, because in our school that is led by me, we should be having people like counsellors to visit more often and check on the school progress and on us to see how we are doing, to guide us and orientate us, nobody is there to do that, at least quarterly they should visit. So the support is really weak. Though they organise workshops but these workshops won't serve any meaningful purpose if they don't visit hands on,

In conclusion, the relationship experiences with other stakeholders were not uniform among the participants, as some were happy with the support they received, while others were far from happy and had just learnt to live with it and survive through whatever came their way from the community and the DBE.

Factors influencing the attitudes and behaviour of learners, teachers and parents

There are a number of factors influencing the attitudes and behaviours of learners, teachers and parents, as expressed by the research participants. The majority of the participants highlighted gender bias, cultural norms, societal beliefs, and lack of exposure, tribalism and familiarity as the key influencing factors.

According to the narration of SCH 4/P4, she perceived the reason behind the poor attitude towards her was because she was born and raised and married in the same village where she is now serving as a principal. That has led to familiarity in terms of which she is being taken for granted most of the time by the parents, teachers and sometimes the learners. SCH 7/P7 said that:

What I think influences the attitudes of learners, teachers and parents is the culture, believe, society and patriarchy as I have mentioned. Because in our

culture men are regarded as more important, clever and valuable than women.

The story of SCH 10/P10 is worthy of note as it covers factors such as tribalism, discrimination and lack of exposure. She said:

Because I was brought into this village to head the school from another location, the thing called “son of the soil” affect the way they treat me, because they feel that the position should have been given to one of them and not me who is regarded as a foreigner because I am from another town even though I am a South African citizen but because I belong to a different tribe, I was not evenly accepted and this was more with the teachers. As for the parents and few teachers, they feel like the position should have been given to a man and not a woman. For instance, one parent even recently went to the extent of saying that we thought that this woman won’t make it here because we think female cannot become leaders. And the learners, they are not motivated because of their background and it’s a deep rural area and nobody drives big car or build big/good houses, they don’t have an idea of the future or careers because they are not positively influenced, all they see around them are negative influences such as people dinking Venda beers, people living in poverty, people using donkey as a means of transportation and they think riding donkey is or should be the biggest achievement, in short poverty influences them to behave negatively and they live without ambition.

The study by Peters (2012) supports the study participants’ narratives. Peters (2012) argues that women are largely affected by prevailing gender roles which belittle the capacity of women in achieving great feats and that the society believes that women work less and cannot handle challenging and more rigorous tasks. Peters (2012) adds that in circumstances where there is an opportunity for anyone to take up a leadership role, the vast majority of the women are segregated and relegated to the bottom of the ladder and men are supported in taking up such positions. These factors among others are because of gender discrimination, cultural stigma and stereotypical societal beliefs. These are similar to the influencing factors narrated by the Vhembe female principals who constituted the study participants.

Impact of learners', teachers' and parents' attitudes on the effectiveness of principals' role

Quite often, evidence is supported by whether the reasons are logical, taking into consideration whether the support for the responses and assumptions is true. In this study therefore, the narratives of the female principals justify that the effectiveness in their task delivery is being negatively affected.

A few of the participants such as SCH 2/P2 and SCH 6/P6 noted that their relationships with the learners, teachers and parents have promoted good performance in their roles as principals. However, overwhelmingly, the majority of the participants reported that a large proportion of their limited precious time was being spent dealing with learner's misbehaviour, settling grievances, micro-managing teachers who were unwilling to work and attending to disrespectful and uncooperative parents. This has led to a dysfunctional system in the school and poor academic performance among learners. They added that this was a major distraction from their main role as principals where they were expected to focus on building strategies to move the school forward, making plans to improve the learners' academic and moral performance and also managing the school resources prudently, among others.

SCH 9/P9 and SCH 10/10 narrated how their roles as principals has been affected by the relationship they have with the learners, teachers and parents. As SCH 9/P9 said:

Yes, the situation impacts my performance very seriously. You know as a leader being undermined and being looked down upon is not a good thing and it affects my performance as a principal. It also affects my attitude at times but I am a very strong person. I always try my best to convince everyone that female principals can do just well and better like their male counterparts through my hard work. Imagine learners undermining me as a female principal, definitely those learners won't perform at their best and teachers also won't put in good working relationship because they are busy looking down on me and this affect my entire role as a principal. Sometimes some parents will come here and shout at me and rebuke me and as a normal human, I feel it because if parents can just come to say whatever they like to me just because I am a female principal, it definitely does have effect on me because its normal.

SCH 10/P10 said with frustration in her voice:

Imagine leading learners and teachers who are highly demotivated; that alone can demotivate you as a principal. Also, some educators show verbal and nonverbal opposition in meetings and all these demotivate you and you even feel so tired and don't want to come to work the following day. All this negative energy can be so tiring and draining that sometimes you just want to give up on going to work to see and meet the same set of people again. But if they had shown unity and support it will be easy and more motivating to work together and achieve a goal. So most time you really have to push them extra miles to pursue the goals but deep down inside as the principal you are demotivated.

Overall, only a few participants reported a positive relationship between their roles as principals and their relationship with the learners, teachers and parents, with the vast majority of the study participants reporting otherwise.

5.3.4.2 Theme 2: Challenges facing female principals

Theme 2 discusses the challenges female principals experience in the line of duty in relation to the educational stakeholders, who are predominantly the learners, teachers and parents. They shared similar thoughts and feelings about these challenges, as they limit their efforts in carrying out their main roles as principals and as effective leaders. The following sub-themes emerged from the narratives of the female principals. These include learners' ill-discipline and unwillingness to learn, drug, alcohol and substance usage and abuse, lack of respect and negative attitudes, teachers' unwillingness to work and lack of cooperation, lack of acceptance within the school context and the society at large, parents' unavailability and unwillingness to support learners' education, gender discrimination and societal stereotypes. The challenges encountered and shared by these female principals led to the aforesaid sub-themes and are in line with the popular challenges other female principals encountered in other parts of the world, as shown in the study of Lumby and Azaola (2011) and Arar and Queder (2011).

Learners' ill-discipline and unwillingness to learn

Ill-discipline is a major challenge that the female principals encounter among their learners. The majority of the participants agreed that most of their learners are not self-disciplined and are reluctant to learn. During the interviews, SCH 1/P1 and SCH 10/P10 shared their experiences in this regard. SCH 1/P1 expressed her feelings of

concern for the learners whom she says are often absent from lessons and those who are not absent are often reluctant to do their school work, while others regularly arrive late at school. these are all signs of ill-discipline. SCH 10/P10 said in this regard:

... the area where my school is, there are many orphans and vulnerable kids who stays with their grandparents and most of this learners tend to have discipline problems. These kinds of learners are very difficult to discipline and you have to go the extra mile and stretch your muscle, especially if you want them to achieve something at the end of the day.

It can be deduced that learners' indiscipline is aligned to their unwillingness to learn and is a major concern for the female principal. It is apparent that without the seriousness, willingness and cooperation of a learner the principal can do little in fostering their success and academic performance. Parsaloi's (2012) study supports this finding as he reports that female principals often complain about learners who do not respect time, who arrive at school late and also leave early. Naicker (2014) adds that a lack of discipline on the part of the learners poses a significant challenge to the leadership of a school and impedes the effectiveness of the female principals' leadership.

Drug, alcohol and substance usage and abuse

Another serious challenge is the use of drugs and hard substances by learners and, disappointingly, some teachers are also involved in drug abuse. The majority of the participants reported that some of their learners are on drugs while others get drunk before coming to school. This kind of lifestyle contributes to moral decay and leads to violence, bullying and even indiscipline on a higher level. It is also concerning to note that some teachers take drugs while on duty and this promotes their lack of cooperation with the female principals. This kind of irresponsible behaviour among the teachers negatively influences the learners and promotes the usage and abuse of hard substances among them. The experiences of SCH 3/P3, SCH 8/P8, and SCH 10/P10 are worth noting.

With regard to the learner, there are those that takes drugs and it's a very big challenge to us and the community do not want to tell us the people who are selling the drugs to this learners, one day a learner came with muffins and there were drugs laced in this muffins which made the learner unable to write

an assessment because the learner slept for almost two days because of the muffin sold to him (SCH 3/P3).

Similarly, SCH 8/P8 had this to say:

As for the learners, challenges are a lot, being in a rural area they involve themselves in drugs and alcohols and are being influenced by those things and their behaviour changes drastically especially after lunch break when they have taken those hard drugs.

The experience of the use of drugs by teachers was shared by SCH 10/P10 who said:

... to be honest even the educators smoke weed and are sometimes under the influence of hard substances. So, when they are under the influences of this substance, they are not themselves and they can scream and yell and act unprofessionally at me which is disheartening.

It can be deduced that the usage and abuse of drugs, alcohol and hard substances is a serious problem for the female principals. It is apparent that such problems jeopardise the efforts of the principal in promoting a sound and conducive learning environment. The experiences shared by the participants are in line with those identified in a study of Makgoka (2016). He argues that some learners come to school under the influence of alcohol and that they sometimes bring illegal substances to school while others actually sell drugs on the school premises. Makgoka (2016) reported that some teachers smoke in front of learners which does not set a good example.

Lack of respect and negative attitudes

Makgoka (2016) and Kitele (2013) point out that female principals are often disrespected by their colleagues and by learners, while parents often show negative attitudes in their dealings with female principals by giving them names intended to undermine them. Similarly, the study participants narrated how learners and teachers disrespect and undermine them at every chance they get. They added that parents are the worst, shifting the blame for their learners' failures onto them. Parents often have reservations about female principals from the outset and criticise every step and decision taken by them. In the opinion of SCH 5/P5, the learners disrespect her mainly because they disrespect their mothers at home and believe only the father has a say in their life. This affects their concept of respect and such learners replicate the same

within the school context. Similarly, SCH 9/P9 explained that her learners disrespect her often, simply because they see the teachers doing the same. During the FGD, SCH 2/P2 added that some of her male teachers displayed negative attitudes towards her because they had also applied for the principal position; hence, they became hostile and disrespectful. The disrespect and negative attitudes experienced from the parents are too much as narrated by the participants. SCH 3/P3 said:

As for some parents, when they come, they quarrel with us and they indicate we are not working especially when they come to get the end of year report of their children who have failed and these are the same parents who do not come to parent meeting or show up during the school term when they were being invited as regards their learner, you never see them throughout the year, and you only find them at the end of the year.

SCH 7/P7 added that on some occasions when the parents visit the school with the idea of having a discussion with the principal, they become hesitant and reluctant the moment they find out the principal is a female, disregarding her presence and capacity. These are manifestations of negative attitudes from the parents. Furthermore, the participants mentioned that disrespect and negative attitudes on the part of learners, teachers and parents often leads to threats and bullying. It is mainly the male teachers who threaten female principals as well as male over-aged learner and even by some parents, who believe that the female principal does not have what it takes to challenge them in this respect.

Teachers' unwillingness to work and lack of cooperation

Many of the participants reported how difficult it is for them to convince their teachers to perform their tasks or follow departmental policies. They mentioned that the majority of male teachers are difficult and uncooperative. SCH 4/P4 said that despite her efforts to make the teachers, especially the male teachers, follow what is written in the policy book, they are still reluctant to do so. SCH 6/P6 complained about the lack of cooperation she receives from her teachers. She said:

When you give the teacher an instruction, the teacher will question that instruction and nag; they will not just follow the instruction immediately.

On the same note, SCH 3/P3 said:

Another challenge is with regards to the educators who don't want to go to classes they want to be talking in the staffroom and some during break they don't want to eat in the staffroom they go out and end up coming late every time and their period will be on and they are not there. Most male educators are lazy and unwilling to work because in my school here there are a lot of female educators and they are the ones who work hard to get the job done.

During the FGD, SCH 1/P1 added that she has to push the teachers really hard for them to come to school on time or attend their classes. “*They won't work without a push*” she said. The participants' experiences are supported by the study by Zikhali and Smit, (2019), who assert that without staff member support and cooperation, it will be exceedingly challenging for female principals to excel in their leadership capacity.

Lack of acceptance within the school context and the society at large

According to Maime (2011), a large number of staff members are reluctant to accept their female colleagues when selected for a leadership position. Chisholm (2001) adds that female principals experience lack of acceptance by colleagues at work. During the interview session, the participants narrated how difficult it was for the learners, teachers and parents to accept them when they were first installed as school principals. Some shared the notion that most of the learners and teachers were used to having a male principal and found it difficult to adjust to the reality of having a female principal. The participants also said it was very difficult for the community to accept the reality of a woman leading a school, as the majority of the community leaders believed that men are born to lead while women are only there to provide support.

During the second FGD with the new participants, SCH 3/P3 shared her experiences, saying:

Other male educators wanted the same principal post and they couldn't get it, then they negatively influence the learners and parents not to accept my leadership, they try to make me look bad even in the community.

Similarly, SCH 7/P7 said:

Some women teachers do not accept my leadership because they don't want the other female leaders to excel and believe another female cannot be leading them so they don't do their best or put extra effort, they only do their minimum.

This participant's narrative is similar to those in the study by Kallie (2015), who argues that female teachers under the administration of a female principal often refuse to take orders from the latter, and some male teachers find it difficult to follow orders or instructions given by a female leader. This situation invariably leads to lack of community acceptance.

Parents' unavailability and unwillingness to support learners' education

According to all the sampled participants who participated in the interview and FGD process, parents' lack of interest, availability and involvement in learners' lives poses a major challenge. During the interview, participants mentioned that parental support was not good and the majority of the parents did not show up to collect their children's academic report at the end of the term. This meant they were hindered from being informed about their children's performance. During the FGD. SCH 4/P4 elaborated on this:

Parents are unwilling to contribute emotionally or financially to the success of their learners.

And SCH 5/P5 said:

... since 2014 that I joined the school, the lack of parent's involvement in learner's life especially in their academics, homework and other activities is of concern.

Other participants further narrated that most of the parents are always away and never physically available to support their children. This has led to the challenge of "children from child headed families" as termed by the participants. SCH 4/P4 laid emphasis on the "child headed learner", saying:

The major challenge in my school is with the child headed learners because most of the parents are working far from home and staying in the cities and the learners are left to live alone without parental influence, and they make majority of the decisions on their own taking the head responsibility for themselves and their younger siblings.

In line with this, SCH 5/P5 added that it becomes very difficult for them to reach the parents when they are really need to attend to their children's performance, misconduct or poor behaviour.

Gender discrimination and societal stereotype

According to Nxumalo (2013), gender discrimination and societal stereotype have always been a challenge for female leaders. Owing to the societal norms, females are considered fragile or substandard and treated as such when compared to male in leadership position (Kattula, 2011). The study participants narrated their experience in this regard and a number of the experiences are worth noting. During the interview, SCH 7/P7 said:

Firstly, it's patriarchy as people in the rural area believe a woman's place is in the kitchen, so usually when a woman assumes a position of leadership, people believe that she won't do well in that position because its only men who can do well in a leadership position. With learners, it is surprising to see that female learners don't have a problem with me as a female principal, it's not the same with the male learners, and they tend to undermine me and refuse to take instructions from me, something they will never do with a male principal. As for the parents, they are even worse, sometimes they come to the office and ask where the principal is, when they are brought in and are shown the female leader, sometimes they refuse to solve the issues with me because I am a woman and they just walk away.

SCH 8/P8 shared her challenges with regard the teachers:

On the side of the educators, just because I am a woman and culturally, it is rare for a male teacher to be led by a female principal and by so doing you can find that most of them are just uncooperative which means whatever thing you decide they will just always rebel and have resistance and there is no submission just because of the cultural issues. Also the religion is part of that, I don't want to mention some of the churches, but there are some of them who believe that men are always the leader and they don't have that perspective that they can be led by a woman.

More challenges related to gender discrimination and societal norms were narrated during the FGD. Starting with the first FGD, SCH 5/P5 had this to say:

Because I am a female principal, the teachers especially the males, exhibit the PHD (Pull Her Down) syndrome and question every instruction I give them as the head of institution."

During the second FGD, SCH 7/P7 shared a similar sentiment:

Mainly with educators, especially the elderly male educators still have the notion that women cannot and must not be a principal. When you assign any task to them they drag their feet and do not do their best because they don't want a woman to be praised in case the school succeeds and they also influence the younger male teachers not to do their best all because I am a woman.

It is apparent from the participants' narrated experiences that gender discrimination is still the order of the day among learners, teachers, parents and society at large, and it is very challenging for a female principal to perform effectively in such a hostile environment.

5.3.4.3 Theme 3: School leadership areas requiring more support

In theme 2, the researcher discussed the challenges described by the female principals, as well as a few pertinent areas of female school leadership that need more support and attention, as indicated by the participants, which are covered in this section. The few pertinent areas of female school leadership requiring more support are discussed under the following sub-themes: The area of learner discipline and support from teachers and the DBE; and the area of school safety and a technical understanding of policy documents

The area of learner discipline and support from teachers and the DBE

The majority of the participants mentioned that more support is required in the area of learner discipline and support is needed from teachers and from the DBE. During the interview process, SCH 5/P5 was keen to express how much she requires help and support from the male teachers in disciplining the learners and pointing them to the right direction with firmness. In her view, male teachers can do better in the area of learner discipline as their masculine view and physical stature embodies the discipline and seriousness trait. She said:

Yes this thing of discipline can be done by a male and they can change the learners to a certain better direction, but for women sometimes we end up sympathising and showing empathy and not performing the discipline that should be really done because of our empathy and care. We are clouded by the nine months' conception and end up being soft towards these children.

In short we need to be empowered to change this soft mind-set that we have because sometimes we need to be harsh and hard in order to transform the learners but in the meantime of our transformation we need the male teachers to really step up and support in this regard to better the life and future of the learners.

Similarly, other participants added valuable pointers during the first FGD. SCH 2/P2 and SCH 4/P4 said they need male teachers' support in disciplining learners, because most of the time the male teachers just hold back and do nothing even though it is supposed to be a joint and team effort to give learners a better future. During the second FGD, two participants shared great insight:

Area of learner discipline is a serious one, since corporal punishment is abolished and this become more difficult for females to exact any form of punishment, if male educators can help in this regard it will really be great and helpful (SCH1/P1).

As regards discipline, department should intervene and always respond to us fast especially when we are dealing with learners involved in dangerous weapon and drug abuse ... the whole process of expulsion should be fast tracked and monitored by the department (SCH2/P2).

In a nutshell, it is apparent from the participants' narratives that to achieve a better future for the learners, a prompt response from the DBE, more support from male teachers, as the embodiment of firmness, and lastly, engaging in teamwork are required.

The area of school safety and a technical understanding of policy documents

According to the participants' narratives, the vast majority require support in the area of safety and security. The participants recounted several scenarios where their safety and the safety of their teachers had been threatened and where the security of the school infrastructure had been at high risk. Some participants mentioned that a succinct understanding of the policy and Act would also be of great help for them in performing effectively in their leadership positions. During the interview SCH 4/P4 highlighted that there are numerous policies in the department policy book that she needs to grasp in order to resolve important matters in the school:

What I see as very much important is we have a lot of policies and Act in the DBE and some of the issues to be resolved needs the understanding of these policies and knowing which of the policy to be applied.

This implies that help and support is needed in having a good command of the technicalities of the policy documents. Other participants added crucial points during the FGD. SCH 3/P3, SCH 6/P6 and SCH 7/P7 all suggested the notion of having support in the area of safety and security. SCH 3/P3 had this to say:

I agree with SCH 6/P6 on the safety and security issues because as female principals we need more support especially with learners who are over age. I mean the learners above the normal high school age of 18, they get to bully other learners and even threaten me and my educators, so the department should do more by providing security to increase the safety and confidence around the school.

Similarly, SCH 7/P7 added that in addition to departmental involvement, the SGB and the community should be more involved in the safety of the school. During the second FGD, three participants shared great insight along the line of safety and security.

SCH4/P4 said in this regard:

I want intervention during late night studies because we teach learners overnight when they are preparing for their Grade 12 exams and it is not easy for a female principal or educator to be left alone in this period without security.

SCH 5/P5 added that the security of the school infrastructure is also at risk and support is needed from the male teachers in this regard in the spirit of teamwork, because male teachers are quite skilful and experienced in dealing with matters involving physical property and infrastructure. Similarly, SCH 7/P7 mentioned:

Area of school infrastructure and maintenance of school resources, we need more support, because as a female principal we cannot just move around the fence making sure that the fence and locks are okay. Also for the male educators who are skilled in certain area they just look away and bring everything to the principal in a spiteful way without showing any support saying Mrs Principal, the chair and tables are broken and this and that is not okay, what are you going to do about that?

Overall, it is apparent from the participants' narratives that, firstly, more security is needed on school premises in order to promote safety and confidence among learners, teachers and the female principal, and lastly, a technical understanding of the policy document by the female principals is paramount.

5.3.4.4 Theme 4: Recommended model to improve the leadership of female principals

Dlamini (2018) argues that females face more challenges in leadership position than their male counterparts. This is because of the lack of acceptance of female leadership, gender discrimination, and societal stereotyping among many others. Hence, the study participants were able to suggest ways in which to address the prevailing challenges faced by female secondary school principals. The recommended models that can be utilised to overcome the challenges and improve the leadership of female principals are discussed under the following sub-themes: extensive capacity building workshops and conferences, availability of an intensive induction process, leadership networking and mentoring programmes, sensitisation of stakeholders, and extensive support from the department.

Extensive capacity building workshops and conferences

According to the participants' narratives during the interview and the FGD process, all the participants were keen to have organised leadership workshops and conferences. The participants believed that they would be capacitated and trained in leadership and handling leadership challenges during workshops and conferences. They also opined that conference would provide them with an avenue to benchmark and interact with other female principals who are excelling in principal positions, and that experiences and strategies could be shared among them. They believed that this would be beneficial to their holistic learning and development process. Of all the study participants' opinions in this regard, two are worthy of emphasis. SCH1/P1 said:

As female principal, the department must organise workshop for us so we can share together areas of weakness and strength and learn from each other because sharing experiences and problems will help us do better. For instance, in my circuit we have 12 secondary schools and I am the only female among the male, so the department should organise so that I can meet with other females from other circuit because I am completely

surrounded by male so we can talk and find out how others are faring and doing things well in their circuit.

Similarly, SCH10/P10 said:

We need conferences that last longer than a day for all ladies to share their experiences and find solutions and strategies to their challenges which will be great. This is because a day workshop is not enough where we are already tired at the end of the whole day information and we end up not doing anything we learnt on that day and practicality is what we really need for a change. Back in the years, I do attend a ladies' leadership conference and since then it has changed my perspective about things making me know as ladies I know we are sympathetic because of the umbilical cord and we love to pray about everything but there is a place of confrontation by a leader and confrontation does not break friendship, so I learnt that from the conference, so more conference should be organised for us to talk and it will attend to most of our challenges.

It is apparent that for female leadership to be improved, extensive capacity building, developmental training and conferences are of the utmost importance.

Availability of an intensive induction process

During the interview process, the participants explained the importance of having an intensive induction process for female educators who are on the edge of becoming principals. They opined that it is important to inculcate the needed skills in the prospective female principal before assuming the position. They also explained that the induction process could prevent many of the struggles or challenges faced after becoming a principal. They believe that the prospective female principal would be capacitated and made fully aware of the potential challenges involved in the principal's leadership role, especially the stigma attached to being a female leader. The participants further added that damage and poor performance could be avoided if the induction process were in place, as they would be equipped beforehand. It is for this reason that they agreed that preparation precedes success and lack of preparation is a sure way to fail. Overall, two participants are worthy of emphasis:

If we can have inductions it will be good because if you are experiencing this thing I am experiencing on a daily basis and you are not strong and brave

enough you can start to lose the strength and focus and end up running the school down. So, we need more training, workshop and facilitation to get us capacitated and become more knowledgeable as to how to handle some of the challenges we will experience on a daily basis before assuming this principal role (SCH 8/P8).

“Back then when I was still the HOD, there was a programme called women in and into leadership, I attended that programme about ten years ago and the lesson I learnt from that program still help me till date, such programs are needed for prospective female principals and it will really help us (SCH 9/P9).

It is apparent that for female principals to excel and perform effectively in a leadership position, an intensive induction process for them should be in place.

Leadership networking and mentoring programmes

The participants emphasised the importance of having networking and mentoring programmes for female principals. They argued that this is one important ingredient that contributes to the success of their male counterparts in leadership positions, because they have the so-called “boys boys where they network, support and mentor each other, but this is out of reach for female principals. They further explained that most female principals are not unified as they exhibit what is called power rivalry and are power drunk. During the first FGD, the SCH 1/P1 said: *“we need leadership networking programs for mentoring which will get us fully equipped.”* This implies that mentoring will provide motivational and psychological support for female principals. The participants’ narratives were in line with the arguments of Lumby and Azaola (2011) and Carnie (2019), who posit that females require the encouragement and motivation that come from mentoring and networking. They add that mentoring strategies significantly promote the possibility of successful and effective female leadership.

Sensitisation of stakeholders

The participants were of the opinion that the success of a female leader in a principal position is far beyond them and involves the cooperation and support of all stakeholders. In this regard, the major stakeholders mentioned by the participants include learners, teachers, parents, and the community. The participants emphasised that they can do little if these stakeholders are not in sync with them, which will always

frustrate and jeopardise their efforts. Furthermore, the participants argued that stakeholders must be sensitised and trained and orientated to what is right. The participants mentioned that learners should be trained and orientated to respecting their elders and the female sex. Moreover, teachers should be sensitised to follow the department's policies and codes of conduct in order to understand the consequent penalties. In contrast, parents should be educated to understand that supporting their children and the female principal is a sure way of ensuring a good future for the learners and society at large. Additionally, the community should be shown the importance of education and the acceptance of female leadership. Overall, a few suggestions by the study participants are worth emphasising:

he department must organise specifically for learners, parents and even educators to sensitise them as regard discrimination and acceptance of female leadership (SCH 3/P3).

Firstly, learners should be taught responsibility from an early age and how to respect women in general. Also the police should be invited from time to time to search for drugs and dangerous weapons and give learners lecture on the danger of indiscipline to their future (SCH 7/P7).

Similarly, SCH 8/P8 said:

Workshops should be put in place for learners, teachers, parents and all stakeholders on how to behave towards female principal, with this, we female principal won't be experiencing what we experience on a daily basis. This sensitisation will make the stakeholder to know their responsibility towards the school and its leadership. Also, stakeholders should spread campaign that the school is a community asset and should be protected.

It is apparent that the participants believe that if the stakeholders can be well sensitised, challenges for female principals will be reduced and the leadership of the female principal will be greatly improved.

Extensive support from the department

According to the participants, the support they receive from the department is not adequate. They argued that if the department could provide them with adequate physical, moral, financial, and technical support, it would promote and improve their. As regards moral support, the participants mentioned that the department needs to

visit them more often and reward them for good performance. They emphasised that if the department could do this frequently, it would motivate them to do better and serve as a major support in performing effectively in their leadership position. SCH 2/P2 and SCH 7/P7 narrated along this line. SCH 2/P2 said:

The department should inspire and support women when they produce good results, when I produce good result and the department show support such as incentives and provide other resources for the school when it is needed it will inspire me as a woman principal.

SCH 7/P7 added that “[t]he DBE should visit the school continually so that the monitoring and every other thing in the school can be in order”.

The participants added that physical support should be available in the form of infrastructure to enhance the effective delivery of their duties as principals. Furthermore, the participants explained that they generally lack the funds to access certain basic necessities such as hiring security and other support staff, among others, which could be done with financial support. SCH 4/P4 narrated her experience in this regard during the second FGD:

The department should increase our norms and sundry because we need more support staff to clean the school environment and security guard for the sake of safety.

Lastly, the participants explained the need for technical support which to them is widely related to departmental policy being structured in a practicable and achievable way. One of the participants during the interview (SCH 7/P7) mentioned in particular how learners who are above the age of 18 should be specially catered for within the policy document, because over-aged learners are seen to cause more trouble with regard to bullying at school. Therefore, extensive support from the department would lead to an improvement in the leadership of female principals.

5.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter, the researcher discussed in detail the findings that emerged from the interview and the FGD process, using the thematic and verbatim procedure highlighted in chapter four of the study. Given this discussion on the four themes which were directly in line with the four research questions, it is evident that the research questions of this study have been answered, thereby attaining the objectives of the study. In the

next and final chapter, the researcher summarises the previous chapters, reaches final conclusions by reflecting on the research questions and then concludes by making recommendations as implications for the study.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented data on the experiences of female principals in leading rural secondary schools in Vhembe District of Limpopo province. Using the data presented, the aim of the study which was to develop a model to enhance the leadership of female principals leading rural schools was achieved. This study presented the findings through themes and sub-themes, which emerged from the data collected through different methods of inquiry, including focus group discussions (FGDs) and face-to-face interviews with female principals. This approach helped the researcher to have an in-depth understanding of the experiences and challenges facing female principals in their roles as leaders. Also, during the FGDs and interviews, participants were able to identify critical areas of female leadership requiring more assistance and suggested possible strategies for solving the challenges they face daily in their roles as female principals.

The researcher examined the findings in relation to the literature review and theoretical framework established in chapters two and three of this study. It was subsequently evident that the findings were similar to a number of the reports and arguments of previous research in the field of female leadership in secondary schools. However, the study was able to come up with new insights. These involve mainly strategies to improve the leadership of female principals. Consequently, a model was devised by revealing critical support areas that need improvement. According to the narratives, the leadership of female principals would be enhanced if proper safety and security were established within the school environment, alongside extensive capacity building workshops and stakeholders' sensitisation, among other things.

In this final chapter, the researcher reflects on the research process (see Figure 6.1), gives a synoptic overview of the study and presents the findings of the study in terms of the theoretical framework. The researcher also presents literature that supports her findings and interprets the new insights that emerged from the study. In the following sections, the researcher answers the research questions that guided the study. The researcher also presents the conclusions, recommendations and limitations of the research study. In this chapter, under the recommendations, the researcher also

shows the developed model that can be used to improve the leadership of female principals leading rural secondary schools. It must be noted that the development of the model was possible with the help of the findings of this study. In other words, the model developed is an integration of the findings that emerged from this study. Accordingly, the model can indeed be proposed for the enhancement of female principals' leadership in schools, particularly rural school given the context of this study.

6.2 THE RESEARCH PROCESS AT A GLANCE

This research study aimed to understand, for recommendation purposes that could be in the form of a model, how leadership among female principals leading rural secondary schools may be enhanced

Therefore, the research study explored the female principals' experiences of the challenges faced, support from the government and how the challenges can be ameliorated. The experiences of female principals were also deduced from the literature and used as a foundation for the discussion during the FGDs and the face-to-face interviews. Furthermore, the study established probable strategies to enhance the leadership of female principals and provide interventions in addressing the challenges they face on a daily basis. These informed the development of the Comprehensive Multi-stakeholder Leadership Model to improve the leadership of female principals leading rural secondary schools. Figure 6.1 shows the research process at a glance. In the next section, the researcher gives a synoptic overview of this study.

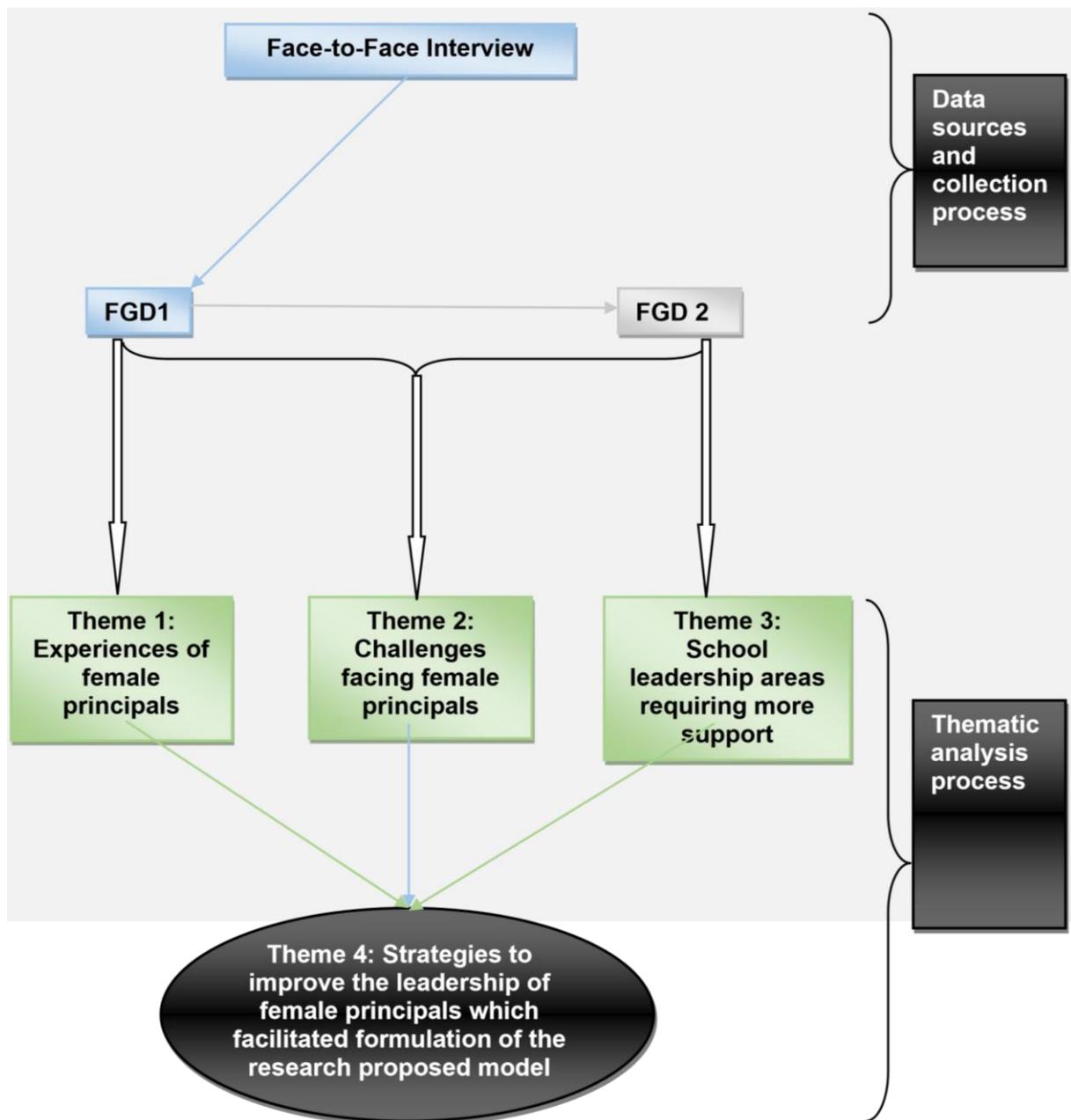


Figure 6.1: A graphical representation of the research process

6.3 SYNOPTIC OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The research focused on ten leading rural secondary schools from five circuits within the Vhembe District as the unit of analysis. The primary participants were female principals as the study focus was on the experiences of female leaders. The study was segmented into six chapters which are summarised as follows:

Chapter one

The researcher concentrated on the background to the research study. She introduced the reader to the problem of, and the rationale for, the study, as well as its purpose in relation to the experiences of female principals in leading rural secondary schools in the Vhembe District of Limpopo province.

Chapter two

The researcher explored the literature review in order to compare the best practices and see what research has to say about the experiences of female principals in secondary schools around the globe.

Chapter three

A number of theories were explored and the theoretical principles of two major theories were selected to underpin the study – transformational leadership and liberal feminism.

Chapter four

The researcher presented the blueprint that was adopted in achieving the research purpose and objectives. The study gathered relevant evidence through face-to-face interviews and FGDs with female principals. To conclude this chapter, the ethical considerations as well as the trustworthiness of the study were set out.

Chapter five

The researcher analysed data drawn from the participants' responses. Themes and subthemes emerged and the researcher subsequently interpreted the data in order to answer the research questions. The four themes illuminated the key elements of the female principals' experiences.

Chapter six

In this chapter, which is the final chapter, the researcher supports her findings with statements from the literature. The research questions are answered and conclusions and recommendations (which also include the proposed Comprehensive Multi-stakeholder Leadership Model) are made. In addition, ideas for further research and the limitations and significance of the study are presented.

In the next section, the researcher discusses the findings of this study in terms of the theoretical framework.

6.4 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In this section the researcher provides summarised answers to the research questions together with a concluding paragraph. Using this approach, the researcher answers the main research question which is “*What leadership model that is based on the experiences of female principals who lead rural secondary schools in the Vhembe District of Limpopo province of South Africa can help enhance or improve female leadership?*” by providing answers to each sub-research question. Therefore, the researcher developed a model that could be used to improve the leadership of female principals leading rural secondary schools. This model is presented in the recommendations section.

Sub-question one:

- What are the experiences of female secondary school principals in Vhembe District?

In this study, the experiences of female secondary school principals covered their relationship experiences with learners, teachers, parents, the community, and the DBE. The female principals’ narratives showed that to a large extent their experiences are not as satisfactory as expected. This suggests that much needs to be done in order to create a conducive working environment which enhances female experiences, particularly for those in leadership positions. The participants narrated the lack of seriousness, poor behaviour and disrespect on the part of most learners. Some of the participants also indicated that their relationships with teachers were not cordial, especially with male teachers, who do not give support or recognise their leadership. Furthermore, the participants explained that many parents belittled them in their capacity as principals.

Some participants indicated that parents do not take them seriously, because of them being born and bred in the same village where they currently serve as principals. In addition, societal stigma, religious beliefs and gender discrimination have clouded the minds of the parents in their attitudes towards them. The hostile relationship which female principals experienced with the learners, teachers and parents, consequently has an adverse effect on them while trying to perform their roles as principals. They indicated that a large proportion of their limited time was spent dealing with learners’ misbehaviour, settling grievances, micro-managing teachers who are unwilling to work

and attending to disrespectful and uncooperative parents. As for the relationship experience with the department, some of the participants received adequate support from the DBE in the form of constant visits to the school to check on how the learners and teachers are faring. The DBE also provided female principals with workshops and seminars, besides connecting them with other relevant third parties such as social workers and the police when needed. While SCH 1/P1 and SCH 2/P2 shared how supportive the DBE had been to them, others for example SCH 7/P7 and SCH 9/P9 were disgruntled with the support they receive from the DBE and they asserted that they learnt to live with and survive through whatever comes their way from the community or the DBE. Some of the complaints of disgruntled participants include the appointment of unskilled educators who are not sufficiently trained, especially novice educators who are fresh from university, as well as the lack of orientation and quarterly assessments by DBE officials.

It would appear that, as revealed in this study, the majority of the principals in this study had poor relationships with their teachers and learners, as well as in some cases with their community when they first assumed the leadership position. Nevertheless, despite the poor relationship experiences, they were able to normalise and smooth out their relationship with the learners, teachers and parents in the later stages of their career. This according to them was mainly through sacrifice, hard work, tenacity, motivation, leading by example, patience, love, kindness, an open-door policy and adherence and a joint decision-making process among many others.

Sub-question two:

- What are the kinds of leadership challenges that female secondary school principals in Vhembe District face from learners, teachers and parents?

During the interviews and FGDs, it was revealed that female principals are experiencing several challenges in regard to their leadership roles. The participants' narratives showed that female principals are faced with learners' indiscipline and unwillingness to learn. The participants complained about the use and abuse of drugs and hard substances among the learners. They believe that the use of drugs and alcohol, or any hard substances, influences the learners to behave irrationally and disrespectfully, making it difficult for them to perform in their leadership roles effectively.

Additionally, parents' absence from their children's lives and a lack of interest and participation in their studies exacerbated the indiscipline and unwillingness to learn on the part of learners. They recounted how close to impossible it was to get hold of parents, simply because most of these parents live in the cities and, as such, learners are left alone in the village to fend for themselves from an early age when they needed parental guidance and support. The female principals went further to express the "heat" they receive from teachers and parents in the form of negative attitudes and disrespect. They warn that colleagues, especially male teachers, disrespect their orders, while learners' parents undermine their ability to lead. The participants added that it can be difficult to convince male teachers to perform their duties because they are at times uncooperative and difficult. Moreover, teachers and parents often threaten and bully the female principals in the belief that female leaders do not have what it takes to challenge them in this respect.

In the main, the female principals blamed the school context and society at large for their unacceptance of female leadership. They articulated how difficult it was for learners, teachers and parents to accept them as their leaders when they were rightfully installed as the school principal. They believed that it was because the majority of the educational stakeholders were used to having a male figure to lead the school in the past. They added that the community found it difficult to accept the reality of a woman leading a secondary school, as the majority of the community leaders believe that men are born to lead while women are meant to support but not actually to take the steering wheel of leadership.

The participants encapsulated this lack of female leadership acceptance as gender discrimination and societal stereotypes. They told of how their colleagues, especially the male teachers, were out to get them and see them fall or fail. Cognisant of these views from the participants, the researcher therefore concludes that learners' indiscipline, disrespect, substance abuse and unwillingness to learn, teachers' negative attitudes and unwillingness to work, threats from male teachers, lack of parental involvement in learners' lives, cultural stigma and gender discrimination are the core challenges faced by the study participants. Such an unsupportive and hostile environment therefore makes it very challenging for them to perform effectively.

Sub-question three:

- What are the areas of school leadership which female secondary school principals see as requiring support as compared to their male counterparts?

During the FGDs and the interviews, the participants stated unanimously that they needed more support in some pertinent areas of school leadership such as the areas of learner discipline and teacher support, as well as departmental support in the area of school safety and security. The sampled female principals expressed how important it is for them to receive recognition from the DBE the same way male principals are recognised. For example, SCH 2/P2 had this to say: *“The other area is I need motivation from the department and community through recognition of my work.”* Sharing similar sentiments during an FGD, SCH4/P4 was also greatly concerned with female principals’ lack of recognition from the DBE. The participant said:

As female principals we are faced with new demands, more complex decisions and additional responsibilities and our day is usually filled with many administrative roles such as procuring resources, managing learner discipline, resolving conflicts with parents and dealing with unexpected teacher and learner crises, but our efforts seem not to be recognised by the DBE officials.

From the narration of SCH4/P4, it can be observed that female principals believe they are just capable of fulfilling tasks like their male counterparts. When asked what they wish the DBE could do in improving experiences of female principals, SCH2/P2 suggested *“well-structured development programmes ... the DBE should be resourceful in arranging professional development programmes for female principals specifically those located in rural areas”*.

The other area of school leadership which female secondary school principals perceived as requiring support was linked to male teachers providing more backing in the area of learners’ discipline, as the participants believed that teamwork is the sure way to success within the school context. The participants were greatly concerned with lack of support from male teachers, specifically in instilling discipline in schools, as some were also displaying bad habits in front of learners. Participants concurred that some male teachers drank alcohol, took drugs and smoked on line of duty, which causes a major challenge for the leadership of female principals.

Lastly, the participants highlighted the significance of having security measures in place on school premises in order to foster feelings of safety and confidence among the learners, teachers and female principals against bullies or imminent threats. It can therefore be stressed that with the provision of security on the school premises, female principals will have more confidence to carry out their core duties and face any direct or indirect intimidating threats from over-aged learners, male colleagues or bullying parents. In addition, the involvement of male teachers in learner discipline will assist in making the female principals' administration a success.

Sub-question four:

- What model may be developed and recommendations made to enhance or improve female principal leadership in secondary schools in rural areas?

The female principals who participated in this study recommended several strategies that can be implemented to address the leadership challenges they face, as well as that can broadly and positively impact on their experiences. These recommended strategies are twofold: firstly, the recommendation involving female principals' leadership enhancement, and secondly, the involvement of other educational stakeholders. With regard to the first issue, the participants recommended extensive capacity building workshops, seminars and conferences, extensive induction processes to prepare female principals before assuming leadership positions, and leadership networking and mentoring programmes. These recommendations are focused on the female principals in order to equip and strengthen them with the needed skills, support and exposure they need to excel in their leadership roles.

On the second issue, the participants indicated that the challenges facing female principals can only be ameliorated when learners, teachers, parents, the department, the community and all other educational stakeholders come together to play a significant part. In light of this, the study participants recommended stakeholder sensitisation which will give the stakeholders a platform for learning about and being oriented to how to support and accept female leadership within the school context and society at large in order to address gender discrimination, religion/cultural and societal stereotype barriers. In addition, the DBE needs to increase its support by making sure physical, moral, financial and technical support is available and sufficient for female principals to excel in their leadership roles. It can therefore be concluded that the

recommendations suggested by the sampled participants should be implemented effectively and promptly in order to address the leadership challenges faced by female secondary school principals in Vhembe District. These recommendations need to be considered in developing the model to improve female leadership which this study sought to develop from the outset of this study.

6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS AND DIRECTION FOR FUTURE STUDIES

The recommendations emanating from this study are based on the information obtained from the empirical data analysis and the emergent themes in chapter five of this thesis. The researcher has classified the discussion of her recommendations under three headings: individual level intervention, stakeholder level intervention, and department/policy level intervention. In implementing these interventions, there is need for multi-stakeholder engagement and collaboration for the leadership of female principals to be improved – propelled by the integrative theoretical framework which used transformational leadership and liberal feminism. This is summarised in the developed model contained in this section. The researcher also emphasises the need for further research on the experiences of female principals in South African secondary schools.

6.5.1 Individual level intervention

The findings of this study clearly indicate that it is important for female principals to be exposed to extensive capacity building workshops, seminars and conferences in order to equip them for the rigours and challenges embedded in their leadership roles. Furthermore, the study suggests that female principals should go through an intensive induction process in order to prepare them for the possible challenges they might encounter upon the assumption of the principal role, and lastly, exposure to a networking and mentoring programme in order to equip and strengthen them with the needed skills and support. In view of these, the researcher therefore highlights the importance of human capacity and personal development for female principals in order for them to excel and perform effectively in their leadership roles.

6.5.2 Stakeholder level intervention

The findings of the study showed that without the joint effort of educational stakeholders, the effort to succeed in their leadership roles as female principals will be futile. The study participants complained of the disrespect, negative attitudes, lack of

cooperation and lack of acceptance they receive from learners, teachers, parents and DBE officials, as well as the gender discrimination and social stigma placed on female leadership by these stakeholders. Learners, parents, community members, and teachers are important stakeholders in the successful leadership of female principals. On this note, the researcher recommends that the stakeholders, including the learners, teachers, parents, community and DBE officials, should be sensitised, oriented and trained on gender equity, as well as best practice and acceptable forms of behaviour towards female leadership. This is particularly important in a society like South Africa where violence against, and the maltreatment of, women are prevalent.

The researcher, therefore, proposes that learners should be trained from a young age to respect each other, especially respect by males for females, who are their playmates. They will then grow up to respect women in the classroom, the school context and society at large. Also, teachers especially male teachers should be reoriented to the importance of cooperating with female leaders, because leaders can only excel with the support of their team members. Moreover, if a leader excels in the school context, it is of immense benefit to the learners, who are the future leaders of society. Hence, teachers should not see a female principal as a threat or competition, but rather as an opportunity to serve and build the nation by producing well-rounded, smart, educated, respectful, and responsible learners.

Furthermore, it is knowing that charity begins at home and the first language a child learns is from the parents. Hence, parents should also be oriented to the importance of accepting female leaders as much as they accept male leaders. Parents should be made to understand that women can equally do what a man can do especially in the area of moulding learners to be the best they can be. Lastly, community leaders are the representatives of the broader community and are respected and influential people in the society and thus should be brought on board. In this regard, alerting and orientating them to support female leaders would be an effective approach to transform the society in which a female principal exists. This approach of stakeholder sensitisation can break the barriers including the lack of acceptance of female leadership, gender discrimination, patriarchy, and cultural and religious stigma and create a better atmosphere and environment for female principals to perform effectively in their leadership roles.

6.5.3 Department/policy level intervention

The findings reveal that the South African government stakeholders are not doing enough in providing support for female leadership. This support includes moral, financial and physical support and probable policy implementation. To this end, the researcher recommends that the DBE should provide adequate and prompt support in the form of sufficient financial provision; visits to the school to encourage, recognise and reward female principals for good performance; provision of security for safety purposes; and the provision of support staff among other things for the administration of rural secondary schools by female principals.

The researcher also recommends policy amendment and intervention, as one of the participants indicated that learners over the age of 18 are the ones predominantly causing trouble and violence in schools. Hence, the DBE should intervene by considering implementing a policy that covers over-aged learners and places them in a special care unit, as they need more attention, especially to meet their psychological needs, because they struggle to fit in with the younger learners in an orthodox school environment and crave attention and/or respect which can lead to violence and/or bullying.

Lastly, female principals can only be adequately trained, equipped and exposed to necessary capacity training programmes, induction processes and networking and mentoring programmes through the intervention of the department. The researcher, therefore, recommends that the DBE should provide adequate training and equip the female principals in order to excel in leadership positions. In addition, the DBE should play an active part in leading the stakeholder sensitisation campaign in support of female leadership acceptance and gender equality.

Having acknowledged the importance of interventions at different levels by various stakeholders, the researcher advocates for the involvement of stakeholders at all levels in interventions aimed at improving the leadership of female principals. Therefore, the researcher proposes a multi-stakeholder collaboration towards the improvement of female principals' leadership experiences. This is explained in the following discussion of the developed model.

6.6 THE MULTI-STAKEHOLDER LEADERSHIP MODEL (CMSLM)

Guided by the aim of the study of developing a model to improve the leadership of female principals leading rural secondary schools in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, this section outlines the proposed CMSLM emerging from the study findings. Before elaborating more on the proposed model, the next section will elaborate on what a model entails and the ensuing process that was followed in developing the model.

6.6.1 Defining a model

A model, as defined by Imenda (2014), is a blueprint for action that describes what happens in practice in a general way. Models typically involve a deliberate simplification of a phenomenon or a specific aspect of a phenomenon. In addition, a model is a system of postulates, data and inferences presented visually in the form of a graph or as a mathematical description that essentially represents an “integrated” way of looking at a particular problem. Models need not be completely accurate representations of reality to have value (Cairney, 2012). Models are closely related to theory and the difference between a theory and a model is not always clear. A theory may be defined as a set of analytical principles or statements designed to structure our observation, understanding and explanation of the world (Nilsen, 2020). Models on the other hand can be described as theories with a more narrowly defined scope of explanation; a model is descriptive, whereas a theory is explanatory as well as descriptive (Madara, Namango & Katana, 2016). A prevalent perception of theory and models is that theory is a broad-conceptual-approach, while models, typically in graphical or mathematical form, are applications of a theory to particular settings.

Several researchers also distinguish between two types of models: (1) those that involve abstract theorising, largely devoid of empirical referents and often used as testbeds for general principles; and (2) those that are applied and attempt to connect theory and data (Nilsen, 2020). The latter was used for the purpose of this study as it guides the process of translating research into practice (i.e., implementation practice) a factor that was considered critical to enhance the experiences of female principals at South African secondary schools.

6.6.2 Development of the CMSLM

Models play an essential role in scientific studies, and are utilised with the purpose of communicating, exploring, learning and representing phenomena or theories (Frigg & Hartmann, 2006). The development of the CMSLM included the following interrelated steps as advanced by Joosten (2020):

- 1. Review of the literature to determine key desired outcomes in practice and research in the field (detailed in chapters two and three).
- 2. Identify and engage researchers and practitioners in the field to identify pertinent research questions and variables of interest for enhancing an understanding of the desired outcomes.
- 3. Identify any gaps and future areas of research needed.
- 4. Create research designs, including formulating measures and instrumentation to conduct research within the framework of inquiry.
- 5. Develop a research model for use by researchers and practitioners across the country.

Frigg and Hartmann (2006) have outlined two functions of communication that the CMSLM respects. Firstly, it has an organising function: it draws together the themes from both study findings and the literature and associates disconnected data by identifying patterns or similarities that may previously have been unnoticed. Secondly, it has a heuristic function: it supports the exploration and discovery of new ideas and directions which can be applied in practice. Cognisant of this, to implement the model in practice, it is represented as an action model (Nilsen, 2020); one which facilitates the implementation by offering practical guidance in the planning and execution of implementation endeavours and/or implementation strategies. Relating to this study, the CMSLM is postulated to offer practical guidelines on the process of facilitating implementation of a conducive workplace environment in South African schools, which fosters gender equity in leadership positions, hence enhancing female principals' experiences.

Action models have been described as active by Graham et al. (2009) because they are used "to guide or cause change". Consistent with this notion, the CMSLM as mentioned earlier is poised to cause an imperative change aimed at narrowing traditional gender bias practices against females, which may have a negative ripple

effect in South African workplaces. Action models, as averred by Nilsen (2020), elucidate important aspects that need to be considered in implementation practice and usually prescribe components that should be followed in the process of translating research into practice. The CMSLM is conceived as having two basic components. The first component is a continuum of leadership challenges that are experienced by female principals. This enables us to robustly identify the nature of gaps in female leadership that need to be addressed. The second component encompasses the action (i.e., mitigatory measures) aimed at responding to the unfavourable gender biased practices female principals are subject to. These mitigatory measures (referred as facilitative elements in the model) require multistakeholder collaboration efforts in order to enhance gender equality and improved leadership experiences. In ensuring that the CMSLM conforms with expected outcome of an Action model, a holistic approach to model development was applied by factoring in all the major experiences, challenges and recommendations proposed by participants which emerged from the study.

6.6.2.1 Model component 1: Continuum of leadership challenges

The CMSLM postulates that there are critical challenges in the experiences of female principals in South African secondary schools which require urgent intervention in order to promote gender equity. The root cause of these challenges as portrayed in the study can be linked to traditional societal patriarchal norms and beliefs. For instance, Carnie (2019) espouses that many African cultures limit women's participation in leadership in a patriarchal system where decision-making authority rests on the shoulders of men. As such, in African society, culture has given more recognition to men at the expense of women. Ntaka (2013) stresses that the experiences of women in urban areas seem to be better when it comes to patriarchal oppression in comparison to women in rural areas, which is the current focus of the study. The prevailing traditional patriarchal norms and beliefs dominant in South African rural communities have certain negative effects on various stakeholders' perceptions of female principalship. These stakeholders include, for instance, learners, teachers, parents, community members, the DBE, NGOs and the government. Therefore, those negative perceptions can lead to female principals, as outlined in the CMSLM (see Figure 6.2), experiencing the following challenges: gender discrimination; lack of acceptance by colleagues and society; lack of cooperation from

teachers, particularly male teachers; opposition from some DBE officials; and at worst resistance from learners.

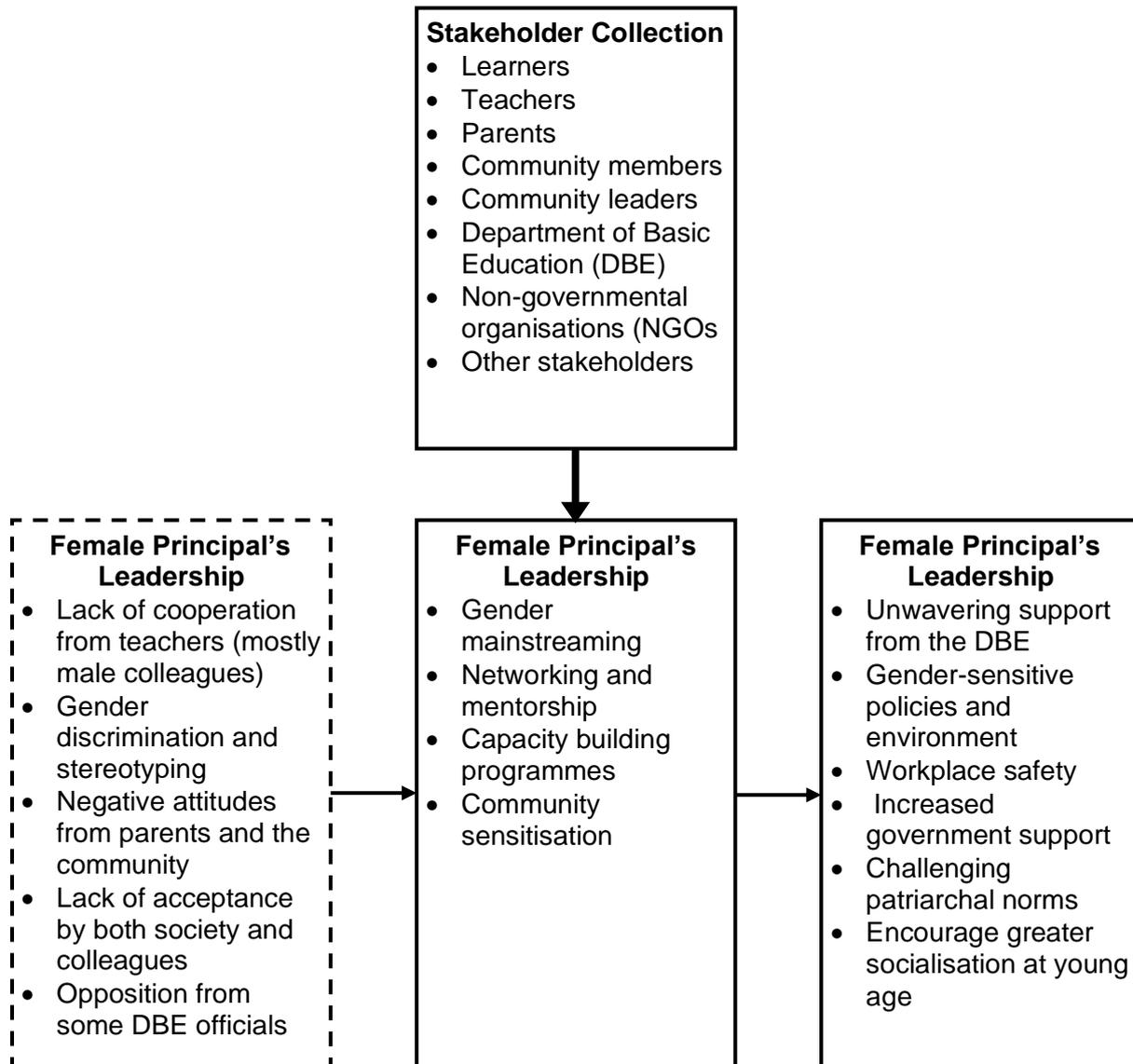


Figure 6.2: Comprehensive Multi-Stakeholder Leadership Model (CMSLM)

NOTE: The dotted lines represent gaps in female leadership that need to be addressed

Source: Author

To make the experiences of female principals more favourable there is need to narrow the challenge gap. To achieve this, the CMSLM proposes a number of mitigatory measures that are enhanced through the collaboration of different stakeholders in fighting the root cause of gender inequalities in South African secondary schools. The subsequent section elaborates more on the second component of the CMSLM.

6.6.2.2 Model component 2: Mitigatory measures

To lessen the unequal gender experiences and the negative experiences faced by female principals, the CMSLM postulates certain mitigatory measures through facilitative elements which are induced by higher collaborative efforts of stakeholders. These should play a mediating role in the relationship between gender equality perceptions and experiences faced by female principals. The former US first lady, Hillary Clinton, once quoted the African proverb “it takes a community to raise a child” or “to build the nation” (Gcelu, 2019:2). This would appear to continue to be relevant today. Working together as a team can lead to better results than working as individuals. This is in line with Yaffee’s (2000) view that when stakeholders engage in collaborative work, they learn from each other and are more likely to foster action and promote change. Furthermore, Mchunu (2010) emphasises that the management of change in the new South African education dispensation will never become functional and effective without the active involvement of all the relevant stakeholders. Consistent with this notion, with the prevailing challenges being faced by female principals, a greater coordinated effort by stakeholders (see Figure 6.3) by instituting proper facilitative elements to eradicate challenges faced by female principals will foster greater gender equality and favourable experiences among female principals, while the opposite is also true. These facilitative elements which are supported by the interplay between transformational leadership and liberal feminism theories, as depicted in the CMSLM, include unwavering support from the DBE; gender-sensitive policies and environment; networking and mentorship; capacity building programmes; community sensitisation; enhancing workplace safety; increased government support; challenging societal patriarchy norms; and encouraging greater socialisation at a young age. These facilitative elements are explained in detail below:

Unwavering support from the Department of Basic Education. The DBE as an influential stakeholder has a pivotal role in working towards increasing the number of women in leadership positions and as such it should give preference to women during recruitment. Furthermore, policies in the DBE should be formulated to prioritise gender issues. It is disturbing that, at an administrative level, only two provinces have female heads of department (North West and Limpopo). Furthermore, there has not been a female director-general at the DBE since 1994 (Tyatya, 2020). The number of female education MECs is also very low (Western Cape, North West and Limpopo), but what

is commendable is that the current minister and deputy minister of basic education are women.

Gender-sensitive policies and environment. The CMSLM advances that it is crucial for collaborative efforts by stakeholders to ensure that they create an environment that upholds gender-sensitive policies at South African secondary schools. For instance, it is crucial for schools to adopt and uphold the Employment Equity Act of 1998 and the National Gender Policy Framework which spells out the need to include women in sectors where they have been previously excluded, particularly relating to leadership positions. Some of the other significant domestic policies that schools need to consider in order to foster a gender-sensitive environment include the Framework for Transforming Gender Relations in South Africa and South Africa's National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality. Besides depending on the national policies, schools are also encouraged to craft their own gender policies tailor-made for their specific environments.

Networking, mentorship and capacity building programmes. According to Villani (2005), female principals who feel adequately supported exhibit the behaviours of effective principals (i.e., they remain at their principalships and encourage others into administration). Thus, the CMSLM proposes that, in order to promote positive experiences and retain female principals, professional development in the form of networking, mentorship and capacity building programmes from relevant stakeholders is required. The main objective of these programmes is to have empowered and confident women leaders who effectively manage their areas of responsibility, as well as the availability of prospective women principals who are ready to take up leadership and management roles.

Increased government support. It is very important for the government to support females in leadership positions across South African secondary schools. Hence, the government needs to particularly emphasise gender equality. For instance, in its annual budget announcement, the government should prioritise measures to improve access to capacity development and training programmes in order to increase the participation of women in leadership positions. It is also important for the government to establish a variety of support networks for women principals aimed at promoting the development of women who are in school leadership roles across the country. Such networks will provide a platform for women principals to engage with each other and

explore the working environment, challenges, their roles and how to sustain leadership initiatives in the education sector.

Challenging societal patriarchy norms. The key barrier to women taking over and retaining leadership in education remains the entrenched system of patriarchy (Dlamini & Adams, 2014). Women often have to take up leadership roles in male-dominated settings and, like all of us who enter unfamiliar and uncomfortable environments, females have to conform to the prevailing cultures in order to succeed. Patriarchy, by its very nature, undermines women and their methods of leadership, which are characteristically service-oriented, nurturing, caring, supportive and inclusive by nature. As such the CMSLM advances that its high time that collaborative efforts from all stakeholders are implemented for the successful challenging of societal patriarchy norms.

Enhancing workplace safety. According to Wanakacha, Aloka and Nyaswa (2018), an effective public secondary school is one with a safe and positive learning environment, where both teachers and students are able to achieve their personal goals and develop the skills to make contributions to society in the future, irrespective of their gender. The CMSLM proposes that conducive environments are required that take into consideration the need for cultural change, including tackling gender stereotypes that hold that women are not capable of leading secondary schools. Such an environment would also take into consideration that females are the lifeblood of any society, and therefore suitable safe working conditions and community support are important for females to retain their leadership positions.

Figure 6.3 illustrates the credence of the CMSLM in promoting gender equity and favourable experiences for female principles by visually plotting the effects of both low and high multi-stakeholder intervention through various facilitative elements, as discussed above.

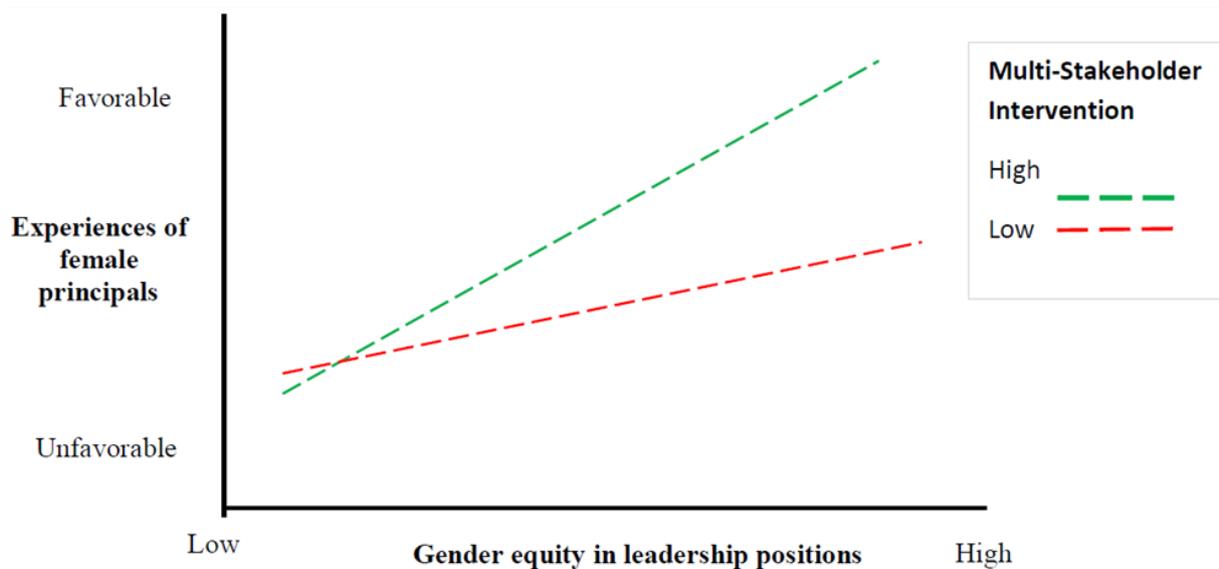


Figure 6.3: Multi-stakeholder intervention effect on experiences of female principals
Source: Author

As shown in Figure 6.3, collaborative intervention by different stakeholders in secondary school leadership is likely to improve gender equality, which will ultimately lead to favourable experiences for females in leadership positions. On the other hand, lower stakeholder intervention, as depicted by the red plot, is likely to have a lesser impact on improving gender equality and providing favourable experiences for female school principals. In summary, this study highly recommends the adoption of the CMSLM by both scholars and practitioners in exterminating patriarchy and gender sensitivities in the South African education system, which affects the effective leadership of female principals. Despite the study being conducted specifically in a rural setup, the CMSLM can also be extended to urban schools as it offers greater insights into promoting gender equality specifically at the leadership level in schools.

6.6.3 Future research direction

Future researchers could select more than one province and could consider selecting participants from other provinces within the country. In addition, this study was conducted as a case study of selected schools within the Vhembe District. However, a comparative study could be conducted to find similarities and differences in the experiences of female principals across the country or even across countries. Research could be conducted on the leadership experiences of females who have been appointed as department heads and deputy principals to ascertain whether they have similar or differing experiences to the female principals. Lastly, the researcher

proposes that other researchers could further improve and test the proposed model and use it in their empirical studies.

6.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study adopted a case study design and focused on a sample of ten female principals of secondary schools in the Vhembe District. In addition, the study focused only on secondary school female principals and excluded primary school female principals and other male secondary school principals who may also have different or similar experiences compared to the participants in this study. Lastly, owing to financial and time constraints, the researcher was only able to focus on one district out of the seven districts in Limpopo province, which led to the use of fewer study participants. The fact that the researcher used just a few study participants does have a negative impact on the study, although the literature reviewed states that qualitative research can have a minimum of five interview participants. With this being said, it is not possible to generalise the findings of the study to all secondary school principals in Limpopo or in other provinces in the country, or to other countries, as they may have different experiences with different circumstances. The issue of generalisation raised does not in any way impact negatively on the findings of the study because the study was not intended to generalise.

In view of the fact that this research was a qualitative research study, the researcher was the instrument by which the study was conducted. As the researcher is a female principal of a secondary school in the Vhembe District, it is possible that her experiences might have influenced both the interview process and the interpretation of the data. This assertion is in line with the statement by Fuller (2016) that the findings of a study may be influenced by the personal thoughts and views of the investigator and that this may lead to bias. The researcher, however, mitigated this personal bias by not including the school that the researcher heads in the study. Nevertheless, the researcher believes that the above-mentioned limitations have not adversely affected the quality of the outcomes of the study, given the level of the validity and reliability of the research instruments used and the research processes adopted in the study.

6.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Firstly, the researcher's journey through this doctoral degree programme and the rigorous research is not an end in itself but a means to an end (Wisker, 2008 cited in

Potokri, 2011). In this section, the researcher illustrates the importance and benefits that can be derived from my study.

The study has afforded me the opportunity to learn and has exposed me to a wider personal development capacity emotionally and intellectually. Significantly, being a female principal and interacting with other female principals during the data collection process (interviews and FGDs) gave me a platform to learn from them and strengthened me emotionally, convincing the researcher she was not alone in this journey of change and enhancement in female leadership. It has also equipped me with the necessary transferable skills to further the research capacity in the area of female leadership in my country South Africa, and the reality of change within my society. In short, the researcher is now better equipped as an agent of transformation and female leadership enhancement.

It is important to note that the findings of this research will be of benefit to the DBE through the recommendations and the model to improve the leadership of female principals. This could be implemented to enhance the leadership of female principals throughout the country, particularly in rural settings. Also, teachers should benefit from the study because if the strategies to improve the leadership of female principals in secondary schools are implemented as the study suggests, it would assist them to be better managers who are understanding, supportive and more productive. In addition, the findings of the study may also motivate, inspire and propel female educators in schools to consider leadership positions as they progress in their careers and reduce the underrepresentation of females in leadership positions across the country.

Lastly, it is believed that the findings of this study will contribute to the body of knowledge, as it identified peculiar challenges female principals face in a rural setting and probable solutions to enhance their leadership in such settings. Also, the findings and recommendations of this study identified gaps in the existing literature, which led to recommending pertinent areas of research for future studies. Furthermore, the study makes an enormous contribution to the body of knowledge by proposing the CMSLM which can be used in the improvement the leadership of female principals.

6.9 CONCLUSION

This study focused on the experiences and enhancement of female secondary school principals in the Vhembe District of South Africa. Therefore, the study contributes to

the literature in female leadership enhancement and serves as a guide to the experiences and challenges of female principals in rural settings. Four themes which critically discussed the experiences and challenges of female principals, leadership areas in which female principals require more support, and strategies to enhance the leadership of female principals in rural settings emerged from the study.

The study revealed that the experiences of female principals were largely negative as they faced a lack of cooperation, resistance, limited support and lack of acceptance from the learners, parents, community, teachers and DBE officials as a result of gender discrimination and societal stereotypes. This impeded the female principals' ability to perform their duties effectively. Despite this, female principals were indicated by the study as selfless, inspirational and serve as role models in seeing the transformation and change they desire in their schools, which is a sure way of overcoming the leadership challenges they face. Given these challenges, the study proposed a multistakeholder approach to help in the improvement of the female principals' leadership through the development of a CMSLM, which underscores the supreme importance of involving the various stakeholders and collaborating with them to improve the leadership of female principals leading rural secondary schools.

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Appendix A: Letter of informed consent

P.O. BOX 239

NZHELELE

0993

11 February 2019

TO: PARTICIPANTS

LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

I am Livhalani Bridget Sinyosi, a PhD Student at the University of South Africa. I am undertaking a study titled: **Experiences of female principals in leading rural secondary schools in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province.**

The aim of this study is to use the experiences of female principals in rural schools to develop and propose a model that can be used to enhance or improve the leadership of female principals who are leading rural secondary schools in the Vhembe District of Limpopo Province, South Africa.

The researcher require your participation in my study as participant to the research questions. Please note that your participation in this study is voluntarily and that it will not cause any harm. The interview will last approximately one hour. Whatever information you provide will remain strictly confidential between you and the researcher. the researcher pledge that the researcher shall ensure anonymity where required and as agreed between us through the use of code names.

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time of your choice without any negative or undesirable consequences to you. Transcript of interviews will be made available to you for comment before it is used.

Attached is a consent form. Should you be willing to participate in this study, please read and sign the consent form

Do not hesitate to contact me if you have any question (s) or concerns.

Contact details

Cell:072 270 8587

Email: sinyosiliba@gmail.com

Looking forward to work with you

Yours faithfully

Sinyosi L.B

Date

Researcher

CONSENT FORM

I hereby agree to participate in this research project on the **Experiences of female principals in leading rural secondary schools in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province** the researcher understand that the researcher can withdraw at any time from the research as a participant. the researcher have received the contact details of the researcher should the researcher need to speak about any issues which may arise from the research/study. the researcher understand that my response will be anonymous and will remain entirely confidential.

.....

Participant Sign

.....

Date

.....

Respondent / Participant sign

Appendix B: Limpopo Department of Education ethical clearance



LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

VHEMBE EAST DISTRICT
CONFIDENTIAL



REF : 12/1/10/8 ENQ: MATIBE M.S CONTACT NO : 082 300 4774

SINYOSI LIVHALANI BRIDGET
P.O.BOX 248
NZHELELE
0993

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH IN THE DISTRICT

1. This serves to inform you that permission has been granted for you to conduct research in the district for your PHD thesis.
2. It is expected that your interactions with principals will not disrupt teaching and learning activities.
3. We appreciate your commitment to allow voluntary participation of your research subjects.
4. Kindly inform the circuit managers and principals of selected school prior to commencing your studies.
5. Best wishes in your intellectual endeavours.



DISTRICT DIRECTOR

12/02/2019

DATE

Tohoyandou Government Building, Old Parliament, Block D, Private Bag X2250, SIBASA, 0970
Tel: (015) 962 1313 or (015) 962 1331. Fax: (015) 962 6039 or (015) 962 2288

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH IN THE DISTRICT: SINYOSI LIVHALANI BRIDGET

The heartland of southern Africa - development is about people

Appendix C: Interviews schedule

FACE-TO-FACE

Experience of female principals in the leading rural secondary schools in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province

1. Briefly describe your relationship experience with learners, teachers and parents?
2. Briefly describe your relationship experience with learners, teachers and parents?
3. What do you do to normalise your relationship with learners, teachers and parents?
4. What do you think influences the attitudes and behaviour of learners, teachers and parents towards you as a female Principal?
5. How does the relationship you have with learners, teachers and parents impact on your work as a principal?
6. How do you perceive the support you get from department of education?
7. What are the areas of school leadership in which you see as requiring support as compared to the male counterparts?
8. What recommendations do you think can be made to address the challenges faced by female secondary school principals in Vhembe District?

Appendix D: Focus group interview questions

1. How would you describe (the good experience and bad experience and how the bad experience was handled) your experiences with your learners, teachers, parent and any other stakeholders?
2. Describe the major challenges you faced while dealing with your learners, teachers, parent and any other stakeholder?
3. What area of school leadership does female principal need more support than the male principals?
4. What solution do you think we could adopt to address the challenges facing female secondary school principals in Vhembe District?

Appendix C: UNISA ethical clearance



UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2019/05/15

Ref: **2019/05/15/30442974/22/MC**

Name: Mrs LB Sinyosi

Student: 30442974

Dear Mrs Sinyosi

Decision: Ethics Approval from
2019/05/15 to 2024/05/15

Researcher(s): Name: Mrs LB Sinyosi
E-mail address: sinyosiliba@gmail.com
Telephone: +27 72 270 8587

Supervisor(s): Name: Dr OC Potokri
E-mail address: cnuvie@gmail.com
Telephone: +27 84 267 1740

Title of research:

Experiences of female principals in leading rural secondary schools in Vhembe District of Limpopo Province

Qualification: PhD in Educational Leadership and Management

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2019/05/15 to 2024/05/15.

*The **medium risk** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2019/05/15 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.*

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.



University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing.
5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date **2024/05/17**. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

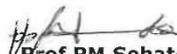
Note:

*The reference number **2019/05/15/30442974/22/MC** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Kind regards,



Prof AT Motlhabane
CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC
 motlhat@unisa.ac.za



Prof PM Sebate
ACTING EXECUTIVE DEAN
 Sebatpm@unisa.ac.za



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Appendix F: Proof of registration

fox

about:blank



1135

SINYOSI L B MRS
P O BOX 248
NZHELELE
0993

STUDENT NUMBER : 3044-297-4

ENQUIRIES TEL : 0861670411
FAX : (012)429-4150
eMAIL : mando@unisa.ac.za

2020-06-19

Dear Student

I hereby confirm that you have been registered for the current academic year as follows:

Proposed Qualification: — PHD (EDUCATION) (90019)

CODE	PAPER	S NAME OF STUDY UNIT	NQF crdts	LANG.	PROVISIONAL EXAMINATION	
					EXAM. DATE	CENTRE(PLACE)
Study units registered without formal exams:						
@ TFEDM01		DED - Education (Education Management)	**	E		
TFPEM01		PhD - Education (Education Management)	**	E		
@ Exam transferred from previous academic year						

You are referred to the "MyRegistration" brochure regarding fees that are forfeited on cancellation of any study units.

To avoid cancellation of your registration or examination entry and forfeiting your minimum initial payment, you must submit the following to the Registrar (Academic) by return of mail:
285 Curriculum Vitae

Your attention is drawn to University rules and regulations (www.unisa.ac.za/register).

Please note the new requirements for reregistration and the number of credits per year which state that students registered for the first time from 2013, must complete 36 NQF credits in the first year of study, and thereafter must complete 48 NQF credits per year.

Students registered for the MBA, MBL and DBL degrees must visit the SBL's E50nline for study material and other important information.

Readmission rules for Honours: Note that in terms of the Unisa Admission Policy academic activity must be demonstrated to the satisfaction of the University during each year of study. If you fail to meet this requirement in the first year of study, you will be admitted to another year of study. After a second year of not demonstrating academic activity to the satisfaction of the University, you will not be re-admitted, except with the express approval of the Executive Dean of the College in which you are registered. Note too, that this study programme must be completed within three years. Non-compliance will result in your academic exclusion, and you will therefore not be allowed to re-register for a qualification at the same level on the National Qualifications Framework in the same College for a period of five years after such exclusion, after which you will have to re-apply for admission to any such qualification.

Readmission rules for M&D: Note that in terms of the Unisa Admission Policy, a candidate must complete a Master's qualification within three years. Under exceptional circumstances and on recommendation of the Executive Dean, a candidate may be allowed an extra (fourth) year to complete the qualification. For a Doctoral degree, a candidate must complete the study programme within six years. Under exceptional circumstances, and on recommendation by the Executive Dean, a candidate may be allowed an extra (seventh) year to complete the qualification.

BALANCE ON STUDY ACCOUNT: 0.00

Yours faithfully,

Prof AP Phillips
Acting Registrar

0108 0 00 0



University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane

2020/11/16, 11:44

Appendix G: Proof of editing

Alexa Barnby

Language Specialist

Editing, copywriting, indexing, formatting, translation

BA Hons Translation Studies; APed (SATI) Accredited Professional Text Editor, SATI
Mobile: 071 872 1334
Tel: 012 361 6347

alexabarnby@gmail.com

26 April 2021

To whom it may concern

This is to certify that I, Alexa Kirsten Barnby, an English editor accredited by the South African Translators' Institute, have edited the doctoral thesis titled "Leadership enhancement amongst female principals of secondary schools in Vhembe District of South Africa" by Livhalani Bridget Sinyosi.

The onus is on the author, however, to make the changes and address the comments made.

