

**THE EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN ACADEMIC LEADERS ON WORKING AND LEADING
TEAMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS DURING A PANDEMIC**

by

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I declare that the above dissertation is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.



SIGNATURE

09 November 2023

DATE

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I am grateful to my Lord, Jesus Christ, and Holy Spirit for helping me see this to completion.

Professionally

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ABSTRACT

The overall aim of this study was to uncover the experiences of women academic leaders in Higher Education Institutions on leading teams and working remotely, while dealing with family related responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study is grounded on feminist research theory, following a qualitative research methodology and a phenomenological research design. Data was collected by means of written narratives and in-depth interviews, with the aim of illuminating women academic leaders' experiences and challenges. A purposeful sample of 8 participants, made up of South African women who were in academic leadership positions in Higher Education Institutions during the COVID-19 pandemic, provided a rich narrative on the experience women on their professional roles and other responsibilities during a pandemic. The data was analysed following thematic data analysis steps.

The findings of the study reveal profound resilience and multifaced realms of challenges that women face daily. With great reference to the literature review and theoretical framework, the findings of the research indicated that women in general face multiple challenges personally and professionally, the pandemic seemed to have magnified these challenges. Despite the challenges and hardship experienced in their personal and professional lives, women academic leaders show resilience, drawing their strength from their institutions, families, and adaptive coping strategies.

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges of women leaders and those who aspire to be in leadership positions and advocates for a more inclusive and supportive society for women and girl children. This research highlights the critical need for tailored support strategies and interventions to address the unique needs and hardships that women face daily, by amplifying the voices of women in academic leadership positions and shedding the light on their experiences.

Keywords: Academic leadership, Women leaders, Higher Education Institutions, Feminist theory, pandemic, COVID-19, remote work, work from home, teams

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

COVID-19 – Coronavirus 2019

HEI – Higher Education Institution

HEIs – Higher Education Institutions

TFL – Transformational leadership

WHO – World Health Organization

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction and background

This study concerns the experience of women academic leaders in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) on leading and working remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2019 the coronavirus or COVID-19 pandemic broke out in Wuhan city, China, affecting millions of people all over the world (Malik and Naeem, 2020:1). On the 11th of March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared the coronavirus a pandemic (Parry and Gordon, 2020:796; Talu and Nazarov, 2020:486).

According to Malik and Naeem (2020:2), the pandemic interrupted the normal way of living in all aspects imaginable. The outbreak resulted in countries all over the world imposing hard lockdowns, requesting citizens to isolate and social distance (Mackett, 2020:70; Malik and Naeem, 2020:3). On the 26th of March 2020 the President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, announced the very first lockdown, with the hope that it would help contain the spread of the coronavirus (Maula, 2021:18). The announcement of the lockdown brought about a halt in most economic activities in the country, putting even more pressure on the education and the health sectors, among other sectors (Mackett, 2020:72; Talu and Nazarov, 2020:486). Academic leaders had to respond by immediately moving teaching and learning activities online without any form of training or preparation for both staff and students (Fernandez and Shaw, 2020:39).

Maula (2021:3) states that while everyone was negatively affected by the pandemic and the lockdown restrictions, women have had to face the hardest blow compared to all other people around the world (Malik and Naeem, 2020:3). According to Parry and Gordon (2020:799) during times of crisis and pandemics women are most likely to be affected and infected as primary caregivers and family leaders (Maula, 2021:7). According to Bhatti and Ali (2021:3), to this day, women are still bearers of multiple roles, and they generally face many obstacles and challenges in life and in the workplace, including but not limited to discrimination, unequal payment and different treatment and this is the case in most countries (Zheng, 2018:228). Parry and Gordon (2020:797) further state that although both men and women get the same amount of work time, women still spend most of their time and energy caring for their families and households in addition to their corporate responsibilities (Zheng, 2018:227).

Chanmugam (2021:650) confirms that she had a number of challenges in her role as a woman academic leader, but the pandemic made most things worse for her, professionally and personally. Similar to many other women in her field, she was never sure of what was expected of her as a family member, a primary caregiver and as a woman academic leader; the unknown had taken a toll on her everyday routine and mental health (Chanmugam 2021:648).

With the pandemic, academic leaders were expected to move their academic activities and leadership roles remotely; to work and lead their teams remotely (Fernandez and Shaw, 2020:40). Considering the preceding, the proposed study intends to explore and bring about a clearer and a better understanding of the experiences of women academic leaders who had to lead teams and work remotely in Higher Education Institutions during the pandemic. Therefore, the study intends to answer the following research question: What are the experiences of women academic leaders in higher education institutions on leading and working in a pandemic? This question will be investigated against the background of the transformative theory, feminism. Feminism as a research theory focuses on seeing the world through a feminist lens, doing away with binary thinking, increasing the awareness of women's issues, and including women's voices in discussions that were and are usually led and controlled by men (Higgs and Smith, 2012:40; Johnson and Christensen 2020:227).

This introduction will be followed by the rationale, the problem statement with the research questions and objectives of the proposed study. A brief outline of the research methodology will be followed by the possible limitations of this research. I will define research concepts and outline the proposed research study chapters, giving a description of what each chapter will entail.

1.2 Rationale for the study

I have always had a desire to lead in the academic space, from my undergraduate teaching qualification to date I have worked hard to see that dream come to pass. Over the years, I got married and have been planning to start a family of my own as soon as I reach my ultimate goal of being an academic leader. When COVID-19 hit, I was working as a Curriculum Designer and Developer, my team and I had to move abruptly to working and meeting remotely, a concept we had never thought possible before COVID-19. Even though we were not familiar or prepared to work under these

circumstances, we soon realised that we were still expected to function and complete our roles as before. This did not excuse most of all the other responsibilities that awaited us at home as parents, spouses and primary care givers. In addition, some of us had to help our families transition to learning and working from home (Zheng, 2018:231).

The first few months I coped well enough thinking it would end soon, and when I read the news and listened to the University updates on the increasing case numbers on a daily basis, I slowly lost hope of us ever going back to how things were prior to the pandemic or the then normal way of working. I then noticed that I was not as productive working from home as I was in the office, I did not know when to knock off or when to take my lunch hour. My working space was right next to where I had to prepare the next meal for the family, and I was constantly called in to check on the increased rate of homework activities. At one point, I had to take care of a loved one who had COVID-19 symptoms. I wondered if I should still take Family Responsibility Leave while I was literally working in the same space where I had to carry out “family responsibilities”. Time made the process much easier and more manageable, even though we had to come up with new ways of living and working.

In June 2021, I decided that I needed to pick myself up, remind myself about my goals and live my life as intended, pandemic or not. To get back on my feet, I worked on my mini dissertation and worked towards submitting by the end of October as I had initially planned in 2019. I was no longer happy at my then job and successfully applied for a role as the Head of Academics at an Independent higher education institution. I was called in for a video interview, something I had never done before, fortunately I was hired for the position, and I started on the first of October 2021. The initial task I had on my first day was to design a work from home schedule for my team, people I did not know. It is an understatement to say I found it difficult to start off my position on a high note with a team I had not met in person. Within a few weeks in the job, I noticed how the team found it difficult to relate to me or my position. I believed it was because they did not know me, as was the case with me not knowing them. This led to me working more hours, trying to get to know my team, while still being expected to continue with my other duties and my family responsibilities at home. I would not say it was easy being a part of a team working from home when the lockdown was first introduced, but being a leader meant I did not have to just complete my own tasks and

take care of my family, I also had the added responsibility of caring for my team and ensuring that they were well enough to be productive. This made me wonder how other women academic leaders or women in any other leadership positions were coping with working and leading remote teams. I started having conversations and listening closely, when we were in meetings, to women in the same position as mine. These conversations turned out to reveal some of the difficulties that women had to deal with as primary caregivers in their homes and working/leading remotely. And this made me wonder how they were experiencing the pandemic as both family leaders or members and academic leaders.

In their research, Talu and Nazorov (2020: 485) evaluate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the challenges for leaders and in leadership, finding that while leaders had the responsibility of keeping their institutions afloat, they also had to make sure that their families and team members were able to transition to the new way of living (Talu and Nazorov, 2020:485). Malik and Naeem (2020:3) highlight some of the studies conducted in Pakistan regarding the impact of the pandemic on women in general, and the outcomes indicate the extent to which women were mainly affected by the pandemic as opposed to men (Parry and Gordon, 2020:789). Mensah (2020:1) conducted a research study on the general experience of female leaders in Higher Education Institutions, finding that while there are attempts to represent women in leadership positions, women are still discriminated against. Moreover, Parry and Gordon (2020:795) indicated that research and reports of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic showed a greater impact on women compared to men. There is generally an extensive amount of research on women leaders and women in leadership (Bhatti and Ali, 2021:3), with the pandemic though, increasing research studies are emerging on the effects of the pandemic on women and the academic space. However, there is still not enough research covering the aspect of women academic leaders and the challenges they face in their professional and personal lives, pandemic or not (Bhatti and Ali, 2021:6). Without adequate understanding of the experiences of women academic leaders in Higher Education Institutions, supporting them and other stakeholders in the space may be challenging. Therefore, allowing women academic leaders to share their experiences on how they manoeuvre multiple roles at home while leading teams in a pandemic can be helpful to finding out how they can be supported and inspire those who aspire to be leaders. The results of this research can

shed light on what Higher Education Institutions can do to support women academic leaders in their roles and functions.

The following section outlines the problem statement, the research questions and the objectives that the research intends to fulfil.

1.3 Problem statement

The concept of women in leadership positions is still a sensitive topic in most countries and women leaders are still underrepresented in most sectors, including Higher Education Institutions (Qadir, 2019;1275). Despite the roles slowly opening up for women over the years, women still have a lot to deal with outside their corporate roles that their equals do not have to deal with on a daily basis (Parry and Gordon, 2020: 797). This was exacerbated by the pandemic that ravaged nations globally.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a huge change in the way we live and do things, and we may never even go back to how things used to be (Fernandez and Shaw, 2020:39). Women, particularly those in positions of leadership, were severely affected by the pandemic compared to their male counterparts. In addition to being expected to do their daily work tasks (Malik and Naeem, 2020:3), they had teams working remotely that they were still leading and for whom they were somewhat responsible. Subsequently putting more pressure on them as they grappled with fiduciary duties and other responsibilities at home.

Despite the excessive amount of research on the general challenges or women personally and professionally in South Africa, there remains a gap in understanding their lived experiences, coping strategies and tailored support in navigating roles and positions in institutions that were previously male dominated. Existing research clearly outlines the general challenges that women face on a daily basis, understandable overlooking what these challenges translate to in a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, there is a pressing need for qualitative research that amplifies women's voices and delves into their lived experiences and sheds a light on their journey, the challenges they face, their resilience and coping strategies. Ultimately allowing them the opportunity to be at the forefront of the development of tailored and effective support strategies for women and girl children.

Therefore, this study seeks to uncover the experiences of women academic leaders in Higher Education Institutions on working and leading their teams while dealing with family related responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

1.3.1 Research questions

To understand how women academic leaders experienced working and leading their teams remotely during a pandemic, the following primary and secondary research questions will be asked.

Primary research question:

What are the experiences of women academic leaders in Higher Education Institutions on working and leading teams during a pandemic?

Secondary research questions:

- How has the pandemic affected women academic leaders' roles and functions in Higher Education Institutions?
- How do women academic leaders manage their fiduciary duties and other responsibilities?
- What are the challenges that women academic leaders experience when working and leading teams remotely?
- How can women academic leaders be supported during the COVID-19 pandemic?

1.3.2 Aims of the research

The overall aim of the intended study is to uncover the experiences of women academic leaders in Higher Education Institutions on leading teams and working remotely while dealing with family related responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research objectives:

- To assess the influence of the pandemic on the work roles and functions of women academic leaders in Higher Education Institutions,

- To determine the extent to which women manage and lead multiple responsibilities outside their academic leadership roles,
- To uncover the challenges that women academic leaders experience when leading remote teams and working remotely, and
- To identify support strategies for women academic leaders to work and lead teams during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The following section gives brief details of the research methodology guiding this study.

1.4 Research methodology

A research paradigm serves as an umbrella for different types of philosophical assumptions that frame the overall approach of the research (Mertens, 2018:35). From the theoretical framework, feminism, we have gathered that a theoretical approach such as feminism is associated with a critical paradigm such as the transformative paradigm (Tracy, 2020:55). The proposed research will be founded on the transformational paradigmatic position, which responds to the needs, ambitions, and everyday realities of individuals who are marginalised in society as well as to more general concerns about fairness and human rights that speak to opening up channels for transformative changes (Mertens, in Flick, 2018:35). According to Hesse-Biber (2018:548) and Mertens (2018:36) the transformative paradigm and the feminist standpoint in research are mainly associated and compatible with the qualitative research approach.

Qualitative research is designed with an interest of either knowing how people understand or experience their world at a particular point in time and in a particular context (Merriam and Grenier, 2019:4). This study seeks to uncover the experiences of women academic leaders in Higher Education Institutions on working and leading their teams while dealing with family related responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. A qualitative research methodology is used when little is known about the topic and is employed in this study because it highlights the need to understand and uncover the experiences of people as well as relay a detailed report of their perspectives of the phenomenon (Johnson and Christensen, 2020:148). Phenomenology, a form of qualitative research design, outlines the plan in which the research processes will be outlined. A phenomenological research design refers to the

researcher's attempt at understanding people's perspectives and experiences of a certain concept, such as the experiences of women academic leaders on working and leading remotely during a pandemic (Johnson and Christensen, 2020:1133; Jha, 2021:70)

Sampling is a process of selecting people or sources from which data will be retrieved for research purposes (Tracy, 2020:82). Purposeful sampling is the general method of sampling in qualitative research, it requires that the choosing of the participants be intentionally and purposefully done in response to the research problem (Tracy, 2020:82; Creswell and Poth, 2018:213) and in relation to the theoretical guidance of the research. In this study, a theory-based sampling method was employed following these steps:

- i. Defining the target population
- ii. Selecting a sampling method
- iii. Determining the sample size

(Taherdoost, 2016:19)

In a qualitative research methodology and phenomenological research design, data are often collected in such a way that it only focuses on the essence of the experiences of the participants, retrieved by allowing participants to relive and recall these experiences in spoken or written format (Johnson and Christensen, 2020:1140). Following the research purpose and design of this research, data were collected by means of written narratives and in-depth individual interviews from each of the participants. A thematic data analysis process will be followed, deeply guided by the components of the data analysis often employed in a phenomenological research design:

- Transcribing the data collected
- Reading through the written transcripts to obtain an overall understanding
- Identifying significant phrases or sentences that pertained directly to the experiences of participants

- Formulating meanings and gathering them into themes common to all the participants' transcripts
- Validating the findings with the participants through member checking
- Including participants' direct quotes and verbatim remarks in the final description

(Cresswell and Poth, 2018:179; Jha, 2021:103).

These components will be addressed in more detail throughout the chapters and, in chapters 3 and 5. The detailed methodology employed in this study is discussed in Chapter 3. It discusses the design and methodology; population and sampling (method, size, and participant selection); data collection process and instruments; ethical considerations and finally the data analysis process.

In the next section, I will outline the limitations of the study.

1.5 Research limitations

Predicted possible limitations of the proposed research, these include methodological and process limitations:

- Contextual factors – contextual factors, such as cultural and socio-economic difference, in which the research is conducted may affect the findings of the research. participants may feel the need to alter their responses due to culturally and socially desirable bias, this could lead to incomplete or inaccurate representation of the data.
- Sample diversity and size – the findings of this research may not be generalizable to the broader population of women academic leaders due to the limited sample diversity and size.
- Participants recruitment – It has already been established that the participants of this research are people who handle and manage multiple roles and responsibilities, having them take time to participate in the study might be very challenging.
- Potential response bias – The effects and impact of COVID-19 have become very sensitive topics of discussions. Participants may underreport or overreport some of their experiences, challenges or emotions.

- The definition of the word “woman” has changed drastically over the years, approaching “women” to participate may not be as easy, as some people may be offended or not identify as women or even feel that the study is discriminating against other groups.

Limitations and risks identified or picked up as the research study progresses will be noted and reported in Chapter 5. The participants will be informed of the limitations and the risks associated with participating in this research. In addition to other factors, they will be given the opportunity to highlight their own limitations and opt-out of participating in the study if need be.

In the next section, I will define the key concepts of the research study topic and I will highlight how these concepts are used in this study.

1.6 Definition of key concepts

The key concepts of this research are identified, clearly defined and explained as they frame the literature reviewed, the process of the research and foreshadow the ways the study will contribute to and extend the findings of the research (Tracy, 2020:306).

The following concepts were derived from the research title and question:

What are the experiences of women academic leaders in Higher Education Institutions on working and leading teams during a pandemic?

1.6.1 Women

Woman, a reference to the female gender and the opposite of a man or people of the male gender (Mestry and Schmidt, 2018:2). In this study the word woman or women will be used as a description of a population of people who identify and describe themselves as women, of the female gender and use or respond to pronouns, she and her.

1.6.2 Academic leader

Academic leaders refer to positions held by academic intellectuals and individuals in academic spaces such as universities and colleges (Knipfer, Shaughnessy., Hentschel and Schmid, 2017:5). In this research, the concept is used to refer to women who are employed in Higher Education Institutions, as leaders of teams of 5 or more people and also identify as academics.

1.6.3 Pandemic

A pandemic refers to an infectious disease that spreads across countries or continents. In this regard, COVID-19 was declared a pandemic as it has spread through multiple countries around the world since 2019 (Menon and Motala, 2021) In the proposed research, the concept will be used to refer specifically to the COVID-19 pandemic as it affected South Africa and the world at large.

In the following section, I will outline the chapters in this dissertation.

1.7 Chapter outline

Chapter 1 Introduction and background

In this Chapter, I introduce the background and the rationale of the study. It includes the research problem, the primary and secondary research questions and the objectives of the research study.

Chapter 2 Literature review and theoretical framework

Chapter 2 covers a review of the literature, it outlines concepts that have already been studied, identifying research gaps and limitations on the existing research while taking into consideration the research phenomenon in question. Chapter 2 also unpacks the theoretical framework guiding the process of this research study.

Chapter 3 Research methodology and design

Following the research question and objectives, Chapter 3, gives a detailed description of the research processes and procedures. This includes the research methodology and design, a description of the sampling method and the details of the participants of the study and how data are collected. In Chapter 3, I also address issues of credibility and trustworthiness and the ethical issues that have be taken into consideration in the research study.

Chapter 4 Research findings and discussion

In Chapter 4, I give details of the data analysis process and how I came to the findings of the research study. I present the results of the study following the thematic data

analysis and interpret the results following the selected research design and purpose. The findings incorporate the theoretical framework and literature review.

Chapter 5 Conclusion and recommendations

Chapter 5 presents a summary of the research results and concludes the research study. This chapter also includes a discussion of the limitations of the study, suggests recommendations based on the research results and possible further research prospects.

1.8 Chapter summary

This first chapter presents the background information of the study and the rationale for choosing the topic therein. The main research question and sub-questions have been stated following the rationale and the overall purpose of the research. The research paradigm, the guiding approach of both the research methodology and research design. Numerous anticipated limitations in relation to the research purpose and methods have been listed for transparency and better mitigations. A brief definition of the key concepts was given, and the chapter was concluded by outlining the structure of the report of the research study.

The next chapter will be a review of literature, starting off with the section of the theoretical framework.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework and literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter is divided into 2 sections, the theoretical framework and literature review. Feminism, as the theoretical framework guiding the direction of the intended research study, is introduced first to give better insight into the standpoint of the intended research and the connection between feminism and the research phenomenon. Building on that, the reviewed literature will cover topics related to the experiences of women, especially those who are in and aspiring to be in academic leadership positions, and the extent to which the pandemic affected them, personally and professionally.

2.2 Theoretical framework

A framework can be used to connect ideas, identify gaps, convert, guide or decipher, or as a research standpoint (Larsen and Adu, 2022:132). The objective of a theory-based framework is to make sense of occurrences by collecting relevant data within the phenomenon (Larsen and Adu, 2022:125). Qualitative research follows a number of theoretical frameworks, including feminist theory (Creswell and Poth, 2018:79), where a researcher is allowed the opportunity to deliberately include their own roles and how these roles impact the lives of women (Creswell and Poth, 2018:65).

Feminism is defined as a theoretical approach that is related to the critical paradigm, transformation; it seeks to transform patriarchy (Tracy, 2020:72). The objective of a feminist-based theory is often that research should be conducted only for reasons of transformation and to bring about a change in perspective (Mertens, 2018:35). In the proposed research study, the theoretical framework, feminism, is used as both a connector of the effects of the pandemic on the roles of women in academic leadership positions and a standpoint from which the research phenomenon can be viewed and studied (Larsen and Adu, 2022:133).

2.2.1 Feminism as a theoretical framework

Feminism as a research theory in the proposed study, investigates the perspectives of power relationships and individuals' social position and how they impact women differently from men (Creswell and Poth, 2018:74). According to Higgs and Smith

(2012:40), feminism as a theory cannot be described and explained as the other theories and philosophies, nor can it be understood the same way. The main goals of feminist research are to see the world through a feminist lens, to do away with binary thinking, to increase awareness of women's issues, and to include women's voices in discussions that are usually led and controlled by men (Higgs and Smith, 2012:40; Johnson and Christensen 2020:227).

The first wave of feminism, around 1792, focused on women's social and political rights within the society (Higgs and Smith, 2012:41). The second wave focused on addressing the assumptions that men were superior to women and the third emerged as more radical than the first and second waves, in the sense that it was anti-men (Higgs and Smith, 2012:41). Letherby (2003:42) state that with the different waves of feminism and progression in the concept, came a number of different perspectives to the concept and the theory of feminism, namely: radical feminism, liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, socialist feminism, African feminism, postmodern feminism, green and eco-feminism and the European and existentialist feminism (Higgs and Smith, 2012:41-42). The ultimate goal of all feminist perspectives is to improve the lives of women in society, this includes psychological health, their cultural power, the prestige of their contributions to society and their material wealth (Johnson and Christensen 2020:227).

As such, the proposed research theory is based on mainstream feminism, which is also known as liberal feminism (Higgs and Smith, 2012:41). Liberal feminism states that both men and women are equally intelligent and competent enough to participate in the society at large and be recognised and acknowledged equally for their contributions (Higgs and Smith, 2012:41; Letherby 2003:53). The goal of the feminist research approach is to establish collaborative and non-exploitative relationships, to place researchers within the study aimed at avoiding objectification, and to conduct research that is transformative (Creswell and Poth, 2018:65; Tracy, 2020:72).

2.2.2 Theoretical standpoint and connection

As a theoretical framework – liberal feminism, the standpoint of the intended research – asserts that because women hold a marginalised place (Higgs and Smith, 2012:41),

they have a unique and significant view of the world, which is not available to dominant groups, Consequently, their voices are integral to processes of qualitative research studies and transformation (Tracy. 2020:54). The feminist theory as a connector in the proposed research addresses the overall aim of the intended research – to uncover the experiences of women academic leaders in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) on leading teams and working remotely, while dealing with family related responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim of the feminist ideology is to correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experiences in ways relevant to addressing women’s unequal social position. The proposed research study intends to give women academic leaders a platform to share their experiences on a phenomenon (Creswell and Poth, 2018:66) that affected women all over the world in more ways than it could have ever been imagined possible, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (Maula, 2021:7).

Feminism is both a theory and a practice (Letherby, 2003:4), concerned with the production of knowledge and the need for change. The intended research is committed to producing women’s experiences in a form of knowledge that will make a difference in the lives of women in general and change perspectives on the lenses from which women are seen and perceived by the society. Therefore, the proposed feminist research is one that draws upon the challenges, struggles and the knowledge of oppressed and disempowered groups, particularly women, and places them at the centre of the research inquiry (Willsher and Goel, 2017:2). Considering that gender and power have spread through all domains of our societies, this form of research theory offers both care by connecting the research phenomenon to the theory and sensitivity, by providing a standpoint for the intended research.

The next section covers the literature reviewed from other researchers and studies conducted in relation to the proposed research topic and questions.

2.3 Literature review

Throughout their lives, women all over the world experience challenges and stressful events because of their roles and functions in their homes, societies, and workplaces (Braun-Lewensohn, Mayer and Tekoah, 2022;1). Women's representation, equity, and

equality in positions of leadership and management have been emphasised as essential to achieving equality between men and women, especially in HEIs in Africa (Idahosa, 2019:1; Braun-Lewensohn *et al.*, 2022:3). The COVID-19 pandemic was nothing short of an even heavier burden (Parry and Gordon, 2020:801), particularly on the women who were already dealing with mental and physical health effects caused by their normal day to day functions (Chanmugam, 2021:648). The literature reviewed covers topics that outline the experiences of women and the impact of the pandemic on their professional and personal lives, as academic leaders.

2.3.1 Women academic leaders in Higher Education Institutions

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fact that most women have to carry the greater burden and the responsibilities of taking care of their households and families (Maula, 2021:19). According to Parry and Gordon (2020:801), women all over the world and in South Africa suffer from double the burden compared to men, as they have to participate in the labour market and household work (Zheng, 2018:228; Khokhar, 2018:69). For women academic leaders, the pandemic did not only give them additional family related responsibilities but a personal and professional burden as well – having to take care of themselves, their family, the student body and their teams (Chanmugam, 2021:648). As such, this study discusses the following:

- being a woman academic,
- the traditional roles of women as expected by the society, and
- the artificial freedom, the exhaustion and poorness of women

2.3.1.1 *Being a woman academic*

Traditionally, institutions were built upon the dominant masculine discourses, with academic institutions being no exception. Hegemonic masculine discourses still have a significant impact and influence on Higher Education Institutions, which presents a major barrier for women who aspire to be in senior leadership roles (Bhatti and Ali, 2021:4). Despite governmental initiatives, oppressive behaviours and unequal systems in higher education continues to assure unbalanced patterns of representation, particularly in leadership positions (Idahosa, 2019:1). One of the most discussed human resources challenges in institutions of higher education and training in Africa is the way women are underrepresented in leadership positions and how

difficult the systems have been set for them to enter this male dominated space (Mensah, 2020:589). According to Idahosa (2019:4) and Offermann and Foley (2020:14), women academic leaders face discrimination and barriers in the academic settings. Racist, sexist, and patriarchal discourses often jeopardise their ability to obtain academic leadership positions and ensures that they remain oppressed, thus hindering their performance in those roles (Idahosa, 2019:4).

There is a rapid transformation taking place in the higher education sector, in South Africa and beyond. This change is due to factors such as globalisation and technology, increasing student enrolments, changes in the management structures, the need to maintain quality in teaching and learning, and demonstrate productive research outputs (Okeke-Uzodike and Gamede, 2021:21). In order to assist the institution in achieving its overall purpose in response to the transition, the duties and responsibilities of academic staff are allocated to suit the change. Globalisation offers women possibilities and challenges since it places greater demands on them and gives them more responsibilities (Pranathi and Lathabhavan, 2021:941). The roles of women academic leaders may vary depending on their ranks and departments; however, these are generally the five main categories of their academic duties: teaching and learning, administration, research, postgraduate supervision and community engagements on an average of 37 to 40 hours a week in South Africa (Walters, Mehl, Piraino, Jansen and Kriger, 2022:51; Okeke-Uzodike and Gamede, 2021:17). Higher Education Institutions have been struggling with finding enough time to devote to academic activities since COVID-19's mandate to remote working arrangements increased workloads, decreased research output, and made it even harder for women academics to achieve work-life balance (Okeke-Uzodike and Gamede, 2021:17). Additionally, most institutions, including HEIs, use team-based structures, meaning women academic leaders have teams that rely on them to accomplish their goals (Offermann and Foley, 2020:13).

The pandemic significantly worsened the difficulties that already exist in HEIs and produced unexpected disruptions in the entire educational field. Firstly, the pandemic has forced women academics to advance technologically and work from home full-time, something they had never done before in their professional careers (Agrawal and Amin, 2022:34). Secondly, most working people find it exhausting to juggle work

and home responsibilities, but women in particular struggle with this because they frequently spend disproportionate amounts of time handling childcare and household work in addition to their professional tasks (Agrawal and Amin, 2022:34; Bulut and Maimaiti, 2021:61). Thirdly, the uncertainty of their future concerning their careers and life in general caused great amounts of stress (Bulut and Maimaiti, 2021:61). Fourthly, the student body, teams and stakeholders relied on them as leaders to give them assurance and continue fulfilling their responsibilities (Fernandez and Shaw, 2020:40). Finally, the balance between work and home is broken, making them run the risk of work overload, which contributes to low performance, low morale, stress and mental health issues (Ghani, Zakaria and Hamzah 2021:155; Bulut and Maimaiti, 2021:61).

Among other things Higher Education Institutions had to adopt extensive technologically advanced management platforms to manage the pandemic while continuing with offering educational services remotely (Okeke-Uzodike & Gamede, 2021:13; Agrawal and Amin, 2022:33). This meant academic staff and leaders had to continue fulfilling their academic activities and tasks to ensure that educational services were successfully rendered. According to Ghani *et al.* (2021:55) academic staff members are more likely to experience work fatigue and other health problems because of techno-overload, a concept that encourages them to work faster because of connected Information Communication and Technologies. Getting used to new methods and conditions of working, in the sense of the advanced technology and working remotely, takes time that most academics did not have (Bulut and Maimaiti, 2021:63). The whole adoption to the new normalcy was taking place remotely, while people were separated from the support of their team members and work mates. With this, it seems like most academics' traditional workplaces and formats had somewhat of a beneficial impact on their performance and mental health (Ghani *et al.*, 2021:155).

2.3.1.2 The traditional roles of women as expected by the society

Traditionally, men and women have been expected to occupy and perform different roles in society, family and in the workplace (Offermann and Foley, 2020:15). In most parts of the world, culture, tradition, and social norms would have it that the role of a woman is to stay at home and care for the children or the family, while men are expected to be at work to provide, financially, for their families (Zheng, 2018:230;

Khokhar, 2018:69). For South Africa, the apartheid system played a huge role in enforcing what tradition and culture had already done in terms of gender inequality. With men going to work far away from their families and only participating in raising their children and caring for their families through financial provision, while women were left to handle all other family related matters (Parry and Gordon, 2020:796). Certain policies have been adjusted to redefine the role of a woman in both Western and traditionally cultural societies (Bhatti and Ali, 2021:3). The end of apartheid in South Africa also brought about a positive shift towards gender equality, as more and more women were presented with opportunities to study and work (Parry and Gordon, 2020:797). However, most parts of the world are still operating in gendered manners and gendered biases (Idahosa, 2019:1; Braun-Lewensohn *et al.*, 2022:1), knowingly or unknowingly, women are still disadvantaged nationally and internationally.

Women function and operate in various parts of society and organisations with multiple roles and identities associated with them in different stages of their lifecycle (Braun-Lewensohn *et al.*, 2022:1). The identities assigned and associated with women are meant to set their social roles in personal as well as professional domains (Bhatti and Ali, 2021:1). Cultural conventions and the enduring nature of gender inequality in Africa makes it even harder for women to identify as anything besides their societal roles (Idahosa, 2019:1). According to Bhatti and Ali (2021:13) women can never be just who their job titles or function say they are because in addition to being leaders, they are wives, daughters, and mothers. Expectedly, the highest number of people who were infected by COVID-19 and related illnesses in South Africa, were women rather than men (Maula, 2021:7). Most women were and are still at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19 as health care workers. Additionally, most of the same women are primary caregivers to their family members (Parry and Gordon, 2020:797; Maula, 2021:28). Therefore, there is no amount of precaution that women take to avoid being infected or affected by COVID-19 personally and professionally (Maula, 2021:28). According to Walters *et al.* (2022:53) most women do not really have a choice when it comes to their caregiving responsibilities.

While women were generally struggling with balancing their professional work and family responsibilities as per traditional social expectations (Almaki, Silong, Idris and Wahat, 2016:76), the pandemic intensified the burden. Among other things the

prospect of remote working meant that academic leaders had to be academics, mothers and educators at the same time and in the same space (Bulut and Maimaiti, 2021:62). Before and throughout the pandemic women academic leaders were still under pressure to continue performing their double-sided roles. When Higher Education Institutions were in the process of workplace restructuring and team considerations, schools and day care centres had also moved their operations online/to remote formats. For most women this meant they had to plan to ensure that their children continued to learn, dividing their time and home space for teaching, working and caring for the sick, all at once and in the best possible way (Chamnugam, 2021:649).

The roles of women in most parts of the world have changed drastically over the years and this has made way for more and more women to take over roles of leadership in most fields of work as well as in Higher Education Institutions (Almaki *et al.*, 2016:75). This is also thanks to the economy that makes it a little easier for society to accept the concept of women in the workplace (Agrawal and Amin, 2022:32). However, the lack of affordable childcare and paid maternity leave means that more women than men are now faced with the hardship of having to choose between their careers and taking care of their families and their homes (Khokhar 2018:68; African Development Bank and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2020:32). Expectedly, women end up choosing to split their time between work and family because in order to continue supporting their families they need income, even as low as that income may be (Parry and Gordon, 2020:796).

2.3.1.3 The artificial freedom, the exhaustion and poorness of women

The same society that enforces and expect these roles from women do not recognise their efforts. Society, culture, and tradition remains judgemental about women's skills and capabilities (Bhatti and Ali, 2021:2), and continues to discriminate, undervalue, and underpay (Parry and Gordon, 2020:797). As a result, women are still bearers of multiple roles in their homes, societies and in the workplace. They generally face many obstacles and challenges, daily (Bhatti and Ali, 2021:3). These challenges include but are not limited to discrimination in all parts of society, unequal payment in the workplace, and gender-based violence, and this is the case in most countries (Zheng,

2018:228). While most under-developed and developing countries are well on their way to ensuring that girl children and women are given equal opportunities in terms of work and education, there are still underlying teachings, within these societies that subject girls and women to discrimination and unfair treatment in most spaces (Khokhar, 2018:68).

According to Parry and Gordon (2020:796) women constitute the majority of the population of the South African population at 51%. Even with these numbers and the growing number of women qualifying in the academic field (Khokhar, 2018:69), women are generally still under-represented and discriminated against in the workplace (Parry and Gordon, 2020:797; Khokhar, 2018:69). Though most women are unaware of the effects of these teachings on their self-confidence, the consequences of these teachings are evident in the way girls and women see themselves and believe they should be treated (Zulfqar, Hussain and Ahmed, 2019:352). According to Khokhar (2018:69) there are women and girls who believe that certain privileges, such as getting an education and certain positions, are better suited for boys and men rather than women (Bhatti and Ali, 2021:3). They do not take up certain positions out of fear of what people in their societies will say, how they will manage to take care of their families and whether or not they will ever find a partner who will not be threatened by their positions or level of education (Zulfqar *et al.*, 2019:352). These are not the sort of issues that men have to worry about when they are presented with similar opportunities, but some women are shamed and feel guilty for even considering any professional or personal commitment that might divide their caregiving role and time (Almaki *et al.*, 2016:80).

Women in South Africa make up most of the low-income sector, with only one in three managerial positions being occupied by women (Parry and Gordon, 2020:797). In 2018, 42.6% of the reported female-headed households in South Africa were much poorer than male-headed households (Parry and Gordon, 2020:796). Women are more likely to occupy informal, low-income, and vulnerable employment opportunities than men (African Development Bank and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2020:14). This is because there are people who still think women are incapable of anything other than domestic work (Qadir, 2019:1276). According to the African Gender Index Report (African Development Bank and United Nations Economic

Commission for Africa 2020:31-32) from a young age, women have to put in 15–17 hours each day on domestic work. As extensive as these domestic duties and responsibilities are, they are unrecognised, unappreciated, and unpaid work (Parry and Gordon, 2020:800). In addition to the domestic work, women academics have to put in an average of 7 to 8 hours for their professional workload (Okeke-Uzodike and Gamede, 2021:16). Expectedly these number of hours affect women's health and often prevent them from entering the work market (African Development Bank and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2020:31). Additionally, these circumstances set them up to fail even before they begin to enter the workplace, as by the time they come to work they would be too exhausted, sick and cannot perform to the best of their abilities; hence, they are declared incompetent and incapable (Zheng, 2018:230).

As with most crises, COVID-19 was a harsh reminder that women and children are vulnerable and almost always more likely to suffer the effects of a crisis than men (Mackett, 2020; Maula, 2021:29). The COVID-19 pandemic also revealed just how much women are still more likely to be poor than men (Parry and Gordon, 2020:797). Many people lost their jobs because of the lockdown and its effects on the economy, but more women lost their jobs than men, as most of them are primary caregivers and had to make the choice between continuing to work or taking care of their families (Kumari, Singh and Roy, 2021:291). In addition to women losing their jobs and having additional household responsibilities, the pandemic added more limitations to their ability to support themselves and their families (Parry and Gordon. 2020:798).

Feminised poverty was prevalent even before the pandemic as most women had to take care of their families while working in mostly low-income informal sectors without any employment security or protection against things such as the pandemic (Khokhar, 2018:67; Parry and Gordon, 2020:799). With the pandemic close to 60% of women around the world work in insecure informal employment, they earn less than men and are more likely to continue living in poverty compared to their male counterparts (Parry and Gordon, 2020:797).

2.3.2 Challenges that women academic leaders experience

Responding to the call for a lockdown, Higher Education Institutions and most organisations had to change their operations (Maula, 2021:18). Without any form of training, academic leaders responded to the pandemic by shifting their functions and activities online; thus, leading their teams and fulfilling their day-to-day tasks remotely (Fernandez and Shaw, 2020:39). Most households, in different socio-economic classes and standards, are headed by women (Parry and Gordon, 2020:647). Therefore, more women academic leaders than men in Higher Education Institutions, had to move to remote work and leading. In addition to having to adjust to the new method of working and leading they had the responsibility to help their families and teams transition to working and learning from home (Chanmugam, 2021:649).

This study discusses the prospect of remote working as a means of workplace isolation that triggers challenges such as conflict between work and family, overworking, work instability and loneliness (Bulut and Maimaiti, 2021:62). The following sub-headings are used for this discussion:

- An advanced level of work life imbalance, and
- Working through ills and hurts

2.3.2.1 *An advanced level of work-life imbalance*

COVID-19 has totally disrupted and turned the entire world upside down and has had a severe influence on the balance of work life, posing more challenges for women in the labour market (Bhatti and Ali, 2021:1). With Higher Education Institutions, schools and day-care centres closed or relocated to full online operation, parents, especially mothers, had to take care of their children and prepare them for the new routine (Agrawal and Amin, 2022:31). Moving to working from home, meant that people had to make a lot of adjustments to their daily working routine. According to Chanmugam (2021:649) changing the way she used to work and adjusting to the new method of leading, caring for her family and working was a very stressful process. This new routine forces people to adapt to the changes quickly and to manage their emotions wisely. In addition to ensuring their well-being and performance, leaders, have to focus more on their team's well-being before expecting high levels of performance from them (Ghani *et al.*, 2021:152).

The roles and the functions of academic leaders were magnified when COVID-19 was announced, this made leading in a higher education institution even more stressful than it normally would be (Fernandez and Shaw, 2020:41). According to Bhatti and Ali (2021:7), before the pandemic women academic leaders had to put in more work, time and effort in order to be considered effective or successful in their roles, with the pandemic this was near impossible. It is difficult for academic leaders to compartmentalise all their academic activities while dealing with the effects of the pandemic (Okeke-Uzodike and Gamede, 2021:18). Chanmugam (2021:649) adds that as much as most women are used to having to care for their families and still attend to their professional leadership tasks, their responsibilities had magnified tremendously with the pandemic, at home and at work. Women academic leaders do not only have to cope with these but also with sickness, loss of friends and family members, or the responsibility of caring for loved ones (Agrawal and Amin, 2022:32).

The pandemic has only worsened the professional and personal hardships that women have to endure on a daily basis (Parry and Gordon, 2020:801). Working from home might have come across as a great opportunity for one to be closer to family for most people (Ghani *et al.*, 2021:157). However, for most women it also involved taking care of loved ones, teaching children, giving assurance to their team members even when they themselves did not know what was happening or for how long it would persist (Chanmugam, 2021:649). Working from home has made it much harder to differentiate professional life from home life (Agrawal and Amin, 2022:31). All the changes that had to be implemented in Higher Education Institutions and our individual home situations as a response to the pandemic, had to happen without any form of planning or training, yet everyone had to find a way to continue operating (Fernandez and Shaw, 2020:41).

2.3.2.2 Working through ills and hurts

According to Agrawal and Amin (2022) the traditional state of mind sees work-life balance more as a female problem, where women are considered responsible for the successful operation of their family's everyday affairs independent of her work profile and official duties. Therefore, most of the work, whether domestic or professional, falls

on women. The majority of women are primary care givers and heading their family homes, they often do not have the time, financial means and chance to take a break or take care of themselves. As much as working and living through these challenges, barriers and constraints is the only option they have, they are not exempted from the physical and mental effects that these have on them. Women are said to spend over 15–17 hours daily fulfilling their domestic duties, for those who are working in the formal or informal spaces, this is in addition to their working hours (African Development Bank and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2020:32). As humans, women in the workplace are unable to avoid stress in balancing their family and work-life to which their heavy workload contributes (Ghani *et al.*, 2021:154).

A work-life balance is understanding what, where and how one gets to complete their work obligations (Agrawal and Amin, 2022:31). In normal situations, employers would acknowledge and provide a conducive and harmonious working environment to minimise the unnecessary work stress and an imbalance between work and life (Ghani *et al.*, 2021:152). Working from home has made it near impossible for employers to create and maintain such spaces. Before the pandemic, most people would do their work in the workplace, after work, they would go home to rest and spend time with family members (Bulut and Maimaiti, 2021:62). Working from home has blurred the lines between space and time in terms of work and personal life. It brings together all the roles of a person at the same time and in the same space. Women academic leaders have to be academics, leaders and mothers at home (Bulut and Maimaiti, 2021:65), which makes it harder for them to organise and separate their roles. As a result, remote work has disrupted people's work-life balance and increases the chances of mental, emotional, physical and psychological health effects (Agrawal and Amin, 2022:33).

Remote work, as attractive as it might have seemed, caused plenty of problems such as anxiety, loneliness, helplessness and stress (Bulut and Maimaiti, 2021:61). Academics are experiencing more stress and other mental health problems working at home; this affects their motivation and performance (Ghani *et al.*, 2021:154). Women who were already struggling to juggle between their work and personal life before the pandemic, found that they were faced with a lot more challenges with the pandemic and remote work (Agrawal and Amin, 2022:31). Chanmugam, (2021:649)

states that at the beginning of the lockdown, she felt like she was getting lost, losing a sense of who she was, what was expected of her from her family and team. Women have been experiencing challenges and stressful events throughout their lives, they face barriers in the workplace, experience restrictive cultural norms, discriminatory laws and gender-based violence on a daily basis and the pandemic added to their burden (Braun-Lewensohn *et al.*, 2022:1; African Development Bank and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2020:11). Working from home exposed them to an environment with inadequate workplace design, awkward and repetitive bodily movements, and other ergonomic dangers (Ghani *et al.*, 2021:155).

2.3.3 The roles and functions of women academic leaders

Traditionally, institutions were built upon the dominant masculine discourses and associate leadership and management positions with masculine traits (Bhatti and Ali, 2021:4), the academic organisation is no exception (Khokhar, 2018:67). Higher Education Institutions are highly influenced by the stereotypical masculine discourses that serve as a major barrier for women aspiring to leadership positions (Knipfer *et al.*, 2017:5; Bhatti and Ali, 2021:4). Aggression, power and competitiveness are some of the characteristics that are associated with success in leadership (Khokhar, 2018:64; Zheng, 2018:229). Women are said to be more sympathetic, intuitive and understanding than men (Zulfqar *et al.*, 2019:352). These qualities are also believed to be their weakness in leadership and management positions. Therefore, women are believed to be too weak to lead and manage teams in the workplace (Khokhar, 2018:64). However, women leaders who show characteristics that are said to be more feminine such as, accommodation, respect and sacrifice, are equally successful in their leadership roles. This study discusses qualities of leadership with reference to:

- Successful leadership in crises
- Leading remote teams

2.3.3.1 *Successful leadership in crisis*

Responding to the call for a lockdown, Higher Education Institutions and most organisations had to change their operations (Maula, 2021:18). Without any form of training, academic leaders responded to the pandemic by shifting their functions and activities online, thus leading their teams and fulfilling their day-to-day tasks remotely

(Fernandez and Shaw, 2020:39). Most households, in different socio-economic classes and standards, are headed by women (Parry and Gordon, 2020:647). Therefore, more women academic leaders, than men in Higher Education Institutions, had to move to working from home. In addition to having to adjust to the new method of working and leading they had the responsibility to help their families and teams transition to working and learning from home (Chanmugam, 2021:649). Whether male or female leaders, the pandemic has had a huge impact on the roles and functions of leaders and their team members (Jones, 2020:19 and Chanmugam, 2021:647).

This drastic shift prompted organisations to relook their leadership styles and methods in order to maintain a healthy workplace while being compassionate to their employees (Jones, 2020:19). For most women in academic leadership positions, this was a critical time, while dealing with the uncertainty of the future, both their teams and families relied on them for assurance and a successful transition (Chanmugam, 2021:647). Jones (2020:19) states that the role of a leader, as it is, comes with a great deal of responsibilities in terms of caring for others and ensuring their well-being. However, COVID-19 introduced a whole new concept of what leadership should look like (Chanmugam, 2021:646) because the uncertainty caused high levels of stress, low morale, low performance and loneliness (Fernandez and Shaw, 2020:42; Ghani *et al.*, 2021:155). The pandemic required leaders and managers to consider the circumstances of their team members; thus, restructuring their expectations and key competences (Fernandez and Shaw, 2020:40; Jones, 2020:20). One way for the academic institution to live through and beyond the pandemic is if the leaders are willing to change their leadership styles to ones that are more empathic, flexible and adaptable (Fernandez and Shaw, 2020:41).

According to Bhatti and Ali (2021:3) prevalent masculine leadership discourses and traditional socialisation patterns, has caused women to doubt their own abilities as leaders. To stand a chance of being considered for leadership and management positions in the workplace and elsewhere, some women think that they need to adopt masculine qualities in order to be accepted and considered as capable leaders, thus suppressing their true qualities (Zheng, 2018:229). As a result, they face a number of challenges in the process of developing their leadership identities (Bhatti and Ali, 2021:1). However, Burni and Dormgogen (2021:1) as well as Jones (2020:18) offer

that sympathy, intuition and understanding are in fact the kind of qualities that leaders ought to have and adopt in order to lead effectively during a pandemic. Braun-Lewensohn *et al.* (2022:2) state that there are women who choose to remain authentic in their nature and still manage to enter male dominated fields and positions and be successful in them even as hard as it may be (Bhatti and Ali, 2021:3).

2.3.3.2 *Leading remote teams*

According to Fernandez and Shaw (2020:42) academic leaders are expected to build and maintain relationships based on mutual trust; however, with the pandemic, this proved to be a very difficult thing for most leaders to establish. The pandemic prompted a change in women academic leadership style, moving to calm reassurance and empathy extended to their team members and the student community at large (Chanmugam, 2021:648). While people were expected to make the sudden move, academic leaders had to ensure that their teams were well equipped and ready to function through the sudden change (Fernandez and Shaw, 2020:40). Such expectations were better met by female leaders who took decisive measures, showed emotions and fostered social cohesion; thus, during the pandemic, whether it be in their homes or their workplaces (Burni and Dormgogen, 2021:1). Chanmugam (2021:647) agrees, stating that the pandemic forced her to want to offer more grace and be more compassionate towards her team considering that in addition to the pandemic, their circumstance may be worse because of different family backgrounds (Fernandez and Shwa, 2020:41).

According to Jones (2020:20) the way leaders responded to the pandemic determined their organisations' survival throughout the pandemic and beyond. With the leadership role considered, women academic leaders who are also primary caregivers had to ensure that their families were safe and taken care of, while also making sure that their team members and clients' were transitioning well to the new normal. Chanmugam (2021:647) states while she was still in shock, confused and trying to make sense of what the lockdown meant for her as a mother and an academic leader, she knew that she had to snap out of her own state of not being okay so that she could continue to lead her team and care for her family in the best way possible. According to Pranathi and Lathabhavan, (2021:941) even in times of distress women have the ability to

encourage decision-making, higher levels of innovation, and create greater workplace harmony.

One of the greatest challenges of working and leading a team remotely is creating and sustaining effective communication channels and coordination among team members and between teams and their leaders (Ghani *et al.*, 2021:154). Burni and Domgorgen (2021:1) state that female leaders were found to be more efficient and competent during this pandemic. The one common thing that made them more efficient in their response to the pandemic is their ability to communicate, handle risks responsibly and act with empathy (Burni and Dormgogen, 2021:1). While their instinct to care for others may seem like a great need during a pandemic, these qualities are often ruled out when matters of leadership and rulership are discussed in most settings and professions (Zulfqar *et al.*, 2019:352; Khokhar, 2018:64). Braun-Lewensohn *et al.* (2022:2) add that female leaders instil positive attitudes in their team members through a psychological process and this facilitates a diversity climate and inclusion in the workplace.

The transformational leadership approach is the most popular leadership theory. According to transformational leadership (TFL), effective leaders inspire their followers to put aside their own interests in favour of the greater good, which results in high levels of effort and performance (Offermann and Foley, 2020:9). Women are frequently rated lower than males on the less desired management-by-exception and laissez-faire leadership styles and much higher than men on the desirable TFL traits such as intellectual stimulation, personalised consideration, motivating inspiration, and idealised influence (Offermann and Foley, 2020:9). According to Pranathi and Lathabhavan (2021:941) women who are in leadership positions are better understood by their team members because they have the capacity to continuously develop themselves, collaborate with others, deliver and influence those around them, thus gaining their respect.

2.3.4 Support strategies for women academic leaders

Women are involved in multiple roles and experience challenging and stressful events throughout their lives (Braun-Lewensohn *et al.*, 2022:1). Some of these challenges include or are rooted in gender-based discrimination. Women academic leaders are

vulnerable to discrimination and harassment as they inhabit traditionally masculine roles, violating social norms (Offermann and Foley, 2020:15). This is true for women in Western societies and even worse for those in culturally traditional societies. Gender-based discrimination and harassment can be classified as an occupational hazard for many women in leadership positions. Therefore, finding a way to get women into leadership positions is not enough to level the playing field and achieve a female leadership advantage (Offermann and Foley, 2020:15). Research and studies conducted about women clearly shows that there is an urgent need for supporting and empowering women in various aspects of life, including family support and career aspirations (Braun-Lewensohn *et al.*, 2022:2). Women needed a great deal of support before and during the pandemic, they will continue to need extensive support even after the pandemic. This study focuses on representation as the first point of support for women and girls all over the world.

2.3.4.1 Representation where it matters most

When policymakers fully understand issues of gender inequality, their contribution to policies become research based and driven by theory, highlighting prevention and intervention strategies to promote safe and equal treatment of women and children (Braun-Lewensohn *et al.*, 2022:1). Policies that do not acknowledge or highlight the impacts of gender inequality in society are also responsible for the burden laid on women and girls by their societies (Mackett, 2021:71). Maula (2021:26) believes that if more women were to be represented in parliament, they would not just bring the attention of other leaders to gender related issues, but they would help bring transformation to policies set out to support women and children (Maula, 2021:26; Burni and Dormgogen, 2021:1). Even though it has been established that women and children are the most vulnerable in times of crisis, gender related issues are often side-lined for matters that are considered more important or challenging (Mackett, 2020:71). Gender representation in parliament has brought about a variety of efforts to address the COVID-19 related gender gaps in countries in the sub-regions (Maula, 2021:29).

According to Khokhar (2018:71) and Knipfer *et al.* (2017:297) the one main form of support that most women need in all spaces and fields is representation, people that

are going to speak and stand with and for them. This can only be done well by people with first-hand experience, those who have a better understanding of what women go through on a daily basis (Zheng, 2018:231). Fernandez and Shaw (2020:41) agree that leading people from different spaces and backgrounds requires compassion, empathy and flexibility, qualities that are mostly credited to women and said to be their weakness (Khokhar, 2018:64). Countries and organisations can benefit greatly by giving women the well-deserved opportunity to lead without making them feel like there is something that needs to be adjusted in their nature in order for them to be successful leaders (Burni and Dormgogen, 2021:10). Zheng (2018:231) adds that women need to maintain their stance and not change who they are to fit into any positions, it is the system that needs to change and accommodate them as and for who they are.

If women and girls are to be supported, recognised, valued and represented, the act should start from high up in our systems, before we can move on to solving the underrepresentation of women in academic spaces and other professions, women should first be represented in the national parliament (Maula, 2021:26). According to Maula (2021:26) women in parliament have enough influence to harness gender equality commissions; in fact, they have been known to also influence the nature and the course of the response to the pandemic. Burni and Dormgogen (2021:10) add that women-led countries, such as New Zealand and Finland, were more efficient in their response to the pandemic. Unfortunately, only four of the East and Southern African countries have come close to achieving gender equality in their seats in parliament; Rwanda at 60%, South Africa at 46%, Namibia at 43% and Mozambique at 41% (Maula, 2021:26).

The most common topic of research in most fields is along the lines of women in leadership and this makes it more difficult to ignore the under-representation and limited support and opportunities for women in higher education all over the world (Almaki *et al.*, 2016:75). According to Zulfqar *et al.* (2019:352) there is a massive amount of literature on leadership in higher education but very little is known and said about women in academic leadership positions, making it even harder to support women in these positions and those who would like to advance to these positions.

2.3.4.2 *The best form of support for women today*

There has been some progress in research and application conducted to help achieve gender equality in most countries and professions; however, there are still systems and operations that are working against the progress of these initiatives (Knipfer *et al.*, 2017:4). For one, most countries in the sub-region still have features in their legislations that discriminate against women, presenting women with weaker rights than men (Maula, 2021:5). Zulfqar *et al.* (2019:351) add that even after all the studies, debates and researchers conducted on the leadership abilities and capabilities of women, men are still generally believed to have stronger leadership characteristics compared to women (Knipfer *et al.*, 2017:5). and most women believe this to such a degree that they do not even have the confidence to advance into leadership roles (Khokhar, 2018:67: Bhatti and Ali, 2021:3). In addition to representation where it matters most, this study discusses the following ideas for the facilitation of support strategies that goes beyond and above the pandemic.

- Quality education and mentorship

Good quality education is central to the empowerment of women and girls, it enhances their quality of life (African Development Bank and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2020:19). Despite all the efforts made by government officials to ensure that girls and women have access to education and training, there are over 960 million illiterate people in the world and two thirds of these people are women (Pranathi and Lathabhavan, 2021:942). African women and girls continue to be disadvantaged in education and training and are more vulnerable to violence and abuse (African Development Bank and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 2020:19).

Higher education is at the forefront of women empowerment, including and integrating women in leadership positions in this space would promote further involvement and representation of women in higher education and contribute to society in general (Braun-Lewensohn *et al.*, 2022:2). Many training programmes have been developed for leaders and leadership roles at Higher Education Institutions, but they have not been equally useful for men and women. at fact, most of them have had a negative impact on women by unintentionally reaffirming old gender norms (Bhatti and Ali, 2021:4). In the absence of core leadership socialisation and training, mentorship and

networking are essential in assisting women in establishing their leadership identities. According to Khokhar *et al.* (2018:72) for more women to advance and survive the role of leadership in academics, those who are already in the position must take up the role of mentoring those who aspire to move towards the same direction. With better training and networking, women academic leadership can improve drastically, thus increasing the number of women leaders who can inspire and mentor other women (Bhatti and Ali, 2021:4).

Higher Education Institutions should invest in training programmes and educational opportunities that are relevant to the needs of women in leadership positions and those who aspire to be (Agrawal and Amin, 2022:32).

- Better working conditions

Although women have access to educational opportunities and are presented with numerous formal roles jobs compared to what they did in the past, gender discrimination, employment challenges, local restrictions, and family obligations continue to limit their potential (Pranathi and Lathabhavan, 2021:940). According to Chanmugam (2021:649) women do not just need support during the pandemic, they have needed support before the pandemic, the need support during the pandemic and will need even more support after the pandemic. The very first point of improving the working conditions of women is to do away with the gender wage gap. The gender wage gap is where men are paid more than women for comparable work (Offermann and Foley, 2020:17). Most female workers at all levels across organisations across the world are still paid less than their male counterparts (Ghani *et al.*, 2021:154; Offermann and Foley, 2020:17). This is one form of discrimination, and unpaid domestic work are some of the things that keep women disempowered and poorer than their male counterparts. The pandemic worsened the state of women's finances, while most women lost their jobs, others had their salaries and working hours cut (Parry and Gordon, 2020:797).

Improving the working conditions of women in Higher Education Institutions, during and beyond the pandemic, will afford them the ability to use the opportunities that are made available to them. Higher Education Institutions should rethink the way they measure performance during the pandemic (Ghani *et al.*, 2021:157). According to

Ghani *et al.* (2021:157) people cannot be expected to be highly productive and perform to the best of their abilities when they are faced with uncertainty. There needs to be a provision and promotion of flexible work schedules and mental health support to allow all employees, especially women, to cope with the many challenges that they deal with daily (Ghani *et al.*, 2021:158; Agrawal and Amin, 2022:35).

2.5 Chapter summary

Women all over the world continue to face challenges that make it hard for them to reach their potential, especially in academic leadership positions. Traditional norms and culture may have been the root of the masculine discourses that continue to discriminate against women in most organisations, and especially in Higher Education Institutions. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the burden and increased the load that women have to carry on a daily basis, personally and professionally. However, the pandemic also revealed, against everything else, that women have exceptional capabilities in management and leadership, especially in times of crises. The literature showed us that women have always needed support. With the pandemic, there is an even greater and more urgent need to empower and support women and girls in all aspects of life, including family support, career aspirations and self-actualisation.

In the next chapter, research methodology, I will give details of the research methods and techniques.

Chapter 3: Research design and methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the foundation from which this research will be constructed. The chapter presents the research paradigm, research design, the sampling process and data collection methods. These aspects of the chapter are related and linked to the research objectives. The methodology chapter also addresses data analysis processes and the ethical aspects of the research and what had to be considered in the planning and construction of the research.

3.2 Research paradigm

A research paradigm is a way of approaching research, thinking about it, and conducting it based on a set of shared assumptions, ideas, values, and practices (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2018:8; Johnsons and Christensen, 2020:63). It is the lens from which we see the world and the people in it, it is the guiding principles of the way we pursue knowledge, see and understand the world around us (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:8). According to Creswell and Poth (2018:50) a research paradigm outlines how the researcher's stance directs the research process, including their views of reality, way of knowing, value stance and the procedures used in the study. This study is founded on the transformative paradigmatic viewpoint, which responds to the demands and aspirations of individuals who are often marginalised in societies, as well as more general concerns about fairness and human rights by offering pathways for transformative changes (Mertens, 2018:35).

A transformative research paradigm highlights the need for research that is aware of and receptive to history, cultural inequity, the importance of relationships, and reciprocity (Mertens, 2018:36). By looking into cultural and historical influences of the identity of women today, this study highlights the experiences of woman academic leaders on leading and working remotely during the pandemic. This is viewed through the lense of feminism, a theoretical approach guiding this research. Feminism is associated with critical paradigms such as the transformative research paradigm (Tracy, 2020:55).

3.3 Research methodology and design

3.3.1 Research methodology

According to Hesse-Biber (2018;548) and Mertens (2018;36) the transformative paradigm and the feminist standpoint in research are often associated and compatible with the qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is better suited to answer the proposed research questions because it is designed with an interest of either knowing how people understand or experience their world at a particular point in time and in a particular context (Merriam and Grenier, 2019;4). According to Bhatti and Ali (2021:2) most of the top researchers in and around Africa have studied the challenges that are faced by women in leadership positions and business owners. However, there is a shortage of research relating to women academics' conceptions of themselves as leaders in higher education (Bhatti and Ali, 2021:14). Qualitative research is used when little is known about the topic and it emphasises a need to understand and uncover the experiences of people and to relay a detail report of their perspectives in the phenomenon (Johnson and Christensen, 2020:148). A qualitative approach is thus, important in this regard as it allowed the participants an opportunity to share their stories and experiences, in their natural settings and without the interference of the researcher (Johnson and Christensen, 2020:1074).

3.3.2 Research design

A research design refers to a plan detailing the process in which the researcher chooses to answer the researcher question, it is a map outlining the plan towards collecting and analysing data to meet the objectives of the intended research (Johnson and Christensen, 2020:878; Rubin, 2021:85). The proposed research requires a design that will fully highlight the lived experiences of the participants in their natural sphere, this is informed by the theoretical framework and the qualitative research approach (Merriam and Grenier, 2019:5). Phenomenology is a form of qualitative research method or design that refers to the researcher's attempts to understand people's perspectives and experiences of a certain concept, such as working and leading remotely during a pandemic (Johnson and Christensen, 2020:1133; Jha, 2021:70). Jha (2021:72) believes that a phenomenological research design should be used when the researcher needs to understand participants' experiences by taking

them through questions that will assist in recalling and retelling their experiences as if they were living them in the present moment (Johnson and Christensen, 2020: 1133).

The purpose of this research design is to discover the way participants perceive or experience a certain phenomenon in their world and their lives, understanding their personalised meaning of the world and happenings around them (Johnson and Christensen, 2020:1133). Vagle (2018:17) is convinced that people go through and experience phenomenological encounters daily, knowingly and unknowingly. It is thus, the responsibility of the researcher to use phenomenological research design components to detail these encounters. In the proposed study, the use of a phenomenological research design, does not generally assume that women are completely unique, with experiences that vary from one women academic leader to the next. However, the purpose of the proposed phenomenological design and the feminist theory as the standpoint of the study seeks to address the essence of the experiences that are common within these women in response to the research question (Johnson and Christensen, 2020:1136; Merriam and Grenier, 2019:5). Qualitative and transformative researchers focus on establishing relationships with participants that allow for the voices of all relevant parties to be heard, especially those associated with positions of least privilege, such as women (Mertens, 2018:36).

Following the phenomenology research design, in the proposed study, data will be generated through written narratives and in-depth individual interviews, where participants will be given the opportunity to retell their experiences as women academic leaders who have had to work and lead teams remotely in HEIs during the pandemic. According to Tracy (2020:55) a qualitative and feminist theory-based research is mainly interested in the responses of participants, sampled from the population under study, in interviews.

The next section will focus on the population of the research study, it will outline the sampling and participants selection process.

3.4 Sample and participant selection

This section provides a clear sampling design and the population suitable for the proposed study. According to Tracy (2020:82), sampling is a process of selecting people or sources of data for research purposes. There are a number of steps that

can be followed during the sampling stage in order to collect relevant data and answer the research questions effectively. For the purpose of the proposed research, I followed three steps of sampling that are based on Robinson (2014:26) and Taherdoost's (2016:19) suggested processes:

- i. Defining the target population
- ii. Selecting a sampling method
- iii. Determining the sample size

(Taherdoost, 2016:19)

3.4.1 Defining the target population

A population refers to a group of individuals selected based on characteristics or elements suitable for the research objectives (Taherdoost, 2016:19). The first step in purposive sampling is to clearly identify the participants that will be suitable for the collection of data (Merriam and Grenier, 2019:14). Therefore, the criteria of the population and sample suitable for the purpose and objective of the proposed feminist theory-based research is that the participants are:

- women,
- who are in academic leadership positions,
- at a Higher Education Institution (HEI), and
- had to work and lead their teams from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

A purposive sampling method has been used in this process because it follows a criterion, and that is considered credible and assures the quality of the research to some extent (Creswell and Poth, 2018:225). Well set out criteria offers clear understanding of who and why the participants were selected for the research (Tracy, 2020: 85).

3.4.2 Selecting a sampling method

The general method of sampling in qualitative research is purposeful sampling, which requires that the choosing of the participants be done intentionally and purposefully in response to the research problem (Tracy, 2020:82; Creswell and Poth, 2018:213). For the proposed research, I followed purposeful sampling, guided by the feminist research theory, which requires that participants be selected based on the specific theoretically based characteristics (Tracy, 2020:84; Creswell and Poth, 2018:225).

The one main characteristic of a feminist theory-based research is that it would have or seek to address issues of the female population in spaces where male and female participants exist. The proposed research's participants are:

- women,
- in academic leadership positions
- in male dominated institutions.

3.4.3 Determine the sampling size

In qualitative research, the sample size is often determined by the research purpose. The norm is to select a few individuals from whom extensive and detailed data can be collected using the most effective data collection techniques (Creswell and Poth, 2018:419; Rubin, 2021:18). Moreover, sample size in qualitative research relies on the research design being followed. In the proposed research we follow a phenomenological research design (Creswell and Creswell, 2018:262). In phenomenological research, data can be collected from 3 to 10 participants who have experienced the phenomenon studied (Creswell and Creswell, 2018;262). For the proposed research, data would be collected from 8 participants based in different types of Higher Education Institutions in and around South Africa.

Having specified the target population and defined their criteria and size leads to the need to finding and recruiting the participants according to the defined criteria (Robinson, 2014:26). The following table has been populated to summarise the profile of the participants:

Table 1: Summary of the participants' profile

Participant's nr	Years as a leader	Team size: pandemic	Team size: now
1	10	82	96
2	11	106	120
3	4	8	12
4	9	17	17
5	6	16	22

6	8	28	32
7	5	6	9
8	7	12	15

Data collection started taking place only after the population and sampling process was completed (Taherdoost, 2016:26). In the next section, I identify the methods and the process that I followed to collect data.

3.5 Data collection techniques

Qualitative researchers who accept that their work needs to address issues of social justice and human rights often align the process of data collection to ways that easily reflect how they can contribute to the transformative change needed to decrease discrimination and oppression and move communities towards greater equity (Mertens, 2018; 42). In phenomenological research, data is often collected in such a way that it only focuses on the essence of the experiences of the participants more than anything (Johnson and Christensen, 2020:1140). One way of doing this is to ask participants to relive and recall the experience in such a way that they can fully describe it in rich detail. Roulston and Choi (2018:235) suggest that using language and discourse is thus vital in this process as the aim is to get the participants to voice themselves as clearly and as detailed as they could. The nature of a feminist research is that it allows the voices of many to be heard in research, rather than the voice of the researcher (Tracy, 2020:55). Moreover, Johnson and Christensen (2020:1140) offer that the best way to get participants to do this is through in-depth individual interviews and written narratives.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018:65), the use of diverse research methods in the past has benefited feminist research and researchers as it allows for more detailed outcomes. Feminist and qualitative researchers employ a variety of interview formats, such as semi-structured, unstructured, oral, and life history interviews, with the goal of learning about women's lives and fostering equality between women researchers and participants (Roulston and Choi, 2018:235). According to Johnson and Christensen (2020:1140), written narratives are best used when there is a need for participants to fully express themselves, and to identify the essence of their experience and

perspective of the phenomenon (Vagle, 2018:149). Following the research purpose and design, of this research, data were collected through written narratives and in-depth individual interviews from each of the 8 participants.

To fully align with the purpose of the proposed research on capturing the truest form of the experiences and perspectives of the participants, the following steps were followed in the data collection process:

- Step 1: sent and then received consent forms from the participants
- Step 2: sent guiding template of the written narrative via email and suggested timelines
- Step 3: proposed dates and confirmed the location and space of the individual interviews
- Step 4: received written narrative from the participants
- Step 5: sent formal invitation to participants for the interview
- Step 6: conducted individual interviews

(Creswell and Poth, 2018:220)

The table below serves as a summary of the process in which data will be collected in the proposed research study.

Table 2: Summary of data collection process

Methods	Participants	Duration	Documents	Location
Written narrative	All participants	3–8 days	Narrative protocol	Google forms
Individual interviews	All participants	20–40 minutes	Interview schedule	Microsoft Teams

3.5.1 Written narratives

According to Vagle (2018:149) phenomenological research data can be successfully collected using any form of written material. Written materials give participants an allowance to give detailed accounts of their lived experiences regarding the phenomenon (Vagle, 2018:157). Therefore, the proposed research will use written narratives, where participants will be given the opportunity to freely express themselves and their experiences on the research phenomenon in written format.

Rather than having research participants describe the meaning and structure of their experiences in an oral manner, via the interview, these narratives allow them the opportunity to write their experiences (Johnson and Christense, 2020:1140). In a feminism theory-based research, it is advisable to give participants the opportunity to express themselves, in a manner that is comfortable and allows them to tell their stories as they desire (Roulston and Choi, 2018:235). Vagle (2018:157) suggests that a detailed guiding schedule or protocol be provided to assist participants align their experiences to the research purpose and objectives. A protocol or schedule that was sent out to participants is attached as Annexure C.

Participants could choose to receive a hardcopy of the written narrative protocol to complete and hand it back manually. However, all of them opted for the option to complete the narrative online on a Google Form document that was designed with the same prompts as the hard copy one. Combined, all of them took 3 to 8 days, from the day I sent the protocol link, to submit their completed responses. These responses were automatically generated and exported to a Microsoft Excel sheet. These were separated in each spreadsheet pre prompt or question and then the sheets were printed out for easy reading.

3.5.2 Individual interviews

In qualitative research, interviews are conducted with the aim of gathering detailed accounts from the participants, these interviews are often friendly, free flowing discussions rather than structured question and answer sessions (Tracy, 2020:55; Jha, 2021:80). Qualitative research interviews are made up of open-ended questions, designed to provide in-depth information about the participants, thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, motivations, experience, and feelings about a certain phenomenon (Johnson and Christensen, 2020:552).

According to Jha (2021:80) research interviews, no matter the purpose or theory of the research, need to be clear of judgement from the interviewer. Instead, they should be interested in the stories and experiences of the participants, hence, the interview schedule and structure that was sent to participants upfront. This act can easily guide the entire process of the research; however, it was deliberately set out in this research for the ethical alignment of the study and informed participation (Roulston and Choi,

2018:237; Jha, 2021:80). Moreover, interviews are flexible, allowing the researcher and the participants to enter a more conversation-based method of data collection rather than a strict question and answer session (Tracy, 2020:158). Therefore, the interview schedule designed for the proposed research will only act as a guideline to encourage and stimulate an easy flowing discussion between the researcher and the participants. The interview schedule is divided into four sections, each guided by each of the four research objectives. We sent out the interview schedule/questions to participants via email a week before the interview so that participants could go over the question and prepare their own questions, if any, before the interview. These are also attached as Annexure D.

Recommendations for feminist interviewers include using the terms used by women in their daily lives, listening carefully for incompletely articulated issues, portraying participants respectfully, and representing research to be understood by audiences new to feminist work (Roulston and Choi, 2018:236). Therefore, these interviews were also used as a form of follow-up on the participants' narrative responses. According to Merriam and Greiner (2019:12) this process is often very helpful in finding additional insights, enhancing the depth of the information and verifying the written responses. Therefore, after receiving the written narratives from participants, individual interviews were scheduled via Microsoft Teams for 45 minutes. The beginning of the interview was based on following up on the participants' written narratives, then some additional questions as per the interview schedule and the final part was offering participants the opportunity to conclude their thoughts and ask questions. The interviews were conducted online, via Microsoft Teams and they were recorded. Transcripts were automatically generated after the interview sessions and were exported as Microsoft Word documents.

In the next section, I discuss the credibility and trustworthiness of the research and its processes.

3.6 Credibility and trustworthiness

The credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research refers to the extent to which the research processes and findings can be depended upon and trusted to reflect the true meaning and answers to the research question (Tracy, 2020:275). According to Merriam and Grenier (2019:25) assessing the credibility of a research project involves asking how truthful the findings of the research are in comparison to reality. To ensure the dependability and trustworthiness of the proposed research, the following strategies were followed.

3.6.1 Briefing participants

Cohen *et al.* (2018:623) state that it is important to conduct a briefing session where participants are encouraged to ask questions about the research process and their contribution. For this research, I conducted individual briefing sessions with all participants who indicated that they were interested in taking part. In these sessions I explained the background and the objectives of the study, and the details of the consent form. I allowed the participants to ask questions or highlight their discomforts, if any. I clearly explained to participants that they can withdraw from the study at any stage. All the participants who agreed to move forward were asked for their preference on receiving the consent forms, completing the written narrative and availability for the individual interviews. The entire process of data collection was informed by the preferences of each participant.

3.6.2 Member checking and corroboration

According to Saldana (2017:232) a researched approached through the lenses of feminism and a critical paradigm will often encourage and make allowance for participants to know and take ownership of the data that they supplied. Member checking is a process of taking organised data back to the participants to judge its accuracy and make corrections based on what they had intended to say or contribute during the data collection process (Creswell and Poth, 2018:342). When the purpose of research involves conscious engagement with members of the society, member checks become very useful because members are aware that they are participants in a research study (Mertens, 2018:42). Participants were given the opportunity to go over the organised data of both their interview sessions and the written narratives in order to check whether the information they submitted was a true reflection of what

they had intended to say and offer. They were allowed to make corrections, add comments and replace statements with what they actually meant and intended. Participants agreed that they needed at least 5 days to go over the data and send it back, due to their schedules and other commitments. All the members returned the data with a few changes, edits and comments.

3.6.3 State limitations upfront

Jha (2021:120) insists that being honest with the participants from the beginning of a research project increases the chances of getting their honest and full participation. In the briefing session, I explained that there are no known risks or limitations at this point of the research and the aim is to reduce all risks and limitation beforehand. However, should there be any potential risks and limitation while the research is still on going, participants were told that they would be informed via their submitted contact details, as soon as possible. This process also included informing participants of the time that they may have to spend, the costs that may be incurred and the resources they need to participate in this research. The participants agreed that they would make time in their schedules, all of them had the resources they would need, including data bundles for the online interview.

3.6.4 Recording and administration

In the briefing session I took notes of each of the participants' preferences; this helped form part of the research administration. In both the briefing session and the consent forms, participants were informed about the need and the purpose of recording the interview sessions. Participants' individual interview sessions were audio recorded via Microsoft Teams. The Google form responses were easily translated into a Microsoft Excel sheet, for easy record and administration. Having records of the data collected ensures repeated listen and corroboration of data as part of a rigorous data analysis process (Potter and Shaw, 2018:188). I also took notes from the initial process of recruiting participants up to the interview process.

In the next section, I will outline the ethical considerations considered in this research project.

3.7 Ethical considerations

Qualitative research involves working very closely with the participants which brings about some complex association regarding cultural norms, beliefs, values and behavioural patterns (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:111). As a result of these associations, qualitative research and the process of data collection offers several ethical issues because of its general nature and the activities involved when qualitative methods are employed (Mertens, 2018:33).

Research ethics refer to the principles that guide the process and the procedures followed in a research process, they help researchers adhere and uphold their values and those of the participants and associated stakeholders (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:111; Johnson and Christensen, 2018:367). The aim of this research, in terms of ethics and ethical considerations, is to work with participants in a respectful and ethical way, to highlight women's voices without presenting them with a new form of oppressive power and a feeling of judgement for their experiences and expressions (Roulston and Choi, 2018:235). To uphold the research ethics and the aims of the proposed research, the following principles were prioritised and considered throughout the research process.

3.7.1 Application for ethical clearance

According to Fick (2018:11) a review of the ethical clearance application conducted by an ethics committee is a crucial contribution in the ethical consideration of a research study and it helps improve researchers' responsibility towards their participants and studies. Before interacting with the participants or collecting data, I applied for ethical clearance from the University of South Africa, as per the requirements of the University and the College of Education. A committee selected and elected by the College of Education reviewed my application and granted me an ethical clearance certificate, with reference number 2023/002/08/55479146/09/AM [Annexure A]. This was the first point of approval to conduct research based on the information I provided in my application and from which the clearance was granted.

3.7.2 Permission and informed consent

Informed consent is one of the basic forms of upholding the ethical values of a qualitative research study (Tiidenberg, 2018: 469). Some researchers, especially those who practice decolonising and feminist methodologies, ask for research

permission directly from participants and they are often ready to be told no (Tracy, 2020:116). Following this approach, I approached individual women academic leaders in Higher Education Institutions from my network, asking them if they would be interested in participating in the research. I initially had 6 confirmed responses from the ones I approached, they also invited and passed on the message to their networks and from those, I received 7 confirmed responses. After the briefing session and the data collection process, I was left with only 8 active participants, as per the research plan. I contacted participants for a briefing session, where they also got to ask questions and re-evaluate their initial interest to participate. I recorded their preferred method of communication and document format and then sent them the consent forms [Annexure B] to read in their own spare time, sign and then send back to me with any questions that they might have. This, according to Jha (2021:19:120), is an excellent method of ensuring that participants understand and are truly willing to participate in a research study.

3.7.3 Voluntary participation

Informed consent is closely related to voluntary participation, once participants are informed about their contribution in the research project and they give consent to participate, their participation is considered voluntary as it is informed and not forced (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:122). The participants in this research were actively involved and committed to sharing their experiences freely, there were no promises of rewards or coercion to force participation. Both the risks and limitations of the research study were outlined to them upfront. During the briefing sessions, I made it clear to participants that there will be no rewards for participating, they are free to withdraw from the study at any given time and they can retract any information they do not desire to share.

3.7.3 Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity

The research ethical code requires that participants of any research be afforded the right to retain their privacy and confidentiality (Jackson, 2018:287). Anonymity is one of the most effective ways of addressing both privacy and confidentiality in qualitative research, this happens when anything, in the research project, that is associated with the participants cannot be traced back to them (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:129). The participants in this research study and project participate knowing that their identities will not be revealed to anyone or associated with any institution. Codes, instead of

actual names, have been assigned to participants to maintain their anonymity throughout the study.

In the next section I briefly outline the data analysis process employed in this research.

3.8 Data analysis

Data analysis is a process of organising, accounting for and explaining the data by noting patterns, themes, categories, and regularities. In simpler terms, qualitative data analysis is the process of making sense of data in terms of participants' accounts and definitions of the situation (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:315). There are a variety of data analysis strategies and methods in qualitative research. However, data analysis methods are guided by numerous concepts built through the research process, including data collection techniques (Tracy, 2020:158). The introduction, background, literature review, and theoretical framework are all well aligned with the structure and method of data analysis used in this study. I was, however, just as prepared for findings that might challenge or deepen the meaning of these concepts. Creswell and Poth (2018:165) state that in a phenomenological research design, data is analysed to identify significant statements, meaning units and the description of the essence of the experiences of the participants (Saldana, 2017:200).

The most common method of analysing data in qualitative research is thematic, which simply refers to the process of theming or generating themes through the process of coding and categorising data (Johnson and Christensen, 2018:1458). Saldana (2017:200) states that the thematic or theming approach is especially applicable and relevant in phenomenological research designs on data that was collected by means of interviews and written narratives from participants. In this research, data was collected using written narratives and in-depth interviews; therefore, data will be analysed following an inductive thematic analysis approach.

Braun and Clarke developed a six-step process of the most cited thematic analysis; Step 1: immersion in the data through repeated reading of the transcripts ; Step 2: systematic coding of the data; Step 3: development of preliminary themes; Step 4: revision of those themes; Step 5: selection of a final set of themes and Step 6:

organisation of the final written product around those themes (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017:3354; Morgan and Hoffman, 2018:259). Jha (2021:103) introduces a much more summarised version of the process of analysing qualitative data; (1) coding; (2) categorising; (3) thematic representation and analysis; and (4) theorisation. Theorisation is not a very common step in qualitative research or a phenomenological research design. For the purpose of this research, I combined and followed the following steps to analyse the data:

- Step 1: Familiarisation
- Step 2: Coding
- Step 3: Categorising
- Step 4: Theming
- Step 5: Definition of themes
- Step 6: Presentation

(Morgan and Hoffman, 2018:259; Jha, 2021:103)

These steps are not set in stone, since qualitative data analysis does not always follow a straightforward process, even with a detailed set out tool, one should always make room for a flexible process (Rubin,2021:180) According to Morgan and Hoffman (2018:259) thematic analysis is a flexible strategy that can easily be associated with spoken and written data collection techniques.

In qualitative research data collection, analysis and interpretation can and often occur concurrently following the research design and purpose, data is analysed as it is being collected (Merriam and Grenier, 2019:15; Jha, 2021:102; Tracy, 2020:232). I started the initial analysing of the data as soon as I received it from participants. Tracy (2020:216) states that there are several software tools available to assist with the heavy projects of data analysis in qualitative research, however, manual data analysis approaches are still used all over the world and they are just as effective but more time consuming. For this research, I used a manual data analysis method in the form of Microsoft Excel spreadsheets. The written narratives were completed on an online Google Form and the responses were automatically generated into an Excel spreadsheet. The individual in-depth interviews were conducted online, and the transcripts were automatically generated through Microsoft Teams. It is important to note that the data collected from the written narrative and the data collected from the

individual interviews were analysed separately. They were not mixed at the initial point of data analysis, instead, they will be combined at the point of interface and integrated in the research discussion (Weller, Bassalo and Pfaff, 2018:567-568).

To interpret the collected data fully, in its truest form and in line with the purpose of the research, I used the research questions and assigned categorised content under each question as a form of a response to the questions. These questions built up themes that are at the centre of the experiences of the participants (Weller *et al.*, 2018:490). This forms part of the theming process for the data analysis and interpretation stage of the research. The data will then be presented following the research questions, supported by extracts and quotes from the participants' interviews and written narratives. The research will also link these to the feminist research approach followed in the research and the literature reviewed in the research study.

3.9 Chapter summary

This chapter outlined the guiding foundation of this research project and how the process of collecting data was employed. Following the feminism theory, the transformative paradigm leaned over to a qualitative methodology. With the research theory in mind, the process of sampling and data collection was firmly rooted in the research purpose. Though time consuming, credibility, ethical considerations and a manual data analysis process were employed to ensure the quality of the study and the next chapters.

The next chapter will outline the detailed process of the data analysis process and report on the findings of the research.

Chapter 4: Research findings and discussion

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter indicated where the data came from, how it was collected, and which method of data analysis would be used. This chapter focuses on reporting, presenting, and discussing the findings of the research. To start off this chapter, I will outline the processes followed leading to the analysis of the data as it addresses how the findings are presented and discussed. The process includes a step-by-step description of the analysis process.

To understand how women academic leaders experienced working and leading their teams remotely during a pandemic, the following primary and secondary research questions will be asked.

Primary research question:

What are the experiences of women academic leaders in Higher Education Institutions on working and leading teams during a pandemic?

Secondary research questions:

- How has the pandemic affected women academic leaders' roles and functions in Higher Education Institutions?
- How do women academics leaders manage their fiduciary duties and other responsibilities?
- What are the challenges that women academic leaders experienced when working and leading teams remotely?
- How can women academic leaders be supported during the COVID-19 pandemic?

In the next section, I expand on the analysis process taken.

4.2 Data analysis and presentation

Data analysis is the process of making sense of data according to participants' accounts and definitions of the situation or their experiences (Cohen *et al.*, 2018:315). Thematic or theming analysis is a process of generating themes by coding and categorising data (Johnson and Christensen, 2018:1458). This method of analysing

data is especially relevant in data collected in written and spoken format (Saldana, 2017:200). In this research data were generated by means of written narratives and in-depth interviews from 8 participants whose demographics were shared in Table 1, Chapter 3. Therefore, data were analysed following the five steps of the thematic data analysis process suitable for qualitative research:

- Step 1: Familiarisation
- Step 2: Coding
- Step 3: Categorising
- Step 4: Theming
- Step 5: Presentation

(Saldana, 2017: 14; Jha, 2021:103)

4.2.1 Step 1: Familiarisation

This stage occurred concurrently with the data collection process, as I collected data, I began to read and re-read the transcripts and narratives. I rewatched and re-listened to the interview recordings to verify the information across all the responses collected in different formats (Tracy, 2020: 213). Familiarisation with data is considered a key step in thematic analysis, it is where the researcher immerses in the data that they have collected to familiarise themselves (Merriam and Grenier, 2019:199).

The main purpose of this stage of data analysis was to familiarise myself with the dataset and to identify initial points of interest and patterns (Dawadi, 2020:64). Lochmiller (2021:2034) and Saldana (2017:22) suggest that one develops a number of questions to help guide the process of coding data, regardless of the research purpose. To avoid imposing an interpretation or making unnecessary inferences about the participants' experiences and perspectives and to help structure the process of coding (Lochmiller, 2021:2034), I used the following questions:

- How are the participants expressing or describing their experiences?
- Are there similar or dissimilar perspectives between participants?
- What experiences do the participants have in common?
- What are the assumptions that the participants are making?
- Are there any emotions or feelings that are being highlighted?

While using these questions, I jotted down some notes and highlighted a few words and phrases. This process helped move me to the next step, coding.

4.2.2 Step 2: Coding

Coding is a process of separating data, through labelling and highlighting, initial points of interest and patterns (Jha, 2021:105). The first stage of coding is called initial or open coding, it occurs in the very first stage of data analysis. According to Jha (2021:107) and Saldana (2017:115). This process was done, rigorously, on printed copies of the transcripts and narratives and it yielded many codes, some were just one phrase and others whole sentences at this stage (Dawadi, 2020:65; Jha, 2021:106).

Though the familiar advice is for researchers to code quickly and spontaneously after familiarising themselves with the data (Saldana, 2017:115), detailed, line by line coding is very important in extracting rich dynamics of data. Jha (2021) calls this a more focused process of coding. In an attempt to move from the process of initial coding to a more detailed coding process, I started colour coding responses to the questions I had initially developed to familiarise myself with the data.

Table 3: Coding in colours

Guiding questions	Colours
How are the participants expressing or describing their experiences?	Blue
Are there similar or dissimilar perspectives between participants?	Purple
What experiences do the participants have in common?	Red
What are the assumptions that the participants are making?	Yellow
Are there any emotions or feelings that are being highlighted?	Green
Other points of interests or patterns	Orange

During this process of rereading and recoding the data, I used my notes to assist in yielding detailed codes. The next step addresses the process of categorising coded data.

4.2.3 Step 3: Categorising

This step is a link between the previous step and the next step, while it requires the use of codes to develop categories, it also serves as an introduction to finding themes (Saldana, 2017:235). Categorising can be defined as the process of assigning or chunking similar or related codes together (Jha, 2021:109). In this step I focused on previously coded passages and phrases to produce categories that are open and broad but still define the relationship, or lack thereof, of the coded data (Lochmiller, 2021: 2036).

According to Saldana (2017:230) a manual process of coding and categorising would involve coding the data on the margin of a hardcopy of the document and then cutting out each code and chunking or grouping the codes into appropriate categories. Closest to this method, I worked on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet I assigned related codes to any statement that appeared related or similar. I generally repeated this process until I had identified a sufficient number of categories (Lochmiller, 2021:2035), as shown in Figure 1 below.

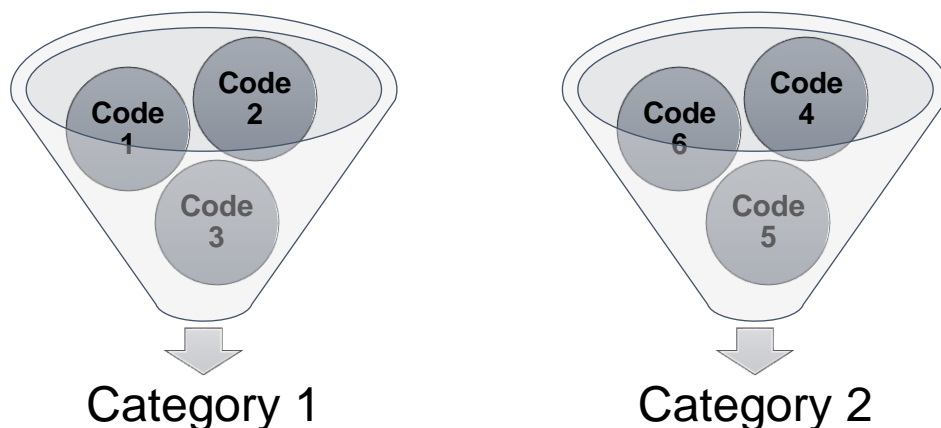


Figure 1: Process of categorising

In the next step, I will explain how I went about the process of theming.

4.2.4 Step 4: Theming

Phases four of this data analysis process involves the researcher's efforts to review, define, and name themes (Lochmiller, 2021;2036). I started off the process of theming

by reviewing the categories, checking whether they made sense and whether they were supporting the data in order to develop themes (Dawadi, 2020:3358).

A theme is a phrase or sentence that describes the phenomenon and the significance of data (Saldana, 2017:297). There are no hard rules or guidance about what makes a theme in qualitative research, often times there is an overlap between categories and themes (Dawadi, 2020:3356; Lochmiller, 2021:2036). Moreover, developing categories is an initial step in the development of themes (Lochmiller, 2021:2032), categories can be used to articulate various assumptions about the data. While in this process, I considered the research questions and used them as a guide in the development and definition of themes.

The purpose of this step is to identify themes that can help understand the phenomenon that is being studied and retell the experiences of the participants. The thematic data analysis of the interview transcripts and narratives revealed the following themes and sub-themes.

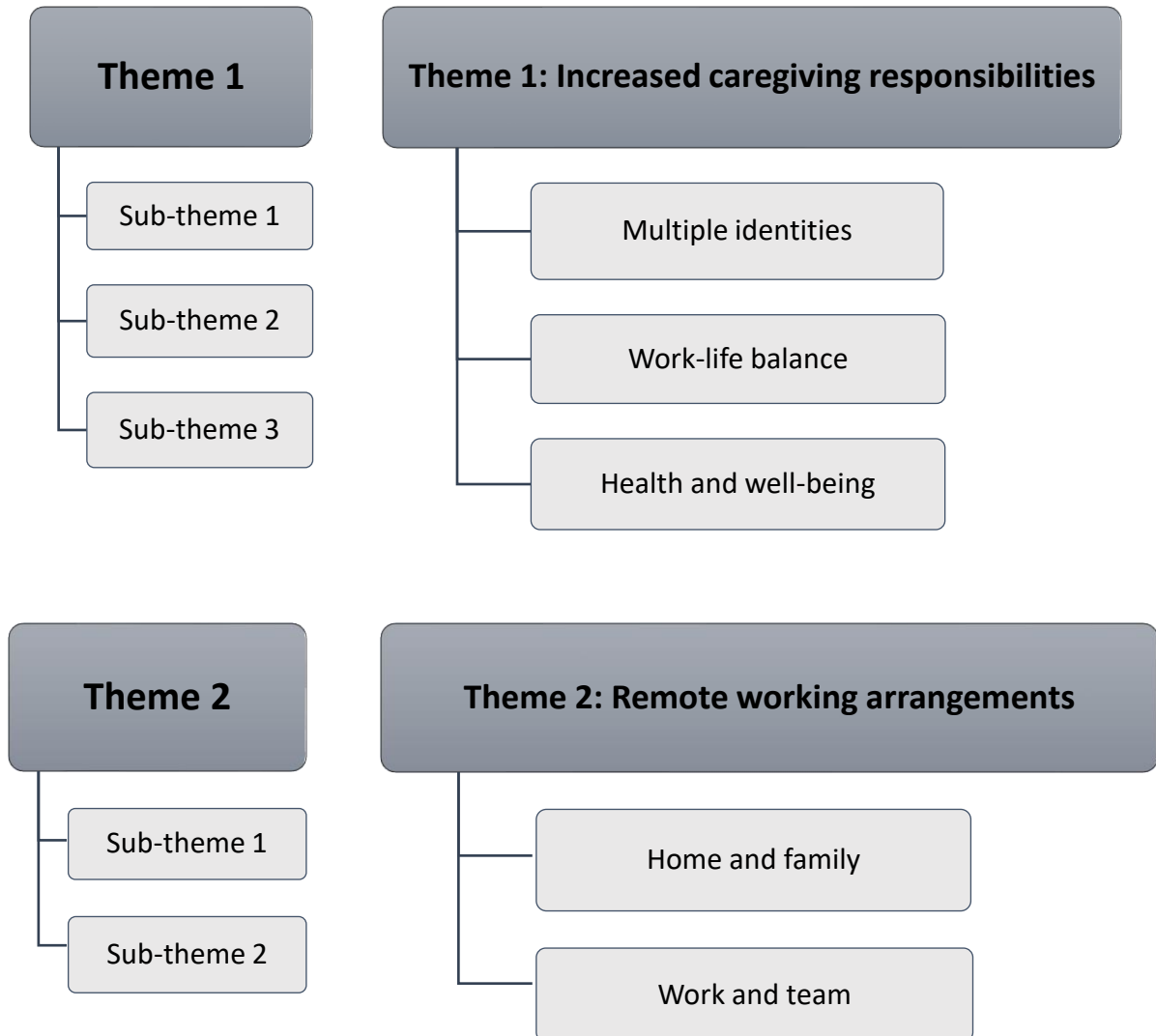
Table 4: Themes and sub-themes (categories)

Themes	Sub-themes
Increased caregiving responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multiple identities • Work-life balance • Health and well-being
Remote working arrangements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Home and family • Work and team
The leadership and management role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A people first approach • Adaptive leadership
Challenges and support strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inequality and discrimination • Surviving leadership • The new normal

The next step will illustrate how these themes and sub-themes will be presented in the findings section.

4.2.5 Step 5: Presentation

In this step I describe and illustrate how I approach the development of the next section, findings and discussions, by outlining how the themes will be presented. Categories can be used as sub-headings or sub-themes of the themes, as they help illustrate how themes were developed (Lochmiller, 2021:2032). Therefore, the finding and the discussion of this research will be presented in a format illustrated in figure 2 below, with themes and sub-themes.



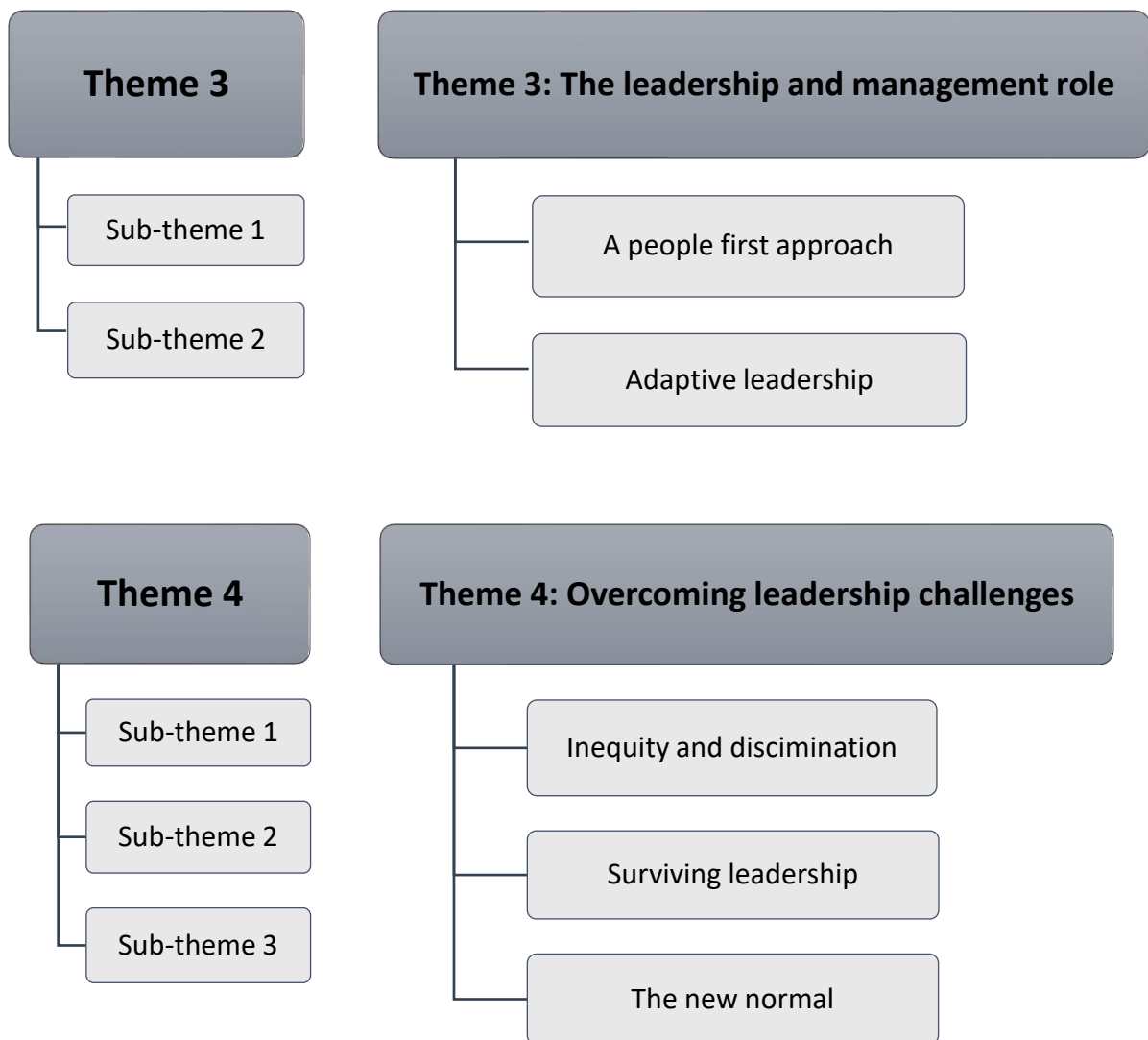


Figure 2: Presentation of themes

I use these categories to identify and select outstanding passages or quotes for inclusion in the final report. In the next section, I will be discussion the data.

4.3 Findings and discussions

This research is grounded in the feminism standpoint, which asserts that because the participants of the study hold a marginalised place in society, they have unique and significant views about the society from which they function (Tracy, 2020: 54). Therefore, the findings of this study are supported by quotations from participant interview transcripts, narratives and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, (Merriam and Grenier, 2019:6).

As part of the ethical considerations and maintaining the anonymity and privacy of the participants, they will be referred to in these codes, with reference to the data collection techniques:

Table 5: Participants codes and presentation

Participant code	Interview responses	Written narrative
Part 1	Part 1 Int	Part 1 Nar
Part 2	Part 2 Int	Part 2 Nar
Part 3	Part 3 Int	Part 3 Nar
Part 4	Part 4 Int	Part 4 Nar
Part 5	Part 5 Int	Part 5 Nar
Part 6	Part 6 Int	Part 6 Nar
Part 7	Part 7 Int	Part 7 Nar
Part 8	Part 8 Int	Part 8 Nar

Theme 1: Increased caregiving responsibilities

Theme one is linked to Research Question (RQ2), how do women academic leaders manage their fiduciary duties and other responsibilities? And describes their increased caregiving responsibilities. Aligned with this research’s theoretical framework, which focuses viewing the world through a feminist lens, eliminating binary thinking and raising consciousness about women’s issues (Higgs and Smith, 2012:40; Johnson and Christensen 2020:227).

According to Parry and Gordon (2020:801), women all over the world and in South Africa suffer from double the burden of work compared to men, as they have to participate in the labour market and household work (Zheng, 2018:228; Khokhar, 2018:69). In Chapter 2, section 2.3.2. Challenges that women academic leaders face, we discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the fact that most women have to carry the greater burden and the responsibilities of taking care of their households and family members (Maula, 2021:9).

the lockdown really tested us [women], the things we put ourselves through to make sure that our families were safe and sane on the same time excelling in our work (Part 8 Int)

When asked what other responsibilities and roles they had outside their academic roles, with reference to the lockdown period, the participants felt that being a woman, whether in academics or not comes with the responsibilities of caring for others.

My husband and I shared the responsibilities in the house but I am a wife and a mother, that meant there are a lot of other things I have to do that I cannot expect my husband or children do (Part 1 Int)

I have always cooked and cleaned and did laundry in my house, but during [t]he lockdown, with everyone at home, I also had to make food and prepare snacks or go shopping (Part 4 Int)

Considering that most households in South Africa and in different socio-economic classes and standards, are headed by women, these may be predictable issues (Parry and Gordon, 2020:647).

I am the man and the woman of my house, I do everything for me and my children... (Part 6 Int)

I was responsible for making sure that my house is in order, and that no one was getting behind on their school work (Part 3 Int)

However, most of these women are used to having to care for their families and still attend to their leadership roles and functions. However, with the day care centres and schools closed, their responsibilities were magnified (Chanmugam, 2021:649).

there is just a lot that we [women] have to do an[d] deal with on a daily basis, but the lockdown was a nightmare, the constant eating and being called every few minute was just too much. (Part 7 Int)

... before COVID-19, I wake up and get my sons ready for school and then we would eat and leave the house. During lockdown, it was something else, I would wake up to prepare food for everyone, try to log in and check my work, once everyone wakes up, its game on, every 5 minutes I was called or asked for something, it was bad. (Part 2 Int)

Working from home might have come across as a great opportunity for one to be closer to family for most people (Ghani, et al., 2021:157).

I was just grateful to be around my family, safe at home... (Part 5 Int)

However, for most women, it also involved taking care of loved ones and teaching children. Theme one is described in detail with the following sub-themes.

Sub-theme 1: Multiple identities

Women are involved in multiple roles and experience challenging and stressful events throughout their lives (Braun-Lewensohn *et al.*, 2022:1). Women can never be just who their job titles or function say they are because in addition to being leaders, they are wives, daughters, and mothers (Bhatti and Ali, 2021:13). When asked what other roles and responsibilities they have outside their academic leadership roles, all the participants listed more than three titles they identify with,

I am a wife, mother, academic, researcher and supervisor (Part 7 Int)

I am also a mentor and a coach... (Part 2 Int)

I am mother of 4, I am a grandmother and stay with my grandchildren, and I am also an aunt... (Part 5 Int)

I am a single mother, a sister, a friend, a colleague and an entrepreneur (Part 8 Int)

In addition to titles, they identify with, some of the participants elaborated on the roles they take on besides their leadership roles, this agrees with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, sub-section, 2.3.1.2 The traditional roles of women as expected by the society, where it states that women operate in various parts of society and organisations with multiple roles and identities associated with them in different stages of their lifecycle (Braun-Lewensohn *et al.*, 2022:1).

My roles and responsibilities are to make sure that my family is safe and health[y], so I cook, clean, make laundry, go shopping and get them ready for school (Part 1 Int)

outside my leadership role, I take part [in] my community, I do outreaches and volunteering (Part 4 Int)

my other roles and responsibilities are at home and at church I am part of the church leadership committee and one of the Sunday school leaders (Part 3 Int)

My roles and responsibilities are being a mother and a father to them [biological children, niece and nephew] ... I am a single mother so I take care of my children without any help, that is why I say I am a mother and a father (Part 2 Int)

In Chapter 2, sub-section 2.3.1.2 The traditional roles of women as expected by the society, we discussed that among other things the prospect of working and leading remotely meant that academic leaders had to carry on these multiple roles at the same time and in the same space (Bulut and Maimaiti, 2021:62). This made it hard for them to separate between work and home life.

Sharing a work space with family is a challenge because when they want your attention they want it, they do not care what you are doing at that time... you can't just tell them you are working (Part 6 Int)

no matter how important my job is, I know that my children just see me as mama... (Part 1 Nar)

The roles and responsibilities that most of the participants referred to already showed that women had multiple caregiving responsibilities long before the pandemic. With the pandemic and the lockdown, women and the people that are under their care had to share a space, making it even harder for women to separate their professional leadership roles from their home responsibilities.

Sub-theme 2: Work-life balance

In chapter 2, sub-section 2.3.2.2 Working through ills and hurts, we defined work-life balance as an understanding of what are ones work obligations, how they could be complete, where and when they should be completed (Agrawal and Amin, 2022:31). When asked how they manage or balance their other roles in addition to their leadership roles, considering the increased caregiving responsibilities during the pandemic, the participants were quick to highlight that they do not have much of a balance between all their roles and duties,

I don't really have a formula or a specific way of balancing, I just try to make sure that I do my best and show up in all areas of my life as a leader (Part 3 Int)

It is important to be that I separate work and my personal life, so I make sure that I do not mix those two things (Part 5 Int)

... so I would start off by checking up on family and making sure that everyone was okay before I started with work stuff (Part 2 Int)

Additionally, some participants agreed that working from home blurred the lines between space and time in terms of work and personal life, as expressed in Chapter 2, sub-section 2.3.2.2 Working through ills and hurts.

before the lock down I tried to make sure that I do work at work and finish there, after work and weekends are strictly for family and friends, but with the pandemic, I was always with family so I added more time to my work (Part 4 Nar)

My normal working hours were 7:30 to 16:30 and that was fine until the lock down, during the lockdown, I start working from 7:30 until very late at night... maybe around 21:00 (Part 2 Nar)

I would start work at around 08:00 by checking my emails and updates, but then I would not stop working, some days I would not even switch off my laptop (Part 8 Nar)

When asked about their daily routines during the pandemic as compared to before, the participants highlighted how following a consistent routine was near impossible when it comes to their home or family-based responsibilities.

you just never know with children, some days they wake up fine, the next day they are sick (Part 6 Nar)

I wouldn't say I have a routine, I never do the same thing everyday (Part 7 Nar)

my routine was never the say [same], my day depended on what was important or happening that day (Part 1 Nar)

I would wake up and pray and then everything else will follow after that (Part 3 Nar)

In Chapter 2, sub-section 2.3.2.2 Working through ills and hurts, we found that most women spend over 15–17 hours daily fulfilling their domestic duties, for those who are working in the formal or informal spaces, this is in addition to their working hours, under normal circumstances (African Development Bank and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa 2020:32). With the increased caregiving responsibilities, maintaining a work life balance has proven to be a challenge for most of the participants.

Sub-theme 3: Health and well-being

Women in the workplace are unable to avoid stress in balancing their family and work-life (Ghani *et al.*, 2021:154). In Chapter 2, sub-section, 2.3.1.1 Being a woman academic, we discussed that when the balance between work and home life is broken,

there is a risk of work overload, which contributes to low performance, low morale, stress and other health issues (Ghani *et al.*, 2021:155; Bulut and Maimaiti, 2021:61). Without having been asked a specific question with regard to their health and well-being, most of the participants highlighted how the increased caregiving responsibilities and their jobs affected their health and well-being, in these factors,

i. Being at risk

According to Maula (2021:28) there is no amount of precaution that women can or could have taken to avoid being infected or affected by COVID-19. Because most of them do not really have a choice when it comes to caregiving responsibilities (Walters *et al.*, 2022:53). The participants showed that in their caring for others, they themselves were at high risks.

My mother was a high risk, so I had to make groceries for her every week, even though I was pregnant at the time (Part 7 Int)

I had to help with my uncle's funeral, I am the oldest one at home (Part 2 Nar)

In the first few days I made sure to monitor everyone's temperature and check for symptoms to avoid risking the whole family (Part 5 Nar)

If I suspected something, even as small as a cough, I would make sure to prepare an isolation room in the house, that person will be isolated until they feel better... I will check on them and bring them food, just to make sure they are OK (Part 1 Nar)

... I had to run around getting supplies, I remember I had to drive to different shops because things were finished in our local stores (Part 8 Nar)

Expectedly, the highest number of people who were infected by COVID-19 and related illnesses in South Africa, were women rather than men (Maula, 2021:7).

ii. The unknown

The COVID-19 pandemic has interrupted the way of life as we know and understand it, the outbreak that resulted in countries all over the world imposing hard lockdowns was very scary and caused a great deal of anxiety, confusion, and stress (Mackett, 2020:70; Malik and Naeem, 2020:3).

the thing with COVID is that you just never know whether you got it or not until it is late, so I was always careful but scared (Part 4 Nar)

According to Chanmugam (2021:648), the worst part about the lockdown was not knowing what to expect the next day.

not knowing what was going to happen was frustrating... (Part 8 Nar)

the numbers [death and infection rates] going up every day was making me very anxious, actually (Part 6 Nar)

... I had to give people hope even when I did not have it (Part 1 Nar)

that is when I realised that mental illness was real... (Part 5 Nar)

Some nights I could not sleep, I had nightmares and thought it was really the end of the world (Part 3 Nar)

iii. The lasting effect

When asked how they were personally affected and impacted by the pandemic, the participants shared challenges that they are still dealing with even to this day due to the pandemic,

I don't believe that we get healed, like totally [completely] with COVID, I think some things we are still carrying even today (Part 5 Int)

... I now wear glasses because of the time I spend on the computer (Part 3 Int)

my sense of smell is no longer working 100% like before COVID (Part 7 Int)

I started having backpains because of sitting in one position all day... (Part 2 Int)

I gained a lot of weight due to stress and not being able to go to the gym during that whole time... it was hard trying to exercise at home (Part 1 Int)

I didn't loose anyone close to me so it did not affect me in that way... but it really affected my mental health (Part 4 Int)

Women all over the world were already dealing with a greater amount of caregiving responsibilities in addition to their job. However, theme one indicates that with the increased caregiving responsibilities, women academic leaders could not manage a work-life balance. Moreover, their health and well-being were affected, in what seems like a lifetime effect. As explained in Chapter 2, sub-section 2.3.2.2 Working through ills and hurts, the pandemic and remote work has disrupted people's work-life balance and increases the chances of mental, emotional, physical and psychological health effects (Agrawal and Amin, 2022:33).

Theme 2: Remote working arrangements

Working and leading a team from home came with the need for teaching and learning services to move online after the announcement of the lockdown. In Chapter 2, section 2.3.2 Challenges that women academic leaders experience, we discussed the prospect of remote working and leading as a means of workplace isolation, that triggers challenges, such as conflict between work and family, overworking, working instability and loneliness.

I am an introvert and was very happy to work from home at first, but then I started feeling isolated and wanted the option to go to work (Part 2 Int)

it is true that you do not know what you have until you done have it... I started to miss the small talks we used to have in the passages (Part 5 Nar)

However, just like any other change, working and leading remotely presented participants with advantages and disadvantages alike:

...it had its ups and downs, but we ended up fine (Part 6 Nar)

Yes, COVID was bad, but there are things that I learned from it... professionally and personally (Part 1 Nar)

Theme two describes the remote working era for women academic leaders. This theme is directly linked to the research question: What are the challenges that women academic leaders experienced when working and leading teams remotely? (RO3). The sub-theme emerged with the following sub-themes:

Sub-theme 1: Home and family

COVID-19 has totally disrupted and turned the entire world upside down and has had a severe influence on the way people live their lives (Bhatti and Ali, 2021:1).

I was very scared and confused in the first few week (Part 3 Nar)

... I just moved with the flow to keep myself sane from all the crazyness [craziness] (Part 7 Nar)

With Higher Education Institutions, schools and day-care centres closed or relocated to full online operation, parents and caregivers, had to adjust and resettle (Agrawal and Amin, 2022:31).

Sharing a workspace with family is a challenge because when they want your attention they want it, they do not care what you are doing at that time... you can't just tell them you are working (Part 6 Int)

Remote working brought all work-related activities into people's normal living arrangements or homes. Most of the participants' working arrangements seemed to have been a challenge in the beginning of the lockdown:

I had to make sure that everything was set up for my grandkids school and for my work (Part 5 Nar)

I used my dining room as an office... (Part 3 Nar)

I did most of my work from the couch... (Part 4 Nar)

all I can say is that my home was not set up for work, there was no space (Part 2 Int)

These working arrangements seemed to have been a little challenging for them to conduct their daily duties and tasks, especially with regard to attending meetings:

I could not find a quiet space to actually focus on my work or meetings (Part 7 Nar)

the one thing I found the most challenging was attending online meeting with the children making noise in the background (Part 8 Nar)

I was in constant fear of something embarrassing happen when my camera was on (Part 1 Nar)

Throughout Chapter 2 we established that most women are primary caregivers, hence most of them had to prepare their houses for their own remote work and their family members' work or schooling as well. When asked what they did to help their families with the transition:

I would encourage them to continue studying and helped them with their school work as much as I could working (Part 5 Nar)

I checked the information their teacher sent us via WhatsApp and helped them with the work that was needed (Part 8 Nar)

I did not want them to think this was a holiday, so I made sure they wake up the same time as before and prepare for their schoolwork (Part 7 Nar)

For obvious reasons, the participants did not think that their working arrangements were a bigger problem for them as leaders and caregivers. This was only the beginning for most of them:

...working from home was new to all of us, so I did not really mind that my children were making noise in the background or that I did not have a proper office like the others, as long as I got the job done. (Part 3 Nar)

the only thing I was worried about was that we were all healthy, I did not care much about working arrangements (Part 4 Nar)

However, these working arrangements still had some impact on the participants' health and well-being as mentioned in theme one:

I started having backpains because of sitting in one position all day... (Part 2 Nar)

For most women academic leaders, remote working arrangements were not only limited to having the right equipment to continue carrying out their duties from home, but also included arranging their families and home environment to accommodate their work.

Sub-theme 2: Work and team

Moving teaching and learning activities online, meant that people had to make a lot of adjustments to their daily routines, both personally and professionally (Fernandez and Shaw, 2020:39). Considering the circumstances from which the adjustments had to take place, this process proved to be both challenging and stressful (Chanmugam, 2021:649). When asked about their teams' transition to working remotely most participants seemed to not have to do much:

... I gave them a week to settle, I told them to focus on getting everything in order and not worry about work... there was not much that we would have done under that stress (Part 2 Nar)

I helped by praying and checking up on them to make sure they were OK (Part 3 Nar)

Because their institutions had made the process easy with the support, they offered staff members at the time:

the university provided us with data so that we did not buy with our own money (Part 1 Nar)

...we were allowed to borrow some of our office furniture until we were able to buy ours, I told my team to make arrangements to go to the office and get some staff [stuff]
(Part 6 Nar)

they [institution] offered sessions to help all staff members with the transition, I just reminded my team to attend the sessions (Part 5 Nar)

it was the role of the university to ensure that we were all set up for working from home
(Part 8 Nar)

Nevertheless, this transition did not come without any challenges. Participants recall some of the challenges that they faced trying to lead a team remotely, especially in the beginning of the lockdown. Clearly some of these challenges were expected, considering the transition was a totally new process. As indicated in Chapter 2, section 2.3.3 the roles and functions of women academic leaders, responding to the call for a lockdown for higher education institutions and other organisations meant a change in their operations (Maula, 2021:18). This had to be done without any form of training or preparation.

we were all just trying to find our way... it was new problem everyday with online work
(Part 2 Nar)

there were a lot of sound and camera issues, I ended up not knowing what was real and what was not (Part 4 Int)

I didn't really blame anyone, we were all trying to learn and we messed up a lot, myself included (Part 5 Int)

Academic leaders and their team members responded to the pandemic by shifting their functions and activities online, thus fulfilling their day-to-day tasks remotely (Fernandez and Shaw, 2020:39). When asked how they manage their teams from home, participants stated several challenges experienced in managing and locating their team members during the very first days of the lockdown:

my team was having a hard time to separate between work time and personal time
(Part 3 Int)

shopping during office hours was a big challenge... for all departments not just us (Part 7 Int)

taking advantage and using work time to do personal things was my challenge (Part 1 Int)

people did not apply for leave anymore, they just did their things and came back online as if nothing is wrong (Part 5 Int)

As challenging as this process might have seemed in the beginning, there was a point when some of the participants and their team members reached a good working arrangement and set up:

as time goes on, they [team] started taking work seriously because they understood that working from home still mean that they need to submit some work (Part 4 Int)

... but once we were all settled, people started doing their work and now we all enjoy the opportunity to work from home (Part 8 Int)

it just it needed some getting used to and then we were all good (Part 3 Int)

there was less frustration when we all started understanding the whole thing about working from home (Part 2 Int)

Both leaders and team members needed to settle into the arrangement of working and leading from home respectively. Although there were challenges and complications in the beginning, it seems that both the teams and participants found common ground in learning and being led from home.

Theme 3: The leadership and management role

The announcement of the lockdown stopped many economical activities, however, for most Higher Education Institutions it mainly meant that academic leaders had to respond by immediately moving teaching and learning activities online (Fernandez and Shaw, 2020:39). This was done without any form of training or preparation for staff members, students and stakeholders. According to Jones (2020:20) and Fernandez and Shaw (2020:41) the manner in which institutions moved their teaching and learning activities determined whether or not their institutions would survive the pandemic and/or beyond.

I wondered if we were gonna make it (Part 2 Nar)

I was in constant worry... it was hard for me to believe that wearing masks and sanitisers are going to be a part of our lives forever (Part 4 Nar)

Theme two describes women academic leaders' leadership and management roles, especially during the pandemic. In Chapter 2, sub-section 2.3.3.2 Leading remote teams, we discussed how academic leaders are expected to build and maintain relationships that are based on mutual trust, with their team members in order to ensure effective management of their roles (Fernandez and Shaw, 2020:42). When asked to describe their leadership styles and roles, participants identified a number of leadership styles.

Five participants specifically referred to the following leadership styles:

I describe my leadership style as a transformation leadership style, I use the same style of leadership even in my businesses... (Part 8 Int)

I am a transformational leader... (Part 2 Int)

I use the leadership style that is participative style... (Part 6 Int)

I try to ensure that I lead my team towards the vision of the university not my own agenda (Part 1 Int)

In addition to these leadership styles, the participants elaborated on the type of leaders that they are and have been throughout their leadership roles:

I am an open leader, I want people to find it easy to talk to me and correct me... (Part 3 Int)

I lead by example, what I expect from people I also do (Part 4 Int)

my leadership style is based on ubuntu, being a people's person (Part 5 Int)

I do not have one leadership style ... (Part 7 Int)

The literature in Chapter 2, sub-section 2.3.3.2 Leading remote teams, showed that women are often rated higher than men of transformative leadership traits such as inspiring their followers and putting aside their own interests in favour of the greater good, which results in high levels of motivation and performance (Offermann and Foley, 2020:9).

This theme emerged from the participants' descriptions of their leadership styles, roles and functions. Theme two is linked to the first research question; How has the

pandemic affected women academic leaders' roles and functions in Higher Education Institutions? And it is discussed with the following sub-themes.

Sub-theme 1: A people first approach

In Chapter 2, section 2.3.3 The roles and functions of women academic leaders, we discussed how institutions of Higher Education were traditionally built upon dominant masculine discourses, where aggression, power and competitiveness were defined as the characteristics that are associated with success in leadership (Khokhar, 2018:64; Zheng, 2018:229). However, the most common thing about the participants' description of their leadership and management styles and roles is that they are not only considerate of the people they are leading but they are not showing or demonstrating any of the characteristics listed above.

When describing their leadership roles and function, occasionally participants made references to how their leadership and management style were people-centric:

I am a people's person by nature and that comes in handy when you are a leader...
(Part 8 Int)

I care a lot about the people that I lead... (Part 3 Int)

...seeing them as just my team or people I work with but seeing them as individuals is important to me (Part 5 Int)

Moreover, some of the participants did not seem to consider themselves leaders to their team members, they felt that they are a part of their team:

for me leadership is not about who is in power but working together to achieve the overall goal (Part 1 Int)

...as much as I am the leader, I still see them as my peers and colleagues (Part 6 Int)

We work so well together I sometimes even forget that I am their leader... (Part 2 Int)

Times and circumstances have changed, as a result more and more women are taking on leadership roles and positions in Higher Education Institutions. As women, who are said to be more sympathetic, intuitive and understanding than men, start taking leadership positions in these space (Zulfqar *et al.*, 2019:352), the entire definition of leadership and successful leadership starts to change from a more masculine to a more people-centred, empathetic and transformative style.

My team and I are in this together... (Part 3 Int)

It is not just about me, it is about the people who depend on me and those who look up to me as a mentor and a coach... (Part 1 Nar)

I know I am a leader because of them, I do not respect them only, I also appreciate them (Part 7 Int)

Sub-theme 2: Adaptive leadership

In Chapter 2, sub-section 2.3.3.2 Leading remote teams, we discovered that leaders who were better able to take decisive measures, show emotions and fostered social cohesion, were most likely to succeed during the pandemic, because of their ability to adapt to changing situations (Burni and Dormgogen, 2021:1).

...I just had to be a human being than a leader at that time, people were suffering, so I try to understand and support them instead of adding [to] their stress (Part 2 Int)

...my leadership style changes based on the situation, the people I am leading and the project we are working on, this way have been working well for all of us so far... (Part 7 Int)

These participants gave a clear introduction to adaptive leadership as indicated in Chapter 2. When asked if the pandemic has affected their leadership or management styles, the participants agreed with Chanmugam, (2021:648) in Chapter 2, 2.3.3.2 Leading remote teams, that the pandemic had prompted a change leadership style, she had moved to a calmer, reassuring and extending empathy to both her team members and the student community at large.

...at that time it was not just about getting work done... people where losing their loved ones (Part 4 Int)

I had to be more understanding and caring because we were all going through a lot (Part 5 Int)

the pandemic has made me more compassionate ... (Part 2 Int)

You can't expect them to perform the same way [as in the office] (Part 1 Nar)

Additionally, the participants indicated how the pandemic, working from home and leading their teams remotely improved some of their management and leadership skills:

my communication skills has really improve... (Part 3 Int)

I am very good with setting up my work online... I have a paperless system now (Part 6 Int)

Tracking the team's work and progress online makes it easy for everyone instead of relying on people's reports we can all see what is happening or who is behind in their work (Part 8 Int)

The pandemic did not only reveal that women academic leaders are adaptive in their leadership, but it also showed improved their leadership skills. According to Fernandez and Shaw (2020:40) and Jones (2020:20) the pandemic required leaders and managers to consider the circumstances of their team members and then restructure their expectations and key competences.

Theme 4: Overcoming leadership challenges

In section 2.3.1 Women academic leaders in Higher Education Institutions, of Chapter 2, we found that Higher Education Institutions are highly influenced by the hegemonic masculine discourses that serve as a major barrier for women who are in leadership positions and those who are aspiring to senior leadership positions (Bhatti and Ali, 2021:4). Despite governmental initiatives over the years, oppressive behaviours and unequal systems continue to ensure unbalanced patterns of representation, particularly in leadership positions (Idahosa, 2019:1).

It is not easy being a woman in a leadership position... (Part 1 Int)

it is not only management that thinks we are week [weak] even some of the people that we are leading think that we are weak and not fit for our positions (Part 8 Nar)

being a man is easy people just assume that since you are a man you are a good leader... (Part 6 Nar)

It is true that the roles of women in most parts of the world have changed drastically over the years, and this has made way for more and more women to take over roles of leadership in most fields of work as well as in Higher Education Institutions (Almaki

et al., 2016:75). However, in most parts of the world, culture, tradition, and social norms would have it that the role of a woman is to stay at home and care for the children or the family, while men are expected to be at work to provide, financially, for their families (Zheng, 2018:230; Khokhar, 2018:69).

women are not taken as serious as men are... (Part 2 Nar)

people just don't want to see women as leaders, they still prefer to be led by men (Part 5 Nar)

they [management] just don't treat us the same way they treat men (Part 7 Nar)

Most of the challenges that women experience includes or are rooted in gender-based discrimination and inequality. According to Offermann and Foley (2020:15), in Chapter 2, section 2.3.4 Support strategies for women academic leaders, women academic leaders are vulnerable to discrimination and harassment as they inhabit traditionally masculine roles, violating social norms.

Following a feminism research theory, this study investigated the perspectives of power relationships and individuals' social position and how they affect women differently from men (Creswell and Poth, 2018:74). Theme four, is a true reflection of this, as it describes the women academic leaders' challenges and strategies on how to overcome these challenges, especially in male dominated institutions. This theme is linked to the third research question (RO3) and the fourth research question (RO4):

- What are the challenges that women academic leaders experienced when working and leading teams remotely?
- How can women academic leaders be supported during the COVID-19 pandemic?

The following sub-themes will help in the describing and elaborating theme four.

Sub-theme 1: Inequality and discrimination

In sub-section 2.3.1.2 The traditional roles of women as expected by the society, of Chapter 2, we learnt that the traditional way of things was set out so that men and women have to occupy and perform different roles in society. Society, culture and tradition remains judgemental about women's skills and capabilities (Bhatti and Ali, 2021:2), and continues to discriminate, undervalue and underpay them (Parry and Gordon, 2020:797).

When prompted to describe the challenging aspects of being a women academic leader, the participant highlighted challenges that stem from different directions but directly linked to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

i. Higher educational institutions are still highly influenced by the stereotypical masculine discourses (Knipfer *et al.*, 2017:5; Bhatti and Ali, 2021:4):
people just don't want to see women as leaders, they still prefer to be led by men (Part 5 Nar)

...even if we do the same jobs, women are not taken as serious as men are (Part 2 Nar)
they [management] just don't treat us the same way they treat men (Part 7 Nar)

ii. Women are said to be more sympathetic, intuitive and understanding than men (Zulfqar *et al.*, 2019:352). These qualities are also believed to be their weakness in leadership and management positions. Therefore, women are believed to be too weak to lead and manage teams in the workplace (Khokhar, 2018:64).

I hate it when they think we are emotional when we try to make our case (Part 1 Nar)
it is not only management that thinks we are week [weak] even some of the people that we are leading think that we are weak and not fit for our positions (Part 3 Nar)

iii. According to Bhatti and Ali (2021) woman have developed self-doubt about their leadership capabilities due to the traditional socialisation patterns and dominant masculine leadership discourses.

sometimes people will test you just to see what you will do, they think we are weak because we are not men so they start doing funny things (Part 6 Nar)

...when you give a good point and people ignore it and then when a man give the same point then they are the hero (Part 4 Nar)

iv. According to Idahosa (2019:4) and Offermann and Foley (2020:14), women academic leaders face discrimination and barriers in the academic settings.

...it is worse for black women, shame, they put us in a position for show, you are not allowed to make decision or question the systems, even if the [systems] are wrong you just have to accept (Part 8 Nar)

Racist, sexist, and patriarchal discourses jeopardise women's ability to obtain and retain academic leadership positions, as they ensure that women remain oppressed (Idahosa, 2019:4). It is for these reasons that some women think that they need to adopt masculine qualities in order to be accepted and considered as capable leaders, thus suppressing their true qualities (Zheng, 2018:229). However, in Chapter 2, sub-section 2.3.3.1 Successful leadership in crisis, we also learnt that there are women who chose to remain authentic in their nature and still manage to enter male dominated fields and positions (Braun-Lewensohn *et al.*, 2022:2), and succeed even as hard as it may be (Bhatti and Ali, 2021:3). While responding to the challenges that they are facing as women leaders, some of the participants were also quick to state aspects of their lives that show that they are resilient:

I worked very hard to be in this position, no matter what people do or say about women, I am a good leader (Part 7 Nar)

...I ignore all the bad comments and focus on the tasks at hand" (Part 3 Nar)

I think I am the best in my role because I don't let personal issues affect my work (Part 1 Nar)

I didn't say because I am here I will relax, no, I continue to develop myself and improve my skills to excel in my field (Part 2 Nar)

Moreover, women in leadership positions are said to be better leaders because they have the capacity to continuously learn, collaborate, deliver, influence, and be respected by their team members (Pranathi and Lathabhavan, 2021:941).

Sub-theme 2: Surviving leadership

In section 2.3.4 Support strategies for women academic leaders of Chapter 2, we discovered that research and studies conducted about and on women in leadership positions clearly showed that there is an urgent need for supporting and empowering women in various aspects of life, including family support and career aspirations (Braun-Lewensohn *et al.*, 2022:2).

When asked what kind of support they need as women academic leaders in Higher Education Institutions, participants responses took different yet aligned directions, confirming some of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2:

- With regards to equal treatment

In Chapter 2, sub-section 2.3.1.2 The traditional roles of women as expected by the society, we highlighted just how society sees and treat women differently from their male counterparts, even with the changes in policies in Higher Education Institutions, women in leadership roles are still treated differently compared to men who are in similar roles.

Treat us all the same, men or women... don't just look down on us because we are women
(Part 7 Int)

- With regard to working hours and family time

In Chapter 2, section 2.3.4 Support strategies for women academic leaders, we discussed flexible working hours as one of the main aspects of what better working conditions for women in Higher Education Institutions would mean.

I do not want to work outside my working hours when it is not necessary (Part 3 Int)

flexible working hours so that we can also take care of other thing (Part 4 Int)

first of all, no meeting after working hours, work should be only within working hours
(Part 1 Int)

- With regard to career advancement and development

Many training programmes have been developed for leaders and leadership roles at Higher Education Institutions, but they have not been equally useful for men and women. In fact, most of them have had a negative impact on women by unintentionally reaffirming old gender norms (Bhatti and Ali, 2021:4).

give women more opportunities to show our strengths and capabilities (Part 8 Int)

we need training that is specifically meant for women in leadership position, not just any training or seminar or conference – ones that are just for women (Part 2 Int)

maybe allow us some time within our working hours to focus on developing our skills and catching up on our studies (Part 6 Int)

- With regard to mentorship and coaching

According to Khokhar *et al.* (2020:72) for more women to advance and survive the role of leadership in academics, those who are already in the position must take up the role of mentoring those who aspire to move towards the same direction.

I would like opportunities to come together with other women in leadership positions. We can share our challenges and learn from each other (Part 5 Int)

Higher education is at the forefront of women empowerment, including and integrating women in leadership positions in this space would promote further involvement and representation of women in higher education and contribute to society in general (Braun-Lewensohn *et al.*, 2022:2).

Sub-theme 3: The new normal

In sub-section 2.3.2.1 An advanced level of work-life imbalance, of Chapter 2, we found and discussed that working from home for most women also involved taking care of loved ones, teaching children and giving assurance to their team members (Chanmugam, 2021:649). Believing that working remotely has made it harder for these women to differentiate professional life from home life (Agrawal and Amin, 2022:31). This was true in the beginning of the pandemic and when people were still confused about the new way of life. In their narrative participants were asked to describe and think back to the first few days of the lockdown, in their description of those first few days participants indicated how they felt:

...not knowing what was going to happen the next day killed me (Part 1 Nar)

... to be honest I was very scared... for me, for my family and for everyone else that I knew (Part 3 Nar)

I remember panicking [panicking]... watching the news made the whole thing worse but I could not stay away from them because we all wanted to be updated (Part 8 Nar)

at first I thought it was only going to last for a new weeks or so... but once I heard we were not allowed to even go shopping I was shaken to the core (Part 7 Nar)

the one thing I remember the most is how much I was worried about everyone and everything (Part 4 Nar)

However, now that schools and day care centres are in full operation, most of the participants felt working from home indeed meant that they could get the flexibility they have been needing in their work and the opportunity for them to be closer to their families.

Working from home has its downs and lows but I would choose to work from or at least having the option to go to the office when I need to because I can actually accomplish a lot at the comfort of my home than at work... (Part 5 Int)

I actually enjoyed working from home, I think it allowed me to really focus on my work (Part 1 Int)

I know this is new but it proved that we can do it, my work and my teams' work has actually improved since we started working from home some days (Part 2 Int)

going to work adds to our stress level, working from home makes me achieve more work (Part 7 Int)

My job is important but my family comes first, taking care of them was my first priority... (Part 6 Int)

Remote working might have been introduced as a way of ensuring that the world continues to operate even during a pandemic; however, it seems to have proven that people can work and be productive even from the comfort of their homes. In their narratives, participants highlighted how both their teams also seemed to thrive working and being led from home:

as time goes on, they [team] started taking work seriously ... (Part 4 Int)

... but once we were all settled, people started doing their work... (Part 8 Int)

it just it needed some getting used to and then we were all good (Part 3 Int)

there was less frustration when we started understanding the whole thing about working from home (Part 2 Int)

4.4 Conclusion

The aim of this research is to make sense of the pandemic and its effect on women academic leaders from their point of view. This chapter focused on detailing the process of data analysis, to make it an easy flow into reporting, presenting and discussing the findings of the research. This process was guided by the research

questions and objectives. The data analysis process resulted in themes to structure the discussion of the findings of the research project. The discussion linked to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and the findings were a true reflection of the participants' voices, hence the direct quotes.

In the next chapter I will give a conclusion of the research study, acknowledge limitations to the study, make a few suggestions and recommendations.

Chapter 5 Conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the research, with a summary of the findings, recommendations, and a reflection on the study. I will present a summary of the findings of the research, with relation to the research objectives. Following the findings are recommendations for Higher Education Institutions and suggestions for further research within the scope of women leaders and Higher Education Institutions. In the final part of the chapter, will be a reflective summary of the research limitations and researcher's experience.

This research followed a qualitative research approach. Data were collected through individual interviews and written narratives from eight women academic leaders from 6 different Higher Education Institutions in South Africa. This study is set on a feminist research theory and the ultimate goal of this research is to establish collaborative and non-exploitative relationships, to place researchers within the study aimed at avoiding objectification, and to conduct research that is transformative (Creswell and Poth, 2018:65; Tracy, 2020:72).

Guided by the feminist research theory, the presentation of the findings of this research in Chapter 4, demonstrated a view of the world through a feminist lens. Showing off the expression of women through quotes generated from the written narrative and in-depth interviews and doing away with binary and socially bias thinking in order to increase the awareness of women's issues. Ultimately including women's voices in discussions that are usually led and controlled by men in Higher Education Institutions (Higgs and Smith, 2012:40; Johnson and Christensen 2020:227).

5.2 Summary of findings

The overall aim of the intended study was to uncover the experiences of women academic leaders in Higher Education Institutions on leading teams and working remotely. The research question that this study intended to answer is:

What are the experiences of women academic leaders in Higher Education Institutions on working and leading teams during a pandemic?

The summary of the findings of this study will be addressed based on the research objectives:

- assess the influence of the pandemic on the work roles and functions of women academic leaders in Higher Education Institutions,
- determine the extent to which women manage and lead multiple responsibilities outside their academic leadership roles,
- uncover the challenges that women academic leaders experience when leading remote teams and working remotely, and
- identify support strategies for women academic leaders to work and lead teams during the COVID-19 pandemic.

5.2.1 Research objective 1

Assess the influence of the pandemic on the work roles and functions of women academic leaders in Higher Education.

The findings in Chapter 4, themes 1,2 and 3 indicate that:

- Their everyday routines were changed and adjusted to additional caregiving responsibilities before they started with their work.
- Leaders adapted their leadership styles and methods, showing more empathy and understanding towards their team members during the pandemic.
- They were leading teams that were unclear on the processes and procedures of working from home and needed training and patience.
- Their everyday routines were changed and affected their working boundaries and hours. They would work way past their knock off time.

The pandemic has influenced and had an impact on women academic leaders' daily roles and functions. Working and leading their teams from home and during a pandemic had an impact in the way that they worked and led.

Even so, the findings in Chapter 4, theme 3 and 4, also indicated that in addition to the negative influence of the pandemic and the challenges that women academic leaders faced during the pandemic, they still:

- showed resilience throughout the pandemic.
- adapted their leadership styles and methods to accommodate their team members.
- continued to develop themselves as leaders.

This objective of this research – to assess the effect of the pandemic on the work roles and functions of women academic leaders in Higher Education Institutions – with the aligned with research question (RQ1); How has the pandemic affected women academic leaders' roles and functions in Higher Education Institutions? The research assessed the effects of the pandemic on women academic leaders' work roles and functions and the findings indicate that the pandemic had a great impact on and affected the work roles and functions of women academic leaders in Higher Education Institutions.

5.2.2 Research objective 2

Determine the extent to which women manage and lead multiple responsibilities outside their academic leadership roles,

The findings in Chapter 4, themes 1 and 2 indicated that:

- Women generally have multiple roles, that participants did not seem to have a problem dealing with or attending to on a daily basis.
- However, with schools and day care centres closed, women's caregiving responsibilities increased.
- Their caregiving responsibilities were one of the reasons why they were constantly at risk of being affected by COVID-19, taking care and attending to the needs of loved ones.
- There could have never been any precaution they could have taken to avoid being affected or infected by COVID-19.
- Managing and leading multiple roles has had a major impact on their work-life balance but the pandemic and working from home worsened the situation.
- Managing multiple roles in addition to their academic leadership role, during a pandemic, has also affected their health and well-being.

With little to no complaints women continue to lead and manage multiple responsibilities in addition to their leadership roles. The findings also show that the participants do not seem to think that attending to their multiple responsibilities, in addition to their leadership role, is a burden.

This objective of this research – to determine the extent to which women manage and lead multiple responsibilities outside their academic leadership roles – was aligned with research question (RQ2); How do women academic leaders manage their fiduciary duties and other responsibilities? The research determined that the extent to which women manage and lead multiple responsibilities outside their leadership roles drastically impacts and affects women’s health, well-being and work-life balance.

5.2.3 Research objective 3

Uncover the challenges that women academic leaders experience when leading remote teams and working remotely

The findings in Chapter 4, theme 2 and 4 indicated that:

- Working from home came with a sense of loneliness
- They struggled with setting up their homes to be effective and conducive working spaces.
- They had to deal with and attend to multiple technical issues and challenges from their team members.
- Both team members and leaders had no clear understanding of the processes of working from home; they all had to learn to work under the new system.
- The lines between work and home life were blurred due to all functions being within the same space, this affected their work-life balance even more.
- It became near impossible for women academic leaders to adhere to their working hours; they would continue working way past their knock off time.

The findings also indicate, in theme 4, a number of challenges that women academic leaders generally face in Higher Education Institutions. The findings indicate that:

- They are often not recognised and acknowledged as leaders by the management and their teams.

- Men and women in leadership positions are treated differently.
- They are dismissed and regarded as emotional when attempting to make a speech.

This objective of this research – to uncover the challenges that women academic leaders experience when leading remote teams and working remotely – in conjunction with research question (RQ3); What are the challenges that women academic leaders experienced when working and leading teams remotely. Helped in uncovering multiple challenges that women academic leaders face and deal with while working and leading their teams from home. Moreover, the research uncovered that women academic leaders' resilience and adaptability made them view some of these challenges they faced as developmental strategies.

5.2.4 Research objective 4

identify support strategies for women academic leaders to work and lead teams during the COVID 19 pandemic.

The finding in Chapter 4, theme 4, indicated that there were several support strategies that Higher Education Institutions offered to general staff members that ended up serving as support strategies for women academic leaders in the leadership and management of their teams.

- Offering training to both leaders and their teams on the prospects of working from home.
- Giving staff members the opportunity to borrow office furniture and equipment for the duration of the pandemic.
- Creating specialised sessions focusing on staff members' health and well-being.
- Issuing monthly data bundles.

Moreover, the findings also show that women academic leaders need the following support:

- Flexible working conditions and hours – having the option to work from home and have access to their offices.

- Training that is specifically designed for them and their needs as women in academic leadership roles.
- The opportunity to attend to their own developments and interact with other women academic leaders.

This objective of this research – to identify support strategies for women academic leaders to work and lead teams during the COVID-19 pandemic – is aligned with the research question (RQ4); How can women academic leaders be supported during the COVID-19 pandemic? The research finding identified support strategies that were offered to staff members during the pandemic. These support strategies, in turn, benefited women academic leaders, by helping ease the process of managing remote team leadership and management.

5.3 Recommendations

Feminism is both a theory and a practice (Letherby, 2003:4), concerned with the production of knowledge and the need for change. The research study is committed to producing women's experiences in a form of knowledge that will make a difference in the lives of women in general and change perspectives and the lenses from which women are seen and perceived by the society. These recommendations and suggestions are based on the findings of the literature reviewed and the findings of this research.

5.3.1 Higher Education Institutions

In Chapter 2, there were a few support strategies indicated that would allow women academic leaders in Higher Education Institutions to thrive in their role and life in general.

1. Redefining leadership and its characteristics

The effects of the pandemic on staff, students, and other stakeholders calls for a leadership and management approach that is sensitive and reflective of what people suffered and how much they have been affected by the pandemic. The findings of this research showed how leaders had to adapt their leadership styles and methods in acknowledgement of the effects of the pandemic on their

team members. Therefore, Higher Education Institutions can evaluate their departments' leaders to see what leaders of teams that were successful throughout the pandemic and beyond were doing differently that made them succeed.

Collaboratively departments or faculties can share their best practices and strategies; thus, redefining post-pandemic leadership and its characteristics.

2. Representation in leadership positions

In Chapter 2, section 2.3.4 Support strategies for women academic leaders, we discovered that higher education is at the forefront of women empowerment. The inclusion and integration of women in leadership positions in these spaces would promote further involvement and representation of women in higher education and contribute to society in general (Braun-Lewensohn *et al.*, 2022:2).

3. Flexible working options

Working remotely showed us that it is possible for people to work effectively in the comfort of their homes, to some extent. For women, this will not only be an opportunity to work from the comfort of their homes but an opportunity to put the time they spend commuting and being idle in their offices, to better use.

4. Training and development

Design and invest in training programmes that are needed specific to the development of women academic leaders, tailor made for the needs of individual leaders. In training and development, consider personalised pathways that are tailored to the needs of every woman leader in higher education.

5. Network and mentorship

Allow and make space for woman-to-woman leaders to network and take part in mentorship programmes. This would form and build a community of practice, women coordinated networks and other collaborative initiatives. These could

also turn out to be professional support systems for women leaders in Higher Education Institutions.

These recommendations cannot be effected by the efforts of Higher Education Institutions alone, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) can play a vital role in

- creating and funding these opportunities,
- ensuring their implementation, and
- evaluating their impact.

5.3.2 Further research and studies

There were a few gaps I identified when analysing and discussing the data in Chapter 4; some of these gaps can be covered and studied further to enrich the findings of this research and support the entire body of knowledge in respect to women in leadership positions.

- Team members' perspectives: Literature indicates that the world at large has not yet grasped the idea of having women in leadership positions. Understanding the perspectives of male team members in being led by a woman, would be a way for women academic leaders to know their weaknesses and strengths as leaders.
- Women academic leaders leading men: In most parts of the world, leadership is associated with men and masculine characteristics. This study would reveal the perspective and experiences of men on being led by a woman in previously male dominated spaces such as Higher Education Institutions.
- Women from different racial groups: Women experience challenges differently because of their circumstances and background. However, there would be a great yield in a study that would attempt to understand the experiences of women from different racial groups.
- Support strategies and empowerment for women: A case study showing how women academic leaders' general lives would be impacted if they were to be supported for a period of time on one or more aspect of their lives.

5.4 Reflection

The goal of the feminist research approach is to establish collaborative and non-exploitative relationships, to place researchers within the study aimed at avoiding objectification, and to conduct research that is transformative (Creswell and Poth, 2018:65; Tracy. 2020:72). This section is a reflection on the limitations of the research as indicated in Chapter 1 and in the proposal of the study. These limitations are checked against the reality of the research project and include limitations that may have arisen without having been anticipated. The last part of this section is an account on my personal reflection on the research process.

5.4.1 Research limitations

In the proposal of the research study, the following were listed as possible challenges and limitations in this research. In this research project the following were encountered and clarified:

- Contextual factors – contextual factors, such as cultural and socio-economic difference, in which the research is conducted may affect the findings of the research. participants may feel the need to alter their responses due to culturally and socially desirable bias, this could lead to incomplete or inaccurate representation of the data.

This limitation was discussed with the participants in details, asking them to express themselves in their truest sense.

- Sample diversity and size – the findings of this research may not be generalizable to the broader population of women academic leaders due to the limited sample diversity and size.

The participants were few but diverse in roles, years or experience and working environment, therefore were able to outline a certain amount of representation of the women academic leaders' population in South Africa.

- Participants recruitment – It has already been established that the participants of this research are people who handle and manage multiple roles and

responsibilities, having them take time to participate in the study might be very challenging.

A lot of time was spent in the recruitment process because most of the participants were excited to be a part of the study but felt that they did not have the time. Moreover, those who were willing to participate needed to be reminded about some tasks, they asked for more time to complete the written narrative, and 3 of them asked to reschedule their interviews.

- Potential response bias – The effects and impact of COVID-19 have become very sensitive topics of discussions. Participants may underreport or overreport some of their experiences, challenges or emotions.

Participants were informed about potential biases and encouraged to go through the interview schedule and narrative guide before the interview sessions. They were allowed to ask questions anytime during the completion of the written narrative.

- The definition of the word “woman” has changed drastically over the years, approaching “women” to participate may not be as easy, as some people may be offended or not identify as women or even feel that the study is discriminating against other groups.

There were no challenges using the word “woman” in describing the participants that would be needed for this research study.

Additional challenges that were encountered during the research process:

- After having planned and completed most of the study, the majority of the participants showed concerns and indicated that they were not happy with their job titles being on the paper.

After carefully considering the value of the titles and checking with the research ethical considerations with regard to privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality, I removed the participants’ job titles.

This did not affect any part of the research project, however, it increased participants’ anonymity.

5.4.2 Researcher's personal reflection

My research interests are driven by my childhood background and career aspiration in academia and higher education. I was raised and surrounded by women, most of whom were illiterate but wise. Their perspectives and approaches to life in general has had a great impact on many aspects of my life, including my research interests.

In my quest for a topic, I focused on the challenges, some of my colleagues and I faced at the time as female leaders in an academic space. Speaking and listening to my fellow colleagues trying to shush their babies in the background and manoeuvre online meetings, made me wonder how women in general were experiencing the new normal.

I have learnt that qualitative research has no one design, it can take a different turn, more time than intended and require more resources for one to feel that they have done a satisfactory job at outlining the participants' (and the people they represent) deepest and truest meaning. I feel that I should have:

- Had more participants, to get an even broader perspective of the phenomenon. Maybe women leaders from different fields of work even.
- Used focus groups, in addition to individual interviews and written narratives. They would have served as a data collection method and help participants share their experiences.

I have concluded therefore that research can never really be done and finished with, there will always be parts of it that can be questioned further, studied more and understood better. I am more driven now to study and understand the lives, perspectives and experiences of women, especially in Africa.

5.5 Conclusion

Concluding and summarising the research, this chapter outlined the aim and the objectives that the research intended to achieve. Each of the objectives addressed a summary of the findings discussed in Chapter 4. Following the summary of findings, recommendations and suggestions were made for Higher Education Institutions and further research prospects. The final section of this chapter is a reflection on the limitations of the study and a brief reflection from the researcher.

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Annexure A: Ethical clearance certificate



UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2023/02/08

Ref: **2023/02/08/55479146/09/AM**

Dear Mrs P KUBHEKA

Name: Mrs P KUBHEKA

Student No.:55479146

Decision: Ethics Approval from
2023/02/08 to 2026/02/08

Researcher(s): Name: Mrs P KUBHEKA
E-mail address: 55479146@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 0714575347

Supervisor(s): Name: Prof Itumeleng Setlhodi
E-mail address: setlhii@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 0124812878

Title of research:

The experiences of women academic leaders on working and leading teams in Higher Education Institutions during a pandemic.

Qualification: MEd Education 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 2023/02/08 to 2026/02/08.

*The **medium risk** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2023/02/08 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 will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the Unisa Covid-19 position statement on research ethics attached.
2. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.




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3. 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.
4. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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.
8. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date **2026/02/08**. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

The reference number 2023/02/08/55479146/09/AM 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
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Annexure B: Consent form

Date:

Title

The experiences of women academic leaders on working and leading teams in Higher Education Institutions during a pandemic.

Clearance certificate reference number: 2023/02/08/55479146/09/AM

DEAR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT

My name is **Precious Kubheka** I am doing research, under the supervision of **Prof. Itumeleng Setlhodi**, a Professor in the Department of Adult Basic Education, towards a M.Ed. in Education Management at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled: *The experiences of women academic leaders on working and leading teams in Higher Education Institutions during a pandemic.*

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

This study is expected to collect important information that could;

- i. Assess the influence of the pandemic on the work roles and functions of women academic leaders in Higher Education Institutions,
- ii. Determine the extent to which women manage and lead multiple responsibilities outside their academic leadership roles,
- iii. Uncover the challenges that women academic leaders experience when leading remote teams and working remotely, and
- iv. Identify support strategies for women academic leaders to work and lead team during the a crisis.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You are invited because you are a women academic leader in a Higher Education Institution in South Africa and have worked and lead a team during the COVID-19 pandemic. There are about 8 participants in the entire study.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

Your role is to provide the researcher with your experience on working and leading teams remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic. You are requested to give detailed accounts of your experience in a written narrative. A written narrative protocol will be provided as a guiding document.

Following the narrative, you will be requested to participate in an individual semi-structured interview. An interview guide will be sent to you beforehand to help prepare for the session. You may contact the researcher should you have any questions.

- The interview will be conducted via Microsoft Teams and recorded for data analysis purposes.
- The time that you will spend in each session is estimated to be 30 – 45 minutes.
- A suitable and convenient time and method will be arranged with each participants.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

The purpose of the proposed research is to determine factors that motivates adult learners to study in learning institutions designed for younger learners, instead of making use of the adult learning institutions designed to offer the same level of education.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

There are no foreseeable or potential level of inconvenience and/or discomfort that participants might experience throughout the study. For both written anecdotes and individual semi-structured interviews, participants will not be asked or forced to answer questions that may be sensitive or uncomfortable to them.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Your identity will be protected throughout the research process and all the information supplied will be treated with confidentiality. Your name will not be recorded anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give. Your answers will be given a code number and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings.

Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the transcriber, editor, and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER(S) PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet at the researcher work office. For future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. After five years, hard copies will be shredded and electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software programme).

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

There will be no incentives or rewards for participating in the study. There are no costs anticipated to occur throughout this study, however, should there be cost relating to the data collection process, they will be covered by the researcher.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish. Clearance certificate reference number: **2023/02/08/55479146/09/AM**

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Precious Kubheka on 071 457 5347/ 051 505 1263 or email pmahlangu91@gmail.com.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Prof. Itumeleng Setlhodi on 012 481 2878 or via e-mail at Setlhii@unisa.ac.za

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you.



Precious Kubheka

CONSENT/ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY (Return slip)

I, _____, confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the Individual interview.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname (please print) _____

Participant Signature

Date

Researcher's Name & Surname (please print) Precious Kubheka

Researcher's signature

Date

Annexure C: Written narrative protocol

Written Narrative

In my letter requesting this protocol, I have indicated to you that I am busy with a research project on the motivation of adult learners and students participating in pre-adult learning institutions. The completed written narrative can be sent or returned to me via email or as a shared Google doc.

The purpose of this protocol is to outline the experiences of women academic leaders during the pandemic, with consideration to their roles at home and in the workplace. This protocol intends to help them structure their recollection of the events in their lives as women leaders and members in their families.

You have consented to this narrative. Please note that the information obtained in this protocol will only be used for research purposes, no names of the participants, institutions, or any form of identifying data will be made known in the report. You have 3 to 8 days to complete this narrative.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

As you write.

- Think about the events chronologically - Describe what you saw, what was said, what you heard, how you felt, what you thought and how you, your family, friends, colleagues, and team acted.
- Try to describe the experience like you are watching it on video of the event replayed.
- If you want to use names in your description, please assign each person a number or an alphabet instead.
- Use a format and method of writing that is most comfortable to you at the time you are completing this.
- Should you prefer voice recording instead of writing, let me know so we can make arrangements suitable for the research.

With these suggestions in mind, please write a description in response to the following prompts.

1. *How did the first few days of the lockdown look like to you and those around you? What are some of the things you remember the most?*
2. *What did you have to do to help your team and family transition from the normal to remote work and/or learning?*
3. *Describe the difference in your routine before the pandemic, during the pandemic and now. Were there any major changes?*
4. *Besides your leadership position, what other roles do you have at home? How do you think the pandemic affected your role as a woman in leadership and the role that you have in your home?*
5. *What is the most challenging thing about being a women academic leader?*
6. *How would you describe your overall experience on working and leading a team remotely during the pandemic?*

Annexure D: Interview schedule

Semi-structured interview schedule

In my letter requesting permission for this interview, I have indicated to you that I am busy with a research project on the experiences of women academic leaders on working and leading teams in Higher Education Institution during a pandemic. I have made a request to audio-record the interview, as it will help me to listen to it again later and to make a transcript of the interview for data analysis purposes.

You have consented to this interview.

The aim of this interview is to help understand your experience working and interacting with your team during the pandemic.

Do you have any questions before we start the interview?

1. Leadership role

1.1 How would you describe your leadership style?

1.2 How do you think the pandemic has affected your leadership role or style?

2. Roles outside work

2.1 What other roles and responsibilities do you have outside your academic leadership role?

2.2 How did you manage these roles in addition to your academic leadership role during the pandemic?

3. Experience

3.1 What was your experiencing working during a pandemic?

3.2 What was your experience leading a team during a pandemic?

3.3 What are the challenges that you experienced working and leading remotely?

4. Support

4.1 What kind of support do you feel that you and your team needed during the pandemic?

4.2 How can institutions of Higher Education better support women in academic leadership positions?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

The interview can either be online, via Microsoft Teams or in person. Please confirm your preference.

The information obtained in this interview will be used only for research purposes, no names of the participants, institutions or any identifying data regarding the participants will be made known in the report.