



FEMALE PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES IN RURAL SCHOOLS IN
KWAZULU-NATAL

BY

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DECLARATION

I **Dorah Mutula** declare that:

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- II. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
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Date 21 December 2023

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my late daughter **Katie Serna Musungu Mutula**. You inspired me to undertake the journey of a PhD, although you left this world too soon to see it come to pass. I did it for you. May your soul rest in the bosom of our heavenly Father.

ABSTRACT

Women face multiple challenges in accessing and participating in educational leadership, and this remains a problem and compelling issue for research. This study aimed to explore female principals' leadership experiences in six selected public primary rural schools in the KwaZulu-Natal Province in South Africa. To understand women's leadership experiences, the study examined their biographies, early learning, and school experiences as leaders. An intersectional lens was employed to understand women's multiple challenges encountered in educational leadership based on an interlocking system that shapes the interpersonal, organisational, and structural aspects of their experiences. This reflects Collin's (2000) assertion that cultural, structural, and interpersonal domains are intertwined, collectively shaping gender dynamics.

A qualitative approach with a narrative inquiry design was applied, and six female principals were purposively selected from rural schools. The data was collated using semi-structured interviews, a focus group discussion, and photographs and analysed using content analysis.

The findings reveal that women experience multiple challenges in the form of gender stereotypes, discrimination, prejudices, bias, rejection, and infantilisation. Women's biography, early learning, and school experiences shape and influence how women lead. The study concludes that the nature of women's leadership experiences is linked to multiple factors, situations, and events; thus, it is personal and complex, and rural women must overcome and surpass the challenges through resilience and supportive environments. The study has implications for leadership structures, women leaders, and policymakers.

Keywords: Female principals, leadership experiences, multiple challenges, intersectionality, resilience, social justice

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABET	Adult Basic Education
CRSL	Culturally responsive school leadership
DOE	Department of Education
DBE	Department of Basic Education
FPLSP	Female principals' leadership support program
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus, Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
SES	Social Economic Status
SMT	Senior management team
SGB	School Governing Body
WOT	Women's Only Training program.
USA	United States of America

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

This study explores female principals' leadership experiences in six selected public primary rural schools in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The chapter discusses the context of the problem, an overview of the research site, the purpose of the study, the aims of the study, research questions, the significance of the study, delimitations of the study, terminology, and organisation of the chapters.

Women face multiple challenges in accessing and participating in educational leadership, and this remains a problem and compelling issue for research. The South African government has implemented policies aimed at achieving gender equality and equity in the workplace. These include the White Paper on Affirmative Action in the Public Service (1998b), and the Employment Equity Act of 1998a, all addressing gender equality and equity in educational leadership. Secondly, the Constitution of South Africa (1996) as legislation, is the bedrock upon which gender equality and equity in leadership are founded. However, women's presence and experiences are still invisible in literature (Alston, 2012; Phakeng, 2015). Phakeng (2015) argued that black women are invisible in leadership and that the masculinity of power marginalises women. Moorosi (2014) concluded that policies do not address the concrete realities of inequality that women experience, thereby underplaying the complexity of challenges influencing women's experiences in educational leadership. Women experience a multi-layered nature of barriers to advancing career development and participating in leadership.

This research is about women, and Collins (2000) suggests that research focusing on Black women's experiences and analysing those experiences through intersectionality promotes rethinking the significance of, for example, gender, race, class, and nationality. Similarly, Crenshaw (1989) contrasts single-axes analysis with one that distorts women's experiences. This study argues that women face multiple challenges that intersect with gender, race, class age, ethnicity, religion, and geographical location to disadvantage some women and privilege other women, depending on the context and social group location.

Studies on women's under-representation in school leadership are evident across various contexts, particularly in developing regions (Barmao, 2013; Moyo & Perumal, 2020). The under-representation of women in school leadership is a challenge in many contexts. Globally and even in South Africa, most women in the teaching profession outnumber their male counterparts, yet women remain under-represented in school leadership (Mayienga, 2013; Moorosi, 2014; 2019; Shakeshaft et al., 2014). Moorosi (2019) and Shakeshaft et al. (2014) cite the absence of statistical and qualitative data, which marginalises women's experiences in research. Meanwhile, a study by Jaga et al. (2018) argued that gender inequalities not only oppress women but an interplay of many other forms of oppression categorised as class, race, language, sexual orientation, age, geographical location, and ethnicity intersect to disadvantage and exclude black women from accessing leadership positions.

As an educator interested in addressing issues of equity, the statistics and literature on women and educational leadership are encouraging yet disheartening. It is encouraging in that there is a huge proportion of women in the education system; however, there are huge differences in numbers between women in leadership positions and their male counterparts. According to the current South African statistics (Stats SA 2022), female teachers overwhelmingly dominate the ranks of teachers, as female teachers account for 70% and male teachers 30% in public schools in the country. On the contrary, statistics reveal that 39% of females hold leadership positions while 61% are male principals. This is a cause for concern, given that women's experiences in school administration and leadership roles are silent in the literature.

Female leaders who have managed to break through the glass ceiling have personal stories to share about how women lead in rural schools. The way female principals perceive and experience their roles as leaders and how they negotiate those experiences are critical to this study. Research on issues of gender disparity in relation to educational leadership has increased (Mestry & Schmidt, 2012; Moorosi, 2010; Naidoo & Perumal, 2014). However, research concerning the gender disparity in educational leadership has received very little exposure (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Further, it is argued that very little is known about the real challenges encountered by female principals in a male-dominated society. Lumby et al. (2010) and Moorosi (2019) contend that literature on women in educational leadership ignores intersectionality. This can be seen, for example, in the limited research that investigates how gender, race and class intersect and influence leadership experiences. On the other hand, Oplatka (2006) suggested that to understand female leadership experiences, a different theoretical lens needs to be used to understand the barriers that women face. This is to say that

not only does gender marginalise women in educational leadership, but an interplay of gender and many other forms of oppression categorised as class, race, language, sexual orientation, geographical location, and ethnicity do marginalise and exclude black women from accessing educational leadership positions (Jaga et al., 2018). This is a gap that this study sought to examine using an intersectional lens, and the findings from this study are significant.

Studies on women's experiences in leadership from the South African context exist (for example, Lumby & Azaola, 2013, 2015; Moorosi, 2010, 2014; Moorosi et al., 2018). However, these studies focused mainly on secondary schools. Steyn's (2015) study stated that research on women in education leadership shows an under-representation of women in leadership and management positions at all levels of the system, including primary schools, high schools, universities, and other educational institutions. Khumalo's (2021) study explored the experiences of female principals in primary schools in Limpopo Province, South Africa. This study did not consider women's multiple social locations in highlighting the diversity of women's experiences in leading schools. Although the study's title is "Female principals' Experiences of Leadership", it only reports on the challenges women experience generally; it has not gone deeper into comprehending the phenomenon through a framework that could unearth the nuances in their experiences within the gendered locations. There is a need for a study that engages women's multiple locations (intersectionality) in highlighting the diversity of women's experiences of leading schools to unearth underlying and interconnected power factors that either impede or empower women leaders' capacity to navigate through the leadership experiences and related complexities of leading in a male-dominated space.

The paucity of women in leadership, therefore, suggests an acute lack of women's experiences in leadership (Bodalina & Mestry, 2022) as a concern, which this study sought to explore. To find out the cause of misrepresentation of women in educational leadership, Shakeshaft et al. (2014) identified barriers that hinder women from accessing leadership positions. The researchers pointed out gender stereotypes as one of the major barriers to women's misrepresentation in educational leadership. Gender stereotypes are patriarchal cultural practices and norms that tend to disadvantage women. Gender stereotypes are one of the tools that are used in the process of gender socialisation. Gender socialisation occurs in the family and school, where gender roles are taught and reinforced by creating normative expectations, for example, the stereotype that women are not good enough to be in leadership positions because they are emotional. Children learn behaviours and attitudes, consciously or unconsciously, which are internalised and influence one's future life. The socialisation

practices of males being strong and leaders, as opposed to women being weak and incapable of leading, hinder women's aspiration and access to leadership positions.

South Africa, like any other African, country is a patriarchal society (Chisholm, 2001). As in other male-dominated societies, the social relations and activities of South African women and men are governed by patriarchal systems of socialisation and cultural practices that marginalise women. The access of women to positions of leadership is constrained by gender roles assigned to men and women. Such cultural stereotypes are engrained in both men and women and form the foundation upon which they encounter differing life circumstances.

Despite the equal opportunities introduced through legislation in many developing countries in the last three decades, traditional gender stereotypes of women's roles, positions, characteristics, and abilities continue to exist (Mayienge, 2013; Moorosi, 2010). These gender stereotypes tend to intersect with other factors such as race, language, small schools, and geographical location (Lumby & Azaola, 2013) to disadvantage women from accessing leadership positions. Selected policies like the Employment Equity Act (National Department of Education, 1998a) and the White Paper on Affirmative Action in the Public Service (National Department of Education (1998b), addressing gender equality in education leadership in South Africa, revealed a lack of balance in the way policy addresses issues of gender (Moorosi, 2014). Policies do not address the concrete experiences of women, thereby underplaying the complexity of challenges influencing women's careers in educational leadership (Moorosi, 2014).

Before the democratic realisation in South Africa, key issues that needed attention were the elimination of negative economic, social, political, cultural, and structural practices that impeded equality and equity for men and women in promoting equal opportunities in all sectors, including educational leadership. Racial inequality permeated the fabric of South Africa as a nation. The understanding is that the political, economic, and educational structures were racialised in favour of the white minority. Apartheid promoted Afrikaner culture, language, and economic interests (Kallaway, 2002), undermining the political, economic, and educational rights of race groups, for example, black African, Indian, and Coloured communities. The departments of education were based on race: one for black Africans, one for Indians, one for Coloureds and one for Whites. This explains why South Africa is known as a rainbow nation with wide economic disparity between the rich and poor (Spaull, 2015).

The apartheid policies categorised groups based on racial status, leading to various communities becoming economically privileged, while black communities were disadvantaged (Naidoo & Perumal, 2014). Therefore, the experience in leading schools, differs greatly as leadership is often shaped by many factors, including geographical location.

1.2 Overview of the research site

This study is about women leading public primary schools in the rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal. The schools from which the women leaders are drawn are in uMgundlovu municipality in the KwaZulu-Natal.

The women in the study are all principals of public primary schools in rural communities in KwaZulu-Natal. The schools that participated in the study are in rural communities and the learners are from black communities. The infrastructure is characterised by a shortage of essential amenities, including access to running water and electricity. Very few of the schools had dedicated playgrounds. In one of the schools, some classrooms lacked doors, have broken windows and use pit latrines. Learners walk long distances to school. All these are representative of rural schools in the province. Further, there is a lack of trained teachers. One of the schools is a multi-grade teaching (MGT) school. The term multi-grade teaching (MGT) refers to teaching children of different grade levels simultaneously in the same settings (Joubert, 2010).

Du Plessis (2014) contends that the definition of the term “rural” still eludes us because it is ambiguous, and the distinction with urban tends to be arbitrary. Thus, no concrete definition has been agreed upon. For Christie (2010) and Du Plessis (2014), the urban-rural distinction is regarded as subjective; therefore, the definition of rurality in the South African context includes a consideration of socio-economic, educational, and cultural factors. Rural schools are those on the outskirts of the country. Some authors refer to them as farm schools, mine schools or small schools that are poorly resourced and the communities live in poverty; for example, Chikoko (2017), Du Plessis (2014) and Moletsane (2012) characterise rural contexts as having poor accessibility resulting in slower or challenging communication and limited social facilities. Additionally, Christie (2010) notes that most schools in rural areas are found in poor communities that are not well provisioned and are attended by black students. As Jaga et al. (2018) noted, the intersection of gender and other categories, such as geographical location, marginalise women in leading schools and, in some instances, may provide opportunities depending on how an individual is positioned in a particular context.

The educational setting in which this study was conducted is characterised by severe poverty and under-development due to the complex historical nature of South Africa. Rural occupation in South Africa is directly linked to apartheid and its colonial policies of systemic exclusion. Key features of rural areas, include long distances to towns and schools and a lack of basic services such as access to education (Hlalele, 2014). Authors such as Chikoko (2017), Faulkner (2015), Lumby (2015), Maringe and Molestane (2015), Maringe et al. (2015), Molestane (2012), and Naidoo and Perumal (2014) observed and described such contexts in terms of multiple deprivation or as disadvantaged. Maringe and Molestane (2015) explain that multiple deprivation is a multi-layered concept. This is to say that multiple deprivation, as applied in educational settings, is influenced by many multi-layered factors. These factors are prevalent in environments and communities facing socio-economic hardships and disadvantages, including poverty, a lack of educationally motivating environments, and cultural and social differences. All these intersect with gender and race to influence how women leaders experience leading in rural schools.

The state and face of the current schools in rural communities indicate that women leaders in rural schools experience leadership differently from urban schools. Khumalo (2021) explored the challenges that are experienced by black female principals in primary schools in Limpopo, South Africa. The study employed the social justice lens to understand female principals' experiences in leading schools. The findings demonstrate that women leaders experience multiple challenges in their leadership practice, including insubordination and sexual harassment.

The South African school system is described as a two-layered system, characterised by levels of inequality that are evident in the wider social system (Hunter, 2019). Most of the student population at two of this research project's schools are from families who either work on sugar cane plantations as farm workers or have no work. The majority (76.7%) of schools in this region of the province fall between quintile one and quintile three of the Amended National Norms and Standards for School Funding (DBE, 2011). The government of the new South Africa, to redress the inequality in public schools, divided schools into quintiles according to the income levels of each community surrounding each school. Schools were classified as quintiles 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. The categorisation is based on the school's socio-economic status, which is determined by measures of average income, unemployment rates, and the general literacy level in the school's geographical area. Quintiles 1 to 3 are the most poor and non-fee-

paying schools. Such schools receive more funding per learner than those in quintiles 4 and 5, which are the most economically advantaged and fee-paying schools based on the assumption that parents can afford to pay fees, and therefore, require less support from the government (Chikoko, 2017). However, Mpofu (2015) contends that although quintile ranking in South Africa is a useful tool, it is not a perfect means of categorisation to help improve learner achievement.

Therefore, to help in understanding the deep complexities that women leaders face in leading schools in rural contexts, it is vital to highlight the socio-economic profile of South Africa in general, then that of the province of Kwa-Zulu Natal where this study was located.

1.3 Socio-economic profile of South Africa and the Province of KwaZulu-Natal

This section discusses the socio-economic profile nationally and on a provincial level to understand some of the challenges that female leaders experience in leading rural schools. According to Stats SA (2022, p.44), the unemployment rate stands at 34.5%, and in 2018, 13 million children received state grants. Nationally, there are 30.4 million people; thus 55.5% of the population live in poverty. Also, 38.8% live in urban areas, meaning most people live in rural areas where the participating schools are located. Stats SA (2022) also reveals that female-headed households had a higher poverty gap and severity estimates compared to male-headed households. In terms of the poverty share in 2022, almost half (49.6%) of households in South Africa were headed by females, whereas those headed by males accounted for 50.4%. Female-headed households contribute significantly to the increasing rates of poverty amongst women because many women are unemployed, which relates to fewer numbers of women in leadership positions.

On a provincial level, Kwa-Zulu Natal is one of the poorest in the whole country, with 68.1% of the provincial population identified as poor (Stats SA, 2022, p.65). Secondly, this province happens to have the largest share of poverty at 24.4% (Stats SA, 2022, p.68). Additionally, 79.2% of poor adults have no formal education, meaning very little support for their children's education. This scenario explains the complexity of leading schools in rural areas, as noted by Moletsane (2012), who characterises rural school contexts as experiencing multiple forms of deprivation, including poor accessibility resulting in slower or more difficult communication and limited social facilities. These challenging conditions impact how women lead. Lumby (2015) further explains that principals of schools located in areas of multiple deprivations face challenges in realising societal expectations that education will meet children's needs to secure

their current and future rights while functioning in a context where rights are denied. Du Plessis (2014) posits rural school principals face complex problems unique to their environment. The study argued that rural schools in South Africa are marginalised because they are underdeveloped. Rural communities and their schools lack basic infrastructure for sanitation, water, roads, electricity, and information technology.

Moreover, schools are multi-layered in nature; therefore, rural school principals face unique challenges and issues that often display their roles as less effective and less attractive than those in advantaged schools. Smit (2017) contends that school leaders operate in different contexts, for example, rural/urban and have different needs; thus, the expectations for school leaders continue to become much more complex. Therefore, understanding how women leaders experience leading in such contexts is the focus of this thesis.

1.4 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of six female principals as leaders of public primary rural schools in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The study focuses on their leadership experiences as principals in rural communities. The study further explored ways in which principals negotiate their experiences in leading schools. In this inquiry, the study further explored the nature of women's leadership in rural schools. The unit of analysis was female principals of rural schools. The study was set in public rural primary schools where women leaders work. However, the study moved back and forth in time and space from the present to the past to understand these experiences. The investigation was about how women leaders with multiple identities (as women, mothers, wives, and teachers) experience leadership in rural schools. The study argued that women possess multiple identities, which intersect with categories of power such as gender, class, race, ethnicity and geographical location, and a profession that disadvantages or privileges individual women leaders differently depending on how an individual is positioned in a social group.

The literature review indicates a growing interest in research studies exploring female principals within the South African context. However, this research predominantly focuses on the challenges encountered by female principals, the leadership styles exhibited by female principals, and the factors that account for the under-representation of women in leadership positions.

Few studies focus on primary school principals in rural areas (Lumby & Azaola, 2015; Khumalo, 2021; Makgoka, 2022; Msila, 2022).

The available literature on women's experiences of leadership in South Africa seems to portray women as a homogeneous unit with the same challenges and opportunities. Women contribute hugely to the South African nation, and stories exist regarding challenges and opportunities they encounter in leading rural schools. This study examined school leadership and how biography, early learning, and school experiences shape and influence leadership. This work identified that early childhood learning is important for leadership development. The study revealed various ways in which women leaders navigated the challenges experienced, including professional development, as ways of gaining power to lead in rural schools. Thus, research in this area is warranted to expose the challenges female principals experience and how they negotiate various structures of power.

1.5 Aims of the study

The main aims of this study are:

1. To understand female principals' experiences of leading rural schools.
2. To understand how female principals negotiate experiences of leading schools.
3. To understand the nature of female principals' experiences of leadership.

1.6 Research questions

The critical research question for this study is:

What are the experiences of female principals as leaders of rural schools? To answer the main question, a series of sub-questions have been formulated:

1. What are the female principals' experiences of leading in rural schools?
2. How do the female principals negotiate their leadership experiences?
3. What is the nature of female principals' experiences of leadership?

1.7 Theory and methodology underpinning the study

An intersectional lens underpins this study. Theoretically, the study was informed by understanding the marginality of women in educational leadership based on historical, social, and cultural subordination in society. The study focused on women's experiences at various intersections of gender, class, age, ethnicity, religion, and geographical location. An intersectional lens was crucial, as it enabled me to see features of leadership that are not

apparent in other theoretically lensed studies (Coleman, 2005; Shakeshaft et al., 2014). Such studies used generalisations based on Western leadership models, which are male-dominant, thus marginalising women's experiences.

Additionally, a critical paradigm underpins the study. Applying a critical paradigm provided an awareness of gender inequality in educational leadership and how women can have agency that enables them to control their lives and change some circumstances (Cohen et al., 2011). This way of viewing the world is about power and social justice. Through this lens, a woman sees herself independently of others, which promotes decision-making, thus taking action to change her life for development (Johnson & Fourillier, 2023).

A qualitative approach was applied with a narrative inquiry design. A narrative interview was a relevant and powerful tool to help understand, conceptualise, and theorise information on the everyday behaviour of individuals, mostly whose voices have been regularly neglected and muted (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Equally important, focus group interviews encourage and empower group voice opinions (Cohen et al., 2011), thus providing individuals with additional ideas and feelings on diverse aspects. At the same time, the use of photographs captures the lived experience of participants and gives insight and a more profound understanding of their world (Wang, 1999). On the contrary, quantitative results are based on numerical responses that overlook participants' responses and perspectives and lack context (Rahman, 2016). The results are generalised; for instance, the studies carried out by Coleman (2005) and Shakeshaft (2014). Using quantitative methods would have undermined the study's findings as it lacks context and overlooks the lived experiences of participants. The data was analysed both inductively and deductively.

1.8 Significance of the study

This research study explores female principals' leadership experiences in rural schools of the KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa. The study is significant because it is about women and their experiences leading schools in rural communities.

The study not only focuses on women leaders in rural schools, but also delves into the relatively limited understanding of leadership in rural schools (Moletsane, 2012). The study argues that women face multiple challenges in their upbringing, schooling, and leadership. Practically, a better understanding of leading in rural schools from the lived experiences of women leading in rural contexts in KwaZulu-Natal province would help provide information on how to

negotiate and resist patriarchal and cultural beliefs and practices that hinder women's advancement in their career progression and participation in leadership. Theoretically, the study also contributes to the body of knowledge on women's experiences of growing up, schooling and early learning, and how these factors shape and influence leadership in rural contexts from the perspective of South Africa and the developing world.

The overarching goal of the study was to determine the nature of leadership that female principals use in rural schools. Using the intersectionality lens and its concepts of resistance, agency and resilience, the study shows that the nature of leadership is linked to multiple factors, situations, and events; thus, leadership is personal and individual. The study demonstrates that leadership is complex and that rural women must overcome and surpass the challenges through resilience that not only occurred in their early lives but continue in school, where men will not support women leaders. Women believe that fellow women should be undermined, thus becoming gatekeepers of patriarchy. The findings resonate with literature on gender role socialisation, stereotyping, and discrimination against women (Msila, 2022; Khumalo, 2021; Oyeniran, 2022).

Finally, themes that emerged from the data not only contribute to existing knowledge on women and educational leadership but also reveal the multi-layered nature of challenges that women face from their biography, early learning, and school experiences. Theoretically, an intersectional lens addresses equity in the workplace and promotes social justice (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991). The role of principalship and the school as an institution are constructs rooted in male dominance; the policy on Affirmative Action in the public service of (1998b) cannot protect women's experiences from discrimination and stereotype threats in the workplace. In this way, intersectionality is a powerful analysis tool because it can account for various interactions of gender, race, age, ethnicity, culture, and geographical location within the context of oppressive and dominant influences. It analyses the complex contexts in which women leaders grow mature, and in which they lead. An intersectional lens allowed me to see features of leadership that are not apparent in other theoretically lensed studies such as Coleman (2005). The challenges women leaders face exhibit interlocking facets across interpersonal, organisational and structural levels. This interplay of domains underscores the intricate nature of gender-based challenges in educational leadership. Using intersectionality and its concepts of resistance, agency, and resilience (Collins, 2000), the study shows that the nature of leadership is linked to multiple factors, situations, and events; thus, leadership is personal and

complex. Due to the complexity of leadership, rural women must overcome and surpass the challenges through resilience that not only occurred in their early lives but continue into adulthood where men will not support women leaders. Similarly fellow women, believe that women should be undermined, thus becoming gatekeepers of patriarchy. Numerous intersectional themes assisted me in analysing their stories that highlight the importance of early childhood learning and how it shapes women's ways of leading in patriarchal, oppressive, and male-dominated spaces as the context within which the women leaders work.

Using a narrative design, the study provides a better understanding of leading in rural schools from the lived experiences of women leading in rural contexts in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. The study shows how women faced gender-based challenges such as discrimination, bias and rejection but using personal agency, women leaders resisted these patriarchal cultural beliefs and practices that hinder women's advancement in their career progression and participation in leadership. Women's stories provide in-depth information about how each woman faced different challenges depending on their position in the group (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989). Some of the women in this study were disadvantaged, for instance Nombuza, Shane and Khuzi, while others Bongi, Nozi and Siwe were advantaged. Using personal agency and being reflective, these women acknowledged their weaknesses and enrolled to upgrade their knowledge and skills, which granted them the power to lead in rural schools. The women in this study show resilience and determination to provide education to marginalised learners in rural schools against all odds.

This study serves to benefit not only women, but all members of society interested in the welfare of learners and education in marginalised rural schools. By engaging women leaders, this research assists in developing a greater understanding of how women learn in their early childhood, and use the values learned in their leadership practices and negotiate their multiple identities on interpersonal (micro) and structural (macro) levels to create opportunities for survival in the male-dominated space of educational leadership.

1.9 Delimitation

This study included six female participants from six selected rural schools in uMgungundlovu district in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The emphasis on rural schools was to provide an understanding of how race, class, gender, geographical location, ethnicity, and profession intersect to marginalise and exclude women from educational leadership positions or, in some instances, create opportunities for women's development. Whereas comparative

works are necessary and useful, this study specifically focused on women (as opposed to men) who are leading in rural public schools. The participants were purposively selected using the following criteria:

- must be leading in a rural school.
- must be a black woman; and
- must have been a school principal for at least more than two years to understand the complexities and culture of the school.

The study only focused on the female school principals and not the teachers or learners because the main goal was to explore the female principals' experiences of leading and how they negotiate those experiences.

1.10 Limitations of the study

Limitations are specific characteristics of the methodology that might influence how a research study may be conducted or the reporting of the findings. Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018, p.156) define a limitation as an 'imposed' restriction which is out of the researcher's control. Their study illuminates that limitations are potential weaknesses out of the researchers' control. These may be associated with the research design or other factors beyond the researcher's control. Therefore, considering all the limitations of a small sample size of only six female school principals for my study is acknowledged. This study is based on qualitative approaches to research; therefore, the results cannot be generalised; however, the results may be applied to similar contexts (Cohen et al., 2018). The other anticipated problem was my being an 'outsider' as a researcher. However, before the interviews, I spent some time chatting with the participants via video call to create rapport before the interview.

1.11 Terminology

Leadership is a process whereby "an individual influences a group of people to achieve a common goal" (Northouse, 2010, p.2). Leadership is not only a characteristic that resides in the leader, but rather a process or relationship between the leader and follower.

Intersectionality denotes the various ways in which race, gender, social class, and geographical location interact to shape the multiple dimensions of women's experiences (Crenshaw, 1989).

Power refers to the leader's authority or control to direct or influence others and the ability to influence a change in one's behaviour.

Positionality refers to our social position in each society in relation to race, ethnicity statuses (e.g., social class, age, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, ability, religion, and geographical location).

Matrix refers to the cultural, social, or political environment in which something develops. The matrix gives structure to the dynamic phenomenon.

The matrix of domination refers to the configurations of oppression and resistance that shape life in specific communities and historical moments (Collins, 2000).

Resilience is the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioural flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013).

Agency refers to the idea that people make personal decisions and are responsible for their own actions.

1.12 Organisation of Chapters

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter provides a background to the context of the problem and presents the research sites, the purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, delimitations of the study, definitions of key terms, and the structure of the chapters.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter presents both empirical and theoretical literature on the phenomenon of women's experiences of leadership in rural schools. The literature reviewed details the experiences of female principals both internationally and nationally. It focuses on the various factors that impinge on female principals' ability to lead and how this influences their day-to-day experiences of being a principal in a rural school. The literature suggests that the experiences of female principals are largely negative, with factors like cultural, societal, organisational, and individual factors influencing a principal's ability to lead. This provides insight into the nature of the principal's ability to lead based on their agency.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework

This chapter introduces and discusses the theoretical lens of intersectionality in understanding women leaders and their practices, perceptions, and experiences in their roles as leaders. The

approach reveals that women leaders possess multiple identities, which influence the way they may lead depending on the context. The matrix of domination explains the structural (macro) and interpersonal (micro) levels, organisational and cultural power relations and how these interact to marginalise or privilege women leaders leading in schools.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter discusses the critical paradigm, as well as narrative inquiry as the chosen methodology to study the lived experiences of women leaders in rural schools. The chapter highlights the strengths of narratives, one of which is working with the participants collaboratively. The pilot study, the selection of participants, and the two-phased approach employed to gather data, analysis procedures and ethical issues are explained. Furthermore, the biographical information of the women leaders, reflexivity, the position of the researcher in the study, trustworthiness of the study and the limitations are also discussed.

Chapter 5: Presentation of Data and Analysis

The narratives of female leaders are provided. The narratives relate to their experiences of early childhood through education, life, career, and leadership experiences. Some of the themes that emerged include early socialisation experiences as assets for later leadership experiences, facing challenges and learning to lead, infantilisation of women, mothering, and collaboration as ways of leading. The findings indicate that female leaders experienced challenges in the form of socio-economic, social, organisational, cultural, and individual factors that impinge female leaders in accessing leaderships positions and how they may lead in rural schools. However, the participating female leaders were able to resist and navigate the aforesaid challenges through agency, resilience, support from family, through mentoring, and upskilling that enabled them to succeed in their role as leaders.

Chapter 6: Discussion of Findings

The chapter discusses the research findings using extant literature and the theory underpinning this study in response to the research questions.

Chapter 7: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This chapter summarises the findings, conclusions, and recommendations, and discusses potential future research areas.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Chapter one provided the background for the study. It presented the background to the context of the problem, the research sites, and the empirical and theoretical literature on women's leadership experiences in rural schools. The literature reviewed highlight the experiences of female principals, both internationally and nationally. It focuses on the various factors that impinge on female principals' ability to lead and how this influences their day-to-day experiences of being a principal in a rural school. The literature suggests that the experiences of female principals are primarily negative, with cultural, societal, organisational, and individual factors influencing a principal's ability to lead. This provides insight into the principals' ability to lead based on gender. It must be noted that, in keeping with the paradigm of the study as one located within social justice, I also present empirical literature that presents the agentic nature of female principals, and how they negotiate their contexts to ensure that they lead effectively. The literature review enabled me to understand the phenomenon of leadership and help identify the gap in the day-to-day experiences of leading in rural schools. In response to the literature gap, this thesis examines female principals' experiences of leading in rural schools.

Next, I discuss rural schools and leadership, challenges faced in rural schools, conceptions of leadership, women's ways of leading, success stories of leading and women's experiences in leadership.

2.2 Rural schools

In this study, rural schools are understood as those located away from urban centres, often geographically isolated. Some authors refer to them as farm schools, mine schools, or small schools that are poorly resourced and communities live in poverty; for example, Chikoko (2017), Du Plessis (2014), and Moletsane (2012) characterise rural contexts to include poor accessibility resulting in slower or difficulties in communication and limited social facilities. Additionally, Christie (2010) notes that most schools in rural areas are found in poor communities that are not well-provisioned and are attended by black students.

The South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 established a national schooling system and categorised schools into public and independent. The public schools are state-controlled and fall under the Department of Basic Education. The schools that were included in this current study are public schools managed by the Department of Basic Education.

2.2.1 Challenges faced in rural schools

The educational setting in which this study was conducted is characterised by severe poverty and under-development due to post-colonial legacies. Authors such as Chikoko (2017), Faulkner (2015), Lumby (2015), Maringe and Molestane (2015), Maringe et al. (2015), Molestane (2012), Naidoo and Perumal (2014) observed and described such contexts in terms of multiple deprivation or as disadvantaged. Maringe and Molestane (2015) expound on some of the multi-layered structural factors prevalent in disadvantaged rural schools, mostly categorised as quintile two or three schools. These factors are prevalent in environments and communities facing socio-economic hardships and disadvantages, including poverty, a lack of educationally motivating environments, and cultural and social differences, marginalising those living in such contexts. Despite the challenges experienced by rural schools, Maringe and Moletsane's (2015) study identified generative leadership practices such as transformational, distributed, instructional, ethical, and asset-based leadership as most promising for schools experiencing multiple deprivations.

Rural schools face multi-layered challenges that are unique to their environment. Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) illuminated the complexity and inter-connectedness of the problems faced by teachers in South African rural schools. Their study of challenges teachers face in rural schools shows that most rural schools need running water, sanitation, or electricity, and classrooms need to be in a better state. Most children only attend school occasionally, as they are forced to work on farms and are not encouraged to attend school. Learners who attend school often find the curriculum irrelevant to their lives and find that their learning is not supported at home. These problems have severe implications for effective teaching and learning. Du Plessis and Mestry's (2019) study recommended the following strategies to mitigate the challenges in rural schools: a school-community orientation program to support new teachers in rural schools to overcome their feelings of isolation and acquire a sense of community and security; and, secondly, all teachers in rural schools should receive training and provide skills to enable teachers to teach students from diverse backgrounds.

More recent research by Nkambule (2022) revealed dilapidated infrastructure, poor classrooms, and poor sanitary conditions as factors affecting teachers and teaching in rural schools. These factors impact teaching and learning, and the way female leaders lead. The study recommends supportive leadership to encourage and motivate teachers to focus on teaching and learning despite the challenges encountered. Rapula (2022) explored the experiences faced by female principals in rural schools in Botswana. The study employed semi-structured interviews to elicit data from five female principals. The findings show that participants experienced challenges such as negative attitudes towards female leaders and a lack of parental support. From the five participants, there were mixed responses regarding attitudes towards female principals. Four out of the five participants indicated negative teacher attitudes toward female school leaders. Only one of the participants noted that teachers were satisfied with her leadership. The study concluded that attitudes towards female principals occurred because some educators were well-qualified and interested in leadership posts. This resonates with Makgoka's (2016) study, which found that colleagues who feel more qualified tend to disrespect female principals.

The state and face of the current schools in rural communities indicate that women leaders in rural schools' experience leadership differently because of socio-economic factors. Despite the abolition of apartheid rule in South Africa and the efforts to transform the educational landscape of South Africa, rural schools still face challenges and problems unique to rural environments (Legotle, 2014). For instance, the socio-economic backgrounds of parents, multi-grade teaching, the quality of buildings, and the norms and values of farm workers, all impact the quality of teaching and learning in rural communities. The educational landscape of the two schools in this research is mainly inhabited by families who work in sugar cane plantations as farm workers or have no work. The majority (76.7%) of schools in this region of the province fall between quintile one and quintile three of the Amended National Norms and Standards for School Funding (DBE, 2011).

Nkambule et al. (2011) examined rural education and rural education research and revealed the importance of understanding the context within which research participants live and work. Therefore, understanding rurality and the challenges faced by female leaders in rural schools is important because the agency of women is understood to be shaped by rural social issues as active constituents. Thus, the challenges encountered shape and influence how women lead in rural schools. That is why Moletsane's (2012) study recommended utilising context-based assets and resources in creating interventions for rural school communities.

2.2.2 Conceptions of leadership

Northouse (2010) conceptualises leadership in three ways. Firstly, leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of people to achieve a common goal. Secondly, leadership is viewed as a combination of characteristics/traits that some individuals possess, whether male or female. These traits influence how a leader acts to bring change to the group. Thirdly, leadership is viewed in terms of power relations (Northouse, 2010). According to Haslam, Reicher and Platow (2020), a leader works to get followers to identify themselves with the goals and common purpose that are shared among the leader and the followers. Such shared identity creates a “we” rather than the authoritarian “I” of micro-management that promotes inclusive leadership.

Traditional leadership theories, called “great man” theories, focus on identifying the intrinsic qualities and characteristics of great social, political, and military leaders (Northouse, 2010, p.3). The man in ‘great man’ theories assumes that men are leaders, not women. The belief that peoples are born with these traits and only “great” people possess them is oppressive, and marginalises women and favours men (Bass, 1999; Northouse, 2010). Rhodes’s (2018) study explains the main factors that influence the career aspirations of senior women leaders in New Zealand secondary schools. Rhodes explains that many women still believe they must take on masculine traits to be successful leaders. In her study, Rhodes (2018) further noted that women believed that “they would need to be a steel woman,” more masculine than male leaders to succeed. This implies that a woman who does not want to take on a masculine style might be viewed as incapable of leading, so she may opt out of that career. This traditional leadership model assumes that good leadership is essentially masculine; such characteristics as being a good decision-maker, assertive, and strategic have been and continue to be associated with good leadership and masculinity.

Grogan and Shakeshaft (2009) point out that traditional leadership theories were based primarily on male behaviour as the measuring stick against which women were compared. Such views promoted male dominance and represented gender inequities in the workplace. The study argued that because women’s lived experiences as leaders differ from men’s, a new theoretical framework of leadership premised on social justice was suggested. Women in this study acknowledged that they lead collaboratively and connect with the community. The women cited having good communication with the stakeholders—parents, teachers, and the external community.

Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) contend that traditional leadership models negatively impact education and leadership because they need to reflect the realities that female principals encounter. The conventional models do not address women leaders' concerns, needs, or realities but rather perpetuate the barriers that women leaders face. This is why Mestry and Schmidt (2013) contend that western forms of feminism do not capture the unique cultures impacted by colonialism in the context of South Africa. Women experience leadership differently, depending on the context.

Johnson and Mathur-Helm (2011) examined the experiences of twenty-five female executives and senior managers from a South African retail bank. The study employed semi-structured interviews to elicit information from the women leaders. The findings revealed stereotypes and male traditions; thus, males still dominated the boardrooms. Female leaders take on masculine traits in predominantly male environments to prove their worth. The study also revealed that women undermine other women, thus promoting the queen bee syndrome. The queen bee syndrome is a term used to describe women executives who alienate other women after reaching senior positions and prevent more junior women from advancing through the leadership ranks (Johnson & Mathur-Helm, 2011).

2.2.3 Women's ways of leading

Leadership styles are gendered and challenge women's participation as leaders. While leadership styles vary, some dominant gender-related leadership styles have been identified in the literature. Female leaders have been described as sensitive, caring, compassionate, participative, and nurturing (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Women's leadership styles are collaborative, inclusive, democratic, and participative (Northouse, 2010). Women also lead purposively, as revealed in research by Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) in the United States.

Although their study revealed that a sense of purpose enables a particular leadership style, such as the nurturing approach, this would undermine how men lead. The leadership styles included relational, spiritual, social justice, and instructional leadership. They argued that these leadership styles identified with women promote social justice in marginalised schools. Bass (1999) also contends that transformational leadership is linked to change.

Grogan and Shakeshaft's (2011) study reveal that female principals understood their realities and attempted to lead in a manner committed to social justice for teachers and auxiliary staff. Social justice endeavours were revealed by bringing diverse community groups together

motivating, students and teachers to work hard. A social justice leadership style focuses on equity and fair and just actions in all interactions. Such a style is paramount in areas where there are intersections of race, gender, class, sexual orientation, geographical location, and disability that have the potential to be disadvantageous to belonging to the dominant group (Collins, 1990). Another important factor that emerged from Grogan and Shakeshaft's (2011) study was the acknowledgment of spirituality that caused female principals to persevere. Spirituality was acknowledged as vital to the success of leading schools. Whenever women leaders felt overwhelmed or pressured, they sought their strength from prayer. Women of black African descent cited their ability to keep pushing forward in conflicting and difficult situations they encountered attributed to their spirituality (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011).

As previously indicated, relational leadership is also associated with women leaders who engage interpersonal relationships (Uhl-Bien, 2006) based on caring, intuition, courage, and collaboration. A narrative inquiry study (Smit, 2014) in Gauteng, South Africa, revealed a relational leadership style. Smit's study found that this leadership style was vital to leading in areas that experience poverty and child-headed families. The caring and nurturing role was emphasised. For example, in collaboration with stakeholders, the school organised meals for students, improving their attendance. In the ethic of caring, Nel Nodding (2013) argues that relationships are fundamental to the human condition and that moral action always occurs in relationships with others. Nodding (2013) further contends that it is a valuable perspective when exploring roles and relationships between women leaders and stakeholders—teachers, learners, and parents. Nel Nodding's ethics of care have been extensively explored in relationships between teachers and students in schools.

Moyo, Perumal, and Hallinger (2020) explored female-leading schools in Zimbabwe. The results show that women leaders used caring, nurturing, and sensitivity, while the men used competitive and masculine leadership styles. The authors believe motherliness, tolerance, caring, and honesty influence women's leadership styles. The study also identified collaboration and power sharing as themes. Women leaders in the study applied shared decision-making to gain control, more excellent staff, and parent commitment in schools. The study concluded that women school leaders have the potential to promote social justice in the education system by redesigning school environments to reduce marginalisation and create opportunities for the girl child and female students (Moyo et al., 2020).

2.2.4 Success stories of females leading schools

Despite the challenges women experience in leadership, there are some success stories of women who have cracked through the glass ceiling and navigated the male-dominated space with success. In Kenya, Mayienga (2013) employed a biographic approach to examine the influence of gender on the self-image of successful female principals in rural schools. The research looked at how personnel interact with the institution to shape the experiences of women leaders. The findings revealed that the intersection of gender and ethnicity has influenced how female principals experience leadership. Mayienga (2013) employed social construction theory to understand how gender and race affect women's leadership. The results revealed gender socialisation to have influenced women's self-image. One exciting thing about Mayienga's study is that the role of protective family capital was shown to have contributed to women's development of self-discipline. Family capital is understood here to be support given by family members and the upbringing of female principals in their childhood as an encouragement to strive for success. This virtue of family capital enabled the women in the study to sail above the constraints of the patriarchal society in which they grew up and led their schools successfully.

In contrast to Mayienga's (2013) study, Moorosi et al.'s (2018) research analysis of successful leadership suggests that women did not enjoy life opportunities during the apartheid regime in South Africa because, at the time, the country was divided along racial specifications, which marginalised black people from accessing education opportunities. Therefore, to negotiate the barriers experienced, women leaders served as role models by providing education to their black communities to inspire the younger generation of women to practice leadership that is inclusive, fair, and socially just (Moorosi et al., 2018). In this way, women leaders build resilience to work in male-dominated spaces. Moorosi et al. (2018) applied intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2000) to explore the experiences of marginalised black women leaders in three different contexts: South Africa, England, and the United States. Another exciting aspect of the research by Moorosi and colleagues (2018) is that intersectionality is recognised globally, as three different contexts were employed to analyse how black women construct success in leadership. To achieve success in leading schools, women leaders used a variety of leadership styles. For example, a pupil-centred approach to leadership in school leadership was about creating teamwork with a common purpose, thus working towards the success of groups of students with difficulties. The women leaders also ensured that values of justice and fairness were at the centre of their leadership. Another skill

the women leaders used was a transformational approach through positive role modelling to impact young girls and female students (Moorosi et al., 2018).

Similarly, Reed (2012) analysed the intersection of race and gender in school leadership for three black female principals in the USA. Reed's study shows that three participants revealed their encounters with various challenges and how they navigated them based on their gender and race standpoints. Reed discovered that the black women leaders in the study faced three significant obstacles, namely the minimisation of their power because of their gender and age and the use of "creative insubordination" in response to oppressive circumstances faced through stereotypical attitudes and norms. In response to "creative insubordination," participants created new ways, although against the standard, to help students repeat a course to improve their marks. The women leaders had the students' interests at heart and were seen as making quiet but steady advancements on behalf of the students they served.

This resonates with Grogan and Shakeshaft (2009, p. 23), who posit that women discuss their desire to "make things better" by increasing support for underserved groups of students in the schools they lead. Similarly, in the same context, more recent research by Johnson and Fournillier (2021) examined the intersecting factors of race and gender that impact women's ability to lead in the United States of America. Despite women's challenges in this study, participants recounted stories of resilience, community, struggle, and perseverance to enable them to lead schools.

Other challenges female leaders face related to constantly proving their ability in a male-dominated environment. Davis and Maldonado's (2015) study shows that the intersection of gender, race, and professional identity oppressed women because of being black, a woman, and working in a white male-dominated space. Although the working environment proved oppressive due to gender bias, the women in the study shared how their parents modelled their leadership qualities and shaped their leadership styles. Parents and family members were referenced as people who provided guidance and support, upon which female leaders-built resilience to counteract gender stereotypes in their leadership roles.

Another successful research study by Oyeniran (2018) focused on women's experiences leading primary schools from an Ivorian context. The researcher employed semi-structured interviews to elicit in-depth information from the women leaders. The findings revealed that female leaders experienced stereotypes and socio-cultural biases. Despite the challenges, the results show that female principals displayed leadership qualities such as collaboration, team-

orientedness, and caring. The study further revealed that for women as leaders, leadership means empowering and caring for learners and teachers. For the women in the study, sharing and learning together seemed to strengthen their leadership. The study recommended that women be part of policymakers, promoting women in school headship to minimise the gender gap.

2.3 Women's experiences in leadership

This section presents women in educational leadership from an international and national perspective. Scholars have shown the distinctive qualities and characteristics that women exhibit. These stem from their sex-role socialisation and real-life experiences, often different from their male counterparts (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). Although women are the majority in teaching, men dominate leadership positions. Myeza and April (2021) recommend using black women's experiences when examining the emergence of black leaders in the workplace. Despite significant policy by the South African government towards the achievement of gender equality and equity, the Constitution of South Africa (1996) as the bedrock upon which gender equality and equity in leadership are founded, the White Paper on Affirmative Action in the Public Service (1998a) and the Employment Equity Act of (1998a), all addressing gender equality and equity in educational leadership, women's presence and experiences are still invisible in literature (Alston, 2012; Phakeng, 2015). Moorosi (2014) concluded that policies do not address the concrete experiences of inequality that women experience, thereby underplaying the complexity of challenges influencing women's experiences in educational leadership. Women experience multi-layered barriers to advancing career development and participating in leadership.

2.3.1 Under-representation as a barrier to women accessing leadership

Although more women are teaching, representation in leadership positions still needs improvement. Studies on women's under-representation in school leadership are evident across the various contexts of the world, particularly in developing regions (see, for example, Shakeshaft et al., 2014; Zitha, 2022). Zitha's (2022) study explains the under-representation of women in leadership, where out of six schools chosen as case studies, four had male principals (67%) while only two schools had female principals (33%). Globally, and even in South Africa, there are more women than their male counterparts in the teaching profession.

Scholars sought to find out the leading causes of women's under-representation in school leadership (see, for example, Amondi, 2011; Chabaya et al., 2009; Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Grogan, 2014; Moorosi, 2007; Oplatka, 2006; Sperando & Kagoda, 2010). Shakeshaft et al. (2014) examined the representation of women in school leadership across different contexts. The researchers reviewed the literature for over twenty years to understand the leadership experiences of women already in leadership positions. The findings revealed that women in leadership positions experience barriers to accessing or advancing in leadership roles. Such barriers included socialisation and sex role stereotyping, discrimination, family and home responsibilities, and a lack of confidence and motivation for career advancement. The study suggested that women serving in key leadership positions must talk about and think creatively with other women about ways to balance family responsibilities successfully.

Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) contend that traditional leadership models negatively impact education and leadership because they need to reflect the realities that female principals encounter. Traditional leadership models focus on comparing men's leadership styles and behaviours to women. Thus, one can see that these traditional models do not address the concerns, needs, or realities of women leaders but rather perpetuate the barriers that women leaders encounter, which lead to under-representation.

Further, Jaga et al. (2018) present an understanding of the intersections of gender, race, class, age, geographical location, and ethnicity that are not addressed in policy. Failure to address these intersections in policy is problematic because more needs to be known about the realities and concerns of women and how they lead in rural schools. Intersectionality illuminates the multiple ways in which women experience leading schools. Alston (2012) further asserts that narratives of black women are primarily not heard in the discussion or teaching of leadership theories, concepts, and research. This invisibility of women's histories in discussions explains how women are disproportionately represented in leadership positions. Invisibility here refers to the concept of a glass ceiling that prevents women from reaching leadership positions, irrespective of their achievement. This, therefore, describes obstacles that are artificial but still form a ceiling on how women can rise to the higher ranks of leadership (Amondi, 2011). Myeza and April (2021) suggest that the importance of using black women's experience when examining the emergence of black leaders in South Africa is to get to know the real issues that affect women. Shakeshaft et al. (2014) and Oplatka (2006) identified social and cultural factors as leading causes of women's misrepresentation in leadership roles. Cultural and social norms and discourses are founded on patriarchy and influence how women experience their ability to

be leaders. This was based on quite strict gendered roles about what is women's work and what is men's work. Amondi (2011) and Shakeshaft et al. (2014) suggested strategies to mitigate barriers women face in their progression to leadership. These include providing gender-sensitive training to males and females to promote no discrimination in working relationships, respect for diversity in work and management styles, and sharing success stories of women leaders.

To further explain the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership, researchers identified various obstacles that hinder women from attaining leadership positions. Some of these barriers stem from the social and cultural context that often colour the view of whether women can and should be leaders. The results from this study may explain the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions and provide an understanding of the daily experiences of women leading in their various educational institutions.

2.3.2. Gender role socialisation and stereotypes

The pervasive impact of gender role socialisation that originates in the family setting contributes to power imbalances and reinforces detrimental stereotypes, particularly disadvantaging females.

Gender role socialisation, which starts in the family as the foundation upon which later life trajectories emerge, influences both males and females because it reinforces and reproduces a view of reality skewed towards creating power differentials to the detriment of females. Harro's (2000) cycle of socialisation explains that we are born into a specific set of social identities that predispose us to unequal roles in an oppressive system. At the family level, both the boy child and the girl child are taught through interaction with peers, parents, and teachers about what roles belong to a male and a female. These teachings are later reinforced through institutions such as the church, schools, and the media to influence females negatively or positively in leading schools. All these ideologies are fixed and stagnant and, therefore, affect female principals negatively; for example, the perspective that women are weak and incapable of leading influences female leaders negatively. Harro (2000) describes this kind of power as consistent and pervasive, and those that challenge such normative discourses face exclusion and marginalisation.

Moorosi (2020) examined women's narratives of being leaders in South Africa. The findings suggest that the processes of becoming a leader are influenced by women leaders' experiences of early socialisation that gave them distinctive methods of leadership and values and attributes

that shape their approach to leadership. For example, women's childhood experiences of growing up were characterised by hardships and struggles because of poverty, but these hardships shaped their resilience and strength as leaders. The women in the study grew up with a strong perception of who they are, which instilled a sense of agency that facilitates and initiates leadership actions. This shows that early socialisation does not only affect women leaders negatively but also serves as an asset for leadership roles. It is crucial to understand how women grow up believing in the discourse surrounding what is masculine and what is feminine. This is because it can explain women's difficulty taking up leadership positions.

Shakeshaft et al. (2014) identifies traditional stereotypes as a barrier to women's advancement in educational leadership. As discussed in the previous section, these traditional stereotypes view women as socially incapable of being leaders because of the binary construction of male and female and, thus, labour division. It is essential to understand how this binary construction comes about, mainly through gender socialisation.

Gender socialisation is essential for understanding how gender attitudes are learned and internalised in people's lives (Harro, 2000). Gender socialisation is reflected in the traditional institutions of family, schooling, the church, and even the media. Gender socialisation begins in family settings through children's interaction with the parents and people they love and trust (Wharton, 2005; Harro, 1997). Chodorow (1978) noted that mothers are and have been the child's primary caretaker and socialiser, whereas fathers are secondary objects for boys and girls. A woman as a mother becomes the first that the newborn interacts with and, therefore, could socialise the child to adapt to a specific behaviour, including becoming aware of the self. Feminist Nancy Chodorow (1978) asserts that women's mothering creates specific conscious and unconscious attitudes or expectations in children. For example, girls and boys expect and assume women's unique capacities for sacrifice, caring, and mothering and associate women with their fears of regression.

Schools are dynamic and significant sites for gender socialisation because children spend most of their time engaged with peers. Secondly, teachers as role models play a vital role in modelling children's behaviour. Stromquist's (2008) findings revealed that administrators/school principals, teachers, and peers are sources of knowledge about gender for boys and girls. For example, teachers present curricular materials (consciously and unconsciously) that contain stereotypical behaviours and different learning opportunities for

boys than girls, often to the disadvantage of girls. Similarly, peers present stereotypical attitudes and behaviours that boys and girls internalise about gender through play.

Dela Torre-Sierra and Guihot-Reina (2022) examined the unequal representation of men and women in elementary textbooks used in Spain. The results indicate that the textbooks are biased by gender, perpetuating discursive strategies that devalue and exclude women as social actors, which maintain male dominance even in the workplace. The textual content in the textbooks reveals a disproportionate presence of men, where males are shown engaging in productive and socially valued activities associated with wealth, courage, and wisdom. On the other hand, women's voices are practically non-existent but only feature in the reproductive role and taking care of the family.

The church is another gender-socialising agent that is not different from the school and family institutions. Through the church, both boys and girls, men, and women, internalise norms and practices that are gender stereotypical. Research by Dunnington (2008) examined how children are socialised in Baptist and United Methodist Churches in the United States. The findings revealed traditional gender roles in both churches and some progressive and gender-neutral roles in the United Methodist Church. However, the researcher does not show gender-neutral roles, what they are, or how they influence leadership. Traditional roles of boys and girls/women and men depict those boys and men as leaders, for example, in the story of Moses leading the children of Israel. In contrast, girls and women were perceived as followers or subservient, for example, in the story of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Such negative stereotypes influence girls and boys to internalise certain behaviours and attitudes that emerge later in adulthood. At this early stage, at the institutional level of the church, the socialisation of traditional gender roles is reproduced and becomes naturalised, normalised, and embedded in people's psyches.

Moving from church socialisation, research by Eze et al. (2016) examined societal socialisation processes that produce gender-based discrimination, which positions women as subordinates. The researchers employed Foucault's discursive lens to present gender dilemmas of identity construction among 30 Catholic sisters from Nigeria and South Africa. The findings revealed that mothers were taught by their grandmothers, and in turn, mothers taught their daughters about the norms and practices of the Catholic church. The process is like a relay process, whereby each generation transmits what they have learned to the next generation.

Similarly, Basu et al. (2017) observed that parents pass on to their children the norms, attitudes, and behaviours they grew up with. This is to say that transmission through the discourse of gender discrimination and role expectation is engrained in the church and other socialisation institutions.

2.3.3 Gendered division of labour

Deep-seated cultural norms and attitudes towards gender roles significantly impact women's perceived ability to assume leadership positions, particularly in rural Russia and various African nations. This section explores how such norms are manifested in the home, workplace, and broader societal contexts, with a particular focus on how they hinder women's career progression in educational leadership.

O'Brien and Wegren's (2014) examination of gender inequality in rural Russia revealed that traditional attitudes towards 'men's work' and 'women's work' originated within the family structure. It was observed that boys were frequently viewed as better leaders, shaping their attitudes and perceived capabilities into adulthood. A similar dynamic was noted by Connell (2005), who highlighted the potential threat men might feel to their status as breadwinners in the face of women's professional progress. This, in turn, reinforces the gendered division of labour and men's dominance in public roles. Although some men may accept change through policies such as the constitution, in practice they still act in ways that sustain men's power in the public sphere and assign domestic labour and childcare to women. Such traditional stereotypes also associate school principalship with masculinity, a view that hampers women's career progression in education management.

Moorosi (2007) explored the experiences of women leaders to understand how they negotiated the gendered division of labour. Semi-structured interviews were administered to 28 female principals of varied races to elicit data. The findings revealed some of the challenges women in the study experienced, including the cultural expectation of women, which suggested that regardless of whether they are employed as workers or employed domestic helpers, women should still perform family chores in the home. Secondly, the traditional stereotypes also associate school principalship with masculinity; thus, women leaders have additional difficulty performing their leadership roles because of the conflicting attitudes and stereotypes regarding what it means to be a woman and what it means to be a leader.

This view hinders women's career progression in education leadership. Moorosi (2007) argues that female principals' challenges and difficulties may make school leadership undesirable,

particularly for married or unmarried women with young children. Using feminist methodology Moorosi (2007) asserts that women in this study feared the additional responsibilities that came with leadership roles. At the same time, they were expected to fulfil their household chores as homemakers as opposed to their male counterparts. Moorosi's (2007) study took place almost 16 years ago. However, Bobalina and Mestry's (2022) study reveals that very little has changed; their findings show that women leaders persistently struggle to balance their work and family lives amidst patriarchal systems and cultural norms. The women experienced gender discrimination and gender role stereotypes. According to Bodalina and Mestry's (2022) study, the day-to-day challenges women leaders face include stereotyping, cultural norms, and balancing work and family life. Women in the study allude to time as the most significant constraint on work and family roles as leaders. The women leaders illuminate that balancing work and family life is hard. Stereotypes and cultural norms affected women leaders negatively; for example, teachers, mainly males, did not take instructions from the female leader. In one instance, a male teacher had to leave the school because he could not stand being led and taking instructions from a female leader.

Mayienga's (2013) study employed a narrative inquiry to understand the self-image of women school leaders in Kenya. The results reveal that firm and differentiated-culturally gendered roles placed a heavy demand on women by weakening their effectiveness in their professional work. Domestic chores, which included ensuring food in the home, cooking, cleaning, nurturing children, and making the home habitable, continued to be the domain only of females. Mayienga (2013) points out that cultural practices, traditions, and ideas about the female responsibilities of completing household chores took precedence over professional work. Women were seen as homemakers, while the males, were assigned the role of breadwinners responsible for professional work to provide for the family. The women in this study found it difficult to balance home and work life and received little or no support from the home. Often, the women stayed up late and got up early to ensure that their homes were cleaned first before going to work. Some women were single mothers raising children on their own, leading exhaustion. The challenges expressed by the women in Moorosi (2007), Bodalina and Mestry (2022), and Mayienga's (2013) research findings relate to what O'Brien and Wegren (2014) referred to as socially transmitted attitudes about what is "men's work" and "women's work." Such attitudes have and continue to disadvantage women in the home and workplace.

2.3.2 Organisational barriers

Barriers to women's leadership are numerous, expansive, and entrenched in the organisational and societal psyche. Despite making up most people within the teaching profession, the number of women in leadership continues to be problematic for reasons such as gender biases, prejudice, and stereotyping. This section explains the barriers preventing women from taking leadership positions within the organisation.

2.3.2.1 Attitude based on prejudice and stereotyping

Some women apply for senior positions and fail due to discrimination in the selection process, while others do not apply at all. Coleman (2005), in a study of secondary teachers in the United States, reveals discrimination during applications and promotion for women in educational leadership. Stereotypically, those on the interview panel held that women are less likely to be good leaders than men; for example, women tend to be passive and gentle, while men prefer strong and more decisive leadership.

Sperando and Kagoda (2010) examined barriers that hinder women from aspiring to secondary school leadership positions in Uganda. The findings revealed processes of interviewing that undermined women based on gender but favoured male candidates. The authors surveyed 62 female secondary school teachers from six co-educational schools in different areas of Uganda. The study also reveals that most female teachers aspire to school leadership, but few have positioned themselves to do well in the competitive application process. Many women think that the process is corrupt and do not expect to receive support from their current school administrator. Research by Amondi (2011) found organisational factors to be the most substantial barriers to women ascending to top educational leadership and management positions in Kenyan higher education institutions. These factors included long working hours not favourable for women with multiple identities as mothers, wives, and professionals, prejudice against women in leadership that prevents them from actualising their talents and abilities, and women having to prove themselves. At the same time, men are assumed to be experts.

Similarly, Mbepera (2015) examined female under-representation in senior leadership positions in rural community secondary schools in Tanzania. A sample of 259 participants from twenty schools was interviewed. The findings revealed that at the organisational level, women leaders experienced a lack of transparent procedures for recommending, recruiting, and appointing heads of schools, contributing to poorer access for women in leadership. Participants cited discrimination during recruitment based on gender.

Several scholars have investigated organisational barriers to women's advancement in leadership. Maheshwari and Nayak (2020) explored barriers faced by women leaders and aspiring women leaders in higher education in Vietnam. The sample included married and single women leaders. Using semi-structured interviews, the results revealed work-life imbalance as a barrier to married and single women in leadership. The participants felt they had a massive workload, for instance, in teaching, supervision, and management. Women leaders felt much pressure to balance work and home life because of the many roles that women leaders had to perform. Moroosi (2010) identified organisational, personal, and social obstacles to leadership accession. The study explored female principals' experiences of their route to the principalship position in secondary schools in South Africa. The study used an analytical framework that identified three phases, principals go through on their career routes: anticipation, acquisition, and performance. This framework suggests that women experience more obstacles than their male counterparts on their career routes. The findings revealed personal, organisational, and social factors in school social practices. Key to these experiences was the underlying male norm of who was more appropriate for school leadership.

Chisholm-Burns et al.'s (2017) study examined how women have achieved leadership positions in selected industries and sectors in the USA. The results reveal barriers to women's advancement in leadership careers and offer strategies to overcome such barriers. The barriers identified included conscious and unconscious biases, a lack of policies that support work-life balance, and a lack of mentors, role models, and sponsors. The strategies suggested providing seminars and workshops to help people identify and reduce unconscious biases at the institutional level and women-identifying role models. This is important for upcoming women leaders. Another strategy was to consider the implementation of organisational policies to provide work-life balance (e.g., flexible hours, job sharing).

Similarly, Gandhi and Sen's (2020) study explored barriers and enablers for women academicians in an Indian university. The study employed a qualitative research approach with a phenomenological design using face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. The women in the study discussed their personal and professional lives and the competing demands placed on them. The results revealed a deficiency in promoting female leadership due to lack of vision, policies, and supportive practices. This was compounded by a prevailing gendered organisational culture and a dearth of role models, mentors, networking opportunities and capacity- training. Furthermore, traditional socio-cultural expectations placed on women exacerbate these challenges. The studies above show that significant organisational barriers to

women's advancement in their career progression include prejudices, gender biases, and discrimination in the workplace. Critical strategies to address these barriers include for instance, developing a professional network of mentors and implementing capacity-building initiatives to effectively empower women leaders with the skills and knowledge required in leadership (Gandhi & Sen, 2020).

2.3.2.2 Negative attitude and insubordination

This section discusses negative attitudes and insubordination as some of the challenges women experience in leading schools in rural communities. Studies reviewed suggest that cultural practices and patriarchal systems cause barriers to women's advancement to leadership positions. Studies on women's experiences show how subordinates display negative attitudes towards women leaders. Mahabeer et al.'s (2018) research noted that women's marginalisation in leadership positions is not only undermined by men but that black women also collude in the subjugation of their fellow women in academia. This is what Freire (1970) called horizontal oppression or horizontal violence—a term used here to describe the harm that some women do to their fellow women in the workplace. Andrews (2020) explored why women do not support other women in leadership in the corporate world in the United States of America. Andrews states that there is an invisible natural law in the 'female culture' that helps to shape how women interact with other women at work and in their personal lives. This is called the 'power dead-even rule'. For instance, women as teachers perceive themselves as having similar self-esteem and power, thus even status. But once one of the women moves up the ranks to the position of leadership, this disrupts the dead-even rule, which may result in other women ostracising or engaging in negative discussions about their peer in secrecy and undermining the female authority. This kind of behaviour in women is to preserve the dead-even power relationship. The findings in Mahabeer et al.'s (2018) study also revealed that black women still face a myriad of challenges related to race, gender, and class within the space of educational leadership and are often depicted as "outsiders" in a space understood to be white and male dominated.

Women in the study were viewed as "outsiders" because they were black and inexperienced in the system. The marginalisation was further reproduced by the failure to provide support to allow women to gain experience. A key support initiative was mentorship, but the study's women indicated this was invisible to them. The participants spoke of how even the body language of the men from different races and class backgrounds showed their hostility and

animosity towards women taking up a space that had hitherto been theirs. This meant that any attempts by the female principals to prove themselves and perform tasks were ignored and disregarded. This showed how gender, race, and class intersect to marginalise black women in leadership positions. However, as Freire (1970) suggested, oppressed women must understand that they are as valuable as their oppressors and deserve to be treated humanely, with dignity and respect. In turn, they push beyond their vulnerability and take ownership of opportunities when presented to succeed as leaders.

Negative attitudes in the workplace from staff and community members hinder women's access to positions of power. Ndebele (2018) investigated the challenges faced by women leaders in South Africa. The study findings reveal negative attitudes from parents and educators, especially males, who perceive female leaders as incompetent and unfit for leadership. Women in the study felt undermined by such attitudes, leading to women's lack of confidence, which is seen as a barrier for women to access leadership. Female principals in this study indicate that male dominance is an entrenched culture among male staff members in general and, notably, among male school management team (SMT) members.

Research reveals that women leaders, after accessing leadership positions, often struggle to negotiate themselves in a male-dominated leadership space. Mgcotyelwa (2012) examined gender and power relations among black women leaders in the Western Cape of South Africa. The findings revealed that women leaders had developed subservient characteristics that undermined their leadership authority. Black women leaders and managers were not supported or accepted as legitimate leaders in the workplace because of prejudices against black women, undermining how women lead. Morojele et al. (2013) extended the idea to explain how women adapt masculine characteristics to prove assertiveness. The authors recommended that women leaders desist from seeking to grow muscles, a masculine attitude that women leaders employed to cope with leading in a male-dominated space of educational leadership (Morojele et al., 2013), but instead remain nurturing and caring as mothers. For this reason, women in Mgcotyelwa's (2012) study were cowed by the negative perceptions levelled against women as leaders because such characteristics degrade women from exercising their leadership abilities.

In conclusion, the results from the reviewed studies revealed that both male and female teachers undermined women leaders. Women also needed more support in the form of mentorship, especially those in new leadership positions. Gandhi and Sen (2020) suggest enablers for

women leaders by developing a professional network of mentors and capacity-building programs and leveraging women's careers by family and society by developing sensitivity towards diversity and inclusion. The studies revealed that because of the patriarchal system, women had to work harder to prove their worth as female leaders. Ndebele's (2018) and Mgcotyelwa's (2012) studies revealed that when women are undermined, this causes a lack of confidence, which is seen as a barrier to women, thus oppressing them from accessing leadership positions.

2.3.2.3 Uncooperative senior management team members

This section discusses more organisational challenges that women leaders experience in their roles as leaders of schools. The study by Khumalo (2017) asserts that cliques, lack of confidentiality, and support within the school management team (SMT) were noted as administrative challenges. Khumalo's study sought to understand women's leadership experiences in rural schools in Limpopo, South Africa. Khumalo's (2017) study employed a social justice lens and qualitative approaches to elicit data. The study's findings reveal that some SMTs tried to divide the staff and the school governing body members. The SMT members tried to collude with the teachers to frustrate the female leader. They influenced anyone they came across negatively to demean the female leader. However, the female principal maintained that some staff members were not easily influenced and continued to do their work and cooperate with other SMT members. Similarly, Ndebele (2018) posits that opposing camps were said to emerge in the school whereby some members of the SMT were siding with the former acting principal if one was still at the school, thus inciting other members of staff not to accept the female principals in the school.

2.3.2.4 Curriculum challenges

Curriculum implementation in schools is seen as one of the critical reasons for schools' existence. Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) examined the challenges teachers face in rural schools in South Africa. The results reveal a lack of material provisions such as physical space, electricity, running water, proper toilet facilities, and textbooks, and it appears that issues in the curriculum are almost overshadowed by the more pressing need for resources for effective learning and teaching. District officials do not often visit rural schools. Non-attendance at school by learners is common in rural schools because most parents are farmers, and sometimes learners must work on farms. Many parents and caregivers have no education, and therefore, cannot support their children with schoolwork. Such challenges hurt the female leader's role.

Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) concluded that the interconnectedness of challenges affects teaching and learning, leading to poor performance in rural schools and negatively impacting how females lead.

Edwards' (2018) study found a misalignment in the curriculum design with the socio-cultural context in disadvantaged rural communities. The curriculum developers do not consider the challenges that rural school learners experience because they are drawn from diverse groups with low socio-economic factors. For example, learners walking long distances to school affects teaching and learning, impacting how a female may lead. The women leaders in the study expressed their frustration relating to the Education Department's external control of curriculum and the frequent changes imposed on schools.

These external controls hinder the principal's ability to lead teaching and learning as the core business of schools. This is because, most of the day, the women leaders spend time doing paperwork and correcting submissions to the department instead of focusing on leading teaching and learning as the core business of schools.

2.3.3 Personal barriers

Scholars researching women's experiences in educational leadership have identified personal barriers hindering women's advancement. Personal factors here refer to each woman's experiences in the workplace, emerging from cultural stereotypes (Coleman, 2007; Shakeshaft et al., 2014). It attempts to show the nexus between the individual and cultural and social. Amondi (2011) examined women's leadership experiences in higher institutions in Kenya. The findings point to individual barriers that prevented women from seeking leadership positions. The women in the study failed to apply for leadership posts for fear of being judged based on their gender. This is because of cultural beliefs and norms that perceive women as incapable of leading. Through socialisation, the women tended to believe such perceptions, which explains their self-doubt and failure to apply for leadership positions. Women in the study feared being humiliated and undermined as women leaders chiefly by male teachers in meetings. Amondi (2011) argued that all the barriers of cultural beliefs, and values are significant explanations for women's under-representation in leadership ranks. What was interesting about Amondi's (2011) study was the inter-relationship between the cultural and the personal or the individual. Thus, understanding how the glass ceiling affects women's leadership must consider this intersection. Amondi (2011) suggests that providing gender-sensitive training programs to both

men and women could promote working relationships and respect for diversity in the workplace.

Mbpera's (2015) study revealed that women leaders faced challenges at the personal level, including family responsibility and rejecting the headship position in schools because of poor communication in rural communities. Poor socio-economic conditions affected women taking up leadership positions in Tanzania. The family responsibility for females strains women and how they perform their work. For this reason, women opted to reject positions of leadership for the sake of their families.

However, there have been changes; for example, Shakeshaft et al. (2014) noted that women are slowly challenging these ideas, often taking ownership of who they are and believing in their ability to be leaders. Through their awareness of self, women started believing in who they were, refusing to accept negative ideas sought to suppress them. This is shown in the way many women now graduate from higher education. Steyn's (2018) study examined the experiences of a female leader who succeeded in leading a rural community school in South Africa. The results show that, having lived in the community for many years, she understood the hostile forces, thus cultural stereotypes, practices, and norms. However, the woman leader had a strong confidence in the ability of teachers and students to improve their performance. This is to show that women can challenge the cultural practices that undermine women's ability to take on leadership roles and lead schools.

Research on issues of gender disparity in educational leadership has increased (see Mestry & Schmidt, 2012; Moorosi, 2010; Naidoo & Perumal, 2014). However, research concerning the gender disparity in educational leadership has, according to Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011), received very little exposure. Further, it is argued that very little is known about female principals' real challenges in a male-dominated society. Lumby et al. (2010) and Moorosi (2019) contend that literature on women in educational leadership ignores intersectionality. This can be seen, for example, in the limited research investigating how gender, race and class intersect and influence leadership experiences. On the other hand, Oplatka (2006) suggested that to understand female leadership experiences, a different theoretical lens must be used to understand women's barriers. This is to say that women experience multiple challenges in educational leadership; thus, an interplay of gender and many other forms of oppression categorised as class, race, language, sexual orientation, geographical location, and ethnicity do marginalise and exclude black women from accessing educational leadership positions (Jaga

et al., 2018). This is a gap that my study seeks to fill using intersectionality theory. Such oversight excludes the experiences of black women from the discourse of educational leadership based on their identities. All the barriers above intersect with other categories of power, such as gender, age, ethnicity, class, and geographical location, to oppress women in leadership.

2.4 The agentic nature of leadership

Women's under-representation in educational leadership is partly driven by gender stereotypes that associate men, but not women, with achievement-oriented, agentic traits such as being assertive and decisive. These stereotypes are expressed and perpetuated in language, with women described as less agentic than their male counterparts.

Role congruity theory examines the relationship between gender roles and other social roles that society enacts (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The standard role an individual plays is that of being male or female. Packed by power, socially shared yet stereotypical gender roles surround the male and female sexes. These roles for males and females are in two distinct dimensions: communal and agentic (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Carli, 2007). Women are communal, meaning they are more caring, nurturing, and concerned about others. On the other hand, men are perceived to be more agentic, meaning they are self-assertive, independent, and in control. Role incongruity happens when two social roles do not align. For instance, when women assume leadership positions and display qualities such as self-assertiveness, leading schools is perceived as incompatible. According to this claim, women are expected to have fewer agentic qualities than their male counterparts. When women enact social roles that are more agentic, they experience barriers.

The language we use to describe men and women speaks volumes and has consequences for stereotypes, career outcomes, and beyond. Research by Lawson, Martin, Huda, and Matz (2021) suggests that appointing women to the top tiers of management can mitigate deep-rooted stereotypes experienced in language, where men are perceived to be assertive and decisive. In contrast, women are described as less agentic regarding caring and nurturing. The findings show that an increase in women's agency is driven by positive aspects portrayed by women's participation in leadership, where women leaders empower other women and inspire young, upcoming leaders. The findings show that when organisations positively portray women as leaders, removing the burden of stereotypes promotes women's ability to perform competently. According to Msibi (2020), most obstacles women experience in leadership have nothing to do

with their leadership ability but are gender-based. This is because women's leadership abilities are unquestionably vital. The conclusion is that the battle to accept women in leadership stems from patriarchal structures and unfriendly cultural practices in the workplace.

Research has shown that women leaders experience gender stereotypes in the workplace. In a review of the literature, Offermann and Foley (2020) explored gender differences in leadership to traits, attributes, and behaviours. They also examined the barriers women leaders experience in the workplace. The study revealed that women experience gender discrimination through cultural stereotypes and are viewed as more sensitive, understanding, warm, helpful, and sympathetic than their male counterparts. These attributes benefit women leaders because they help them in their leadership roles. On the contrary, Eagly and Karau (2002, p.225) point out that women who violate gender role expectations by exhibiting agentic traits in leadership face “backlash” for holding masculinely defined positions. Offermann and Foley (2020) concluded that to reap the benefits of female leadership, organisations must combat the numerous barriers female leaders face that their male counterparts often do not, including gender-based discrimination and backlash for exhibiting agentic traits in leadership. Instead, creating inclusive organisations that allow women to grow using their agentic attributes will help organisations succeed in the future.

2.5 Challenging the devalued status of mothering in leadership

Leadership is based on social interaction between leaders and subordinates. Processes, including gender, influence this interaction. Women's status as mothers is devalued (Correll et al., 2007). Being a mother lowers women's hourly earnings. Working mothers encounter disadvantages in perceived pay competence relative to women with no children. Correll et al. (2007) point out that the mechanism to explain this wage penalty for motherhood includes employer discrimination against mothers. In their study in Australia, Correll et al. (2007) found that mothers were rated as less competent and less committed to paid work. Thus, the evaluators offered mothers lower salaries and other rewards because they assumed mothers were less competent and committed than other workers. England et al. (2016) point out that some women spend months or years out of employment or reduce the hours they work to care for their children, thus lowering women's experience and productivity at work. Women are expected to be the primary caregivers for their children and not to work outside the home. Evidence for the effect of cultural norms on women's earnings was shown by Agüero et al. (2020), whose study focused on the motherhood wage penalty in 21 developing countries. The authors found out

that mothers with older daughters experienced a wage premium compared to mothers who did not have older daughters. The study suggested that older daughters who help with chores free up time and energy for their mothers to seek employment outside the home.

Despite being devalued in the discussion above, many scholars demonstrate the existence of a mothering style in educational leadership and its associated effects.

The mothering style of leadership, though devalued from the discussion above, many scholars show how a mothering style exists in educational leadership and its effects. Grill, Jones, Andrew, and Whitehead (2022) explored women's cultural origins of leadership in the United States of America. Four women leaders were interviewed. The findings revealed "leadership as pouring into," which emphasises the importance of relationship building in their leadership and the extensions of leadership to benefit others (Grill et al., 2022, p. 42). One participant in the study spoke of her mother pouring into her the values of motherhood, and now she pours into other teachers and students alike. Grill et al. (2022) concluded that relationships are pouring into or a reflection of the extended relation to the mothering/other mothering/caring nature of black women leaders. The women leaders act as role models to their students and teachers.

Chege's (2022) study examined Kenyan female leaders' lived experiences to understand how maternal influence shapes leadership. The findings reveal that Kenyan mothers provide a supportive space during upbringing where their daughters observe discipline, enterprising, faith, independence, loving, leading by example, being open, supportive, visionary, and resilient, which the researcher defined as maternal influence. The mothers in the study demonstrated leadership in practice in their roles as mothers to their daughters. The women leaders interviewed shared how the values they learned from their mothers influenced how they led in their workplace. Values, such as love, leading by example, vision, and resilience are essential to effective leadership. Effective leadership depends more on the relevant qualities of leaders, such as those alluded to by Chege's (2022) study.

Similarly, Msila (2022) examined the narratives and the leaders' understanding of their roles in leading successful schools. The focus of the study was on historically black South African schools. The findings reveal that the participants maintained that qualities such as motherhood, flexibility, loyalty, mentoring, and collaborative leadership were among the qualities that were common among women leaders. Msila (2022) concluded that although all women leaders are likely to have these qualities, today, women leaders will go beyond nurturing and mothering

qualities, adding social justice qualities to their role as leaders because of the multi-layered nature of rural communities steeped in patriarchal practices that marginalise women. Msila suggests that female leaders embrace feminist consciousness, leading to social justice and equity.

2.6 Women's preparation programs for principalship

School principals in South Africa were rarely trained formally before their principalship attainment but were appointed based on their teaching records (Bush & Oduro, 2006). Many of those aspiring to be principals train while they are on the job. Shakeshaft et al. (2014) posits that women's support organisations should serve as vehicles for growth for women at the initial leadership career stages and in top-level positions. Women experience unique and numerous barriers to advancing into leadership positions compared to their male counterparts. Therefore, they require going through leadership preparation programs to acquire the knowledge and skills and prepare women leaders to psychologically negotiate barriers in educational leadership (Dean & Perrett, 2020). The women leaders perceived that women were subject to more excellent societal judgment. The workload between work and family life stressed others. Dean and Perrett (2020) illuminate that formal mentoring is essential to counteract the barriers women face in educational leadership but also suggest that the interaction of mentoring and informal support networks would promote gender equality and justice in schools.

Petriglieri (2011) conceptualises leadership development programs as the key to helping female principals meet the demands for effective leadership by benefiting the individual, organisation, and society. Petriglieri (2011) saw such development programs as the key to developing women's leadership identity work and where the program could be forwarded as 'identity workspaces' to develop this. Ely et al. (2011) frame leadership development as identity work. The authors define identity work as a process through which one becomes a leader. It is a process of negotiating and regulating identity. The study focused on how gender shapes women's path to leadership without either victimising or blaming women while simultaneously cultivating a sense of agency in women.

In more recent research, Bhati, and Ali (2021) examined women's voices and their construction of leadership identities within Pakistan's dominant masculine academic culture. The results reveal that as women leaders, women are socialised to conform to the traditionally feminine norms in society; most of them are perceived as less confident, dependent, and emotional. These stereotypes often develop self-doubt among women leaders and their leadership

identities, and they become scared of being unsuccessful or criticised. Taking gender into account is essential because it shapes women's paths without victimising or blaming them while cultivating a sense of belonging. Bhati and Ali (2021) suggested that universities should develop gender-sensitive policies to encourage and celebrate women's leadership in education.

In most cultures, masculinity and leadership are closely linked. There is this notion that the ideal leader, the natural man, is decisive, assertive, and independent. In contrast, women are expected to be friendly, caretaking, and unselfish. Such a mismatch between conventionally feminine qualities and the qualities thought necessary for leadership puts female leaders in a double bind (Ibarra et al., 2013). Similarly, Ely et al. (2011) stated that "leadership development programs that teach women to act like men to get ahead are misguided and likely to misguide women leaders" (p. 488).

Instead, the authors suggest certain aspects necessary when designing women-only leadership development programs, such as how professional networks can contribute to building and deepening expertise, power, and credibility as a leader (Ely et al., 2011). Ibarra et al. (2013) and Ely et al. (2011) assert that a woman-only leadership program provides safe spaces where women leaders identify everyday experiences and challenges and willingly and openly talk about these experiences, take risks, and be vulnerable without fearing that others will misunderstand or judge them. Through these networks, women leaders build their resilience to counteract the stereotypical challenges women face in the workplace. Research by Debebe (2011) also underscores the value of a women's training program (WOT) for female principals to sustain and improve women's leadership skills in the United States. Key to the findings was the *identity and leadership program*, which was a woman-only leadership program. During the teaching and learning, women felt supported and helped at every stage, thus enabling each learner to discover their strengths and what they needed to grow as leaders. The all-female environment and the use of gender-sensitive teaching and learning practices, all shown within every stage of transformational learning, are helpful for leadership training (Debebe, 2011).

The all-female environment for the women leaders in this study highlights one aspect of recognition—cultivating a sense of belonging. Women in an all-female environment feel that one's experiences and feelings are shared and accepted. Through sharing experiences from different backgrounds, women could see the problems women face as women and leaders. Women also feel a sense of freedom to talk about gender-related concerns (Debebe, 2011). The all-female environment offers an opportunity to experience a collaborative and supportive

leadership and learning environment where women learn from a majority position. Whereas traditional leadership programs expect women leaders to develop traditionally male behaviours, such as being assertive and decisive, these tend to victimise and disadvantage women leaders.

Brue and Brue (2018) analysed women's only leadership development training to determine how leadership roles are conceptualised and implemented and how women independently and collectively construct new leadership role identities. The findings show themes such as accepting the belonging narrative, identity emergence, and reflexive leadership. The study shows that women's leadership identities emerged from lived experiences. Women leaders viewed themselves as belonging; they bonded in this all-female training. The relational connections were significant. Women in the study also indicated that their leadership identity was developed through "knowing yourself," relating to others, and believing that they could "make a difference" in their new role of leadership (Brue & Brue, 2018, p.15). Participants spent time internally discovering and reflecting on who they were. Participants discovered their strengths, weaknesses, styles, and approaches, which constituted a significant portion of a leadership curriculum. In the process of reflection, the women participants could reach the 'aha' moments. Brue and Brue (2018) concluded that the program helped participants visualise their leadership goals and view themselves differently.

In the South African context, Msila (2022) recommends the Advanced Certificate in Education-School Management and Leadership (ACE-SML) program to support women in leadership. The program is said to have assisted women to psychologically face some of the challenges of leading rural schools. Similarly, Bodalina and Mestry (2022) recommend the Advanced Diploma in Education in Leadership and Management (ADELM) as a prerequisite for a teacher willing to apply for a leadership position. The authors argue that development programs should not be one-size-fits-all but should be tailor-made to suit the individual specific needs to equip both men and women on how to deal with challenges encountered in their day-to-day leading of rural schools.

2.7 Day-to-day experiences of leading in rural schools

Schools are dynamic, with interaction between teachers, learners, parents, the community, and the school principal. As leaders of schools, female leaders face multiple challenges in their day-to-day running of schools. These include gender discrimination, prejudice, high expectations, emotional upheaval, long working hours, and constant surveillance.

2.7.1 Gender discrimination and stereotypes

Women in leadership positions experience gender discrimination and socialisation through their upbringing. The argument is that cultural practices perpetuate gender inequalities and subordination of women, and these carry over from the family as the foundation into institutional structures such as schools, churches, and the media. Research by Bodalina and Mestry (2022) and Ndebele (2018) shows that women leaders experienced stereotyping and cultural norms. Stereotypical attitudes and cultural norms affected women leaders negatively; for example, teachers, mainly males, did not take instructions from female leaders. Negative attitudes from parents and educators, especially males who perceive female leaders as incompetent and not fit to be in leadership. Such attitudes undermine how women leaders perform their roles. Research by Eagly and Carli (2003) using social theory found that in terms of everyday organisational behaviour and attitudes, discrimination in male-dominated settings occurs through blatant and subtle stereotyping and questioning of women's competence. This is why women must prove their worth by working three times more than their male counterparts. Eagly and Carli (2003) concluded that these discriminatory barriers are significant for women's career advancement. However, these stereotypes become assets as they push women to realise their potential in leading schools. Ndebele (2018) recommends gender awareness workshops with parents and educators to sensitise them to gender equity issues in schools.

2.7.2 High expectations

In the context of women occupying leadership positions, an intricate interplay emerges between societal expectations and their inherent challenges. Schools have high expectations of leaders in terms of achievement. These expectations, emanating from teachers, community members, and broader society, cast a distinct spotlight on these women's roles.

As women ascend to leadership positions, the community and society have high expectations, which pull women leaders in the opposite direction. In the past, many women have struggled to get acceptance in the workplace because of societal and community expectations. In their daily activities, women leaders experience acute awareness about the role gender plays in the perception and expectations that the teachers, community, and society have for them as female leaders in rural schools. Women leaders are expected to be more understanding than their male counterparts. Women leaders are expected to be mothers and carers of learners in rural schools because that is their role (Espinoza, 2023). The social and cultural expectations of women in

society are consistent with literature where Morojele et al. (2013) assert that the community's expectations of women are to be mothers and men as leaders.

2.7.3 Emotional upheaval

Scholars have written about women's experiences in leadership positions in many contexts, and one of the challenges women experienced was emotional upheaval. Johnson and Fourillier's (2023) study found that women leaders who ascend to leadership positions are signing up for emotional turmoil. The participants demonstrated how they experienced workplace emotions, especially when facing stereotypes. The study examined the intricate paths of four black women in educational leadership in the United States of America. The women leaders overcame emotions caused by cultural stereotypes through resilience and remaining strong as women leaders in the male-dominated leadership space.

Women in educational leadership experience emotional upheaval daily through cultural patriarchal practices. Such stereotypical attitudes do affect the internal state of women leaders. Women leaders' negative emotions, such as frustrations, disappointments, anxiety, helplessness, and powerlessness, undermine and reduce teacher interest and intrinsic motivation (Zembylas, 2003).

Chance's (2022) study revealed that black women in higher education leadership positions experience adversity, including emotional turmoil. A participant in the study likened leadership to "a job that will chew you up, but you have to be able every day" (Chance, 2022, p. 68). This explains the kind of emotions that women leaders experience in the workplace. However, adversity allowed the women leaders to build the character trait of resilience as a strategy to bounce back from painful circumstances and move forward.

2.7.4 Long working hours

Women experience multiple challenges in their daily activities in the workplace.

Research by Amondi (2011) found organisational factors to be the most substantial barriers to women ascending to top educational leadership and management positions in Kenyan higher education institutions. These factors included long working hours that are not favourable for women with multiple identities as mothers, wives, and professionals, prejudice against women in leadership roles that prevents them from actualising their talents and abilities, and the constant need for women having to prove themselves. At the same time, men are assumed to be experts. Maheshwari and Nayak's (2020) study found that female leaders experienced huge

workloads in teaching, supervision, and management. The participants felt much pressure to balance work and home life because of the many roles female leaders had to perform.

2.7.5 Constant surveillance

Women experience multiple challenges in the workplace, including constant surveillance.

Foucault (1977) talks of how schools are set up to use surveillance to regulate individuals' behaviour. Foucault believed that institutions produced obedient citizens who comply with social norms, not simply because they were threatened by corporal punishment but because their behaviour was constantly sculpted to ensure they fully internalised the dominant beliefs and values. Similarly, male, and female teachers and the community monitor the women leaders' school activities and behaviour.

Fitzgerald (2018) refers to this kind of surveillance as the policing of women leaders. The study suggests that this would, in return, help women to be aware of their behaviour and be fair and caring to their learners and teachers. Thus, the practice of surveillance helps women in leadership positions to regulate their behaviour. Employing the metaphors of "looking good and being good," Fitzgerald (2018, p.1) argues that women in leadership continue to face tensions and ambiguities in their everyday working lives. The policing of women leaders' bodies, appearance, and overt behaviour by female colleagues was one of the gendered assumptions women leaders encountered in Fitzgerald's (2018) study. This is to say that women leaders in rural schools are watched and monitored by male and female teachers, parents, and the community to ensure that the culture is adhered to.

Oyeniran's (2020) study explored how female leaders deal with hindrances in school leadership in the Ivorian context. Ten women head teachers were interviewed through semi-structured interviews to gain in-depth information. The findings reveal that despite the challenges that women face in schools, women deal with challenges differently. Therefore, the study suggests training, experience, emotional strength, and deep listening as coping strategies that help women leaders succeed.

2.8 Summary

Women's experiences in educational leadership are a well-known international and national phenomenon. From the literature I have read, women experience multi-layered inequalities and oppression as barriers to advancing women's career development and participation in leadership. These include gendered organisational cultures, gender discrimination, sex-role

stereotypes, attitudes, the infantilisation of women, and cultural norms and beliefs experienced at the personal, organisational, and structural levels. These are experienced in the home, workplace, and society in general. Thus, to understand women's experiences of leading in rural contexts, a different theoretical lens must be applied to understand the barriers women face through their narratives. This is to say that women experience multiple barriers, an interplay of personal, organisational, and systemic, and many other forms of power oppression categorised as class, gender, race, language, geographical location, profession, and ethnicity that disadvantage women and influence how they lead in rural schools.

However, women leaders navigate the day-to-day challenges of leading by employing their agency depending on their social group position. Therefore, the intersectional lens is recommended to understand what is created and experienced at the intersection of the axes of oppression that women leaders share in leading rural schools.

Research on female principals is growing in South Africa; however, more focus is on the challenges faced by female principals, the leadership styles of female principals, and factors explaining the under-representation of women in leadership roles. Few studies focus on primary school principals in rural areas (Lumby & Azaola, 2015; Khumalo, 2021; Makgoka, 2022; Msila, 2022). A literature review of a small but growing research area on women's day-to-day experiences of leading in rural schools exists; however, this study examines school leadership and how biography, early learning, and school experience shape and influence leadership.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

In chapter two, I discussed international and national empirical literature that provided insight into the gendered nature of leadership. Various factors influence how female leadership occurs. In this chapter, I discuss the theoretical framework that helps to interpret and make sense of the data for this study. Osanloo and Grant (2016) argue that a theoretical framework serves as the foundation from which all knowledge for research is constructed. The theoretical framework, therefore, provides a world view that informs and links every decision made in the research process of this study based on the research questions, objectives and the data gathered.

I discuss intersectionality theory (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989) as an analytical framework to explore and understand female principals' experiences, practices, perceptions, and attitudes of power in the context of education. Power is understood in terms of relationships between people (Collins & Bilge, 2016). The argument of this thesis is that women face multi-layered challenges as women, mothers, wives, and professional leaders, and therefore, based on their interconnected social positioning and location, the interconnected power factors may impede or empower women leaders' capacity to navigate through the leadership experiences and related complexities of leading in a male-dominated space.

Firstly, I discuss intersectionality theory, which emphasises race, class, and gender as systems of oppression that impacted the structuring of mostly black women's lives. I show its origin, developments, application, and tensions that exist. Next, I discuss the matrix of domination (Collins, 1990), a mode of analysis that includes all systems of oppression that mutually constitute each other to shape women's lives. The matrix may indicate advantage or disadvantage, privilege, or penalty, one depending on an individual's positioning. Lastly, agency is discussed to show how women negotiate their leadership experiences in educational settings in rural communities, and reflexivity, which provides a clear guide on how to go about the research process to ensure ethical considerations.

Educational settings are believed to be arenas where inequities and injustices can be produced and reproduced, for instance, the poor representation of women in leadership positions, unequal power relationships between women leaders and stakeholders (teachers, learners, parents and community leaders), disadvantaged learners from poor backgrounds, and the transmission of

knowledge (Collins & Bilge, 2016). In such multi-layered settings, educational leadership can be used to create equitable and just educational systems by influencing policy, educational culture, instruction, and day-to-day operations that affect women's identities, opportunities, and issues that further affect how female leaders are considered and treated across contexts (Roland, 2018). To understand the day-to-day experiences of women leaders and their role in school settings, the use of this theory as an analytical tool is most appropriate. This is because an intersectional lens serves several purposes, but most importantly, it focuses on women's experiences and their multiple identities, acts as a catalyst for change, addresses equity in the workplace, and promotes social justice through diverse ways of leading, for example, women care and ensure teaching and learning take place in rural schools.

3.2 Origins of intersectionality

The origins of intersectionality can be traced back to early social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, which studied inequities within political, social, and economic structures, including education, employment, and the legal system (Collins & Bilge, 2016). However, these movements were political and led by Black men, and according to Hooks (2000), they were sexist, as they only supported Black men's agenda for equality with white men. Further, the women's movement also did not account for the realities of Black women, as the movement spoke only to the lives of white women, who were prioritising white women's pursuit of equality with white men (Hooks, 2000).

But it is believed that the concept was first used by freed slave Sojourner Truth in her speech "Ain't I a Woman?" query in 1851 at the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio in the USA. In the speech, Truth challenged the notion that being a woman (i.e., gender) and black (i.e., race) were mutually exclusive (Brah & Phoenix, 2004).

The notion of her gender as a woman did not sufficiently explain the inequitable treatment she experienced without its intersection with her race. This explanation provides an opportunity to examine how gender and race interact with other identities to cause effects, especially how black women experience leading in schools (Bowleg, 2012). Similarly, Ann Julia Cooper's 1892 publication, *A Voice from the South*, shows that intersectionality was in use way before Crenshaw developed the concept. In her writing, Cooper (1988, p.9) focused on the life experiences of black women. Her conceptual framework addressed both "a woman question" and "a race problem". Cooper's (1988) work helps in understanding that intersectionality is a theory to address the multiple social problems, including leadership, that black women

experience. In more recent research by Peters and Nash (2021), intersectionality was explicitly extended by acknowledging the multiplicative influences of marginalisation based on the racial and gendered experiences of black women in the United States of America. The study centred on black women's leadership in schools and communities, women's racialised and gendered experiences, and how women resisted racism in educational settings. The results reveal the multiplicative influences of marginalisation centred on race and gender and across planes of identity; for example, black women's actions as leaders mirrored their commitment to serve the communities with whom they dedicated to improving and bringing about change in schools.

3.2.1 Definition of intersectionality

Legal scholar Kimberlie Williams Crenshaw used race critical theory, legal theory, and feminist theory to develop and define intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991). She saw intersectionality as the confluence of gender, class, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements and cultural ideologies, and the outcomes therein in terms of power. Intersectionality aims to interrogate how different forms of disadvantage intersect and thereby explain the specific experiences of certain groups of women based on gender, race, and class simultaneously. This definition opened a conceptual space through which one can study how different forms of oppression work together to produce unique experiences of black women in educational leadership.

3.2.2 Developments in intersectionality framework

Crenshaw (1989, 1991), influenced by previous thought as discussed above, developed intersectionality theory in response to white liberal feminism, which for her, failed to account for the experiences of black women. She argued that research that focuses on gender-only frameworks emphasised by white liberal feminists is narrow and deeply flawed because it fails to take into consideration how intersecting power relations of race, class, geographical location, and gender affect women's options (Crenshaw 1991). Crenshaw (1991) argued that when feminist theory attempts to describe women's experiences through analysing patriarchy, sexuality, or separate spheres of ideology, it often overlooks the role of race. The role of race is evident in the study by Anderson, Okoro and Moore (2022) who examined how race and gender influence black women academic leaders to function in leadership positions in the United States of America. Using critical race theory and narrative inquiry, the results reveal that race burden is ever-present, overwhelming, and crushing black women as they rise through the ranks of leadership. Women in the study felt that their authority was routinely undermined

and thwarted, and for some women, they felt that they were put in positions of leadership as an act of racial hostility, making them a target. Such experience for black women is “a sink or swim position” (Anderson et al. 2022, p.6).

Crenshaw (1991) further argued that patriarchy’s conceptualisation of gender by grouping individuals into men and women neglects the differences and power relations within each category. Therefore, intersectionality brings to the fore the multiple ways in which gender and race interact to oppress women, for example, in leading rural schools.

Crenshaw (1989) also challenged the limitations of critical race theory for failing to capture the realities of black women’s experiences. One limitation of critical race theory for Crenshaw (1989) was the notion of the permanence of racism, which suggested that racist hierarchical power structures were to govern all political, economic, and social domains. This permanence shows that race is more important or salient than any other social identity. One can then say that by using critical race theory to understand leadership, and then only using race to interrogate leadership appointments, one would only be able to see white males in leadership. This would ultimately promote, produce, and reproduce an understanding of racial inequality that may also work towards the reproduction of white supremacy. This is because the preponderance of this focus on white leadership reinforces the idea that only white men can lead.

However, leadership is intertwined with more than just race and the use of racial power. Crenshaw (1989) also asserted that intersectionality was meant to explain the perspective of historically marginalised groups. In this sense, she speaks to the double bind based on the two identities of race and gender. However, for her, this did not adequately capture the reality of black women’s lives. She then included other identities, for example, class, disability, sexual identity, and ethnicity to explain the multiple identities and intersections that arise and marginalise women on a macro level. This then allows one to understand that multiple identities intersect in various ways because of structural, systemic, organisational, and individual factors that influence the lives of women. In the case of this study, structural manifestations highlight the oppression of women leading schools based on their gender, socioeconomic status, and geographical location of rural schools. Rural schools predominately serve black communities with low incomes and lack of resources. Christie (2013) points out that there are inequalities of space and place within countries such that experiences of education are very different depending partly on the geographical conditions. This global/local tension shapes South

Africa's inequalities in education despite a constitution that enshrines equality and equity in society. In her writing of “Mapping the Margins”, Crenshaw (1989) employed structural and political intersectionality to interrogate how historically, black people experienced discrimination and oppression during slavery in the United States of America. For Crenshaw, structural intersectionality happens in ways in which the locations of black women at the intersection of race and gender make actual experiences of, for example, domestic violence, rape, and remedial reforms qualitatively different from those of white women (Crenshaw, 1991). In the case of this thesis, the actual experiences of women leading in rural schools may differ depending on their social positioning. This is to say that the social context provides an important perspective to understand the forms of power and oppression present in the lives of women leaders in rural schools.

The application of Crenshaw’s (1991) ideas helps me to identify, analyse and understand the interlocking social institutions on a large scale or macro-level structural and cultural configurations (Crenshaw, 1991) of power oppression that women leaders experience in leading rural schools. This helps to understand the settings (geographical, social, and cultural) in which women experience leading schools in rural communities differently.

Patricia Hill Collins (1990) extended the concept of intersectionality in her book *The Black Feminist Thought* to include the matrix of domination and sexuality. For Collins, domination needed a better explanation to enable a rational explanation of the intersectional forces of race, gender, social class, sexuality, and geographical location manifest in the matrix of domination. I will discuss the matrix of domination in the next section.

3.3 The concept of matrix of domination

The concept *matrix of domination* refers to the overall organisation of power in a particular society or organisation, such as a school. The concept first emerged during slavery in the United States of America and was developed by feminist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins (1990). In black feminist thought, Collins emphasises race, class, and gender as the three systems that historically were used to structure women’s lives. The additional system of oppression structures the matrix of domination for other people. For Collins, the matrix of domination is a mode of analysis that includes all systems of oppression that mutually constitute each other and shape people’s lives. The project locates the lived experiences of oppression with the social contexts that produce those very experiences. Collins (1990) asserts that the configuration of oppression and resistance does shape life in specific communities and historical contexts in

different ways. In a review of the literature, Zeinali et al.'s (2022) research used an intersectional analysis to assess women's progress in the health workforce in South Africa. The researchers Zeinali et al. (2022) argued that an intersectional lens helps to better understand how gender interacts with other social categories, which results in upholding the persistence of women's barriers to career progression and leadership. The findings show that the barriers faced limit women's access to resources that improve career development, including mentorship and sponsorship opportunities. The implication of the study is considering other intersecting social identities such as age, ethnicity, class, geographical location, and sexuality that create unique positionalities of privilege and/or disadvantage. Adopting such an approach can strengthen gender equity in leadership (Zeinali et al., 2022). These understandings resonate with Crenshaw's (1991) assertion that women face layered forms of oppression.

The matrix of domination which Collins (2000) refers to as the domains of power framework, consists of four dimensions through which power is organised: interpersonal, disciplinary, cultural, and structural.

The dimensions operate singularly and in combination in shaping the social organisation of power (Collins, 2000). The matrix of domination allows one to see the intersections of privilege and disadvantage that shape the behaviour of an individual and sheds light on strategies of resistance for survival. Collins (2000) points out that domination and resistance are organised differently across social contexts. Therefore, applying Collin's (2000) concept of the matrix of domination as the domains of power framework enables a more nuanced understanding of how unjust power relations are organised and resisted at the individual or micro level. This will enable a better understanding of how women, as leaders in rural schools, experience disadvantage or privilege and how they resist and negotiate power oppression.

These four domains of power provide opportunities for using intersectionality to better understand women's experiences of leading rural schools and how they resist and negotiate these experiences. For this study, I order and discuss the four dimensions as follows: interpersonal, disciplinary, cultural, and structural domains.

3.3.1 The interpersonal domain

The interpersonal domain influences everyday life. This is made up of personal relationships and the interactions therein. This domain is important to help me answer the second question of the thesis, which seeks to understand how female principals negotiate their leadership

experiences. Collins and Bilge (2016) refer to personal interactions as power relations. At the school level, these interactions would include women leaders and their stakeholders (teachers, learners, SMTs, SGBs, parents and the local community). According to Collins (1990), individual people experience and resist oppression on their level of the personal biography, where power relations unfold. It is at this level that women may draw on their personal agency to resist oppression and strive for change.

This interpersonal domain links to the disciplinary, hegemonic, and structural domains. Thus, the oppression that women leaders experience at the individual level is linked to the disciplinary, cultural, and structural domains and is maintained through attitudes and behaviours, for example, sex stereotypical attitudes that view women as incapable of being in leadership positions (Collins, 2000). Such attitudes, perceptions and behaviours might be conscious or unconscious, but either way, the effects are destructive to female leaders. But intersectionality is about social justice and therefore provides a way to resist these cultural practices and norms that discriminate against women being in leadership positions (Collins, 2000).

Collins argues that any change in this domain starts through the “intrapersonal sphere” (p. 9), which means how a person views and understands his or her own self and experiences, and especially how his or her own “thoughts and actions uphold someone else’s subordination” (p. 9). She suggests that change in each domain is possible if, for instance, women try to find the cracks and fill them through internal desire and determination. For example, the belief that women are not capable of making rational decisions compared to their male counterparts in leadership positions provides an opportunity and space for women leaders to resist the negative patriarchal stereotypes through agency and strive to bring change in spaces where women lead, thus, rural schools. The changes may come about through training and workshops to upskill in areas identified to be challenging to the members of staff, or school governing body members through sharing experiences of leading (Steyn, 2018). This may result in changing the way schools are organised and managed through changes in the school culture and the physical appearance of schools in rural contexts. It is here in the interpersonal domain that power plays out.

As an example, a male teacher undermines the leadership of a female by refusing to take instructions when assigned a task. It would be interesting to understand from the data gathered how women leaders navigate their roles and assert their authority through their daily

interactions with staff, parents, learners, and the community at large to ensure effective leadership while maintaining their positions of authority as females.

3.3.2 The disciplinary domain

The disciplinary domain or power is believed to manage/control oppression. This domain is about laws and surveillance. Borrowing from Foucault, Collins (2000) states that the disciplinary domain consists of bureaucratic organisations whose main task is to organise and control human behaviour through concepts such as routine, rationalisation, and surveillance. This domain of power explains what happens in school contexts. Disciplinary power is relational rather than personal; it circulates through hierarchical networks for instance, through interactions with the principal, teachers, learners, and other stakeholders. For Foucault (1977), discipline reflects micro-practices that socialise people in their day-to-day activities. This is where individuals act as channels for power to pass through and be applied to them, or where routine practices cement or reinforce beliefs about male superiority. Foucault (1977) illuminates how surveillance is applied to monitor teachers in schools. The practice of surveillance emphasises the importance of teaching and learning as the school's core business. It is also about the social inter-relationships between the principal, learners, parents, and community leaders. The practice of surveillance also helps the women regulate their own behaviour as females. Therefore, intersectionality unearths these nuances in women's experiences of leading schools in rural communities.

For example, women leaders as professionals may use their power to ensure that learners and teachers are treated justly and fairly.

The concept of surveillance

Foucault (1995) defines surveillance as disciplinary power used as a tool for ranking, ordering and normalising individuals. Foucault (1977) used his work on *Discipline and Punish* to analyse the way power works on the body through external controls. Foucault uses the modern system of surveillance in prisons, schools, factories, and hospitals to analyse power in everyday social interactions. Foucault (1977) talks of how schools are set up to use surveillance to regulate an individual's behaviour. Foucault believed that institutions produced obedient citizens who comply with social norms, not simply being under threat of physical punishment but because of their behaviour being constantly sculpted to ensure they fully internalise the

dominant belief and values. Similarly, the women leaders' activities and behaviour are monitored by both male and female teachers and the community.

Hamamra et al. (2022) employed the concept of surveillance and resistance to delineate issues of power and control that showed up in an online higher education module at a Palestinian university. The researchers observed that surveillance practices were important mechanisms for monitoring the success of the educational process during the Corona virus era. These surveillance practices proved to be effective in managing the academic duties and daily activities of lecturers. Such activities included monitoring the lecturer's behaviour during the delivery of lectures. This kind of surveillance is what Fitzgerald (2018) refers to as policing in her study of women leaders. However, policing or surveillance here had a positive influence, as it helped women leaders to be aware of their behaviour and be fair and caring to their learners and teachers. Thus, the practice of surveillance helps women leaders to regulate their behaviour. Employing the metaphors of "looking good and being good" (2018, p.1). Fitzgerald (2018) further argues that women in leadership positions continue to face tensions and ambiguities in their everyday working lives. The policing of women leaders' bodies, appearance and overt behaviour by female colleagues was one of the gendered assumptions that women leaders encountered. However, female leaders would feel as though they must constantly perform because they are under the watchful eye of other people—teachers, parents, and the community. They must, therefore, always be prepared to explain themselves and their work. This is to say that as women leaders in rural schools, they are watched and monitored by both male and female teachers, parents, and the community at large to ensure that the culture is adhered to, and that schools are led effectively. Effective leaders manage and empower their followers and, in this case, teachers through supervision and mentoring (Steyn, 2018).

3.3.3 The cultural domain

The third domain is hegemonic, which legitimises oppression. Collins (2000) states that this domain—the cultural domain—consists of language use, images we respond to, the values and attitudes we hold and ideas we entertain. This is the cultural sphere of influence where consciousness and ideology come together. These ideologies are produced and reproduced through school curricula, textbooks, religious teachings, media images, cultural practices, and beliefs (Collins, 2000; Collins & Bilge, 2016). For example, Diko (2007) and Moorosi (2007) blame the under-representation of South African women in educational leadership and argue that cultural expectations about women still prevail to this day. For them, men are socially

constructed to have the upper hand in areas of power. This is revealed in the way things are done as well as the beliefs that people hold. For example, the belief that women should not hold positions of leadership because they are emotional and sensitive is challenging to women leaders. Images in the media sometimes represent women as weak compared to their male counterparts. Such beliefs influence how decision-making in schools is done.

Gender discrimination and stereotypes are taught in the home and later replicated in the workplace, for instance, in situations where women are not respected or supported as leaders. Sinclair (2011) asserts examining personal beliefs and assumptions should be traced from early childhood to the school context. This is to say that women experience multi-layered challenges. But women leading rural schools must negotiate all the challenges to ensure the smooth and effective functioning of their schools. Collins (2000) suggests that amidst oppressive challenges, women leaders need to be reflective, as this domain serves as a steppingstone to deconstruct the cultural domain and strive for transformation because change is possible. Through women leaders' recounting of how they negotiate their experiences of leading in rural schools, this may help inform policymakers on what kind of leadership is possible in rural schools despite the challenges therein. The cultural domain acts as a link between social institutions (structural domain), their organisational practices (disciplinary domain) and the everyday social interactions (interpersonal domain). Dominant groups maintain their power by creating and maintaining a system that supports male domination in leadership.

3.3.4 The structural domain

The structural domain consists of social structures such as laws, politics, religion, and the economy. These public policies organise, regulate, and legitimise power in social institutions such as schools, families, health institutions, and government agencies, where social hierarchies take form and oppress different groups of people depending on which social group one belongs to. This is because intersectionality is linked to power dynamics in society. This domain is said to set the structural parameters that organise power relations (Collins, 2000, 2017). For example, legislation and policies in South Africa at the national level do promote gender equality, as evinced in the Constitutional Act (1996); however, at the micro level, where female principals work, there is disjuncture and inequalities are eminent, as shown in the literature. Similarly, schools are confronted with often contradictory demands and expectations from the structural level of government; for example, when it comes to issues of equity in the workplace, the promise of an equal society through the constitution only exist on paper but the

reality on the ground is different, thus, women continue to be under-represented in senior leadership positions in the workplace (Bodalina & Mestry, 2020; Seala, Fish & Schreiber, 2021). Bodalina and Mestry (2020) assert that women leaders experience being subjected to the false notion that, as women, they lack the resilience and experience desired when faced with threatening situations in their day-to-day leading of schools, for example, a male teacher who refuses to take instructions from a female leader.

Inequality through gender bias at the workplace influences women leaders to struggle in their positions as new appointees. This explains why oppression is structured and its causes embedded in unchallenged norms, habits and symbols in practices underlying institutional rules, regulations and those following the rules, in this case, women leaders (Young, 2014). Therefore, any change or challenge in the structural domain comes through ‘insider resistance’ which is agency (Collins, 2000). Bodalina and Mestry’s (2020) study revealed women leaders used agency through their qualities of resistance and tenacity to excel in their leadership roles. Figure 1 presents a summary of the four domains.

Figure 1:

Domains of Power Framework

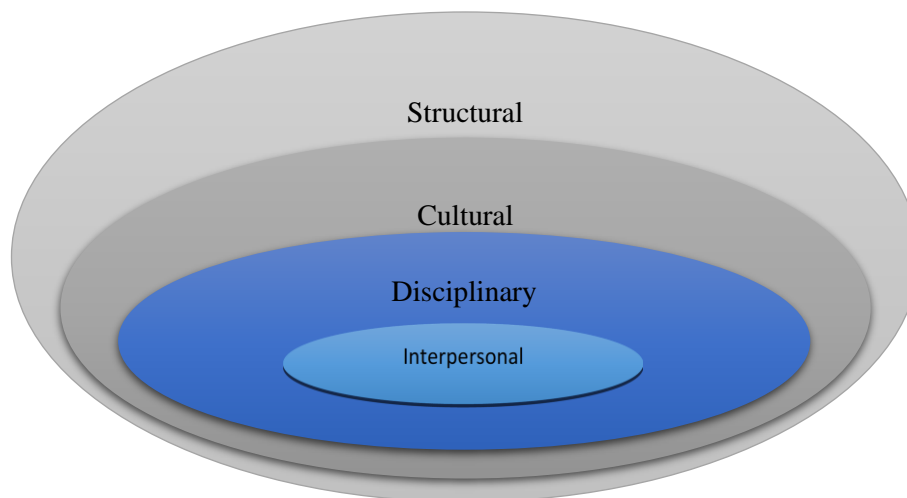
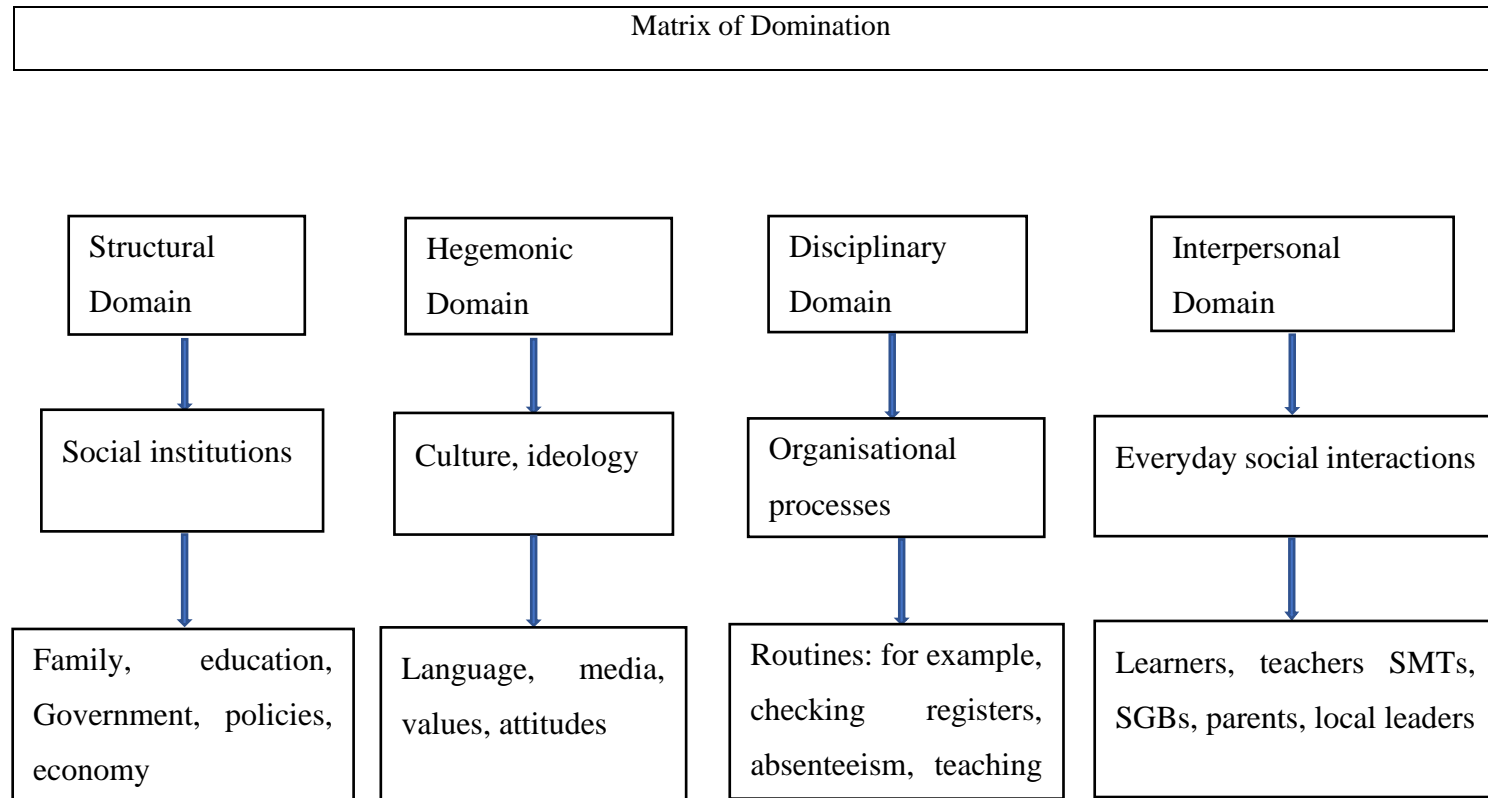


Figure 2:

Matrix of Domination



The use of a matrix of domination brings an analysis of power to the forefront. This is where gender, ethnicity, social class, and geographical location between individual women leaders are easily visible. Collins and Bilge (2016) argue that power relations of racism and sexism gain meaning in relation to one another and are to be analysed via their intersections, for example, racism and sexism, as well as across domains of power, thus interpersonal, disciplinary, cultural, and structural. The matrix of domination allows me to see the kind of relationships that exist between the women leaders and the stakeholders (teachers, SMTS, SGBs, parents and the community) This will provide a sense of what the women leaders experience in leading rural schools and how they negotiate these experiences through agency. I discuss the concept of agency, next.

3.4 The concept of agency

Giddens (1984) defines agency as the capability of an individual to act independently and make his or her own free choices. This is the power individuals require to think for themselves and act in ways that shape their experiences and life trajectories. Foucault (1977) illuminates that power exists only where people have the capacity to act freely by resisting that power. Individual people are understood to be active participants rather than passive spectators (Cohen et al. 2018). Individuals as active agents reach their goals through reasoned reflection, and their agency helps them to imagine and act towards new ways of being, thus leading to their development (Sen, 1999). Women leaders as agents exercise their agency, thus resisting the pressures of normalisation by challenging morality through their personal, ethical conduct that aligns with social justice agendas. Giddens (1984) theory of structuration links agency to structure through his discussion of rules and resources, which complements Collins's (2000) structural domain in the matrix of domination. This provides the understanding that people's actions are shaped by the very social structures that serve to reinforce or reconfigure them. The theory of structuration coupled with the concept of agency allows an understanding of how women leaders use their agency to care for learners and teachers.

A study on teacher agency by Charteris and Smardon (2015) in Australia illuminates that teacher agency is integral to teachers' capacity to reflect on and act in their practice. The findings of the study demonstrate how constructive teacher dialogue can enable agency as an appropriate tool for decision-making in schools. In later research, Charteris and Smardon (2018) discuss relational agency as a learning interaction where there is a flow of information within the school. This may relate to, for example, a woman leader giving feedback to a teacher

after a class observation or a teacher reporting to colleagues after attending a workshop offered by the department.

Collins (2000) argues that seeing how our thoughts and actions uphold other people's subordination should be the first step to change. Intersectionality invites researchers to think about agency as being situated in a temporary intersection where subjects give meaning to their actions in specific social locations at a specific time. The situatedness of agency is the main contribution that intersectionality provides to understanding what happens at the intersection of categories that produce oppression and domination (Rebughini, 2021). Thus, through agency, black women leaders can relate to the intersection of gender, race, and location, and identify which social practices to apply in a particular situation. Often, this is related to a social positioning and location that has power associated with it because of a dominant identity, in this case, gender. Eagly (2020) contends that prescriptions about gender stereotypes present an agency paradox for women who aspire to be in leadership positions. On one hand, women are considered a general category and are thought to lack the agency required to be effective leaders. On the other hand, a woman's strength display of agency often brings disapproval (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Eagly (2020) concludes that women are not replicas of male leaders. But rather, they are more participative and democratic than men in their approach to leadership. For example, women leaders understand the ethnic environments in which they were brought up and now work in similar locations, so these women can challenge the stereotypes that society has assigned to them by empowering young girls and women towards change. Here, women leaders use the power associated with their dominant identity of being, for example, middle-class and professionals to effect change. Relating to change, Collins (2000) argued that it is the responsibility of an individual man or woman to recognise and understand his or her victimisation and act to challenge oppression, power inequalities and strive for change.

In a study by Bodalina and Mestry (2022), women identified and used their strength, for example, multi-tasking, to resist oppression. The women in this study used their agency through their qualities of resistance and tenacity to grant them opportunities to excel in leadership positions as females. For Collins (2000), how an individual sees and understands her, or his own self and experiences is what prompts them to act for change. This is also about the way women use the power associated with their other social identities, for example, as professionals, to make change possible in the way they lead in rural schools. Tariq and Syed's (2017) study shows how Muslim women apply strategies such as personal networks and furthering education as ways of gaining power. The study reveals that women in the study first,

struggled to adopt basic leadership traits from home, such as being confident, assertive and out-spoken. This was because of gender discrimination and cultural stereotypes. However, through social networks and training courses, the women progressed to become leaders. This helped me to understand that women leaders as agents have the capacity to bring about change in their respective schools, as shown by studies that employed intersectionality as a tool for analysis.

In conclusion, this section speaks to the importance of agency. Women possess the power to act in ways that shape their experiences and career trajectories. Thus, women have faith in their ability to lead schools in rural communities. Through agency, they can resist pressures of normalisation, such as women not being capable of being in leadership positions. Individual women identify the area of weakness and act on it to bring about change. For example, a female principal organising a workshop for teachers to upgrade in a particular subject may in turn improve the learner's achievement in education.

3.5 Applicability of intersectionality

Researchers have employed intersectionality as an analytical tool to understand how race, class and gender intersect to cause effect in women's experiences of leadership. Johnson and Fournillier (2021) examined the intersecting factors of race and gender that impact women's ability to lead in the United States of America. Four black women in leadership positions were interviewed through semi-structured interviews about their life journey in their leadership advancement. The interviews were face-to-face, and the researchers employed a three-part interview process with the goal of decreasing the weakness of constructing findings on any one individual occurrence. The findings reveal that women leaders encountered racism. For example, one participant was discouraged from taking an honours class because it was claimed that it was going to be challenging for a black leader.

Secondly, through conversations in corridors, black women knew that they were different because of the race issue (Crenshaw, 1989). The women participants had to constantly prove themselves as black women leaders. In keeping watch over black women, both their tones in their speech and physical bodies were policed. This is to say that they were under surveillance by white dominance. The policing that black women encountered positively influenced women leaders to regulate their behaviour, which led to ethical and effective leadership. Johnson and Fournillier (2021) concluded that women leaders narratives suggest that through community support systems, women leaders overcame extant barriers to emerge into positions of power.

Msila (2022) examined the narratives of eight women school leaders in South Africa and how female principals build effective schools against the odds. The study used semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion as data production tools. The data was analysed thematically, first by searching for similarities and differences in the text, then by finding themes and developing categories. The results reveal that women leaders in historically disadvantaged schools faced an intersection of race, gender, and culture. The barriers included patriarchal domination leading to being demeaned by both male and female teachers. To navigate the barriers, women in the study shared certain qualities as leaders; for example, struggles as black women in historical black schools made them resilient by being respectful and understanding the community's culture. The women in the study applied the Advanced Certificate in Education-School Management and Leadership (ACE-SML) qualification as an empowerment tool to lead big schools effectively. The ACE-SML qualification was the first two-year formal qualification in South Africa, which prepared practicing principals as well as future principals with the necessary leadership and management skills (Msila, 2022). This resonates with Collin's (2019) work, which posits that some women choose to become mothers of the community and contribute their reproductive labour to the survival of better schools in their local communities.

Other challenges that female leaders face relates to having to constantly prove their ability in a male-dominated environment. Davis and Maldonado's (2015) study shows that women participants felt the impact of both race and gender. For these women, race did not trump their gender, nor did gender trump their race. As black women progressed in their leadership development, women faced double jeopardy despite their leadership abilities. One of the participants narrated how the woman leader was oppressed for being black and a woman. In a meeting a white male teacher kept on talking over her while she was talking. The white male continued to grow louder with the hope of stopping the woman leader from talking, but instead, the woman leader got louder and drowned out the voice of the white male. This was a way of proving her authority as a female leader in a space dominated by both race and gender. In a similar context, Aaron (2020) employed critical in-depth interviews to examine four female principals' perceptions, descriptions and enactments of school leadership based on their intersectional identities as black and women. An intersectional lens formed the conceptual framework. The results demonstrate that black women leaders' multiplicative identity as black and women influence women's experiences and perceptions of leadership. Key to the results were student-centred leadership and deconstructing perceptions about black women.

In conclusion, the studies discussed above reveal how women, in the context of the United States of America and South Africa, negotiate their leadership experiences. The findings reveal that women in positions of authority encountered an intersection of gender, race, and patriarchal domination. However, these challenges did not bring the women down; instead, these experiences were used as tools to sharpen their resilience to work even harder and prove their worth as leaders in a male-dominated space. This suggests that it is important to develop training programs that promote inclusive and more equitable educational leadership. This resonates with Collins (1990), who sums it up by noting that race and gender are completely bound to one another, incapable of being separated and continue to disadvantage women in leadership.

3.6 Contestations surrounding intersectionality

Several scholars have heralded intersectionality for its ability to interrogate power inequalities in society. Despite this, tensions also exist; for instance, firstly, on intersectionality's particularity and focus on identity and black women's experiences. However, for Davis (2008, p. 68), the focus within the theory on "the interaction among categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power" means that intersectionality does not only allow for an interrogation of the identity of black women but for all social identity constructions. Coaston (2019) postulates that intersectionality is not about identity and representation, but more about deep structural and systemic questions about discrimination and inequality. In support of the work of intersectionality, Carbado, Crenshaw and May (2013) contend that intersectionality's goal of drawing on black feminist multiplicative conceptions of power is to bring the often-hidden dynamics forward to transform them. This is to say that intersectionality is a concept stimulated by the imperative of social change. This is done by interrogating the inter-locking ways in which social structures produce and entrench power and marginalisation in society. In the case of my study, it is not to compare men and women but rather to focus on women's experiences to understand how their multiple identities influence how females lead in rural schools.

Secondly, Ludvig (2006) argues that the weakness of intersectionality arises when it comes to empirical application. This is because the list of difference is endless or indefinite (Ludvig, 2006, p. 245). However, Collins (2000) has responded, arguing that this is a valuable insight as it shows how different social identity categories intersect and give different outcomes

depending on the context. For example, a study by Moroosi et al. (2018) used a life-history approach and interviewed three black women leaders on their experiences of gender and race in constructing success in leadership in three different contexts: England, South Africa, and the United States. The study used an intersectional lens to analyse their accounts. The analysis suggests that black women leaders' constructions of success are shaped by overcoming barriers from their own racialised and gendered histories to being in a position where they can lead in providing an education for their black communities. The results imply and deepen our understanding in all three contexts of the effects of the historical struggle on the current practices of leadership, as well as the attitudes that inform them. This then enables a more nuanced, multi-layered understanding to emerge from the data in my study, which points to the argument that women leaders possess multiple identities that interact with other categories to produce different outcomes depending on the location of individual women at a given time.

Another criticism was the lack of a methodology to guide researchers, which hinders the application of intersectionality and makes it difficult to use (Nash, 2008). In response, McCall (2005) proposed narratives as a methodology which is a qualitative approach because they take an individual's experience and infer the broader social location embodied in the individual. McCall (2005) notes that complexity when using narratives is managed by focusing on the single group represented by the individual. Bauer et al. (2021), in a systematic review of literature, sought to identify innovative methods that could be applied to health research using an intersectional lens. The study employed quantitative methods to extract data. The results supported concerns among intersectionality scholars that core theoretical tenets are often lost or misinterpreted in quantitative research; quantitative methods are simplistic and often misapplied. However, they suggest mixed methods with additional methods such as classification and regression trees, which allow data-driven explorations of heterogeneity within populations across social identities. Therefore, applying qualitative approaches to research by using a narrative design in this study enabled the production of contextual real-world accounts or knowledge about individual women leaders' multiple identities, behaviour, social structures, and shared beliefs and experiences, which might be lost when using quantitative research approaches. As women reflect on their histories and backgrounds, multiple nuances emerge; thus, women's narratives of their leadership experiences are better understood with the concept of reflexivity which is discussed in chapter 4.

In conclusion, tensions about the lack of a methodology to guide researchers when using intersectionality exist. However, McCall (2005) suggests a narrative design to be suitable as a

data production tool. Because intersectionality is about interrogating the interlocking ways in which social structures produce and entrench power and marginalisation even in research, the concept of reflexivity becomes key to an ethical research process. Reflexivity plays a pivotal role in ensuring the accuracy of the research findings.

3.7 Chapter summary

I have discussed intersectionality theory as an analytical framework to examine women leaders' experiences of leading rural schools. As an analytical tool, intersectionality helps me to identify, analyse and understand the interlocking social institutions of power on a micro and interpersonal level, and cultural configurations of power oppression that women leaders experience in leading schools in rural communities. This provides an understanding of how women experience multiple challenges and how some of these experiences influence women's leadership in rural communities differently based on their social positioning. It also gives understandings of the multiple ways women lead schools. The concept of matrix of domination contains the intersections of privilege and penalty, or advantage and disadvantage that shapes the behaviour of an individual and sheds light on strategies of resistance. Domination and resistance are organised differently across social contexts. The application of the matrix of domination power framework enables a more nuanced understanding of how unjust power relations are organised and resisted at the level of an individual. Collins (2000) asserts that cultural, structural, and interpersonal domains are intertwined, collectively shaping gender dynamics. The domains interact and converge, shaping and influencing women leaders' experiences at every turn, thus, through upbringing, schooling and now in practice.

This enables a better understanding of how individual women as leaders experience disadvantage in a male-dominated space of leadership and are privileged as middle-class professionals, and how these women resist and negotiate power oppression through their individual agency.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The research methodology chapter refers to the procedures by which I went about my work describing, explaining, and interpreting phenomena (Cohen et al., 2018). It provided a plan that guided me as a researcher in deciding what type of data was required for my study and which data collection tools were most appropriate for the purpose of the study (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). This chapter presents the procedures that I undertook to gather data about the research problem.

The purpose of this research was to explore the experiences of female principals as leaders in six selected rural public schools in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. I employed a critical paradigm to analyse, synthesise, and understand the key research question.

What are the experiences of female principals as leaders of rural schools?

To answer the main question, a series of sub-questions were formulated:

1. What are the female principals' experiences of leading in rural schools?
2. How do the female principals negotiate their experiences of leadership?
3. What is the nature of female principals' experiences of leadership?

This chapter is organised into the following thematic sections: Ontological and Epistemological underpinnings, critical paradigm, qualitative approach, narrative design, pilot study, sampling procedures, data collection instruments, analysing narrative data, trustworthiness of data collection instruments, ethical considerations, research reflexivity, limitations of the study and a summary of the chapter. These aspects are discussed progressively in the sections that follow.

4.2 Ontological and Epistemological underpinning that framed the conceptualization of the study

As a researcher embarking on this qualitative study to investigate the leadership experiences of female headteachers in rural schools in KwaZulu-Natal, it was crucial to consider the ontological and epistemological underpinnings that informed my research approach.

Ontology, which is concerned with the nature of reality and existence, plays an important role in guiding my research. I advocate a relativistic ontology and recognise that reality is subjective and multi-layered. In the context of this study, I recognise that each principal's leadership experience is unique, shaped by her personal background, the specific context of a rural school and the complex interplay of social, cultural, and political factors. By advocating a relativistic ontology, I argue that there is no single, objective reality when it comes to understanding these leadership experiences. Instead, I aimed to explore and illuminate the multiple realities constructed by the school principals themselves by giving voice to their diverse perspectives and lived experiences.

Epistemology, which focuses on the nature of knowledge and the ways in which we acquire it, is equally important to my research approach. I am guided by a critical epistemology that emphasises the importance of critically understanding and interpreting the subjective meanings that individuals attach to their experiences. In this study, I sought to gain insights by engaging directly with female school leaders through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. These interviews provided a platform for participants to share their stories, challenges, and triumphs in their own words, allowing me to delve into the richness and complexity of their leadership experiences. The self-reflective nature of the narrative interviews enabled participants to think differently about their realities where they were able to see for example how their lives were constrained and limited by patriarchy or the socialisation process that rendered them powerless at times. By embracing a critical epistemology, I recognise my role as a researcher who co-constructs knowledge with participants. In co-constructing knowledge with participants two aspects are important. Firstly, the voices of a group of participants marginalised by normative discourses about leadership are heard and promoted. Secondly, my own reflection allowed me to recognise that my own background, experiences, and interpretations will inevitably shape the understanding that emerges from this study. Through a process of iterative analysis and reflexivity, I endeavour to make sense of the principals' experiences whilst keeping my own subjectivity as a researcher in mind.

4.2.1 Critical paradigm

A paradigm is a pattern or model of behaviour, where it is maintained that a paradigm is a solution to a certain problem approved of by the scientific community (Kuhn, 2012). Similarly, Kivunja and Kiyini (2017) define a paradigm as a set of shared beliefs that informs the meaning or interpretation of research data. This is to say that a research paradigm is the foundation upon

which the study's research procedures and methodologies are anchored. It gives the researcher a clear path to examine the research problem.

In research, it is important for a researcher to clarify what his/her paradigm is before engaging in the research process. This is because a research paradigm inherently reflects the researcher's beliefs about the world that s/he lives in and wants to live in (Lather, 1988). My belief is that schools should be organised to promote equitable teaching and learning for all learners, irrespective of their backgrounds. This is to say that a paradigm defines how one sees the world and how he/she understands and acts within that world (Kivunja & Kiyini, 2017). Such a world view is a framework that guides the methodological aspects of the research study; for example, it guides the decisions about what research instruments will be employed and how the data will be collected and analysed. In other words, the paradigm adopted directed my exploration of the research, including data collection and analysis procedures. A paradigm, therefore, has "implications for every decision made in the research process" (Kivunja & Kiyini, 2017, p.26).

This study uses the critical paradigm. The critical paradigm is about realising a society that is based on equality and democracy for all its members. The purpose of the paradigm is not merely to understand situations but rather to enable marginalised groups of society, such as women, to gain control over their own lives and change them (Collins et al. 2011). This study shows how women stood up against odds to get knowledge and skills to empower them as leaders in rural community schools steeped in cultural beliefs and practices. Kincheloe and McLaren (2011) posit critical paradigm is concerned with issues of power and social justice. This is a worldview through which power relations construct our thoughts and experiences (Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016); for example, how a woman sees herself independently in relation to others may facilitate and promote decision making which may result in bringing change in her life. From a critical perspective, the purpose of research is to discover and offer solutions to societal problems; for example, gender inequality in educational leadership (Johnson & Fournillier, 2023). This worldview seeks to redress inequality and promote individual freedom within a democratic society (Cohen et al., 2011). Based on intersectionality, as critical theory, this study focuses on women leaders' experiences of leading rural schools and how these experiences impact their career advancement, which may lead to under-representation of women in leadership positions. Intersectionality as a critical social theory is inspired by critical race theory and black feminism, which both questions the power dynamics of various social locations where structural iniquities and inequalities prevail and provide opportunities for transformation (Crenshaw, 1991). The aim of this study is not to transform women leaders but

to understand how women experience multiple challenges in leading schools and how they negotiate these experiences.

Intersectionality seeks to understand oppression when various social identities intersect. Women, as mothers, wives, and leaders, may experience privilege or oppression depending on their position. The argument for this study is that women experience multiple challenges in career progression and leadership participation. Therefore, their interpersonal relationships influence women leaders' daily interactions with, for example, the self, family, church, and the workplace (Collins, 2000). It is within these spaces of interaction that power issues play out to disadvantage or create opportunities for individual women leaders, depending on their location. My "insider" status as a woman in the study is an imperative methodological practice as it centres on the voices of women in educational leadership (McLemor & Choo, 2019) and promotes empathy and rapport-building. Thus, I was constantly reflective of the women in the study (Abrams et al., 2020).

Francisco et al. (2023) defines reflexivity as continuous, collaborative, and multifaceted practices through which a researcher self-consciously critiques, appraises and evaluates how their subjectivity and context influence the research process. This means that it is an ongoing process that extends across the entire duration of the research. According to constructivist theory, knowledge and meaningful reality are constructed out of interaction between the participants in a social context. Therefore, the social world can only be understood from the standpoint of the participants (Cohen et al. 2011). This approach allowed me to explore a social process through women's voices in collecting data and analysing information. Researchers Bowleg (2008) and Shields (2008) suggest that qualitative approaches are highly appropriate due to their theoretical compatibility and historic links between intersectionality theory and qualitative methods. This is because of its description of a multi-dimensional nature, which makes investigation using qualitative methods seem natural (Shields, 2008).

Bowleg (2008) and Shields (2008) discuss the theoretical compatibility and historical links with the intersectionality theory of identity, which makes investigation using qualitative methods seem natural (Shields, 2008). Thus, women possess multiple identities as women, mothers, wives and leaders of schools, and these multiple identities intersect with other categories such as race, class, gender age, sexuality, and geographical location, resulting in the disadvantage or privilege of individual women leaders depending on where one is located (Collins, 2000). This enabled me to illuminate the complexities of participants' thoughts and

individual bodies as sites of intersectional oppression, which in turn generates new knowledge that represents marginalised experiences. The intersectionality approach also brings to the fore the forces that create those experiences to facilitate more understandings of leadership in rural schools and the constraints therein (Shields, 2008). Intersectionality approach promotes the voices of those marginalised in society, such as women, and therefore links to the narrative methodology that motivates the participants; for example, the key question was women's leadership experiences. Participants were motivated to discuss their stories of leading in a rural environment and were happy that people would hear and know about their stories of how they lead in rural schools from their own standpoint.

4.2.2 Qualitative approach

Literature suggests that there are two main approaches to research: one grounded in scientific experimentation, and inclined to numbers, which claims to be able to generalise findings of the research. This is referred to as a quantitative approach. On the other hand, there is the qualitative approach, which aims to interpret data by making sense of the meaning that participants construct in their natural setting to understand in-depth information about the participants (Cohen et al., 2018). My study employed qualitative data production methods (for example, semi-structured interviews, focus groups and photographs). Narratives were employed to understand how women leaders make meaning of their leadership experiences. Qualitative data production methods are said to be highly appropriate for my research question because the purpose was to learn from the women leaders in which they experience it, the emotions they bring, and how they interpret what they experience. Qualitative data production methods share the goal of generating new ways of seeing existing data. This approach aims to make meaning from the data gathered. These new ways of seeing data enabled me to get in-depth information about female leaders in rural community schools.

Qualitative approaches in educational research are said to be appropriate because they provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2018). I applied qualitative data methods in this study first, because of their fluidity and flexibility in nature, which provide a better understanding of the meanings, interpretations, and subjective experiences of individual women leading schools. Secondly, this approach allowed me, as the researcher, to hear the voices of a group of women leaders who have been marginalised in society but are privileged to be leaders of schools. Thirdly, the nature of the in-depth data methods of qualitative approaches that I applied in the study allowed the participants to express their emotions and

experiences through words and language (Cohen et al., 2018; Gee, 2011). This is to say that semi-structured interviews as a qualitative approach, allowed me as the researcher to see the expressions that participants display during the conversations, and this also enabled me to ask for clarification or ask another question and further probing new information that arose during interview. In the next section, I discuss the research design.

4.3 Research design: Narrative inquiry

A narrative inquiry is seen in a variety of ways and tends to include several different approaches and traditions, such as biography, autobiography, and life history in research. In terms of locating the narrative approach in the broad spectrum of qualitative research, it tends to be positioned within a constructivist stance, with reflexivity, interpretivism and representation being the primary features of the approach (Riessman, 2005). The belief in constructivist theory is that social reality is constructed out of ongoing interaction and therefore, to understand the ways in which social interaction is structured in terms of power, narratives provide an intersection of history, biography, and society (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p.132). The term narrative in the human sciences may refer to texts at several levels that overlap: stories told by research participants, interpretation accounts developed by an investigator based on interviews and fieldnotes, observations and the narration a reader constructs after engaging with participants' narratives (Riessman, 2008) According to Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) terms, "narrative inquiry is the study of experience" (p. 189) It is based on this claim that many researchers attempt to give voice to suppressed minorities or the otherwise demeaned, thus facilitating greater social understandings. The historical and social contexts of how women have been positioned in a male-dominated society played a significant role in how participants' stories emerged and how their stories helped create social justice in rural schools. Challenging the dominant, masculine narratives and bringing women's voices that were once silenced to the fore were primary for my study. Narratives are composed for audiences at moments in history, and they draw on taken-for-granted knowledge and values within a particular field (Riessman, 2008).

In a narrative, a series of events are described. For example, the narrator of the story tells the story from personal experience. By personal experience, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to the emotions such as feelings, hope, desires, reactions, and moral dispositions of a person, whether researcher or participant. On the other hand, Gergen and Gergen (2011) see experience not as something we have as a possession but rather as something we do in a relational sense.

In my study, women leaders' narratives focused on personal experience as a fundamental structure upon which new knowledge can be drawn, especially when leading in rural schools. Clandinin and Roseik (2007) argues that narrative inquiry normally starts by concentrating on the individual and her or his "personal understanding". Narratives collect stories from individuals or small groups of people. These stories tell of the individual experiences that often expose the researcher to the identities of that very individual (Butina, 2015). Therefore, storytelling is important to allow an understanding of human lived experiences (Smit, 2017). Narrative inquiry benefited this current study because the focus was on participants' lived experiences in their leadership journey as female principals and their own stories. It also allowed me to connect with the participants and their experiences as I listened and retold their stories. This allowed the study to offer an understanding of human experiences through stories. Making women's concrete experience as the point of entry for inquiry and exposing new knowledge contained within those experiences of leading schools might fill the gaps about women in educational leadership (Hesse-Biber, 2007). Therefore, an understanding of the personal experiences of women leading rural schools, their multiple identities, and how they negotiate these experiences was key for this study.

People who narrate personal experiences move back and forth in time and space, telling their personal and social experiences (Polkinghorne, 1995). Therefore, women's accounts of their experiences growing up, schooling, becoming teachers, and now as leaders of schools may be interwoven with their past and present experiences to produce new understandings (Collins, 2000). Narratives also provide an opportunity for women leaders to unite their past selves with those of the present and even with the projected selves of the future (Polkinghorne, 1995), bringing together in a coherent fashion differing versions by providing a deeper sense of understanding of leadership experiences. To draw from female principals' experiences of leading in rural schools, I employed a design that centres on experiences, given that the participants not only recount their stories but also become engaged in living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Participants retold stories of growing up, schooling and how they became leaders in rural community schools, thus sharing their past and current experiences before and after becoming leaders.

Social groups such as women tell stories with words and meanings that are specific to their experience, way of life, and context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This is to say that participants in this study narrated stories of their experience leading schools in their context. The selected schools were in rural areas of the Province of KwaZulu-Natal, and even one of

the schools is referred to as 'deep rural' (Chikoko, 2017). Meaning that the challenges experienced in the two settings (rural and deep rural) are not only individual but rather an interplay of individual and structural; for example, rural schools experience challenges, such as a lack of clean running water, which marginalises learners and teachers in rural schools. Therefore, women narrated unique stories that are specific to their settings. Similarly, Collins (1990) asserts that narratives are selected for their applicability to the lived experiences of individuals and are also accepted methods among feminist researchers (Polkinghorne, 1995). Stories are said to be powerful tools that can raise consciousness and bring about change (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Collins (1990) asserts women ought to be resilient not only to survive but to challenge and transcend oppression in male-dominated spaces of leadership. Women in this study talked about being resilient to oppressive anti-woman power. For these women, resilience is part of consciousness-raising to liberate women towards just and effective leadership in rural communities.

Counter-narratives are critical of the master/dominant narratives, with their origins in critical race theory. Counter-narratives often arise out of individual or group experiences that do not fit the master narratives. The purpose of counter narratives is to bring into scholarship the lives and experiences of people who are on the margins of society, such as black women (Stanley, 2016).

A narrative design is flexible and allows a researcher to use a variety of data collection methods (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In my case, I was able to use semi-structured individual interviews, focus group interviews, and photographs, which provided the basis for inductively, deductively, and thematically generating new theoretical explanations. Secondly, using narratives establishes trust and rapport between the researcher and the participants, which is in favour of feminist desire (Oakley, 1981). Narrative methodology retains the integrity of people rather than breaking them. This design enables evolving situations; for example, in the practice of leading in rural schools (Cohen et al. 2011). Narratives also give participants a voice to share their experiences in their own unique ways.

Some of the limitations of a narrative approach include, firstly, the ethics part of methodology when it comes to reporting with the fear that some sensitive information may be linked to the narrator of the story. However, I used pseudonyms chosen by the participants themselves and the schools to protect the privacy of the participants. Secondly, narratives rely on the skills of the narrator of the story, whether he/she understands the critical question being researched or

not. For this study, participants were given guiding questions to help the narratives flow. And lastly, the data collected might be overwhelming for the researcher in terms of analysis (Cohen et al., 2011). Data gathered through semi-structured interviews and photographs was indeed overwhelming. Next, I discuss how I selected the participants of the study.

4.4 Participant selection

Quantitative research uses standardised procedures and random selection of participants to remove the influence of external variables and ensure generalisation of findings. Contrary to this, participant selection in qualitative research is purposeful (Sargeant, 2012). Participants are selected who can best inform the research questions and enhance understanding of the problem under study. Decisions regarding selection are based on research questions and theoretical perspectives. A quantitative approach to research requires statistical calculations of sample size to ensure sufficient power to confirm the outcome of the results. However, in qualitative research, the sample size is not predetermined (Sargeant, 2012); therefore, my study employed purposive sampling, which I discuss below.

4.4.1 Purposive sampling

Participants for this study were selected purposively based on the qualitative discourse. A group of women were targeted in rural schools to give in-depth information about leading schools (Cohen et al., 2018). Else-Quest and Hyde (2016) contends purposive sampling includes multiple strategies that can be used to achieve representation and sample special or unique cases. I approached the department of Basic education in Pietermaritzburg and requested for female primary school heads leading in rural schools. A list of schools and telephone numbers were given, and I started making calls to request whether the women leaders could participate in the study. The purpose of the study was clearly explained to the female leaders. Therefore, the six women in this study were selected because of their willingness to work with me in the study and were leading in rural schools. The uniqueness of women in this study is that they are black women, leading in rural schools steeped in where cultural beliefs, some against holding positions of leadership. Cohen et al. (2018) suggest that purposive sampling is used as an enhanced sample to include, for example, the voices of women who were once silenced from research discourses. Therefore, in this research study, six women school principals were selected using the following criteria:

1. The school principal must be a woman from a rural, government-run, primary school.

2. The principal must have served in the position for more than two years.

I do acknowledge that a limitation to my study is that it focuses only on a small number of six female principals' experiences of leading in schools. The study is also limited to women in primary schools; hence, the intention was not to generalise the findings of the research to all female leaders in all schools. However, my goal was to locate a small number of women who were willing to make a commitment to work with me over a period to gain in-depth information into their experiences of how they function in their roles as school principals in rural schools. This resonates Cohen et al.'s (2018) ideas. Next, I introduce the participants in the study.

4.4.2 Sample population

Upon being granted permission to do research in the selected schools, the demographic information below was completed using a questionnaire schedule (see Appendix 1). The purpose of a questionnaire in this study was primarily to gather biographic data shown in the table below. The participants chose their own pseudonyms in place of their actual names and those of the schools for confidentiality purposes. Table 1 shows the demographics of the female principals and their schools.

Table 1:

Participants' Demographics

Name of school	Type of school	Qualification	Teaching experience in years	Leadership experience in years	No. of teachers in the school	No. of learners
Lamu school	Rural	BED Hons	28	5	32	1120
Flora school	Semi-rural	Master's	32	18	13	546
Lwati school	Rural	BED Hons	25	4	10	120
Marylyn school	Semi-rural	BED Hons	28	22	11	310
Nehema school	Deep-Rural	BED	20	8	4	35
Mamu school	Rural	Master's	35	13	33	1164

In this section, I present the lives of the participants through their biographic information. I provide brief demographic information and background on each of the female principals who committed to journeying with me in this research project. This information helped me understand the history and context of the participants, thus the focus of my research study.

NOMBUZA

Nombuza is the principal of Lamu School and is married with five children, all under the age of 25.

The school is located 177.8 km from Pietermaritzburg CBD and is classified under quintile 2 as a no-fee institution. Although Nombuza comes from the same community where the school is in Northern KwaZulu-Natal, her family lives in Durban, so she travels every Friday to be with the family for the weekend. She is in her fifties and has served as a principal in the current school for five years and has been teaching for 28 years in her rural community located in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. Nombuza says she is passionate about education for girls from poor backgrounds, given her negative experiences growing up in a rural community in the same area.

SHANE

Shane heads Flora School, which is a quintile 3 school, 40 km from Pietermaritzburg CBD. She is a single mother with an adult son. She is in her fifties and holds a master's degree in educational leadership. She has worked at several schools, including a farm school. The school is in a township, but learners are drawn from the rural area. As a school principal, Shane facilitates workshops for teachers in nearby schools to upgrade their teaching and learning. She also holds workshops with SGBs of her school as a way of building relationships with the stakeholders.

NOZI

Nozi is a single mother with two adult daughters, and heads Lwati School, which is a quintile 2 school. The school is in Swayimane, 50 km away from Pietermaritzburg. The school is a public government school classified as a no-fee-paying institute. She is in her mid-forties and has been a school principal in her community for four years. She has twenty-five years of teaching experience and leads a staff complement of ten members with an enrolment of one hundred

and twenty learners. She has an honours degree in Education. Nozi has experience teaching in the different contexts of Botswana and South Africa. She has more to offer from two countries. She is passionate about education, especially for young girls.

SIWE

Siwe heads Marylynn School. She comes from an area that is 98.9 km away from Pietermaritzburg. Estcourt lies at the edge of the Natal Midlands and is the centre for a substantial livestock industry. Siwe is a single mother with one daughter who is studying nursing. Siwe has served as a school principal for twenty-two years in her current school and has 28 years of teaching experience. She holds an honours degree in education, and she is currently pursuing a master's degree in educational leadership.

KHUZI

Khuzi heads Nehema School and is married with five children: two sons and three daughters. She holds a degree in education and has been serving as a school principal in her rural community, which is 58 km away from Pietermaritzburg. Her school is a multi-grade teaching (MGT) school and has only 35 learners with a complement of four staff members. The term multi-grade teaching (MGT) refers to the teaching of children of different grade levels at the same time in the same settings (Joubert, 2010). The school is isolated in a rural area, and learners must travel long distances to reach the school. It is the only public primary school in the area. There are very few visible communities in the area where the school is located. The school is classified under quintile 2 as a no-fee-paying institution. Due to the unique structure of a multi-grade teaching school, Khuzi takes on multiple roles simultaneously to accommodate the demands of an MGT school. However, she is passionate about teaching, and she loves children.

BONGI

Bongi is the principal of Mamu School, which is a quintile 3 school located 15 km from Pietermaritzburg. The school was founded in the early 1960s and has grown both in terms of numbers and infrastructure. The school is classified as a no-fee-paying institution. Bongi is widowed and has a daughter and a granddaughter. She holds a master's degree in educational leadership and has been in the position of leader in her community for 13 years. Besides being a school leader, Bongi works as a resource person in facilitating workshops for school heads in the circuit and serves on interview panels for teacher promotions by the Department of Basic Education in her area.

4.5 Data production instruments

Data production instruments are the tools used to gather data for research projects. Henning (2004) contends that data travels through three data sources in qualitative research. These include field notes through observations, one-on-one interviews, and documents. Before I discuss the data sources through which I gathered information about female principals' leadership experiences in rural schools, I will present the tools that I used to produce data.

4.5.1 Semi-structured individual interviews

I employed individual, semi-structured interviews as the main tool for gathering data. A semi-structured interview originates from the interpretive tradition, which aims to make meaning from the subjective experiences of individuals (Cohen et al., 2018). Through interviewing or conversations, people make meaning through discourse. This guided the methods for producing data for this study. Semi-structured interviews are qualitative in nature and uses open-ended questions to get in-depth information from participants (Cohen et al., 2018). A semi-structured intention is to attend to lived experiences of participants while addressing theoretical variables, such as gender. This method helped to describe, interpret, contextualise, and develop in-depth accounts of participants' experiences (Seidman, 2006). Seidman suggests that in-depth interviewing allows access to the voices of marginalised groups in society, such as women.

Qualitative researchers have and continue to experience unique opportunities and challenges to study not only the crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic but also the additional social distancing, that mandates restrictions on using traditional methods of face-to-face approaches of all kinds. My research was severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, especially on data production tools. The initial tools were observations, transect walks, and face-to-face interviews. But because of social distancing as a protocol to limit the spread of the virus, alternative methods were employed. This is to say that all was not lost, as a group of researchers, Lobe et al. (2020), suggest options for various platforms, such as Zoom video conferencing to collect qualitative data instead of face-to-face interviews and observations. In a position paper, Gray et al. (2020) examined specific attributes of Zoom video conferencing that contributed to high-quality, in-depth qualitative interviews when face-to face interviewing was not feasible. In the case of my study, Zoom video conferencing was a new technique of conducting virtual interviews as a qualitative approach to collect data I therefore had to test whether technology would work by employing a pilot study of one participant as a sample which I will discuss later.

I facilitated video conferences for one-on-one semi-structured interviews, during which female principals shared their life experiences, using a chronological timeline as a guiding framework. All interviews were conducted in English. Seidman (2006) asserts that understanding the lived experience of other people, such as female principals, and the meanings they make of that experience through in-depth interviewing is vital. The participants narrated stories of their early childhood, schooling, career, and their past and current leadership experiences. The interview questions aimed to identify the personal background that shaped the female leaders' identities,

thus their growing up, schooling and professional lives and examined how they made sense of these experiences.

Before the commencement of the interview, I emailed the participants and carefully explained the nature, scope and format of the interview and clarified some points that participants needed to know before the interview. Participants had to confirm the day and time of the interview before I emailed them the Zoom link for the video conferencing interview. The interviews started with a “scene setting” phase in which I introduced myself to the participants and clarified the topic, objectives, and role of the research (Henning, 2004). During the interviews, I posed the questions and let the participants narrate their stories without interruption. I probed where necessary to guide the participants through the research topic as the women leaders narrated their experiences by highlighting whatever they considered relevant to how they lead schools. During the interview process, I probed for clarity. At the end of each interview, I thanked the participants for sharing their stories of leadership. The interviews lasted for about one hour and thirty minutes. All interviews were video recorded with the permission of the participants and were later transcribed. The transcriptions were later emailed to all the participants for verification.

The reasons for using semi-structured interviews were: first, I was interested in female principals’ stories about their leadership experiences. Secondly, interviews as forms of conversation between two people in the context of my study helped me as a researcher to examine what the women leaders say, their emotions, how they say it, for what reasons, and the kind of interactions in which they were involved. Thirdly, interviews confirmed other methods, such as focus group interviews to be complementary and delved into the motivations of how women lead (Cohen et al., 2018). Fourthly, in-depth interviews not only provided rich information, but also offered the opportunity to ask follow-up questions, probe additional information, justify previous answers, and make links between several topics that emerged during the interview discussions (Queiros et al., 2017). Individual interviews also offered a comfortable atmosphere in which the women leaders might have felt more comfortable establishing a candid conversation with the researcher. This is evident in the manner in which the participants responded, in some instances saying, “You know”. I must also say that participants enjoyed the narrative interviews because they had the feeling that the research was a worthwhile project for them as women to contribute to the literature on women in leadership positions. One participant shared her views: *“I am happy that people will read my story and know my school”* (Khuzi) another participant shared by saying, *“Now we know that patriarchy*

affects us all women” (Bongi). However, the limitations include being time intensive. The second tool I employed was the focus group interview which I discuss below.

4.5.2 Focus group interview

The second method of data production that I employed in this study was a focus group interview with female principals. A focus group as a tool for data production, though used extensively in quantitative research, is also applied in qualitative research to gain insight into the experiences and perspectives of individuals, in this case women leading schools. The researcher facilitates a guided discussion with a small group of people who have personal or professional experience on the topic under study, such as leadership in schools (Cohen et al., 2018).

The nature of the number of participants in a focus group has been contested. For some scholars, the number of participants to be invited is usually between six and eight (Kimeger & Casey, 2000). Some studies reported having between four and ten participants (Cohen et al. 2018). These contestations leave the researcher in a dilemma about how many participants should be included in a study. Nyumba et al. (2018) point out that one of the drawbacks of a focus group discussion is the lack of a guarantee that all those recruited will attend the discussion. The focus group may be used as the sole data production tool or might be used in combination with other qualitative methods. In this study, I used a focus group of six female school principals to assist in clarifying and amplifying meaning as well as underscoring nuances and multiple understandings of women’s experiences of leading in rural schools. A focus group was used in combination with individual semi-structured interviews that I have discussed above and photographs to understand how females lead schools in rural communities. Using open-ended questions as a guide to lead the discussions in the focus group interview helped to unpack the social experience by answering such questions as: What is going on here? Why and how do things happen the way they seem to?

A focus group in this research offered participants the opportunity to share experiences, ideas, expressions, and opinions as female leaders. Lim and Tan (2001), in a position paper, explored how online discussions can facilitate the production of qualitative data from focus group discussions. It is an interactive method where participants make contributions to the topic under discussion. In the case of my study, participants reacted to the summary of ideas that emerged from the individual interviews. Gundumogula and Gundumogula (2020) suggest the importance of focus groups in qualitative research; among these the, focus group method examines in-depth how the group members think and feel about the topic under discussion. In

addition, Cohen et al. (2018) pointed out that focus group interviews are economical on time by producing large amounts of data in a short period of time. During the focus group discussions, photographs were used to elicit conversation with the women leaders. This was a participatory tool that allowed participation of all the women in the study, as they took time to take photographs, and elaborate on the pictures, values, and meanings. This also became a conversation tool where women could see the similarities and differences in their experiences. This provided an opportunity for women's understanding of everyday challenges experienced and how some navigate these experiences. This is explained more clearly in the following section. The data was video recorded with the permission of the participants and later transcribed.

The focus group interview was conducted via zoom conference. Prior to the focus group interview, I discussed with the women leaders participating in the research through WhatsApp to confirm the day and time when all would be available. Upon all the participants agreeing on the specific day and time, I sent them the Zoom link inviting them to the focus group interview.

To carry out the focus group interviews, I applied Cohen et al.'s (2018) suggestion of chairing the focus group meeting. I chaired the meeting and struck a balance by keeping the meeting open-ended but to the point. The meeting began with welcome remarks to the participants. Thereafter, a discussion of the ground rules, which included ensuring confidentiality by asking participants to introduce themselves using pseudonyms and letting them know that the interview would be video recorded and that the recorded information would be destroyed once the study was concluded. I used the focus group to discuss the photographs that women participating in the study had taken earlier on.

One major limitation levelled against the focus group interview as a tool is that group dynamics lead to non-participation by some members and domination by others due to power differentials (Cohen et al., 2018). However, in the case of my study, firstly all participants were women leaders in schools and had participated in the individual interviews enthusiastically and voluntarily. Secondly, each individual woman leader had submitted their own photographs, and so each participant had to talk about their own photographs, which promoted the uniqueness of each participant. I also chaired the meeting, therefore ensuring that all participants had a chance to speak at a given time in an orderly manner. Another challenge that I experienced in my study was getting all the participating women leaders for the focus group interview at the same time. This took quite some time because I had to ensure that the

interviews did not interfere with the women's work. Finally, we managed to get a schedule that suited all the participants and got five of the six to participate in the focus group. The other tool that I used for my study is photovoice which I discuss next.

4.5.3 Photovoice method

A third tool of data production was photovoice. This is a creative approach to participatory action research that was first developed by visual project feminist Caroline Wang (1999). Photovoice is a method designed to empower members of marginalised groups, such as women in educational leadership, to work together to identify key issues that concern them as professionals in a male-dominated society. This happens when participants engage in or collaborate in the construction of knowledge. The photovoice method creates the opportunity for women to share their experiences of leadership and have their voices heard. Wang and Burris (1997) explored the concept of photovoice and noted that video recording people's narratives about their photographs can capture the extent, distinctions, and expressions of people's stories. Therefore, I employed photographs and focus group methods to work together and capture women's nuances in leading schools. Next, I show how I applied the tool of photographs.

4.5.4 Application and use of photographs as a data production tool

At the end of each individual interview conducted, I asked the participating female principals to take photographs of significance in relation to their leadership that they might have liked to share using their cell phones. Pictures taken were those that women leaders could relate to and tell stories of how they lead or stories that related to their leadership. This is in line with feminist thinking, which seeks to empower vulnerable groups to become aware of power dynamics in society (Wang & Burris, 1997). The following four steps were applied:

Step 1: I explained the process of taking photographs to the participants. Participants were asked to use their cell phones to take photographs of their choice that relate to their leadership. Issues of ethics concerning taking photographs of humans were explained to the participants.

Step 2: Participants took photographs for a period of one week, and then the photographs were sent to me, as the researcher, via WhatsApp.

Step 3: A participatory workshop/photo analysis

A workshop with participants to talk about the photographs took place during the focus group interview. Photographs were displayed on the screen, and each individual woman leader responsible for the displayed photograph explained why she wanted to share the picture, what story the picture revealed, and how the story related to their leadership. The participants elaborated on the pictures, values, and meanings. During this phase, the participants explained the reasons behind their selection of specific photographs, a step referred to as the contextualisation stage in participatory research by Wang and Burris (1997).

Step 4: Analysis of the photographs

In this stage, participants were asked to identify and sort out all the photographs discussed and sort the photographs into groups; for example, participants decided to group photographs that showed challenges faced in schools, developments/successes, and daily leadership activities that take place at the school. This is what Bananuka and John (2014) and Harley (2012) referred to as codifying. By the end of the workshop, all photographs were analysed collaboratively with all the participating female principals. This stage provided participatory and collaborative conversations. The findings were merged into each participant's individual narrative at the end of the discussions.

All discussions were video-recorded and later transcribed with the permission of the participants. Once the transcription of the data was completed, a copy of the transcripts was sent to the participants via email for verification. The participants accepted the transcripts as true reflections of the interviews and did not make any changes.

The use of photographs as a data production method allowed me to collaborate with the participants during data collection and analysis. As the women leaders discussed their photographs of challenges experienced in leading rural schools, one could sense the emotions, through the stressing of particular words. Photovoice strengthens claims of conscientisation, which is necessary for engaging in social change (Freire, 1970). It also provided an opportunity for the co-construction of knowledge, a greater voice in both individual and collective experiences, and participation from women leaders (Wang & Burris, 1997). However, there was limited use of photographs in the thesis because the study was conducted during the time of Covid 19 as indicated in 4.5.1 above. Therefore, the participants were limited to take photographs because of both ethical and Covid restrictions. I discuss a pilot study that I use to test the tools next.

4.6 The pilot study

Piloting interviews with a selected population of interest is said to be beneficial to a qualitative intersectional study to ensure potential participants understand the formulated interview questions. Abrams et al. (2020) assert that the formulated question tools elicit information relevant to the overarching research question of the study.

Prior to data gathering for this study, I conducted a pilot study in August 2020. My respondent was a black woman and a mother who had worked as a high school principal in Kenya for six years before relocating to Botswana, then South Africa, as an academic. In her position as an academic in higher education, she has worked with teachers in schools during the teaching practice program, and therefore understands the landscape of schooling in the South African context. Even though she is not currently working as a school principal, I considered her suitable for the study since she had enough leadership experience.

The pilot study proved to be helpful in several ways. Firstly, it gave me confidence as a researcher that the interview questions and my questioning technique were suitable for gathering information from a respondent. However, I realised that it would have been more helpful to have my respondent complete a brief demographic survey before the interview to obtain some background information about the respondent beforehand. Therefore, I designed and used demographic surveys in the main study. Secondly, the pilot study enabled me to test the technological issues, for example, the audio sound and internet connectivity when using Zoom video conference for interviewing. Finally, regarding the analytic technique, the pilot study gave me a chance to practice how to craft the questions and ensure that the objectives of the study were captured. In general, the pilot study assured me that the study approach was realistic and doable. This provided a green light for determining the appropriate participants to work with through the journey of the research project.

4.7 Data analysis

In this section, I show how the raw data gathered in this study was analysed. Before data analysis, the data was organised around the research question. All the relevant data from various data sources (semi-structured interviews, photographs, and focus group discussions) were collated to provide a collective answer to the research question.

Each participant chose a pseudonym, which was used to mark the participant throughout the study. Each participant had their own data set printed out into hard copies (Cohen et al., 2011).

4.7.1 Analysing narrative data

Analysis of narratives is a qualitative data analysis that focuses on explaining or interpreting the personal story. The assumption is that stories on their own do not reveal or provide insight into the variety of lived experiences among participants except through descriptions (Polkinghorn, 2016). Interpretive analysis of storied texts is to deepen the understanding of the meaning conveyed in the story. The interpretation uncovers and clarifies the meaning of the text.

The main content analysed in the participant's stories were based on the research questions and the intersectional approach upon which the study was anchored. The stories analysed were gathered from six women leaders in rural government schools through semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and photographs. I analysed the narratives both thematically and theoretically to obtain common themes and concepts located within the stories (Polkinghorne, 1995). My study had six participants, and each participant told her story of leadership experience. The common concepts and themes were inductively derived from women's stories.

In analysing the content of the stories, I first read through each individual narrative several times to get a sense of the overall data content. During the process of reading, I moved back and forth between the data and the theory of intersectionality until I found the best fit. In the data, the common theme of power emerged as one that intersects with other categories of difference (e.g., gender, class, ethnicity, and age) to disadvantage or privilege women in leadership positions (Collins, 2000). I moved through my data and intersectionality theory to understand how gender, class, ethnicity, age, and professional positionality may disadvantage or privilege each individual woman leader in the study.

In developing the story settings, I was mindful not only of the general cultural environment in which the women leaders are located but also took note of the important people that shaped or influenced their actions and attitudes, for example, positive and negative relationships (Polkinghorne, 1995). Thus, relationships during upbringing, schooling, and college life—the attitudes and values that were passed on to the participants—may have shaped their leadership skills.

To understand how women leaders experience leadership, I explored their narratives about their early childhood, schooling and current leadership experiences within different locations that were affected by gender, class, and ethnicity. Reinharz and Chase (2002, p. 230) assert that

social scientists believe that “a person’s social location shapes his or her identity, experiences and perspectives”.

The next step involved the sorting of information from the themes that I identified into time, place and type of interaction that was involved. I coded the data into three-dimensional inquiry spaces as suggested by Clandinin and Connelly (2000), which are continuity (time), situation (place) and interaction (personal and social). I sorted out the data into time frames. Thus, early childhood experiences, schooling experiences and leadership experiences to have shaped how women lead. I then put the data into place that constituted the family setting (psycho-social) and the school context (educational). I then put the data into types of interactions, following the three-dimensional space in the inquiry. The experiences of relationships and interactions as experienced by the women leaders were both personal and professional domains. The psychosocial and educational contexts played a major role because they helped to shape who the participants are as leaders of schools in rural communities.

After working on the biographies for each participant, the next step of analysis was to understand how the participants function as leaders. This led to another step of analysis to identify the activities that women participants engaged in as leaders of schools. This step revealed the role of women leaders and the activities that they carry out on a day-to-day basis.

This also helped me to capture the challenges, successes, and conflicts, among other factors, that the participants experienced in performing their roles as leaders.

Next, I discuss the trustworthiness of the findings of the study.

4.8 Trustworthiness

Whereas quantitative researchers attribute the credibility of research to validity and reliability, qualitative researchers emphasise trustworthiness. It is how truthfully the research findings can be judged by the reader. Guba (1981) highlighted four constructs that may be used to ensure the trustworthiness of qualitative research findings. These are credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability. Next, I illustrate how the constructs were employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the findings in this study.

4.8.1 Credibility

Guba (1981) explains credibility as how true the data reported in a research project reflects the participants’ stories. This means that the research must be factually correct and present a true

picture of the phenomenon being investigated. Applying a narrative approach for this study was appropriate as it validated personal lived experiences of female leaders in schools and theoretically the study was informed by the understanding of the marginality of women in educational leadership based on historical, social, and cultural subordination in society. Concrete experience is seen as a criterion for credibility by feminists (Collins, 1990).

A narrative design adds credibility to my study because it is about experience, offers flexibility and provides the basis for inductively and thematically generating new theoretical explanations. Through women leaders' stories, concrete experiences of how women navigate challenges in leading schools emerged.

These will be reported in Chapter Five. Triangulation of methods is another criterion that is said to be strong, especially the combination of semi-structured individual interviews, focus group interviews and photographs (Lather, 1988) as leading to trustworthiness in qualitative and feminist research. As Fusch et al. (2018) noted, the use of multiple sources of data promotes social change, mitigates bias, and enhances reaching data saturation. Triangulation as an approach aligns well with intersectionality theory and was used to enhance my understanding of the phenomena while simultaneously enhancing the quality, and trustworthiness of the data gathered (Abrams et al., 2020). Triangulation involves employing multiple external data collection methods concerning the same events in a phenomenon. In my study, individual interviews, focus group interviews and photographs were used to understand how women leaders experience leading in rural schools.

I verified the final information provided by the women participating in the research because they are the authentic owners and experts of the data based on lived experience. After compiling data from the female principals, a copy of the transcripts was sent to individual participants for verification purposes. Evidence of consciousness-raising in the research process leading to transformation in the lives of the women leads to the trustworthiness of the results. This arose during the process of data collection and data analysis, especially the participatory method using photographs. Similarly, Cope (2014) suggests maintaining an audit trail by documenting decisions and assumptions as a researcher. I did keep a journal where I documented every detail as the data collection went on as a strategy to enhance credibility in qualitative research.

4.8.2 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the researcher's ability to show that the data represents the participants' responses (Cope, 2014). Data presentation, analysis, and interpretations of the findings in my study were established and demonstrated directly from the participants' narratives. I demonstrated this by providing rich quotes from individual participant's narrative that depict each emerging theme as shown in Chapter Five.

4.8.3 Peer checking

Once data collection commenced, the transcription of audio-recorded interviews began. I listened to the audio-recorded interviews several times to ascertain the proper interpretation of the data and assign proper codes. After each transcription, interview transcripts were sent to my supervisors and fellow students in the school of education for authentication.

4.9 Ethical considerations

Qualitative research requires every researcher to consider ethical issues seriously. Ethics in research defines what is or is not legitimate to do, or what is right and wrong in the research process (Cohen et al., 2018). Cohen et al. (2011) noted a major ethical dilemma that researchers find themselves in, namely the need to strike a balance between their role as researchers in search of scientific truth and their participants' rights and values which can be threatened by the research. An ethical researcher, therefore, ought to guide, protect and oversee the interests of the research participants without causing any harm (Cohen et al., 2018). As a researcher promoting ethical practice, I was guided by the ethical guidelines upheld by the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the code of conduct of research. Before beginning the recruitment of participants for this study, a research proposal, and an application to conduct research were submitted to the University of KwaZulu-Natal's research ethics committee. The same application was also submitted to the Department of Basic Education for permission to do research in government schools in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. Both the university and the Department of Education granted clearance to proceed with the research (see Appendices 5 and 6). During the research process, the following were adhered to in terms of ethical issues:

Autonomy: Participating women voluntarily signed consent letters to take part in the study (see Appendix 3). The women had the freedom to withdraw at any time during the research process. The voluntary withdrawal of participants was reinforced prior to commencing the interviews through the informed consent forms.

Non-maleficence: I ensured that no harm, either physical or emotional, was inflicted on the women in the study.

Beneficence: The study was about women's experiences; therefore, women were happy and eager to share their lived experiences and challenge some of the taken-for-granted knowledge in educational discourse. Prior to the interviews, I sent an email to the participants explaining what the research was all about and what was expected of them. Each participant was made aware of the interview and chose the right time and day for the interview to take place.

Confidentiality: To ensure and respect the confidentiality of the women participating in this study, I granted the women leaders the opportunity to choose a pseudonym. Pseudonyms were used in presenting the data and reporting the findings in this thesis to protect the identities of the women and their schools. Consistent with the University of KwaZulu-Natal's research ethics committee's expectations, all materials used in this study will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and viewed only by myself and my supervisor. Ethical issues were followed throughout the reporting of the findings, a process that requires honest self-examination. In the next section, I discuss my positionality in this research project.

4.10 Researcher Reflexivity

A critical paradigm, qualitative approach, and intersectional research requires that one be diligently reflexive throughout the research process. Reflexivity is the tendency to critically self-examine the nature of the research process (Fonow & Cook, 2005). Reflexivity plays a pivotal role in ensuring the accuracy of the research findings. Reflexivity asks the researcher to create and maintain a subjective awareness of their multiple privileges, intentions, identities, and power. It further suggests that overlooking relational authority in position framing is a strong source of error (Bourdieu, 2004).

Wasserfall (1993) defines reflexivity as a process by which an ethnographer, while engaging in a field study, becomes more aware of his/ her social background influences that may shape his /her beliefs and produce a better representation more in tune with the reality his/ she encounters. According to this position, reflexivity makes the research process more mutual, as a strategy that deconstructs the author's power. Wasserfall (1993) argues that it is only through reflexivity that one can conduct an ethical study. Similarly, Fonow and Cook (2005) define reflexivity as the tendency to critically self-examine the nature of the research process. Both studies reveal that reflexivity plays a pivotal role in ensuring the accuracy of the research findings. Reflexivity asks the researcher to create and maintain a subjective awareness of their

multiple privileges, intentions, identities, and power in undertaking a research process. Reflexivity questions the taken-for-granted ideologies, assumptions, and norms that underpin practices, policies, and actions. The concept of reflexivity is important to me as a researcher.

Therefore, with reflexivity as a hallmark of feminist research (Ackerly, 2008), it would be deeply ironic to not give a brief reflection on my own positionality, identity and perspective that inform my study as an intersectional researcher. This is because reflexivity guides relationships in research based on the research ethic, which is associated with a critical feminist theory. Milner (2007) described research positionality as the researcher's awareness of his/her racial and cultural consciousness, as this influences the research processes, especially where issues of ethnicity and cultural diversity are concerned. This means that my positionality as a researcher must be taken into consideration.

Based on ethnic diversity research processes, I am a black woman and a mother, therefore an insider in the research project, which provides a unique opportunity for candid conversations with the women leaders about the role of gender in educational leadership. However, I am not of the same ethnic group as the research participants, which contributes to my position as an outsider. I am also an educator who has experienced teaching in three different contexts: Kenya, Botswana, and South Africa. I, therefore, acknowledge my personal and cultural biases, knowing that I cannot separate from them; for example, being a researcher raises issues of bias and power between the researcher and the participants. But based on my insider status as a black woman, a mother, and an educator by profession, provided candid conversations with the women leaders to who narrated their stories without fear of power relations. This is to say that, as a researcher, I ought to be more transparent about my role in the research process (Fonow & Cook, 2005).

Firstly, I minimised the problem of bias by employing a reflexive journal where I captured every detail of all my daily reflections. Secondly, I also used memos to document critical interpersonal dynamics during the data production stage. Thirdly, the use of a workshop where participants reflected on photographs and thereafter, discussed and analysed the photographs about their leadership as a participatory methodology is what De Vault (1990) refers to as “a process of seeking meaning together”—both researcher and researched. This means both I, as a researcher, and the participants, collaboratively analysed data together.

Similarly, Fonow and Cook (2005) suggest that participatory research may help to reduce the widely divergent power differentials between the researcher and the researched, thus allowing

multiple subjectivities to define the problem and its solutions. This process contributes to consciousness-raising (Collins, 2000) for both the women participants and me, as the researcher, which is transformative and in favour of intersectionality and narrative methodology. Thirdly, for member checking as mentioned earlier, I did share the transcribed data with the participants for verification and to ensure that their accounts were validated.

As a qualitative researcher, I started the process of reflection, especially on the tools for data collection, even prior to connecting with the participants of the study, which continued through the analysis and writing of the final report of the study. Additionally, experiencing this research process has continued to motivate my reflections of being a woman, a mother and a professional in educational leadership.

4.11 Chapter summary

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss the methodology I employed to study female principals' biography, early learning, and leadership experiences in public rural schools and how they negotiate these experiences. The critical paradigm guided the choice of approach, and therefore, I was mindful of the methods I chose to value the participants' subjectivity.

I employed a narrative design as a methodology to produce contextual real-world accounts or knowledge about women leaders' multiple identities, behaviours, social structures, and shared beliefs and leadership experiences. A critical paradigm and narrative inquiry are both about lived experiences and values the participation and voices of marginalised women in research. This methodology allowed me to work collaboratively with the women in this study, given my insider status. Reflexivity played a major role in valuing the subjectivity of the women leaders participating in this research project. Reflexivity helped me to maintain a subjective awareness of my privilege, intentions, identity, and power as a researcher.

The use of qualitative data gathering methods, namely semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and photographs as a participatory approach, enabled insights into women's lives that highlighted nuances in how they lead in rural schools; for example, the use of a focus group to discuss photographs enabled glimpses of rural schools in terms of infrastructure. Therefore, the use of a focus group to discuss photographs taken by the participants contributes to the existing methodological literature on women's leadership experiences. The use of photographs adds the idea of working with participants collaboratively to construct knowledge. The next chapter presents women's narratives and analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter focused on the methodology that guided the procedures and methods used to gather data for answering the critical puzzle of this thesis. This chapter presents six respondents' biographical narratives. According to Clandinin and Roseik (2007), narrative inquiry typically starts by concentrating on the individual and her or his "personal understanding." In understanding the individual's personal story, it is crucial to place the individual in the story's chronology while considering all contextual factors that impact their work (Clandinin & Roseik, 2007). The participants recount their childhood memories of growing up, being female, and experiencing leadership. Participants' direct responses were obtained from qualitative semi-structured interviews (SI), a focus group (FG), and photographs (P). Pseudonyms chosen by participants and their schools were used for confidentiality purposes. The overarching critical question of the study was about female principals' leadership experiences in rural schools in KwaZulu-Natal. The following narratives promote the unique voices of the women participating in the study. The researcher was cognisant and sensitive of any reckless re-telling of the stories; thus, they are framed within empirical studies and theories, as discussed in the literature review in Chapter Two. This chapter is organised as follows: presentation of individual narratives followed by interpretation of unique stories.

5.2 Participants' narratives

This section presents women's narratives as personal experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of social life through personal stories of upbringing, schooling, career progression, and leadership.

5.2.1 Nombuza leading Lamu Primary School

I am married, a mother of five, and the principal of Lamu Primary School. I was born and raised in the rural area of KwaZulu-Natal. Life was so difficult with my mother because we were four siblings; she struggled to make ends meet and take us to school to get that education. I have 28 years of teaching experience and five years as a principal. I grew up with my siblings in a rural area, from my early childhood, my family and the community

treated males and females differently. While growing up as kids, we were engaged in home activities where boys looked after cattle while we, the girls, did the house chores (SI).

Growing up, I was told that education for a female is not that important. That is what my parents, especially my father, told me. From my father's perspective, the male is more important than the female. I started schooling very late, at 12, instead of the recommended age of seven (FG/S). There were those cultural beliefs, many of them against taking girls to school. The idea was that only boys could be educated, were superior, and would be family leaders tomorrow, not girls. The place of a girl is at home (SI). After my father passed on, my mother took it upon herself to ensure that we, the girls, went to school and got an education against society's beliefs. We are a part of a community where men are always regarded as superior. We must listen to those laws and rules set by the community leaders. As a young girl, I saw how I struggled to get help. The societal beliefs that put me down as a young girl and a woman influenced me to be a teacher to bring change in my community (FG). From my father's perspective, a male is more important than a female. But having reached where I am, I see that I am a female principal; I see myself as an agent of change because now, being a female principal in my school, many learners are girls from rural areas. Maybe they are experiencing what I experienced. They are discouraged, told that they are nothing and that their education is nothing. So, it lies with me to motivate them that, look, you can be a great leader (FG).

As a female, your subordinates do not accept you in leadership positions. The attitude of staff members because they believe that, as females, we are not supposed to be in leadership. Our characteristics are judged in many ways: emotional, sensitive, etc., and should not be in leadership. Both male and female staff members do not accept you as a female leader (SI). The parents believe in a male than a female as a leader. Because they think a female leader cannot protect their children, sometimes they will convey messages to the learners and say hey! Tell your principal that I am not coming to school (SI).

Leadership is so challenging. If you are a principal and a woman, it is where you realise it is better to serve under a specific person not to be a leader (SI). Everybody did not respect the first female principal I worked under. I used that as an opportunity to support her. They rejected everything she said, and so I came in as a mediator, and through that, I

was recognised as a leader (SI). When I got promoted to HoD, I overtook other people already employed before I came to that school. So, I first experienced resistance to being supervised by me because they were there before I went to the school. I was seen as an outsider. But this did not stop me from doing my work. I acted as if I did not notice anything; instead, I came closer to them. I had that approach of not confronting them; instead, I took it as if a person needed assistance to accomplish his/her work (SI).

Relationships in the school exist, for example, between me as the leader and the SMTs. But it is not good in such a manner that all my SMT members, five out of six of them, came to the school before me, almost the same as the situation with the educators. Looking at me as their supervisor, yet they came first to the school, does not sound nice to them. Sometimes, when I issue instructions, I see that resistance; I know that delay in techniques is not just jumping to my education. Sometimes, it calls me to raise my voice. It calls me to discipline a person in front of others so that a person can stand up and do their work. It is both; they are good and not good (SI). Making a person account is a hell of a job because that person can challenge you and cry, "ma'am, you don't see that I am sick; you think I am lying. Can I just come late for sweet nothing? You must know that I have challenges at home." We have a committee (teachers, Senior management team members) that looks after learners' welfare, but as a principal, all learners' needs are reported to me. All learners who are vulnerable and struggling in their families are reported to me. As a result, parents are exempted from meeting their situation when a specific fee is expected of them. We also make food parcels for those learners to have supper at home because their families are struggling (SI).

I must ensure that the planning is done effectively because the curriculum is the core business of our existence as a school. I need to encourage the teachers to do it every day. I request Grade R-7 work, a portion of certain exercise books to mark, and randomly check them at the office. That is a strategy to make them up and do all the time to perform their duties (SI) effectively.

We have worked hard as a team (teachers, SMTs, SGBs, and I) to put pavement in the school (she worked collaboratively to tile the school premises to prevent learners from falling and hurting themselves). Even the vegetable garden seen there is all a collective

effort. The vegetables assist with our feeding scheme. I also see that the pit latrines are emptied because the department does not do it for us. Every development you see in the picture is the effort of the teachers together with the SMTs, SGBs, and me, the principal. The SGB organises for fundraising to do all these developments.

Figure 3:

Nombuza's School Pavement and Garden



Figure 3 shows the paving of part of the school sidewalk between classes. This work was initiated through the collaborative efforts of the SGBs, SMTs, teachers, parents, and the school principal. The grounds now provide a conducive space for assembly, and some vegetable gardens are used in the feeding scheme.

Analysis

5.2.1.1 Early experiences are assets for leadership at a later stage

This section discusses Nombuza's early childhood experiences and how these became assets for her leadership in the later stages of her career development. Nombuza speaks to the knowledge and skills she gained by observing and participating in the activities during her growing up years. The narrative points to the premise that the experience for later professional life develops in early childhood through upbringing and schooling in a family set-up as the

foundation. The socialisation process informed her who she could or could not be, often about the opposite gender.

Nombuza's early life experiences depict a life replete with some form of struggle. For example, she grew up in a poor family in a rural area under apartheid. A life of work proved influential in how she thought about her experiences and her future as a principal. She first depicts what is essential to her in the opening remarks, where she prioritises motherhood and marriage before her profession (*I am married, a mother of five, and the principal of Lamu Primary School*). For her, her identities of being married, a mother, and a principal intersect to influence her beliefs about her future role as a teacher and principal.

What is also important is how she experiences gender role socialisation. According to Harro (2000), it occurs at various levels (individual, institutional, and societal) where individuals are socialised on how to become the correct kind of male or female. For her, gender role socialisation began at the institutional level of the family and community, which shaped and moulded her through gender roles, cultural norms, expectations, and dreams. Nombuza identifies family background and schooling as contexts of interaction with the parents and siblings, relatives, teachers, and people she loves and trusts. Harro (2000) affirms the cyclical nature of socialisation, stating that an individual is born into specific social identities that perpetuate unique power structures. The family is a primary agent for transmitting cultural norms and attitudes that contribute to gender-based discrimination and bias.

Nombuza acknowledges her mother as one who influenced her values, character, and career paths, thus motivating and encouraging her to further her studies, which ultimately helped her rise to the ranks and attain the principalship position. One can also see the differences in how her parents thought about her and her future. Through cultural tradition, the father was positioned as the head of the family. In his role and by cultural tradition, he viewed *education as unnecessary for females*. Thus, she was seen as inferior and less valuable, there was little that she could do, and it accounts for her only starting school at 12. However, what she learned from her father was particularly influential, as she knew that men are always *regarded as superior people and that, as females, we must listen to those laws and rules*. These unspoken rules and regulations determined the reality and life of all females but also instilled in her a resilient spirit that ensured that she was persistent in taking up space within a male-dominated leadership arena.

Nombuza acknowledges that gender role socialisation starts at the family level and disadvantages the girl child and the adult woman, which explains her experiences. Children's social interactions and daily activities, such as doing house chores for girls and herding cattle for boys, are seen as contexts for learning culture and gender. For instance, boys going out to herd cattle is seen as a space for work, while girls remaining in the house to do house chores is seen as occupying an area of unpaid work. This socialisation process tends to enhance the privilege and power of men and boys relative to women and girls. Through these interactions, children are socialised into the fundamental dynamics of the division of labour for girls and boys. Moreover, girls unconsciously learn how much space they can occupy. For boys, the wide-open spaces are theirs to rule and conquer, whereas the restricted and confined space of the house is what females must get used to. Unconsciously, Nombuza was being taught that her world was restricted and limited.

Nombuza learned about gender hierarchy. Through early teachings, she learned motherhood and how to multi-task—thus, cleaning, cooking, minding the children, and so on, which probably is not an education for a leader but would serve as an asset when she became a school principal. She learned that she was treated differently as a woman by the tasks and roles assigned to girls and boys. It could indicate that, with her father's demise, the world opened for her. Her mother, one could argue, was a transformative individual who made the decision contrary to community rules, norms, and ideas that she should be educated. Her observations of her mother's struggle, courage, and resilience enabled her to become *an agent of change*. She also sees that her life was one of struggle.

This kind of treatment she was subjected to from her father and the community was oppressive, according to Nombuza. This taught her to be persistent in her role as a leader and to continue to challenge the normative parts of men and women. Even in her early career as a teacher, head of department, and principal, one can still see 'struggle' as an overriding feature of her experiences. She thus continues to encourage the girl children in her school not to allow oppressive treatment to put them down as girls but to work hard towards becoming who they are.

Finally, her narrative shows the family as the foundation upon which early socialisation influenced her attributes and leadership career. The data also reveals her struggles while growing up and her challenges in her journey into leadership. Nombuza shows how she negotiated her leadership experiences by applying the teachings from her early childhood years.

5.2.1.2 Being non-reactive improves leadership experience

This section presents some ways Nombuza negotiates challenges in leading by being non-reactive. Non-reactivity means being mindful of one's physical and emotional health (Schussler et al. 2016). Mindfulness helps a leader increase emotional self-regulation, facilitating opportunities for greater compassion by improving relationships. This is based on her early experiences of resilience despite her struggles. Women leaders face obstacles in their day-to-day role of leadership. To respond to some of these obstacles, Nombuza chooses to be non-reactive to negative attitudes displayed against her, relate to other people, and further learn about leadership. She uses this strategy; for example, she points out a situation where she worked under a female leader whom other staff members rejected. She decided not to choose sides, instead working as a mediator overtly. This mediator role allowed her to be recognised as a leader by the teachers and the principal, whom she covertly supported. The female leader, in return, allowed her to experience leadership, which led to her being promoted to the position of HoD. Being in that space helped Nombuza shape her leadership experience as a female. She learned the value of mediation and carefully decided who and how to support.

In another instance, when Nombuza got promoted to HoD, she experienced resistance from male and female teachers who questioned her supervision. In this, one sees vertical oppression, where the male teachers used their gender to disempower her. She also experienced horizontal pressure from the female teachers (Collins, 2000). Here, despite sharing a common identity as female, the female teachers instead colluded with their oppressors and used common stereotypes of leadership to prevent Nombuza from taking on her positional role as head of the department. Here, Nombuza faces systemic pressure from both male and female teachers in the workplace. However, to gain a position of power, she chose to be non-reactive. Nombuza had to think through her experiences carefully before acting. For her, these experiences of growing up in a rural area taught her to work with diverse groups of people in a community school of diverse cultures. Thus, she endured obstacles she encountered, which helped her emotionally self-regulate by being non-reactive, mindful, respectful, and understanding the culture of her community, which preserves relationships.

Being non-reactive was a source of power for her because, in doing so, she masked her true feelings and pretended not to notice any discontent or acts of sabotage. She continued to use this valuable strategy in her leadership role. Being non-reactive allowed her to ignore teacher

resistance to her supervisory role and pushed her further up the promotional ladder from a HoD to a principalship position.

However, this strategy can be seen as avoiding blame and sustaining a view of self and social acceptance. Bandura (1999) refers to this as a moral disengagement or self-regulatory mechanism. This distances her from culpability to sustain equilibrium, which may have adverse effects by undermining her self-esteem and self-efficacy as a leader. Nombuza views these instances of insubordination as steppingstones upon which she developed resilience. However, some cases caused her to be more visible and confrontational, where she had to raise her voice to stamp her authority; for example, on becoming the school principal, the school management team members refused to take instructions from her as a female leader. In such a situation, Nombuza had to raise her voice as a way for her to negotiate and enforce authority as a female leader. This leadership strategy might not last because subordinates will always wait to be followed to do their work.

5.2.1.3 Collaborative work to achieve common leadership goals

The collaborative work of Nombuza and other school stakeholders is towards the common goal of educating learners in a rural school. According to Nombuza, *teaching and learning* are the main reasons why schools exist. As the school leader, she manages the school in many ways; for example, she ensures effective teaching and learning in rural schools by encouraging a conducive environment and monitoring teachers' and learners' behaviour. To enforce this, she randomly picks learners' books to check work coverage to keep the teachers working towards improving teaching and learning in the school. The surveillance role here is essential and evident in her monitoring curriculum coverage. Like Shane's narrative, Nombuza's story resembles the ideas of Foucault's (1977) concept of the panopticon, a prison design where cells were located around a central inspection point and surveillants could see what was happening without them being seen. The panopticon metaphor has been used to illustrate how surveillance operates in society, particularly how power can be operationalised in a school set-up. According to Foucault (1977, p. 201), the panopticon induced 'in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power.' Thus, 'the gaze' is action as one never knows if someone is watching from the watchtower, but the sense of being watched is internalised. The panopticon encourages surveillance and self-discipline, which are vital to effective leadership. Nombuza practices self-policing her performance as a school leader by making herself visible to teachers and learners by randomly checking work coverage

in learners' books. This helps Nombuza regulate her behaviour and become aware of her environment, thus teachers, learners, and their activities.

There are two ways to see this. Firstly, from the teachers' point of view, this may seem disempowering to their professional status as teachers. Herein, they could feel as though they must constantly perform because they are under the watchful eye of the principal. They must, therefore, always be prepared to explain themselves and their work. However, in this process, they also become unconsciously self-regulating, learning that they must ensure they cover the curriculum adequately. Secondly, Nombuza's decision to constantly track the progress of the curriculum can be seen as a social justice endeavour where, ultimately, the people who benefit from this act are the learners who are accessing the curriculum and, in the process, learning and acquiring skills for their future. However, her role as a collaborative leader extends to the teachers as the ultimate means to ensure learners have a better lot. She ensures that teachers are kept abreast of planning, teaching, and learning to develop teachers professionally and support their teaching. All this ultimately provides a schooling context where teaching and learning are valued for positive learner achievement in education for a better future.

Another of her goals is *children's welfare*. Working with a team of teachers and SMTs, she ensures that vulnerable learners are identified and exempted from paying a certain fee. Secondly, through her leadership, some food parcels are provided to vulnerable learners to take home so they can have food to eat with their grandmothers/caretakers. Nombuza's role as a principal is most valued among learners, who recognise and appreciate her efforts beyond official learning and teaching. Also, in her pastoral role as the principal, she shows compassion and care to the needy learners in the school. This kind of leadership is inclusive, promotes trust with the learners and teachers, and supports social justice.

Other goals, according to Nombuza, include the *general developments in the school*, including working collaboratively with the teachers, senior management team members, and the SGB members; the female leader paved some sections of the school as a sidewalk for learners to minimise accidents and put up a vegetable garden.

Working collaboratively with the teachers, SMTs, SGBs, and the community, Nombuza shared a photograph representing some developments she spearheaded as a female leading a rural school. She initiated the paving of the school grounds and through the combined efforts—the space between the classrooms. This initiative created a lovely area where the school holds assemblies and has reduced the number of learner accidents and falls. These efforts, she

believes, improve the school environment, which brings dignity to a rural school that was once marginalised. Secondly, the vegetables from the school garden assist with the feeding scheme for indigent children. Through the support of the parents and community, fundraising drives have helped the school achieve a female leader's goals. Apart from leading teaching and learning and managing the school, Nombuza also sees that the pit toilets are emptied because the department does not do it promptly for rural schools. This demonstrates her proactiveness as a female leader. This project reveals the working relationship between the school and the community and the changes a female leader has initiated. Being a female leader requires so many aspects besides managing teaching and learning.

Effective leadership in schools depends on the qualities of a leader. Nombuza displays qualities in her narrative, including managing teaching and learning, motherhood, loyalty to the community, and mentoring teachers by randomly checking work coverage through learner's books and collaboratively working with teachers, SMTS, SGBs, and the community to bring development that provides a conducive teaching and learning environment for both teachers and learners to thrive.

In doing all these things, Nombuza establishes her position and authority in a rural school. She shows that she is a strategic leader, proving her power that, as a female, she can lead.

5.2.1.4 Facing challenges and learning to lead

This section presents the challenges that Nombuza experienced as a female leader. Women leaders encounter challenges from cultural beliefs, traditional norms, and practices rooted in patriarchal systems. Patriarchy always supports male dominance and female subjugation by maintaining negative stereotypes about women. In the next section, I present Nombuza's challenges in her day-to-day leading role. These include resistance, gender stereotypes, and the struggle to get help.

Resistance from both men and women

The teacher's refusal to comply with the leadership of a female is shown in the narrative. In her leadership position, Nombuza experienced insubordination and resistance from staff members who did not want a female leader. Discrimination and scepticism against women in leadership roles persist, often requiring women to prove their capabilities in stark contrast to their male counterparts. Eagly and Carli (2003) capture these experiences, revealing gender biases and prejudices woven into daily organisational behaviours.

Some male teachers resisted her instructions, and when they did, they took their time (a delaying tactic) to follow instructions. This can be seen as a play for power where their resistance to female power is challenged, albeit in quite ambiguous and covert ways. The effects of it, however, render her uncertain. The resistance came from some teachers, in particular males. She also alludes to the fact that female teachers collude with other teachers to subjugate female leaders, thus acting as gatekeepers of patriarchy. Collins (2000) refers to this behaviour as horizontal oppression. She encountered in form of derogatory remarks, subversion, and resistance to following her instructions, which undermined her authority as a female leader. All these did not stop her from pursuing her dream of becoming a leader; instead, she even became more aware of the power she does have, for example, being resilient and by raising her voice to enforce her authority as a female leader. She attempted to regain power in these ways.

The hegemony of gender stereotypes (restricting, limiting, hierarchical, etc.)

A gender stereotype is a generalised view about attributes that ought to be possessed by women and men or roles that men and women should perform. A stereotype can be positive or negative; for instance, the belief that women are weak and incapable of leading disadvantages women from pursuing leadership roles. Gender stereotypes stem from patriarchal systems (Eagily & Woods, 2012), are reinforced during early childhood socialisation in the family, and determine the future life chances of a female. The embedded nature of gender role socialisation, the use of stereotypes, and the community's cultural understandings are encapsulated in Nombuza's father's oppressive perspective of sending the girl child five years later than the boy child to school. "I was told that education for a female is not that important. That is what my parents, especially my father, told me. From my father's perspective, the male is more important than the female. I started schooling very late, at 12, instead of the recommended age of seven". When males are socialised to perceive females as lesser beings than it is to be expected, then gender practices in the home are likely to be replicated in the workplace. This shows that despite policies enshrined in the South African Constitution (1996) on gender equality and equity in the workplace, women are still judged based on gender. Attitudes about women's leadership are usually informed by stereotypes, whereby men view women as emotional and not capable of leading.

For Nombuza, leadership in a rural community school is prescribed according to the patriarchal system of power, with male power dominance as the defining factor and being assertive as

opposed to women being perceived as weak, emotional, sensitive, and therefore incapable of protecting their children. Thus, as a female, she had to be aware of the context in which she worked and understand the gendered nature of culture. The negative perceptions and attitudes of male community members towards women leaders are expressed in Nombuza's narrative. Discrimination and gender stereotypes are evident, revealing that women are still maltreated in the workplace. For instance, parents believe a female principal cannot protect their children; Data reveals that "parents believe in a male [rather] than a female as a leader because they think a female leader cannot protect their children". Therefore, it is difficult for Nombuza, as a woman, to negotiate power as a professional in a male-dominated space. This resonates with Bodalina and Mestry's (2022) research, which views stereotypes and cultural norms as a cause of concern where men dominate and enjoy many privileges while women remain subservient and considered ineffective leaders. Gender discrimination intersects with other factors such as socioeconomic status, age, ethnicity, and geographical location to oppress women leaders.

The embedded nature of gender oppression: I struggled to get help as a girl child and a woman.

This section presents Nombuza's struggles as a girl child and woman. These are seen as obstacles that prevented her from advancing in her leadership development education.

While growing up in a rural area of KwaZulu-Natal, it was a struggle for Nombuza's mother to get them food and education. Additionally, Nombuza was told that education for a female is not essential. These could be interpreted as forms of oppression, as can be inferred from her father's perspective that males are more important than females. Nombuza learns about her future from the person she loves and trusts the most. This is a critical determining feature in socialising oppressive ideas by people considered trustworthy. For Nombuza, she internalises this as not getting help from the person she loves—her father.

Nombuza points out that, due to cultural beliefs and norms, men were and are still regarded as superior people to females. These societal beliefs of allocating roles where females are regarded as weak and males as vital, and leaders tried to put Nombuza down and erase her visibility as a young girl and a woman in society. But instead, all those challenges, "the societal beliefs that put me down as a young girl and a woman influenced me to be a teacher to bring change in my community (FG). From my father's perspective, a male is more important than a female. But having reached where I am, I see that I am a female

principal; I see myself as an agent of change". These influenced and shaped her leadership attributes. Despite starting school five years later than the usually prescribed age, this could not stop Nombuza from learning. Being in the same class with learners five years younger, she instead embraced schooling, provided leadership to her younger classmates, and went further to train to become a teacher, rising to a leadership role as a female. Although these struggles were seen as challenges, they turned out to be steppingstones for learning to become a female leader. All the challenges Nombuza faced exhibit interlocking facets across interpersonal, organisational, and structural domains (Collins, 2000).

Tension-filled relationships and high expectations

Schools are multi-layered, with different people from different backgrounds and cultures. As a female leader in such contexts, Nombuza is expected to be more understanding than her male counterparts. For example, Nombuza is expected to understand the teacher's reasons for not reporting to work. As mothers, teachers cannot just stay away from work or stay late for no good reason, which is why she must understand as a female leader. Women leaders are expected to be caring and nurturing to learners and teachers because that is what the community has given to women as their role. Women leaders are also expected to balance their leadership role and family. They are expected to perform all the functions of a mother, a wife, and a leader. "I am married, a mother of five, and the principal of Lamu Primary School". Nombuza acknowledges that the spatial separation imposed by her professional responsibilities strained her relationship with her children. In this case, she carried the weight of guilt, emblematic of neglecting her familial obligations due to work-related demands, often necessitating extended periods away from home.

Nombuza acknowledges going to school to get knowledge and the profession of teaching as one way of negotiating her challenges. She became a teacher through professional training, a privilege that pushed her to become a leader. Through resilience, Nombuza resisted gender stereotypes levelled against women as unsuitable for leadership positions by working hard to prove to the community that she could lead. This was demonstrated through caring and nurturing attributes towards teachers and learners in her school. On the contrary, women as leaders face disadvantages when designated as fulfilling a care function in leadership. Borgerson (2018, P. 3) notes that "caring characteristics and caring interaction, when embodied by women at work and in everyday life, appear to undermine positive perceptions of female

potential and block access to leadership opportunities. Nombuza saw the challenges as assets—thus ways of negotiating power.

Shane's narrative

5.2.2 Shane leading Flora Primary School

I am a single mother with an adult son. I grew up in a rural area, and currently, I lead a school in a rural area as well. As we grew up, household chores were divided according to gender. Some tasks were meant for boys. For example, our mother taught us to look after cattle, while girls were to cook and clean the house. (FG)

I grew up in a rural area, and we were poor. Though my parents were not educated, they were very loving and caring, and they taught us respect for elders and hard work. I feel my parents prepared me to be who I am today. They were caring and groomed me because, in everything that I am doing today as a leader, I am stronger because of the background that I grew up with. The gift of my parents surrounded me and developed me so much. (SI) We lived in a mud house, but my mother was very creative. She was good at making the mud and plastering the house, and it could look like it was cemented when it was not. She would also plant trees, flowers, and plants to beautify our surroundings. I feel proud because even today, I carried on with the same idea of decorating, planting flowers, and being creative in my school. (FG)

I enjoyed schooling except for the corporal punishment in primary school. High school was much better; I was more mature and a prefect, though a male was more senior, and I was doing well in class. After high school, I did not attend university because I could not afford it. Instead, I went to a teacher's college because it was cheaper. It was at college that I learned to become a teacher. After college, I started working in a farm school. For parents to accept you as a female leader, you must always work towards benefiting their children by caring for and providing pastoral care. But being a female, you must work harder to prove you can manage. There is a time when a male parent can come and reprimand you as if you are a child. I wouldn't say I like it—shouting at you like you are a child.

In my new school, I had this old lady who was a very caring principal; in fact, she taught me how to manage people and human relations. (SI) I was promoted and moved to a new school as a HoD, acting as the principal, and had this bad experience with male teachers. The male teachers resisted me, [serving] as the principal. It was very challenging for me. It challenged my skills, my knowledge, and my confidence. I used to cry [on] those days, so everything I said would be questioned and challenged. I had to face these—some young and some old. But I told myself that despite all these, I am not quitting. I have to develop myself, read more, and better myself. I did some management courses; I enrolled for my degree. If you are developing people, the majority will cooperate, do well, and participate, but there will be one or two who will ask, "Where is she taking this to?" But the majority of teachers cooperated, and it worked for me. Challenges existed every day. Challenges of undermining and demeaning, but I did not allow it to put me down. (SI)

I work and walk around often when I arrive at school in the morning. I must attend class, one at a time, to ensure the classes are stable. If I have a category, then I go to teach. But from 9 a.m., I will focus on my management work, so I will type a circular and send it quickly to the teachers. Sometimes, I randomly check teachers' files, but not always. Sometimes, I attend to parents who may want to see me for various reasons.

According to the Department of Education guidelines, we must focus on teaching and learning as our core business. Many learners are coming from poor backgrounds where parents have no education. We need to support them [learners] and check what is wrong. Is it the learner's background, or is it because of my poor instruction when teaching the subject? This helps us to know where we need development as teachers in rural schools. Most of the time, we have realised that it is not learners who are having difficulties in learning; sometimes, it is the way we teach. (SI)

I organise for such workshops to develop our SGBs also. In this workshop, we develop our SGBs so that they can learn about their responsibilities as stakeholders in their children's education. For them to actively participate in their children's learning. (FG/P)

This program of female principals was called the Female Principals Support Program (FPSP). I was lucky I was picked to participate in the program. The department wanted one female principal from each circuit to be represented in the program. So, in this

program, we were encouraged to support each other. We would come together and share experiences. We realised as we started these meetings that, yes, we lack this confidence, we lack this assertiveness, we need labour relations information, and we need more technology. Most of us realised that we could not even type; we were still using pen and paper, so our purpose was to develop each other. (SI)

Figure 4:

Shane's School Garden



Figure 4 shows Shane's school garden. Here, she is teaching her learners the skills of gardening and beautifying the environment, a skill she learned from her mother growing up as a child.

Figure 5:

SGB Workshop at Shane's School



Figure 5 shows Shane conducting a workshop for school governing body members (SGBS). Such seminars are to educate parents to learn how to actively participate in the education of the learners.

Analysis

5.2.2.1 Growing up and gender role socialisation as assets for leadership

This section presents Shane's experiences growing up and how these have shaped how she leads. Shane traces her leadership socialisation to her childhood and upbringing. Like the narrative of Nombuza, Shane also depicts a life of growing up surrounded by inequality and struggle. Her early efforts seemingly relate to growing up in a rural area. For instance, she discusses living in a mud house. Despite the low socioeconomic status, she grew up in, Shane enjoyed a loving family environment from her parents, whom she describes as 'loving' and 'caring'. Such an environment shaped and 'groomed' her into the person she is now as a female leader. The familial values instilled in her childhood strongly influenced her sense of doing leadership right to benefit learners and teachers in her rural school.

Through gender role socialisation, Shane learned a mothering role through interaction with her mother and siblings. Children's social interactions and daily activities, such as doing house chores for girls and herding cattle for boys, are seen as contexts for learning culture and gender dynamics. Through these interactions, children are socialised into the fundamental dynamics

of social power. Here, Shane's mother shaped her self-concept and self-perception through norms and roles taught in the home, for example, cooking and cleaning the area around the house. Like Nombuza, her mother is crucial in providing her with resilient tools to succeed later in life. What is also striking is that her mother works hard doing what would today be regarded as men's work, where she was good at making mud (cow dung) to plaster the house. Shane also shows her pride in her mother's accomplishments because doing something regarded as men's work to perfection, where her mother's plastering skills were so good that an outsider could not make out the difference between cement and mud. In a way, this undermined the patriarchal practice of males cementing the house. Cementing the place is traditionally a male role, but Shane's mother shattered the notion of separating role functions based on gender. Moreover, Shane's narrative shows the multiplicity of roles her mother takes on—traditional male and female roles—allowing her to straddle both. Her mother also planted plants and flowers to beautify the house. These observations demonstrate to Shane that a female could do the hard work associated with male labour and the soft work of beautifying her surroundings. The implicit values that she is being socialised into are hard work, respect, determination, and motherly love, which Shane learned from her mother and, to some extent, her father. These values or sources of knowledge taught Shane to be resilient (Collins, 2000), and she uses these in her work as a school principal. These knowledge assets allow Shane to become more powerful in her work as principal.

The positive teachings instilled in Shane contribute to the importance of family as the foundation upon which social identities are shaped and professional skills are developed. This confirms Collins' (2000) assertion that family represents the interpersonal domain that moulds everyday life. Shane also embraces the positive values of hard work, respect, and organisation taught by her parents. She employs these in her leadership by encouraging teachers and learners to adopt the same values, contrary to the cultural teachings that bring about gender inequality. This shows how everyday interactions are interconnected, collectively shaping gender dynamics within society.

Figure 4 presents a photograph shared by Shane during a focus group discussion, representing practices of the positive teachings she learned from her mother. Building on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning, Shane's narrative is based on the belief that the unique and lived experiences of an individual enrich one's learning processes. Here, she exposes the learners in her school to a beautiful environment, unconsciously making them feel more valuable, which resonates with research by Zipin, Sellar and Hattam (2012) that discusses how

teachers may draw knowledge assets from students' family and community lifeworlds to build rigorous learning activities. The knowledge already in the community is referred to as funds of knowledge. The theoretical framework of funds of knowledge has been used to study children with diverse backgrounds and the experiences that they bring to school. Shane displays the skills and knowledge she acquired from her mother, which her teachers did not recognise while in school, especially those from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. Shane can relate to and apply this knowledge and skills to her leadership, which benefits the learners in her school. This promotes the inner psyche of children who have experienced schooling environments that are unkept, undesirable, and not valued because of socioeconomic conditions in rural schools. This contrasts with the literature about rural schools (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019); Shane shows that leadership can change the once marginalised spaces into conducive teaching-learning environments.

In conclusion, early socialisation played a significant role in Shane's later leadership role because it shaped her leadership attributes and character.

5.2.2.2 Becoming a professional but treated as a child

Becoming a professional is a process. Here, Shane narrates her professional experiences and how she was treated as a child. Shane acknowledges the school as another institution of socialisation. She speaks about her schooling experiences and becoming a leader while still being treated as a child.

Shane enjoyed her high school years because she encountered a variety of teachers who encouraged her and motivated her to work hard and achieve more. Different teachers employed different ways of teaching, which made learning enjoyable. However, the world after high school was a limiting and restricted one. Because of her socio-economic status, she could not attend university, which would have opened more opportunities and access to various career options. Financing tertiary education was expensive, which *disadvantaged* girls and women from poor backgrounds like Shane. For this reason, she took teaching as a career because there was no other option given her *socio-economic status*. Her identity as being poor restricted and limited her decision-making. Economic capital may determine how much parents can financially support their children's academic pursuits. Despite Shane's disadvantage of her low socioeconomic status, she enjoyed the social capital provided by her parents, who were not highly educated. Social capital influences students' educational aspirations through parental norms, values, and expectations. This resonates with research by Mayienga (2013), which

highlights the role of protective family capital that contributed to the women's development of self-discipline that they used as a tool in their leadership, a virtue that enabled them to sail above the constraints of the patriarchal society in which they grew up.

Shane's first posting was to teach at a farm school in a rural community. According to research by Masinire (2015), returning to teaching in rural contexts is an opportunity to serve and give back to the community. There is that recognition that Shane's expertise as a trained teacher is most needed in her rural school. Having been raised and schooled in a rural area, Shane views going back to teaching there as an opportunity to educate once-marginalised learners and serve as a role model to young girls. There is also the social justice aspect of being an agent of transformation in rural schools, given that learners are on the fringe of receiving a quality education that may improve their life chances. Research by Moletsane (2012) posits that challenges experienced in rural schools are well understood by the people who live and work in rural areas, namely teachers. Through resilience and perseverance, Shane travelled a long distance to get to school, given that she struggled to get transport money. Despite Shane not being paid on time by the Department of Education, she had acquired the knowledge and skills of being a teacher and developed a passion for teaching as a career. In the process, she learned many lessons from her female principal. The caring female leader taught Shane how to manage people and relationships. These provided Shane with the opportunity to practice leadership before becoming a leader. She used the opportunity to empower herself and garner the power to lead. Through her hard work and commitment that she had learned from her upbringing, she was later promoted to the position of head of the department.

Socialisation into leadership was an excellent challenge for Shane; thus, moving up two ranks from head of the department to principalship without preparation for a female leader was a problem. The transition from teaching to principalship was unplanned, and the opportunity suddenly presented itself. The masculine leadership norm caused Shane to experience resistance from male teachers, which Collins (2000), Hardiman, and Jackson (1997) call vertical oppression. *"The male teachers resisted me [serving] as the principal. It was very challenging for me. It was challenging my skills, knowledge, and confidence"*. Also, her age was not a demeaning factor, even though she was younger than the rest of the teachers, it was evident that there was an interlink of two identities whereby gender and age were disrespected. This shows that women who experience challenges in educational leadership are not located within separate spheres of gender, race, age, ethnicity, and social class (Crenshaw, 1989).

The above experiences allowed Shane to resist stereotypical attitudes, work hard to acquire knowledge and skills, learn to be a good leader, and gain critical information on leading. Her early socialisation taught her that females are marginalised and that expectations for a female are different from that of a male. Shane's experiences link to transformational leadership because these experiences created valuable and positive changes in her career and those of the teachers and learners. Hallinger (2010) contends that transformational leadership is linked to factors in the external environment and the local context of a school.

5.2.2.3 Infantilisation (power play—reducing her to a child).

This section presents some challenges that Shane experienced as a leader. Among the challenges that Shane experienced in her leadership role was being made to feel like a child. For example, a male parent coming to the principal's office and reprimanding her as if she were a child is demeaning and has the effect of reducing her authority, rendering her powerless. For Shane, her positional power associated with being a principal and the energy related to her social identity as a principal could not be used. Here, the male parent used his gendered agent identity to reduce her to a powerless child, shouting her down. This treatment affected her leading to *emotional upheaval*, ultimately downplaying her authority as a female leader. Research by Macarthur (2015) suggests that infantilising a woman as a girl or a child may harm their feelings of leadership and their thoughts about how other people in their environment perceive them. The study findings show the importance of language in influencing perceptions, where women are frequently referred to as a girl or a child in everyday conversations.

5.2.2.4 A Motherly Role as a Female Principal

Parents' stereotypical role of female leaders is that of caring for and providing pastoral care to their children. The feminine part of nurturing and caring has been perceived negatively towards women in leadership. Besides nurturing and caring, a female leader must work harder to prove that she can lead. For instance, Shane must work harder at the mercy of males to prove she can teach. Females must work harder and be subject to scrutiny as opposed to their male counterparts. The teachers and community must approve of Shane's visibility. Thus, she must do and show visible work to be accepted by the school governing body as a leader. There is no respect for a female leader because of cultural norms and practices that stem from patriarchy. Research by Davis and Maldonado (2015) shows that one of the challenges women faces is constantly having to prove their ability to lead in a male-dominated environment. Shane resists

stereotypical oppression to teach in a rural school by working hard to prove her worth and using her mothering role attributes.

Research by Arif, Khan, and Hussain (2021) reveals some motherly characteristics of women leaders in secondary schools in Pakistan. The researchers interviewed male and female teachers to understand the aspects of a female principal. Women leaders in the study demonstrated a motherly approach by mentoring and encouraging teachers and co-workers by engaging them in routine decision-making. The women leaders were easily accessible and approachable by teachers, co-workers, and students. They also established better communication and interactions with the mothers of students. The findings of the study resonate with what Shane does in her leadership. This means that a female principal has multiple roles that she must perform in a rural school.

Despite Shane's multiple roles as the leader of teaching and learning, managing the school, and providing nurturing and pastoral care, she still faces stereotypical attitudes from male teachers. But Shane understood who she was and what she wanted to become in her career. This self-awareness helped her to stay the course despite the challenges she experienced. Quitting was not an option for her. Additionally, respect, loyalty, and hard work are virtues she learned from her mother during her early upbringing. These virtues became her guiding compass and made her want to develop herself professionally. To do this and better herself, she enrolled in a management course and learned more about managing people. She also registered for a degree in education to work herself up the professional ladder and empower herself with knowledge. These courses benefitted Shane; for example, she learned about labour relations, which improved her relationships with teachers and learners; methods of teaching, which in turn improved learner achievement; and technology to stay abreast of current technological trends. The challenges she experienced served as a push factor for her betterment. Here, Shane shows her resilience by not accepting the traditional norms and values that undermine women as weak and not capable of being in leadership and by furthering her studies to develop herself as a female leader. The challenges pushed for and created an opportunity for Shane's professional development.

Foucault (1977) illuminates that power and knowledge go together, thus, when one gains knowledge, he or she also gains power; where there is power, there is resistance. Shane acknowledges, that having learned a lot from high school through college, she gained academic knowledge as a professional teacher. She gained power as opposed to the cultural norms and

practices prescribed for females. She could now resist the patriarchal perception that women are incapable of being in positions of power. For example, *"It was very challenging for me. It challenged my skills, my knowledge, and my confidence. I used to cry [on] those days, so everything I said would be questioned and challenged. I had to face these, some young and some old. But I told myself that despite all these, I am not quitting"*. After she became a teacher under a female principal, she was socialised into becoming a leader. She was able to experiment with leading, for instance, by lead assemblies and organising meetings before she became a leader. Through this socialisation, she gained the power to direct and control events in a school setup. Some of the teachings Shane learned from the female leader were to be respectful and caring, to organise meetings, and to practise human relations. All these values shaped her leadership skills, especially in relating to the community.

5.2.2.5 Becoming a school principal means managing the whole school

The section highlights the activities that a school principal carries out on a day-to-day basis. A school principal is seen as the most senior in authority and is accountable for all issues about the school. Shane's daily activities as a female leader of a rural school are characterised by monitoring teaching and learning, doing management work, attending to learners', teachers', and parents' needs, and ensuring the smooth running of the school. One of her daily activities is to organise and control human behaviour through surveillance and to ensure the school's smooth running and the building of healthy relationships. For example, Shane randomly checks teachers' files. This is a form of surveillance because the teachers know that the school principal monitors their teaching. The practice of surveillance emphasises the importance of teaching and learning as the school's core business. It is also about the social inter-relationships between the principal, learners, parents, community leaders, and teachers. Shane is also constantly surveilled as a female leader by the community, teachers, and the Department of Basic Education. Therefore, she must work hard and prove that she can manage the school as a female; this is emphasised by how she is always busy attending to multiple roles to ensure the smooth running of the school.

As a leader in a rural school, Shane exhibits awareness of the context from which the learners are drawn, which is a geographical space. Here, she demonstrates situational awareness by grasping the significance of providing quality education to learners in rural schools. She also demonstrates self-awareness and the ability to redirect her energy and that of teachers towards teaching and learning. Therefore, as a leader, she is inclined to be concerned about teacher

development, which may lead to better education achievement for learners in rural schools. Shane acknowledges that many learners come from poor backgrounds where parents have no education. Literature shows that many parents and caregivers in rural communities lack education and cannot support learners with schoolwork (Shikapelo, 2020). With this understanding, she knows that the school needs to keep the learners, as there is little or no support from the parents. By prioritising teaching and learning and learners' support, she expresses her caring role, and for her, supporting learners from rural schools is critical because a learner's background should not hinder a learner's progress and achievement. She reveals some of the initiatives she implemented, for example, *"Most of the time, we have realised that it is not learners who are having difficulties in learning; sometimes, it is the way we teach. I organise for such workshops to develop both the teachers and SGBs"*. This strategy helps teachers grow, which influences learner achievement in the school and is linked to transformational leadership about change (Hallinger, 2010).

Her multi-layered roles comprise caring, nurturing, mothering, teaching, and management. She is also a hands-on principal, so she teaches and occasionally observes teachers in class to understand the needs of teachers and learners. According to Shane, her presence is felt all over the school because of her multi-layered roles as a female leader, and the changes she has initiated in a rural school are evident. Learner achievement is one of the ways she proves to her stakeholders (the Department of Basic Education, the community, teachers, and learners) that she is a hard worker and capable of leading effectively.

5.2.2.6 Teaching and learning is the core business of the school

This section presents how Shane leads and manages teaching and learning in her school. As a female leading in a rural school, her main role is to manage teaching and learning. For her, the learners are crucial to everything that happens in the lifeworld of a school. Shane narrates that the first thing to do is establish stable classes daily. For example, if a class is without a teacher, she quickly ensures order. Shane has multiple roles, but the key is managing teaching and learning as the core business of their existence as a school. She also teaches, besides her other managerial responsibilities. She employs the values of hard work that her mother socialised into her growing up. Her role is to keep her ear on the ground, meaning that as a leader, Shane pays attention to everything happening in the school and has a school-wide view. This resembles the ideas of Foucault's (1977) concept of the panopticon, a prison design where cells were located around a central inspection point and surveillants could see what was happening

without them being seen. The panopticon metaphor has been used to illustrate how surveillance operates in society, particularly how power can be operationalised in a school set-up. According to Foucault (1977, p. 201), the panopticon induced ‘in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power.’ Thus, ‘the gaze’ is in action, as one never knows if someone is watching from the watchtower, but the sense of being watched is internalised. The panopticon encourages surveillance and self-discipline, which are vital to effective leadership. Shane practices self-policing her performance as a school leader by making herself visible to teachers and learners. Charteris (2021) suggests that by recognising one’s visibility and vulnerability in the face of others’ judgements, an individual ‘assumes responsibility for power constraints. This helps Shane regulate her behaviour and become aware of her environment, teachers, learners, and their activities.

Shane, however, also supervises and polices the work of her SMTs and teachers to ensure that sound planning, teaching, and learning go on in the school. The policing is in the form of randomly checking the teacher’s files. This is a strategy she employs to ensure that teachers are also prepared for the school day and the function and purpose of the school. Thus, teachers also work with uncertainty and pressure because they are not always aware of when the principal might call for files. Thus, surveillance works in two ways for both Shane and the teachers. Firstly, they must all be mindful that they are under constant scrutiny. Secondly, they must always be prepared to explain themselves and their work. The effect of this through continuous repetition is to become self-regulating, where the process of always being prepared and ready becomes internalised. Shane plays an oversight role, and surveillance becomes a strategic tool she uses to monitor teaching and learning, focusing on learner achievement.

According to the Department of Education, teaching and learning is the core business of schools. In rural schools, many learners are drawn from homes whose parents or caretakers have no education (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). This is a challenge for rural schools regarding curriculum implementation, which results in poor learner achievement. Many learners are not supported by their parents. Therefore, as a school, *“We need to support them [learners] and check what is wrong. Is it the learner’s background, or is it because of my poor instruction when teaching the subject? This helps us to know where we need development as teachers in rural schools”*. Reviewing the ways in which teachers teach and her observation as the leader for teaching and learning in the school helps the school management identify the real issues that hinder learner achievement in rural schools. The narrative shows Shane displaying servant

leadership. Greenleaf (1977) first coined servant leadership as an effective, ethical leadership and management style that considers leaders as servants to others. According to the theory, a servant leader has a genuine commitment to her followers and predominantly serves their needs by empowering them. Servant leaders share power with others and encourage the development and growth of others. Her main concern is about learners' achievement in education.

5.2.2.7 Developing others and developing self

This section discusses how Shane developed herself and others. Shane acknowledges that working in a male-dominated space requires the skills and knowledge to execute the work. Therefore, knowing who she is and what she wants, and thus having self-awareness that she lacks the knowledge and skills to manage people, she applied for courses to develop assertive skills—a prerequisite for effective leadership. Oyeniran (2020) suggests training for female leaders to upgrade their knowledge and skills in managing schools. This self-development helped Shane gain power as a tool to lead in a male-dominated space. This also enabled her to network with other female leaders in rural schools. For example, she learned how to share experiences of leading in a rural school. All this was about self-empowerment and improving her teaching method in a rural school.

Leading for Shane means working as a team to bring change to a rural school. She looks for ways to develop the teachers in subject areas where teachers experience challenges, such as teaching mathematics, and poses the question, *Is it the learner's background, or is it because of my poor instruction when teaching the subject?* Here, Shane identifies with the teachers' weaknesses, thus leading by example and being a team player. She also holds herself accountable when it comes to learner achievement, thereby prioritising teaching, and learning. Research by Eagly et al. (2003) shows that female leaders tend to adopt transformational leadership over transactional leadership. This is when a leader works with their team to bring change to the organisation. This resonates with Shane's way of leading, as she is committed to promoting the participation of all stakeholders, including teachers, learners, and the school governing body members, in educating learners in rural schools. Shane organises workshops for teachers to upgrade their knowledge and skills in teaching methods and for the SGBs to develop their understanding of their role as stakeholders in their children's education. Although creating the SGBs is seen as undermining her power, Shane is not afraid to do this. She believes in empowering others to improve learner achievement in rural schools, which is also associated with social justice. Her leadership allows participatory decision-making where teachers and

senior management team members collectively plan and implement classroom teaching and learning.

From her leadership experiences, Shane acknowledges that female principals require support in the form of knowledge and skills from the Department of Primary Education to lead in a male-dominated space. Shane recognises the importance of networks through the development of herself and that of teachers and SGBs. She highlights the Female Principals Support Group she attended by stating that such groups are networks for sharing experiences of leading as female leaders in rural schools. Through such developmental programs, Shane was empowered and changed how she led. She suggests that through such programs, women leaders may share what works and does not work in rural schools, which is essential for rural schools and policy developers because rural schools' needs differ from those of urban schools.

In summary, Shane acknowledges her agency as being aware of the need to develop herself to acquire knowledge, skills, and leadership power. She also empowers other stakeholders, including teachers and SGBs, through workshops to improve learners' achievement. Networks such as the Female Principals Support Group (FPSG) support female leaders through sharing experiences in leading rural schools.

Siwe's story

5.2.3 Siwe leading Marylyn Primary School

I am a single mother with one adult daughter. I am the principal of Marylyn Primary School. I grew up in a middle-class family because both my parents were working. My mother was a teacher. While growing up, we were grouped; we all did similar work, whether as a boy or a girl, we did the same chores. Our parents loved us equally. There had so many siblings, but they could afford to pay fees. I say so because they took all of us to boarding school, although we were many children.

We grew up in a society where culture dictates that a male is more powerful than a female. Also, the upbringing, for example, when we were growing up, if you could argue, you could be told that a girl does not talk like that. Yeah! So, you must always be submissive. When you get into an argument, the elders think you are disrespectful. And these are some of the things that kill our confidence as women. (SI)

I started school at the age of seven. My primary school life was fascinating. I used to be among the top ten in my class, making school life enjoyable. You could get a reward, stationery or yeah, whenever you did well. I had a chance to serve as a school prefect, too. My parents were both working, so they took us all to boarding schools, although we were many children. My mother was a teacher, so I took after her. It is only that when you are a female, the community tends to undermine you. You always must prove to the community that you can lead.

I taught for six years, then thereafter, I became a school principal. I was never an HoD. I was never a deputy principal; I just jumped to the principalship. The post was advertised, I applied for it, and the interview process was fairly done.

When leading people, challenges will always be there. Even if you are doing your work, there will be sabotage, mostly from female teachers. Yes, I experienced these. They do not want to give you respect, but they will respect you if you are a male.

As a principal, I have discovered that people will not like you. But once you set the record straight, they quickly abide and do what is expected. Whereas with the males, even if he says anything, they all respect him. (FG)

In the activities I engage in as the principal, typically, when I arrive, I check that all is well, teachers are present, and everything is set for the day to start. When it comes to go to class, I go to teach. After that, I come back to the office to check if there are any submissions to do. Sometimes, I deal with complaints from parents, but generally, I monitor, discipline, motivate, encourage, and supervise.

We are a rural school, and many of the parents are uneducated, so even if you call them to school to talk about the learners' work, they used to say, "I have never been to school, so I only believe what my child is telling me". That is the major challenge for rural schools because they cannot even assist their kids, but as a school, we must help the learners through remedial classes because this is our responsibility.

The relationship with my teachers is good because there is progress at school. Even if we disagreed, I used to tell them that even if you are not happy, you must abide by the rules and regulations set. Because we have laws that govern us at school, you must not be got

where you cannot answer. There are channels that you must follow. The relationship with my SMT is excellent. I say so because this is my 22nd year as a school principal. It has never happened that when we sit at SMT meetings, when we go to the staff, they turn against me; they do not. We are constantly working as one team. My SMT consists of females only. We have a committee that deals with decisions concerning learners' welfare. It depends on what kind of decision it is. The SMT makes some decisions, but disciplinary decisions are taken by the disciplinary committee of which the SMT [is] a part. The SMT also makes decisions concerning teaching and learning, but all these committees report to me as the school principal (SI).

Analysis

5.2.3.1 The intersection of family, social class, and leadership

This section explores how Siwe's early childhood experiences within her family shaped her leadership abilities later in life. Siwe acknowledges the significant role of the family as a socialising agent in shaping one's career trajectory. Growing up in a middle-class family with both parents working, Siwe was provided for and had the opportunity to attend boarding school. As a teacher, her mother influenced Siwe's decision to pursue a career in education and eventually become a school principal. According to Schmidt and Mestry (2014), the intersections of race, class, and gender contribute to networking opportunities, educational advancements, and cultural knowledge.

Collins (2017) argues that the concept of community serves as a framework for understanding power relations as individuals experience and conceptualise them. People use the idea of community to organise and make sense of their individual and collective experiences within hierarchical power structures. In Siwe's case, as part of the community, her family played a crucial role in shaping her career path and providing a foundation for success that empowered her to challenge societal patriarchal norms. The family is a significant factor in an individual's well-being, as it is a socialising agent that shapes relationships and influences agency (Collins, 2000). Within the family, Siwe was exposed to power structures constructed by family members such as parents, siblings, and peers through socialisation (Harro, 2000). Through these interactions, children learn about subordinate and dominant roles. However, Siwe recounts that her parents treated all the children equally when assigning household chores without dividing them based on gender. This suggests there was no distinct division of labour

for boys and girls, and they all happily participated in the same chores. Siwe's perspective challenges traditional notions of gender roles within a family, as literature often portrays a clear division of labour. Her parents' equal treatment of their children taught her about equality, even within the workplace.

Siwe's mother, being a teacher, influenced her educational journey and career choice from an early age. The teachings and values instilled at home were reinforced at school, motivating Siwe to excel academically. She found encouragement from teachers who recognised and rewarded her for her achievements. Siwe's smooth progression in her career can be attributed to the social capital she received from her family. According to Mayienga (2013), protective family capital plays a role in developing self-discipline among women leaders. In this context, family capital refers to the support provided by family members and the upbringing of women leaders during their childhood, which encourages them to strive for success. The values of hard work and self-discipline instilled in Siwe during her upbringing contributed to her academic success and influenced her decision to pursue teaching as a career. She continues to apply these values in her current role as a female leader, aiming to prove to society that she is capable of effective leadership.

By examining Siwe's upbringing, it becomes apparent that her family's support, the absence of gender-based division of labour, and the influence of her mother's profession played crucial roles in shaping her leadership trajectory. Siwe's story demonstrates how family, social class, and personal values intersect to influence one's career choices and leadership approach.

5.2.3.2 Culture Intersects with Patriarchy to Oppress Women Leaders

Siwe's narrative highlights her challenges as a woman in a patriarchal society, where culture plays a significant role in oppressing women. Culture encompasses the way of life, including language, dress code, and behaviours, within a particular group of people. Siwe struggled to navigate her culture and faced obstacles in understanding how to conduct herself during conversations and arguments. The socialisation practice of being submissive to males enforced the belief that a woman's place is in the kitchen, as taught by cultural norms. Failure to adhere to these norms would be viewed as being disrespectful by community elders, reinforcing cultural rules and regulations that reinforce women's subordinate positions. These teachings are designed to oppress women and maintain the status quo. However, Siwe's agency and determination allowed her to overcome these barriers and pursue her aspirations of becoming

a teacher. Through hard work and resilience, she defied patriarchal norms and practices that deemed women incapable of assuming leadership positions. Through personal agency, women create space for themselves in leadership roles and navigate structural inequalities (Collins, 2000).

Patriarchy, a societal system in which the father or eldest male heads the family, promotes and privileges male dominance in various aspects of society, including educational leadership. Practices, attitudes, and expectations are organised around the belief in male superiority and female inferiority. Cultural and social norms rooted in patriarchy shape women's experiences and perceptions of their leadership potential. Gendered roles, based on strict definitions of what constitutes "women's work" and "men's work," contribute to gender discrimination and stereotypes that particularly impact women. Siwe highlights, *"When you get involved in an argument, the elders think you are disrespectful. And these are some things that kill our confidence as women."* Such factors erode women's confidence, often seen as a personal barrier to leadership positions. Faulkner's research (2015) reveals that deeply entrenched cultural traditions and patriarchy negatively affect the execution of leadership roles by female principals. These patriarchal practices interact with other categories of difference to disadvantage Siwe. Her experience of leadership is not located within separate spheres of gender, race, age, and social class (Crenshaw, 1989). Instead, these independent spheres converge and form an interlocking system that shapes the interpersonal, organisational, and structural aspects of qualitative experiences that are not captured within the mainstream leadership discourse. Johnson (2004) points out that patriarchal culture defines the nature of things, for example, men and women, by valuing masculinity and maleness and devaluing femininity and femaleness. Such beliefs are internalised, increasing the multi-layered nature of Siwe's challenges. This intricate web of challenges reflects Collins' (2000) assertion that cultural, structural, and interpersonal domains are intertwined, collectively shaping gender dynamics.

Siwe personally experienced being undermined by the community when she was appointed as a female leader, as patriarchal practices viewed women as incapable of assuming leadership positions. After completing her teacher training, Siwe was posted to a rural school, where her leadership efforts were undermined due to patriarchal norms prioritising male power dominance. Leadership roles were perceived as reserved for the strong, while women were considered weak and unfit for leadership. Female leaders face constant undermining and

scepticism due to patriarchal practices and norms questioning their decision-making abilities. Nonetheless, Collins (2000) suggests that women leaders must critically reflect amidst oppressive challenges, using their positions as steppingstones to challenge and transform the cultural and hegemonic domains.

For Siwe, these obstacles fuelled her resilience, determination, hard work, and self-discipline to prove her leadership capability. She gained the power to lead in a rural school setting through her upbringing, personal awareness, and professional development. Siwe reshapes the narrative by demonstrating that, with the right skills, knowledge, and empowerment, she cannot be intimidated or undermined by negative patriarchal cultures and practices. She believes she has the power to lead effectively in a rural community school despite deeply rooted cultural beliefs and patriarchal structures. This is how she negotiates power through her urgency (Crenshaw, 1991).

5.2.3.3 Sabotage from female teachers

The narrative reveals that it is noteworthy that women leaders face challenges beyond those of their male colleagues. The study underscores the presence of negative attitudes and behaviours among female colleagues, indicative of horizontal oppression (Collins, 2000; Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). The collusion of female teachers in subjugating fellow women leaders underlines a complex phenomenon often referred to as "gatekeepers of patriarchy". Horizontal oppression occurs when members of the same group consciously or unconsciously engage in behaviours that undermine one another. The female teachers directed their anger towards Siwe, perceiving her as someone who had deviated from the prescribed status assigned to women by patriarchy and had become a professional. Such attitudes stem from the internalised subordination of women in society. Literature (Amondi, 2011; Eagly & Karau, 2002) highlights gender bias and prejudices against women in the workplace, including educational institutions. Research by Mahabeer et al. (2018) revealed that men do not solely drive women's marginalisation in leadership positions but that black women also contribute to subjugating their fellow women in leadership. The study's participants mentioned how even women from different racial and class backgrounds displayed hostility and animosity towards women who entered a space that they previously occupied. Despite resistance from female teachers, Siwe did not let this hinder her performance as a female leader. She displayed resilience in challenging gender bias and prejudice in her role. For example, *"I have discovered that*

people will not like you. But once you set the record straight, they quickly abide and do what is expected”.

5.2.3.4 Being authoritative as a way of leading

As a leader, Siwe has learned through experience that not everyone will like her. Leadership involves influencing followers towards a common goal. Siwe's goal as a school leader is to manage her subordinates, encouraging teachers to fulfil their role of educating marginalised learners in rural schools. However, she faces disrespect and attempts by female teachers to undermine her authority. Siwe discovered that teachers quickly comply with her instructions when she sets the record straight by giving clear directions and being firm. In this narrative, Siwe highlights her challenges with female teachers as a female leader. Still, she confronts them by establishing rules and asserting herself, thereby challenging negative stereotypes associated with women due to patriarchal norms and practices. Being authoritative makes her an effective leader. This resonates with Goleman's (2017) assertion that an authoritative leader mobilises people towards a vision and gives direction towards the goal—in this case, teaching and learning in schools.

Like male leaders in any organisation, women leaders need various strategies to navigate their roles. Siwe's narrative illustrates the importance of strengthening her feminist values to survive in a patriarchal environment. She demonstrates that authority derives from the position held, whether male or female. It also suggests that, at times, to be seen as powerful, Siwe must use similar strategies that male leaders use. By appropriating these characteristics, she can lead the school in a particular manner.

Schools operate within a multi-layered structure governed by rules. The structural domain establishes the parameters that organise power relations (Collins, 2000, 2017). While legislation and policies in South Africa promote gender equality at the national level, there is a disconnection and evident inequalities at the micro level where female principals work, as depicted in Siwe's narrative and supported by existing literature (Moorosi, 2006). Bodalina and Mestry (2020) argue that women leaders are often subjected to the false notion that they lack resilience and desired experience when faced with challenging situations in their daily leadership roles, such as a male teacher refusing to take instructions from a female leader. Collins (2017) emphasises that understanding the domains of power helps women identify how unjust power relations are organised and resisted, providing individuals from marginalised

groups with diagnostic tools to develop action strategies in response to social inequalities resulting from intersecting systems of oppression. In Siwe's case, she strategises by giving clear direction, being firm, assertive, and asserting authority.

5.2.3.5 Lack of parental involvement in learners' education

Siwe, in her role as principal, demonstrates her understanding of the socioeconomic factors that negatively affect rural schools. In her rural school, many learners come from families facing unemployment and low levels of education. She recognises that some parents cannot assist their children with schoolwork due to their lack of education. This becomes a challenge, as these parents often use their lack of education as an excuse to avoid attending school functions or engaging in discussions about their child's progress. This finding aligns with research indicating that parents' socioeconomic status in disadvantaged communities influences their interest in and involvement in their children's education (Naidoo & Perumal, 2014). Siwe also notes that unemployed parents in these communities refuse to volunteer their services at the school, stating they cannot provide them for free.

Despite these challenges, Siwe adopts the strategy of having excellent relationships with the senior management team and teachers. These are the people who implement teaching and learning in the classrooms. Teachers go a step further by providing remedial lessons to assist the learners. She recognises that the leader is responsible for bringing about change in the school and responding to contextual challenges with a transformative approach. Siwe emphasises the importance of being a good listener as a female leader, as it conveys to teachers and community members that they are valued, fostering improved relationships.

5.2.3.6 Working as a team

Siwe describes her leadership approach as interactive and inclusive, with greater involvement of teachers in decision-making processes. She established various committees that address different aspects of school management, such as learners' welfare, disciplinary matters, and teaching and learning. By shifting away from the traditional hierarchical leadership norm and embracing a more distributive form of leadership, Siwe shares power with her teachers, empowering and mentoring them as future leaders. Her leadership style reflects transformational leadership, as relationship-building forms the foundation of her leadership

approach. She attributes this approach to her upbringing, where as children, they shared responsibilities.

Siwe employs a transformative style of leadership that allows teachers to practice and experience leadership at lower levels. The fact that they work as a team indicates a foundation of trust and respect. She demonstrates interpersonal agility in mentoring and building confidence in her teachers, utilising various committees to foster teamwork and improve learner outcomes. As a transformational leader, Siwe facilitates collective efforts to bring about change in her rural school. Research by Bass (1999) suggests that female leaders tend to exhibit more transformative leadership qualities than their male counterparts. Transformative leadership raises the maturity and standards of followers, promoting achievement, self-actualisation, and the well-being of individuals, the organisation, and society. Siwe leverages her authority as a female leader in a rural community school by challenging implicit biases and prejudices through an intersectional understanding (Crenshaw, 1989). These findings align with research by Msila (2022), highlighting the role of women leaders within schools and the communities they serve. Female participants in the study viewed their positions as opportunities to foster collaboration, shared leadership, and shared governance in schools. Siwe, it can be seen, exercises her power as a female leader in a rural community school by working collaboratively with teachers, learners, and parents.

Bongi's story

5.2.4 Bongi leading Mamu Primary School

I was brought up in a family of four siblings. I grew up in Durban, but I live and work in Pietermaritzburg. I lost my husband in 2018 through a heart attack. When I grew up, I was treated as a female; the dress you were associated with was pink and white. When playing, we could play with cooking, and at some point, I could play as a teacher and others as students. My parents were devoted Christians, and we grew up in a Christian way of life, where they set up rules and boundaries on how to behave as children. We had to attend church services every Sunday through Sunday school, youth service, and then the elderly church. Right now, that background of Christianity taught me obedience, respect and being compassionate. All these influences how I do things, even in my leadership.

I think in terms of our culture, it has taught us that the woman's place is in the kitchen. For me, culture dictates that a woman's job is to bear children, cook, do all the house chores, stay at home, and not go to work. Be submissive to the husband, look after the children, respect the elders and everybody at home. So, for me, patriarchy oppresses us as women, and it does not allow women to be given leadership positions because they were not born to lead but were only born to be at home and do the house chores (FG).

At school, I played netball and volleyball. I found the teachers in high school to be lazy. The teachers at college were very dedicated and committed to their work. They would make you like going to classes and attending all your lectures. It was my first time to be exposed to that environment. You know, from lazy teachers in high school to educated and committed teachers in college. This influenced me as a teacher (SI). I started teaching at Sacred Heart Primary School. My principal was a female and belonged to the Catholic Church, but I was a Christian. I remember we were the first teachers with diplomas. So, having to work with a principal who has a junior primary teacher's certificate, she would feel inferior that you are young, but at the same time, you are overqualified. She tried to sideline me.

The first time the post of HOD was advertised, I applied, but the interviewing processes favoured male candidates. The panelist looked at me and said, You are too young and unmarried. So, I moved to another job with the university. After some time, the post was readvertised. I applied and got it, yet I am here today.

As a compulsory transfer, moving to my present school was difficult. So, I knew exactly that their steps in the reception would not be good. And yeah, it was unsuitable due to the male and female resistance (SI). But as a school principal, you must love them all but trust no one. When it comes to my experience as a female, is that I may have to wake up and work harder. By nature, I am a hard worker, and I must lead by example if I am saying that everything that we do, we do it for the benefit of our institution, and we do it for the use of those learners. I always ensure everyone is involved in whatever we do with all stakeholders, including the community. As the principal, I am also a mother to everyone in the school; why? All people—teachers, non-staff members, learners, and even—parents come to me because they know that I have something to offer, [and] that,

at some stage, when they are not performing well in their duties, I must know what the cause is. (SI). I plan and organise staff development workshops.

As a leader, I must be the first one to change. The change must start with me and others around me. Everything that I do must be good, even for those around me. It means, as a leader, being influential means bringing all stakeholders together so that all of you can be on the same footing. It means going the extra mile and being in line with all changes in the education system. It involves you being a visionary leader who knows your stakeholders (learners, teachers, parents, SMTS and SGBs). (FG)

When I arrive in the morning, I check around to ensure everything is okay. I get to my office and pray because that is where I draw strength. After that, I go about as everyone is coming in. Attend the assembly, and check that teaching and learning are taking place in every classroom. This is the core activity that must take place every day. If a teacher has not arrived, I keep the learners busy. After that, I get to my office to do administration work, make submissions, check emails, and meet with the deputy to see if there are any urgent matters to discuss. I invite vast numbers of people to come to capacitate our SGBs. To make sure that they understand their duties as members of the school governing body and how to ensure the relationship is very good, because if those two do not work together, there is a problem. (SI)

As female principals, we need to be intense, focused, and intentional to resist and fight the patriarchal system when appointed in the position of principalship. As females, we always have to work three times more as expected because we want to fight this patriarchal system, which says that a woman is not fit to be in a leadership position. (FG).

Analysis

5.2.4.1 Intersections of age, family, church, and leadership

Bongi's experiences growing up as a female reveal the complex layers of her upbringing. Raised in a devout Christian family, she emphasises the significance of family and religion in shaping her understanding of the self as a woman. Within her family, she observed both empowering (for example, the values of respect, hard work, and multi-tasking) and oppressive (for instance, that a woman's place is in the kitchen cooking and bearing children) dynamics. Through interactions with her parents, siblings, and peers, she learned about gender and how she was treated as a female. The family served as a platform for her socialisation into a system of social oppression, where she became aware of her differences based on the roles assigned to her and the expectations placed upon her by her parents. For instance, she was expected to cook, clean, and display warmth, love, and care. These experiences within the family have significantly influenced her approach to leadership. These feminine traits of modesty, warmth, love, and caring influenced her leadership style. She highlights, *"I am also a mother to everyone in the school because all people —teachers, non-staff members, learners, and even parents —come to me because they know I have something to offer."* Her story resonates with Brion and Ampah-Mensah's (2021) study, which shows that women in their study used maternal qualities to their advantage. Combining home experiences as a mother and the job carves a unique motherly leadership style.

Growing up in a devout Christian family further contributed to Bongi's socialisation as an obedient child. She was conditioned to adhere to rules and boundaries at home and within the Christian faith. This obedience was enforced without her consent and deviating from these prescribed norms resulted in consequences aligned with Christian teachings and values. Attending church services every Sunday was a fundamental aspect of her upbringing. At each stage of her life, she participated in church programs reinforcing Christian teachings and values. This consistent exposure to religious principles has had a lasting impact on a servant leadership style. Basu et al. (2017) found that parents often transmit their norms, attitudes, and behaviours to their children, thereby perpetuating gender discrimination and role expectations within the family, church, and other social institutions. Bongi acknowledges the church's role in shaping her as a committed Christian, which aligns with her leadership approach rooted in fairness and social justice. Religion has been pivotal in shaping her life trajectory and

leadership style. *“As a leader, I must be the first one to change. The change must start with me and others around me. Everything that I do must be good, even for those around me”.*

The church is the second agent of socialisation after the family. At this level of socialisation, the stereotypical messages learned were weaved into the interpersonal thread of the fabric, the first layer of oppression. The teachings of being obedient and compassionate to the church became internalised, shaped, and influenced her leadership. *“Right now, that background of Christianity taught me obedience, respect, and being compassionate. All these influences how I do things, even in my leadership”.*

In summary, Bongi's experiences demonstrate that leadership exists within the home but is often imposed upon children as obedient family and church members. However, she impresses these teachings as they propagate her current leadership style. As a child, she could not question the education her parents and the church imparted. Consequently, she experienced oppression from the people she loved, including her parents, peers, and the church. However, she acknowledges certain positive teachings, such as respect, care and obedience that she incorporates into her leadership style.

5.2.4.2 Women at the nexus of culture and patriarchy

Culture encompasses the way of life of a particular group of people, encompassing aspects such as dress code, language, and manners. Bongi shares her experiences as a woman in a patriarchal society, where, like Siwe, she grappled with understanding her culture. Cultural and social norms, firmly rooted in patriarchy, greatly influence how women perceive their ability to assume leadership roles. Shakeshaft et al. (2014) identified social and cultural factors as significant contributors to the under-representation of women in leadership positions. Through cultural teachings and norms, Bongi learned that a woman's role primarily revolves around domestic responsibilities, bearing children, and not occupying leadership positions in the workplace. She recognises the cultural expectations that confine black women within patriarchal structures, where they are typically followers rather than leaders. Bongi firmly believes that challenging these patriarchal practices is essential to her role as a woman leader, and she is deliberate in doing so.

Bongi posits that these patriarchal norms and practices, such as *"woman's job is to bear children, to cook, do all the house chores, stay at home and not to go to work. Be submissive to the husband, look after the children, respect the elders, and everybody at home"*, are deeply ingrained at the family level and perpetuated through educational institutions, church teachings, and media, which serve as agents of socialisation. These teachings are internalised and pose obstacles to the career advancement of girls and adult women. Bongi's narrative exemplifies how different forms of oppression intertwine to create unique experiences for black women (Crenshaw, 1991). However, Bongi resisted internalising the cultural teachings that deem women unfit for leadership and pursued her dreams by pursuing education and working diligently to become a teacher.

The system of patriarchy is structured within the family, which is disadvantageous to girls and women as it empowers male children while disempowering their female counterparts through gender role socialisation. Gender role socialisation begins within the family, acting as the foundation upon which further influences are built. Socialisation for Bongi reinforces and reproduces an imbalanced perception of reality that perpetuates power differentials to the detriment of females. This resonates with Siwe's narrative, where she saw culture dictating what a female should do and become. As described by Harro (2000), the cyclical nature of socialisation affirms that individuals are born into specific social identities that perpetuate unequal power structures. For Bongi, both the family and the church serve as the agents for transmitting societal norms, contributing to the perpetuation of gender-based discrimination. The family, as the primary agent, taught her through daily activities. *"I was treated as a female; the dress you were associated with was pink and white. When playing, we could play with cooking."* For instance, Bongi was taught that women should stay home and be wives, while men were meant to work outside the home. Her discomfort with the myths and misinformation she learned pushed her towards becoming a teacher and a school principal in her community. Instead of Bongi interrupting the cycle of socialisation, she is caught in the process as she practices the same values taught by the church in her leadership style.

Connell (2005) observed that gender is a socially constructed concept that influences the division of work in both the home and workplace, and it reinforces authority. Bongi's experiences of socialisation align with these observations. *"patriarchy oppresses us as women, and it does not allow women to be given leadership positions because they were*

not born to lead but were only born to be at home and do the house chores". Furthermore, Connell (2005) noted that if society's definition of masculinity includes being a breadwinner, then "strong" men might feel threatened by women's professional progress as it challenges their sense of worthiness and respect. Mutangirwa's research (2016) supports this by highlighting how early socialisation within families prepares females for motherhood and perpetuates patriarchal values prioritising male leadership over females. Bongi, however, challenges these gender roles and believes that, as a leader, she has the power to fight against patriarchal practices by proving her worth through hard work. Lawson et al. (2021) show that women's agency increases when they participate in leadership roles and empower younger leaders.

Despite traditional norms and practices limiting women's career advancement, Bongi sees them as assets that have made her stronger as a woman. These challenges have motivated her to work hard in school and pursue her goal of becoming a teacher and leader in her rural community school.

5.2.4.3 Acquiring knowledge as the power to lead

Schools served as socialising agents after the family, and Bongi's primary schooling went smoothly without difficulty. However, she encountered "lazy teachers" (her description) in high school, which influenced her understanding of leadership. Bongi noticed these teachers did not take their work seriously, depriving her of critical knowledge and skills. This experience taught her the importance of monitoring and supervising teachers, ensuring they fulfil their responsibilities. She applies this skill in her current role by monitoring teachers' work to prevent students from experiencing the same issues she faced.

During her teacher training, Bongi found the teachers more committed than those in high school. This positive influence motivated her to become a teacher. She acquired valuable attributes such as being inspiring, determined, and dedicated, which she now employs in her leadership role. Bongi acknowledges that knowledge and skills gained in college give her the power to lead, challenging the cultural norms and practices that limit women in positions of power. Her experience reveals the complex dynamics of power relations and resistance at the individual level. Despite gaining professional control as a teacher, she still had to work harder to prove herself in a male-dominated leadership space. *"When it comes to my experience as a female, is that I may have to wake up and work harder, three times more"*.

Bongi faced a situation where a female principal, who held a lower qualification than her, attempted to sideline her from participating in school decision-making processes. This highlights how qualifications can be used as a tool of oppression among women in leadership positions.

5.2.4.4 Procedural fairness or unfairness in school promotions

Typically, organisational promotions are based on experience and qualifications, and similar processes are followed in South African schools. Bongi's narrative reveals that to be a female principal, marital status and age are considered. "I applied, but the interviewing processes favoured male candidates. The panelist looked at me and said, 'You are too young and unmarried'". She faced these challenges of being a single woman and young, disadvantaging her from accessing leadership. This resonates with research by Mbpera (2015), which suggests that women leaders in Tanzania lack transparent procedures for being promoted to educational leadership positions. Similarly, a recent study by Mbokazi, Mkhasibe, and Ajani (2022) highlights the unfairness and political influence in the current promotion process in South African schools. This suggests that male domination and political connections often affect teacher promotions.

Resistance from both male and female teachers posed challenges for Bongi's leadership. Male teachers often resist female leaders due to patriarchal attitudes and stereotypes undermining women's leadership capability. This has been shown in Nombuza, Shane, and Siwe's narratives and relates to Khumalo's (2021), which found that female leaders face deliberate defiance and insubordination from both male and female teachers. Bongi, however, uses her experience of resistance as an asset, motivating her to work harder and gain the power to lead in a rural school. She involves all stakeholders in the school, including teachers, learners, parents, and the community, demonstrating care and nurturing with a motherly touch. "I always ensure everyone is involved in whatever we do with all stakeholders, including the community". Bongi's Christian upbringing, with values of respect and obedience, influences her leadership style. "We had to attend church services every Sunday through Sunday school, youth service, and then the elderly church. Right now, that background of Christianity taught me obedience, respect and being compassionate. All these influences how I do things, even in my leadership".

5.2.4.5 Walking away and way back: Identity construction and leadership

Bongi's early childhood conditioned her into the traditional female role, which still influences her perception of herself as a principal. Her micro-management approach to leadership, rather than empowering the senior management team (SMT), suggests a lack of trust in teachers and colleagues. Trust is essential for fostering productivity and achievement among teachers. Bongi acknowledges that her leadership skills and knowledge need improvement, highlighting the importance of leadership development programs. "When I arrive in the morning, I check around to ensure everything is okay. I get to my office and pray because that is where I draw strength. After that, I go about as everyone is coming in. Attend the assembly, and check that teaching and learning are taking place in every classroom. This is the core activity that must take place every day. If a teacher has not arrived, I keep the learners busy". Leadership should involve influencing, delegation, motivating, and empowering young leaders for change. Bongi's experience indicates that she does not trust the teachers, hence her micro-management approach.

In conclusion, Bongi recognises that her upbringing in a patriarchal system still influences her leadership. She views herself as a mother figure to everyone, adhering to the societal expectations of female leaders. The irony of her narrative is that the discomfort of the myths and misinformation she learned when growing up pushed her to become a teacher, but she does not interrupt the cycle of socialisation; instead, she is trapped. However, her narrative lacks mention of the roles played by the SMT, contradicting the literature on effective leadership. She positions herself as the sole point of contact for various stakeholders, which may hinder the delegation of responsibilities and limit teacher trust.

5.2.5 Nozi leading Lwati Primary School

My name is Nozi; I am turning 45 years old this coming Saturday and am the firstborn in my family. My family is complicated because my mother did not get married to my father. So, I have siblings from my mother's side and from my stepfather's side. And my grandparents are the ones who brought me up, and I am grateful to God for that. I experienced a sense of males being accorded more value than females.

I grew up where we were forced to go to church. When you do not go to church, you do not get food. So, you must go to church to have your lunch on a Sunday. But all in all, I think

it was a great upbringing. Because of the values that we were taught then, I can appreciate them now. I was brought up to be compassionate with Christian values, which I use in my leadership. I used to carry oranges in a bowl on my head, go and sell them in the streets, yeah! We did not play much as kids. We used to work and work and missed out on playing as kids (SI). We were involved in several activities; for example, the boys looked after cattle while the girls cooked and tidied the home. While boys were taught to work outside the home, we, the girls, remained at home, being taught about cooking, caring for children, and preparing to be a mother. Those are the activities that we did. But these two, I cannot forget. One is respect. Two is hard work (FG).

I started school at the age of six. I liked school very much. I was the teacher's favourite and did very well at school. I did not do grade four. I was promoted from grade three to grade five because I was doing well at school. Yeah! The school was excellent. School was the best place for me because I would escape the work at home. There was too much work at home, you know! High school was also excellent; I was in good books with the teachers. Also, I was the youngest in my class because I had skipped a course, and I took advantage of that. Some boys could not complete writing notes, so I could help them write letters, so high school was fun. At to college, there was too much work! There were too many assignments at one point, and I asked myself, 'Why not quit?' But then I said to myself that Jesus might come at night. So, I kept pushing. My grandfather was a good believer in education, so he paid for my education.

I first applied as a temporary teacher immediately after finishing high school and taught a grade One class. I was only 16 years old by then, but I was teaching people who were doing grade One at age 21. They just came to learn how to write their names and then go to work in the mines, so it was tough for me, given that I was a female. One significant experience I had was teaching at Paka Primary School. I learned a lot from my school principal, who was a female then, and even from other teachers. I think the experience was great! Because of my hard work, I was then promoted. Then, at this point, I worked very closely with the female principal and felt like I learned a lot from her. I can say that she was my mentor. I can say that she was very organised. And you know that I like people who are scheduled. She always managed teachers' developmental workshops and

was always on point. She would still go to classes to observe the teachers and give feedback. I think I learned a lot from her; hence, I am here now. But after I got promoted, I experienced resistance from male teachers. I have also observed that department officials disrespect females but respect male principals.

Leadership is tough. Sometimes, I ask myself what those school principals I worked under did, how they managed, and how they were experiencing what I am experiencing now. Due to the workload and admin work, I don't have a private life. I have a work life. I am always here at work or church on a Sunday. You know, sometimes you just come to school thinking everything is in order, only to find out that there is a teacher who didn't come to school because he or she has a clinic to attend, and so your program for the day is disrupted. (SI)

My role as the principal is to manage, monitor, and teach, among others. But I make sure the school is following the policy on the curriculum. Sometimes, I outsource and bring in vast [numbers of] people to develop us as teachers in teaching and learning. I must observe teachers at times and give feedback. Sometimes, I ask a particular teacher to observe another teacher teaching a particular subject, for example, maths, to learn from each other. (SI)

I only have four SMTs. They are all females, and we are open to each other. We talk about everything and anything concerning the school and the learners. We work collaboratively. Decisions concerning the learners are taken collectively by the SMTs. We usually meet as a team, discuss and plan about teaching and learning and the welfare of the learners. After the SMT meeting, I typically delegate one of the SMTs to conduct the general meeting or assembly because I want them to have authority. I also organise workshops for teachers to upskill.

Analysis

5.2.5.1 Intersection of age, family, church, and leadership

A striking commonality among Nombuza, Shane, Bongi, and Nozi is that family structure is the foundation upon which later life trajectories evolve. Nozi states how she was socialised into multiple identities in a family set-up. She starts by highlighting that her family is complicated,

meaning that her mother did not get married to her father. So, she had siblings from her mother's side and her stepfather's side, but her grandparents brought her up. She acknowledges that her grandparents taught her as a girl child about becoming a woman and society's expectations. At the family level, Nozi was introduced to a system of social oppression (Harro, 2000) through family members—grandparents, siblings, and peers. This is where she was socialised to understand that she is different (Crenshaw, 1991) because of how her grandparents and siblings interacted with and treated her.

Nozi views herself as a woman in response to gender norms, behaviours, and socialisation that she went through as a young girl. These teachings were later reinforced through institutions such as the church, schools, and the media to influence females negatively or positively in leading schools. Family, the church, and schools were seen as socialising agents that taught Nozi different ways of doing things, including understanding self-perception. Harro (2000) describes this kind of power as consistent and pervasive, and those that challenge such normative discourses face exclusion and marginalisation. *I grew up where we were forced to go to church. When you do not go to church, you do not get food.*

These cultural norms and practices that portray women as lesser human beings than males, who are seen as superior, become internalised, and have consequences for an individual. Hooks (2000) refers to this as “the enemy within”, a term used to describe internalised sexism. Women like Nozi, who see themselves as inferior or of less value to their male counterparts because of socialisation, have experienced internalised sexism. Research by Amondi (2011) found that women in the study tended to believe internalised stereotypes and perceptions, which explains their self-doubt and failure to even apply for leadership positions. These internalised teachings are seen as barriers to women's progression into leadership.

Nozi indicates an awareness that gender socialisation starts at the family level and disadvantages the girl child and adult woman. Children's social interactions and daily activities, for example, boys going outside the home hunting and looking after cattle while girls remain home to do house chores and cook, are all seen as contexts for learning culture and gender. She observed that boys were socialised into working outside the home while girls remained in the house doing unpaid work. Through such socialisation, Nozi learned and observed behaviours and attitudes that she internalised; for example, she knew her identity as a female because of the sexism she faced, where males were valued more than females (Hooks, 2000).

Nozi grew up where she was forced to go to church. She acknowledges that the church has socialised her as a devoted Christian. This was oppressive. She was forced to accept the rules of attending church every Sunday without challenging them because she was a child. Whenever she failed to conform, she faced the consequences of not having a meal on a Sunday. Nozi was conditioned by her grandparents—people she depended on for her survival—to attend church services every Sunday. She, however, learned virtues such as respect, compassion, and hard work, which she employs in her leadership role. She appreciates her grandparents' upbringing, which she recognises to have shaped her, instilled the value of education, and influenced how she leads. The family she viewed as empowering yet controlling as a child shaped her into a female, mother and Christian leader, and established gender roles and responsibilities (Hooks, 2000). Family is central to an individual's social well-being and shapes later leadership attributes.

Schooling was seen as another level or agent of socialisation for Nozi. Starting school at six, she was aware of her internalised belief that males are of more value than females. This awareness pushed her to work hard and excel at school. Her application of hard work and resilience helped her to perform well and rise to become a teacher and subsequently become a school principal. This finding confirms what Collins (2000) suggests: that change is possible if, for instance, women try to find the cracks and fill them through internal desire and determination. Nozi challenged the gender roles in her community by working hard at school and confronting internalised sexism in the long run (Hooks, 2000). This helped her to build her self-belief and work towards becoming a teacher. She acknowledges that her age privileged her to excel at school. Taking advantage of her age and academic performance, she defied traditional stereotypes and challenged assumptions about females being of less value than their male counterparts.

Despite Nozi's oppressive socialisation in the home, school, and church, she acknowledges the positive teachings that shaped her leadership role. As a child, she learned the values of hard work, respect, and resilience, which shaped her leadership.

5.2.5.2 Patriarchy oppresses and devalues females

Cultural social norms and discourses are founded on patriarchy and influence how females experience their ability to be leaders. Patriarchy is a system of social organisation where men dominate over women, and it is a powerful ideology because men are conditioned to secure the consent of the women they oppress. These social norms and discourses are imposed on young

boys and girls at the family level. This occurs through interaction with family members, the people we love and trust. Through these cultural teachings and norms, Nozi experienced a sense of males being valued more than females. For example, while boys were taught to work outside the home, the girls remained at home, being taught about cooking, caring for children, and being prepared for motherhood. From there, she learned that a woman's place is at home doing chores, bearing children, and not being in a leadership position in a workplace. According to her, culture has taught her that a female can lead in the home by minding the children, tidying up the house, ensuring food is prepared, and the general well-being of the family, but not in the workplace. She understands how the teachings she learned expect a black woman to be in a patriarchal society and that women should be placed in lower positions because they are of low value.

The system of patriarchy is structured at the family level. It disadvantages the girl child and adult woman because it empowers the male child and disempowers the girl child through gender role socialisation. Gender role socialisation, which starts in the family as the foundation, emerges as an influence on both males and females because it reinforces and reproduces a view of reality skewed towards creating power differentials to the detriment of females. As described by Harro (2000), the cyclical nature of socialisation affirms that individuals are born into specific social identities that perpetuate unequal power structures. The family serves as the primary agent for transmitting societal norms, contributing to the perpetuation of gender-based discrimination. From early socialisation, children learn behaviours and attitudes that are internalised and later in life impact women negatively by oppressing them even when in the position of leadership; for instance, Nozi, just like Bongi, was taught that women should stay at home to be wives while men go to work because men are more valuable than females, which disadvantages women from accessing leadership positions. Research by Mollel and Tshabangu (2014) found that most participants concurred that broader cultural perceptions position women as dependents on men and that a woman's career should be subservient to her husband and family.

Connell (2005) observed that gender is socially constructed, divides work in the home and in the workplace, and legitimates those in authority. If the social definitions of masculinity include being a breadwinner and being "strong", then men may be offended by women's professional progress because it makes men feel less valuable and worthy of respect. According to research by Mutangirwa (2016), the early socialisation process that takes place at the family level prepares females for motherhood, and this is continuously reinforced by patriarchal society,

which upholds the value of the male gender in leadership as opposed to females. Wood (2019) points out that one of the worst forms of power over women is the upholding of gender inequality and stereotyping that degrades, devalues, disregards, and hinders women's equal contribution and involvement in the public and private spheres of life. It is also true that traditional gender roles and stereotypes have a powerful influence on the division of gender roles. These divisions are often visible at home, in the workplace and in society. Gender role socialisation leads to gender inequality, which discriminates against women from occupying leadership positions. However, Nozi believes that after becoming a leader, she has gained the power to fight against patriarchal practices by working hard to prove to her community that she is valuable and worthy as a female leader. Research by Lawson et al. (2021) shows that an increase in women's agency is driven by positive aspects portrayed by women's participation in leadership, where women leaders empower younger leaders.

Gender is hierarchical and produces inequalities that intersect to disadvantage the girl child and the adult woman. Gender roles are taught in the family, and the family is structured in a way that positions the father as the head of the family with more power than the mother, who is placed in a subordinate position with less value. The gender hierarchy is believed to promote a top-down leadership approach that is male-dominated and marginalises women. Nozi's leadership is seen as less hierarchical, as she tends to use words like 'we' and 'our' when relating to her interactions with teachers and SMTs. A practice that is more relational, empowering, and collaborative in nature.

Despite the patriarchal norms and practices limiting women's advancement in career trajectories, Nozi applied hard work, respect, compassion, and mentoring to be much stronger as a woman and pursue her career goal of being a teacher and a leader in her rural community school.

5.2.5.3 Enablers in the journey to leadership

In this section, Ngozi's narrative speaks to and mentions people who shaped and directed her career trajectory and influenced her to become a female leader. Many people impacted her life journey; however, she views the following as real mentors:

Grandparents

Her maternal grandparents brought raised, and therefore, they played a mentoring role in her life. These are the first people who socialised her into doing chores as a girl child and later as a woman. Hard work and respect are two key values she learned from her grandparents; for

example, she never got to eat unless she did some manual work. She never had time for play as a child, which, according to her, was oppressive, but she never challenged that because she was a child. Nozi, at some stage, believed that her grandparents were mistreating her. But now, she appreciates such teachings because she applies them in her leadership, encouraging learners and teachers alike to work hard and respect one another. The grandparents provided the social capital that enabled Nozi to climb the ladder of education and subsequently rise to the position of principal. According to the literature, Mayienga's (2013) study reveals that the role of protective family capital contributes to the women leaders' development of self-discipline. This is the support that was given by family members and the upbringing of female principals in their childhood as an encouragement to strive for success. This virtue of family capital enabled Nozi to sail above the constraints of the patriarchal society in which she grew up and shaped her way of leading.

Teachers

Nozi saw teachers as socialising agents in a school setup. Teachers at both primary and secondary levels played a significant role in her journey to becoming a leader. Reinforcing the teachings of hard work instilled by her grandparents, at the school level, her teachers motivated her to strive for excellence. She was granted the privilege of mentoring other students at a young age because she excelled in her classwork. She uses these tactics to empower her teachers to teach different content. For this reason, she encourages teachers to observe each other teaching a particular subject matter which has proved to work well and benefits the learners.

Female principal after college

Nozi's story shows that she worked under a female principal who acted as a role model. Here, Nozi was socialised into a leadership identity. According to her, the female principal was hard working and organised and she knew her work very well. Nozi worked very closely with the female principal and learned a lot from her. She asserts that this female principal was her mentor. The principal organised teaching and learning meticulously. She liked it, and so she applies the same skills to her leadership. She always supported the teachers by organising developmental workshops for them. Although she had multiple roles as a female, she would still go to classes to observe the teachers and give feedback. Nozi found this to be a great idea

because it helps her to know where teachers are having difficulties and thereafter organise developmental workshops.

Nozi's narrative shows the importance of mentors in her journey to becoming a leader. As a woman who was formerly marginalised due to hegemonic leadership norms, she was motivated by her mentors and now employs the same skills to empower other teachers. She has learned to identify her latent abilities and utilise them effectively in her personal and professional lives. Ely et al. (2011) contend that people learn new roles by identifying with role models and experimenting with provisional identities like those Nozi encountered. Furthermore, the authors point out that there is a lack of successful women leaders who can serve as mentors for other women. All these point to women's invisibility as leaders in educational leadership.

Nozi acknowledges the mentoring she received from her grandparents, and teachers, and the female school principal she worked under. Though the mentoring was informal, it shaped her leadership skills, which made leading possible for a female. From Nozi's narration, mentoring and social networking act as valuable social capital for women leaders. This enables women to improve their skills in managing schools and advance in their careers.

5.2.5.4 Facing challenges and learning to lead

Women leaders face social and cultural challenges in accessing leadership positions. Nozi narrates some of the challenges she encountered in her daily work, and as much as the obstacles are oppressive, she views them as lessons to lead. These include:

Lack of knowledge and skills as a barrier to leadership

She acknowledges the lack of knowledge and skills as a challenge to teachers. Nozi started teaching as a temporary teacher after completing matriculating. She alluded to the fact that she lacked the knowledge and skills to lead and exercise her power back then. She also pointed out that age and gender affected her execution of power as a female teacher educating 21-year-old male grade One learners who worked in the mines. She had no training in managing a class or teaching methods; all these were problems for her. However, these did not stop her from pursuing her dream of becoming a teacher. She used the opportunity to plough back into the community for social justice reasons. She learned some skills to be a teacher, which motivated her to pursue the teaching course. The teaching experience after training was described as significant because she acquired new skills and knowledge in teaching. Foucault (1977) illuminates that power and knowledge go together; thus, when one gains knowledge, he or she also gains strength, and where there is power, there is resistance. This is to show that the

knowledge and skills Nozi acquired in college were used as a tool to gain the ability to lead. She then applied some of the skills learned in her teaching, and because of her hard work, it was not long before she was promoted to head of the department. This shows that she had gained the power to lead more effectively. This did not mean well for some of the teachers.

Dean and Perrett (2020) assert that women experience unique and numerous barriers to advancing into leadership positions compared to their male counterparts; therefore, they require ongoing leadership preparation programs to acquire the knowledge and skills and prepare women leaders to negotiate barriers in educational leadership psychologically. The women in the study perceived that they were subject to more excellent judgement by society. The workload between work and family life stressed others. Dean and Perrett (2020) illuminate that formal mentoring is essential to counteract the barriers women face in educational leadership but also suggest that the interaction of mentoring and informal support networks would promote gender equality and social justice in schools.

Rejection by male teachers,

Like Nombuza, Shane, Siwe, and Bongi, Nozi experienced rejection from male teachers, which is vertical oppression (Collins, 2000). Male teachers undermined her authority as a female based on stereotypical attitudes. Not only did she experience rejection as a woman, but also because of her age. She was much younger than the rest of the teachers. She was oppressed on three levels: as a woman, her age, and as a professional (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991). To negotiate through the oppression, Nozi was firm, worked closely with the female school principal, and learned through developmental workshops to advance her career trajectory. Collins (2000) points out that being reflective as a woman is a steppingstone to deconstructing the cultural domain in the matrix and striving for transformation because change is possible.

Disrespect from departmental officials

Government schools in South Africa are under the Department of Basic Education umbrella. Nozi, as the principal, is accountable to the department officials at the district level. She narrates experiencing disrespect from the department officials, who treat male principals with more respect compared to the female principals. This happens when making submissions at the district office. Nozi perceives this as oppressive because of patriarchal norms and practices that view women as incapable of making wise, invaluable decisions and, therefore, not suitable to be in leadership positions. This is because cultural rules and norms that devalue women are structured and founded on patriarchy, are produced, and reproduced, and are difficult to

challenge (Harro, 2000). But all these did not poke her down. Instead, these challenges pushed her even more towards improving herself and becoming the school principal that she is.

Balancing work and family life

The relationship between family and career was seen as a difficult one for Nozi. She acknowledges that being a female leader is complex because there are too many roles besides administrative work that require her attention. Nozi posits that she works long hours and now has no private life. All she thinks about is her schoolwork. “Due to the workload and admin work, I don’t have a private life.” To illustrate, Nozi, as a single mother with grown-up children, spends most of her time on school-related responsibilities because she has no husband and small children to look after. She tends to give her schoolwork undivided attention without the guilt of being a mother and wife. Clearly, Nozi had no familial obligations that constrained her. However, she voices her concern for her loss of social life because of her responsibilities at school. According to the literature, Bodalina and Mestry’s (2022) study reveals that women leaders persistently struggle to balance their work and family lives amidst patriarchal systems and cultural norms. The women experienced gender discrimination and gender role stereotypes on a day-to-day basis. Women in the study allude to time as the most significant constraint on work and family roles as leaders. The participants illuminate that finding a balance between work and family life is hard.

The challenges experienced acted as ways for Nozi to gain power and be able to lead in a patriarchal society. For example, she has become more resilient, and the value of hard work learned from her grandparents helps her in her role as a female leader effectively.

5.2.5.5 Understanding leadership from the experiences of women

Nozi conceptualises her leadership as founded on relationships, thus working as a team. For her, what matters is service and the personal and professional fulfilment that comes with making a difference by caring for learners and providing education to once-marginalised learners in rural schools. From her narration, her main focus is on teaching and learning as the central core business of schools. Therefore, her roles as the principal include managing teaching and learning and monitoring how teachers implement the curriculum through surveillance.

With the understanding that leadership is not about an individual, she works collaboratively with teachers and SMTs in decision-making concerning the well-being of learners. She also

delegates duties to the SMTs to encourage their professional development. Therefore, there is power and information sharing, which allows SMTs to manage teaching and learning actively. This is also a way of empowering teachers and SMTs to practice leadership. These values of empowering teachers and hard work she learned from her grandparents and teachers in school, thus showing the importance of early socialisation. She is now reproducing the same values in her teachers and learners. This shows an intersection of gender, upbringing, and context to influence how Nozi leads (Crenshaw, 1990; Collins, 2000).

In addition, Nozi organises teacher professional development through workshops by herself and outsourcing to empower teachers and keep them abreast of current trends in education. Similarly, the feedback from Nozi to teachers during classroom observations influences teachers' professional development and strengthens acceptance of Nozi's authority as a female leader. Although Nozi's suggestion on class observations seems like a great idea, how feasible is it to observe teachers in rural schools with a large enrolment and with the many roles she plays as a leader?

Her leadership is inclined towards learners' needs and empowering teachers through developmental workshops. For her, this is the main reason why schools exist. She also acknowledges her weaknesses in lacking knowledge and therefore seeks help from many people to capacitate them as teachers. Nozi's leadership is about the learners' welfare and the teachers' development. According to Eagly and Johnson (1990), women often adopt relationship-oriented approaches that are characterised by care and the forging of solid bonds; men often adopt leadership styles that are controlling, direct, and autocratic. Thus, women's leadership styles often include typical transformational leadership behaviours such as supporting subordinates' engagement and participation in decision-making, collaboration, and professional development.

The narrative shows that Nozi's upbringing instilled in her the value of hard work; through her journey to her career trajectory, she learned to be resilient and respectful. These have helped her to work collaboratively with teachers, SMTs, learners, and parents and bring about change in a rural community school.

5.2.6 Khuzi leading Nehema Primary School

I am a married woman. I am the second-born [child] in my family. Growing up, I played hide and seek, I was a girl guide, and I played netball at school. My parents were very

strict, but they brought us up well. Being a girl guide at school taught me how to be disciplined. Our father, as the figurehead, was the strictest one between my parents. Because of these teachings, I am a very disciplined woman.

I started school at the age of seven. I was doing very well at school. I used to get what the teacher was teaching very quickly, and I would help the teacher with other children. You know, our school used to have multi-grade classes. After finishing my matric, my parents could not afford to send me to university or college because of money. But these opportunities that are here right now, like bursaries, were not there in 1990. There were no such opportunities; I was employed with the matric certificate and did teacher training through distance education. There was this lady who taught me while I was doing grade two. Although she is no more, that lady used to tell us as her learners that education is a very powerful weapon. She used to encourage us to work hard and read. She taught me never to be put down by the challenges that might put you down.

I did my diploma in education after completing matric in 2009. I also have got other diplomas in ABET, management and another one that deals with learners with disabilities. I was promoted to be principal in 2012 while I was acting after the former principal got another job.

Leadership experience that I remember even now as a principal is that when you are a leader, you must try to develop those you are working with. That is, either educator, parents, you must develop them so that you work with them closely and you must make friendship with them. You must delegate them, support them when they have some problems because you are going to need that also. That is what I can say, leadership experience is you do what you expect others to do to you as well. Becoming a principal, you must become a good teacher with good morals. You must be one who loves your work; you must know the constitution of education.

You must try to inform yourself about the policies and your education system, so yeah, those are the things that will guide you if you want to become a principal. You must understand issues of ethics and the Department of Education. My relationship with my team, as I call them, is very good. As I told you before, you have to be friendly with them, greet them when they come in the morning. Ask them how they are doing; if you are open

like that, they come to me as a principal and share what they are going through because they know that I can listen and give them some advice as well.

Unfortunately, we are not having many learners in our school. But concerning the welfare of our learners, it starts with the class teacher; when the teacher sees that a learner has a problem, she/he checks on the child, then informs me as the principal, then we try anything to help the child. We also call the parent to come to school so that we can discuss it. Yes, we do take care of the welfare of learners. I also do assist those children. For example, if I see that there is a learner who does not have shoes or stationery, we buy for that child. Being a multi-grade school is challenging. Right now, people are moving from the community to other places, so it means that our enrolment is decreasing. I am having a challenge; for example, when you are teaching five learners and two are absent at school, it breaks my heart. You have to teach only three kids that day. You know, to be in a small multi-grade school is very challenging and very stressful too. You have to entertain those children, come up with games to motivate them.

I am the principal and also the teacher, I am also working as the administrator. I check on the teachers, monitor and check that all is well in the school. I live inside the school compound; I wake up early to open the gate because the security lives outside the compound. All these are challenging to me as the principal with many roles.

About managing to balance between work and social life, I do prioritise my schoolwork, though I have my own children at home. I am a lucky woman because my husband is very supportive and caring. He really loves his children.

Analysis

5.2.6.1 Family as the foundation upon which later leadership develops

In this section, Khuzi narrates her socialisation in the family and school. Khuzi, like the other women in the study, grew up during the apartheid regime in South Africa. Her family was from a low socio-economic background and therefore experienced some kind of struggle; for example, her parents could not afford to send her to university. Khuzi identifies herself first as a woman through her upbringing within the family unit and at school, where she played games with peers associated with being a girl; for example, hide and seek, girl guide, and netball. Her leadership role is secondary to family and therefore not recognised. She was socialised to

behave femininely through the games she played with her peers. Gender role socialisation promotes gender inequality, discrimination, and stereotypes. Thus, Khuzi learned and observed some behaviours from her parents and siblings in the family and from peers during playtime in school. These teachings taught her that she was different because of the roles assigned to her as a female (Crenshaw, 1989). This finding resonates with Harro's (2000) cycle of socialisation, which explains that we are born into a specific set of social identities and that they predispose us to unequal roles in an oppressive system.

However, Khuzi does not mention any negative stereotypes or prejudicial attitudes associated with these teachings that she received from her family; instead, she points out the positive values that were instilled in her through these teachings. She summarises that the teachings have taught her to be a disciplined woman. These teachings are internalised and reproduced. From her perspective, socialisation taught her to be disciplined, a virtue that she applies to her leadership role. Meyers (1987) posits that traditional feminine socialisation instils in girls the gentle purity of femininity and feminine goals. Feminine socialisation is believed to be crucial to women's persistence and subjection.

Through socialisation in the home, Khuzi learned and observed her father as the figurehead with power, who was respected and stricter than her mother. This gender hierarchy explains why her father is superior and has more authority than her mother. Khuzi experienced gender hierarchy in the home and the workplace, for example, where echelons of power are male dominated. She acknowledges schooling as exciting and enjoyable because she quickly grasped what the teacher taught. She internalised the teachings from her teachers and now applies them in her current leadership role. Khuzi attended a multi-grade school during her schooling years and is currently leading a multi-grade school. The term multi-grade teaching (MGT) refers to teaching children of different grade levels simultaneously in the same setting (Joubert, 2010). It appears Khuzi was influenced by her teacher to pursue a career in multi-grade teaching. Her background helps to understand who she is and how she has come on the journey towards leadership, thus her experience (Sinclair, 2011).

5.2.6.2 Education as a powerful weapon leading to leadership

In her journey towards leadership advancement, Khuzi shares her experiences of schooling. She was inspired by her grade two teacher to read and work hard. She went through her primary education, and during this period, she learned from her grade two teacher that education was

powerful. She learned never to allow challenges such as a lack of school fees to deter her from reaching her educational goals or dreams.

Khuzi experienced difficulties in her schooling due to financial constraints, forcing her to change schools. These problems prevented her from taking a degree course; instead, she had to find temporary employment. During this period, she acknowledged a female principal who mentored her regarding the school culture and class management. For her, this was a learning space for leadership. Knowing her lack of knowledge and skills, Khuzi was motivated by her inner self to enrol in teacher training through distance learning. This led her to acquire a professional teacher certificate. For Khuzi, pursuing teaching as a career was sparked by her experiences of multi-grade education in her primary school years and learning from her female principal in her initial teaching position. In addition to her professional certificate, Khuzi completed many other courses; for example, she earned a diploma in Adult Basic Education Training (ABET), management, and another one that deals with learners with disabilities.

Through professional development, Khuzi acquired knowledge and skills that help the teaching methods that she applies in her practice. She believes the qualifications also helped to improve her confidence, which promotes effective leadership. She expressed the importance of possessing a teaching qualification to become a principal. Bourdieu (1977) identified qualifications or educational credentials as a source of cultural capital that grants privilege to one who possesses them. This is to say that she had gained the power to lead, which privileged her, leading to her promotion. Khuzi was promoted to the principalship position in her school after acting when the principal left for greener pastures. However, she did not express how the staff members or community received her; instead, she highlighted the expectations of becoming a principal.

In conclusion, Khuzi acknowledges the transformative potential of education as it enabled her to acquire skills and knowledge and move up the ladder from a classroom teacher to a school principal.

5.2.6.3 Leading a multi-grade school is more challenging than a monograde school

Khuzi narrates the challenges she encounters as a leader managing a multi-grade school. She alludes to the fact that enrolment at her school is very low because many families are moving away, which affects the enrolment. It is possible that community members recognise the little academic capital evident in multi-grade schools and thus move away, leading to a decrease in enrolment. Dladla (2020) concurs that parents acknowledge that multi-grade schools do not

offer quality education and send learners to mono-grade schools with more learning opportunities. The consequence of this decision is a decrease in enrolment at Khuzi's school, affecting her ability to lead effectively. This indicates her inability to challenge the practice where communities move their children to mono-grade schools that offer quality education.

One major challenge is that learners have to walk long distances to school. Secondly, there are fewer schools, and families are sparsely populated in the area, which makes her school isolated from other neighbouring schools. Such isolation contributes to fewer teachers working in multi-grade schools. *"Being a multi-grade school is challenging. Right now, people are moving from the community to other places, so it means that our enrolment is decreasing"*.

She also points out that the responsibilities of a principal in a multi-grade school are more challenging than those of a principal leading a mono-grade school. Khuzi states her roles as a female leader in a multi-grade school as follows: she is the principal, the teacher, the administrator, and sometimes she acts as the security guard. Additionally, she must motivate learners with games, as there are no facilities for sports like those offered in mono-grade schools. She highlights that, as the leader of a multi-grade school, she multi-tasks without any support in terms of training. The environment of a multi-grade school is not conducive because of the workload. Looking at the roles Khuzi plays, she is overloaded with work and works for long hours, negatively impacting how she leads. According to the literature, Taole (2022) found that school principals experience workload issues and lack professional leadership development in multigrade contexts. However, Khuzi is committed to teaching learners, and she feels terrible whenever a learner miss school because, for instance, when there are five learners in a class and two of them miss school, there will be just three learners on that day. Teaching and learning are the core reasons why she is in school. Khuzi communicates this message to the teachers she calls her team, meaning they work and collaborate.

5.2.6.4 Good relationships leading to effective leadership

Khuzi leads a small multi-grade school in a rural community. As with any other formal school, Khuzi is responsible and accountable for all activities in the lifeworld of the school. Being a small multi-grade school of only thirty-five learners and four teachers, Khuzi maintains good relationships with all the teachers and learners. For example, she refers to the teachers as her team. This is to show collaboration among the teachers. Her openness to teachers and learners allows seamless communication with her subordinates and stakeholders. The teachers' willingness to confide in her and seek advice indicates trust in her authority and leadership.

A healthy working relationship is about teaching and learning and the welfare of the teachers and learners. Checking on them frequently gives the teachers motivation and trust that their leader genuinely cares about them. Khuzi embodies these traits as a leader since she is caring and employs an open-door policy so that teachers, learners, and parents are free to share their concerns. She shares power with her teachers to ensure teaching and learning, which are the core activities of the school, continue smoothly. There was no mention of workshops or strategies on how she develops her teachers from the conversations.

It is evident from the narrative that teachers are the managers in the classroom and deal with cases there, but if the issue is beyond their jurisdiction, then it is reported to the principal. This demonstrates the shared power between the principal and the teachers. This is one way of empowering the subordinates and ensuring they are accountable for their duties. In so doing, the teachers are socialised to become the leaders of tomorrow.

5.2.6.5 Balancing work and family

During our conversation, Khuzi mentioned that she is married with five children. She shows her multiple identities as a woman, mother, wife, and professional leader of a multi-grade school. Her school is situated far from her home area, and therefore she stays on the school premises and only visits her family occasionally.

She prioritises her leadership role over that of the family. She states that she is lucky because her husband is very supportive and caring. This gives her the peace of mind to concentrate on her work, knowing that the family is safe under the leadership of her husband. She, however, does not say how it feels to be away from her children for long periods of time and how this impacts her work. It suggests that Khuzi is playing safe about cultural practices, so she is cautious not to mention anything negative about culture. Throughout our conversation, she was careful in her narration. In conclusion, Khuzi's story confirms Sinclair's (2011) argument that one's beliefs and practices shape and influence how to approach power and a lack of it.

5.3 Summary

The findings of this study from the six narratives were summarised according to the key research questions: What are the female principals' day-to-day experiences of leading in rural schools? How do the female principals negotiate their leadership experiences? And what is the nature of female principals' experiences of leadership?

In response to the first research question, the findings generally revealed that women leaders experience multi-layered factors as barriers and privileges to career advancement and participation in leadership. A critical theme that emerges is that early learning is essential for leadership. Some of the themes that emerged from the narratives include gender role socialisation, cultural norms and practices, gender discrimination, bias, gender hierarchy, struggle, rejection, resilience, motherhood, social capital, cultural capital, and positive values including hard work, respect, and compassion. Such attitudes and behaviours are taught to children in the family, internalised, produced, and reproduced in schools, churches, and the workplace. The said teachings are experienced at the personal, organisational, and social-cultural levels. They intersect with other power categories such as gender, class, age, ethnicity, and geographical location to disadvantage or privilege women in leading rural schools.

The findings that respond to the second research question generally show that women leaders as individuals employed different ways of negotiating their leadership experiences depending on the situation and how an individual is positioned in the social group. The findings reveal that women leaders applied the positive values learned from early childhood in family setup, schools, and church as agents of socialisation. Such attributes included hard work, respect, resilience, compassion and motherhood, which women leaders used as mechanisms for negotiating leadership experiences. Secondly, women leaders used the concept of surveillance to monitor and ensure effective teaching and learning in schools, as well as to self-regulate themselves as leaders responsible for the management of schools. Thirdly, women leaders applied personal agency for self-development by acquiring knowledge and skills, through professional development as cultural capital to effectively lead schools. Some women attended support groups like female principals' support programs and networks. All these are ways women leaders used to gain power to lead in rural schools.

In response to the third research question, the findings indicate that women leaders in rural schools employ responsive leadership approaches that respond to the needs of learners who live in rural areas to bring about change. They do this by providing education to formally marginalised learners in rural communities through developmental workshops to empower teachers and SGBs, providing food parcels to vulnerable learners, creating a conducive teaching, and learning environment, being listeners and caring to learners, teachers, and parents, and providing a mothering role to learners, among others. The findings also show women leaders working collaboratively with SMTs, SGBs displaying a transformational, mothering, and strategic leadership style.

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings based on the data presented in the previous chapter; the findings are organised around the research questions and interpreted using the extant empirical literature and theory underpinning the study. The study sought to address the following question:

What are the experiences of female principals as leaders of rural schools? To answer the main question, a series of sub-questions were formulated:

1. What are the female principals' experiences of leading in rural schools?
2. How do the female principals negotiate their leadership experiences?
3. What is the nature of female principals' experiences of leadership?

The findings discuss the experiences of female principals in leading rural schools, how they negotiate these experiences, and the nature of leadership the women leaders employ. The study is anchored on intersectionality theory (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991) to understand women's experiences leading in rural schools.

Table 2 below summarises themes and sub-themes from the narratives of six women leaders' experiences leading in rural schools.

Table 2:*Summary of the findings*

Research question	Theme	Sub-theme
RQ 1. What are the female principals' day-to-day experiences of leading in rural schools?	1. Early childhood learning is essential for leadership.	Family, gender role Socialisation and stereotypes Gender discrimination, biases, prejudices Gender hierarchy, cultural norms, and practices Rejection
RQ2. How do the female principals negotiate the leadership experiences?	2. Gaining the power to lead in rural communities	Attributes of hard work, respect, motherhood, compassionate, and resilience infantilisation Female principals support programs Use personal agency to gain the power to lead.
RQ3. What is the nature of female principals' experiences of leadership?	3. Women leader's ways of leading	Responsive leadership Transformational leadership Servant leadership Mothering leadership

Collins and Bilge (2016) argue that for one to understand the events and conditions of the social, political, and self, many factors come into play. Mainly, people's lives and the organisation of power are not only better understood by a single axis, but many other axes of social division of gender, class, ethnicity, and geographical location all operate not as exclusion entities, but they do build on each other and work together (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991). The broad question addressed by this study was what the female principals' day-to-day experiences of leading in rural schools are. Therefore, an intersectional lens was employed to understand the experiences of privileged and disadvantaged women leaders in educational

leadership. The study argues that women face multi-layered forms of oppression, intertwining gender, class, age, religion, ethnicity, culture, and profession.

Although these intersections often disadvantage women, for some, they metamorphose into assets that propel them towards leadership roles. Intersectionality can account for various interactions of gender, race, age, ethnicity, and geographical location within the context of oppressive and dominant influences. This approach analyses the complex contexts in which women leaders grow and mature and in which they lead schools. Intersectionality theory suggests that leaders must understand their self-concept to define who they are and where they are going.

6.2 Early childhood learning is essential for leadership

The findings in response to the first critical question regarding women leaders' experiences of leading schools indicate that women leaders experience oppression (Nombuza, Shane, and Khuzi) or privilege (Bongi, Siwe, Nozi) depending on their positioning in the social group. The emerging themes include family, upbringing, culture, gender role socialisation, gender discrimination, bias, gender hierarchy, struggle, rejection, resilience, motherhood, and positive values, including hard work, respect, and compassion. These findings concurred with discoveries from various scholars that women in leadership positions encounter an intersection of multi-layered experiences (Bodalina & Mestry, 2022; Harro, 2000; Shakeshaft et al., 2014; Sinclair, 2011; Moroosi, 2020).

6.2.1 Family, gender socialisation, and stereotypes

The significance of the family as the foundation for early socialisation emerges as the first theme from the study's data. The family structure shapes individuals' self-concept and interactions with family members and the external environment. This early socialisation lays the groundwork for understanding behaviour and navigating different societal contexts. The narratives of the six women participating in the study shed light on their self-identity as women and leaders, offering insights into their developmental journeys and leadership perspectives.

According to Collins (2000), it becomes evident that family represents the interpersonal domain that moulds everyday life. It is the nexus where individuals acquire a sense of identity and values. These women leaders share everyday experiences rooted in their family upbringing, significantly influencing their self-perception and leadership attitudes. This echoes Collins' assertion that family shapes individuals' lives.

Transitioning to the literature, the study's findings contribute unique insights to the global discourse on women's leadership, particularly within South African rural areas. The women leaders' upbringing during the apartheid era and the prevalence of poverty within their families are distinctive factors that influenced their career trajectories. Notably, the study highlights the pervasive impact of gender role socialisation that initiates in the family setting. This process contributes to power imbalances and reinforces detrimental stereotypes, particularly disadvantaging females.

As described by Harro (2000), the cyclical nature of socialisation affirms that individuals are born into specific social identities that perpetuate unequal power structures. The family serves as the primary agent for transmitting societal norms, contributing to the perpetuation of gender-based discrimination. Harro's cycle of socialisation aligns with the study's findings that both male and female children are exposed to gender-specific roles early on, shaping their beliefs about leadership roles.

The concept of power dynamics extends to adulthood, as exemplified by the study's participants, who experienced gender discrimination and stereotypes throughout their leadership journeys. These biases, rooted in childhood teachings and reinforced through societal institutions, hinder the progression of female leaders. The work of Sinclair (2011) underscores the importance of examining personal beliefs and assumptions regarding authority and leadership. In this context, women leaders' ability to trace their leadership attributes back to their childhood experiences highlights the profound influence of early socialisation.

The replication of gender practices from home to the workplace underscores the persistence of gender biases despite legislative efforts for equality. The notion that leadership is inherently linked to masculinity, as revealed by Coleman (2007), continues to shape perceptions of women leaders. Alam's (2022) exploration of gender disparities in STEM fields further emphasises the impact of preconceptions and work-life balance preferences on women's career choices. These attitudinal barriers are intricately tied to the societal constructs instilled during childhood.

The data also exposes the hierarchical structure established through gender role socialisation, where women are conditioned to perceive leadership as a male domain. This structural determinant perpetuates a restricted view of women's leadership potential. Eagly et al.'s (1995) research on leadership effectiveness aligns with these findings, revealing how gender stereotypes influence perceptions of leadership capability. This perspective underscores the

need for more nuanced approaches, as Blackmore (2008) suggested, to comprehend the multifaceted nature of women's leadership.

The data reveals women experience under-representation in educational leadership based on cultural stereotypes. For instance, parents are influenced to believe that a female leader cannot protect their children (Nombuza). Such stereotypes undermine women's authority and sometimes reduce a woman's confidence. This confirms Bodalina and Mestry's (2022) concern that cultural stereotypes view women as socially incapable of being leaders, which is a barrier for a female to access leadership in a male-dominated space. In most organisations, men are dominant figures who enjoy numerous privileges, while women are subservient and considered ineffective leaders. In contrast, Chance (2021) shows black women as resilient leaders who navigate cultural adversities, including traditional stereotypes. Collins (2021) continues to advocate for women to constantly resist traditional stereotypes, not only for survival but to build resilience in a male-dominated space of leadership.

Finally, the data indicates that family is the bedrock for early socialisation, significantly influencing women's leadership trajectories. The study's findings support existing literature (Johnson & Fourillier, 2022), highlighting the intricate interplay between childhood experiences, societal norms, and leadership development. This analysis, which incorporates intersectionality and acknowledges the complexities of individual contexts, demonstrates that a deeper understanding of women's leadership in rural settings can be achieved, as Sinclair (2011) advocates.

6.2.2 High expectations

In the context of women occupying leadership positions, an intricate interplay emerges between societal expectations and their inherent challenges. The women leaders under scrutiny in this study navigate a paradox where heightened community and societal expectations exert a counteractive influence. A profound recognition of gender's pivotal role in shaping perceptions and anticipations surfaces as a recurrent theme among these women leaders in rural educational settings. These expectations, emanating from teachers, community members, and broader society, cast a distinct spotlight on these women's roles.

Central to these expectations is the assumption that women leaders are naturally endowed with heightened empathy and understanding compared to their male counterparts. This expectation finds its roots in the dual role these women leaders often undertake—that of educators and

mothers. To illustrate, these leaders are anticipated to comprehend the rationale behind teachers' absenteeism, thus reinforcing their obligation to a holistic comprehension of pedagogical and familial dynamics. Paradoxically, leniency towards absenteeism within the school context may precipitate a detrimental impact on the quality of teaching and learning, consequently compromising overall student achievement. These intricate dynamics are illuminated in the work of Espinoza (2023), whose exploration of gendered and racialised expectations in leadership within the United States emphasises the salient significance of motherhood's connection to leadership, particularly in the context of women's leadership styles juxtaposed with those of their male counterparts.

The multifaceted role of women leaders emerges further as they are entrusted with the nurturing and care of learners and educators within the rural school environment. This perception aligns seamlessly with existing literature, as exemplified by Morojele et al. (2013), who assert that societal expectations stipulate women as caregivers, whereas men are framed as leaders. This observation underscores how traditional norms, specifically patriarchal constructs, persist within our societal framework (Hooks, 2000). The familial structure serves as a blueprint for leadership attributes, wherein the male is traditionally positioned as the family's head, thus emblematic of qualities such as effective decision-making, assertiveness, and strategic acumen. These traits have conventionally been intertwined with notions of solid leadership and masculinity.

Considering these dynamics, Crenshaw's intersectionality theory (1991) becomes particularly salient. By highlighting the limitations of binary gender categorisations and emphasising the intricate interaction between various dimensions of social identity, intersectionality exposes the nuanced inequalities within leadership contexts. This perspective offers a richer understanding of the traditional patriarchal norms that influence women's trajectories in education, career development, and leadership roles. This is exemplified by instances where women face layered forms of oppression, intertwining gender, class, age, religion, ethnicity, and profession. Although these intersections often result in disadvantages, for some, they metamorphose into assets that propel them towards leadership roles, empowering them to contribute to rural educational advancement.

The concept of breaking the glass ceiling through women's ascent to leadership positions takes on a complex hue. Contrary to a smooth integration within the school community and the surrounding society, the women leaders in this study grapple with the necessity of proving their

competence through tireless endeavours. Their journey towards acceptance is one of relentless dedication and perseverance, often necessitating threefold exertion to attain recognition. This echoes Collins' assertion (2000) that women within male-dominated environments are compelled not only to survive but to challenge and transcend oppression, embodying resilience, and intentionality in their roles as female leaders.

Even with the legal frameworks promoting gender equality, deep-seated stereotypes persist, obstructing women's professional growth. Faulkner's study (2015) corroborates these findings, illustrating how cultural traditions and patriarchy continue to cast a shadow over women's execution of leadership roles. Shattering these stereotypes requires active resistance on the part of women, as outlined by Collins (2000). A formidable barrier lies in the cultural expectations perpetuating the belief that women are ill-suited for leadership due to their perceived emotional and sensitive disposition. This deeply ingrained bias impacts women's self-esteem and serves as a deterrent to accessing leadership positions. Nonetheless, Collins (2021) contends that women's agency in resisting these stereotypes ensures their survival and nurtures resilience within male-dominated leadership.

The intricate nexus of expectations, gendered dynamics, and cultural norms emerges as a quintessential facet in the journey of women leaders in educational settings. The intersectionality theory shines a light on the multifaceted nature of inequalities. At the same time, the persistent struggle against stereotypes underscores the resilience and determination exhibited by these women in carving their path within the realm of leadership.

6.2.3 Balancing work life and social life

In the realm of women school leaders, the intricate balancing act between work and social life has been explored across various studies. Notable literature contributions from Moorosi (2010) and Ndebele and Shava (2019) underpin the complexity of female principals' performance, often hindered by the weight of domestic responsibilities accentuated by cultural norms. These cultural expectations, unaccompanied by corresponding support mechanisms, have historically proven to be a significant hurdle. However, in contrast to prevailing studies, the present investigation offers a distinctive perspective: Most women leaders surveyed did not perceive this work-life balance as a formidable challenge. It is essential to highlight that within the cohort of six participants, only a solitary respondent acknowledged that the spatial separation imposed by her professional responsibilities strained her relationship with her children. In this case, the woman leader carried the weight of guilt, emblematic of neglecting her familial

obligations due to work-related demands, often necessitating extended periods away from home.

Surprisingly, the findings from this study underpin the influence of social capital (Bourdieu, 2018), as it emerged as a critical factor enabling women leaders to navigate their roles successfully. This perspective challenges the prevalent narrative drawn from works such as Bodalina and Mestry (2022) and Moorosi (2007), which had previously illuminated the absence of spousal support driven by patriarchal cultural norms. The contextual conclusion drawn is that the age profile of the women participants, predominantly in their late 50s, and the status of their children as adults contribute to an environment conducive for them to manage their professional and familial responsibilities with more agility. Furthermore, the educational attainment of their male partners emerges as a discernible factor, potentially influencing the robust support these women leaders experience in their pursuit of leadership roles.

6.3 Multi-layered barriers and intersectionality

Historically, research has often implicated personal, organisational, and structural/socio-cultural factors as barriers obstructing women's progress in leadership roles. The prevailing view, hitherto, attributed the primary hindrance to personal factors. However, this current study presents a more nuanced perspective, revealing an intricate interplay of personal, organisational, socio-cultural, and multi-dimensional power dynamics, including class, gender, age, ethnicity, and geographical context. These dimensions collectively impede women's advancement within careers and leadership positions. It is here that gender stereotypes, discrimination, prejudice, and exclusion manifest, all originating from deep-seated patriarchal norms and practices (Hardiman & Jackson, 1997). The intricacies of these barriers mirror Collins' (2000) conceptualisation, asserting that societal culture and ideology are intertwined across structural, organisational, and interpersonal domains.

6.3.1 Structural inequities and persistent struggles

Structural factors inherent to the educational landscape further compound women's struggles in career advancement. The study's focal point, rural schools predominantly categorised as quintile two or three, sheds light on the prevalence of poverty and unemployment within these regions. Christie (2020) amplifies this narrative, emphasising the lingering presence of apartheid's socio-economic disparities, particularly evident in the persistent inequalities along racial and gender lines. Despite South Africa's strides towards democracy, the pervasive echoes

of historical injustice reverberate. This is most conspicuous in the rural-urban divide, wherein rural schools remain disadvantaged.

6.3.2 Interlocking challenges: Interpersonal, organisational, and structural

Intriguingly, the barriers women leaders face exhibit interlocking facets across interpersonal, organisational, and structural levels. This perspective echoes Collins' (2000) assertion that social institutions, organisational practices, and everyday interactions are interconnected, collectively shaping gender dynamics within society. This interplay of domains underscores the intricate nature of gender-based challenges in leadership.

6.3.3 Organisational dynamics: Induction and resistance

Within the organisational sphere, the study supports the pivotal role of schools in propagating gender stereotypes. While these stereotypes may originate early in life, they mature within organisational contexts through recruitment practices, interviews, promotions, and cultural norms. Women leaders, consequently, find themselves not only confronting these biases on a personal level but also at an organisational level. This backdrop reinforces the imperative for leadership and management training before assuming such roles. Bush and Oduro (2006) indicate that effective induction is vital for leadership efficacy. The lack of adequate training and preparation is evident within the study, with women often being promoted based on teaching experience rather than leadership aptitude.

6.3.4 Challenges in the promotion and acceptance of female principals

The promotion trajectory for women leaders also comes under scrutiny. Moving from Head of Department (HoD) to principalship, a transition often without the intermediary role of deputy principal, poses significant challenges. This mirrors the observations of Moorosi (2010), highlighting the problematic nature of accessing principalship roles, particularly for women. This lack of exposure and preparation is an ongoing concern, as Bush and Oduro (2006) noted that formal training for school principals is scarce. These organisational dynamics perpetuate gender disparities in leadership.

6.3.5 Navigating resistance: Rejection and opposition

Unquestionably, the experiences of women leaders often intersect with resistance, particularly from male colleagues. Rejection of female authority upon appointment to principal positions is an overarching theme. Amondi's (2011) research concurs, emphasising the weight of

organisational factors such as long working hours, which disproportionately affect women with multifaceted roles as mothers, wives, and professionals. Discrimination and scepticism against women in leadership roles persist, often requiring women to prove their capabilities in stark contrast to their male counterparts. Eagly and Carli (2003) capture these experiences, revealing gender biases and prejudices woven into daily organisational behaviours.

6.3.6 Internal struggles and collaboration: Gatekeepers of patriarchy

Moreover, it is noteworthy that women leaders face challenges beyond those of their male colleagues. The study underscores the presence of negative attitudes and behaviours from male and female colleagues, indicative of horizontal oppression. The collusion of female teachers in subjugating fellow women leaders underlines a complex phenomenon often referred to as "gatekeepers of patriarchy." This internal challenge echoes findings from Mahabeer et al. (2018), unveiling the complexity of power dynamics embedded within these educational spaces.

In conclusion, this study redefines the discourse on women's experiences in leadership roles. It challenges conventional narratives by showcasing the intricate interplay of multiple dimensions, from personal to structural, and encompassing a spectrum of challenges, be they stereotypes, resistance, or structural inequalities. This research serves as a call to action, urging organisational introspection, policy reform, and the cultivation of supportive environments that propel women leaders toward success.

6.3.7 Infantilisation: Female principals treated as children

Within gender discrimination and its multifaceted implications for women in leadership roles, an alarming revelation emerges: infantilisation. The data from this study unequivocally indicates that female school principals are subjected to abuse characterised by treating competent adults as children (Epstein et al., 2023). This distressing trend manifests when a female principal's authority is demeaned, reducing her to the status of a child, even in her capacity as a leader. One stark example is when a male parent enters the principal's office and rebukes her, echoing the disciplining of a child. This reduction of authority undermines her decision-making prowess and perpetuates a perception of powerlessness. This alarming finding resonates with Epstein et al.'s (2023) exploration of 15 types of infantilisation, where emotional abuse emerges as a predominant factor. Of significance is the realisation that such degrading treatment is prevalent among marginalised groups, particularly women, signalling the

persistence of discriminatory practices even as these women wield professional authority as school principals. This study thus unveils an underexplored dimension of gender bias, underscoring the need for further inquiry into the dynamics of infantilisation within educational leadership.

6.3.8 Emotional turmoil: A compelling challenge

Leadership, particularly within the educational context, is fraught with emotional demands from interactions with learners, teachers, parents, and the broader community. Schools, as dynamic ecosystems, foster complex relationships across multiple layers. The findings underpin a consistent narrative of emotional upheaval faced by women leaders. This emotional turmoil finds its roots in the very nature of leadership responsibilities. The personal testimonies of participants reflect instances where female principals, in pursuit of their roles, encounter emotionally charged scenarios. In an illustrative case, a parent's outburst reduces a principal's authoritative standing to that of children. Moreover, certain women leaders express the burden of needing to forego wearing heels due to the practical demands of their role. Participants like Nombuza and Nozi accentuate the broader sentiment that assuming leadership roles presents a considerable challenge. These emotional challenges resonate with Zembylas' (2003) assertion that teacher emotions are intricately woven into cultural, social, and political relations. Emotional experiences are diverse, from amazement to sorrow, forged through interactions with students, colleagues, and parents. Significantly, these emotions shape educators' internal state and resonate with the broader cultural, societal, and political landscape. Kelchtermans (2005) encapsulates this vulnerability by highlighting the structural conditions underpinning the teaching profession, which precipitate emotional experiences.

6.3.9 Socio-economic struggles and identity formation

The interplay of socio-economic factors and identity formation emerges as a pivotal lens through which to examine the experiences of women leaders. The early upbringing of women leaders significantly impacts their perception of leadership. The varying family backgrounds—from middle-class families fostering easy access to quality education to those marked by financial struggles—shape the lenses through which these leaders perceive their current roles. Exploring socio-economic dynamics is crucial, encompassing women leaders, teachers, and learners' challenges. The stark socio-economic disparities found in rural contexts, as indicated by Chikoko (2017), Du Plessis (2014), and Moletsane (2012), influence how women leaders navigate their roles. This context is portrayed vividly through the lens of the study's

participants, highlighting the arduous journeys learners undertake to access education and the struggles parents encounter due to their limited educational background. The collective experiences of women leaders from such backgrounds galvanise them to initiate workshops, promoting teacher development and parental involvement to combat these challenges.

6.3.10 Identity and cultural norms

At the micro level, the intersection of internal and external factors shapes women leaders' experiences, a concept aptly captured by Collins (2000). Identity construction is grounded in early gender socialisation, facilitated by family, school, and religious settings. These settings forge gender norms and roles, often solidifying expectations of female submission and confinement to traditional roles. Children absorb behaviours and attitudes within these formative environments, subtly internalising them for future life. The idea that a woman's place is in the kitchen is an outcome of this socialisation, perpetuating cultural regulations that instill compliance. This internalised gender role stereotype corrodes women's confidence, echoing Shah's (2023) study, where low self-esteem inhibits women's advancement in leadership. Furthermore, the study reveals that, despite securing leadership positions, women leaders continue to grapple with traditional stereotypes, working thrice as hard to prove themselves. This relentless effort reflects Collins' (2000) call for women to overcome perceptions of weakness in male-dominated environments. The complexity of this interplay between internal and external factors requires an intersectional framework to grasp the depth of oppression (Collins, 2000).

6.3.11 Multi-layered challenges and their interplay

The study's findings crystallise a narrative of multi-layered, interconnected barriers women leaders face across interpersonal, organisational, and structural dimensions. This intricate web of challenges reflects Collins' (2000) assertion that cultural, structural, and interpersonal domains are intertwined, collectively shaping gender dynamics. Indeed, these domains are not isolated silos; they interact and converge, influencing women leaders' experiences at every turn.

In conclusion, this section underpins the multi-faceted challenges women leaders encounter within the educational sphere. The revelation of infantilisation as a form of abuse aimed at reducing women to children within leadership roles is disconcerting. Emotional upheaval, socio-economic disparities, and identity complexities further compound the struggle. Understanding these challenges through an intersectional lens is imperative, as these domains

are not isolated but intrinsically interconnected. This calls for comprehensive reforms, from organisational policies to societal norms, to create a more equitable landscape for women in educational leadership.

6.4 Mechanisms of negotiating leadership experiences: Empowering leadership in rural contexts

Negotiation often operates subtly in the intricate tapestry of daily workplace interactions, driving the quest for shared goals and mutual support. This phenomenon is especially pronounced in educational institutions, where negotiation pervades routine work, from seeking assistance to accomplishing tasks.

6.4.1 Unveiling negotiation strategies in leadership

In addressing the second research question, the study delved into the intricate world of negotiation strategies women leaders employ to navigate their leadership experiences. The narratives provided a window into how women leaders negotiate as they interact with stakeholders—teachers, learners, parents, and the community. This negotiation is not solely self-serving; it encompasses individual and collective interests, employing agency to counteract oppression.

6.4.2 Harnessing women's agency

Collins (2000) underscores that the matrix of domination is fundamentally responsive to human agency, viewing the world as a dynamic arena where ownership and accountability are paramount. In the study's context, women leaders adeptly harnessed agency, drawing upon values imbibed during their formative years. This reservoir of virtues encompassing respect, diligence, compassion, and nurturing underpins their leadership endeavours. The narratives illustrate how these attributes intricately inform leadership practices. For example, Shane encountered daunting resistance from male teachers that impugned her skills and confidence. She pursued further education through her agency, gaining skills and knowledge that empowered her to endure and transcend such challenges. This echoes Foucault's (1977) insight that power is intertwined with accepted forms of knowledge that influence education and learning management. Drawing from her upbringing, characterised by diligence, Shane acquired the prowess to manage people effectively, further honing her leadership acumen.

Nombuza, too, exemplifies this agency-driven resistance. She dismantled patriarchal beliefs that constrained her leadership potential, epitomising resilience by pursuing education and becoming a beacon of change. Her role as an agent of transformation extended to inspiring young girls, urging them to embrace education and aspire for leadership roles. Collins (2000) aptly observes that victimisation can galvanise action, and Nombuza's journey personifies this sentiment.

6.4.3 African women as reflective leaders

D'Cruz et al. (2007) define reflexivity as responding to one's immediate context and making informed choices. This introspective practice aligns with the findings, depicting women leaders as reflective agents. Armed with the wisdom to acknowledge their limitations, they pursued professional development to fortify their leadership prowess. An exemplar of this reflective approach is Shane's endeavour to identify pedagogical shortcomings and proactively address them through workshops, enhancing teaching quality.

Intriguingly, African women's historical affinity for reflexivity permeates this narrative. Throughout history, they have employed introspection to grapple with societal inequities, a theme reminiscent of Collins (1989). Their transformation into mothers, educators, and community leaders has relied on reflexivity, perpetuating education within their communities.

6.4.4 Empowerment through female principals' leadership programs

The female principal participants' academic credentials span from a professional diploma in teaching to a master's degree in education. Based on the demographic profile detailed in Chapter Four, the six participating women exhibit diverse qualifications: two possess a diploma in teaching, two hold a master's degree in education, and the remaining two are pursuing a master's degree in education. Interestingly, at the time of their appointment to the principalship position, only a teaching qualification was required, reflecting the absence of a formal entry qualification for such positions at the time—a phenomenon not unique to South Africa (Bush & Oduro, 2006).

6.4.5 On-the-job training and workshops

Most women participants reported undergoing training by the Department of Education (DoE) while actively leading. These training sessions, typically in the form of workshops, equipped the women leaders with vital skills such as managing labour relations and school

administration. Moorosi (2014) examined a similar program in South Africa, identifying key themes such as personal attribute development, the interaction of gender, race, background, context, and the influences of mentoring and networking.

6.4.6 Female principals leadership support program

A few women leaders attended the *Female Principals Leadership Support Program* (FPLSP). This program provided a forum for sharing experiences of leading rural schools, and participants realised that, as women leaders, they often lacked self-confidence, management skills, and technological expertise. The program was an essential step for women's empowerment, as recounted by one participant (Shane) who gained essential management skills through the program.

Shakeshaft et al. (2014) contend that women's support programs should serve as growth vehicles at the early and advanced stages of leadership careers. This aligns with findings from a study by Debebe (2011) on a women-only training program (WOTP) in the United States to enhance female principals' leadership skills. Key findings emphasised identity, leadership development, and a supportive all-female environment at every stage of transformational learning (Debebe, 2011).

The recognition of an all-female environment as a critical factor in cultivating a sense of belonging is emphasised by Debebe (2011). Women in such an environment often feel a connection, an acceptance of shared experiences and feelings, fostering collaboration, support, and learning from a majority standpoint.

Debebe's (2011) findings are pertinent to the current study as they underscore women's experiences with gender discrimination and stereotypes. In an all-female program, women are more likely to discuss these issues without fear of victimisation. Similar assertions by Ibarra et al. (2013) and Ely et al. (2011) highlight the benefits of women-only leadership programs. These safe spaces enable women leaders to identify common challenges, share experiences, take risks, and be vulnerable without fear of misunderstanding or judgment. Such networks enhance resilience against stereotypical workplace challenges and foster effective leadership.

To conclude the section, the intricate mechanisms women leaders employ to negotiate their leadership experiences are revealed through agency, reflection, and strategic programs. In these narratives, negotiation is an intrinsic aspect of leadership, propelled by values, resilience, and introspection. Women leaders act as change agents, challenging conventional norms and

promoting community education. They continually enhance their leadership skills through reflective practices, addressing pedagogical deficiencies through proactive measures. The relevance of women's leadership programs, like FPLSP, cannot be overstated. These initiatives cultivate resilient leaders, fortified by shared experiences and gender-sensitive learning environments. In the end, the fusion of agency, reflection, and strategic programs paints a dynamic portrait of how women leaders gain power and assert influence in the context of rural educational leadership.

6.5 Women's ways of leading in rural schools

In exploring women's leadership in rural schools, this study investigates the distinctive qualities and characteristics that women exhibit. These stem from their sex-role socialisation and real-life experiences, often different from their male counterparts (Eagly & Johnson, 1990). The current research reveals specific ways that women demonstrate leadership, including responsive leadership, collaborative leadership, mothering leadership, servant leadership, and transformational leadership styles. The following sections elaborate on these styles and connect them to relevant literature and theoretical frameworks.

The women leaders in this study, drawn from public schools in rural communities in KwaZulu-Natal Province, demonstrated a keen understanding of the culture, language, and socio-economic status of the communities from which learners hail. Their professional power was channelled to respond to the learners' needs by providing education. One participant, Nombuza, emphasised her valued role as a principal by ensuring that teachers are current with planning, teaching, and learning and by displaying compassion and caring for needy learners. The women leaders reported regular surveillance to ensure smooth running in the schools, and some were particularly passionate about gender equity and served as role models for girl children.

6.5.1 Responsive leadership

According to Johnson and Fuller (2014), culturally responsive school leadership involves inclusive practices for ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds. The concept, first developed by Geneva Gay (2000), posits that culture encompasses a group of people's customs, language, values, beliefs, and achievements. In this context, Lopez (2015) asserts that culturally responsive leadership fosters equity, diversity, and social justice in alignment with intersectionality theory (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991). Such practices do not happen spontaneously but through self-reflection and commitment (Khalifa, 2020).

The women leaders in this study, familiar with their rural community's context, exemplified culturally responsive leadership. Their practices included planning, monitoring teaching, and learning, and organising workshops to enhance education in rural schools.

6.5.1.1 Equity audits and social justice

Khalifa (2020) recommends equity audits to combat oppression in schools. This includes working with staff members to assist learners with socio-economic challenges at home and promoting culturally responsive practices (Gay, 2000).

These strategies often overlap with leadership for social justice approaches (Theoharis, 2008), a goal of intersectionality theory (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991). Recognising the inadequacy of traditional Western-based leadership theories for minority learners in rural schools, Khalifa et al. (2016) argue for professional development to build culturally responsive practices.

6.5.1.2 Connection to international research

The findings of this study align with international research such as that of De Lourdes Viloria (2017) in the USA, which demonstrates the effectiveness of culturally responsive leadership. Similarly, Byrd (2016) supports applying culturally relevant teaching practices focusing on high student expectations and critical consciousness.

As revealed in this study, the women leaders in rural schools display unique leadership traits, both different and similar, with a common goal to educate and bring about change. Their commitment to serving learners who were once marginalised despite challenges resonates with key concepts in culturally responsive school leadership like critical self-reflection, agency and action, support, and sustenance. Focusing on gender equity, responsiveness to learners' needs, and alignment with international research adds to the broader understanding of women's ways of leading in rural educational environments. Their actions are a testament to their dedication, showcasing diverse leadership traits central to culturally responsive leadership and social justice work in rural schools.

6.5.1.3 Critical self-reflection

To cultivate leadership rooted in cultural responsiveness, a profound self-examination is paramount. Such awareness is not simply a self-centred exercise. However, it extends to understanding others, enabling the creation of spaces that foster change in relationships involving key stakeholders like teachers, learners, and parents.

Women leaders in the study under discussion actively reflect on their cultural beliefs, values, and practices, which have been ingrained since early childhood. They consider factors such as the learners' backgrounds in low socioeconomic groups, language differences, and varying sexual orientations. Such self-reflection leads to a deeper understanding of learners and informs changes in teaching practice. For instance, Shane revealed that their school reflects on teaching practices and arranges workshops to improve areas like mathematics teaching (Lopez, 2016).

Critical self-reflection's primary objective in culturally responsive school leadership is to create an equitable environment where all stakeholders feel a sense of belonging and connection to their school (Lopez, 2016; Khalifa, 2020). This involves identifying vulnerable children in schools and supporting them with necessary provisions, such as food parcels.

According to intersectionality theory, understanding the interplay of personal, cultural, and structural elements is essential, which includes considering the historical and socio-economic contexts of rural communities (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991). Through their role as change agents, women leaders promote justice and dignity in rural schools, addressing the needs of previously marginalised groups.

6.5.1.4 Agency and action

Women leaders play a significant role in instigating change in rural schools. As exhibited in this study, their self-awareness contributes to developing their knowledge and skills, ultimately aiding them in ascending the leadership ladder. The importance of agency is emphasised by Lopez (2015) and Collins (2019), who underscore the need for self-awareness before action and the importance of collective effort.

Historical perspectives reveal that many women have gained strength through group consciousness and activism. Resilience, cultural capital, and leadership power in rural schools where learners were once marginalised are learned and developed by women leaders, aligning with ideas presented by Collins (1990) and Bourdieu (2018).

As Hopwood (2017) posits, agency arises from the interaction between an individual and practice, influencing development conditions. Examples from the study, such as Shane's self-awareness leading to assertiveness, illustrate how women utilise their agency to counter oppression and gain influence in male-dominated spaces.

6.5.1.5 Support and sustenance

Entering leadership roles in schools requires support to comprehend the environment and the multifaceted responsibilities of leadership. The findings from this study reveal that women like Shane, Nozi, Siwe, and Bongi received support through schooling, professional development, and continuous training.

Shakeshaft et al. (2014) and Lopez (2013) concur that support remains crucial for women transitioning into leadership positions, especially when engaging in culturally responsive practices. Understanding the organisation's culture is fundamental, and mentorship, professional networks, and robust support systems are vital for aspiring principals (Bush & Oduro, 2006; Kruse & Krumm, 2016).

This support cultivates resilience and promotes student achievement, creating safe spaces for relationships and transformation, in line with what Collins (2021) and Dean and Perrett (2020) refer to. The continuous nurturing and training in these aspects contribute to sustainable development within rural schools, fulfilling the goal of equity and success for all involved.

6.5.2 Servant leadership

Servant leadership, defined by Greenleaf (1977) as a managerial technique and a way of life, resonates with women participants in this study who shared their upbringing in rural areas of the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. Many of these women experienced hardship in accessing education due to poverty and socio-cultural practices. After completing their education, they chose to teach in rural schools to serve their communities.

Despite their many challenges in their journey to leadership, these women were determined to serve learners and teachers in their communities. The women work collaboratively with teachers and senior management teams (SMTs) to ensure effective teaching and learning occur. They provide food parcels to vulnerable learners, showing compassion and care in their pastoral roles. Participants such as Shane, Nombuza, and Khuzi exemplified this servant leadership.

Greenleaf (2004) proposed that becoming a servant leader is a conscious choice arising from the natural desire to serve rather than to lead. This leadership style emphasises the moral and ethical dimensions and resonates with the women's narratives in the current study. Despite struggles in a male-dominated space, they remained hopeful, resilient, and self-aware, which helped them rise to greatness as women leaders in rural schools.

6.5.3 Mothering leadership style

Most of the women leaders participating in the current study shared their experiences growing up, revealing lessons learned from their mothers that have significantly shaped how they lead schools today. Several participants explicitly linked their leadership styles to maternal influence, including Nombuza, Shane, Siwe, Bongzi, Nozi, and Khuzi. The values learned from their mothers that were frequently mentioned include hard work, respect, compassion, caring and nurturing, organisation, and visionary thinking. These values are now actively applied in their current leadership roles. For example, Bongzi articulates her sense of responsibility, acting as a motherly figure and voice of reason to her stakeholders—teachers, learners, and parents—who approach her for assistance. Similarly, Nombuza sees herself as an empowering role model to the girl children in her school, inspiring them to work diligently and aspire to become leaders like her.

These findings resonate with the study conducted by Chege (2022), who explored Kenyan women's lived experiences to comprehend how maternal influence shapes leadership. Chege's research reveals that Kenyan mothers create supportive spaces during upbringing where daughters observe and imbibe qualities like discipline, faith, independence, love, resilience, and leadership by example. The researcher described these aspects as a maternal influence, which was also seen to be demonstrated in the current study, affirming the insights shared by the women regarding lessons learned from their mothers that now shape their leadership behaviours.

Parallel research by Moodly (2022) underlines that women often adopt a motherly, caring, nurturing leadership style, distinctively different from men's approaches. Interestingly, Moodly's study also examined men's advocacy for women in leadership, investigating whether men understand women's lived experiences and challenges within institutional cultures. Six male leaders in higher education in South Africa were interviewed. The findings revealed an apparent understanding by male leaders of the challenges experienced by women but a lack of full appreciation of more profound levels of patriarchy and institutional culture's impact on women's lived experiences. A participant in the study indicated that in times of strife and volatility, women's mothering leadership attributes could be precious, as men were perceived as uncaring by male students. This observation further supports the advantage of the mothering, caring, nurturing style of leadership attributed to women (Moodly, 2022).

6.5.4 Transformational leadership

The findings of this study reveal that many of the women leaders exhibit a transformational leadership style. This is evident in their commitment to promoting participation from all stakeholders—teachers, learners, parents, senior management teams, and school governing body members—in the education process.

Their efforts include organising workshops for teachers, focusing on areas of need such as mathematics teaching. These findings align with research by Eagly et al. (2003), which highlights that female leaders prefer transformational leadership over transactional styles. The women leaders in the current study believe in empowering others, particularly in rural schools, aligning with the principles of social justice (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2000).

6.6 Chapter summary

The chapter has presented the study's findings, focusing on various themes, such as the importance of early learning in leadership. Gender role socialisation, gender discrimination, stereotypical attitudes, gender hierarchy, and cultural norms and practices were also revealed as significant factors. These attitudes stem from patriarchal cultural practices and norms deeply ingrained in communities.

The findings indicate that personal, organisational, and structural barriers intersecting with other power dynamics such as gender, class, age, ethnicity, and geographical location shape and influence how women lead. Women leaders in rural schools also encounter resistance from male teachers who refuse to support women leaders and female teachers who act as patriarchy's gatekeepers.

The chapter further shows that women leaders often lack prior training or mentoring for leadership positions. However, they utilise attributes learned during childhood, such as hard work and compassion, to enhance their leadership practice. By organising workshops, providing support, and working collectively, they seek to improve education and bring about change. Mechanisms used for negotiation include agency, reflection and strategic programs. This contributes to responsive leadership that meets the needs of rural students and fosters change.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the study's findings using extended literature and the theory underpinning this study. Very clear conclusions emerged regarding the critical questions formulated in the introductory chapter. This chapter takes a step further by presenting a summary of the study's processes undertaken to answer the critical question. Firstly, I discuss the nature of female principals' experiences, the importance of intersectionality, the critical paradigm underpinning the study, the methodology, and personal reflections. Thereafter, I present the key findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the study organised around the research questions. This study examined six female principals' leadership experiences of leading in rural schools in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. The study addressed the following questions:

1. What are the female principals' experiences of leading in rural schools?
2. How do the female principals negotiate their leadership experiences?
3. What is the nature of female principals' experiences of leadership?

7.2 Summary of the findings

This section provides a summary of the study in response to the research questions stated above.

7.2.1 Female principals' experiences of leading in rural schools

In response to the first research question, the findings generally revealed that women leaders experience multi-layered factors as barriers and privileges to career advancement and participation in leadership. A critical theme that emerges is that early learning is essential for leadership. Some of the teachings experienced by women leaders included gender role socialisation, culture, gender discrimination, bias, gender hierarchy, struggle, rejection, resilience, motherhood, the importance of acquiring social capital and cultural capital to negotiate barriers, and having positive values, including hard work, respect, and compassion.

The findings reveal the interplay of the socio-economic environment in which the women grew up. The early upbringing of women in this study significantly impacted their perception of

leadership. For some, Nombuza, Shane and Khuzi experienced financial struggle, whereas Bongani, Siwe and Nozi brought up in middle-class families, experienced advantage. The socio-economic disparities found in rural communities and schools continue to exist, as indicated by Chikoko (2017), Du Plessis (2014) and Moletsane (2012), shape and influence how women leaders navigate their leadership roles. Numerous intersectional themes such as class, gender, age, culture, ethnicity, and geographical location assisted me in analysing their stories that highlight the importance of early childhood learning and how it shapes women's ways of leading in patriarchal, oppressive, and male-dominated spaces as the context within which women leaders work.

The findings reveal power dynamics from early childhood in families, which later mature within organisational contexts through recruitment practices, interviews, promotions, and cultural norms. Rejection of female authority upon their appointment to principalship is an overarching theme. Amondi's (2011) study concurs, highlighting long working hours as an organisational challenge for women. Therefore, women have to work harder to improve their worth as leaders. Eagly and Carli (2003) contend that gender bias and prejudices are woven into daily organisational behaviour. Women's leadership attributes are traced back to their childhood experiences in the family through gender role socialisation, for example, being respectful, keeping the home clean, and relationships with family members, especially mothers. Such practices were replicated in the workplace, thus shaping, and influencing how women enact leadership.

7.2.2 How female principals negotiate their leadership experiences

The findings that respond to the second research question generally show that women leaders as individuals employed different ways of negotiating their leadership experiences depending on the situation and how an individual is positioned in the social group. The findings reveal that women leaders applied the positive values learned from early childhood in the family setup, schools, and church as agents of socialisation. Such attributes included hard work, respect, resilience, and motherhood, which women leaders used to negotiate leadership experiences. Secondly, women leaders used the concept of surveillance to monitor and ensure effective teaching and learning in schools and self-regulate themselves as leaders. Thirdly, women leaders applied personal agency for self-development by acquiring knowledge and skills through professional development as cultural capital. Some women used their self-reflexivity as power to organise workshops to develop skills and knowledge for both teachers

and the school governing body members. All these are ways women leaders use to gain power to lead in rural schools. The women in the study employed personal agency and resistance in the face of discrimination and rejection in the workplace, not only for survival but also to build resilience as leaders in a male-dominated leadership space (Collins, 2021). Despite the challenges encountered (personal, organisational, or structural), the women participants were privileged as professionals and opted to respond to the needs of learners in rural communities by providing education. The values learned from their early socialisation at the family level, such as hard work, respect, and compassion, helped the women leaders in their later leadership roles. This was a way of gaining power to lead in rural community schools.

7.2.3 The nature of female principals' experiences of leadership

In response to the third research question, the findings indicate that women leaders in rural schools employ responsive leadership approaches that respond to the needs of rural students and bring about change. They do this by providing education to marginalised learners in rural communities that experience socio-economic factors through developmental workshops to empower teachers and SGBs, providing food parcels to vulnerable learners, creating a conducive teaching, and learning environment, being listeners and caring to learners, teachers, and parents, and providing a mothering role to learners, among others. The findings also show women leaders working collaboratively with SMTs, displaying transformational leadership, mothering leadership, and strategic leadership styles.

7.3 Reflections on the study

Women experience challenges as school leaders. Studies have shown that women's under-representation in educational leadership is based on gender when evaluating women compared to white males (Coleman, 2005; Shakeshaft et al., 2014). These studies show that women face gender stereotypes, discrimination, and prejudice in the workplace. Women who experience challenges in educational leadership are not located within separate spheres of gender, race, and social class (Crenshaw, 1989). Instead, these independent spheres converge and form an interlocking system that shapes the interpersonal, organisational, and structural aspects of qualitative experiences that are not captured within the mainstream leadership discourse. This intricate web of challenges reflects Collins' (2000) assertion that cultural, structural, and interpersonal domains are intertwined, collectively shaping gender dynamics. The domains interact and converge, shaping and influencing women leaders' experiences at every turn.

The study shows the intersection of gender, early learning, culture, and geographical location and how these experiences shape and influence leadership. This is because early leadership experiences provide an understanding of why women developed ways of approaching power and authority, or a lack thereof (Sinclair, 2011). Some of the women in the study show leadership from their early childhood. The study shows that the nature of leadership is linked to multiple factors, situations, and events; thus, leadership is personal and complex. The study demonstrates the intricacy of leadership and that rural women must overcome and surpass the challenges through resilience that not only occurred in their early lives but that continue in school, where men will not support women leaders. Some of the women in the study shared how some female teachers as colleagues collude with other teachers to undermine their fellow women leaders. This underlies a complex phenomenon often referred to as “gatekeepers of patriarchy”. The findings show that issues of gender role socialisation, stereotyping, and discrimination against women still exist.

An intersectional lens underpinned this study. The theoretical concepts allowed a deeper understanding of the marginality of women in educational leadership based on historical, social, and cultural subordination in society. The study focused on women’s experiences at various intersections of gender, class, age, ethnicity, religion, and geographical location. The theory served several purposes, most notably as a catalyst for change, addressing equity in the workplace, and promoting social justice (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991). In this way, women’s leadership qualities are honoured, and space is provided for their voices to be heard in educational leadership discourse. The choice of intersectionality was necessary for this study because different women experienced leadership differently depending on an individual’s positioning in the group (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991). Some women (Bongi, Siwe, and Nozi) were advantaged and able to access learning, while others experienced difficulties (Nombuza, Shane, and Khuzi).

An intersectional lens was crucial, as it enabled me to see features of leadership that are not apparent in other theoretically lensed studies (Coleman, 2005; Shakeshaft et al., 2014). Such studies used generalisations based on Western leadership models, which are male-dominant, thus marginalising women’s experiences. A few studies have examined females’ leadership experiences in South Africa (Msila, 2022; Makgoka, 2021; Khumalo, 2020). However, this current study does not only look at leadership within the school as later studies, but also how biography, early learning, and school experiences shape and influence leadership. Some

women (Bongi, Siwe, and Nozi) were advantaged and able to access learning, while others experienced difficulties (Nombuza, Shane, and Khuzi).

The critical paradigm underpinned the study. One of the key benefits of using the critical paradigm is that it allowed me to have an acute awareness of gender inequality in educational leadership, but more especially of how women can control their lives and make changes to their leadership practices that are both pragmatic and responsive (Cohen et al., 2011). This way of viewing the world is about the negotiation of power for the fulfilment of social justice for the learners most vulnerable in the education system. Through this lens, women in this current study questioned the taken-for-granted knowledge, for example, why their authority was questioned despite the women having acquired the required qualifications to be in leadership positions. Women had to prove their worth by working three times harder (Shane, Bongi). The unique stories of six women leaders provide multi-layered ways of how African black female principals were brought up, matured, and led in the context of South African public rural schools.

A qualitative approach was applied with a narrative inquiry design. A narrative interview is a relevant and powerful tool to help understand, conceptualise, and theorise information on the everyday behaviour of individuals, mostly whose voices have been regularly neglected and muted (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). The study shows that each individual woman had a unique narrative and experiences that had been muted by cultural practices, for example, the perception that women should not hold leadership positions but remain in the home as caretakers, as well as being neglected in educational discourse literature. Equally important, focus group interviews encouraged candid conversations and participation (Cohen et al., 2011), thus providing women leaders an opportunity to share their challenges and strategies for what works in a rural community school. The use of photographs captured the lived experiences of women participating in the study and provided insight and a more profound understanding of their leadership experiences (Wang, 1999). Different from quantitative studies, here participants' responses and perspectives were important and provided insight into how context forces actions (Rahman, 2016). The results in quantitative research are generalised; for instance, see Coleman (2005) and Shakeshaft (2014). Using qualitative approaches values the situatedness of context and the lived experience of participants. The women participants were purposefully selected from six public primary schools in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. Three methods of data gathering were employed. Semi-structured interviews, focus group

discussions, and photographs were used to gather in-depth information from the women leaders.

The data was produced using an interview guide and subjected to a narrative thematic analysis. I adopted Clarke and Braun's (2013) six stages of thematic analysis. The approach has been used in previous studies, for instance, Moorosi (2020). In this study, I started by listening to the recordings, then transcribing the interviews. The narratives were transcribed verbatim from the voice recordings of the interviews. Each recording was transcribed under the same set of questions guided by the research questions so that similarities and differences would be apparent. A copy of the transcripts was sent to the women participating in the study to verify their stories. The research questions were used to organise raw data into themes that emerged from participants narratives of their life stories. I read and re-read the transcripts to familiarise and make meaning of the data. The data was analysed both inductively and deductively. Constant comparative analysis of data allowed for the establishment of emerging themes.

The study's trustworthiness was determined by applying a narrative design, which was appropriate as it validated the personal lived experiences of female leaders in schools. Reflexivity was employed throughout the research process to maintain a subjective awareness of my privilege, intentions, identity, and power as a researcher. I am an insider in this research, based on my positionality as black woman, a mother and a professional. This provided a unique opportunity for candid conversations with women leaders on the role of gender in educational leadership. Though I am an outsider based on my ethnicity, I was very transparent about my role in the research process (Fonow & Cook, 2005) and contacted participants prior to the interviews to get to know one another. Research ethics was compiled based on the University of KwaZulu-Natal research ethics policy and protocol. In addition, permission was obtained from the Department of Education and the individual schools participating in the study.

7.3.1 Lessons learned

The lessons are drawn from the experiences of the female principals interviewed in this study. Reflecting on the stories of women in this study, firstly, I am aware that women experience multiple challenges through early learning, schooling, the workplace, and time demands that require one to be prepared to take on extra responsibilities and longer working hours. Some of the early learning can be assets to shaping and influencing the way we lead schools.

As a woman, there is a need to be more comfortable in the role of a leader than adopting stereotypically male behaviour. Secondly, in this study, the participants were quite adamant about adhering to their sense of self, which shows a sense of agency. Ultimately, remaining steadfast about who they were facilitated their leadership actions. This allowed them to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses and work on their weak areas; for instance, Shane, Nozi, and Khuzi enrolled in courses that enhanced leadership skills. Nguyen (2019) suggests that professional development programs expand teachers' knowledge and skills, contribute to their growth, and enhance their effectiveness with learners. Thus, there is a need for continuous professional development to keep abreast of current trends in educational leadership. For example, in this study, Shane shows how professional development enhanced her skills in management and her relationship with teachers and learners, which, in the long run, promoted learner achievement.

Thirdly, a female leader must develop and maintain a solid support system, such as the female principals support program for rural schools that some of the participants attended. Through such a system, women leaders can share their experiences of what works in rural schools. These support programs for female principals proved to be useful. The program could address managing people and navigating cultural norms and practices in a male-dominated environment (Debebe, 2011).

Women in this study have successfully accessed and maintained leadership positions against multiple odds. Some of the challenges faced in early learning and in the workplace—gender role, socialisation, discrimination, stereotypes, prejudices, infantilisation and rejection—became assets that shaped and influenced their leadership styles.

Instead of focusing on the negatives of why women do not aspire to be in leadership positions, more qualitative, in-depth case studies that celebrate the professional accomplishments and experiences in leading rural schools are needed to learn about what works in the South African context.

Fourthly, the findings from this study shows that women school principals are subjected to abuse whereby parents treat competent adults as children (Epstein et al., 2023). This is believed to reduce and undermine women leaders' ability to make decisions, thus perpetuating a perception of powerlessness. This is despite the power wielded by women as professional leaders. There is scarce literature on infantilisation; therefore, this study exposes an

underexplored dimension of gender bias underpinning the need for further inquiry into the dynamics of infantilisation within educational leadership.

7.4 Limitations of the study

Limitations are specific characteristics of the methodology that might influence how a research study may be conducted or the reporting of the findings. Price and Murnan (2004) defined limitations as “the systematic bias that the researcher did not or could not control and which could inappropriately affect the results” (p.66). The persistent tendency to make mistakes by either exaggerating or belittling the actual value of the research qualities has been a concern in any qualitative research undertaking (Cohen et al., 2011) by either participant in the narration process or by the researcher in the re-narration process. Therefore, I quoted participants data to keep their unique stories real. The limitation of a small sample size of only six female school principals for my study is acknowledged. This study is based on qualitative approaches to research; therefore, the results cannot be generalised; however, the intention of the research was not to generalise the results but rather to get in-depth information on women’s leadership experiences in rural schools. The results can be applied to similar contexts (Cohen et al., 2018). The other anticipated problem was my being an ‘outsider’ as a researcher. However, before the interviews, I spent some time with participants via video call to get to know each other and create rapport before the interview. This helped to build trust because participants were willing to tell me their sometimes-painful stories of leading in a rural context.

Another limitation beyond the researcher’s control was the outbreak of COVID-19, also known as the Coronavirus. COVID-19 emerged in Wuhan, China, and was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation on the 11 March 2020 (Sohrabi et al., 2020). COVID-19 is a disease caused by SARS-COV-2, a new type of coronavirus. According to the WHO, COVID-19 affects the upper respiratory tract and spreads mainly through person-to-person contact. Infections are deadly, as shown by the high numbers of infections and deaths recorded globally (Sohrabi et al., 2020).

These developments led to the President of South Africa implementing a five-week national lockdown on 26 March 2020, to halt the spread of the virus. Due to the severity of the pandemic, the lockdown was extended, causing schools to remain closed. This severely disrupted my research project progress because I could not collect the data scheduled to commence in March 2020. Secondly, I had to change some of the instruments for data collection. The initial plan was to use observations, documents, and transect walks, but these

changed to individual interviews, focused group semi-structured interviews, and photographs via Zoom video conferencing. Thirdly, the pandemic brought much fear, leading one of my participants (Mavundla) to withdraw from participating in the research. However, despite her dropping out of the research, this did not influence the quality and trustworthiness of the study because this was about collective narrative stories from participants. The narratives continued to yield rich, in-depth, and critically relevant data.

Another limitation was getting the people for the focus group at the same time. As school leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic, they were overwhelmed with work; therefore, getting all of them at once proved difficult, which caused delays in completing the data collection process.

7.5 Recommendations

This section presents the recommendations emanating from the findings of the study. The recommendations are aligned with the main research questions of the study.

The following recommendations have been proposed:

7.5.1 Prioritising educational leadership and management policy and structural review

Educational leadership and management practices and structures for school principals continue to perpetuate dominant, patriarchal leadership discourses. Therefore, it is recommended that the South African Department of Basic Education collaborate with educational leadership and management faculties in higher education institutions to prioritise reviewing literature that informs primary education's educational leadership and management policies and structures. Firstly, policies should emphasise the importance of early childhood learning as the basis upon which later career development evolves. Secondly, this should include culturally responsive leadership for rural schools to promote social justice. This should be done first, by promoting a language of instruction that is inclusive. Second, culturally responsive leaders should ensure that every voice is heard and incorporate cultural values and norms in teaching and learning to promote diversity. This research serves as a call to action, urging organisational introspection, policy reform, and the cultivation of supportive environments that propel women leaders towards success.

7.5.2 Establishing Working Relationships and Promoting Social Justice Through Formal Orientation

The study found that women leaders face resistance mainly due to gender bias. Some women posted to rural community schools had to spend considerable time negotiating their way with teachers and the general populace to gain acceptance. There is no formal orientation or induction for women leaders when they assume their roles as principals of rural schools. The study, therefore, recommends that district officials, through the Department of Education, organise joint orientation/induction sessions for newly appointed school principals, particularly women and rural community leaders, to establish a working relationship that can be nurtured to benefit the school and one that promotes social justice.

7.5.3 Promoting mentorship through gendered support programs

There is a need for regular gendered in-service training for female principals, such as the female principals support programs (FPSP) for rural schools, to sustain and improve their leadership skills. Such in-service training would empower women leaders to remain resilient as leaders of rural schools. The gendered programs could address managing people and navigating cultural norms and practices in a male-dominated space (Debebe, 2011). It is recommended that successful women leaders, such as those who participated in this study, be allowed to share their experiences of leading in rural schools, how they navigated cultural barriers, and be encouraged to become mentors to other teachers, incredibly upcoming young leaders.

7.5.4 Empowering women leaders as resource persons in policy making

As leaders, women must empower themselves by learning more about each other, sharing experiences, unlearning stereotypes, challenging the status quo, and questioning societal assumptions, norms, values, roles, and structures. Women leaders could become resource persons on policy-making platforms to share information on how women as leaders respond to the needs of learners and how they gain the power to lead in rural schools.

7.5.5 Including gender-sensitive training in professional leadership programs

Professional leadership programs should include gender-sensitive training for males and females to promote non-discriminatory working relationships based on social justice and respect for diversity in work and management styles.

7.6 Contribution of the study

This study contributes to existing research by looking specifically into women's experiences as a social group whose informal ways of learning leadership are yet to make it to the

mainstream literature. Practically, better understanding of women's experiences in leading rural school is brought to the fore. From a policy perspective, the study's findings reduce the gap on the lack of women in educational leadership particularly leading rural schools. The rural setting provides the significance of cultural factors including the role of values and upbringing that shaped and influenced women's leadership. The cultural factors also show the reality of issues faced by both teachers and learners in rural schools. The study provides empirical evidence by female principals as a social group once marginalised from the discourse and situated in rural geographical location as leaders. Understanding how women negotiate the complexities of leading in rural schools is an addition to leadership development especially for rural schools.

The successes and positive leadership experiences by women leaders illuminated a collective practice of leading through rural community involvement in rural schools. Data show that women as mothers in schools consciously chose to become involved with rural communities by providing education to learners in rural schools.

Theoretically, the findings answered the first question which sought to understand women's leadership experiences in rural schools. As per this approach, women experienced interlocking facets of interpersonal, organisational, and structural challenges (Collins, 2000), collectively shaping gender dynamics in the workplace. Women in the study dealt with challenges associated with the intersection of gender, age, ethnicity, and geographical location. An intersectional lens through the concepts of resistance and agency, provided ways of negotiating the challenges women faced which in turn gave women power to lead effectively in rural schools. Using intersectionality and its concepts of resistance, agency, and resilience (Collins, 2000), the study shows that the nature of leadership is linked to multiple factors, situations, and events; thus, leadership is personal and complex. The challenges women leaders face exhibit interlocking facets across interpersonal, organisational, and structural levels. This interplay of domains underscores the intricate nature of gender-based challenges in educational leadership. Due to the complexity of leadership, rural women must overcome and surpass the challenges through resilience that not only occurred in their early lives but continue in school, where men will not support women leaders. Numerous intersectional themes assisted me in analysing their stories that highlight the importance of early childhood learning and how it shapes women's ways of leading in patriarchal, oppressive, and male-dominated spaces as the context within which women leaders work.

Methodologically, stories provide a way of understanding women's knowledge as subjects sharing their leadership experiences. This can only be brought out through narratives. The study provides a better understanding of women's lived experiences of leading in rural contexts in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. Women's stories provide in-depth information about how each woman faced different challenges depending on their position in the social group (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989). The women in this study show resilience and determination to provide education to marginalised learners in rural schools against all odds.

7.7 Conclusion

This study provides insights into the intersections of culture and gendered experiences of women leaders in rural schools. Relationships, systems, power dynamics, and socio-economic environments fundamentally shape women's leadership. The larger macro-structure of government and policy has failed to protect and support women in their work settings in rural schools. The chapter presented a summary of the processes undertaken to answer the critical question of this study. In this chapter, the reflections on female principals' leadership experiences were discussed, along with the importance of intersectionality theory, the critical paradigm, the qualitative approach, and the narrative as a methodological design to produce stories of lived experiences. Key findings and lessons learned were presented with recommendations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview guide

Interview guide for women school principals

My name is Dorah Mutula; I am an education researcher from the university of Kwa-Zulu Natal. I am doing a research study which seeks to explore female principals' leadership experiences in schools.

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To understand female principals' experiences of their day-to-day leading of schools
2. To understand how the female principals, negotiate power differentials with their teachers, parents, students, SMTs, SGBs and local leaders
3. To understand the nature of female principals' experiences of leadership

With your permission, I would like to have 1 hour of your time to ask you about your experience as a leader. There will be two interviews, an individual interview, and a focus group. Each interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed. Matters arising out of this first interview will be used for the follow-up interview in the focus group. At the end of this interview, I will ask you to complete a short questionnaire to gather biographic information about you. This information will be filed and used when data is being analysed. Once again thank you for accepting to share your story of leadership experience with me.

Semi-Structured interview 1

Please tell me about yourself

Childhood

1. Can you tell me about your family of birth, siblings, parents, and grandparents?
2. What was your growing up days like? What kind of activities did you engage in? was work or chores divided among the siblings?

3. What do you remember most about your parents or other family members during your childhood years?
4. What feelings come up when you remember your parents or grandparents?
5. How would you describe the social class of your family in comparison to your neighbours or other community members?

Schooling

1. At what age did you start attending school?
2. Did your other siblings attend school too?
3. What was your primary school life like?
4. How about your high school?
5. What do you remember most about your college life?
6. Who financed your education? How affordable was the school fees?
7. Do you remember any challenges you faced that might have prevented your schooling?
8. Who and what influenced and shaped your schooling life most?

Career life

1. What were some of your early experiences as a teacher?
2. What was your experience of leadership when you were a teacher?
3. Were any of the principals you taught under female? If so, please tell me about her leadership. How did the female leader relate with staff?
4. Did you notice any difference between the leadership approach of males and females (if they experienced both)?
5. You are now a school principal. Tell me the pathway to your becoming a principal. How was it like moving up the ladder?

Experience as school principal

1. What has been your experience as a school principal?
2. What are some of the highlights of being a female principal?
3. How would you describe a day in your school as a principal? What you do when you arrive at school? In your office? Morning session? Afternoon until close of the day?
4. What are the issues that you deal with?
5. Please tell me all your leadership roles
6. What is your relationship with teachers? Can you say why this is so?
7. What is your relationship with parents? Can you say why this is so?

8. What is your relationship with your management team-(HoDs, Deputy principal, SMTs) -Can you say why this is so?
9. How are decisions concerning learners welfare taken in your school? Decisions about teaching and learning? Discipline issues?
10. What are students responses to your status as a principal-can you say why this so?
11. What are some of the successes that you can link to your role as principal of the school?
12. What is your relationship with district managers, education department officials?
13. Do you ever feel as though your authority is being undermined? By whom? About what?
14. Can you tell me a bit about the community in which your school is located? Do you have their support? Tell a bit about this
15. What are some of the challenges you experience?
16. COVID-19 has been really tough for all of us. Tell me about how you have experienced being the principal during this pandemic. What are some of the things that you have to think of?
17. What are some of the challenges that you have gone through during the pandemic? What is happening at school-Tell me about the teachers and how they are handling this? Are they supportive of you during this time? What about your learners?
18. How do you feel about the closure of schools during the pandemic?
19. Do you feel anxious as the principal? Why?/Why not? What do you do when you feel anxious?
20. How do you manage to balance between work and private/social life?
21. Are you seeing more women leaders in South Africa now than when you began your leadership?
22. What changes do you think are necessary for more women to become school leaders?

Thank you for your time.

Appendix B: Focus group/analyses of photographs on leadership

1. What is it like being a woman principal? Do you think culture influence how you lead as a woman?
2. Can you describe a day in your office as a principal?
3. What are some of the issues that give you sleepless night? Do you think this is related to being a woman leader?
4. What strategies do you employ in solving the challenges?
5. At official functions and meetings with the department officials, do you think that women leaders are treated differently? Around which issues? How do you feel about this?
6. Do department officials listen to women leaders? Give some examples
7. What kind of support do you get from male teachers?
8. What kind of support do you get from female teachers?
9. What kind of support do you get from the parents?
10. What kind of support do you get from SMTs, Local leaders?

Questions on photographs that relate to leadership in schools.

1. Why do you want to share the selected photographs?
2. What story does the selected photographs tell?
3. How does this story relate to your leadership?
4. From the photographs selected from all the participating schools, what is common in relation to your leadership?
5. What do you think should be done to increase the number of women leaders in schools?

Appendix C: Questionnaire for biographic information of female principals

Name_____

Date_____

Kindly complete the following information about yourself. Mark with an X

1. Age group: 20-30 31—40 41----50 51---60 Over 60
2. Marital status: Single Married Divorced Widowed
3. Highest qualification: Certificate Diploma Honours degree master's PhD

Please fill in the spaces below:

4. when did you become a teacher? _____
5. How many schools have you taught in so far? _____
6. After how many years of your teaching did you become a school principal?

7. Number of years as a principal: _____
8. Name of school: _____
9. Type of School_____Rural/urban/township
- 10.Type of Quintile: _____1,2,3,4,5
11. Number of Educators: _____male_____female
12. Number of learners: _____
13. Number of SGBs: _____
14. Composition of SMTS: _____
15. Number of Local traditional leaders: _____

Thank you

Appendix D: Ethical clearance



01 November 2019

Mrs Dorah Lyaka Mutula (213569411)
School of Education
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Mrs Mutula,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00000644/2019

Project title: Female principals leadership experiences in rural schools in KwaZulu-Natal

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 03 September 2019 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. **PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

This approval is valid for one year from 01 November 2019.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Urmilla Bob
University Dean of Research

/ms

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
Dr Rosemary Sibanda (Chair)
UKZN Research Ethics Office Westville Campus, Gwen Mbeki Building
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4001
Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/>

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Appendix E: Permission to conduct research in the KZN DoE institutions



education

Department:
Education
PROVINCE OF KWAZULU-NATAL

Enquiries: Phindile Duma

Tel: 033 392 1063

Ref.:2/4/8/1873

Mrs DL Mutula
77 Onibi Road
Pietermaritzburg
3201

Dear Mrs Mutula


PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"FEMALE PRINCIPALS' LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES IN RURAL SCHOOLS IN KWAZULU-NATAL"**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education Institutions has been approved.

The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from 24 July 2019 to 10 January 2022.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Miss Phindile Duma at the contact numbers below.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.

uMgungundlovu District


Dr. EV Nzama
Head of Department: Education
Date: 25 July 2019

KWAZULU-NATAL DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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Appendix F: Editor's report

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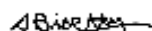
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The pen is mightier than the sword

To whom it may concern

I edited the thesis titled: Female Principals' Leadership Experiences in Rural Schools in Kwazulu-Natal, by DORAH LYAKA MUTULA, student no. 213569411, a thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree in the School of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.



Sury Bisetty
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