

**Stakeholder Perceptions of Socio-Cultural Factors Hindering the
Representation of Women in Principalship Positions: A Case Study of Two
Secondary Schools in Eastern Cape**

by

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Supervisors' Authorisation

I, Dr Lynette Lulama Mbatha, the candidate's supervisor, agree/do not agree to the submission of this thesis for examination.

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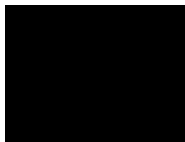
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I, Ntsika Dyantyi, hereby declare that:

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Dedication

Now unto him that can keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

Jude 1:24-25

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Abstract

The underrepresentation of women in principalship positions within the educational sector persists as a significant challenge globally. Despite advancements in gender equality, socio-cultural factors continue to impede the progress of women aspiring to leadership roles in education. This case study explored stakeholder perceptions regarding the socio-cultural barriers hindering the representation of women in principalship positions in two secondary schools located in the Eastern Cape region of South Africa. A qualitative case study research design located within the interpretive paradigm was adopted for this study. Data were generated through semi-structured face-to-face interviews with nine purposively selected participants. The findings were then analysed thematically, with results presented according to the key themes identified from the data. The study was located within the liberal feminism theoretical framework. The study findings unveiled several key factors significantly impacting women's progression, particularly in attaining principalship positions within schools. Deep-rooted societal stereotypes, cultural beliefs, and practices, along with cultural and societal norms, emerge as formidable barriers. Systematic biases in the appointment process and gender bias in leadership selection exacerbate the challenges faced by women aspiring to principalship positions in the schools where the study was conducted. The study recommended that there is a need to foster a more supportive environment for female leaders in schools. Leadership awareness workshops can be organised to educate stakeholders about the importance of gender diversity in leadership and to address unconscious biases that may exist in the selection and promotion processes. Community empowerment awareness campaigns are also suggested to engage the wider community in supporting and championing women in leadership roles within schools. Professional development opportunities should also be made more accessible to women, enabling them to acquire the necessary skills and competencies for leadership roles. Additionally, schools should ensure equal opportunities for all, creating a level playing field where talent and merit are the primary considerations for advancement, regardless of gender.

Keywords: Socio-cultural, hindering, representation, principalship.

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Background to the Study

1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the study. It gives the general background of the stakeholder perceptions of socio-cultural factors hindering the representation of women in principalship positions in the Eastern Cape. It also presents the background of the study, justification for the research, and a statement of the problem research objectives and questions. Further, the methodological approach, clarity of key concepts and the structure of the dissertation are discussed.

1.2 Background of the Study

The representation of women in educational leadership roles has been a longstanding issue, leading to a noticeable gender imbalance in the field. Despite women constituting a significant portion of the public education workforce, their underrepresentation in principal positions, especially in secondary schools in the Oliver Reginald (O R) Tambo Inland Education district, underscores the persistence of gender inequality (Jauhar & Lau, 2018). This study shed light on the stakeholder perceptions of socio-cultural factors hindering the representation of women in principalship positions in two secondary schools in the Eastern Cape.

Historically, leadership has been perceived through a masculine lens, associating certain traits and behaviours with effective leadership. Moorosi et al. (2020) states that women in educational leadership in South Africa are hindered by traditional stereotypes that define leadership as masculine. She further argues that these conventional stereotypes contribute to the perpetuation of gender disparities and the marginalisation of women in leadership positions. This perception has inadvertently led to the marginalisation of women in leadership roles, as their qualities and approaches may not align with traditional expectations (Avgeri, 2015). According to Hightower (2019), cultural practices in South Africa often influence the preference of men over women in leadership and management positions. He mentions that one

of these cultural practices is stereotyping.

Similarly, a recent study by Qadir (2019) confirms that this marginalisation of women in leadership positions is not unique to South Africa. His research showed that, in many Indian organisations, men are more likely than women to assume leadership roles when they become available because it is thought that they have the aptitude and abilities to succeed in management roles. In contrast, women are better suited for household duties.

Current statistics from the O.R. Tambo Inland district in Eastern Cape, South Africa, show a significant gender imbalance, with only 24% of secondary school principals being women and 76% being men (DBE, 2023). Principalship in this district is still viewed as a male quality despite several rules designed to mainstream gender and change school leadership.

This study seeks to contribute to the ongoing debates on the underrepresentation of women in principal positions, explicitly focusing on socio-cultural factors and recommending suggestions to promote an inclusive educational leadership landscape in the Eastern Cape.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The background of the study has highlighted context for understanding the challenges women face in educational leadership. Some key points are that despite women constituting a significant portion of the public education workforce, they are underrepresented in principal positions. This reflects a gender inequality in educational leadership (Jauhar & Lau, 2018).

Another point is that leadership has historically been perceived through a masculine lens, associating certain traits and behaviours with effective leadership. This perception has led to the marginalisation of women, as their qualities and approaches may not align with traditional expectations (Avgeri, 2015). Lastly, cultural practices often influence the preference for men in leadership positions, reinforcing gender disparity (Hightower, 2019; Moorosi, 2007). The background also implied that these issues of marginalisation of women in leadership roles are not unique to South Africa. Similar challenges are observed in other contexts, such as India (Qadir, 2019).

Despite making up most of the teaching profession, women are disproportionately under-represented in senior roles. According to Pavlidis, Kennelly and Castro (2020), women should be treated equally to men when selecting candidates for leadership and management positions, especially for principal roles in schools. However, in South Africa, there is a preference for men over women in school leadership and management positions (Bayeni & Bhengu, 2015).

This is despite policies like the Commission for Gender Equality Act (1996a), the South African Schools Act (1996c), the Education Labour Relations Act (1997), and the Employment Equity Act (1998b), which uphold principles of equality and non-discrimination and emphasise the need for equitable representation of women in leadership roles, there appears to be a gap between policy and practice. This disparity raises questions about the factors influencing the marginalization of women educators in principalship roles. This study seeks to investigate stakeholder perceptions of socio-cultural factors. Addressing these factors is crucial to bridging the gap between policy and practice, ensuring equitable representation of women in leadership positions.

1.4 Research Objectives

The specific empirical research objectives of this study were:

1. To examine socio-cultural factors identified by stakeholders as influencing women's progression into principalship roles.
2. To explore the perceptions of stakeholders towards the socio-cultural factors influencing the representation of women in principalship positions.
3. To explore policy and institutional practices impacting women's progression into principalship positions.

1.5 Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What socio-cultural factors are identified by stakeholders as influencing women's progression into principalship roles?
2. How do stakeholders perceive the socio-cultural factors influencing the representation of women in principalship positions?
3. How do policy and institutional practices impact women's progression into principalship positions?

1.6 Justification for the Study

Akanle and Shittu (2020) explain justification in social research as a logical discussion highlighting a research project's academic, scholarly, and practical benefits. It entails defining the potential contributions of the research to science, policy, and the relevant study population. Rather than merely identifying the beneficiaries, a well-crafted justification provides a detailed rationale for the study's value to these stakeholders (Akanle & Shittu, 2020). The rationale for this study is presented in three levels: theoretical, personal, and practical justification.

1.6.1 Personal Justification

During my years of schooling, I consistently observed that male principals dominated leadership roles, even though most staff members were female. This disparity sparked my interest in understanding the reasons behind the limited presence of female principals, particularly in secondary schools. The contrast between the gender composition of staff and leadership led me to question the factors contributing to this imbalance. Motivated by these observations, I explored the socio-cultural factors influencing women's representation in principalship positions. I recognised that while various barriers exist, socio-cultural influences significantly shape women's career trajectories in educational leadership. By focusing on these factors, I aimed to uncover the complex dynamics that hinder women's progress and examine how cultural expectations and stereotypes impact their career advancement.

Through this study, I sought to contribute to the broader discourse on gender equity in education leadership by highlighting women's socio-cultural challenges in pursuing leadership roles.

Understanding these factors is crucial for developing strategies that promote gender balance and create a more inclusive leadership landscape in secondary schools. Ultimately, my research aims to shed light on the socio-cultural factors affecting women's educational leadership progression and advocate for meaningful change.

1.6.2 Professional Justification

It is anticipated that the study will increase the awareness of both male and female educators of the value of female educators in principal positions of the secondary schools of the O R Tambo Inland Education District. The research findings could assist female educators in recognising the challenges that prevent them from ascending to promotional or management positions, including their false perceptions of value and competency. The study will also assist policymakers in identifying gender gaps in principal roles in the secondary schools of the O R Tambo Inland education district.

It is hoped that this study, through its analysis of the stakeholder perceptions of socio-cultural factors hindering the representation of women in) principalship positions in two secondary schools of the O R Tambo district in Eastern Cape, informed by feminist theories, will help not only women but a wider group of society to understand these factors and lead to a new and expanded way of thinking about the role of women in education. In addition, this study will broaden and heighten our knowledge about women's changing positions in the past decades.

Therefore, this study's results may be valuable in creating new legislation and government and institutional policies that will favour hiring women in school management positions. The results of this study could also be of value in developing new strategies that could be implemented to deal with the problem of the underrepresentation of female educators in managerial positions in secondary schools in South Africa.

1.6.3 Theoretical Justification

This study stems from the persistent underrepresentation of women in principalship positions in South Africa despite the anticipated improvement following the country's democratic transition in 1994.

Despite well documented policies and laws like the Commission for Gender Equality Act (1996a), the South African Schools Act (1996c), the Education Labour Relations Act (1997), and the Employment Equity Act (1998b) addressing gender discrimination and imbalances, inequalities and injustices prevail in various government sectors, particularly education. Currently, there are affirmative action and employment equity acts. These policies aim to redress past imbalances and promote equal employment opportunities in the workplace. However, the issue of gender inequality in managerial positions remains a significant concern, highlighting ongoing challenges in achieving accurate equity. Scholars such as Uwizeyimana and Mathevula (2018), Bonzet (2017), Lari (2019) and Avgeri (2015) have extensively examined the underrepresentation of women with a specific focus on general leadership and management roles. However, there is scarcity of research that specifically focused on the socio-cultural factors influencing the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions within a rural context. One study that comes close is Bayeni and Bhengu (2015), which looked at the complexities and contradictions in gender policy implementation in rural areas. While there are several studies on the underrepresentation of women in principalship positions, there is still a gap on focusing on socio-cultural factors, especially in Eastern Cape rural contexts. Therefore, this study aimed to fill this research gap by investigating the socio-cultural factors that influence women's progression to principalship positions within the context of the Eastern Cape in secondary schools within the O R Tambo District. By exploring these socio-cultural factors, the research seeks to contribute to the ongoing debates on the underrepresentation of women in principal positions, explicitly focusing on socio-cultural factors and developing strategies to promote gender equity and foster a more inclusive and diverse educational leadership landscape in the Eastern Cape.

1.7 Methodological Approach

The study adopted a qualitative research approach located within the interpretive paradigm. The qualitative approach is appropriate for research questions concerning processes, unanticipated outcomes, and cultural impacts; for instance, the current study sought to capture stakeholder perceptions of the socio-cultural factors hindering women's representation in principalship positions. A case study research design was adopted. Data were generated through semi-structured face-to-face and focus group interviews with nine (9) purposively sampled participants. Data were transcribed, coded, and organised into themes, which were analysed. This section is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

1.8 Clarification of Key Concepts

The key concepts are clarified below to ensure the correct interpretation of terminology in this study.

1.8.1 Principal

A principal, as defined by the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996c, is an educator appointed or acting as the head of a school. In the context of this study, the principal's role is pivotal due to their significant influence on various aspects of school management, including the culture, effectiveness of teaching and learning, and overall institutional success. As the primary leader, the principal sets the tone for the school environment, shaping both academic and social outcomes. Their leadership extends beyond administrative functions, encompassing the management of staff, interactions with the community, and implementation of policies, all of which impact the school's performance and development. Given their central position in the educational hierarchy, principals are also key figures in understanding the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. Their experiences, challenges, and perspectives offer valuable insights into the barriers that aspiring female leaders face. Female principals must navigate gendered expectations and stereotypes, which may influence their leadership style and acceptance within the school community. Analyzing the role of principals in this study provides an understanding of how institutional structures and socio-cultural norms contribute to the gender disparity in school leadership, highlighting the need for strategies that promote equitable opportunities for women to advance into these positions.

1.8.2 Stakeholders

Freeman (1984) defines stakeholders as individuals or groups that influence or are influenced by an organization's actions, goals, and policies. In educational institutions, key stakeholders include principals, teachers, parents, school governing bodies, departmental managers, and community members. These stakeholders play crucial roles in shaping the educational environment and decision-making processes. Their involvement is not limited to the direct educational process but also extends to the governance and leadership structures within schools. This study focuses on the diverse perspectives of these stakeholders to understand the complexities surrounding women's underrepresentation in

leadership positions. By examining the viewpoints of various stakeholders, the study aims to identify the systemic, institutional, and societal factors that contribute to gender disparity in educational leadership. Each stakeholder group offers unique insights into the challenges and barriers that women face in pursuing and sustaining leadership roles. This comprehensive approach allows for a deeper exploration of gender equity issues and highlights potential strategies to promote the representation of women in leadership. Ultimately, the study seeks to contribute to the dialogue on gender equality and propose actionable solutions to address the root causes of women's underrepresentation in school leadership.

1.8.2 Social

The term 'social' encompasses the interactions, connections, and behaviours that occur within society, shaping how individuals and groups relate to one another. According to Falk and Kilpatrick (2000), these interactions are facilitated by societal structures and institutions that influence daily activities and behaviour. Social factors, including shared norms, values, and expectations, play a powerful role in shaping how gender roles are perceived and reinforced within communities. In the context of leadership in schools, these social factors often perpetuate traditional gender stereotypes, where men are viewed as natural leaders and women as caregivers or supporters, thereby maintaining patriarchal norms. These ingrained views create barriers for women, making it difficult for them to be seen as suitable candidates for leadership roles. Understanding these social factors is critical to addressing the challenges that prevent women from pursuing or being appointed to leadership roles in schools. Societal interactions, particularly within educational institutions, can often reflect and reinforce the broader patriarchal structures that dominate many communities. As a result, women aspiring to leadership positions may face resistance not only from decision-makers but also from their peers and the wider community, who hold traditional beliefs about gender roles. Addressing these social factors requires a deep examination of how societal norms and values are constructed and maintained, as well as targeted efforts to challenge and transform these norms to create a more equitable and inclusive environment for women in educational leadership.

1.8.3 Culture

Eagleton (2016) defines culture as the shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours, and artifacts that characterize a group or society, which play a critical role in shaping perceptions of leadership. In the

Eastern Cape, traditional gender roles and expectations, deeply embedded in the cultural fabric, influence how stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and community leaders, view women's suitability for leadership positions. These traditional beliefs often hold that leadership is a male-dominated space, reinforcing the idea that men are more naturally suited to positions of authority, while women are expected to fulfil more nurturing or supportive roles. Such perceptions create an environment where women aspiring to leadership positions are frequently overlooked, despite their qualifications or leadership potential. The case study of two secondary schools in the Eastern Cape offers valuable insights into how these socio-cultural factors contribute to the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles within the education sector. By examining the interactions between stakeholders and female leaders, it becomes evident that cultural norms heavily influence the recruitment and selection processes for leadership positions. Teachers, parents, and community leaders may unconsciously or consciously support male candidates over equally or more qualified female candidates due to longstanding beliefs about gender roles. This complex interplay between culture and gender limits the progression of women into leadership roles, perpetuating inequality and reinforcing barriers that hinder the representation of women in educational leadership.

1.8.4 Socio-cultural Factors

Socio-cultural factors have a profound impact on shaping leadership prospects for women, particularly in patriarchal societies. These factors encompass a wide array of societal norms, traditions, and cultural values that influence how individuals perceive and interact with female leaders. According to Mbithuka (2019), socio-cultural elements directly shape people's thoughts, feelings, values, and behaviours, affecting how women in leadership are viewed and treated. In the context of leadership in two secondary schools in the Eastern Cape, these influences become particularly evident. Gender biases, rooted in cultural traditions, often hinder the acceptance of women in leadership roles, where male dominance in leadership positions is seen as the norm. This cultural inclination shapes the attitudes of both men and women, ultimately limiting the opportunities available to aspiring female leaders.

The deeply ingrained socio-cultural norms that prioritize men in leadership roles also contribute to the development of stereotypes that depict women as less capable of handling leadership responsibilities. These perceptions and attitudes create barriers for women, who often face resistance not only from their male counterparts but also from within the broader school community, including parents, teachers, and learners. As a result, female leaders in these schools must constantly navigate through layers of

discrimination and prejudice that question their authority and competence. Despite these challenges, women who pursue leadership positions in education demonstrate resilience in the face of such socio-cultural barriers, yet their progression is often stunted by the very norms that shape the attitudes of those around them.

1.9 Outline of the Study

The dissertation has been divided into six chapters as follows:

Chapter 1 presents an overview and context of the research, outlining its motivation and background. It detailed the issues addressed by the study and its goals. Additionally, the chapter explained the reasoning behind the study, its importance, where it was conducted, definitions of key terms, underlying assumptions, and its constraints and scope.

Chapter 2 provides national and worldwide literature on the topic being studied. It uses a range of subjects that highlight female leadership in education and stakeholders' opinions of the sociocultural barriers preventing women from holding principalships. The report presents scientific data to demonstrate that more work needs to be done to increase the possibilities for female principalships by evaluating various literature sources.

Chapter 3 presents the liberal theoretical framework used in this study. A motivation for why the liberal theory was chosen as a lens to guide the conduct of the current research and how the framework was applied is discussed.

Chapter 4 deals with the research methodology and design adopted for this study. It also presents the methods used to generate data. The chapter also includes the analysis process and discusses processes to ensure trustworthiness. It concludes by outlining the study's limitations and how ethical considerations were adhered to throughout this study.

Chapter 5 sets out the analysis and discussion of findings; this is done through the contextualisation of the study and analysis of major themes emerging from the data.

Chapter 6 is the last, presenting the research study's conclusions, personal reflections, and summary. It

further recommends what can be done to address the underrepresentation of women in principalship position.

1.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter introduced and provided a background of the study and motivation for the research. Statement of the problem and objectives of the study were documented. Further, the rationale and significance of the study, location of the study, clarification of key concepts, assumptions, limitations and delimitations, and the study's outline were also identified and documented. The next chapter presents the existing literature arguments and gaps about stakeholder perceptions of socio-cultural factors hindering the representation of women in principalship positions.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explored the overview of the entire study. The chapter discussed the overarching purpose of the study by outlining the background of the study and the motivation for the research. The study's problem statement, justification and importance, key terms' definitions, and structure were also detailed and recorded.

This chapter will cover the literature review and is organised to provide wide-ranging scrutiny of the various concepts of women's leadership in education and what hinders women's representation in principalship positions. It starts by offering the historical context and background of women's leadership roles, concentrating on essential milestones and variations over time. Subsequent, it scrutinises the socio-cultural and institutional blockades that contribute to the underrepresentation of women in principalship positions, as well as unfair appointment practices and the influence of post-colonial and post-apartheid supremacy undercurrents. The review further deliberates the efficacy of current policies and statutory measures intended to encourage gender impartiality in educational leadership. To finish, it explores tactics and interferences, such as mentoring, support, and empowerment programmes, which address the disproportions and encourage a more inclusive and varied leadership landscape in secondary schools.

2.2 Historical Context in Women's Educational Leadership

The history of women's leadership roles has evolved significantly over time, marked by several pivotal milestones and changes. The historical context of women's leadership roles has been marked by noteworthy changes, with prominent indicators shaping the prospects available to women in educational leadership. The early actions were critical in inspiring the status quo and set the step for imminent improvements. In the early 20th century, women's roles in leadership were strictly limited due to persistent social standards and legal limitations favouring male

supremacy (Mathevula, 2014). During this period, societal norms confined women to domestic roles, and educational opportunities were largely restricted. Moorosi et al. (2020) highlight that the suffrage movements of the early 1900s were crucial in challenging these norms. The push for women's right to vote and for broader civil rights laid the groundwork for future advancements in gender equality (Stromquist, 2018).

The post-World War II era, particularly the 1960s and 1970s, saw significant strides in women's rights, driven by feminist movements that advocated for gender equality in various domains, including education and employment (Moorosi et al., 2020). During this time, legal reforms and increased educational opportunities for women began to challenge traditional gender roles. The passing of landmark legislation such as the Education Act in the mid-20th century mandated equal educational opportunities for all genders, significantly promoting gender equality in education. This legislative change empowered women to challenge societal norms and barriers that traditionally hindered their advancement in leadership (RSA, 1998). The late 20th century continued to build on earlier progress, with significant legislative measures aimed at promoting gender equality in the workplace. In South Africa, the Employment Equity Act of 1998 was a pivotal moment, providing a legal framework to redress historical gender imbalances (RSA, 1998). This period also saw the decentralisation of school governance to School Governing Bodies (SGBs), intended to democratise decision-making in education.

However, scholars argue that this often-reinforced traditional gender roles, particularly in rural and township areas where male domination persisted (Diko, 2014). Despite these legislative advancements, the implementation of gender equality policies has been uneven, with cultural and institutional barriers continuing to impede women's access to leadership positions in secondary schools (Mbalilak & Onyango, 2022). These hurdles are deeply rooted in historical power inequalities and cultural customs that have long assigned women subsidiary roles. The ongoing challenges highlight the need for targeted interventions to address the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership. The feminist movements of the mid-20th century are often credited with significantly advancing women's rights, but scholars also note the limitations of these movements in addressing the intersectional challenges faced by women of different racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds (Stromquist, 2018;

Moorosi et al., 2020). Additionally, the decentralisation of school governance is debated as both a democratizing force and a mechanism that can entrench traditional gender roles, depending on the local context (Diko, 2014). Understanding these historical developments is crucial for contextualising women's challenges in attaining educational leadership positions. Nevertheless, the suffrage actions of the early 1900s laid the foundation for women's human rights, progressively leading to improved access to education and professional prospects for targeted interventions to address the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership.

2.3 Challenges Faced by Women in Educational Leadership

Women in educational leadership face enduring challenges that hinder their progression to senior roles, despite ongoing efforts towards gender equity. Mathevula (2014) laid the foundation for understanding these barriers, focusing on how traditional gender roles and stereotypes limit women's access to leadership opportunities. Building on this work, Moorosi et al. (2020) argue that while societal progress has been made, organisational cultures within educational institutions remain resistant to change, continuing to marginalise women's contributions. They highlight how traditional gender roles still exert a strong influence, manifesting in the persistence of male-dominated organisational cultures that sideline female leadership and reinforce the perception that leadership is inherently masculine.

Mutanga's (2022) research adds another dimension by emphasising that stereotypes not only endure but also evolve. These stereotypes become more subtle over time, making them difficult to challenge. Such preconceived notions about women's capabilities subtly undermine their leadership potential and visibility, contributing to their underrepresentation in senior roles. Dudu (2019) further highlights the issue of patriarchal domination within educational institutions, where power disparities favour men and make it difficult for women to ascend to leadership positions. Patriarchal structures are deeply embedded in organisational life, necessitating systemic change to dismantle these power imbalances and create a more inclusive leadership landscape. Additionally, Bruey et al. (2018) address cultural hurdles that exacerbate the challenges women face, particularly for those from minority backgrounds. Their work illustrates how cultural norms and expectations continue to marginalise women leaders, reinforcing the perception that women are less suited for leadership roles. This is particularly evident in contexts where patriarchal traditions are deeply entrenched, further complicating the path to leadership for women. The persistence of these cultural barrier's points to the need for comprehensive interventions

that address both societal and institutional factors to promote leadership diversity and gender parity in educational settings. Taken together, these studies provide a critical lens through which to view the complexities of women's underrepresentation in educational leadership. While societal progress has been made, the systemic and cultural barriers rooted in traditional gender roles, stereotypes, and patriarchal power dynamics continue to pose significant challenges.

2.3.1 Traditional Gender Roles and Stereotypes

Gender stereotyping represents a significant external barrier impacting women in the workplace, as highlighted by Jugmohan and Muzvidziwa (2017), Ndebele (2018), and Vassakiset al. (2018). These scholars argue that pervasive societal expectations and biases often assign specific roles and capabilities based on gender, thereby limiting women's opportunities, and eroding their motivation to pursue leadership roles. For instance, women are usually viewed primarily as caregivers, which can be seen as incompatible with the demands of educational leadership roles. Such deeply ingrained stereotypes limit women's professional growth and affect how their leadership abilities are perceived by both men and women within the educational sector. Such stereotypes reinforce outdated notions that associate leadership qualities with masculine traits, such as assertiveness, decisiveness, and competitiveness, while undervaluing traits typically associated with femininity, such as empathy, collaboration, and inclusiveness. As a result, women may face implicit biases and overt discrimination when seeking leadership positions, as their qualifications and capabilities may be scrutinised through a gendered lens.

A female principal described how male co-workers and local community members put her in danger of losing control of the situation because she is a woman (Zikhali & Smit, 2019). The above infer how female principals face significant challenges in maintaining control and authority due to gender biases and stereotypes. These challenges stem from a lack of respect for her authority, traditional gender roles, and cultural attitudes that undermine women's leadership. This situation jeopardises women professional position, well-being, and effectiveness as a leader. Such attitudes can lead to a hostile work environment where women leaders must navigate additional scrutiny, resistance, and challenges to assert their leadership and control decision-making processes.

Stereotypes are detrimental to women because they put them in positions where they cannot lead, primarily due to gender (Mthembu, 2013; Mythili, 2017). Due to the society's and schools' cultural norms, Moorosi (2010) notes that women in South Africa have difficulty moving up the social ladder. These stereotypes perpetuate narrow definitions of leadership that align with traditional masculine traits, such as assertiveness and decisiveness, while undervaluing qualities typically associated with femininity, such as empathy and collaboration. As a result, women face systemic challenges in accessing leadership roles and encounter bias in hiring, promotion, and decision-making processes.

Hightower (2019) contends that cultural practices in South Africa frequently shape men's inclination towards preferring men in leadership and managerial roles. He points out that stereotyping is one such cultural practice resulting from entrenched gender biases that favour men over women in leadership positions. The cultural norms and expectations that prioritise male leadership perpetuate systemic inequalities by marginalising women from opportunities for advancement and decision-making authority. The above arguments highlight how cultural practices reinforce gender norms that not only limit women's access to leadership roles but also shape societal perceptions of leadership as inherently masculine, thereby perpetuating gender disparities in South African organisational settings.

2.3.2 Patriarchal Domination and Power Disparities

Patriarchal domination and power disparities, particularly those originating before post-colonial and post-apartheid periods, play a significant role in the current governance of South African schools. Moorosi et al. (2020) argue that the power dynamics established during these historical periods continue to marginalise women in leadership roles. These power relations perpetuate gender inequality by ensuring that decision-making power remains predominantly in the hands of men.

The underrepresentation of female educators in managerial and leadership positions can be attributed to the oppressive nature of patriarchal domination, as highlighted by Mutanga (2022). Historically, education systems have been structured around patriarchal norms and values that prioritise male leadership and authority. This structure often limits opportunities for women to

ascend to leadership roles, as men typically occupy decision-making positions.

In many South African schools, this is evident in the composition of school governing bodies (SGBs) and the persistent male dominance in principalship positions (DBE, 2015). The continuation of these patriarchal structures undermines efforts to achieve gender equality in educational leadership, sustaining the marginalisation of women and the prevalence of gender-based discrimination.

2.3.3 Cultural Hurdles and Inferiority Complex

Cultural hurdles and inferiority complexes further contribute to the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. Mathevula (2014) and Dudu (2019) highlight that cultural norms and practices often discourage women from pursuing leadership roles, fostering a sense of inferiority and self-doubt. Some female educators experience a sense of hopelessness, leading them to accept submissiveness due to the prevailing cultural norms (Bruey et al., 2018). The above suggests that despite aspirations for equality and recognition in their professional lives, these women feel resigned to conforming to traditional expectations. The study highlights the psychological and emotional impact of entrenched cultural hurdles, where women internalise a sense of powerlessness and lack of agency, affecting their ability to challenge or change the systemic inequalities they face (Bruey et al., 2018). These cultural hurdles manifest in various forms, such as the expectation that women prioritise family responsibilities over career advancement or the belief that leadership is inherently a male domain. These beliefs can lead to a lack of confidence among women, making them less likely to aspire to or accept leadership roles. Addressing these cultural challenges is crucial for creating an environment where women feel empowered to pursue and succeed in leadership positions, reducing gender disparities in educational leadership.

Ngcongco and Ramraj (2022) highlight the prevailing notion in traditional African culture that defines a "good" woman as one responsible for cooking, doing laundry for her husband, and attending to domestic chores for the family. Traditional African societies often uphold gender roles that assign women the primary responsibility for domestic tasks, including cooking, cleaning, and caring for the family. These expectations are deeply rooted in cultural norms, customs, and values that shape gender roles within the community. The emphasis on domestic

responsibilities can limit women's opportunities for education, employment outside the home, and participation in decision-making processes. Gender roles can constrain their autonomy and ability to pursue personal aspirations beyond the confines of traditional gender roles. These studies highlight how deeply ingrained societal expectations and cultural norms can hinder women's progress in the workplace.

2.3.4 Unfair Recruitment and Appointment Practices

The underrepresentation of women in leadership roles, particularly in secondary school principalships, is a well-documented issue, with scholars like Mathevula (2014), Mbalilak and Onyango (2022), Stromquist (2018), and Moorosi et al. (2020) identifying various factors that contribute to this gender imbalance. Central to this issue are unfair appointment practices, which remain one of the most significant barriers preventing female educators from advancing to principal roles. Research by Bayeni and Bhengu (2015) points to biases and discriminatory attitudes among shortlisting and interview panellists, where female candidates are often judged unfairly despite their qualifications and experience. These findings reveal the necessity of implementing fair and equitable recruitment practices to ensure that all candidates are evaluated based on their competencies and leadership potential rather than gender-based assumptions.

Malahlela (2017) further reinforces this argument, highlighting how biased hiring practices among panellists perpetuate gender disparities in school leadership. Despite women constituting most of the teaching workforce, men continue to dominate senior roles such as principalship. This imbalance is exacerbated by unethical appointment practices that systematically favour male candidates, denying qualified women the opportunity to ascend to leadership positions. Similarly, Mokgoka (2016) underscores the persistence of gender biases in educational leadership, pointing out that women's underrepresentation in principal roles reflects entrenched patriarchal norms that limit their advancement.

The decentralisation of school leadership appointments to School Governing Bodies (SGBs) following South Africa's democratic transition in 1994 further complicates the situation. The Department of Basic Education (2000) observed that despite legal frameworks like the Employment Equity Act (55 of 1998), subjective preferences and gender biases often influence the selection process, leading to the marginalisation of female candidates. This is a systemic challenge in adhering to gender equality

principles in educational leadership, where women continue to face limited opportunities for professional development and advancement. Recent legislative reforms, such as the Employment Equity Amendment Bill (2020), aim to address these gaps by introducing stricter compliance measures and setting employment equity targets across various sectors, including education. The Amendment Bill empowers the Minister of Employment and Labour to establish sector-specific targets, ensuring that underrepresented groups, particularly women, are given fair opportunities to assume leadership roles. Additionally, South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 reinforces these efforts by advocating for gender equality and women's empowerment in leadership. The NDP emphasises the need for targeted training, professional development programs, and accountability mechanisms to ensure that gender equity policies produce tangible outcomes.

Despite these legislative efforts, significant gender disparities in leadership roles persist. For example, in the O R Tambo Inland education district, there are only 22 female principals out of 92 secondary school principal positions (DBE, 2023). This stark underrepresentation of women in principalship positions raises concerns, particularly in a democratic society that prioritises equal opportunities. The literature highlights that while significant research has been conducted on this issue, progress remains slow, with male dominance in school leadership persisting despite most educators being female. This study, therefore, seeks to explore the socio-cultural factors that hinder women educators from pursuing principalship positions in the local context, particularly considering these enduring barriers.

2.4 Global and Regional Prevalence of Gender Leadership Issues

The challenges that women face in attaining leadership positions are, as Carli and Eagly (2016) and Xiang et al. (2017) illustrate, a global issue deeply rooted in cultural norms and gender stereotypes. These scholars provide a comprehensive analysis of how societal expectations and biases systematically limit women's opportunities to rise to leadership roles across diverse settings. Despite differences in cultural contexts, their work reveals a striking similarity in the obstacles women encounter worldwide, such as entrenched gender biases, structural barriers, and the pervasive influence of traditional gender roles. These barriers not only hinder women's career progression but also perpetuate a perception that leadership is a predominantly male domain, thereby reinforcing a cycle of gender inequality in leadership.

What is particularly significant in the works of Carli and Eagly (2016) and Xiang et al. (2017) is the dual focus on both universal and context-specific challenges. While the core issues of gender bias and structural barriers are present globally, the way these challenges manifest varies according to regional and cultural contexts. For example, in some cultures, overt discrimination may be more prevalent, while in others, more subtle forms of bias, such as tokenism or marginalization in decision-making, may be at play. This global perspective highlights the need for interventions that are not only broad in scope but also tailored to the particularities of each region. Crafting effective solutions requires a nuanced understanding of how local socio-cultural factors intersect with global patterns of gender inequality. By acknowledging both the universal and context-specific challenges, we can design more targeted, culturally sensitive interventions that better address the unique struggles women face in pursuing leadership roles. Moreover, the international perspective provided by these scholars emphasizes that achieving gender equity in leadership requires concerted efforts on multiple fronts. Addressing the structural and cultural factors that limit women's leadership opportunities calls for systemic changes at institutional, policy, and societal levels. This includes not only implementing legal frameworks that promote gender equality but also challenging deep-seated cultural norms that continue to marginalize women in leadership.

2.4.1 Global Prevalence

Swain (2019) highlights a significant issue in England, where female educators are often perceived as lacking essential leadership qualities such as authority and decisiveness — due to the entrenched belief that leadership is a masculine domain. This historical precedent not only perpetuates the stereotype that men are inherently more suited for leadership positions but also undermines the contributions and capabilities of women. The characterisation of leadership traits as predominantly masculine reinforces a narrow definition of effective leadership, effectively sidelining women who do not conform to these expectations. This cultural bias creates a significant barrier, as it diminishes women's chances of being recognised and promoted to leadership roles, fostering an environment where their skills and potential remain undervalued.

Similarly, the insights from Xiang et al. (2017) regarding Australia and New Zealand emphasise the detrimental impact of gender stereotypes on women's career progression in the education sector. Women aspiring to high-level decision-making roles often find themselves underestimated or overlooked, further entrenching the cycle of exclusion from leadership opportunities. The authors argue that

stereotypes not only limit women's visibility for leadership positions but also perpetuate the notion that they lack the requisite qualities for roles that require vision and innovation. This observation aligns with Carli and Eagly's (2016) findings in the United States, which reveal that despite significant advancements toward gender equality, female leaders continue to encounter systemic barriers that stem from deeply ingrained gender stereotypes. Their assertion that these challenges are not confined to specific countries underscores the global nature of the issue, suggesting that the battle for gender equity in leadership transcends national boundaries.

The case of China, as analysed by Xiang et al. (2017) and Zivave et al. (2020), presents a complex interplay of historical and contemporary socio-cultural factors that contribute to gender imbalance in leadership. Despite economic progress, traditional values that prioritise male dominance continue to shape gender dynamics, placing immense pressure on women to fulfil conventional domestic roles. This cultural expectation often conflicts with women's professional aspirations, creating a dual burden that further marginalises in the workforce. Moreover, the competitive and hierarchical nature of Chinese corporate culture exacerbates the challenges women face in attaining leadership positions. Understanding these unique cultural contexts is essential for developing effective strategies to promote gender equality in leadership. It necessitates a nuanced approach that acknowledges both the historical legacies and contemporary realities that influence women's experiences in leadership across different societies.

2.4.2 Regional and Local Prevalence

In addition to the global perspectives discussed in the previous section, examining the local prevalence of socio-cultural barriers to women's leadership is essential. These barriers vary significantly based on local cultural, economic, and political contexts.

In Nigeria, traditional gender roles and socio-cultural expectations significantly hinder women's leadership opportunities. Studies by Dudu (2019) and Mbalilak and Onyango (2022) provide insights into the impact of cultural norms on women's professional advancement. In many Nigerian communities, women are primarily viewed as caregivers and homemakers, often seen as incompatible with leadership positions. This perception is reinforced by educational and professional systems that favour men, leading to a significant gender gap in leadership roles. Addressing these sociocultural barriers requires a multifaceted approach that includes changing

societal attitudes, providing support structures for women, and implementing policies that promote gender equality.

Kenya faces similar challenges, where socio-cultural norms and patriarchal systems limit women's leadership opportunities. Research highlights how these barriers manifest in educational and professional settings. In Kenya, women often face systemic discrimination and bias in both recruitment and promotion processes (Sperandio & Kagoda, 2010; Allen, 2018). Traditional beliefs that prioritise male leadership and decision-making authority further exacerbate these issues. Additionally, the lack of mentorship and networking opportunities for women restricts their career advancement.

Sperandio and Kagoda (2010) state that in Uganda, women, throughout their lives, are rarely seen as independent, strong-willed, or able to make decisions for themselves. This lack of decision-making power is deeply ingrained in societal norms and perceptions. They argue that sons are often favoured because they are believed to carry on the family name and lineage. On the other hand, daughters are seen as destined for marriage, leading to less appreciation and praise (Sperandio & Kagoda, 2010). These beliefs reflect a strong patriarchal opinion, where women are expected to be subservient to their fathers and later to their husbands after marriage, reinforcing the idea of male dominance.

The above view is supported by Ndimbo (2018), who examined how the criteria for appointing women to leadership roles in Tanzanian primary schools impact their opportunities. The study revealed that societal factors constrain women's access to leadership positions, including unfavourable attitudes and traditional beliefs. Given what has been mentioned so far, societal factors perpetuate a cycle where women face systemic barriers based on outdated perceptions of gender roles, limiting their ability to achieve leadership roles and contribute fully to educational leadership and governance.

South Africa presents a similar case where historical, cultural, and socio-economic factors combine to influence women's leadership opportunities. Moorosi et al. (2020) and Mathevula (2014) illustrate how the legacy of apartheid and post-colonial power structures continue to impact gender dynamics in school governance and broader professional settings. These studies highlight that despite progressive policies aimed at promoting gender equality, deeply

entrenched patriarchal norms and racial inequalities still pose significant barriers for women aspiring to leadership roles. For instance, women often face double discrimination based on both gender and race, limiting their access to leadership positions and professional development opportunities. Black women experience discrimination based on their gender identity, further exacerbating their marginalised societal position (Moorosi et al., 2020). Therefore, understanding these local challenges is crucial for developing targeted interventions that address the specific socio-cultural barriers faced by women in South Africa.

In the context of this study, the unique socio-cultural and economic challenges that influence women's leadership opportunities in this region of the Eastern Cape of South Africa, studies reveal that despite legislative frameworks promoting gender equality, such as the Employment Equity Act (1998), women in the Eastern Cape face persistent barriers rooted in traditional patriarchal norms and economic inequalities (Lumby & Azaola, 2014; Msweli & Kule, 2023). These barriers manifest in various forms, including limited access to professional development, mentorship, and leadership training, which are crucial for career advancement. Additionally, the legacy of apartheid and ongoing racial inequalities exacerbate these challenges, particularly for black women, who face dual discrimination based on both gender and race (Lumby & Azaola, 2014; Msweli & Kule, 2023). The decentralisation of school governance to School Governing Bodies (SGBs) has also been criticised for perpetuating male dominance in decision-making processes, often sidelining qualified female candidates (Moorosi, 2007). Therefore, targeted interventions addressing these specific local challenges are essential to creating a more inclusive and equitable environment for female leaders in the Eastern Cape.

The above-cited scholars confirm that while there are commonalities in the barrier's women face globally, there are also significant differences shaped by local cultural contexts. In some cultures, patriarchal traditions might be more deeply entrenched (Moorosi et al., 2020; Mathevula, 2014; Sperandio & Kagoda, 2010), creating formidable barriers to women's leadership. Conversely, in more democratic societies, implicit biases and glass ceiling effects persist, while explicit discrimination may be less familiar. By comparing these differences and similarities, one can better understand the multifaceted nature of gender leadership issues and tailor interventions to specific cultural contexts.

2.5 Support Structures, Mentorship and Networking Opportunities

Given the socio-cultural factors mentioned above regarding women's leadership opportunities, this section explores the role of support structures and mentorship in promoting gender equality in leadership roles.

2.5.1 Lack of Support and Mentorship

The lack of support and mentorship for women aspiring to leadership significantly hinders their career advancement. Davis (2012) and Pruitt (2015) highlight how the absence of structured support and mentorship programmes leaves women without the necessary guidance and encouragement to navigate leadership challenges. Davis (2012) states that women possess the ability and aptitude to be strong leaders. Still, they often receive different and less effective support, mentorship, sponsorship, and networking opportunities than their male counterparts. This discrepancy in support mechanisms plays a significant role in the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. Even though women have the same potential and leadership abilities as men, these disparities in support, mentorship, sponsorship, and networking create significant obstacles to their advancement.

Pruitt (2015), in support of the above, indicates that when a male sponsors a female to hold a leadership position in education, he typically chooses and sponsors a woman who appears to be submissive and less scary, whom he believes he can control for his benefit. He argues that men in positions of authority help and mentor one another, form networks, and hire associates and protégés to fill leadership and administrative positions, ignoring qualified women primarily to maintain the status quo of keeping men and not women in power.

Without mentors, women lack role models to emulate and advisors to provide career strategies, which is critical in overcoming obstacles and breaking through the glass ceiling. This gap in support systems perpetuates the cycle of underrepresentation as potential female leaders struggle to find the necessary resources to advance their careers. Addressing this gap through the development of comprehensive support and mentorship programmes is essential for empowering women and fostering an environment conducive to their success in leadership roles.

Zikhali and Smit's (2019) study, which focused on why women leave leadership in Gauteng Province, indicated that South African women frequently encounter obstacles that are impacted by society. These societal influences create challenges such as lack of support, unequal opportunities for advancement, and limited access to networks crucial for career development. These all contribute to the challenges women face in maintaining and advancing in leadership positions and without a strong support system, women may struggle to navigate the complexities of leadership roles, leading to higher attrition rates.

Maseko (2013) highlights a nuanced challenge women leaders face: the resistance and lack of support from other women, who are expected to be their allies. This phenomenon is disheartening, as women leaders often anticipate challenges from their male counterparts but might not be prepared for similar issues within their gender group. Women who look to their peers for support and direction consider this antagonistic behaviour by other women to be highly negative and complex to understand (Allen, 2018). Such behaviour can reinforce negative stereotypes about women in leadership and professional roles, perpetuating the belief that women are not supportive of each other and cannot work effectively together. These beliefs can further entrench gender biases and make it even more challenging for women to succeed.

Interestingly, Allen (2018) argues that many women in leadership roles refrain from mentoring and supporting aspiring women because they are focused on maintaining their own power and positions. This behaviour can be driven by a perceived threat to their status and authority, leading them to act in ways that protect their current standing rather than foster other women's growth. Dopwell (2019) reports that because men are perceived as more supportive of one another than women, women leaders view interactions with other women leaders as unfavourable and unwanted. He remarked that women establish battle lines, battling against and disrupting, rather than forming alliances and friendships. An overall decline in the number of women who hold leadership positions is brought on by the perception that some female leaders are envious, undermining, and obstructionist. This perceived lack of support can lead to reluctance to form alliances and collaborate with other women leaders.

Women lack cooperation and find it difficult to mentor and network with one another, hindering their advancement because they need more backing, inspiration, and connections necessary to

fill such leadership positions (Sperandio & Kagoda, 2010). The perception that women have limited opportunities in leadership roles can foster a scarcity mentality. Women may feel they must compete fiercely for the few available positions, leading to reluctance to share resources or support each other's career growth. Therefore, this study aimed to examine stakeholder perceptions of socio-cultural factors hindering the representation of women in principalship positions in two secondary schools of the O R Tambo Inland Education District.

The above scholars provide compelling evidence of the positive impact of mentoring relationships in supporting women's leadership journeys. These relationships help women overcome barriers and build their confidence and capability to assume leadership roles (Uthman, 2018; Lumby and Azaola, 2011). Implementing formal mentoring and sponsorship programmes is crucial in promoting women's leadership, ensuring that aspiring female leaders receive the support needed to achieve their career goals.

2.5.2 Networking Opportunities

Networking opportunities are crucial for career advancement, yet women often face disparities in accessing these opportunities. Sperandio and Kagoda (2010) emphasise the importance of networking for professional growth and forming strategic connections that can open doors to leadership positions. Networking provides access to information, resources, and opportunities often critical for career progression. However, Mbithuka (2019) shows that women frequently have fewer networking opportunities compared to their male counterparts, limiting their exposure to key decision-makers and reducing their visibility in professional circles. Enhancing networking opportunities for women through targeted programmes and initiatives can help bridge this gap, allowing women to build the relationships necessary for career advancement and leadership roles.

This study seeks to explore interventions that may be used to support, mentor, and enhance networking opportunities to mitigate the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. By building robust support structures, we can create an environment that nurtures and empowers women, paving the way for a more equitable and inclusive educational leadership landscape.

2.6 Intersection of Socio-cultural Factors and Support Structures

This section explains socio-cultural barriers and the critical role of support structures or lack of integration into women's leadership opportunities. By examining how socio-cultural factors interact with the availability (or lack) of support structures, we can better understand the compounded challenges women face in ascending to leadership roles.

2.6.1 Networking Opportunities

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2.7.1 Combined Impact of Socio-cultural Factors and Support Structures

Socio-cultural factors and support structures do not exist in isolation; instead, they intersect to create compounded barriers that significantly hinder women's leadership opportunities. Makgoka (2016) and Dopwell (2019) provide insights into how cultural norms, gender stereotypes, and the absence of supportive networks jointly affect women's professional trajectories. For instance, socio-cultural expectations often discourage women from seeking leadership roles, reinforcing traditional gender roles and limiting their aspirations. When combined with the lack of mentorship and networking opportunities, these factors create an environment where women are less likely to receive the guidance and encouragement needed to pursue and succeed in leadership positions. This intersectionality amplifies the challenges faced by women, making it even more difficult for them to break through the glass ceiling. Understanding this intersection is crucial for developing comprehensive strategies that address socio-cultural barriers and support deficits, ensuring a holistic approach to promoting gender equality in leadership.

2.7.2 Compounded Effects on Professional Growth

The compounded effects of socio-cultural barriers and inadequate support structures

significantly impede women's professional growth and leadership aspirations. Studies by Dopwell (2019) and others highlight how the interplay of these factors results in a double burden for women. Women must navigate the challenges posed by socio-cultural expectations and contend with the absence of robust support mechanisms. For example, cultural norms prioritising male leadership can undermine women's confidence and deter them from seeking mentorship or networking opportunities, further isolating them from the resources necessary for career advancement. This compounded effect perpetuates a cycle of underrepresentation, where women remain on the periphery of leadership roles despite their qualifications and potential.

Acknowledging and addressing the dual impact of these elements, we can develop more effective strategies to promote gender equality in leadership roles, ensuring that women receive the necessary support to overcome socio-cultural challenges and achieve their full potential in their professional careers.

2.8 Strategies to Address the Underrepresentation of Women in Principalship

Various approaches and interventions have been proposed, and strategies have been implemented for mitigating socio-cultural barriers and promoting gender equality in leadership. This section reviews governmental policies and mentorship programmes that have shown promise in addressing these challenges.

2.8.1 Government and Policy Interventions

There have been government-initiated initiatives in South Africa to challenge gender stereotypes around leadership and management in education. Policies such as the South African Schools Act (1996) and the Employment Equity Act (1998) provide insights into effective governmental interventions. These policies mandate equal opportunities and aim to dismantle structural barriers to women's leadership. For instance, affirmative action policies in South Africa require organisations to implement strategies that promote gender equity, including in leadership roles.

While these initiatives have made significant strides, inadequate enforcement and lingering socio-cultural biases often limit their effectiveness. These policies must continuously be

evaluated and strengthened to ensure they achieve their intended gender equality goals in leadership (Khoza, 2021). In so doing, these laws can more effectively support the appointment of qualified individuals to leadership positions, regardless of gender, and ensure that the principles of fairness and equity are upheld in educational institutions.

2.8.2 Mentorship and Empowerment Programmes

Mentorship and empowerment programmes support women's career development and leadership aspirations. Studies by Lumby and Azaola (2011) and Pavlidis et al. (2020) underscore the importance of such programmes in overcoming socio-cultural barriers. Effective mentorship programmes provide women role models, guidance, and professional networks vital for career advancement. With guidance, encouragement, and belief in women's abilities, mentors contribute significantly to breaking down barriers and supporting women in their journey towards leadership positions. The benefits of mentoring extend to the attraction and retention of capable women in leadership roles, ultimately contributing to a more diverse and inclusive educational leadership landscape.

Nyondo (2023) has suggested that education authorities should continue empowering and endorsing female teachers. Experienced female leaders could serve as valuable resources for other female teachers, conducting awareness programmes tailored explicitly for women in schools. The author further noted that addressing various leadership-related issues helps to alleviate common fears among female teachers. Laverty et al. (2022) have argued that the Department of Education should design an inclusive curriculum that addresses gender issues and promotes gender sensitivity within educational settings. This view echoes the findings of Bayeni and Bhengu (2015), whose study recommended that the Department of Basic Education should establish centres specifically designed to empower women in management positions.

2.8.3 Institutional Policies and Practices

Policy and institutional practices play a critical role in shaping women's progression into principalship positions within the educational sector. Policies such as the Employment Equity Act (55 of 1998) in South Africa aim to promote gender equality and provide a framework for redressing historical imbalances. However, the effectiveness of these policies is often

contingent on their implementation and the support structures in place within institutions.

Studies show that while policies may set aspirational targets for gender parity, their impact is frequently undermined by entrenched cultural norms and systemic biases within educational institutions (Moorosi, 2007; Zikhali & Smit, 2019). For instance, the decentralisation of school governance to School Governing Bodies (SGBs) in South Africa, intended to democratise decision-making, has sometimes reinforced traditional gender roles, resulting in women being overlooked for leadership roles despite their qualifications (Diko, 2014). This disparity highlights the need for more robust policy enforcement and institutional support to ensure that gender equality principles are effectively realised.

The Department of Basic Education (DBE) in South Africa has implemented various initiatives such as leadership training programmes aimed at promoting gender equity and support female educators. However, practical challenges remain, such as insufficient support systems and the persistence of gender stereotypes, which continue to affect women's advancement in educational leadership (Moorosi et al., 2020). The DBE's efforts to promote gender parity are often hindered by systemic issues such as biased recruitment practices and limited access to leadership roles for women. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort to align policy with practice, ensuring that supportive measures are effectively implemented and that gender equity principles are consistently applied across educational institutions (Mathevula, 2014; Swain, 2019). Aligning policy with practice requires a comprehensive approach that integrates gender equity principles into institutional operations, ensures the effective implementation of supportive measures, and maintains consistent application of these principles. This alignment is crucial for making meaningful progress toward gender equity in educational institutions.

2.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter covered the pertinent overview of the literature used in this study, which included works on the experiences and difficulties faced by female principals and strategies for enhancing their leadership. This debate covered several local, regional, and international research concerning the leadership development of female principals. The chapter used data from several sources to demonstrate scientific empirical evidence that more needs to be done

to encourage female principal leadership, particularly in rural South Africa. The following chapter focuses on the theoretical framework used in this study.

Chapter 3

Theory Underpinning the Study

3.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, the literature was reviewed concerning the stakeholder perceptions of socio-cultural factors hindering the representation of women in principalship positions. This chapter presents liberal feminism as a theoretical framework that guided the study and serve as a tool, I used to understand stakeholders' perceptions of socio-cultural factors hindering the representation of women in principalship positions. According to Bertram and Christiansen (2014), theories explain the reasons behind certain occurrences, or they can offer a framework illustrating the processes through which events occur.

I started by explaining liberal feminism and its relevance to this study. I then discussed the five concepts of the theory and the role that liberal feminism plays in the educational leadership landscape. I then conclude this chapter by exploring the critique of this theory and explaining how this theory links to the methodology selected for this study.

3.2 Liberal Feminism Theory and its Relevance for this Study

The concept of liberal feminism does not have a single founder attributed to it. It emerged during the late 18th and early 19th centuries as part of the first wave of feminism. Prominent figures associated with developing liberal feminist ideas include Mary Wollstonecraft, John Stuart Mill, Harriet Taylor Mill, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton (Tong, 2014; Hooks, 2000). These individuals, among others, advocated women's rights, including equal educational opportunities, legal rights, and suffrage. Liberal feminist ideas continue to be influential and have been further developed and expanded upon by subsequent feminist thinkers.

Granlund (2018) defines liberal feminism as a branch emphasising individual rights and equal opportunities. He argues that the theory advocates for gender equality through political and legal reform within the current system. Similarly, Fuller (2014) argues that liberal feminists advocate for changes in laws and policies to ensure equal rights and eliminate gender-based

discrimination. Advocating for change may involve pushing for laws that support equal pay for equal work and anti-discrimination policies. Fuller (2014) further contends that liberal feminism trusts that women should have the same opportunities as men in education, employment, and all other areas of public life. Opportunities may include access to the same resources, opportunities for advancement, and protection from discrimination.

This study subscribes to the definition by Granlund and Fullers thoughts and has used the liberal feminism theory to explore stakeholders' perceptions on the challenges and barriers on women's representation as well as the impact of policies and institutional practices on the rights and equal opportunities of women in the Eastern Cape secondary schools. Hence, one of the research questions of this study is to gather insight into stakeholders' perceptions on factors influencing the representation of women into principal positions. It also sought to analyse the impact that policies and institutional practices have on the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions with an aim of proposing actionable solutions to promote gender equality in educational leadership. These study objectives are consistent with the liberal feminist ideology of equal rights and opportunities.

In summary, this study embraced liberal feminism as its theoretical framework for several compelling reasons. Firstly, liberal feminism theory was aptly chosen due to its fundamental emphasis on realising women's full human rights, as enshrined in the South African Constitution. Secondly, revealing the socio-cultural factors that obstruct women's representation in principalship positions, liberal feminism theory facilitated a nuanced analysis of stakeholder perceptions within Eastern Cape secondary schools. Thirdly, liberal feminism theory, emphasised the need for policies and practices that promote gender equity and recognise women's leadership potential. Ultimately, this study analysed existing inequalities and advocated for inclusive practices that ensure women's full participation and recognition in educational leadership, thereby fostering a more equitable and just educational environment.

3.3 Concepts of Liberal Feminism Theory

The five concepts of liberal feminism and how each is valuable for this study are discussed below:

3.3.1 Equality of Opportunity

Elford (2023) defined ‘equality of opportunity’ as a principle that supporting the idea that all individuals should have an equal chance to succeed in life, regardless of their background or circumstances beyond their control. This concept emphasises removing discriminatory barriers and providing a level playing field where individuals can pursue their goals and ambitions based on their abilities and efforts. Applying this principle helps identify specific hindrances that prevent women from having an equal opportunity to advance to leadership roles.

By understanding the equality of opportunity, this study sought to examine how societal norms and institutional practices can be transformed to provide equal access to resources, remove structural barriers, and challenge gender biases. This understanding allows stakeholders, such as educational authorities and policy makers, to create an environment where women have same opportunities as men to achieve leadership roles. Thus, the concept not only frames the research questions and objectives but also guides the analysis of data and the development of recommendations.

This principle is particularly relevant to this study as it highlights actionable steps that schools and educational authorities can take to raise awareness about gender schools and educational authorities can implement initiatives to raise awareness about gender equality and challenge existing practices. Implementing initiatives based on this principle can lead to more inclusive and equitable practices, ensuring that women are equally represented in leadership positions.

3.3.2 Discrimination and Gender Bias

Discrimination and gender bias refer to the unfair or unequal treatment of individuals based on gender (Dunham, 2017). These issues are persistent across various aspects of life, including education, employment, and social interactions. Discrimination and gender bias concepts combine both explicit actions and subtle attitudes that disadvantage one gender over another, typically affecting women and other marginalised genders.

In the context of this study, gender biases significantly impact women's opportunities for progression into leadership roles within the educational sector. Understanding these biases is crucial for identifying the systemic changes needed to create an environment where women

have an equal opportunity to ascend to principalship roles. For instance, traditional gender stereotypes often compartmentalise women into specific roles, leading to the perception that they are less capable of handling leadership positions. This bias can result in women being overlooked for promotions or judged more harshly than their male counterparts. Addressing these issues requires investigating how multifaceted stakeholders perceive this concept as a factor in fostering gender equity in leadership. Also understanding how gender biases and discrimination impact women's progression into leadership roles is integral to addressing the research questions posed. The first question, "What socio-cultural factors are identified by stakeholders as influencing women's progression into principalship roles?" seeks to uncover the specific socio-cultural barriers that stakeholders perceive, such as traditional gender stereotypes and societal expectations that confine women to certain roles.

Addressing these issues require investigating how stakeholders such as educators, existing principals, departmental heads, and policy makers perceive and address gender bias as a factor in fostering gender parity in leadership. Through understanding these perceptions, the study can propose effective strategies to contest with gender bias and promote equal opportunities for women.

3.3.3 Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are preconceived notions whereby individuals are assigned specific attributes, roles, and behaviours based on gender (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). The gender stereotypes are often culturally deep-rooted and perpetuated through socialisation processes, media portrayals, and institutional practices. Gender stereotypes frequently depict men as more agentic, meaning they are seen as taking charge and being in control. At the same time, women are viewed as more communal, meaning they are attuned to others and focus on building relationships (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). These stereotypes can significantly influence both self-perception and the perception of others, leading to biased decisions and expectations in various contexts, including the workplace (Heilman, 2012).

Elford (2023) discusses how the gender stereotypes create barriers that prevent women from being perceived as capable leaders, thus affecting their representation in leadership roles. For

instance, women are often stereotypically viewed as more nurturing and less authoritative than men, which can undermine their authority and credibility in leadership positions.

In this study, the concept of gender stereotypes serves as a valuable lens through which to understand the underrepresentation of women in principalship roles through understanding stakeholders' perceptions. In recognising the pervasive impact of these gender stereotypes, the study can identify the specific cultural and societal norms that hinder women's career advancement. This principle is important and relevant to this study as it creates an opportunity to develop strategies to challenge and dismantle these gender stereotypes, thus promoting a more inclusive and diverse educational leadership landscape.

3.3.4 Gendered Expectations

According to Ridgeway and Correll (2004), gendered expectations arise from and reinforce the gender roles that dictate what is considered "masculine" and "feminine" behaviour. Gendered expectations refer to the societal norms and beliefs about the appropriate roles, behaviours, and attributes of individuals based on gender. The gendered expectations are deeply embedded in cultural, social, and institutional practices and influence how individuals perceive themselves and others, how they are treated and what opportunities are available to them (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Acker, 1990).

These expectations can be pervasive and manifest in various aspects of life, including family roles, educational opportunities, and career paths. For example, women are often expected to be nurturing and supportive, while men are expected to be assertive and dominant. Such expectations can limit women's access to leadership positions and create barriers to professional advancement (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

In the context of this study on the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions, gendered expectations can lead to biased evaluations of women's capabilities and performance. Eagly and Karau (2002) argue that women in leadership positions often face a double bind: they are expected to display traits traditionally associated with leadership, such as assertiveness and confidence, but when they do, they may be judged harshly for not conforming to feminine stereotypes. Conversely, if they conform to feminine stereotypes, they may be perceived as less competent leaders. Liberal feminism seeks to challenge and change these societal expectations

by advocating for gender equality and promoting the idea that leadership capabilities are not determined by gender. Through dismantling these entrenched norms, schools can create a more equitable environment where women are equally represented and valued in principalship positions. The understanding of the gendered expectations is crucial for addressing the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. Through recognising and challenging these societal norms, organisations and individuals can create more equitable environments that allow all individuals to pursue their goals and ambitions regardless of gender (Ely & Meyerson, 2000).

3.3.5 Equal Representation

Equal representation refers to the principle that all groups within a society should have proportional representation in various sectors, especially in leadership roles. This principle is rooted in the belief that diverse perspectives contribute to more inclusive and effective decision-making processes (Phillips, 1995; Dahlerup, 2006).

Phillips (1995) argues that equal representation is essential for genuine democracy, as it ensures that the interests and perspectives of all societal groups are considered in the decision-making process. This principle challenges the historical underrepresentation of marginalized groups and advocates for policies and practices that promote diversity and inclusivity.

Further, Dahlerup (2006) emphasises that equal representation not only enhances the legitimacy of democratic institutions but also leads to better governance outcomes. When leadership bodies reflect the diversity of the population, they are more likely to address the needs and concerns of all citizens. This is particularly important in contexts where certain groups have historically been excluded from leadership positions. In the context of this study, equal representation aims to address the systemic barriers that have led to the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. Kanter (1977) notes that organisations mirror societal structures, where men often dominate power and leadership. Organisations can create a more equitable environment by promoting equal representation, allowing women to effectively contribute their skills and perspectives.

Consequently, understanding and implementing equal representation is crucial for achieving gender parity in leadership roles. It requires a commitment to identifying and dismantling the

structural barriers that hinder the full participation of women and other underrepresented groups in leadership (Kanter, 1977; Dahlerup, 2006).

3.4 The Role of Liberal Feminism in Addressing Gender Inequality in Educational Leadership

Several studies have applied Liberal feminism theory in education and other sectors. Pavlidis et al. (2020) employed liberal feminism to examine the need for empowerment programmes to equip women with the skills and confidence required for leadership positions. Their study emphasised that equal access to education and leadership opportunities is crucial for achieving gender parity.

The goal of liberal feminist philosophy is to oppose patriarchal, racist oppression and to produce solutions that apply to social justice. This is supported by Brooks and Hesse-Biber (2007), who argue that research influenced by liberal feminist theory promotes women's empowerment, liberation, emancipation, and the more general goals of gender justice. Moorosi et al. (2020) explored how power disparities and patriarchal domination, rooted in post-colonial and post-apartheid governance structures, continue to marginalise women in leadership roles. The application of liberal feminism in their study highlights the need for systemic changes to promote gender equality in school governance.

Additionally, liberal feminists also contend that any laws, customs, or practices that limit the rights and possibilities of men and women must be repealed (Khoza, 2021). In the context of this study, liberal feminist philosophy's primary goal was to identify socio-cultural structures that hinder women's representation in principalship positions. Understanding these dynamics can help identify the cultural and social practices that must be addressed to promote gender equality in school leadership. Adopting a feminist perspective, as Potokri (2015) notes, involves actively listening to women's and other people's perceptions and responding in ways that support their prosperity. This approach emphasises the importance of incorporating the

perceptions of various stakeholders, including women educators who aspire to leadership roles. It helped capture their perceptions of real-life challenges due to socio-cultural constraints.

The framework contends that practices impeding equal rights and opportunities should be eliminated. Sinyosi and Potokri (2021) highlight the study's objective to identify and challenge sociocultural practices that limit women's representation in leadership. It provided a clear directive to seek actionable solutions to these barriers.

Liberal feminists argue that social and legal obstacles are the root cause of women's subjugation and that they hinder women from succeeding in the public sphere. Given that women's opportunities and outcomes were limited, liberal feminists were inspired to use the legal system and education to address the issue (Simba, 2021). It is also true that legislation and educational programmes are the main methods used to lessen the marginalisation and oppression of women in South Africa (Dudu, 2019).

Liberal feminism seeks to achieve equal opportunities and improve the working conditions of women (Pavlidis et al., 2020). According to Sinyosi and Potokri (2021), women should have equal rights to execute their responsibilities and address injustices done to them because they possess equal potential as males. Furthermore, liberal feminists contend that any laws, customs, or practices that impede men's and women's equal rights and opportunities ought to be eliminated, making it a suitable framework for this study.

Regarding socio-cultural barriers, Mathevula (2014) and Mbalilak and Onyango (2022) discuss how traditional gender roles and stereotypes hinder women's leadership opportunities. By applying a liberal feminist lens, these studies advocate for challenging and changing societal norms that perpetuate gender biases.

Therefore, liberal feminism provides a robust theoretical framework for understanding and addressing gender disparities in leadership. Advocating for equal opportunities and challenging discriminatory practices offers a pathway towards a more inclusive and diverse educational leadership landscape.

3.5 Critics of Liberal Feminism

The previous section has advocated for liberal feminism ideology in educational leadership. However, several issues have been raised against liberal feminism: its European and middle-class origins, which restrict its relevance to working-class and women of colour; its focus on working-class and global women; and its preference for individual rights and state-sponsored reform over criticisms of structural oppression (Crenshaw, 1991; Hooks, 1984). These critics suggest that while legal and policy changes are crucial, they may not be sufficient to deal with the entrenched social-cultural challenges for women from certain socioeconomic backgrounds. The liberal feminism theory's history of being associated with middle class white women's issues is seen as excluding the voices of the marginalised groups (Smith, 2016).

Liberal feminism often emphasises individual rights and opportunities (Okin, 2013). The above critics argue that this focus can overlook more significant social and systemic issues contributing to gender inequality, such as patriarchy, institutional discrimination, and cultural norms. By concentrating on individual empowerment, liberal feminism might not address these broader issues effectively. Liberal feminism's detractors claim that because of its individualist principles, it is difficult to see how underlying societal structures and ideas harm women (Meighan, 2014). They contend that even in situations where women are not dependent on any man, they are nevertheless dependent on a patriarchal state.

One of the more common criticisms of liberal feminism is that it tends to overlook the significance of traditional women's roles by focusing too heavily on transforming women to fit into male-dominated roles and norms (Mitchell, 2013). This approach often prioritises individual advancement and assimilation into existing structures, rather than valuing the unique contributions and perspectives associated with traditional female roles. As a result, liberal feminism can be criticised for downplaying the importance of community and collective experiences in favour of emphasising individual success and integration into the male-centric spheres of power.

Despite the above critics, liberal feminism theory provides a robust framework for understanding and addressing the socio-cultural factors that hinder women's representation in

principalship positions. Its emphasis on legal reforms, challenging stereotypes, promoting meritocracy, advocating for professional development, addressing structural barriers, and ensuring equal representation offers practical and relevant solutions to the issues identified in the study. Empirical studies have shown that policies promoting gender equality in education can effectively increase women's representation in leadership roles (Johnson, 2019; Andersen, 2020). By applying liberal feminist principles, stakeholders can work towards creating a more equitable educational environment that supports and values women in leadership roles.

3.6 Methodological Alignment with Liberal Feminism

A qualitative case study research design within the interpretive paradigm aligns well with the theoretical framework of liberal feminism, particularly an in-depth exploration of the nuanced socio-cultural factors that affect women's representation in educational leadership. This approach prioritises understanding the meanings and experiences of individuals, which is essential for uncovering stakeholders' subjective perceptions and biases regarding women in leadership roles.

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions emerged as a powerful method for gathering rich, detailed data that reflect the participants' personal experiences and perceptions. This methodological choice supports liberal feminism's emphasis on giving voice to stakeholder's experiences and recognising the importance of individual narratives on amplifying women's voices and acknowledging individual narratives as vital to comprehending broader social challenges.

In using semi-structured interviews, the study strategically captures the complexities and subtleties of gender discrimination and bias encountered by women within the educational sector. Purposive sampling ensures that participants are selected based on their knowledge and experience with the phenomenon under study. This is consistent with the liberal feminist focus and tenants on understanding women's challenges and barriers. By selecting well-informed participants about the socio-cultural factors affecting women's representation in principalship positions, the study can provide deeper insights into the systemic issues that must be addressed. Thematic analysis is an appropriate method for identifying and analysing patterns within qualitative data. It allows for data organisation into themes that reflect the key issues and

challenges related to gender equality in leadership positions. This method supports the liberal feminist goal of uncovering and addressing the socio-cultural and institutional barriers that hinder women's advancement. By presenting the data according to themes derived from the findings, the study can highlight the specific areas where interventions are needed to promote gender equality.

3.7 Chapter Summary

Liberal feminism ensured that the study followed a philosophical view and that a particular theory underpinned all its structures and aspects. This study adopted the liberal feminist perspective because the study sought to emancipate and elevate women's underrepresentation in leadership and management positions in general and particularly in the workplace by looking at the stakeholders' perceptions of socio-cultural factors hindering the representation of women in principalship positions. The following chapter focuses on the study research methodology and design.

Chapter 4

Methodology and Design

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided the theoretical framework that framed this study. This chapter discusses the research design and methodology used to approach this study and how it benefitted from it. This qualitative study investigated stakeholders' perceptions of socio-cultural factors hindering the representation of women in principalship positions in secondary schools of the Eastern Cape. This chapter outlines the research design, approach, paradigm, sampling strategy, data generation, data analysis, ethical issues, trustworthiness issues and limitations of the study.

4.2 Research Paradigm

According to Baker, as cited in de Vos et al. (2017) declare that a research paradigm is a pattern made up of several tenable assumptions and a plan for gathering and evaluating data. Accordingly, a paradigm is a framework, perspective, or worldview that directs further action and is predicated on presumptions and convictions regarding society, the nature of knowledge, and the way in which a researcher perceives and analyses real-world data. Nieuwenhuis (2007) further defines a research paradigm as a collection of presumptions or convictions about fundamental truths that give rise to a worldview. This means that representations of how people view the world can also be called paradigms or philosophical perspectives. The study employed an interpretive paradigm. According to Cherry (2020), humans form their own conceptions of the universe and utilise them to interpret the things they see and feel. According to Merriam (2009), the interpretive paradigm aims to comprehend the participants' perspective of the world where they live and work. The study's goal, which was to comprehend stakeholder perceptions of socio-cultural factors hindering the representation of women educators in principalship positions in two secondary schools of the O R Tambo Inland Education district, was supported by an interpretive paradigm. The interpretive paradigm allowed me to explore how participants attach meaning to sociocultural factors hindering women's representation in principalship positions and how they see society influences how they interpret it (Maree, 2019).

The interpretive paradigm was particularly appropriate for exploring stakeholder perceptions of socio-cultural factors hindering the representation of women educators in principalship positions. It allows for a nuanced exploration of the specific socio-cultural context within which these perceptions are formed. In the case of your study, understanding the unique cultural, social, and organisational dynamics of the secondary schools in Eastern Cape is essential to grasp the full picture of the barriers faced by women educators. This paradigm allowed for an in-depth understanding of the subjective experiences and meanings that stakeholders, including principals and teachers attribute to the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. Through focusing on the interpretive approach, I captured the nuanced socio-cultural dynamics and historical context unique to this region, thereby providing a holistic perspective on the barriers faced by women educators. This understanding was crucial for developing strategies to address gender disparities in educational leadership.

4.2.1 Ontological Assumptions

Interpretive research is based on the belief that reality is a subjective construct shaped by the interpretations and meanings people ascribe to events (Scotland, 2012). Humans actively engage with their world, participating in it, shaping it, and co-creating meanings about it and themselves through these interactions (Crotty, 1998; Scotland, 2012). Consequently, reality is seen as a socially constructed experience, leading to the existence of as many realities and perspectives as there are individuals experiencing a phenomenon (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Scotland, 2012; Willis, 2007). Morehouse (2012) argues that recognising multiple realities and perspectives offers a more comprehensive understanding of a situation. Therefore, situations are not fixed or static but evolve over time and place, making reality a complex and multi-layered phenomenon (Cohen et Al., 2011). Given that reality is mediated through experiences and meaning making is subjective and socially constructed, those best equipped to describe an event are those directly involved in it (Cohen et al., 2011; Mack, 2010). In other words, interpretive researchers believe that reality is best understood by those who have experienced a particular situation. Guba and Lincoln (1994) further assert that an accurate understanding of "how things really are" and "how things really work" is best obtained from individuals with first-hand experience of the phenomenon (p. 108).

Considering the abovementioned points, the ontological assumption for this study was that reality was a subjective and socially constructed phenomenon. This means that the perceptions and attitudes of stakeholders shape their understanding of the socio-cultural barriers affecting women's representation in leadership roles. Each stakeholder's perspective was considered a unique reality, contributing to a comprehensive and multi-layered understanding of the issue under investigation.

4.2.2 Epistemological Assumptions

Interpretivist researchers argue that knowledge is a subjective construct shaped by cultural and historical contexts (Cohen et al., 2011; Scotland, 2012). It is created through social processes rather than discovered (Scotland, 2012). In this study, I adopted an interpretivist epistemology, emphasising the importance of understanding the meanings and experiences of individuals within their specific contexts. This involved engaging with stakeholders to co-create knowledge about the socio-cultural factors affecting women's leadership opportunities. The study explored how stakeholders perceive the socio-cultural factors influencing women's representation in principalship positions, acknowledging that these perceptions are socially constructed and context dependent.

4.3 Research Approach

This study utilized a qualitative research approach. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) explain that qualitative research involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach, examining people in their natural environments to understand and interpret phenomena and the meanings individuals attribute to them. This approach offers a comprehensive view of social phenomena, focusing on participants' subjective perspectives within their socio-political and historical contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Qualitative research served well as it is best suited to uncover and provide a detailed understanding of the multifaceted, intricate phenomena as those in this study (Creswell & Poth, 2016), thus capturing and preserving intrinsic complexities of human behaviour (Buston et al., 1998). Denzin and Lincoln (2011) affirm that qualitative

studies emphasise the qualities of entities and processes that are not experimentally examined or measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. This approach enabled me to explore attitudes, behaviours, and experiences to understand the problem from the participants' viewpoint (Maree, 2019). In qualitative research, I was positioned to see the world through the eyes of the participants and to understand the world as others experience it (Austin & Sutton, 2014). For instance, I was able to delve deeply into the subjective experiences and viewpoints of the stakeholders. This facilitated the identification of specific socio-cultural factors, such as traditional gender roles, societal expectations, and cultural norms, that stakeholders believe influence women's progression into principalship roles which addressed research question 1. The interpretive approach allowed me to understand how stakeholders perceive these socio-cultural factors, providing insights into their attitudes, behaviours, and experiences. By seeing the world through the eyes of the participants, I could capture the nuanced and varied perceptions of stakeholders, shedding light on how these factors are experienced and interpreted differently by various individuals within the educational community which addressed research question 2.

I actively engaged with participants during this research as they shared their personal perceptions. The backdrop for these experiences was predominantly their work environments, providing insights into the events, interactions, and individuals shaping their experiences. It was crucial to acknowledge that participants ascribed personal meanings to these experiences, influencing the stories they told. My fundamental responsibility was to guide participants in discussing the phenomenon under study. What did you do? This also involved interpreting verbal expressions and discerning non-verbal cues, as emphasised by Merriam (2009). The focus of this study was to delve into the stakeholders' like (principals, departmental heads, educators, and circuit managers) perceptions of socio-cultural factors hindering the representation of women in principalship positions, seeking to grasp both the essence of their encounters and the significance they attributed to them. A distinctive feature of the study was the detailed description of each participant's world, highlighting the uniqueness of their perceptions and experiences.

4.4 Research Design

A research design delineates the procedures for conducting a study, encompassing the methods and schedule for gathering, evaluating, and disseminating the relevant data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). According to Kratochwill and Levin (2015), a research design is a choice, and a declaration of the general research technique or strategy selected for a specific project. They contend that a research design ought to support and provide guidance for the project's planning. This study adopted a qualitative case study research design, focusing on a small number of participants. Creswell (2016) defines a case study research design as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear. This approach involves an in-depth, longitudinal examination of a single instance or event: a case. It provides a systematic way of looking at events, collecting data, analysing information, and reporting the results (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As a result, the researcher may gain a sharpened understanding of why the instance happened as it did, and what might become important to look at more extensively in future research. Case studies are used in various disciplines, including social sciences, education, and business, to explore and understand complex issues, processes, or behaviours (Maree, 2019). Case study research seeks a profound understanding of a situation to capture the real-life context of an event (Cohen et al., 2011; Kumar, 2011).

The research aimed to explore stakeholder perceptions regarding the socio-cultural factors that hinder women's representation in principalship positions within the Eastern Cape, a region characterised by diverse cultural dynamics and educational challenges. The decision to employ a case study approach was strategic, allowing for an in-depth examination of this complex issue within its natural context. By focusing on a limited number of participants, the study prioritised accuracy and depth over breadth, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of the nuanced barriers women face in aspiring to leadership roles in education. In the Eastern Cape, the socio-cultural landscape is shaped by various historical and contemporary influences that impact gender dynamics within educational institutions. This study engaged with a carefully selected group of stakeholders, including school principals, teachers, and members of the school governing bodies, all of whom possess unique insights into the institutional and societal factors affecting women's leadership prospects. Their lived experiences and personal narratives provided valuable perspectives on the prevailing attitudes, beliefs, and cultural norms that contribute to the underrepresentation of women in principalship. The qualitative nature of

the case study allowed for a flexible research design, enabling the researcher to adapt the inquiry as new insights emerged throughout the data collection process. This adaptability was crucial in uncovering the complex interplay between socio-cultural factors and women's leadership aspirations. For instance, participants could articulate how traditional gender roles, stereotypes, and biases influenced not only their personal experiences but also the broader institutional practices that govern recruitment and promotion in schools. Furthermore, the case study method emphasised the importance of context, as it highlighted how local cultural dynamics and social interactions shape perceptions of women's capabilities and potential for leadership. By immersing in the participants' natural settings, the study could capture the subtleties of their attitudes and beliefs, revealing how deeply ingrained cultural narratives continue to affect women's advancement in education.

Additionally, this approach supported the exploration of diverse perspectives and experiences, leading to a richer, more comprehensive analysis of the barriers faced by women in leadership positions. According to Simons (2014), a qualitative case study technique allows for a thorough analysis and interpretation of the experiences and complexities of programmes and policies within the specific socio-political contexts in which they are implemented. Such a design further supports the interpretative paradigm. Stake (2008) and Yin (2003) have suggested that an interpretive paradigm-based case study recognises the subjectivity of the meaning that participants provide. This allowed me to comprehend the participants' experiences (principals, departmental heads, educators, and circuit managers) and difficulties related to the study's principal goal by understanding how they conceptualised reality.

4.5 Sample and Sampling

The study was conducted in two secondary schools of the Oliver Reginald Tambo Inland district within the O R Tambo District Municipality. The district is named after Oliver Reginald Tambo, a prominent anti-apartheid activist and politician in South Africa. The municipality comprises five local municipalities: King Sabata Dalindyebo, Nyandeni, Mhlontlo, Port St Johns, and Ingquza Hill. It covers approximately 80% of the previously disadvantaged Transkei region and is one of the province's four Integrated Sustainable Rural Development Programme (ISRDP) nodes. The two schools that were selected are situated (insert the name of the local municipality). The area faces many socio-economic issues, such as unemployment, poverty, crime and illiteracy. Geographically, the schools are located within a minimum distance of one kilometre and a maximum distance of 10 kilometres.

In a research setting, a sample is a subset of the study population that serves as a representative sample of the overall population (McIntosh & Morse, 2015). The target population for this study was approximately 741. This was made up of approximately 92 secondary school principals, 134 DHs 506 PL 1 educators and 9 circuit managers in the O R Tambo Education District secondary schools. Sampling is a technique used by researchers to choose subjects from a broader target group who will serve as the sources of the necessary data for the study (Khan, 2014). Nine (9) participants which included two (2) principals, two (2) departmental heads, three (3) Post Level 1 educators and two (2) circuit managers for the district in which the schools are located, were purposively selected. Participants were chosen because they hold key roles within the educational hierarchy (principals, departmental heads, educators, and circuit managers) that directly influence or are affected by the representation of women in principalship positions. Good and clear justification. Including principals, departmental heads, educators, and circuit managers ensures a diversity of perspectives from various levels of authority and responsibility within the educational system. This diversity allows for a comprehensive exploration of how socio-cultural factors such as gender norms, organisational culture, and societal expectations affect women's representation in leadership roles.

The purposive sampling involved the deliberate selection of participants based on the study's objectives which was stakeholder perceptions of socio-cultural factors hindering the representation of women educators in principalship positions. Purposive sampling is a non-random method where participants are selected based on their expertise and experience with the phenomenon under study (Cohen et al., 2011; 2017; Creswell, Klassen, Smith & Clark, 2011; Etikan, Bala, Bakir & Yuvalı, 2017). In this case, purposive sampling provided me with the flexibility to selectively choose participants who aligned with the specific criteria and anticipated outcomes of the study, aiming to yield information-rich results (Barkhuizen et al., 2013; Maree & Pietersen, 2007; Merriam, 2009). In terms of inclusion and exclusion criteria, the study generated data from participants who had been at the school for more than five years because they had valuable insights regarding the principalship of the school. Current principals of the two schools and the circuit managers who work directly with the two schools were included; however, circuit managers not working directly with the two secondary schools were excluded. This criterion helped to maintain the study's focus and relevance, providing more precise and applicable data on the factors influencing the representation of female educators in

principal positions. Participants who had taught at a school for less than five years were excluded since they did not have sufficient information to be able to answer the questions on the matter under investigation.

The composition of participants in this study was two (2) males and seven (7) females between the ages of 35–55 years (shown in Table 1) and had several implications for the findings and the overall representativeness of the study. These participants had 10 to 29 years of teaching experience and possessed a deep and nuanced understanding of the subject matter. Their insights contributed valuable perspectives and a wealth of knowledge that might not have been as readily available from those with less experience. Their experience was particularly valuable for understanding trends, changes, and persistent challenges hindering women educators to principalship positions. A diverse participant sample has provided a richer understanding of the complexities surrounding underrepresentation of women in principalship positions. Also, different genders had distinct viewpoints on leadership, workplace culture, and the challenges associated with principalship positions of their schools. It enhanced the robustness of the study findings as participants gave varying responses based on their career experiences in educational leadership.

Table 1: Biographical Information of Participants

Participant's Name	Gender	Age	Name of School	Education Qualification	Years' Teaching experience	Participants Current Positions
PN1	Male	52	S1	Secondary Teacher Diploma (STD), Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE)	26	Principal
PN2	Female	47	S2	Bachelor of Education (B Ed) Bachelor of Education Honours (B Ed Hons)	18	Principal
DH1	Female	35	S1	Bachelor of Education (B Ed)	10	Departmental Head
DH2	Female	42	S2	Secondary Teacher Diploma (STD) Bachelor of Education (B Ed)	15	Departmental Head

PL1	Female	38	S1	National Diploma: Adult Basic Education and Training (ND: ABET) Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE)	11	Post level 1 Educator
PL2	Female	49	S1	Secondary Teacher Diploma (STD) Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE)	29	Post level 1 Educator
PL3	Female	42	S2	Bachelor of Education (B Ed)	15	Post level 1 Educator
CM1	Female	52	District Office	Secondary Teacher Diploma (STD), Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE), Bachelor of Education Honours (B Ed Hons), Master of Education (M Ed)	28	Circuit Manager
CM2	Male	55	District Office	Bachelor of Arts (BA), Bachelor of Arts Honours (BA Hons)	25	Circuit Manager

I considered several factors, such as determining participants and sites that would be included in the study, a crucial aspect highlighted by Creswell and Poth (2018). The strategic approach to participant selection was driven by the specific goals and focus of the research, ensuring that the chosen participants would be able to contribute meaningfully to the desired outcomes.

The sites selected for this study were two secondary schools in the O R Tambo District in the Eastern Cape. These schools were conveniently chosen as the sites due to their proximity to my residential area, which allowed easy access during data generation. Convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method, involves gathering data from a group that is readily accessible and available. This method does not aim to select individuals who best represent the entire population but rather those who are easiest for the researcher to reach (Simkus, 2022). This choice also eliminated the need for additional transportation and accommodation expenses.

I made telephonic appointments with the school principals and circuit managers and arranged to meet with the participants on agreed-upon dates. The intention of the meeting was to share details of the study.

4.6 Data Generation Methods

Creswell (2016) contends that the data-generation method is a component of a research design that outlines precisely what kind of data should be generated and how this should be done. As a result, the data generation method comprehensively explains the procedures and components utilised in the field to generate data from the sample's participants (Gibbs, 2007). The primary method employed for data generation in this research was face-to-face semi-structured interviews following the interview schedule (Appendix 1).

Maree (2019) defines semi-structured interviews as a qualitative research method that combines a pre-determined set of open questions (questions that prompt discussion) with the opportunity for the interviewer to explore themes or responses further. According to Creswell et al. (2017), semi-structured interviews are often utilised in research to validate and complement data obtained from other sources. Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik (2021) suggest that semi-structured interviews involve using an interview guide designed to address research objectives. This guide is not intended to be followed verbatim or in a fixed sequence during each interview. Instead, it serves to provide structure and direction while allowing for a natural flow of conversation that is tailored to each interviewee. Typically, a semi-structured interview guide includes primary open-ended questions supplemented by follow-up probes. These probes enable interviewers to delve deeper into specific topics as they arise during the interview process. The semi-structured nature of the interviews facilitated a more flexible and interactive exchange between the participants and me, enriching the depth and breadth of the data generated and allowing me to obtain comprehensive insights into the research questions. The one-on-one setting promoted natural and uninterrupted conversations, which are crucial for establishing trust between the participants (Creswell, 2014a).

I started generating data from the school principals and DHs and later circuit managers, providing a strategic and management perspective, and allowing for probing and clarification.

Starting with school principals and DHs has allowed for a bottom-up approach to understanding the educational system. School-level administrators often have a more intimate knowledge of day-to-day operations, while DHs can provide insights at a broader departmental level. This hierarchical progression assisted me in building a comprehensive understanding of the educational landscape. It provided a structured framework for probing and clarification, leading to more meaningful and actionable insights. Semi-structured interviews were the chosen method, and these interactions took place in the respective principals' and DHs offices. Interviewing participants in their offices created a familiar and comfortable setting. This contributed to a more relaxed atmosphere, potentially encouraging participants to open and share their perspectives more freely. Familiar surroundings have also made these participants feel more at ease during the interview process. This approach has acknowledged the importance of their positions and emphasised the significance of their insights into the research or data generation process. The duration of the interviews was about 40 minutes each, providing a substantial amount of time for participants and me to engage in open and unrestricted discussions.

Additionally, a focus group was employed for data generation from three PL 1 educators. According to De Vos et al. (2017), focus groups can be seen as group interviews, serving as a valuable tool for gaining insights into people's feelings or thoughts on a particular issue, product, or service. Focus groups are a qualitative data generation method where participants engage in group discussions on a specific topic (Morgan, 1997). Focus groups enhanced the validity and trustworthiness of the study's findings, facilitating a collective discussion among Post Level 1 educators. This method allowed for the exchange of diverse perspectives and experiences, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the socio-cultural factors impacting the representation of female educators in principal positions.

Focus groups provided a richer, more validated understanding of how Post Level 1 educators perceive and are affected by socio-cultural factors in relation to female representation in principal roles. The dynamic nature of focus group discussions encouraged participants to express their views more openly, which can lead to more authentic and reliable data (Morgan, 1997). Additionally, the presence of peers provided a sense of security and validation, making it easier for participants to discuss sensitive issues such as gender discrimination and bias. This was particularly useful in a study aiming to address underrepresented voices, as it ensures that

a range of perspectives were considered. Furthermore, the collective insights gained from focus groups helped triangulate findings from individual interviews, thereby strengthening the overall robustness of the research (De Vos et al., 2017).

One focus group interview was conducted with three educators from School A and one educator from School B because some Post Level 1 educators from School B withdrew from participating in the study. This was valuable in understanding unique insights and personal experiences. In this context, the focus group was utilised to explore the perceptions of PL1 educators regarding the underrepresentation of women in principals' positions. Morgan (1997) defines focus groups as a research technique involving group interaction focused on a topic predetermined by the researcher, emphasising their role in facilitating collective discussions and capturing diverse perspectives on the subject at hand. In this study, focus groups served as a crucial supplementary data source and played a vital role in the triangulation process. Utilised alongside face-to-face semi-structured interviews, focus groups facilitated interaction with PL 1 educators in their familiar environments, fostering meaningful discussions. The duration of the focus group interview was 30 minutes. This approach not only provided additional insights but also enhanced the robustness of the data through triangulation, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The interactive nature of the focus group interview allowed participants to build upon each other's ideas, providing diverse perspectives on the same question (Maree, 2016). The reason for using focus groups alongside semi-structured interviews for Post-Level 1 educators was to capture a comprehensive range of perspectives and insights on the stakeholder perceptions of socio-cultural factors hindering the representation of women in principalship positions. Focus groups allow for group interaction, enabling participants to discuss and debate their views collectively. This method helped to uncover shared experiences, differing opinions, and deeper contextual understandings that were not fully captured in individual interviews alone.

4.7 Data Analysis

According to Maree (2019), data analysis is a process of compiling and organising the participant data to derive meaning from it. By selecting just the information pertinent to the study and creating themes to categorise the data, the data analysis method assisted me in

reducing the volume of information generated (Wellman et al., 2005). Data analysis, according to Creswell (2014a), is the process of looking through, cleaning, manipulating, and modelling data to find relevant information, draw conclusions, and aid in decision-making. I adopted both an inductive and a deductive thematic approach known as a “hybrid” or “integrative” approach, which offered the benefits of both flexibility and theory-driven analysis. The thematic approach is an analytical method for locating, analysing, and reporting patterns or themes in data, according to Braun and Clarke (2006). Data from participants generated through semi-structured face-to-face and focus group interviews were analysed using the six thematic analysis steps explained below.

4.7.1 Familiarising Yourself with Your Data

Braun and Clarke (2006) indicate that familiarising yourself with data involves immersing yourself thoroughly in it, whether you have collected it yourself or received it from others. In this study after the transcripts were completed and participants had verified them to ensure accuracy. I then immersed myself with data, reading it repeatedly. The purpose of reading repeatedly was to search for meanings and patterns. I read the entire dataset more than three times before starting, this allowed me to shape ideas and identify potential patterns. While reading I was taking notes and marking ideas, and all this was later used to allocate codes.

4.7.2 Generating Initial Codes

I then proceeded to the second phase of thematic data analysis, which is coding. Coding is a crucial part of the analysis, as it organises the data into meaningful groups. This involved creating initial codes that identify interesting features of the data, whether semantic or latent (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I then coded and collated all data into meaningful segments, resulting in a comprehensive list of codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.7.3 Searching for Themes

Once all data had been initially coded and collated, I then searched for themes. This phase involved shifting the focus from individual codes to broader themes by sorting the codes into potential themes and collating relevant coded data extracts within these themes (Braun &

Clarke, 2006). The process involved analysing how the different codes combine to form overarching themes.

4.7.4 Reviewing Themes

Braun and Clarke (2006) state that Phase 4 of data analysis begins with a set of candidate themes and involves refining them. During this phase, I had to decide to discard some themes due to insufficient data. I also merged and, in some instances, had to split others into separate themes and had to investigate the coded data extracts to ensure they form a coherent pattern.

4.7.5 Defining and Naming Themes

Braun and Clarke (2006), sy Phase 5 of data analysis begins with a satisfactory thematic map and involves defining and refining the themes for presentation. I identified the essence of each theme and determined what aspect of the data it captures. This process resulted in three (3) themes with ten (10) subthemes, and these are discussed in Chapter 6.

4.7.6 Producing the Report

This Phase 6 involves the final analysis and write-up of the report, presenting a compelling story of the data that convinces the reader of the analysis's merit and validity (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The write-up integrated data extracts from the two data generating tool as discussed in the next chapter to support the analysis, providing a comprehensive view of the findings.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2014) and Merriam (2009), ethics in research often address morally good or wrong behaviour. Ethics in research must be considered when determining the appropriate behaviours of participants. The researcher is prohibited by ethics from failing to maintain study participants' confidentiality and must disclose fraudulent findings (Barkhuizen et al., 2014; Struwig & Stead, 2013). This is in line with Maree's (2019)

argument that researchers have ethical obligations to consider. Among these are the legal restrictions that go along with collecting and disclosing data in a way that safeguards the welfare and rights of study participants. Initially, I applied and received approval from the schools and the ECDOE to conduct the research. I then applied and received ethical approval from the University of KwaZulu-Natal Ethics Committee to perform this study. Participation must always be voluntary; no one should ever be forced to participate (Neuman, 2006); thus, prior to the interviews, each participant received information about the study and was requested to participate. Each participant signed consent forms. The participants were not provided with any financial advantages, and their participation was entirely voluntary. I informed the participants that I would use pseudonyms in any reports created from the data to protect their privacy and confidentiality. The Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), which states that personal information should only be used and/or disclosed to third parties with the consent of the individual involved, was also explained to them. I also informed the participants that the data they supplied would only be utilised for this study and that all tapes would be kept for five years in a secure area that would only be accessible by myself and my supervisor.

4.9 Trustworthiness

According to Yin (2018), transparency refers to when all processes from empirical studies are explained and documented and can be reviewed and comprehended as a way of showing. According to Creswell (2014b), validity in qualitative research is neither the same as it is in quantitative research, nor is it a corollary of generalisability (the external validity of transferring results to other situations, people, or samples) or reliability (evaluating stability). Validity and reliability are crucial standards for excellence in quantitative research. According to Creswell and Miller (2000), terms like credibility, authenticity, and trustworthiness are frequently employed in qualitative literature that discusses validity. One of the advantages of qualitative research, according to Creswell and Miller (2000), is its trustworthiness, which is based on assessing whether the conclusions are true from the perspective of the participant, the researcher, or the readers of an account. To validate this study, various ways were employed in this qualitative research to increase the trustworthiness of the study. This study used trustworthiness with the four concepts: credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability. Data source triangulation was used as the data was generated from different stakeholders that is 2 school principals, 3 post level 1 educators, 2 departmental managers and

2 circuit managers. Comparing and contrasting the perspectives of these diverse groups, the study could identify consistent patterns and discrepancies in perceptions. This approach ensured that the findings are not biased by the views of a single group and reflect a more comprehensive understanding of the socio-cultural dynamics. The aim was to generate results that are not only realistic but also applicable across diverse teaching contexts in the province. To ensure credibility and reliability, the research deliberately incorporated contrary and inconsistent results, aligning with the approach advocated by Yeasmim and Rahmam (2012). This rigorous process sought to strengthen the validity of the study's findings and increase the likelihood of their generalisability to various educational settings.

4.9.1 Credibility

Self and Roberts (2019) explain that credibility is determined by the reason for undertaking the study and how the data were generated. Credibility guarantees that the necessary data is generated from pertinent sources knowledgeable about the studied subject. Credibility can be ensured through ongoing participant interaction, persistent observation, and member checks (Babbie & Mouton, 2010). I interpreted the data correctly, allowed participants to verify the interpreted findings, and sought feedback to ensure accuracy.

4.9.2 Transferability

Korstjens and Moser (2017) define transferability as the degree to which qualitative research findings can be transferred in other contexts with other respondents than those used in this research. Babbie and Mouton (2010) define transferability as the potential for the type of study to be performed by other persons and produce outcomes like those that the prior researcher acquired. In the context of this research, I comprehensively described the research site, participants, and processes used to generate data for future studies.

4.9.3 Dependability

According to Gibbs (2007), dependability relates to whether individuals can rely on the information for use in the future and the correctness of the facts supplied. It is the stability of the research findings over time. It is determined by asking the research participants to evaluate

results, interpretations, and recommendations regarding what they have said during the interview. Detailed records of the research process have been kept for this study to ensure consistency over time.

4.9.4 Confirmability

Babbie and Mouton (2010) state that confirmability is the extent to which a research study's interpretation can be linked to its original source and determines whether it accurately captures the participants' perspectives. When data are double-checked throughout the data gathering and analysis process to make sure the findings are probably replicable by others, the confirmability of qualitative data is ensured. An explicit coding system that lists the codes and patterns found during investigations can be used to document this. I ensured the study's confirmability was guaranteed by sharing findings and interpretations with the participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences. This helped to ensure that the findings are truly representative of the participants' perspectives.

4.10 Assumptions, Limitations and Delimitations

This section presented the study's assumptions, limitations, and delimitations:

4.11 Assumptions

The research adopted a purposive approach, where I identified the participants to be included in the study. This may have caused other potential participants with the required information to be excluded from the study. Thus, to overcome this challenge, the importance of the study was explained to the participants. I then ensured confidentiality by assuring them that their identities would not be disclosed. The participants in this study included various stakeholders, such as current and aspiring principals (male teachers and female teachers) and during data generation, each participant group brought its own perspectives, beliefs, and societal expectations about women's roles in leadership and management positions. It was assumed that female participants might have faced power imbalances and marginalization within their professional context, which could have affected their willingness to share their experiences openly. Additionally, it was assumed that male participants, who held positions of authority

within the school system, might have influenced the dynamics of the research, impacting the participants' readiness to disclose specific perspectives. To address these potential issues and mitigate bias, it was assumed that adopting an objective stance during the research process was necessary to ensure the successful outcome of the study.

4.12 Limitations

The study focused on specific socio-cultural factors affecting women's leadership in education, such as traditional gender roles, patriarchal domination, and cultural hurdles. However, this scope may not encompass all possible barriers or facilitators of women's leadership. Factors such as economic constraints, personal motivations, and broader policy environments might also play significant roles but are not the primary focus of this research. This limitation could result in an incomplete understanding of the challenges faced by women in educational leadership.

4.13 Delimitations

The study was confined to two secondary schools of the O R Tambo District in the Eastern Cape, which is predominantly rural. Therefore, results cannot be generalised throughout the country.

4.14 Chapter Summary

The research design and methodology, as well as the research approach, paradigm, sampling strategy, data generation, and data analysis, were covered in Chapter 4. Concerns about ethics, reliability, and study constraints were also considered. In addition, methods for guaranteeing the accuracy of the data were showcased. The study results derived from the data generated are provided, examined, and analysed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Discussion of Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis and discussion of the findings of the study, which aimed to investigate the stakeholder perceptions of socio-cultural factors hindering the representation of women in principalship positions in two secondary schools in the Eastern Cape. As discussed in Chapter 4, the data were analysed according to the research questions of the study using both an inductive thematic approach and a deductive approach, which offered the benefits of both flexibility and theory-driven analysis. Direct quotes from participants were used to support the findings.

5.2 Discussion of Findings

This section is divided into two main sections: inductive and deductive analysis. The inductive thematic analysis is where this phenomenon of underrepresentation is discussed under the three themes and sub-themes guided by the research questions. The data were analysed into the three themes and 10 subthemes as shown in Table 3 below.

Table 4: Themes and Sub-themes

Themes	Sub-Themes	Research Questions
1. Gender Stereotypes and Discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Deep-Rooted Societal Stereotypes• Cultural Beliefs and Practices• Cultural and Societal Norms	What socio-cultural factors are identified by stakeholders as influencing women's progression into principalship roles?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Historical Precedents	

2. Workplace Culture and Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systemic Bias in Appointment Processes • Lack of Support for Women in Leadership • Gender Bias in Leadership Selection Panel • Cultural bias and Stereotypes 	How do stakeholders perceive the socio-cultural factors influencing the representation of women in principalship positions?
3. Lack of Strategies and Interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor Implementation of Policies • Ineffective and Non-impactful Strategies and Interventions 	How do policy and institutional practices impact women's progression into principalship positions?

5.3 Theme 1: Gender Bias and Stereotypes

Gender Bias and Stereotypes analyse the pervasive influence of societal norms, beliefs, and stereotypes on gender roles within the context of educational leadership. This theme discusses deeply ingrained cultural and societal expectations contributing to the underrepresentation of women in principalship positions and how these expectations perpetuate gender discrimination within educational institutions. This theme has the following sub-themes: deep-rooted societal stereotypes, cultural beliefs and practices, cultural and societal norms as a factor influencing women's progression.

5.3.1 Deep-Rooted Societal Stereotypes

The study revealed a pervasive and entrenched influence of societal norms and perceptions contributing to the underrepresentation of women in principalship positions. Participants

consistently highlighted deeply ingrained gender stereotypes and beliefs within the communities, perpetuating the notion that men are inherently better suited for leadership roles than women.

People (people in our communities) have the mentality that females cannot lead them; they prefer to be led by males. It will take time to change because they are influenced by our societies. It becomes a problem when female educators discipline learners. They (female educators) are not taken seriously; they are not respected just because they are females. (PN2)

The finding above revealed that female educators are not taken seriously and not respected solely because of their gender and is a concerning reflection of persisting gender biases and stereotypes in society. This issue encompasses several layers of societal attitudes and systemic challenges that contribute to the unequal treatment of women in the field of education. This bias is further exemplified by firsthand experiences shared by individuals below:

Let me say there is still a stereotype that the people who are supposed to be in labour leadership are those that are males. I once applied for a post as a chief education specialist, which is normally called Curriculum Education Specialist (CES), and then I was told by the community members including the SGB that the post was for a male; no female can lead in such a position. So, there are still those stereotypes within our communities even though I may say if I can take it politically, we voted in 1994 and affirmative action is in place, but it is not in implementation. (CM1)

One other example to show that this issue of cultural issues [is] deeply entrenched in our locations or communities. You know when they're having their meeting there, females will stay alone, then on their side and then all males will stay on that side. On the other side. If you go there, as I say, this thing is deeply entrenched in their way of doing things. Only males would lead. They would only talk on just by themselves. Women are just quiet down there, but they cannot take any lead. So, if we can start by that and make them understand each other, make females free to talk and make males understand that women must be allowed to talk their minds, maybe that also can assist. As I say that it is deeply entrenched, even in religion, they're using the scriptures like,

1 Timothy 2:11-12 that females must be silent, they cannot do this and that in terms of leading the congregation now. Even in our traditional settings they will say, 'Asinakuva ngamfazi apha' (we cannot be told by a woman here). (PN1)

The statements above clarify that the societal stereotypes of separating females and males during meetings reflect a traditional gender division that reinforces gender stereotypes. This segregation suggests that there are distinct roles and expectations for each gender within the community. The fact that only males lead and dominate the discussions while females are expected to remain quiet highlights the unequal power dynamics and lack of gender equality within the community. This reflects a patriarchal system where men hold authority and decision-making power. This situation also places women at a disadvantage, as they encounter numerous obstacles preventing them from fully and effectively participating in the labour market. As a result, many women find themselves relegated to informal employment opportunities.

These findings are in line with Sperandio and Kagoda's (2010) findings in other contexts. They reported that in Uganda, women throughout their lives are rarely seen as independent, strong-willed, or able to make decisions for themselves. This view about the lack of decision-making power is deeply ingrained in societal norms, culture and perceptions. This notion was later supported by Ndimbo (2018), who examined how the criteria for appointing women to leadership roles in Tanzanian primary schools impacted their opportunities. The study revealed that societal factors, including unfavourable attitudes and traditional beliefs, act as constraints on women's access to leadership positions. Sons are often favoured because they are believed to carry on the family name and lineage. On the other hand, daughters are seen as destined for marriage, leading to less appreciation and praise (ibid). These beliefs reflect a strong patriarchal opinion, where girls are expected to be subservient to their fathers and later to their husbands after marriage. This reinforces the idea of male dominance. The South African context is no exception. Some female educators experience a sense of hopelessness, leading them to accept submissiveness within the patriarchal system due to the prevailing cultural norms (Bruey et al., 2018). The findings of this study highlight how entrenched societal stereotypes undermine women educators' authority and credibility in leadership roles. The persistent belief that leadership is inherently male reinforces barriers that prevent women from accessing principalship positions.

5.3.2 Socio-Cultural Beliefs and Practices

Cultural beliefs and practices heavily influence the selection and recognition of leaders within secondary schools. The preference for certain individuals based on cultural or social contributions rather than qualifications exemplifies the challenges women educators face in breaking through societal norms to attain leadership positions, as highlighted by three participants below:

Socio-cultural factors have contributed to the underrepresentation of women educators in principalship positions in my school in a way that women are seen as people who are meant to be led by men. All important decisions are made by men, and women educators are meant to just obey without questioning anything. If women happen to question those decisions, they are seen as people who do not respect men and who do not have morals, as our societies instil the idea of women with morals as women who do not question decisions taken by men. (DH2)

I think a factor that is influencing these imbalances or this underrepresentation of women educators in principalship positions is cultural differences. In our African culture, it is believed that men are supposed to be leaders. It affected many females who did not get these positions. (PL2)

In South Africa, there are cultural practices that prevent most of the women from going to school. Such practices that were happening in the past have delayed most women to transform, mentally and otherwise, in terms of cash, in terms of geographical location, being far away from the institutions of learning and, as a result of poverty, making fewer privileged to the largest extent women to perforate the system and get into the higher levels of learning, where they would be mentally liberated and play successfully in the roles that men have played. (CM2)

The three quotes from participants above illustrate how socio-cultural factors contribute to the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions. Women face resistance, discrimination, and scepticism, not just from their male counterparts but also from entrenched societal attitudes

that question the legitimacy of women's authority and leadership abilities. In South Africa, historical cultural practices significantly hindered women's access to education, thereby delaying their mental and economic development. These practices, often rooted in gender discrimination, resulted in women being geographically isolated from educational institutions and impoverished, further limiting their opportunities. The lack of educational access prevented many women from achieving the mental liberation necessary to compete for roles traditionally dominated by men. Nyondo (2023) argues that certain social and cultural norms pose obstacles to women potential to reach leadership positions. The impact of patriarchy has resulted in the marginalised status of women in many societies where these cultural values persist, potentially affecting the distribution of leadership roles between men and women in education today. Living in predominantly male-dominated societies, individuals are raised within a cultural framework that upholds male superiority. This influences decision-making processes for both men and women, as their choices are shaped by patriarchal values. For example, many women develop low self-esteem and lack confidence, leading them to rely on men for important decision-making tasks. These findings are contrary to Hideg and Shen (2019), who conducted a study in Karatu District, Tanzania, focused on why there are still so few women in leadership positions in Tanzania. The findings reported that, technically, women are underrepresented in managerial positions of their own choice.

The socio-cultural beliefs and practices that undermine women's leadership potential are deeply rooted in historical and cultural contexts. The testimonies of participants highlight how these entrenched attitudes continue to influence the selection process, leading to the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. The persistence of these cultural norms necessitates a comprehensive approach to dismantle the barriers they create. Understanding the historical context and ongoing socio-cultural dynamics is essential for developing effective strategies to promote gender equity in educational leadership. By addressing these deeply ingrained beliefs and practices, stakeholders can work towards creating an environment that values and supports women's leadership potential, ensuring that qualifications and abilities take precedence over cultural biases. This approach is vital for fostering an inclusive and equitable educational leadership landscape in the Eastern Cape and beyond.

5.3.3 Historical Precedents as a Factor Influencing Women's Progression

The findings from this study have identified historical precedents as the major theme influencing women's progression into principalship positions. The apartheid regime in South Africa perpetuated gender stereotypes and discrimination against women, including the belief that women are unfit for leadership roles. Despite the end of apartheid, these entrenched stereotypes persist in contemporary society, shaping perceptions of women's capabilities and suitability for leadership positions. The historical marginalisation of women has created a legacy that continues to impact opportunities for women in educational leadership, as expressed by the participants:

The imbalances of the past still affect the way people think in our days. During the apartheid regime, it was said that women could not be leaders; women could not rule. People are still holding those gender stereotypes to say women educators cannot be principals in our schools, which results in them being underrepresented in principalship positions. (PL1)

In the past women were not even allowed to go to school, the reason being that after qualifying, get married, and they are not an investment in a family situation and let alone to say men were not providing all the material needs of women. So, you can see now that culture was hindering women to go to school, to become independent, but rather encouraging that they should be dependent to their husbands. (CM2)

The acknowledgement of these historical roots is crucial for understanding the current underrepresentation of women in principal positions. Historically, women were systematically denied access to education, primarily due to cultural beliefs that relegated them to domestic roles and prioritised their dependence on men. This cultural paradigm reinforced the notion that women's primary purpose was to marry and support their husbands rather than pursue independent paths such as education and career advancement. Women were deprived of opportunities for personal and professional development, perpetuating their subordination and reinforcing traditional gender roles.

Avgeri (2015) asserts that, historically, leadership has been perceived through a masculine lens, associating certain traits and behaviours with effective leadership. This perception has

inadvertently led to the marginalisation of women in leadership roles, as their qualities and approaches may not align with traditional expectations. The lingering effects of past discriminatory practices have created enduring barriers for women educators seeking to ascend to leadership roles, further exacerbating gender disparities in educational leadership.

These findings are directly applicable to the current study titled: "Stakeholder Perceptions of Socio-Cultural Factors Hindering the Representation of Women in Principalship Positions: A Case Study of Two Secondary Schools in Eastern Cape." The historical precedents of gender discrimination and stereotyping during the apartheid era have left an indelible mark on contemporary perceptions of women's leadership capabilities. Participants' testimonies reflect how these deep-seated biases continue to influence the selection and promotion processes in educational settings. The historical context provided by the apartheid regime's impact on gender roles underscores the importance of addressing these entrenched stereotypes to promote gender equity in leadership.

5.4 Theme 2: Workplace Culture and Leadership

Workplace culture and leadership encompass the values, norms, and practices that define the atmosphere and dynamics within an organisation. This theme explores the various aspects of organisational culture, including communication styles, decision-making processes, diversity and inclusion initiatives, and leadership styles. It delves into how these factors shape employee experiences, influence productivity and innovation, and impact overall organisational performance. This theme has the following sub-themes: systematic bias in appointment process, gender bias in leadership selection, lack of support for women in leadership and cultural bias and stereotypes.

5.4.1 Systematic Bias in Appointment Processes

The appointment processes in the education sector display a deeply entrenched systematic bias, where women are often denied opportunities for higher leadership positions based on gender. This bias is evident in both explicit statements and subtle judgments about women's abilities to handle the pressure of managerial roles. This is highlighted by three participants below:

Most women would serve as a deputy principal for quite a few years being a female, and then if the principal was a male person, they would still maintain the same stance to say, let's reappoint and look for a male teacher to lead this school. Remember, a school is one of the most important places in the community, so they say they want to produce leaders therefore they cannot be led by a female. That is the stereotype we are having in our district. (PN1)

The stereotypes influence the appointment process of women educators in my school in a way that women are offered certain positions which are lower than the managerial positions that they deserve. No matter how good you are at doing your work, because you are a woman, you will be classified as someone who cannot handle the pressure of being in a managerial position or being a leader. This has led to the appointment of a few females and more males in managerial positions at my school. Women are judged by their gender, not by their work, and this disadvantages women who are born leaders and who deserve leadership positions. (DH2)

Although one of the four focus group participants argued that they had no first-hand experience, however, they have heard that women are denied appointments to leadership positions due to an unfair appointment process. One participant said:

No, I have never experienced any gender biased or stereotype during my appointment, but I have seen women being denied opportunities due to unfair appointment practices that are influenced by the gender stereotypes. Socially, women have been and are still viewed as a second-class citizen, and most women cannot see themselves taking leadership in a male dominated sphere of leadership. Our culture focuses on shaping young male leaders. (PL3)

These findings are congruent with those by Wiese (2020), Hightower (2019), Swain (2019) and Xiang et al. (2017), which collectively emphasise the pervasive impact of gender stereotypes on women's career advancement in the education sector. It is clear from the above that gender stereotypes and biases significantly impact the career advancement opportunities of women educators. Despite their qualifications, skills and leadership abilities, women find themselves relegated to lower-level positions or are denied opportunities for promotion simply

because of their gender. This perpetuates gender disparities in leadership representation and reinforces the notion that leadership and management roles, particularly principalship in secondary schools, are reserved for men, which entrenches inequality within secondary school leadership and management.

In the context of two secondary schools in Eastern Cape, these stereotypes manifest in the appointment process, where women are often relegated to lower positions despite their qualifications and capabilities. This bias stems from the pervasive belief that women cannot handle the pressures of leadership roles, resulting in fewer women in managerial positions. The unfair appointment practices, shaped by these stereotypes, have led to a disproportionate number of male leaders, perpetuating the notion of women as second-class citizens and reinforcing cultural norms that prioritize the development of young male leaders. The findings from the current study highlight the need for systemic changes to address these biases, ensuring that women are evaluated based on their work and leadership potential rather than their gender, thereby promoting gender equality in educational leadership.

5.4.2 Gender Bias in Leadership Selection Panel

The study unveils a concerning correlation between the career advancement of women and the biases inherent in the selection panel for leadership positions. The composition of selection panels and nomination committees predominantly comprises men, leading to a lack of gender diversity. This absence perpetuates biases against women aspiring to leadership and management roles.

The findings also indicate the intersectionality of gender and age bias, indicating that certain leadership positions are perceived to be reserved for individuals of a specific age and gender. This intersectionality compounds the challenges faced by women. The quotes from participants below support the notion of intersectionality of gender and age this finding.

I have seen women being offered lower positions rather than key managerial positions because they are just also women. So, with that, I have seen how you would not be appointed to key managerial positions just because you are female. (DH1)

The School Governing Body are mainly men. Therefore, it is if I can take it scientifically so “like dissolves in like” you cannot have more male people in a panel or in the school government bodies and expect them to vote for a female. So, it means that even the composition of the people that are forming up those nomination committees or the selection panels are mostly males. Therefore, they believe that it is for males. (CM1)

One focus group (female) participant commented that:

There are policies by the Eastern Cape Department of Education to address gender equity and equality when it comes to appointing principals. For example, it is highly encouraged that if the principal is a male, a deputy principal must be a female; if there are eight SMT members, five of them should be females. This is a deep-rooted belief that males were created to lead and deep-rooted as if it needs radical policies to address and radical campaigns to boost women’s confidence. (PL3)

The lack of representation and the biases in the selection process not only restrict women's career progression but also perpetuate a cycle of inequality within the schools. The analogy "like dissolves in like" suggests that individuals tend to favour those who are like them, leading to a preference for male candidates in male-dominated selection panels. Bayeni and Bhengu (2015) argued that some panellists' attitudes during shortlisting and interviews left much to be desired. This is supported by the research of Carli and Eagly (2016), who highlighted the persistent challenges faced by female leaders in the USA despite ongoing efforts towards gender equality spanning over a century. Their argument underscores the global nature of gender stereotyping, emphasising that it transcends national boundaries. They asserted that gender bias serves as an invisible obstacle hindering women's advancement into higher levels of school management. This assertion is later supported by Malahlela (2017), who highlights the issue of the panellists' biased hiring methods, which she alleged resulted in a lack of female principals in secondary schools. Although women are in the majority in the education sector, males continue to hold senior posts like principalship because of unethical appointment practices in the selection and appointment process. This bias in leadership selection process not only hinders women's career progression but also perpetuates a cycle of inequality within schools.

These findings are directly applicable to the current study titled: "Stakeholder Perceptions of Socio-Cultural Factors Hindering the Representation of Women in Principalship Positions: A Case Study of Two Secondary Schools in Eastern Cape." The gender biases and lack of diversity in selection panels identified in the broader literature are reflected in the specific context of the Eastern Cape. The participants' experiences and observations reveal that despite policies aimed at promoting gender equity, deep-rooted cultural biases and stereotypes continue to influence the appointment processes, hindering women's advancement to principalship positions.

5.4.3 Lack of Support and Recognition for Leadership

Another interesting finding is that a few of the women who make it to leadership positions are also faced with challenges in these leadership roles. One participant (female) mentioned that, as women, they experience discrimination and disrespect in their roles as educators and leaders, and their authority and abilities are questioned solely based on their gender. This relates to the point mentioned above that societal stereotypes are transferred from the community to the workplace. Two participants who shared their challenges said:

Female educators are underrepresented in principal positions because many people (teachers within the school and community members) still believe in old ideas about men being better leaders than women. These beliefs create an unfair environment. So, when women want to become school principals, they often encounter doubt and resistance. People judge them based on old-fashioned ideas about what men and women should do, instead of looking at their skills and qualifications. (PL3)

Female educators are significantly underrepresented in principal positions due to pervasive, outdated beliefs held by teachers and community members that men are inherently better leaders than women. These entrenched stereotypes foster an unfair environment where women's leadership capabilities are frequently questioned and undervalued. When female educators aspire to become school principals, they often face scepticism and resistance rooted in these traditional gender norms. Instead of being assessed on their skills and qualifications, they are judged based on antiquated notions of gender roles, which hinders their career progression and perpetuates gender imbalance in educational leadership.

As a female manager, I have experienced numerous challenges based on gender. Just the fact that I'm female. For example, I remember that at some point, I felt undermined even to take certain roles. There was a situation where I wanted, and I thought I deserved to form part of the Disciplinary Committee, but because issues were raised about how a female can discipline anyone, this issue is for male teachers or male people that get to occupy such committees, and I felt real really undermined. (DH1).

Eish, if I can give an example, in our district, we have got a female district manager, and the problem is that male educators do not support her. You will find that people with experience who are supposed to be supporting her don't support her because they also want the position. The cultural influence of not recognising women for leadership and management positions is spoiling the whole process. Women educators fail because of not being recognised for principalship positions rather than their male counterparts. Male educators think that they are the ones who must occupy these leadership positions, yet they have weaknesses like us as women. (PN2)

The lack of support has a negative impact on women's confidence and can act as a barrier to their career advancement and contribute to their underrepresentation in leadership positions. A female focus group participant had the following to say:

We sometimes undermine ourselves as women. We think that men should lead us. I believe that we can try to address that through leadership training. Sometimes, what is often lacking is that we do not have anything to show that we are equal because, beyond your qualifications and beyond your experiences, it becomes questionable whether you can lead. To prove that we must be trained and probably have a certificate to say, look, I have enrolled on this training that the department has offered, and I have passed it. I believe that training will help a lot and in between seminars talking about leadership and us as women, probably from women to women, also empowering each other or also from men to female, because more than anything, we also need the confidence and capacitate each other. (DH1)

These findings agree with the study findings by Gaus (2011), who conducted a study on women

and school leadership factors deterring female teachers from holding principalships at elementary schools in Makassar. The findings revealed a paucity of support from superordinate's, a lack of mentors and that there is no one in their schools who would be willing to tell them what to do to succeed in headship positions. Below are quotes from some of the participants supporting this point.

Focus group participants concurred with the above argument, and they represented by the two extracts below:

Socially, women have been and are still viewed as second-class citizens, and most women cannot see themselves taking leadership in a male-dominated sphere of leadership. Our culture focuses on shaping young male leaders. (PL3)

Also, females are not underrepresented in these positions just because they are not educated, but they have got an inferiority complex that they cannot lead. They put everything over the shoulders of men, so it makes it impossible for them to succeed in leadership positions. They do not have the confidence to lead. They are saying leadership is meant for men, of which gone are those days because females have got potential and an ability to lead. (PL1)

It is evident that women hold feelings of inferiority or inadequacy when it comes to leadership roles. This inferiority complex may stem from societal expectations and gender stereotypes that have historically favoured men in leadership positions. As a result, women may internalise these beliefs and perceive themselves as less capable or deserving of leadership roles compared to their male counterparts. Low self-esteem can manifest as a lack of confidence in one's abilities to lead effectively. Women who struggle with self-doubt may hesitate to pursue leadership opportunities or may underestimate their own potential for success in leadership roles.

This calls for challenging societal norms and fostering a culture of empowerment and support, where women can overcome their feelings of inferiority and gain the confidence to pursue leadership positions. Recognising and valuing the contributions of women in leadership roles is essential in dismantling barriers to their advancement and promoting gender equity in leadership. This is consistent with Bruey et al. (2018), who pointed out that the cultural

perception that places men in a superior position over women significantly hinders the recognition and acknowledgement of female educators' leadership capabilities. Despite women educators possessing the necessary qualifications, skills, and capabilities for principalship positions, they face barriers to recognition within the communities and schools they serve. Nevertheless, patriarchal norms are also present in Western nations, albeit to a lesser extent. For example, female leaders in the USA encounter distinct challenges due to their gender, despite ongoing efforts towards equality spanning over a century (Carli & Eagly, 2016). Historically, women in the USA were relegated to second-class status, evidenced by their exclusion from voting rights, stemming from the perception that they lacked the capacity to make significant decisions independently. This marginalisation was driven by patriarchal values that placed women in subservient roles. Similarly, in Chinese society, patriarchal influences historically relegated or consigned women to subordinate positions, which may persist in shaping the dynamics of educational leadership for both men and women today (Bush & Haiyan, 2000). The failure to support women in leadership positions profoundly affects their career progression and professional satisfaction. The experiences shared by participants reflect a cultural and societal bias against women in leadership, impacting their confidence and hindering their contribution to decision-making processes.

This lack of support is not an isolated issue but is deeply rooted in socio-cultural stereotypes, as highlighted in previous studies (Mthembu, 2013; Mythili, 2017). Cultural practices, such as the segregation of genders in meetings and the use of scriptures to limit women's roles, contribute to an environment where women are not recognised or encouraged to assume leadership positions. Hightower (2019) argues that in South Africa cultural practices often influence preference for men over women in leadership and management positions. He mentioned that one of these cultural practices is stereotyping. This perception is a product of rigid gender biases favouring males over women regarding leadership. The findings above stress the critical role of support from colleagues, stakeholders, and the broader community in fostering an inclusive environment for female leaders. This support includes not only encouragement and recognition of female leaders' abilities but also active assistance in overcoming challenges and barriers they may face within the school environment.

On the other hand, Gobena (2014) and Makgoka (2016) found that most female educators choose their families in preference to top positions because of their upbringing. The

discrepancy between these perspectives reflects varying contexts, cultural norms, and individual experiences. While some female educators may indeed face societal pressures that steer them away from leadership roles, others may actively seek and benefit from supportive environments that facilitate their professional advancement. Therefore, it is crucial to recognise the complexity of factors influencing a women's career decisions and to foster environments that empower them to pursue leadership positions while accommodating their diverse personal and familial commitments.

The findings from the study on stakeholder perceptions of socio-cultural factors hindering the representation of women in principalship positions in Eastern Cape align closely with broader research on gender stereotypes and discrimination in leadership roles. In both school contexts, women face significant challenges due to entrenched societal stereotypes that question their capabilities solely based on gender. Despite their qualifications and skills, women are often relegated to lower positions, their authority and abilities undermined by a culture that favours male leadership. The lack of support from colleagues and the broader community, coupled with internalized inferiority complexes, further hampers women's confidence and career advancement. These issues are not unique to South Africa but reflect a global pattern, as seen in studies from the USA and China, where patriarchal norms similarly impact women's leadership opportunities. For instance, China represents a distinctive case study in gender imbalance in leadership due to a blend of historical and modern socio-cultural factors, as discussed by Xiang et al. (2017) and Zivave et al. (2020).

Despite notable economic progress, traditional values that prioritise male dominance continue to shape gender dynamics, leading to persistent disparities in leadership roles. Women in China frequently encounter substantial societal pressure to adhere to traditional domestic responsibilities, which can impede their professional ambitions and hinder their advancement into leadership positions. This ongoing tension between conventional gender roles and evolving economic opportunities underscores the complexities of achieving gender equality in leadership within the Chinese context. Carli and Eagly (2016), highlight the persistent challenges faced by female leaders in the USA despite ongoing efforts towards gender equality spanning over a century. This persistent disparity reflects the complex interplay of societal norms and institutional practices that undermine progress toward genuine gender parity, demonstrating that achieving equality requires more than just policy changes; it necessitates a

fundamental shift in attitudes and practices at all levels of leadership and organisational structure.

5.5 Theme 3: Lack of Strategies and Interventions

The third research question in this research was whether strategies and interventions had been implemented to address the underrepresentation of women in principalship positions, and their perceived effectiveness and impact. The results of this study show that proactive policies like the South African Council for Educators (SACE), Employment Equity Act, Employment of Educators Act no 76 of 1998, and the Bill of Rights are some of the strategies that have been initiated but not successfully implemented. Principals and circuit managers stated that these policies are stated in the South African Constitution and the aim is to promote gender equality in all ways, so people or institutions are obliged to follow such policies like the Employment Equity Act and Employment of Educators Act (76 of 1998), that must be adhered to during the appointment process of a principal.

The Educators Employment Equity Act says people are not supposed to [be] judged according to their gender and females must be given a first preference than males even in terms of scoring as a previously disadvantaged group. This act is compelling people not to be stereotyped during the appointment process of a principal. It is also imperative that we comply with the government legislation and follow the policies by the Department of Education so that we eliminate gender stereotypes in the appointment of a principal. (PN2)

The current government brought forth the solution that is at the table since 1994, where they had the in the Bill of Rights (Chapter 2). The equity principle says that all the documents that are being developed are developed in such a way that they do not discriminate between men and women, so by virtue of that, they are allowed to apply for all positions. It tells you that we have the same footing on the job market. Only those who are courageous and those who really want to be in the upper position of the institutions who apply. The way they advertise is neutral and aims to attract applicants based on the leadership skills that are being put in the adverts. Therefore, the applicants can equally apply, whether they are a woman or a man. Also, to create a more inclusive

work environment for women educators who are currently in these senior positions. There are policies of the department that aim to protect women against sexual harassment. According to SACE, South Africa Council for Educators, where there is a special code of conduct for teachers, making the environment conducive at a school level to ensure that every teacher is at liberty to discharge his/her duties as expected. (CM2)

These policies are ineffectively implemented and have no impact, and thus, the participants suggest implementing and enforcing policies that protect women, creating safe and supportive environments where all individuals feel respected and valued. Below is a quote from one of the participants that supports that there are no effective interventions.

I think what is also lacking in our department is the training. For instance, now that I am a principal, I started being a departmental head, but up to this moment I was never trained. There is nothing like induction when you get into this position. It was only when this NGO called “JENN” where took us for training. Even in our leadership, you will find that there are lacking. For me, I believe that in each position, you are supposed to be trained. We are not sure even about our job description. I think it is imperative that the Department of Education organise training and leadership capacity development workshops for women educators who are currently in leadership positions and those aspiring leadership positions in the education sector. (PN2).

The focus group discussion alluded to the fact that already there are policies by the Eastern Cape Department of Education to address gender equity and equality when it comes to appointing principals. For example, it is highly encouraged that if the principal is a male, a deputy principal must be a female; if there are eight SMT members, five of them should be females. This is a deep-rooted belief that males were created to lead and, deep-rooted as it is, it needs radical policies to address and radical campaigns to boost women’s confidence. Thus, there are discrepancies between policy intentions and practical outcomes in addressing gender inequality in principalship positions. These findings emphasise a need for more robust enforcement of existing policies, alongside proactive measures such as training and leadership development programmes to empower women educators and challenge systemic barriers to

their advancement. The next section of this chapter presents a deductive analysis using the liberalism theoretical framework that grounded this study.

5.6 Deductive Analysis using Liberalism Theoretical Framework

This section of the chapter presents a deductive analysis using the liberal feminism theory concepts to explore how participants viewed the underrepresentation of women in secondary schools. The deductive analysis facilitated the integration of theoretical perspectives and existing knowledge to interpret and contextualise the findings. This section seeks to discuss how the concepts of liberal feminism relate to the data generated.

5.6.1 Equality of Opportunity

Liberal feminists believe that equality of opportunity is a fundamental principle that advocates fairness and equal access to resources and opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their background, race, gender, or socioeconomic status (Simba, 2021). Elford (2023) agrees that equality of opportunity is rooted in the principles of fairness and justice. It aims to eliminate discriminatory barriers that might prevent individuals or groups from accessing the same opportunities available to others. The findings in this study emphasise the importance of promoting equality of opportunity and gender equality in school environments, highlighting the long-term benefits of fostering inclusive cultures where all individuals are empowered to thrive, regardless of their gender, background, or identity. It emerged strongly from the data that this is not the case, and women are not given equal opportunities and do not start from the same footing because of socio-cultural factors.

One of the participants supported this position and explained that:

I think from the very word go, there should be a balance in the selection. Let us say we are looking for six candidates that we are going to interview, then now three should be males, three should be females, just to make a balance and to give them equal opportunities into the interview. (CM1)

Suggestions from CM1 above agree with that of Simba (2021), who contended that equality of

opportunity is a fundamental principle that advocates for fairness and equal access to resources and opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their background, race, gender, or socioeconomic status. This notion suggests that everyone should start from an equal footing, and success should be earned based on one's abilities and efforts.

5.6.2 Discrimination and Gender Bias

Dunham (2017) states that liberal feminists regard discrimination and gender bias as unfair or unequal treatment of individuals based on their gender. These issues are pervasive and can manifest in various aspects of life, including education, employment, healthcare, and social interactions. Gender bias often stems from deeply ingrained stereotypes, cultural norms, and historical prejudices. In some societies, girls may face obstacles in accessing education, limiting their opportunities for personal and professional development due to discrimination and gender bias. The reference to men predominantly holding senior positions like principals' points to the existence of a "glass ceiling" phenomenon. The glass ceiling represents an invisible barrier that prevents women from advancing to top leadership positions, even when they possess the qualifications and skills necessary for those roles. The findings confirm the concept of discrimination and gender bias as factors hindering the representation of women in principalship positions that continue to influence decision-making processes, particularly within educational institutions. They also highlight the need for targeted interventions to address these systemic barriers.

The panels and the School Governing Body are mainly men. Therefore, if I can take it scientifically its "like dissolves in like", you cannot have more male people in a panel or in the school government bodies and expect them to vote for a female. So, it means that even the composition of the people that are forming those nomination committees or the selection panels are mostly males; therefore, they believe that principalship is for males. (CM1)

The imbalances of the past still affect the way people think in our days. During the apartheid regime, it was said that women could not be leaders; women could not rule. People are still holding those gender stereotypes to say women educators cannot be principals in our schools, which results in them being underrepresented in principalship

positions. (PL1)

In the past women were not even allowed to go to school, reason being that after qualifying, get married and they are not an investment in a family situation and let alone to say men were not providing all the material needs of women. So, you can see now that culture was hindering women to go to school, to become independent, but rather encouraging that they should be dependent to their husbands. (CM2)

Consistent with the above notion, Mokgaka (2016) indicate that, in an education context, there are discriminatory practices when appointing female principals by emphasising that although women are known to be the majority in the education sector, senior positions like principals are still predominately held by men. The observation that women constitute the majority in the education sector but are underrepresented in senior positions such as principalships underscores the existence of gender disparities in leadership roles. This imbalance suggests that women face barriers in ascending to higher levels of authority and responsibility.

5.6.3 Gender Stereotypes

Swain (2019) affirms that liberal feminists believe that these stereotypes restrict women from expressing their full leadership potential and position them subordinate to men. Gender stereotyping acts as a barrier to the career advancement of women in the education sector. Stereotypical beliefs and expectations about the roles and capabilities of men and women may limit the opportunities available to women aspiring to high-level positions. The findings of this study confirm the concept of gender stereotypes as one of the principles of liberal feminism that grounded this study by highlighting the pervasive influence of gender stereotypes and biases in the educational sector, particularly regarding the leadership roles held by women. Below are quotes from the participants.

Let me say there is still a stereotype that the people who are supposed to be in labour leadership are those that are males. I once applied for a post for being a chief education specialist, which is normally called CES, then I was told literally so that in my face, the post is for a male, no female can lead in such a position so there are still those stereotypes within our communities. (CM1)

As a female manager, I have experienced many or numerous challenges based on gender stereotypes, just the fact that I am female. For example, I remember that at some point I felt undermined to take certain roles. There was a situation where I wanted and thought I deserved to form part of the disciplinary committee but because issues were raised about how can a female discipline anyone, this issue is for male teachers or male people that get to occupy such committees, and I felt really, really undermined. (DH1)

The stereotypes influence the appointment process of women educators in my school in a way that women are offered certain positions which are lower than the managerial positions that they deserve. No matter how good you are at doing your work but because you are a woman you will be classified as someone who cannot handle the pressure of being in a managerial position or being a leader. This has led to the appointment of few females and more males in the managerial positions at my school. Women are judged by their gender, not by their work and this disadvantaged women who are born leaders and who deserve leadership positions. (DH2)

In line with the above findings, Xiang et al. (2017) reveal that gender stereotyping is a significant obstacle for women in Australia and New Zealand who aspire to high-level positions in the education sector. Gender stereotypes may be particularly pronounced in the context of leadership. Assumptions about leadership qualities, such as assertiveness, decisiveness, and authoritative demeanour, being traditionally associated with masculinity, can disadvantage women who may possess different but equally effective leadership styles. These findings emphasise a need to achieve gender equality and representation in educational leadership and highlight the importance of addressing systemic biases to create a more equitable and supportive environment for all educators. Contrary to these findings, Al-Ruhaili et al. (2020) argue that women prioritise familial responsibilities and domestic duties, leading them to abstain from accepting leadership roles that may be perceived as conflicting with societal norms. This perspective suggests that cultural expectations and social pressures play a significant role in shaping women's career choices, particularly in patriarchal societies where traditional gender roles are reinforced.

5.6.4 Gendered Expectations

In liberal feminism, gendered expectations play a significant role in contributing to the underrepresentation of women in principalship positions within the education sector. These expectations are shaped by societal norms, stereotypes, and biases about the roles and capabilities of men and women. The study findings revealed the reluctance of the School Governing Body (SGB) to appoint a woman as principal despite her qualifications, which suggests a pervasive bias against female leadership, in line with the concept of gendered expectations as a concept of liberal feminism that grounded this study. This bias stems from societal norms and expectations that position men as natural leaders and women as followers.

I know someone who deserves to be a principal, but the stance of SGB was not quite sure whether the school should be led by a woman or not. It was not even an issue that the person does not deserve because she lacks certain experiences and what not, but just because in that village, women are supposed to be followers to men. Ultimately, she was appointed; however, in the recent months after the appointment, she experienced resistance amongst teachers to say that we cannot account for you because you are a female and cannot answer to females. (DH1)

This agrees with Bayeni and Bhengu (2015) who conducted a study on the complexities and contradictions in gender policy implementation; lived experiences of three school principals in South Africa. They argued that women are expected to be mothers, wives, caregivers, and nurturers. These stereotypes create expectations about what a leader should look and act like, potentially disadvantaging women whose leadership styles may not align with these traditional norms. These findings revealed deeply ingrained gender expectations and stereotypes on decision-making processes within educational institutions, particularly regarding leadership positions.

5.6.5 Equal Representation

Equal representation challenges traditional gender stereotypes and norms. By having more women in principalship positions, stereotypes about leadership qualities and styles can be dispelled, showcasing that effective leadership is not tied to gender-specific traits. The study findings proposed an approach of ensuring equal representation in both male and female

candidates in the selection process, which aim to address gender imbalance and promote equity in educational leadership roles in line with the equal representation principle for liberal feminism which grounded this work.

I think from the very word go, there should be a balance in the selection. Let us say we are looking for six candidates that we are going to interview, then now three should be males and three should be females, just to make a balance and to give them equal opportunities into the interview. (CM1)

In line with the above statement, Pavlidis et al. (2020) indicated that when appointing candidates for leadership and management roles, particularly principal posts, women should be treated equally to men. Liberal feminists advocate for equal chances and suggest using affirmative action to advance women's social status. Encouraging equal representation involves supporting the career progression of women. This may include leadership training, and other initiatives to address specific challenges faced by women in pursuing and thriving in principalship roles. A balanced representation of male and female candidates can contribute to a more diverse pool of perspectives and experiences. This diversity can enrich the decision-making process by bringing in different viewpoints, approaches, and leadership styles, ultimately benefitting the institution. The use of the liberal feminism theory for the deductive analysis allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the participants as it provided a theoretical basis for this study, and the findings of the study illustrate how the core tenets of the liberal feminism are presented in the participants' experiences.

However, the findings of this study agree with the critiques of liberal feminism that contend that because of its individualist tenets, it is challenging to recognise how underlying societal institutions and beliefs disadvantage women. Meghan (2014) argues that women are nonetheless dependent on a patriarchal state even if they are not dependent on specific men. These opponents say that institutional modifications such as granting women the right to vote fall short of emancipating women (Meighan, 2014). Liberal feminism may overlook the systemic inequalities entrenched within societal institutions and beliefs that perpetuate gender-based disadvantages.

5.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the discussion of findings through a synthesis of the empirical data and socio-cultural factors hindering the representation of women in principalship positions in the Eastern Cape. This discussion of the findings was centred around the research questions. Common and unique themes emerged when I examined and analysed the narratives. The findings revealed a complex interplay of societal gender stereotypes, workplace culture, historical precedents, and the lack of effective strategies and interventions in addressing the underrepresentation of women in principalship positions within educational institutions. Deep-rooted societal stereotypes and cultural beliefs perpetuate the notion that men are better suited for leadership roles, leading to systematic biases in appointment processes and leadership selection. Women who do manage to attain leadership positions often face discrimination and a lack of support, further hindering their progression. Historical precedents, particularly stemming from the apartheid era in South Africa, continue to shape contemporary perceptions and barriers faced by women educators. While proactive policies exist, such as those outlined in the South African constitution, participants perceive them as inadequately implemented, suggesting the need for additional interventions, enforcement mechanisms, and radical policies to challenge entrenched gender stereotypes and promote gender equity in educational leadership. The next chapter brings the study to a conclusion by summarising the study, drawing conclusions, and then making recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 6

Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

The scarcity of women in secondary school principalship positions is a global issue, as evidenced by research findings (Van Jaarsveld et al., 2020). This disparity persists in countries, such as Indonesia and South Africa. Notably, statistics from the O R Tambo Inland District in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, reveal a substantial gender imbalance among secondary school principals, with only 24% being women, while male principals constitute 76% (ECDOE, 2023).

Therefore, this study aimed to contribute to the ongoing debates on the underrepresentation of women in principal positions, explicitly focusing on socio-cultural factors and developing strategies to promote gender equity and foster a more inclusive and diverse educational leadership landscape in the Eastern Cape.

6.2 Summary of the Study

The study investigated the stakeholder perceptions of socio-cultural factors hindering the representation of women in principalship positions, particularly focusing on the O R Tambo Inland Education district of the Eastern Cape, South Africa. It began by delineating the background, motivation, and problem statement, emphasising socio-cultural factors contributing to the underrepresentation of women in principalship roles. Employing a qualitative approach with a case study design, the study investigated stakeholder perceptions, socio-cultural factors, and potential interventions regarding women's representation in leadership positions. Drawing upon international and national literature, it underscored the need for enhanced efforts to empower female principals. The liberal feminist theoretical framework guided the research, and data were generated through semi-structured interviews. Analysis of the data revealed significant themes, discussed in Chapter 6, contextualising the findings within the study's framework. The concluding chapter offers reflections, summarising the research and recommending strategies to address the gender gap in educational leadership.

Overall, the thesis aims to shed light on this critical issue and propose actionable steps toward gender equity in principalship roles.

6.3 Summary of the Study Findings

In this section, I present the conclusions deduced from the themes derived when analysing the data in Chapter 6. The findings are organised according to the three key questions that this study aimed to answer:

- What socio-cultural factors are identified by stakeholders as influencing women's progression into principalship roles?
- How do stakeholders perceive the socio-cultural factors as influencing the representation of women in principalship positions?
- What is the impact of policy and institutional practices on women's progression into principalship positions?

The next section discusses how the following research questions were answered.

Research Question 1: What socio-cultural factors are identified by stakeholders as influencing women's progression into principalship roles?

One important contributing aspect is the widespread and deeply ingrained preconceptions that exist in society and influence how people view women's responsibilities and skills. These preconceptions create obstacles for prospective female leaders in educational settings because they frequently portray women as more suited for supporting and nurturing duties than for leadership responsibilities like principalship. Cultural practices and beliefs also have a significant impact, as they often impose certain norms and expectations on women, impeding their progress towards principalships in many communities. Moreover, women's chances in educational leadership are impacted by cultural norms related to gender roles, expectations, and behaviours. These standards discourage some women from pursuing leadership posts and present extra obstacles for those who do.

Historical precedents that perpetuate gender inequality, like the legacy of apartheid in South Africa, exacerbate these issues even more. Historical precedents that reinforce discrimination

against women and gender stereotypes, like the legacy of apartheid in South Africa, make these issues much more difficult to overcome. These deeply ingrained ideas have not changed even after apartheid ended, and they continue to influence how women are viewed today when it comes to leadership roles and the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in education. Comprehending the historical background is crucial to appreciating the persistent obstacles that female educators encounter when attempting to progress in their careers.

Based on the findings, I argue that the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership roles, particularly in principalships, is significantly influenced by societal preconceptions, cultural practices, and historical precedents. These factors collectively create barriers for women, portraying them as more suitable for nurturing roles rather than leadership positions, imposing restrictive norms and expectations based on gender, and perpetuating gender inequality through historical examples like apartheid in South Africa. These deeply ingrained ideas and practices not only discourage women from pursuing leadership roles but also present additional obstacles for those who do, making it difficult for them to advance in their careers. Understanding the historical and cultural context is essential to acknowledging the persistent challenges female educators face in their professional advancement.

Research Question 2: How do stakeholders perceive the socio-cultural factors as influencing the representation of women in principalship positions?

The study's conclusions shed light on stakeholders' perspectives regarding the impact of socio-cultural factors on women's representation in principalship roles. Stakeholders perceived systematic biases in appointment processes as favouring male candidates and impeding women's advancement into leadership positions within educational institutions. These perceived biases are exemplified by biased decision-making procedures and gendered language in job descriptions. Moreover, women aspiring to leadership roles are perceived to encounter challenges due to insufficient support networks, prompting stakeholders to advocate professional development opportunities, support networks, and mentorship programmes. Additionally, stakeholders highlight the perceived persistence of ingrained prejudices and cultural biases shaping expectations about women's suitability for leadership roles, hindering their career progression. Stakeholders aim to address these issues and cultivate a more equitable and inclusive environment conducive to women's participation in educational leadership.

Surprisingly, the study revealed the perceived enduring influence of historical precedents on women's underrepresentation in principalship positions despite advancements in gender equality. The perceived prevalence of societal gender stereotypes and discrimination within educational institutions underscores the need for targeted interventions to challenge and dismantle these beliefs, fostering environments that embrace diversity in leadership. It is perceived that despite women's qualifications and capabilities, they face systemic barriers and biases, necessitating comprehensive approaches involving policy changes, organisational reforms, and cultural shifts to promote gender equity and ensure equal opportunities for all aspiring leaders.

I contend that socio-cultural factors, such as systemic biases and ingrained gender prejudices, continue to hinder women's representation in principalship roles within educational institutions. Despite advancements in gender equality, stakeholders perceive that biased appointment processes, gendered language in job descriptions, and limited support networks disproportionately favour male candidates and impede women's leadership advancement. The study highlights the persistence of cultural stereotypes and historical precedents that shape negative perceptions of women's suitability for leadership, calling for targeted interventions such as mentorship, professional development, policy reforms, and organisational changes to create a more equitable environment that fosters gender diversity in educational leadership.

Research Question 3: What is the impact of policy and institutional practices on women's progression into principalship positions?

Remarkably, the study's conclusions showed that there were very few targeted strategies or interventions aimed at addressing this issue. However, participants in the study offered valuable insights and recommendations to close this gap. These suggestions are detailed below as part of the study's recommendations, providing valuable guidance for potential interventions and actions to promote gender equity in educational leadership. While the study revealed significant socio-cultural barriers impeding women's progression into educational leadership, there is a notable absence of targeted strategies or interventions to address these issues. Despite this gap, the study participants provided insightful recommendations aimed at promoting gender equity, offering practical solutions such as the implementation of mentorship programs, professional

development opportunities, and the establishment of support networks for aspiring female leaders. These recommendations are critical to the study's conclusions, guiding potential actions and interventions necessary to foster a more inclusive and equitable leadership environment within educational institutions.

6.4 Reflection on my Study

Reflecting on this study, I have gained a profound and nuanced understanding of the intricate socio-cultural factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of women in principalship positions. This research has underscored the necessity for concerted efforts at multiple levels, from policy formulation to grassroots advocacy, to address the systemic inequalities that perpetuate gender disparities in educational leadership. One of the most significant takeaways from this study is the critical importance of amplifying the voices of marginalised groups. By giving a platform to those directly affected by gender bias, we can gain a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of the barriers they face and the solutions that may be most effective.

This study has reinforced the need to advocate for inclusive practices within educational institutions. Ensuring that policies and practices promote gender equity is crucial for creating a supportive environment where women can thrive in leadership roles. On a personal level, this research has highlighted the importance of continually challenging my own assumptions and biases. Understanding that everyone has unconscious biases is the first step towards mitigating their impact and fostering a more equitable environment.

The findings emphasised that achieving gender equity in educational leadership requires systemic change. This involves not only policy reforms but also shifts in cultural attitudes and practices within communities and institutions.

The methodology used in this study, specifically the qualitative case study approach within an interpretive paradigm, has proven to be robust and well-suited for investigating the complex socio-cultural factors affecting the representation of women in principalship positions. By employing this approach, the study has been able to delve deeply into stakeholders' perspectives, uncovering valuable insights that might not have been revealed through

quantitative methods alone. This has provided a rich, contextualised understanding of the issues at hand.

6.5 Recommendations

Based on the case study conducted on stakeholder perceptions of socio-cultural factors hindering the representation of women in principalship positions in two secondary schools in Eastern Cape, the study proposes several strengthened recommendations for future studies and practical interventions:

Promotion of Gender Sensitivity: Developing and implementing comprehensive training programmes focused on gender sensitivity and inclusivity for all school staff, particularly those involved in the selection and promotion processes, is important. These programmes should cover unconscious bias, the importance of gender diversity, and strategies to foster an inclusive school culture. Conducting regular workshops and seminars that bring together educators, administrators, and community members to discuss and address gender-related issues is also important. These sessions typically bring together educators, administrators, and community members to collaboratively discuss the challenges and barriers related to gender inequality in schools. By facilitating open dialogues and sharing experiences, these workshops and seminars help to raise awareness, challenge existing norms, and develop strategies to support gender equity. This practice aligns with broader educational policies and initiatives designed to promote fairness and ensure that gender considerations are integrated into school governance and leadership development. These events should facilitate open dialogues, share best practices, and promote a culture of continuous learning and improvement in gender sensitivity.

Enhancing Policy Implementation: It is crucial to conduct regular audits and reviews of existing gender equality policies to ensure their effective implementation as well as to identify any gaps or barriers in current policies and take actionable steps to address them. This can involve setting up a dedicated task force or committee to oversee and monitor policy compliance. Establishing clear accountability mechanisms to ensure that policies promoting gender equality are enforced could also assist. This could include setting specific targets for female representation in leadership roles, regular reporting on progress, and holding leaders accountable for meeting these targets.

Community Empowerment Awareness Campaigns: The study recommends launching of awareness campaigns in collaboration with local organisations, schools, community leaders, and media outlets to highlight the importance of gender diversity in educational leadership. These campaigns should showcase the benefits of gender-inclusive leadership and share success stories of female leaders in education. Engage with grassroots organisations and community groups to spread awareness and build support for gender equality in educational leadership. This can involve organizing community meetings, discussion forums, and outreach programmes that educate and empower community members to advocate for gender-inclusive practices.

Leadership Awareness Workshops: The Department of Basic Education could organize specialised workshops aimed at equipping women with the skills and knowledge needed to pursue and succeed in leadership roles. These programmes should cover a wide range of topics, including leadership development, effective communication, conflict resolution, strategic planning, and resilience building. Establishing mentorship and networking programmes that connect aspiring female leaders with experienced mentors in the field of education is another recommendation. These programmes can provide guidance, support, and valuable insights to help women navigate the challenges of leadership roles. The Department of Basic Education can offer certification programmes for women who complete leadership training workshops, providing formal recognition of their skills and readiness for leadership positions. Recognising and celebrating the achievements of women leaders through awards, media coverage, and public acknowledgments becomes necessary.

6.6 Direction for Future Studies

Future studies could expand the scope of the study to include a broader range of schools across different regions or provinces to compare the socio-cultural factors influencing the representation of women in principalship positions. This comparative analysis can highlight regional variations and help identify common patterns or unique challenges faced by women in leadership roles. The future studies should examine the policy landscape at the national, provincial, and school levels to identify existing policies and practices that either facilitate or hinder the representation of women in principalship positions. This policy analysis could

inform recommendations for policy reforms aimed at promoting gender equity in educational leadership. Many stakeholders could be engaged in collaborative action research initiatives aimed at co- designing and implementing strategies to promote gender equity in educational leadership. This participatory approach could empower stakeholders to become agents of change and foster a sense of ownership and commitment to addressing gender inequalities in principalship positions.

Future studies focusing on the same phenomenon can adopt the theory of Intersectionality by Kimberlé Crenshaw. This theoretical framework is particularly useful in understanding how various forms of discrimination and oppression intersect to create unique experiences for individuals, especially women in leadership roles. Intersectionality emphasises the importance of considering multiple overlapping social identities, such as gender, race, age, and socioeconomic status, which can compound the biases and barriers women face in their career advancement (Crenshaw, 1991). In the context of gender bias in leadership selection panels in Eastern Cape, intersectionality can help researchers and policymakers comprehend how these overlapping identities impact women's experiences and opportunities. For example, women of different age groups or racial backgrounds might face distinct challenges and biases that are not fully captured when considering gender alone. By adopting an intersectional approach, future studies can provide a more nuanced understanding of the barriers to women's representation in principalship positions and develop more targeted interventions to address these issues.

6.7 Conclusion

The study explored the stakeholder perceptions of socio-cultural factors hindering the representation of women in principalship positions, highlighting societal preconceptions, cultural practices, and historical precedents as significant barriers. I argue that deeply ingrained gender biases, systemic discrimination, and a lack of targeted interventions discourage women from pursuing leadership positions and impede their career advancement. Despite some progress in gender equality, stakeholders identify biased appointment processes, gendered language in job descriptions, and inadequate support networks as ongoing challenges. I call for mentorship programs, professional development opportunities, policy reforms, and organisational changes to promote gender diversity and create a more equitable environment for women in educational leadership, underscoring the importance of addressing both socio-

cultural factors and institutional practices to facilitate women's progression into principalship roles.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A: DATA GENERATION TOOLS

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR DEPARTMENTAL HEADS, PRINCIPALS AND CIRCUIT MANAGERS

1. According to liberal feminism, everyone should have equal opportunities to succeed regardless of gender. What barriers or challenges have you experienced in your career advancement due to gender?
2. Can you share an example of how gender biases or stereotypes influenced the appointment process of women educators in your school district?
3. How can we address and eliminate gender biases and stereotypes in appointing and promoting women educators to principalship positions?
4. How can we improve the recruitment and selection process for women educators in principalship positions to ensure a more equitable representation?
5. How can we create a more inclusive and supportive work environment for women educators in leadership positions?
6. How can the education system better address and challenge traditional gender roles and expectations that may limit women's advancement to leadership positions?
7. Can you provide an example of how socio-cultural factors have contributed to the underrepresentation of women educators in principalship positions in your school district?
8. How can we encourage and support women educators in pursuing leadership positions and provide them with the necessary resources and training?

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS FOR POST LEVEL 1 EDUCATORS

1. What are the most critical factors contributing to women's underrepresentation in principalship positions?
2. Have you ever personally witnessed or experienced gender biases or stereotypes during the appointment process for principal positions? Can you describe the situation?

3. How do you think policies and practices at the institutional level may be perpetuating gender disparities in principalship positions?

4. What steps could be taken to address the underrepresentation of women in principalship positions, and how could these steps be implemented in your school or district.

APPENDIX B: ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE



24 October 2023

Ntsika Dyantyi (223133537)
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear N Dyantyi,

Protocol reference number: HSSREC/00006191/2023

Project title: Stakeholder perceptions of socio-cultural factors hindering the representation of women in principalship positions: A case study of two secondary schools in Eastern Cape

Degree: Masters

Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 29 September 2023 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 until 24 October 2024.

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.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)

Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 **Email:** hssrec@ukzn.ac.za **Website:** <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

INSPIRING GREATNESS

APPENDIX C: DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION ETHICAL CLEARANCE



CORPORATE PLANNING, MONITORING, POLICY AND RESEARCH COORDINATION
Steve Vukile Tshwete Complex, Zone 6 Zwelitsha, 5608, Private Bag X0032, Bisho, 5605 REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA:
Enquiries: Ms. F. Pakade Tel: 040 602 7071 . Fax :040 608 4372. Email: fundiswa.pakade@ecdoe.gov.za
Website: www.ecdoe.gov.za Date: 05 September 2023

Mr. Ntsika Dyantyi



Butterworth

4960

Dear Mr. Dyantyi

PERMISSION TO UNDERTAKE A MASTERS RESEARCH: STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS HINDERING THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN PRINCIPALSHIP POSITIONS: A CASE STUDY OF TWO SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN EASTERN CAPE

1. Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research involving two principals, four departmental heads, four post-level one educators and two circuit managers in two (2) secondary schools within the Oliver Reginald Tambo district under the jurisdiction of the Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE) is hereby approved based on the following conditions:
 - a. there will be no financial implications for the Department;
 - b. institutions and respondents must not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation;
 - c. you seek parent's consent for minors;
 - d. it is not going to interrupt educators' time and task;
 - e. the research may not be conducted during official contact time;
 - f. the research may not be conducted during official contact time, provided that an arrangement to do research at the school including getting inside a classroom has been arranged and agreed upon in writing with the Principal and the affected teacher/s;



Customer care line: 086 063 8636
Website: www.ecdoe.gov.za





- g. you present a copy of the written approval letter of the Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDoE) to the Cluster and District Directors before any research is undertaken at any institutions within that particular district;
 - h. you will make all the arrangements concerning your research;
 - i. should you wish to extend the period of research after approval has been granted, an application to do this must be directed to Chief Director: Corporate Strategy Management;
 - j. you present the Department with a copy of your final paper/report/dissertation/thesis free of charge in hard copy and electronic format. This must be accompanied by a separate synopsis (maximum 2 – 3 typed pages) of the most important findings and recommendations if it does not already contain a synopsis;
 - k. you present the findings to the Research Committee and/or Senior Management of the Department when and/or where necessary;
 - l. you are requested to provide the above to the Chief Director: Corporate Strategy Management upon completion of your research;
 - m. you comply with all the requirements as completed in the Terms and Conditions to conduct Research in the ECDoE document duly completed by you;
 - n. you comply with your ethical undertaking (commitment form);
 - o. You submit on a six-monthly basis, from the date of permission of the research, concise reports to the Chief Director: Corporate Strategy Management.
2. The Department reserves a right to withdraw the permission should there be non-compliance to the approval letter and contract signed in the Terms and Conditions to conduct Research in the ECDoE and/or legal requirements to do so.
 3. The Department will publish the completed Research on its website.
 4. The Department wishes you well in your undertaking. You can contact the Mrs. Fundiswa Pakade on the numbers indicated in the letterhead or email fundiswa.pakade@ecdoe.gov.za should you need any assistance.

[Redacted Signature]
T. MASOEU
CHIEF DIRECTOR: CORPORATE STRATEGY MANAGEMENT

FOR ACTING HEAD OF DEPARTMENT: EDUCATION



APPENDIX D: GATEKEEPERS LETTERS (PRINCIPAL)



School of Education
College of Humanities
University of KwaZulu University
Edgewood Campus
25 October 2023

APPLICATION LETTER FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

To whom it may concern.

I am Ntsika Dyantyi, a registered Master of Education candidate at the University of KwaZulu Natal in the School of Education under the College of Humanities. I am required to complete a dissertation as part of my degree fulfilment. The topic of my study is **“Stakeholder Perceptions of Socio-Cultural Factors Hindering the Representation of Women in Principalship Positions: A Case Study of Two Secondary Schools in Eastern Cape”**.

The purpose of this memorandum is to communicate the intention to conduct research and request permission to visit learning site to generate data. It is anticipated that the study will increase the awareness of both male and female educators of the value of female educators in principal positions of secondary schools. The research findings could assist female educators in recognising the challenges preventing them from ascending to promotional or management positions, including their false perceptions of value and competency. The study will also assist policymakers in identifying gender gaps in principalship positions in the secondary schools of the Oliver Reginald Tambo Inland education district. It is hoped that this study, through its analysis of the factors that contribute to the under-representation of women in principalship positions, informed by liberal feminist theory, will help women and the wider society understand women’s role in education. Interviews will be recorded and conducted as a tool to collect data. Participants' opinions and views are valuable for this study. The researcher will also guarantee the respondents that confidentiality and privacy protection will be ensured by code naming participants and the research sites; will not promise incentives and inform them that the research study is for academic purposes only.

Thank you.

Yours faithfully,

[Redacted signature]

.....

Dyantyi Ntsika (Mr)

[Redacted contact information]

APPENDIX E: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS

COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL

For research with human participants

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Note to researchers: Notwithstanding the need for scientific and legal accuracy, every effort should be made to produce a consent document that is as linguistically clear and simple as possible, without omitting important details as outlined below. Certified translated versions will be required once the original version is approved. There are specific circumstances where witnessed verbal consent might be acceptable, and circumstances where individual informed consent may be waived by HSSREC.

Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date: 25 October 2023

Dear sir/madam

I am Ntsika Dyantyi, a registered Master of Education student at the University of KwaZulu Natal in the School of Education under the College of Humanities. I am required to complete a dissertation as part of my degree fulfilment. The topic of my study is Stakeholder Perceptions of Socio-cultural Factors Hindering the Representation of Women in Principalship Positions: A Case Study of Two Secondary Schools in Eastern Cape. My contact number is [REDACTED] my email addresses are ntdyantyi@wsu.ac.za or 223133537@stu.ukzn.ac.za. My supervisor is Dr. Lulama Mbatha. She is a lecturer in the School of Education, College of Humanities, Pietermaritzburg Campus, University of KwaZulu-Natal. My supervisor's contact details are [REDACTED] Email: MbathaL5@ukzn.ac.za.

You are invited to consider participating in a study involving research on sociocultural factors hindering women from getting appointed to principal positions. The aim and purpose of this research are to investigate the perceptions of those involved and affected by the appointment of principals. The study is expected to enrol twelve participants, four post-level one educators, four departmental heads, two principals and two circuit managers, in two secondary schools of the Oliver Reginald Tambo Education district in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. The study will involve audio-recorded interviews and focus group discussions. The duration of your participation if you choose to enrol and remain in the study is expected to be 60 minutes. The study will not involve any risks or discomforts to you. The study will provide no direct benefits to you as a participant. However, I hope that the study will create increased awareness of the value of female educators in principalship positions and will recommend strategies that will assist policymakers in identifying gender gaps in principalship positions in secondary schools.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (approval number: HSSREC/00006191/2023). In the event of any problems or concerns/questions, you may contact me at [REDACTED] ntdyantyi@wsu.ac.za, or 223133537@stu.ukzn.ac.za or the UKZN Humanities & Social

Sciences Research Ethics Committee; contact details as follows:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000
KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

Participation in this research is voluntary, and you may withdraw participation at any point. If you refuse/withdraw your participation, you will not incur a penalty. You may also stop participating without stating any reasons, and your withdrawal can be done verbally or in writing. I may terminate you from the study if you are no longer employed at the two secondary or the district circuit chosen for the study.

You will incur no costs due to your participation in the study. There will also be no incentives or reimbursements for participation in the study.

Your responses will be strictly confidential and used only for academic purposes. You will be anonymous throughout the study and given a pseudonym. The names and any information that could identify you as a participant will not be used in the final thesis or any publication deriving from this study. Printed copies of raw data/transcripts of interviews will be securely locked away in my supervisor's office. All digital audio files and other electronic data will be stored on the hard drive of the password-protected personal computer and the hard drive of the password-protected laptop of my supervisor. All data from computers and any other device will be deleted after five years.

--

CONSENT

I..... have been informed about the study entitled **Stakeholder Perceptions of Socio-cultural Factors Hindering the Representation of Women in Principalship Positions: A Case Study of Two Secondary Schools in Eastern Cape by Ntsika Dyantyi.**

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction. I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that I may withdraw at any time, and that I am not entitled to any personal benefits. I have been informed that there are no risks associated with my participation in the study. If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study, I understand that I may contact Ntsika Dyantyi at [REDACTED] email address: ntdyantyi@wsu.ac.za or 223133537@stu.ukzn.ac.za. If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers, then I may contact:

HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

**Research Office, Westville Campus
Govan Mbeki Building
Private Bag X 54001
Durban
4000**

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA
Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609
Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za
Additional consent, where applicable

I hereby provide consent to: I DO GIVE CONSENT / DO NOT GIVE

Audio-record my interview/focus group discussion	YES / NO
Video-record my interview/focus group discussion	YES / NO

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Witness
(Where applicable)

Date

Signature of Translator
(Where applicable)

Date

APPENDIX F: LANGUAGE EDITOR CERTIFICATE


gill.hannant@outlook.com

Mrs G C Hannant
28 Hillcrest Avenue
CRAIGHALL PARK
2196

11 April 2024

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I certify that I have edited the MEd dissertation:

**Stakeholder Perceptions of Socio-Cultural Factors Hindering the
Representation of Women in Principalship Positions: A Case Study of
Two Secondary Schools in Eastern Cape**

by

Ntsika Dyantyi

However, the correction of all errors/missing information remains the responsibility of
the author.


G.C. HANNANT (BA HED)