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Leadership challenges experienced by female school principals in primary schools and the coping strategies they employ in the Capricorn District in Limpopo Province

By

Wadzanai Noreen Karichi

Supervisor: Dr S.E. Mthiyane

DECLARATION

I, Wadzanai Noreen Karichi, declare that this research report, **Leadership challenges experienced by female school principals in primary schools and the coping strategies they employ in the Capricorn District in Limpopo Province** submitted to the University of Witwatersrand is my independent work which complies with the rules and regulations of the University of Witwatersrand. The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work. This research has not be submitted before to any other institution by myself in fulfilment of the attainment of any qualification.



Student Signature July 2022

SUPERVISORS' STATEMENT

This Research Report has been submitted with my approval



Doctor Siphiwe E. Mthiyane (Supervisor)

July 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I hereby express my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to the following people:

God Almighty for giving me the strength, courage and wisdom to complete my studies.

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To my husband, Doctor Talent Diotrefe Banda, for always encouraging and supporting me during my studies. You are a role model to me as I have seen you go through your educational journey and make a mark for yourself and your family. Thank you for being selfless, assisting with my computer and sitting with me as I worked through the night.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to my late father, Mr Never Karichi and my mother Pauline Karichi who believed in my capabilities as a person and advised me how education is the key to unlock doors in life. I know they are ecstatic and proud that I have completed this study and I thank them for raising me to be the person that I am.

I dedicate my study to my husband, Talent, your encouragement, determination and advice has landed me here. Thank you for being the person that you are.

I would also like to dedicate this study to my son, Tinotenda and daughter Dineo, I hope this study inspires you to see how important education is in one's life. The power lies within your mind and drive to excel. You can be any one you want to be and you can do it.

ABSTRACT

The study investigated the leadership challenges experienced by female school principals in primary schools and the coping strategies they employ in the Capricorn District in Limpopo Province. A literature review showcased that South African women in education face challenges as women in leadership positions. The study was conducted using the post-structural feminist approach. The study's objectives were to understand the leadership challenges faced, explore strategies they employ to resolve them and discover how they adapt to successfully build a school considering the challenges women face in a male-dominated society. Two data collection instruments were used, namely interviews and observations.

Moreover, purposive sampling was used to identify the target group required for the research. Also, it fits well into the study as this research was guided by the qualitative research method. Also, the results discovered were analysed. Findings suggest that the interviewed primary school principals were coping well as principals, managing to handle challenges they came across and did not feel intimidated by male colleagues or other male principals they knew.

The study recommends that more women be appointed in school leadership posts and more studies be conducted now in the new era to discover if women are still underrepresented like before. The interviewed women mentioned they felt empowered and showed to be in control. The outlook depicted as they communicated suggested they were not diminished but were excelling in their leadership post. The support the interviewed principals received and their drive showed that they were capable and were transforming their schools to excellence. If this can be implemented on a broader scale of the entire South African community, then the future would be bright not for women alone but for all future generations in the country.

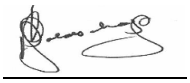
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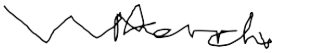
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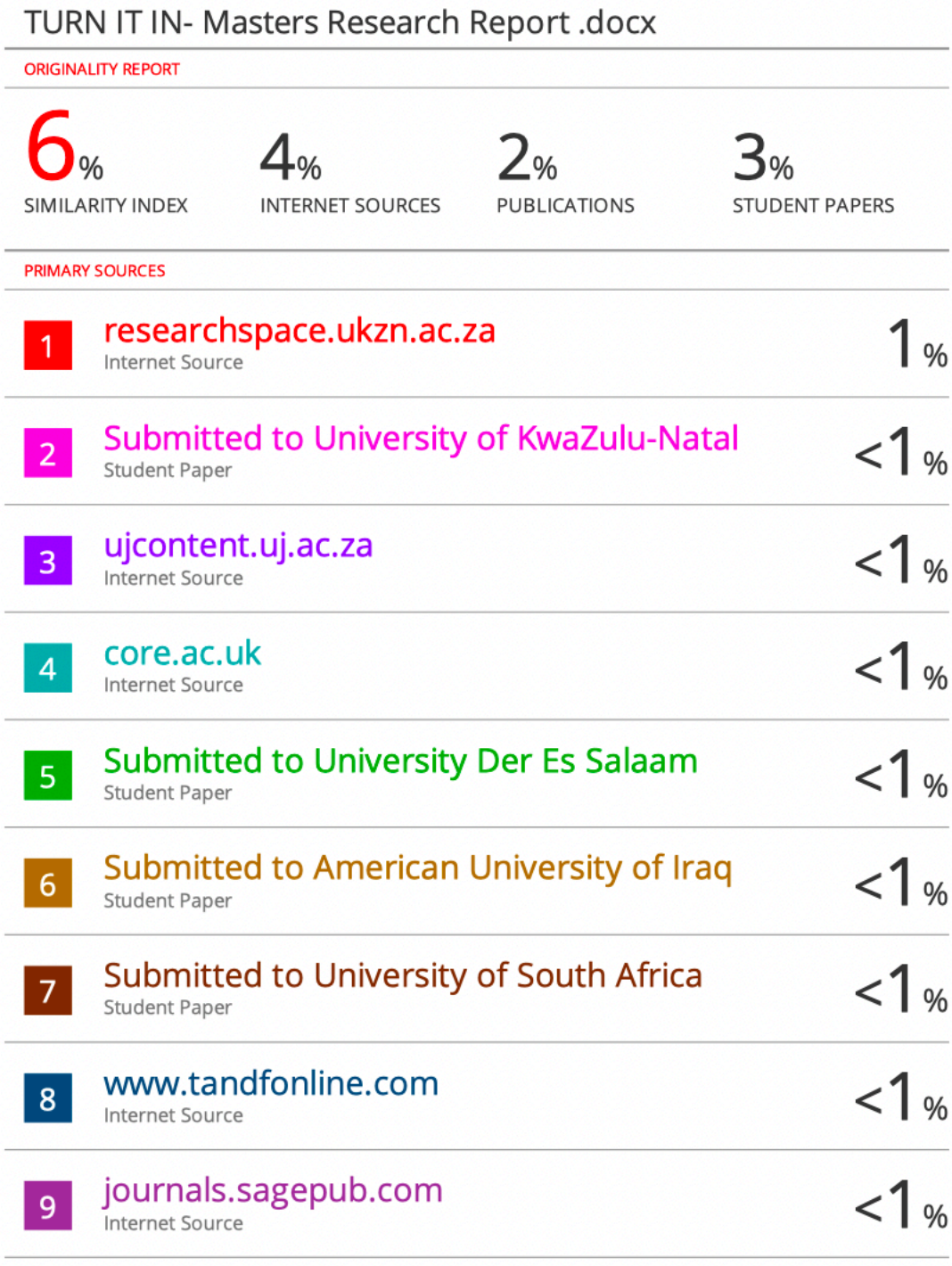
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction and background

Globally, women are struggling to attain leadership positions, despite the dramatic increase in their formal employment these last five decades to achieve power and be considered responsible enough to lead (De la Rey, 2011). In South Africa, though there has been significant increases of women in positions of power even after the apartheid era, this development still occurs, and women leaders running a school is not an everyday activity (De la Rey, 2011). There are many male leaders compared to women who manage and run schools. Male principals are seen as capable and know how to manage and lead a school because society has classified this. Female leaders have resurfaced amid all the struggles to fit in, finding their place in the male-dominated sector. However, this is not easy, and society does not do justice as women are hardly acknowledged as capable of handling such leadership posts in the community. Therefore, it means that women who take on leadership positions encounter adverse challenges. Gender inequality in South Africa is an issue that faces many black women who aspire to take on leadership positions (Noge, 2014).

Female principals who are effective in their school operations are successful managers to schools (Oboegbdem 2013, Schmidt & Mestry (2015), thus bringing to the fore that South Africa is still muddled by a widespread gender bias against female leaders. Female school principals struggle to fit in and be accepted in their workplace due to the classification that comes with their race, gender and class. Society does not do the female principals justice to allow them to fit in as culture and tradition discriminates against women and is against them empowered to leadership posts. Gender imbalances still occur as only a small percentage of women get the opportunity to be placed into leadership posts (Naidoo & Perumal, 2014).

1.2 Problem Statement

Women in South Africa are underrepresented in scholastic roles even though the management roles are held commonly by women (Lumby & Azaola, 2013). Acceptance and recognition of female leaders have amplified in the past few years but still women struggle to fit in (Mnisi,

2015). Researches and findings presented from various studies on women around the world show that female leadership exists and that women are not entirely banned from leadership positions (Kalekye, Koome & Gichuhi 2020:84). Women struggle to be acknowledged and accepted as equals in a society that views men as the ones that deserve to fulfil leadership posts. Culture comes through with statements that specify that successful women end up divorced due to them having a successful career unlike them looking after their families (Sahin, 2018). Moreover, the South African leadership supports men and shows resistance to change (Diko, 2014). Cultural stereotypes that emphasise men as capable to lead and categorise women to follow and respect men with the women regarded as to hold only the position of being in the kitchen interfere with women being allowed to lead and manage schools (Chen et al, 2012; Chisholm, 2017).

As a residence of Capricorn District, it came to the researcher's attention, before conducting the study that female primary principals where few compared to male primary principals in the area. The researcher then pursued to uncover leadership challenges experienced by female school principals in the Capricorn District Province in Limpopo and coping strategies they employ. According to Mestry and Schmidt (2012), female principals struggle to adjust to their leadership roles as they are categorized as emotional and weak to hold leadership posts. These women are then discouraged as incapable. The women that have managed to break the glass ceiling struggle with several trials and encounters in management, leading them to retain various characteristics and expertise to deal and combat with these encounters (Smith, 2008).

Therefore these challenges need to be understood together with an understanding as to how they handle all the challenges that are placed on them. Thus, this study explores female principals' leadership challenges as they lead and manage their schools and unravel the strategies they employ to overcome and address the challenges in a male-dominated society.

1.3 Purpose for the study

This study aims to gain insight into the leadership challenges experienced by female school principals in primary schools in the Capricorn District of Limpopo province and discover strategies employed to overcome the challenges of their leadership role in a male-dominated position strive to ensure that the school's success is unravelled. An understanding is brought to understand the gendered prejudices from the school and community towards female principals.

Moreover, the study offers to untangle the strategies used by the female principal to function and operate the school regardless of the challenges that come forth (Mnisi, 2015).

In a male-dominated society where man upholds most leadership positions, women leaders who take up the role experience more challenges in conducting their responsibilities. The transformational leadership theory comprises of building a unified common interest between leaders and followers" (Bush & Glover, 2003, p.12). The principal works together with her team towards a common goal of bringing about change. It encourages and motivates the employees towards a brighter and more positive future for the school. These are the best I could classify female leaders. Castanheira and Costa (2011), as cited in Balyer (2012), posit that transformational leadership is about serving, empowering, and inspiring followers into greatness. Females have a nurturing characteristic; hence they befit this leadership theory.

1.4 Significance of the study

Being a teacher at a school run by a woman, I was not aware that female principals were few who took up leadership posts. I enjoyed my work and always looked up to my principal for advice and guidance. However, on one occasion, our school hosted a circuit primary sports event that saw all schools in the Capricorn District coming together. This was when I noticed the female principals present were less compared to a large number of male principals there. It then dawned that female principals are relatively rare in our district, and reading more on research articles I obtained, it became clear that this was a worldwide issue. After this realization, I became curious about how these female principals operate in this male-dominated profession and what strategies and plans of action they implement with the leadership challenges they deal with.

Investigations and analyses on female leadership and literature have revealed that women are discriminated against in school governance and management positions. Gardiner, Enomoto and Grogan (Klein et al. 2007:116) explain how the ethnic group of race and gender issues contributes to the interpretation of women holding governance posts in Nigeria and South Africa. Lack of confidence arises as the ability to lead is questioned (Chisholm, 2001). Also, the gender gap is a global case and issue; hence it can never be easy for a female to take up a leadership post as the challenges are tough to overcome. The culture depicted in society and

the family responsibilities are the preoccupations of women, whilst men are considered to be the ones that can work and lead (Naidoo & Perumal, 2014).

Therefore, the challenges faced by females taking on leadership posts need to be addressed and understood to educate the public and society on challenges female school heads have to deal with in their line of work. By doing this, other women who want to get into a leadership post are educated on what happens and learn survival tactics used by others in their choice of field. The view that women are incompetent to assume leadership posts is a struggle for women holding leadership posts. Information discovered in research reveals how women achieve success by possessing nurturing capabilities that contribute to working well with others (Msila, 2013).

1.5 Objectives of the study

The investigation seeks to accomplish the stated research aims:

- Identifying leadership challenges faced by female school principals as they lead and manage their schools in the Capricorn District in Limpopo Province.
- To explore strategies female school principals employ to resolve the challenges they face towards the profitable operation of their schools.
- How they adapt to successfully build a school, considering the challenges women face in a male-dominated society.

1.6 Key research questions

The research aims to identify responses to the given study questions:

- What leadership challenges are faced by female school principals in the Capricorn District in Limpopo Province, and how do they overcome them?
- What strategies do female school principals employ to overcome gender-based challenges as they lead and manage their schools?
- How do they adapt to successfully build a school, considering the challenges women face in a male-dominated society?

1.7 Definition of key terms used in the study

1.7.1 Female school leadership

Female school leadership entails a position of authority held by a woman as they lead and manage in a school institution (De Bruyn & Mestry, 2020). Female leaders have numerous challenges, some which entail degrading of women, unfairness and lack of support and work-life balance (Shakeshaft, 2007:04). However, over the past few years, women have progressed in education and have been breaking the initial barriers of labour force and political engagement that were previously there that withheld them from leadership positions and from taking on the role of leadership. Female school leadership has surpassed men in aspects of educational involvement and performance in underdeveloped and developing; women are registering in advanced education more than men (Pande et al., 2012).

1.7.2 Glass ceiling

This concept refers to the challenges women go through to get accepted in leadership positions. The glass ceiling is not clear or visible, but it blocks the need for achievement because it is unreachable. It limits females wanting leadership positions from rising, and a barrier stands towards them (Russo & Hassink, 2012).

1.7.3 Prejudices

Prejudice refers to an act which contradicts self-respect and destroys the harmony possessed by individuals. It is a mentality towards individuals communicated either in a negative or positive manner (Dovidio, Schellhaas & Pearson, 2019).

1.7.4 Gender

Gender refers to the term used to describe individuals' social identity that is woman or man together with the behavioural tendencies e.g., masculine or feminine (Chrisler & Lamer, 2016).

1.7.5 Educational leadership

Educational leadership refers to the process of collaborative engagement through leading and guiding the talents and energies of teachers, students and parents towards achieving common educational aims.

1.8 Delimitations of the study

Delimitations refers to qualities and features that constrain the scope and describe the restrictions of my research (Miles & Scott, 2017)). These features are in my control. Delimiting factors from this study entail the selection of aims, the study questions, theoretical views which I embraced and the population I choose to investigate (Simon, 2011). Delimitations act as denotations and boundaries to a research study. The limitations I foresee to this study are that only four female principals from primary schools in the Capricorn District of Limpopo Province will be interviewed and participate in the research study and not a large group of female principals, so data collected will be precisely on the small group.

1.9 Structure of the study

The first chapter in this dissertation introduces the study by presenting the study's background, purpose, and significance. It also outlines the critical study aims delimitations together with the structure of the research. This chapter lays the research foundation.

The second chapter offers the literature review and theoretical frameworks relevant to the research. The central aspect presented is understanding what other researchers have written and found about the topic.

The third chapter presents the research design and methodology aspects: the research paradigm, research design, research methodology, research population, data analysis, issues of trustworthiness, ethical issues, and limitations of the study.

The fourth chapter presents the data presentation, analysis and discussion of the study findings, including the strategies they employ in their leadership challenges.

Chapter five is the final chapter and presents a study summary, conclusions, recommendations and implications of the research.

1.10 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the introduction, background and overview of the critical aspects of the study. It focused mainly on stating the problem statement, purpose and rationale, research aims, and the essential research questions that guide the research. In the next chapter, international and local reviews related to the research topic on female school leadership, the challenges they experiences and the coping strategies will be reviewed.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

2.1 Introduction

The above chapter started by outlining the background, problem statement, purpose, significance of the study, delimitations, definition of concepts, research questions, and the study's layout. This chapter will review the literature and discuss the theoretical frameworks that underpin this study.

2.2 Body of the literature review

For the research to be conducted in this section, information extracted from various literature concerning women in leadership positions will be observed to understand evidence already presented, any similarities or differences from the literature, and attain a clear understanding of leadership challenges surrounding female principals. However, the first point of departure will be the clarification at the global perspective about the research topic at hand, followed by an explanation on female leadership styles and leadership challenges will be discussed.

2.2.1 Female Leadership Challenges (South Africa)

In South Africa, it has become common that male principals are appointed with support from cultural and traditional paradigmatic tendencies even though women signify the majority in the teaching profession (Karamanidou & Bush, 2017). Chapter 2 of the Constitution (Republic of South Africa 1996), sections 9(2) and 9(3), argues that the state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on the grounds of race and gender. But still, women are not fully supported into taking up a leadership role (Khumalo, 2021).

Another study conducted by Mestry and Schmidt (2012), supports the above as they state that women in South Africa still suffer from systemic discrimination in educational structures and hierarchies on top of other daily challenges as they work. Patriarchy has taken over amongst all ethnic and racial groups in South Africa and this has made it difficult for women to fit in to take on high positions in education or other sectors (Bodalina & Mestry, 2022). The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) report indicates that despite the presentation of

various laws meant to promote gender equity in the workplace, the progress continues to be unsatisfactory (Nomadolo ,2021).

It is evident from the above researchers that despite various opportunities and documentation set out that allows and encourages women to get to be treated fairly and be leaders in society, this is still not yet achieved.

2.2.2 Female Leadership Challenges (International)

Globally women are underrepresented due to the labelling that they are categorized. Gender discrimination, gender disparity and stereotyping takeover. According to (UNESCO, 2010) research document, the international community pledged to remove gender inequalities at all levels and stages of education by 2015, which was part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, this is still a work in progress as women are seen more as mothers and nurturers than be treated equally as leaders in society. Women are struggling to be accepted. Bush, 2011 supports this by adding that women can be leaders like men.

Other women around the globe are also going through issues of gender disparity. Agezo and Hope (2011) bring forth the case of women in Ghana, where male leadership takes the forefront in all facets of life. Their research shows that men have historically dominated leadership in Ghana and that societal representation has been structured with male leadership taking the forefront in all facets of life. Still, this status quo is now being challenged as women are increasingly taking on the role of headteachers.

Another study conducted in Kenya by Odhiambo (2011) shows the struggles of women to be accepted in society. The women of Kenya struggle to enter higher leadership positions due to direct and indirect discrimination. Similarly, research suggests that Israel has more or the same challenges where women face patriarchal cultural norms limiting them (Shapira, 2011). Moreover, according to Reed (2012), African-American women school heads are struggling with challenges of race and gender in the workplace. There is a demand for school leaders in the United States of America, but little consideration is given to using women in educational leadership to solve the crisis (Martinez, 2013).

In China, female principals lack confidence in their leadership as they lack support to pursue their leadership roles at schools. Women doubt themselves as incapable because society sees

them like so (Yang & Brayman, 2010). Likewise, in Ethiopia, there is the case where secondary female school principals face numerous challenges to be accepted equally as male principals (Botha & Aferwork, 2020).

All the information from various researchers showcases that female leaders around the globe struggle to be accepted in society due to the different reasons mentioned above.

2.2.3 Female Leadership Styles

The leadership styles associated with women expose excellent characteristics of their leadership positions governed by democracy, good conflict management, and showing tolerance. Women are described as lacking proper leading skills compared to men who society sees fit to lead. Persistent inequalities remain in many regions and at different levels of education (Naidoo, 2014). Women can run leadership posts, especially in schools, due to their nature as females. Moreover, female leaders are transformational leaders. This leadership style has nurturing aspects, and traditionally women are associated and socialized as nurturers (Msila, 2013). Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011)bring forth information about how women function with inhibiting factors such as strength and spirituality to realise and appreciate the world of others, model behaviour and inspire others in their article in the book on the New way. Furthermore, women are regarded as empathetic listeners who value teamwork while also acting as experts at building relationships, encouraging others to achieve their maximum potential (Elias, 2018).

In addition to the above, it has been brought to the fore in previous writings that the leadership traits which are used in leadership were inbuilt, but the current view to these traits shows that they may perhaps be taught (Mitchiner, 2000); hence this exposes the fact that leading can be learned if someone is determined to do so. This claim discloses that effective leadership guidance can permit any determined person to become a leader. Also, several studies that have been conducted reveal gender differences in leadership; a conclusion to this revealed that women adopted a more democratic leadership style. At the same time, men are more autocratic in their leading (De la Rey, 2013).

Lumby et al. (2010) wrap off the discussion on women's leadership styles as he explains that women are determined and aspire to excel. Still, these drives are hampered as the issue of discrimination infiltrates together with societal beliefs, preconceived opinions and bias. The

female principal's leadership achievement has not yet reached a stage where women leaders can be appreciated. Women struggle to be acknowledged as leaders worldwide, and their aspirations are cut off due to discrimination and gender disparity.

2.2.4 Coping strategies

Principals go through many challenges as they go about running and leading their schools. They need to be aware of their surroundings and hold a big responsibility towards the success of their school to be successfully managed. Coping strategies are essential for them to strike a balance as they go about with their work (Attom et al., 2021). According to Mahfouz, 2020, stress and pressure for principals is part and parcel of what comes through with holding such a position. Principals interviewed in the research of Mahfouz mentioned three main types of stressors they had to deal with which entailed work, relationships and time. Coping strategies of family time and spending some time away from work assisted the principals to cope with the stressors that come with the position they hold (Mahfouz, 2020).

All the information presented above shows that being a principal is not an easy post to hold and maintain. Many challenges come forth but coping strategies must be in place to ensure the principals get to do their work effectively and with a purpose that does. Not drain them but encourages them.

2.2.5 Leadership Challenges

Furthermore, as we analyse South Africa, which is the area where my study will be conducted, it is evident that the underrepresentation of women also exists. Morojele, Chikoko and Ngcobo (2013) state that women in South Africa have been empowered and given the opportunity to be school principals. However, exclusion due to the issue of gender still occurs. The women who take on management posts struggle to be accepted; they face more challenges, unlike the men who conduct the same position as them. Authoritative cultures around South Africa control and regulate women's capacity to serve as leaders (Moorosi, 2010).

Similarly, Maseko (2013) notes that females in South African are categorised and differentiated on the basis of cultural beliefs. For the past 20 years (1995-2016), they have been deprived access to top higher levels of leadership and management roles. Damage has occurred due to patriarchal oppression and domination. Women are still grappling with fitting in the leadership role without being judged according to their gender (Schmidt & Mestry, 2015).

Another challenge in leadership came from the COVID-19 pandemic. It disrupted the lives of students in different ways, depending not only on their level and course of study but also on the point they have reached in their programmes. Principals and teachers had to change their normal routine of teaching and operating. Learners had to be regrouped and the uncertainties and anxiety to learn under the new normal was tough on everyone involved (Daniel, 2020).

Also, the implementation of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) was an important step in achieving educational reforms especially between former resourced and under-resourced schools. However, CAPS has been plagued by challenges. The teachers are often frustrated by curriculum changes owing to lack of clear technical expertise to carry out teaching responsibilities (Mdutshane, 2007). The teachers often lack the theoretical knowledge and familiarity with principles informing the implementation of curriculum change (Maharajh et al.,2016). This issue on CAPS becomes a challenge for principals as they need to ensure their teachers know what is required and push through to do what is required.

In addition to the above, Naidoo and Perumal (2014) bring forth information that some leadership challenges women to face consists of gender discrimination which affects the leadership and management duties as the post held is observed as for men only, lack of confidence is another aspect women struggle with and often at times women are deployed to work at low performing schools. De la Rey (2011) further explains how gender representation is an issue. She further explains that though South Africa has advanced in global ranking as a 1/3 of the ruling party is represented by a woman, a hierarchical society with equality and opportunities for women have no equal chance. Discrimination and stereotyping have been imposed and hindered women's entrance to leadership positions. An analysis by Lumby and Azaola (2011) on becoming a principal explains that women choose to be educators as a second choice to survive carefully. Others opt to be appointed at a school that male leaders do not prefer to lead.

It is clear from the above that different writers across the educational pedagogy have made findings on women being overlooked and underrepresented. This has made them be viewed differently due to many contributory factors that have made them be treated unequally and experience gender stereotyping. These findings bring to the fore that, as a nation, challenges are there. In conducting this research, an explanation is thus brought out to examine the

leadership challenges experienced and if the previously read literature correlates to the researched information from this study.

2.3 Theoretical framework

Societal misconstructions cause and influence greatly disputes women face when pursuing educational leadership positions. Nichols and Nichols (2014) support this by explaining how females are traditionally connected and labelled by their feminine qualities of sympathy, appreciative, passionate and supportive. In contrast, males are portrayed as authoritative, dominant, influential and determined. The above shared fallacies affect leadership of women. Therefore, my study will be guided by the poststructuralist feminist theory. Poststructuralist feminist theory refer to an assortment of women's basic commitment of information, authority, personality and distinction (Giblin, 2016).

The theory chosen fits into the study as this study addresses challenges faced by female school principals. Post structural women's studies provides valuable insight to analysing administrative changes with rational perception (Bacchi, 2010). The theory raises awareness that power is located in systems of shared meaning that reinforce mainstream ideas and silence alternatives, admitting that the issues about women and men are largely influenced by their cultural beliefs which include morals and societal engagements (Giblin, 2016).

Weedon (1987), a prominent thinker of this theory explains that post structuralism as a mode of knowledge which uses language, subjectivity and social processes to understand existing power relations and identify areas together with strategies for change (pp 40-41). Poststructuralist feminism theory aims to change how things stand and how customs influence constitutions by criticising the dominant discourse and determine a different perspective that will construct new values and traditions (Fullagar, Pavlidis, & Francombe-Webb, 2018).

Moreover, post structural feminists are concerned with the distribution of power amongst men and women and how these are founded, organised and represented. Furthermore, post-structural feminists use post-structural views of language, bias, societal organisation, and authority to understand why women endure societal interactions relations that lower their significance to those of anti-feminist beliefs. These concepts will help conduct my research. (Fullagar, Pavlidis, & Francombe-Webb, 2018).

The issues surrounding women in leadership need to be understood from a rational perspective in society and not only by gender distinction of males versus females alone. The aspects of the poststructuralist theory challenges the normative power of social structures and practices (Davies, 2013); hence this theory would be helpful in the research. Furthermore, post-structural feminism contests prevailing manliness views on knowledge by utilising plans of conflict Bacchi & Eveline, 2010).Secondly, post-structural feminists pursue exposure of lineages that put across men as the expected leader and destroy their supremacy to society. In addition, post-structural feminists empower and permit side-lined people and provide new methods of interpreting the society. It also involves discussions and individual actions to understand, digging up the reasons of being uncapable, systems of persecution and women's involvement (Damarin & Anderson, 2001).

Therefore, it is clear from the above information that the poststructuralist feminist theory is the best theory to help uncap the findings as to what exactly occurs and transpires among positions of authority held by women in primary schools.

2.4 Chapter summary

This chapter discussed issues and challenges raised about females in leadership and leadership styles held by women locally and internationally how women experience discrimination and oppression locally, continentally and globally. Chapter two also provided the literature review and theoretical framework that underpins this particular research. The following chapter in this research focuses on the research design and methodology, covering other areas such as research paradigm, population, design and data degeneration methods.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research design and methodology utilised in the research. It accomplishes this by examining the research paradigm, the research design, research methodology, research population (sampling), data generation methods, data analysis, issues of trustworthiness, ethical issues and limitations of the study. To remind the reader, this study sought to find answers to the following research questions:

- What are the leadership challenges faced by female school principals in the Capricorn District in Limpopo Province, and how do they overcome them?
- What strategies do female principals use to successfully build a school considering the leadership challenges that come across due to their gender as women?
- How do they adapt to successfully build a school, considering the challenges women face in a male-dominated society?

3.2 Research paradigm

Research paradigms offer and represent thoughts about the world and provide principles for interpreting reality (Elisha, 2012). A research paradigm refers to activities act controlled through individual beliefs (Creswell, 2009). The research is located into the interpretive paradigm because its features align with this research (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). The interpretive paradigm permits researchers to analyse society through the interviewees' opinions and encounters. In an attempt to answer the research questions, the researcher following this paradigm explores the encounters to develop and uses those experiences to construct and interpret his understanding and clarify data (Thanh & Thanh, 2015).

3.2.1 Ontology of the interpretive paradigm

Ontology refers to a study of how establish the reality of objects and ideas. (Batista, 2020).
It addresses the core of human attitudes and values on existence (Richards, 2003, p. 33). It pursues the truth towards research question through showing the current nature of information (Antwi & Hamza, 2015). It is through ontology, an understanding is brought forth that the reality of the participants can be understood from their mind and socially constructed meanings

(Snape & Spencer, 2003). Moreover, ontology considers the existence of questioning. The researchers viewpoint is indicated in the way they analyse societal authenticity which influence the search for understanding and assumptions and beliefs that the researcher has contribute as a baseline towards the research (Creswell, 2014).

3.2.2 Epistemology of the interpretive paradigm

Carson (2001) defines epistemology as how the researcher knows reality. The domain of theory studies the findings of data and how information is gathered and authenticated. (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003). Epistemology takes into account the formation of knowledge towards determining chosen methods required in analysing research questions (Creswell, 2014). In addition, it is interconnected with the strategy the interviewer uses to discover knowledge to attain . This research practices this interpretive paradigm from the participants' stories, experiences, and voices; we explore and understand reality. The research seeks to understand the leadership challenges female principals go through and experiences of participants are the ways through understanding and exploration of reality are brought to the fore. In this study, the researcher does not decide what is regarded as knowledge but prioritises what the participant views as knowledge from discussions carried out during the interviews (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Furthermore, epistemology is a core influence that drives the interviewer to distinguish right and incorrect as well as how they perceive society (Scotland, 2012).

Both ontology, which entails knowing the truth of existence and epistemology, which addresses the current information, are vital factors in influencing the way we perceive objects and ideas (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

3.2.3 Methodology of the interpretive paradigm

The methodology is concerned with the research and crucial exploration of information production methods (Scotland, 2012). It pilots the interviewer to determine the exact type of data required for the research and which data collection tools will be suitable for the study. The main question derived from this paradigm will direct the researcher to examine how society should be studied. The interpretive paradigm does not postulate an exact technique to be pursued but it concentrates on the procedure followed to attain the aim of the study (Scotland, 2012).

In addition, the interpretive methodology involves the design process for leading the study and it does not place emphasis on tools or pointers to the study (Igwenagu, 2016). Methodological research assumptions are vital contributors towards research methods for collecting and analysing data. It includes the research approach, techniques, processes and analyses research methods. Research methods involve the gathering and exploration techniques utilised in the production and development of information (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

The rationale of using the interpretive paradigm is that it is suitable for this research because it will provide an opportunity for a thorough perception of the individual encounters that participants go through. The study aims to understand leadership encounters experienced and the assumptions that society and the social world exists in isolation from human knowledge and that human behaviour is directly affected by the knowledge derived from culture (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

3.3 Research design

The research design is a strategy and tactic implemented for investigations and collection of data to generate direct proof used as a response to research questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). It outlines who will be studied, explains who the participants will be, and where and when the study will be held. In qualitative research, it is vital to uncover and value experiences presented together with viewpoints and opinions of participants being the main priority in the research design (Conrad & Serlin, 2011).

There are five research designs: ethnography, case study, phenomenology, grounded theory, and biography (Petty, Thomson & Stew, 2012). My study utilises the case study approach. Case studies consider and scrutinise multiple case-events over time through a comprehensive, in-depth collection of case data from various sources of information offering meaningful context (Stephens, 2009). Case studies builds comprehensive, contextual understanding of the case, dependent on various data feeds (Yin, 2003) rather than relying on individual and subjective stories as in narrative analysis. According to Simons (2009), "*Case study is an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, program or system in real life*." If maintain such analyses on the descriptive level, case studies are considered as descriptive methods (Thomas 2011, p. 512). It

should be noted that, case studies may involve investigating multiple scenarios; thus, one or more cases can be explored in a single research.

I chose a case study approach because it provides a unique example of real people in real situations. My target group comprises individuals who would best need this type of study (Cohen et al., 2011). The advantages of using this case study are that it develops rich and widespread understandings about people. It uses effective techniques in the data gathering process, which comprises interviews and open-ended questions (Creswell, 2016). However, there are certain disadvantages to case study research. It is prone to problems of observer bias, despite attempts made to address reflexivity. It is not readily open to cross-checking; hence it may be selective, biased, personal and subjective (Cohen et al. 2011).

3.4 Research methodology

Research methodologies comprise of quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods (Stephens, 2009). However, for this study, I chose the qualitative method. Qualitative research refers to a type of research used to gather answers without the use of arithmetic ,geometric or numerical processes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 17). This method allows the interviewer to study participants involved at their usual location and surrounding to allow the interviewer to understand their experiences (Stephens, 2009). It is here the researcher examines, and reads situations and scenes, upholding empathic neutrality (Jones & Ficklin, 2012).

Also, I discovered that this type of method would align well with my research topic as it is a widely cited research tradition that places its primary focus with research questions emphasised on identifying details of occasions and encounters as well as gathering perceptions from participants observing inadequate phenomenon (Hammarberg et al, 2016). A researcher acts as the "human instrument" of data collection (Hammersley, 2013) Further, it possesses characteristics that entail the natural setting phenomena for data collection. An investigator is a crucial instrument in its collection, data being collected from words and focusing on the participants' perspectives (Stephens, 2009). Qualitative research is descriptive (Polit & Beck, 2009, 2014). Moreover, a qualitative research study gives a straight description of the desired phenomenon and the information sought (Neergaard et al., 2009).

The advantage of using qualitative research is that it obtains from a real life viewpoint and analyses a phenomenon in its usual state (Sandelowski, 2010). It enables flexibility in commitment to the framework when designing and conducting a study (Conrad & Serlin, 2011). The study findings are straightforward, and contain precise data gathered, making sense to the reader (Creswell, 2009). The study explores leadership challenges experienced by female school principals and how they navigate those challenges in the researched schools. The qualitative study method has an informative nature, aiming to discover significant occurrences experienced by different participants. Their input needs to be found, making it suitable for this research (Conrad & Serlin, 2011).

3.5 Sampling strategies

Research population is defined as the overall figure of persons, incorporated in the research (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014). In my research, the research population involved female principals in the Capricorn District in Limpopo Province. Within this population, I chose four female school principals leading primary schools. A research sample comprises a group of individuals selected from all the other respondents in a population from which the study is being conducted who share similar characteristics (Tichapondwa, 2013). These four women were the best candidates for this research because the research needs female principals to implement the study. My research sample is represented by the four chosen female principals in the Capricorn District. The participants will be a perfect match for this study as their data will be unbiased, consistent and come from their individual experiences. Their survival acts of how they lead and manage challenges in a male-dominated environment and post together with the strategic ways they lead and manage schools need to be understood and brought to the fore (Cohen & Arieli, 2011).

Sampling is defined as the population the study emphasises on. I opted for purposive sampling because it derives from the investigator pursuing specific individuals relevant to the study (Cohen et al., 2011). A purposive sampling strategy was employed to identify the female principals in the Capricorn District to offer a diversity of views relating to the research topic. (Etikan et al , 2016). These women have been principals for more than five years. It allows for participants' deliberate choice, allowing the researcher to decide what they entail on discovering; hence purposive sampling allows room to find people who can willingly provide information to unravel what the researcher seeks to learn (Musa & Alkassim, 2016). Most

women struggle and face leadership issues when in places of authority. Hence, the participants can express precisely what they go through on a day to day basis as female principals leading primary schools.

3.6 Data generation methods

Data generation refers to gathering data to shed light on the specific research question. Research instruments are used as tools to collect data for analysis (Bertram and Christiansen, 2014). There are different research instruments, some of which are open-ended questionnaires, observations, interviews and others. However, this study will mainly use interviews to generate data (Cohen et al., 2011). The researcher met and conducted interviews with the participating female principals. One-on-one meetings were conducted with them and, with the use of questions, asked them about their experiences concerning the research question and unravelled what challenges are experienced as they tackle the leadership post of principal in the male-dominated arena and strategies they employ as they cope in this type of environment. The interviews involved a conversation with which the researcher asked questions in line with the topic of study. These conversations were recorded using a phone voice recorder to capture the data accurately. Covid-19 precautions and measures were taken with both participants to ensure safety is prioritised.

The advantage of using this research instrument is that it allows for personal level engagement with the research participant (Birmingham & Wilkinson, 2003). The choice of using interviews is precisely because they will enable one-on-one engagement in the discussion, detailed information is extracted, and sensitive issues that are there are discussed freely. (Stuckey, 2013). However, Cohen et al. (2011) suggest a disadvantage of face to face interviews in that they might be intimidating in their conduction on one on one basis.

3.7 Data analysis

Data analysis refers to the practice of developing direction, arrangement and significance to the mass of gathered information in research (De Vos, Delport, Fouche and Strydom, 2011). It involves coding data focusing on various categories and identifying and describing themes or patterns from participants' perspectives (Chenail, 2012). There are different models of qualitative data analysis where some are grounded theory, narrative analysis, thematic analysis,

discourse analysis and case studies (Braun and Clarke, 2012). This study utilises thematic narrative analysis when analysing data. Thematic narrative analysis is a flexible method that aims to identify, analyse and describe themes from data collected in interviews (Smith, 2016).

A six-step phase process of thematic analysis was used (Braun and Clarke (2006:870).
The first step entails familiarising yourself with your data and noting initial ideas. I will listen and re looking into recorded data from the interviews of each participant and take note of useful points mentioned. The second step is to generate codes. It is here that I will mark the data according to the set code I want to use. After that, I will then search for themes. This third step would assist in ensuring I gather relevant data to each potential theme. The fourth step would be reviewing the themes, and this would entail the researcher checking if the themes work. Afterwards, the fifth step of defining and naming themes would be implemented. I would polish details of every theme and make defined terms, and the concluding step will entail producing the report of the findings from the data obtained (Butina, 2015). Therefore, the information presented from interviews conducted in my study will be analysed and broken down to themes that come forth (Savin-Baden, 2013.). This concept goes hand in hand with the study, and it will assist in identifying recurring themes that would be brought from the mentions made by the participants. (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

3.8 Issues of trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in research signifies confidence level in information, understanding, and techniques used to safeguard the quality and other attributes of the study (Pilot & Beck, 2014). Cohen et al. (2011) describe reliability in research as synonymous with having consistency, dependability and reliability, and these aspects go hand in hand with the qualitative research aspect of research design I will be using when doing my research. The critical criteria of validating in qualitative research like the one to be conducted are ensuring credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are aspects my study will adhere to (Cohen et al., 2011). Triangulation is described as using two or more data generation methods to study some aspects of human behaviour (Cohen et al., 2011). In qualitative research, triangulation is replaced by crystallisation as a better term to use. Crystallisation enables qualitative researchers to shift from considering something as fixed, rigid, two-dimensional object towards the idea of a crystal, which allows for an infinite different shapes, substances, transmutations, dimensions

and approach angles (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Therefore, crystallisation, presents researchers with a complex and greater understanding of circumstances (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

3.8.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to participant opinions and the academic's understanding and portrayal (Polit & Beck, 2012). Credibility showcases the researcher's capability to illustrate that the information represents the participants' feedback without biasness, favouritism or preferences of the researcher (Connelly, 2016). The aspects mentioned above will be followed in this research together with transferability and authenticity. The researcher in this study will ensure that no personal bias will interfere with the research and all presented information is only what the participants communicated. The skill and range to which the researcher explains the participant's involvements' feelings, expressions, and reactions will be reliable and of correct conduct without bias (Polit & Beck, 2012). The pointers mentioned above are essential, and adherence to these aspects allowed the research to be trustworthy with accurate and exact data.

3.8.2 Transferability

Transferability is the criteria used for assessing external validity (Cope, 2014). Creswell (2007:204) explains transferability as an event when researchers access, compare and apply findings from another study to their own research case. This can be accomplished when the original document provides adequate descriptive data correspondent with the second study. Accordingly, transferability alludes to consistent findings in similar contexts; thus, comparison to other cases or theories (Connelly, 2016). The results may assist readers in determining whether interventions are necessary to their work with similar issues. Transferability corresponds with the traditional concept of "external validity" (Rubin & Babbie, 2005).

Research studies are considered to satisfy the criterion of applicability when their findings can fit into contexts outside the case study situation and when scholars regard the research outcomes as significant and applicable in their own studies (Polit & Beck, 2014). The extent to which the findings of qualitative research study can be transferred to other contexts or environments with other respondents. The researcher will facilitate that the information presented will provide transferability judgment by a prospective user through the thick description, explaining behaviours and experiences, and context to an extent that such behaviours and experiences become significant and meaningful to an outsider.

3.8.3 Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research refers to consistency and reliability of the research findings and the degree to which research procedures are documented,(Polit& Beck, 2014). In the study of female principals, the researcher took note of all activities and decisions about aspects of the study, such as whom to interview and what to observe (Cope, 2014). Moreover, dependability involves participants' evaluation of the findings, interpretation and recommendations of the study, such support by the data received from participants (Shenton, 2004).

3.8.4 Confirmability

Confirmability, involves the skill used by the researcher to gather information from the interviewees to reflect what it intends to reflect and not reveal information influenced by the interviewers bias and views (Polit & Beck, 2012). The researcher ensured the confirmability of the data findings by explaining incomplete conclusions drawn from themes found in the interviews with the participants through direct quotes extracted from the interviews (Polit & Beck, 2014). I will ensure confirmability has been achieved by checking and rechecking data throughout my study and providing my personal views do not interfere with the data I present (Lincoln & Cuba, 1986). The information presented by participants needs to take the lead.

3.9 Ethical issues

Ethics are defined as the moral principles that govern behaviour (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013), while Cohen et al. (2011) add that ethics are "principled sensitivity to the rights of others" and "while the truth is good, respect for human dignity is better". Hence, ethical issues are a must in any study. Ethical issues and standards were maintained and observed when the research was conducted. The issue of confidentiality is a sensitive matter; hence data collected from the research participants was sustained by ensuring that only myself and my supervisor have access to responses gathered from the participants and refrain anyone outside my research from accessing this information (Silverman, 2016).

Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality and privacy are vital to research (Cohen et al., 2011). Informed consent is a definite necessity that a researcher must follow as it is a requirement needed in research that requires the voluntary participation of research participants (Josephson & Smale, 2021**).** Participants should feel free to voluntarily

take part in the study with no fear to be exposed to risks hence the purpose of the informed consent forms; confidentiality is vital in protecting the participant's right to privacy thus boundaries to ensure their privacy is maintained and protected (Cohen et al., 2011). Therefore, professionalism was maintained and appointments with participants were set on dates that were convenient for them. Furthermore, ethical clearance from the Research Office of the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, consent forms from all participants on willingness to partake the research, and approval from the Department of Education in Limpopo Province and Capricorn District Office were also considered.

3.10 Limitations of the study

Limitations refers to possible weaknesses found in research and are out of the researcher's control (Simon, 2011). Limitations occur nearly in all we do. In the case of this particular study, the sample derived from the participants cannot be applied to a more prominent population finding. Another limitation is time(Simon & Goes, 2013). With this in mind, my study will be done on a small scale as it unravels into leadership challenges of only four female principals from the Capricorn District; hence the limitation here will be it cannot be generalised to other areas or contexts (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Also, findings from my study can be helpful to assist current female principals who will get a chance to read through the experiences of others, aspiring females who want to take on the post of principal will also benefit as well as other researchers can be assisted in their studies from information obtained. It is essential to know the limitations of this study so that the researcher understands the conditions of the research and the challenges to be encountered.

3.11 Chapter summary

Chapter Three provided the research design and methodology to answer the research questions. Also, research paradigms, research design, the research methodology, sampling, data collection and analysis methods, issues of trustworthiness, ethical issues, limitations of the study, and data analysis were discussed. The following chapter focuses on data presentation and discussion of the research study.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

In this research chapter, an in-depth analysis of discovered information is thus brought forward and discussed. The presented data were obtained from the sample, which is the four female principals from the Capricorn District of Limpopo. This chapter derives from the purpose of the research, which entails discovering leadership challenges female principals encounter in their day to day running of primary schools and unravelling the strategies they employ as they deal with the challenges. Relevant information discovered in the research was done using questions specifically prepared for the participating female school principals. A few notes were considered in the interviews conducted, but the interview sessions were recorded. Therefore, in this chapter, the researcher outlines the data extracted and presents how it was analysed. As part of ethical considerations used in this research, letter codes of A, B, C and D were used to protect the identity of the female primary school principals. This chapter will explain the information and data gathered from the interviews.

This study comprises three research questions: the first question is to seek to understand what leadership challenges female school principals face in the Capricorn District. The second question was to get an elaboration as to what strategies the female principals use to successfully build a school, considering the leadership challenges that come across due to their gender as a woman. The third question checked how they adapt to successfully build a school regarding women's challenges in a male-dominated society.

4.2 Data presentation and discussion

Below I present the findings that were obtained from the field of the study from participants. The information is presented as themes and sub-themes produced from the interview questions.

4.2.1 Biographical Presentation

A total of four women took part in addressing the research question about the leadership challenges faced by female primary school principals from the Capricorn District.

Table 4.2.1: Profile of the participating female school principals

Principal	Age	Marital Status	Qualification	Experience held as principal	Race
A	30-40	Married	Masters	10+ years	White
B	51-60	Married	Honours Degree	5+years	White
C	30-40	Married	Masters	10+years	White
D	51-60	Married	Masters	10+ years	White

The above biographical data shows that all these women principals are married and mature as shown by the age range from the above table. Furthermore, they are well qualified to hold the position they hold as principal. All the principals where once teachers before they got their promotion as principal hence their experience from that combined with the experience they currently hold as principal, it can be attested that they have adequate experience and knowledge to run their schools effectively. All the interviewed principals were all white. It is important to mention that there are black and coloured female primary principals in the area of research but none of them were available for contributing towards the research. It would have been interesting to interview other races who hold this position and hear out their opinions and views upon the research topic. The researcher tried countless times to have telephonic interview, emails and even went in person to ask for permission but still no luck hence those that were available are the ones that participated.

Research Question one: What strategies do female principals use to successfully build a school considering the leadership challenges that come across due to their gender as women?

4.2.2 Theme One: Leadership challenges

Several leadership challenges arose in the different interviews done, and below is a detailed explanation of each of the challenges discovered and what the participants had to say about this.

4.2.3 CAPS (Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements) curriculum

Most participants complained about using the CAPS curriculum to their learner's syllabus.

Principal A said :

The workload is too much; my staff struggle to teach everything expected and rush through the curriculum.

Likewise, principal B said :

There are a lot of components needed to be covered, and assessments to be done are many plus teaching time with the learners is disturbed.

Principal C added on this when she was interviewed and stated that:

The various aspects to be covered are many, but they push through to make it work.

Principal D also said :

The areas to be covered are many, and the slow learner is a disadvantage, but the school strives to make it a success at the end of each term.

According to Du Plessis and Maris (2015), CAPS resolved the previous issues from the earlier curricula. Still, it posed a challenge for learners and teachers to cope. The workload was massive with the extended content structure, which pushed teachers under pressure to teach fast and leave behind weak and struggling learners, compromising the teaching and learning quality. Limited teacher knowledge and professional development about CAPS make implementation difficult as the top-down approach where teachers are compelled to follow, takes over (Maharajh et al., 2016). I went through the CAPS document at the one school, and the way it is structured gives the educator a detailed guideline of what to teach and clear guidance to assessment requirements needed. However, the principal's comments shows that they experience challenges when using this document in their school teaching.

4.2.4 Balancing family and work

The findings revealed below show that each participant experienced challenges balancing their family, household, and work.

Principal A said that :

I need a certain mindset to run my school without bringing challenges from home to work. If I do not do this, my day will become a disaster. My husband knows we work as a team, and hence we try to maintain open communication to avoid unnecessary frustrations, as this does occur at times. I have two teenage boys and a husband, and they both have needs

and demands. Sometimes complaints arise from my husband that I am putting more effort and time into my work than at home.

Likewise, principal B said:

Juggling work-life balance can be a strain. At times issues arise at home, and you need to go to work, but you have this hanging on your head the entire time but still have to run the school.

Principal C stated that :

A robust support system at home needs to be in line and make sure you look after yourself emotionally, physically and spiritually. I take some time off to go for fun events I love, like dog training and spend time with my family to allow a balance.

Principal D also said that:

A need to split up work and family is a must for me. It is not always that I can separate the two as, at times, it depends on the scenario, and I need to separate as a clash leads to disaster.

Women in educational principal posts require stability to manage domestic responsibilities as mothers, wives, and career women (Williams, 2011).

4.2.5 Women and their emotions

The data gathered show that the female principals acknowledged that their emotions play a significant role in controlling their schools.

Principal A said that :

I need to make sure things at my home are fine. It is difficult and demanding to balance work and separate that. At times it gets a bit overwhelming, but I find a balance.

Principal B also said that:

Women are highly regarded and held in high esteem, unlike many others. I lay aside my emotions when I conduct my work. I make sure I separate the feelings and take a moment to pause and analyse before I react. I have been through many traumas in my job, and

laying aside emotions has been the one constant I need to do as I know that emotions can make me or break me.

Similarly ,principal C said:

Women are emotional beings; we think with our hearts and not just our heads. We have more empathy for situations than men; for men, it's more of a black and white of right or wrong. As women, I concluded, we face more challenges in our leadership posts because we get emotionally involved with situations that we come across.

Likewise, principal D said:

To separate emotions and drawing the line from emotional and professional sides, not always, not with ladies, she laughed. It depends on the seriousness of the case, e.g. a naughty child not behaving that's different. Then someone comes through and states my husband passed away or I had a miscarriage or rape case. It's challenging to put your emotions aside; I can use my feelings to my advantage. If I put myself in their shoes, I can help them, but if I stand cold backwards and analyse and take decisions, I might make the wrong decision. We can use our emotions to our benefit.

Thus, in conclusion, the principals all described various ways emotions touches their lives.

4.2.6 Sisterhood with other females

Another challenge discovered was the lack of togetherness amongst women colleagues with three principals.

Principal A said that:

I was a teacher in the school, and when the opportunity arose for a principal post, I applied and got it, but I struggled even now with some female colleagues who undermined me as a principal and look at me as their colleague. It kind of seems to be a bit better, but this is something I struggle with to show them that there need to be boundaries.

Principal B also said that:

I work with both men and women, and the men are not so into gossip and issues, but some women colleagues have beef with me and how I run my school. Many talks were once

spoken to me, and I had to address it, but again, something always comes up; I have never figured out their issue: jealousy or spitefulness.

Surprisingly, principal C did not have any issues with her female colleagues and staff. She explained that they have mutual respect for one another, and any problems that arise are addressed and attended to without any fuss or jealousy getting in between.

Like Principal C, principal D stated that, "They see me as a sister they can reach out. We work together with other women, and they don't give me problems as such, but you can see with some women we just relate as colleagues, but getting more from that won't work". They want to be your colleague but not your friend.

Hence, Principal A and B experienced similar challenges unlike Principal C and D.

4.2.7 Challenge of a woman in management

The findings from this theme are not all the same. Each participant explained how they had experienced the challenge of being a woman in management, comparing themselves to men in leadership positions.

Principal C said:

Women go through more challenges than men. We are emotional beings, we women and think with our hearts and not just our heads. As women, we face more challenges because we get emotionally involved in situations. Also, there is this stereotype that we are supposed to be in a kitchen barefoot and taking care of the children. We fight so hard and need to prove ourselves with physical evidence.

Principal B also said:

There have been many cases where I have felt something needed to be done in a particular way, and I got opposition, and I listen to others and compromise even if sometimes it is not comfortable, but I hear what they say.

Surprisingly, Principal D had two responses. She said:

Women are going through more challenges than men. YES and NO. It depends on circumstances if you are happily married and have a fantastic husband that I can voice

towards at night; he doesn't want to run the school, but he listens, and that helps me a lot and am happily married I don't want to bring stress from home to school I can do my job. But if you are not happily married, the case can be different. Women who face a challenge for me; it's the cultural thing they don't want to listen to you and try to manipulate you, and I once had a case where I went through this.

Principal A also said*:*

When you conduct yourself as a female leader all eyes are on you to see how you run the school. It is never easy as woman but I make it work.

4.2.8 Equality between men and women

The challenge mentioned above was on the heads of most of the participants. Principal C and D expressed that they had seen and experienced the equality issue and that it affected the female principal in carrying out their duties as expected. Principal D said that: *There is no equal treatment between men and women in leadership positions like the one I hold as a principal. Men are seen as better and stronger leaders; they believe women are incapable. In my culture, the Afrikaans, there is a struggle as our culture classifies men are better leaders, and they must take the lead in a leadership post women are categorised as weak.*

Likewise, Principal C said:

In private sectors, it is equal, I have not met a person that looks down on me as a female principal or women or a younger person, but there is no equality with men and women in public schools. In public governmental schools, I have seen women frowned at in leadership positions even as a Head of Departmental, and they put immense pressure on women and make them look inadequate.

However, contradictory to what was said above by Principal C and D, Principals A and B had a different perception and experience to this. Principal A noted that the men at her school treat her well. These men work in the garden and field and have never given her problems. She has not experienced any differentiation, her reason being that *"maybe because I am superior to them."* Principal B said: *I think men and women are treated equally, and in my opinion, the female principals are much more focused and efficient than many men. Women have high esteem as leaders.*

4.2.9 Gender stereotyping, culture and insubordination

The findings from the interview questions to the participating principals indicate two different responses. Two of the principals, principals A and B, explained that men around them treat them with respect and discrimination. Years ago, the underrepresentation of women is something they are not experiencing. Their environment is not as bad as what used to happen years back, but changes occur. Principal A stated that "*men in my school treat me so well with respect and have not given me any problems… Principal B said," my male colleagues and I have a fantastic relationship with me, and they treat me like a little sister.*".

Principal C and D mentioned different opinions from principals A and B. Principal D mentioned how her culture still underrepresents women. She said, "*In my culture, the Afrikaans there it is a struggle as our culture classifies men are better leaders, and they must take the lead in a leadership postwomen are categorised as weak…".* Participant C experienced stereotyping from the public school sector where she saw people frowning at her because she was a woman. Still, the private schools treated her well and not different.

The data, showcases how women seem to have been accepted as school principals, but to some extent, discrimination still exists, but it is not as harsh and steep as it was back in the previous years.

4.2.10 Issue of age and posture

Another interesting finding was the issue of age and posture towards the female principals. Principals A and B had no challenges, but principals C and D did.

Principal C said:

> *I became a principal at a very young age and worked with people for 60years plus, and it was challenging to raise my opinion as a young principal.*

Likewise, principal D said :

> *When I became a principal, only five people were younger than me, and the rest of the staff, 112 people, were older than me, which was a challenge for me. I have seen how many people look at me and at the posture I have, and most see me as incompetent and cannot lead that I cannot do the job of being a primary school leader.*

I do not know where this mentality comes from; they look at you as though you do not have brains.

The other challenge for me was the unions, one union went for me and tried getting me out of my position, and we had terrible fights. But with time, they understood how I operate as a leader, and today we see eye to eye and even communicate, asking for others advice.

4.2.11 COVID - 19 pandemic

The findings revealed that all principals agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic raised several challenges that had to be settled and adjustments that had to be done during this time. Principal A said: *I became a principal soon after the COVID-19 pandemic. This was very challenging for me, as the adjustments required were new to me, for example, staff falling sick, it still is complex but a bit better but taking it a step at a time.*

The COVID-19 pandemic meant a lot of adjustments to everyone in the world and schools. Principal A mentioned how the number of learners per class were grouped into groups and would not come to school on the same day. It was an issue that teachers had to work extra hard; sanitisers had to be available and budgeted for extra cleanliness and monitoring of children to ensure safety measures. It was a lot to do and still is. Still, now it is much better as we have adjusted.

Principal C addressed that some parents also kept their children for a more extended period due to fear of taking them out in public, and this made rise to loss of learning time for them, more pressure to the teacher as the learners returned they needed to catch up.

4.2.12 Challenges with male and younger colleagues.

Principal A has male colleagues and some young staff members in their schools that they interact with daily, and they all attested that they had no challenges whatsoever with both categories of colleagues. They showed them respect and worked well with them and other women in the school.

Similarly, principal D said:

The younger teachers and colleagues worked well with her and everyone else. They have interns who are training at the school and others doing practicals, and they were very helpful and showed everyone respect. They are eager to learn and look up to me as their role model.

Principal B also said that:

Sporadically, I find that this particular generation coming up feel we owe them something, and they are not prepared to have a servant's heart, and it is a problem. When we were younger teachers back in the day, as the youngest, you did the tricky jobs. This generation has no respect and manners to conduct themselves like we did.

With principal C, she said:

I did not get any ill-treatment from men, but I have seen how in private sectors when it comes to schooling and relations, I haven't met anybody within the independent system that looks down upon a woman or a younger person even the men.

Research Question Two: What strategies do female school principals employ to overcome gender-based challenges as they lead and manage their schools?

4.3 Theme Two: Coping strategies

The findings from this question to the participating female principals brought forth different opinions as each mentioned what worked for them.

4.3.1 Self-empowerment

The findings demonstrated that Capricorn District's female primary school principals advanced in their leadership position by empowering themselves by studying further to get more knowledge on successfully running the school and leadership by training in trauma, counselling, clinical psychology, and life coaching.

To support the above, Participant C said:

I made a choice empower myself through further studies of trauma, life coaching and counselling to ensure that I can do my job understanding how to assist learners, staff and parents I work with.

Principal A also said that:

I have set goals and build my school from scratch and these goals of ensuring it becomes a. success is what I strive for. I have a responsibility towards myself and my school hence I stand up for myself and push for positivity in myself and my school. I do not know everything and am still learning but I know who I am and my goals are for the long run.

Similarly, Principal B said:

I push for good work and surround myself with positive people and push for positive choices. for myself as a person. I practice self-care to ensure I do not overwhelm myself and make time to go away to relax and push towards building a successful school.

With Principal D, she said:

I have studied counselling, psychology and educational management to empower myself to successfully run my school. I am a role model to other people and push myself because I love my job. I have managed to build a network with other principals who also assist me if I need help. I choose to be positive person and this brings me so much joy as I run my school.

4.3.2 Balance and time management

The findings discovered revealed that the female primary school principals in the Capricorn District strive to make sure they have a balance at home with their families and at work to ensure that they can run their school smoothly.

Principal A said that:

I *make sure I keep track of my daily meeting and family activities that need my attention. I ensure I balance all that is required of me and ensure that I manage my time towards my daily routine. If I do not do so my day becomes a disaster hence my day starts quite early at home as I prepare for my children and husband then proceed to work.*

Also, principal B said that:

I plan my and organise my routine to differentiate and separate family time and school related duties. Waking up early allows me to kick start my day well and also monitoring my time to ensure I get a. balance is important. My secretary assists with setting up appointments in line with everything around me and this assists me greatly.

Principal C said:

I am usually the first to arrive at work in the morning and start off my day early. Balance is very important for me and when I do not do this issues also arise at home as my daily schedule. Gets thrown off course. It is a lot at times as the Departmental meetings may take up more time or another emergency rocks up that needs my immediate attention but if I have such I always inform my spouse to assist at home or Deputy to chip in with the school. This support system is important for me and helps me a lot.

Principal D said that:

Being a principal is not for 'sissies' without balance and time management I do not see how I can possibly conduct my work well. I have a supportive partner and amazing staff that also assists me but also look up to me. I cannot arrive late at work and expect them to also do so. I also have classes as I teach learners in my school and hence a lot of how I operate as a principal and teacher is vital towards the successful running of my school.

They all agreed that this was not easy as, at times, complaints arose at the home of their unavailability and demanding profession. Still, they found ways to work by practising effective time management routines to balance time for their families and work.

4.3.3 Support from family and staff

Though the principals mentioned the leadership challenges of balancing family and work being hard and challenging, the female primary school principals felt that their families, staff, and friends contributed significantly to their coping in successfully managing and leading their schools.

Principal A said that:

I push towards conducting my work with motivation and success to excel but my family. And staff make the journey worthwhile. These people help me when I need help and support me. I do have challenges I face just like everyone else and I know my team has my back at all times, be it my husband or colleagues at work.

Principal B stated that:

Support from my secretary, teachers and other members in the school committee assists me in managing the school effectively. Also, when we have events, some parents go an extra mile and this is something I value as the principal. At times some of my friends bring in flowers with cards that have sweet messages and I love flowers. This brightens my day and encourages me to keep working hard. My husband is also very supportive and this assists me very much.

Also, Principal C said that:
Managing and leading a school is never easy and a lot of decision making occurs on a day to day basis but the support system that I have of a husband who is there for me and staff who go an extra mile gives me a chance to effectively lead the school with confidence.

Principal D said that:
I have a fantastic support system at home and at work. My staff and I work as a unit and assist me in a lot of work that I do. The Deputy makes time to cover up certain aspects together with the SMT and other teachers too. This makes it easier to lead as to a larger extent I can see am not alone. My husband is very supportive and assists me with other aspects like technical aspects i might be struggling with at work and at home he also assists greatly with our children.

4.3.4 Practising servant leadership, being an essential member with wisdom and being honest and trustworthy

The findings from the study presented information that most of the female primary school principals in the Capricorn District practised Servant leadership to successfully build a school considering the leadership challenges that come across. The ability to listen, show empathy, allow and initiate growth amongst staff members, and practice stewardship to the other staff members and people around them has been a fulfilling experience amongst the female principals (Dennis et al, 2010).

Principal D also said that,

> *The one strategy that has worked for me and made everything easier to handle was the ability to serve.*

However, as the female principals practised Servant leadership, they mentioned that being a principal is a very lonely job as you cannot go to other staff members for advice on issues you

are facing; you need to be selfless and put a lot of people as priorities and that they do not get assistance from the department. The SMT is there too, but another principal mentioned that *"when the pawpaw hits the fan, you are on your own."* This shows how the female principals are not self-absorbed but carry out their duties as a mother cares and nurtures her children, prioritising their staff, learners and colleagues, allowing them to be included.

In the quest of being an essential member with wisdom and serving others, the findings revealed that most principals valued knowledge as a characteristic required to practice when having a mission to attain success successfully.

Principal B said:

> *I need to do my job well and have the wisdom to run my school. Before I act, I need to think and set aside emotions. I learnt to be wise.*

Principal A also mentioned that she is aware that culture and society are observing her character and management tactics; hence, she works on being the best; she cannot please people but does what she loves, allowing her passion to take over. She strives to do her best, seeks wisdom from God, and gives herself time to think through situations before responding. Also, Principal A mentioned one of the female principals in the district that she looks up to as a role model(which was also interviewed)… "*she has tonnes of wisdom, and I am learning from her."*

On observing Principal D*'s* office, there was a lot of drawings and cards she had prepared to give out; Principal D explained that it is gifts for her staff; she makes these regularly, her motto is to serve she does not want her staff or students to feel scared of her, but she trusts in the ability to help the people and being able to fit in. She counsels and advises some of her staff and is there for her team, learners and parents.

Similarly, Principal C said:

> *Being more diligent by listening, serving, to treat everyone as an individual, studying and growing myself, working together with my staff, parents and learners and not just me leading them but making us all be together in this. It's incredibly fulfilling to see everything flowing so well daily at the school. The world changes, and people change, so I need to realign myself.*

In practicing honesty and being trustworthy, all four principals agreed that they must be honest and trustworthy to their staff, school, SMT, parents, and the district for their leadership to succeed. Transparency has been a key in how they build their school. Principal D said: *Getting the trust of my staff, being honest and most importantly, being open. There is always hope. When I face challenging situations in the office, I grow from them even though it's never easy, and it has taken me this far in my leadership post. I never thought I would become a principal, my father did not believe I could be a teacher even, and today, I stand proud of what I have achieved.*

4.3.5 Prayer and strength from God

Spirituality came up from most of the participants as a coping mechanism. The majority of the principals relied on strength and trusted God in how they conduct themselves, aligned with their Christian values (Juma & Simatwa 2016:126).

On observations, I noticed Principal D opens all classes, teaching and duties with a prayer over the intercom before anyone starts their work for the day, and she ends the day with prayer at 1:30 pm.

Principal D said that:
In the mornings before school starts, prayer is the first order of the day in the staff room and on the school intercom system. I am a firm believer and believe I cannot do anything in my life without the guidance of God. Everything I do even choices and decisions at work I put God first to lead me so that I do not stray or makes decisions without him leading me through it all.

Principal A mentioned that "*I research things and changes I need to make sure I am aware of how I should do my job to the required satisfaction I am proud of, and that is in line with what is required of me. I am a Christian, and I work towards being a better person to myself and what is expected of me".*

It is evident that most female primary school principals depended on prayer as a coping mechanism to successfully manage their schools.

Research Question Three: How do they adapt to successfully build a school, considering the challenges women face in a male-dominated society?

4.4 Theme Three: Building a successful school

4.4.1 Practice participative and democratic style of leadership

The findings discovered from the interviews and observations of the principals showcased that they all practised the democratic leadership style. Principal A said: *"Always expect the unexpected as a principal, getting staff members to assist and participate helps a lot. I practice more of democratic style of management. Avoid judging and leading by example".* This indicated that she values others and does not work in isolation but incorporates her staff in building her school successfully. The findings from the observation of Principal D was that she had meetings with the SMT every morning, and she mentioned how they advise and helped in making important decisions and assisted her greatly with the running of the school. Staff meetings are held often, and staff are made aware of some issues, and they are asked to participate and chip in, thereby allowing room for open communication and suggestions. All four principals confirmed they also had meetings with parents and other staff, including general hands, cleaners and gardeners, on issues about their departments, and this has assisted in creating an open environment for communication. Participant B mentioned how she values the opinions of others to arrive at a decision that everyone contributed to finally. She went on to say: "*I do not know it all and parental meetings, men in my profession respect me and use my knowledge for gifts and talents I have in decision needed, and they make me feel valuable. I handle issues and my work diplomatically from the parents, teachers, students and staff.*

The theory chosen for this study was post-structural feminism. One of its aims is to explain that issues surrounding women in leadership need to be understood from a rational perspective in society and not only by gender distinction of males versus females alone. The findings that came through from the research brought the statement made from this theory into life. As discovered from other studies in the literature review, the way women are underrepresented has not held back the four interviewed female principals from the Capricorn District of Limpopo. Still, they have made their mark to strive to do their utmost best in the leadership position they hold. They enjoy their work and never trade it for another post or job.

From the findings gathered, it is evident that culture and society influence the way female principals lead their schools. The post structuralist theory applies here as it prefers the rational way of understanding challenges women go through. The leadership challenges

mostly mentioned by the participants are to a larger extent just ordinary challenges any leader may experience as they run their school be it a male principal or female principal. The findings showcase that challenges experienced cannot only be determined on men as a hindrance through societal influences. These women are making a difference in their societies and the issues about men dominating the profession is not their main focus but they are successfully leading their schools through their dedication and determination to achieve success for the schools they manage.

4.5 Chapter summary

This chapter first presented the qualifications, age and race of the female principal's data relevant to the study. Afterwards, the main objective of discovering leadership challenges experienced where presented, followed by the coping strategies the female principals employ to deal with challenges that occur in their line of work and the principles they use to successfully build their schools.. The data was analysed, presented into themes, and interpreted into findings from the study. The next chapter is the concluding chapter and will suggest recommendations and conclusions drawn from the research study.

CHAPTER 5

STUDY SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previously discussed chapter analysed data found in the various discussions with the different samples of female principals. The above chapter disclosed the leadership challenges faced by the female principals and unfolded strategies they used that could benefit others that may want to pursue the leadership position of a female principal.

However, this chapter presents the summary of the study right from the onset of the discussion, with the guideline being from the initial research questions and the themes that build into the concept. After that, conclusions are presented in alignment with the data gathered. From that, the summary and conclusions are reached, which allows the stating of desired recommendations that would assist further study and research linked to this discussed phenomena.

The following research questions guided the research:

1. What leadership challenges are faced by female school principals in the Capricorn District in Limpopo Province, and how do they overcome them?
2. What strategies do female principals use to successfully build a school considering the leadership challenges that come across due to their gender as women?
3. How do they adapt to successfully build a school, considering the challenge women face in a male-dominated society?

5.2 Study summary

The main objective that was intended and set out in this research was to discover the leadership challenges female principals face from the Capricorn District. The researcher gathered and collected data from the female principals in the area. Data were collected utilising structured interviews. The information captured from this was then decoded into themes that were analysed and then interpreted to findings, and these findings from the study are presented.

Chapter One introduced the study by presenting the study's background, purpose, and significance. It outlined the key research questions, delimitations of the study, and the structure of the study. This chapter laid the foundation of the research.

Chapter Two outlined the literature review and theoretical frameworks relevant to this study. The central aspect presented in this chapter was to understand what other researchers have written and found on the topic.

Chapter Three discussed research design and methodology aspects of the research addressed as responses to the research questions set out towards the study.

Chapter Four presented detailed findings to the research addressing the leadership challenges the female principals to have, focusing on data presentation, analysis, and discussion of the research findings.

Chapter Five, the final chapter, summarises the study's conclusions, recommendations, and implications.

5.3 Conclusions

After carefully considering the research study's findings, the following conclusions were grasped.

The research aimed to discover leadership challenges experienced by female principals as women from previous research struggled immensely to fit into society as leaders.

Research Question One: What leadership challenges are faced by female school principals in the Capricorn District in Limpopo Province, and how do they overcome them is discussed and explained below.

The challenges experienced entailed the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS), balancing family and work, emotional management, issue of age and posture, COVID-19 pandemic, younger colleagues and the issue of culture. These characteristics discovered came across as challenges in the day to day lives of the female principals, but they all explained how they had coping strategies to deal with the issues they came across, and they have managed.

The conclusion drawn from the findings about the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements(CAPS) is that the teachers rush through the curriculum to complete the given tasks, which hampers teaching and learning quality. The principals mentioned the workload and assessments to be covered are many. Hence the conclusion drawn from the above findings is that the CAPS document workload on teaching and learning is a lot due to the limited time frame teaching needs to occur. Du Plessis and Maris (2015) support the issues in this document as they explain how CAPS resolved issues from the previous curricula but brought in a challenge for teachers and learners, which entailed a massive workload of content that had to be covered. Hence, the Ministry of Education needs to relook into the CAPS document and check with schools to address this matter.

Another finding discovered was the issue of balancing family and work. Most principals explained how juggling their professional and personal lives is a struggle. Thus, this statement concludes that having a demanding career and family is not an easy task to manage. Women in educational leadership positions have domestic responsibilities as mothers, wives and career women (Williams, 2011).

In addition, another finding was that of women and their emotions. The female principals mentioned that their feelings as women play a role in the way they lead and manage their schools. Research studies on this showcase that women and their emotions is an issue in the workplace and that for decades this has held women back as too "unstable" to hold a leadership position (Elias, 2018). The women attested that they are emotional beings and think with their hearts and not only with their heads. Thus, this research concludes that women are emotional beings and that is how they are as individuals but they can be successful leaders as long as they manage their emotions to not disrupt their work.

The sisterhood issue with other females in the school was another finding discovered from the research that some principals experienced. The lack of togetherness is depicted into spitefulness and jealousy. Some people believe that the place of work is not a place to make friends, while for others, there are expectations that some (if not all) of their social needs will be met at work (Morrison & Cooper-Thomas, 2016). Therefore, it is concluded that sisterhood and unity of women is an issue for others in the school but working together brings in unity and allows room for major success.

The finding of equality between women and men brought to the fore by some of the principals expressed no equal treatment between men and women. The conclusion derived from this is that culture has played a significant role in categorising men and women according to the men as strong and influential leaders, with women being categorised as weak.

Moreover, this research study revealed that the interviewed female principals faced challenges that did not restrict them, often depicted and categorically only for women. If historical viewpoints about women reflect women's subordination and oppression, they force women to discover their roots and past (Wood, 2012). Inequality results from cultural and historical developments, geographic setting and religious customs predominant in society (Stump 2008). Similarly, is the issue of equality, gender stereotyping, culture and insubordination. Some participants experienced segregation in the public schools and frowning as people showed them they were not good enough. Male dominance and female subordination have ideological and material bases (Njoroge, 2009).

In the progression of the research study, the conclusion drawn from the findings of the issue with age and posture is that the physical appearance and age of a leader has an effect on the people they lead and that people have various opinions on this matter. This overlaps with the other finding of younger colleagues who lack manners and are not focused on their conduct towards the principals. The conclusion drawn from this finding is that the more youthful colleagues' behaviour was not sitting well with some of the principals, and they do not see eye to eye in some instances. Teachers beginning their careers in 2011 and for many years ahead are strikingly different from the previous generation of traditionalists, baby boomers, and even gen xers (Richardson, 2011).

Lastly, the conclusion drawn on the finding of the issue pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic is that the it brought rise to several and difficult challenges towards the day to day running and activities to all the schools headed by the female principals interviewed.

The COVID-19 virus is the greatest encounter that national education systems have ever faced and some of the learners will not be able to complete their school curriculum and assessment in the normal way (Daniel, ,2020).

In conjunction to the post structural theory used in this study, it is evident that most of the issues women have been influenced by culture that still sees men as inferior to women.

Research Question Two: What strategies do female school principals employ to overcome gender-based challenges as they lead and manage their schools?

The interviewed female primary schools mentioned that the coping strategies of self-empowerment, striking a balance, time management and support from family and staff were brought forth by the participants. These aspects are assisting the female principals to ensure they do their job well.

Interestingly, the women mentioned that gender based challenges is not something that they are experiencing in their work, but have come across it at other areas for example in the government sectors but at their school the men around them respect their leadership and are willing to assist if they may need help. They are aware that there are few women principals in the district but they are not facing a challenge where men come and challenge their positions as female principals.

On addressing research question three which was on how they adapt to successfully build a school, considering the challenges women face in a male-dominated society?

The female principals responded that they practiced participative and democratic style of leadership which contributed greatly to building their schools successfully. All four principals confirmed they had meetings with parents, staff, including general hands, cleaners and gardeners, on issues about their departments, and an open environment for communication has been instilled in their schools. They do not feel inferior to everyone around them and values opinions from colleagues.

5.4 Recommendations

The following recommendations are made from the above findings and conclusions from the study.

5.4.1 Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS)

The Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS)drafted by the Department of Education system needs to be re-evaluated, and another better teaching and assessment strategy be planned. The OBE previously upheld before CAPS had issues and was later adjusted to the now CAPS; hence, this too needs to be evaluated to allow inclusion of all learners. Teachers are rushing through the teaching time, and learners, especially slow learners, struggle to grapple with what is required, hampers their learning time.

5.4.2 COVID-19 pandemic

This virus hit the whole world and South Africa unexpectedly. The issue of safety measures amongst schools must be implemented. Issues raised from the participants came more from department schools where lack of necessary supplies to assist in this time was

5.4.3 Implementation of support structures

The data discovered from the interviews with the female primary principals from the Capricorn District is that they faced issues of balancing family and work. The female principals expressed that balancing family and work is a mission that is never easy to balance the professional side of work and family. The researcher recommends that the female primary school principals surround themselves with support structures that assist them in striking a balance. Most principals mentioned that their spouses were very supportive of their careers, which helped them immensely. Still, they should have other people in the school and principals around the district that can work together with them.

5.4.4 Establishing balance

The study findings showcase that a female principal needs to strike a balance considering the demanding post of school leader they hold; hence the researcher recommends a coping strategy of ensuring delegation of tasks to other teachers and staff members to ease the workload.

Teamwork increases collaboration, productivity with more ideas improves and builds a school to be successful; hence this would assist the female principals.

5.4.5 Strength from prayer

The researcher recommends that the female primary school principals continue implementing spirituality as a coping mechanism in successfully building their schools. All the principals mentioned how their belief in God has helped them cope with tricky situations they never thought they would manage. Hence, it is evident that religion has contributed positively to their success and should be maintained.

5.4.6 Servant and mothering leadership

Evidence gathered from the interviews showcased that all-female principals believed in practising servant leadership in the way they lead their schools. They were all willing to serve others and not be regarded as a higher authority but function in unison with their staff and parents. All agreed that this form of leadership style made leading easier and doable. Also, the researcher discovered that all interviewees, i.e. the female principals, are mothers. The mothering instinct they have to nurture and be willing to work towards the greatness of their schools, together with the willingness to serve, has influenced their successful running of the schools they lead. Hence, the study recommends that servant leadership continues to be practised by the female principals to build their schools and be a coping mechanism as they lead and serve the Capricorn District community diligently.

5.5 Chapter summary

The study revealed challenges such as the Curriculum Assessment Policy Statements (Khoza, 2018), balancing family and work, emotional management, issue of age and posture, COVID-19 pandemic, younger colleagues and the issue of culture. Moreover, coping strategies mentioned by the principals were the implementation of support structures, practising servant leadership, balancing work, family and emotions and strength from prayer. The study findings brought to the fore that changes made post-1994 for South African women have allowed the interviewed female principals to grow as individuals and not be pulled back by the previous underrepresentation experienced. Female principals are defining the odds and going against perceptions from culture and statements that have been put across by society to derail them.

They did not see themselves as held back in their work and needed to fight for acceptance in their environments. Cultural issues that came through from the literature review and aspects of post structuralism about the female principals not being seen as a leader were still being experienced by some of the principals but only to a lesser extent. They expressed that they were well aware that women were not privileged to lead back in the day. Still, evolving times have allowed them to be who they want to be as leaders without experiencing hindrances like those experienced by other women. The men surrounding them provided support towards their growth as well as complied with the female principal leadership without hesitation or tension.

Women from the study conducted all demonstrated to hold a democratic and servant leadership style to how they lead their schools. The leadership mentioned above are closely aligned in that they carry core values of stewardship, selflessness, empathy and humility.

The experiences of stereotypical behaviour have been to the minimum, and no explicit comments were made directly to compare their leadership to men. The study ends with a recommendation that further research is conducted to determine if women are still being underrepresented and if it has gotten better. Also, challenges experienced by female leaders ought to be discovered and assistance rendered without the labelling of male or female being the centre of the debate. The researcher hopes that the research conducted would assist and facilitate future studies on women in leadership in other countries and South Africa.

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APPENDICES

DEPARTMENT RESPONSE LETTER

LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

CONFIDENTIAL

Ref: 2/2/2 Enq: Makola MC Tel No: 015 290 9448 E-mail:MakolaMC@edu.limpopo.gov.za

Wadzanai Noreen Karichi
P/BAG 3
Wits
2050

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

1. The above bears reference.
2. The Department wishes to inform you that your request to conduct research has been approved. Topic of the research proposal: **"LEADERSHIP CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY FEMALE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS AND STRATEGIES THEY EMPLOY IN THE CAPRICORN DISTRICT IN LIMPOPO PROVINCE. "**
3. The following conditions should be considered:

3.1 The research should not have any financial implications for Limpopo Department of Education.

3.2 Arrangements should be made with the Circuit Office and the School concerned.

3.3 The conduct of research should not in anyhow disrupt the academic programs at the schools.

3.4 The research should not be conducted during the time of Examinations especially the fourth term.

3.5 During the study, applicable research ethics should be adhered to; in particular the principle of voluntary participation (the people involved should be respected).

3.6 Upon completion of research study, the researcher shall share the final product of the research with the Department.

Cnr 113 Biccard & 24 Excelsior Street, POLOKWANE, 0700, Private Bag X 9489, Polokwane, 0700
Tel:015 290 7600/ 7702 Fax 086 218 0560

4 Furthermore, you are expected to produce this letter at Schools/ Offices where you intend conducting your research as an evidence that you are permitted to conduct the research.

5 The department appreciates the contribution that you wish to make and wishes you success in your investigation.

Best wishes.

22/02/2022

Mashaba KM
DDG: CORPORATE SERVICES

Date

Cnr 113 Biccard & 24 Excelsior Street, POLOKWANE, 0700, Private Bag X 9489, Polokwane, 0700
Tel:015 290 7600/ 7702 Fax 086 218 0560

DISTRICT LETTER

4 Quiver Tree Street
The Aloes Estate, Panorama
POLOKWANE
0700

The Department of Education
Capricorn District Office
PIETERSBURG
0699

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE CAPRICORN DISTRICT OF LIMPOPO PROVINCE:WADZANAI NOREEN KARICHI STD NUMBER:2364483

I do hereby kindly request your office to grant me the permission to collect data and do research in the Capricorn District of Limpopo Province. I am currently enrolled as a student at the University of Witwatersrand Johannesburg and am pursuing my Master's Degree in Education.

The focus of my research is on leadership challenges experienced by female school principals in the Capricorn District of Limpopo Province and strategies they employ .The main aim is to collect relevant data through using open ended questions and semi structured interviews. The study hopes to disclose the challenges encountered together with coping strategies employed by the female principals. The schools that have been identified as participants are all under the Capricorn District. The research findings will be circulated to the Department of Education and participating schools.

I greatly appreciate your consideration of my application and assistance towards the conduction of my research.

Yours sincerely

Wadzanai Noreen Karichi (Masters Student)

DEPARTMENT LETTER

4 Quiver Street
The Aloes Estate
Panorama
POLOKWANE
0700

The Department of Education
PIETERSBURG
0699

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE CAPRICORN DISTRICT OF LIMPOPO PROVINCE:WADZANAI NOREEN KARICHI STD NUMBER:2364483

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I greatly appreciate your consideration of my application and assistance towards the conduction of my research.

Yours sincerely

Wadzanai Noreen Karichi (Masters Student)

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

The title of the research for this study is called:

Leadership challenges experienced by female school principals in primary schools and the strategies they employ in the Capricorn District in Limpopo Province.

Name of the researcher: Wadzanai Noreen Karichi

I,……agree to participate in this research project. The research has been explained to me and I understand what my participation will involve . I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below).

I agree that my participation will remain anonymous YES NO

I agree that the researcher may use anonymous quotes in her research report YES NO

I agree that the interview may be audio recorded YES NO

I agree that the information I provide may be used in anonymized format after this project has ended, for academic purposes by other researchers, subject to their own ethics clearance obtained. YES NO

Signature ……

Name of the participant…….

Date……

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Individual Interview Questions for the Research Participants

1. In your opinion, what is your role as a school leader?
2. Do you think men and women are treated equally in leadership positions like the one you currently hold?
3. How do other women colleagues regard leadership from you as a female principal?
4. How do you manage your professional and personal duties altogether?
5. What kind of leadership challenges have you encountered ever since you were appointed ?
6. Can you please explain what coping strategies you use to address these challenges?
7. Do you get assistance towards handling the challenges you encounter?
8. In your position as principal, what have you learnt?
9. Would you encourage and motivate other women to pursue the same career to be like you, that is be a principal?
10. How do you adapt to successfully build a school considering the challenges women face in a male dominated society?

LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS



Dear Madam

My name is Wadzanai Noreen Karichi and I am a Masters student in Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I have to undertake a research project, and I am investigating leadership challenges experienced by female principals in primary schools and strategies they employ in the Capricorn District in Limpopo Province under the supervision of Dr S. E. Mthiyane. The aim of this research project is to gain insight into the leadership challenges faced and coping strategies to these challenges.

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in an interview. This activity will involve you as the and will take around 45 minutes. With your permission, I would also like to audio record the interview using a digital device. This recording will be stored and only the researcher will have access to this recording. It will be deleted after 5 years.

There will be no personal costs to you if you participate in this project, you will not receive any direct benefits from participation but there are no disadvantages or penalties if you do not choose to participate or if you withdraw from the study. You may withdraw at any time or not answer any question if you do not want to. The interview will be completely confidential and anonymous as I will not be asking for your name or any identifying information, and the information you give to me will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else. I will be using a pseudonym (false name) to represent your participation in my final research report. If

you experience any distress or discomfort at any point in this process, we will stop the interview or resume another time.

If you have any questions during or afterwards about this research, feel free to contact me on the details listed below. This study will be written up as a research report which will be available online through the university library website. If you wish to receive a summary of this report, I will be happy to send it to you.

With your permission the data collected from this research project may be used by other researchers in an anonymized format. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the ethical procedures of this study, you are welcome to contact the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), telephone +27(0) 11 717 1408, email hrecnon-medical@wits.ac.za

Yours sincerely,

Researcher:
Wadzanai Noreen Karichi, 2364483@wits.ac.za, 0820745721

Supervisor:
Siphiwe Mthiyane, siphiwe. Mthiyane @ wits. ac.za , +27 11 717 3012