

From Gender Disparity to Gender Parity in School Leadership: Narratives of Female School Heads from Harare Province, Zimbabwe



School of Education

BY

Vongai Blessing Chakanyuka

A thesis submitted in the fulfilment of the academic requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy to the Faculty of Humanities: School of Education at the
University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Supervisor: Dr. Geeta Motilal

Date Submitted: March 2022

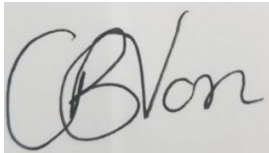
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I, Vongai Blessing Chakanyuka, under the supervision of Dr Geeta Motlal, hereby declare that this research “From Gender Disparity to Gender Parity in School Leadership: Narratives of Female School Heads from Harare Province, Zimbabwe” is my unaided work and that:

- (i) All sources have been accurately reported and acknowledged.
- (ii) It is submitted to the Faculty of Humanities for the degree of Dr of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.
- (iii) This thesis has not previously, in its entirety or in part, been submitted to any other university for any degree or examination in the interest of any academic qualification.

This dissertation has been submitted with the permission of the supervisor.

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STATEMENT BY THE SUPERVISOR

I, Dr G.B. Motilal,

As the candidate's supervisor, agree to the submission of this thesis.



Supervisor's signature

March 2022

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Allow me to exalt God first for, in the words of Psalm 138:8: ***“The Lord will perfect that which concerns me”***.

I am greatly indebted to my unbelievably patient supervisor and mentor, Dr Geeta Motilal, whose guidance, knowledge, and wisdom I appreciate. I have learnt so much from her critical comments. I value her academic and moral support, making it possible for me to complete this challenging task. Thank you very much for believing in me, Doctor, and pulling me when at some point, I was drowning in family bereavement. Her understanding and compassion which she expressed during the difficult times that I faced in the research process, because of family bereavements will forever be embedded in my heart. It was a privilege to be supervised by her.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my late husband, Pardon Chakanyuka (31/12/2020) and my late father, Phibion Magavu (27/12/2020), who both passed on in December 2020. We started this journey together, but I completed it alone when you had been promoted to glory. They were genuinely generous, supportive and inspirational men whose wife and daughter respectively, I am fortunate and proud to be. May the fruition of this thesis bring you spiritual joy as I know you are shining down on me.

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Lastly I devote this research to my mother, Gogo Regina Magavu “VaMachuma”, your tenacity and love has kept me afloat dear mum.

ABSTRACT

Gender equality is a right enshrined in the constitution of Zimbabwe under a full declaration of rights. The purpose of this research was to understand and discover the experiences and leadership challenges that female school heads encounter while leading schools resulting in gender disparities. Related literature helped put this study into context on leadership, female leadership, feminism, gender issues in education and disparities in educational leadership. This study was underpinned by the transformational theory because of its emancipatory nature that saw it befitting of the perspective of this research.

A qualitative approach was employed to obtain narratives on exploring gender disparities in school leadership positions. Specifically, the study focused on challenges, abusive cultures and experiences of 10 female school heads in Zimbabwe. Interviews, field notes and questionnaires were employed to get an in-depth information about the lives of the participants. Methodological triangulation was carried out to eliminate research prejudice and achieve trustworthiness. The purposive sampling frame was 99 out of the 268 school heads in Harare and 10 out of the 99 women heading primary and secondary schools in Harare were chosen. I evaluated socially acceptable norms, culture and values perpetuating gender disparities, articulating how they affect ascendancy to leadership positions and provision of educational leadership in Zimbabwe. The women's agency in mitigating gender disparities make them deviate from being passive in the quest towards gender parity. A descriptive analysis, interpretation and discussion of the strategies was employed to understand issues of gender parity.

The findings of this study have the potential to benefit educational stakeholders, including students, teachers, heads, parents, politicians, and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE), as well as gender activists and non-governmental organisations. From this perspective, my study reiterates that women are not passive recipients of these challenges; they devise mechanisms to mitigate and break the glass ceiling. The key themes established were aligned to the purpose of the study and linked directly to the research questions. Each finding led to a specific theme and was undergirded by the transformational theoretical framework and literature related to the study. In conclusion, I proffered recommendations that may serve as guidelines for rectifying the anomaly where female school heads are not treated same way as their male counterparts due to gender considerations.

KEY WORDS: Gender, Disparities, Educational Leadership, Female Leadership, Feminism.

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From gender disparity to gender parity in school leaderships
Narratives of female school heads from Harare Province, Zimbabwe

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DATE CONSIDERED

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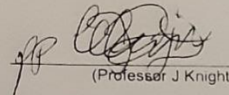
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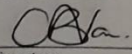

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN THE STUDY

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AU	African Union
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICT	Information Communication Technology
MoPSE	Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDC	School Development Committee
TLT	Transformational Leadership Theory
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
WHO	World Health Organisation
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand
WSoE	Wits School of Education
DSI	District Schools Inspector
PED	Provincial Education Director
HOD	Head of Department
ZIM	Zimbabwe

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

What is the best image to capture the conditions experienced by current women leaders? Do women face a glass ceiling? Are they held down by a sticky floor? In fact, these metaphors do not accurately represent the conditions for contemporary women leaders because the challenges women face are complex and nuanced but not insurmountable. Women have experienced major strides as leaders. Yet, although women no longer lack all or nearly all access to leadership, full equality is still a somewhat distant goal, and women have the burden of overcoming obstacles that men do not face (Carli & Eagly, 2016:514).

The quotation above emphasises the complex challenges women face and the major strides made towards attaining parity in leadership. Although the images depicted are still in favour of men, the future holds hope for most women. They have the zeal to claim equality despite the experience of negativity in the world that is dominated by men. Furthermore, the quote reiterates that, while women are seemingly down-trodden, as it were, they have the capacity to correct the conditions, as their situation is not cast in stone. However, what is apparent in the quote is that women have the propensity to emancipate themselves to turn the challenges they face into opportunities.

On the eve of July 18, 2018, the former and now late President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Comrade R.G. Mugabe was asked about the chances of female presidential candidates during a Zimbabwe Television interview (Zimbabwe Broadcasting Television July, 2018). He replied that women did not have what it takes to rule Zimbabwe. Insinuated in the statement is that, in general, Mr Mugabe felt that women were not ready or could not gather enough votes to win an election. Such language can be considered discriminative and sets women several steps back in the strides they have made towards emancipation as they are accorded same educational opportunities as men. These views were directed at two female aspiring presidential candidates in the Zimbabwe 2018 harmonised general elections. The statement runs counter to the education policy enunciated

at independence which called for universal primary education regardless of gender (The Zimbabwean 1980 Election Manifesto). The pronouncement and popularisation of the policy on education witnessed many people, both young and old enrolling *en masse* to attain some form of education. Such gender insensitive statements appear as an insult to the Zimbabwean Constitution's basic tenets and principles (The Zimbabwean Constitution Amendment (No.20) ACT 2013 Section 17.2) that advocates for gender equality. Women are therefore faced with a glass ceiling as the invisible obstacles remain embedded in the minds of such leaders who are listened to when they speak. Eagly and Carli (2012) postulate that the glass ceiling denotes that women face gender-based barriers at management stages. Obstacles increase as they progress through the hierarchy of leadership.

Zimbabwe has made great strides on gender equity, women's empowerment, and equality, although complex problems still remain. While policies are evident and well-articulated, gender inequalities remain perpetuated by policy implementers who deliberately stall policy implementation. The views that were expressed by the late President, could be the general perception of males regarding women holding leadership positions, taking up influential public offices or running institutions such as schools. His sentiments were connotative. The former President's notion is hence misplaced as women have outgrown restrictions imposed on them by retrogressive systems that purport to be moving with the globe's tide. Women have long broken the glass ceiling in leadership that impedes their horizontal and vertical mobility as active and competent social actors. It has been observed that, despite existing bottlenecks that constrict upward movement by women, the number of women in leadership positions is slowly but certainly growing. It is hoped that society will inevitably move from a culture of disparities to a culture of gender parity without being influenced by cultural prejudices and stereotypes.

On the international scene, Harp, Loke, and Bachmann (2016) reported that some journalists viewed the female USA presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton, as unable to contain her emotions and thus inadvertently questioning her competencies as a leader just because of her gender. The hard-fought, though ultimately fruitless gender awareness battle of Hillary Clinton has inspired some women to break the glass ceiling in various forms of leadership including education in pursuit of recognition and advancement. As Connors (2010) observes, the cartoon imageries of Hillary Clinton emphasised gender-related themes of her appearance and emotions. Such negative views about women are a cause for concern as competencies are supposed to be the benchmark for service delivery and not gender and emotional themes. Eagly and Carli (2007) assert that men and women have different personalities, and these attributes have been the traditional grounds for denying leadership positions to deserving women. This study intends to stir debate for and against female representation in the sphere of education.

1.2 Background to the Study

The aim of this study is to advocate for the paradigm shift from a culture of gender disparity to a culture of gender parity in educational leadership and management in Harare Metropolitan City of Zimbabwe. The study explores the lives of female primary and secondary school heads in relation to gender disparities in school leadership. There is evidence of robust research conducted on female leadership and the barriers they face in Zimbabwe (Moyo, Perumal, & Hallinger, 2020; Shava & Ndebele, 2014; Wadesango & Karima, 2016; Zikhali & Perumal, 2016). Zimbabwe is party to gender parity conventions – Beijing 1995, World Health Organisation 2016, United Nations Global Compact 2020 and the Davos World Economic Forum of 2020. If followed through, Zimbabwe can have a higher level of gender equality in future. This study intended to bring out the strength of women leaders; advocate for their support group and specifically the

creation of an association of female heads. The study highlights the benefits of education, demonstrates how gender barriers can be minimised and how policy can be made more favourable to women when it comes to the practice of leadership. In the education fraternity, school leaders are the core role models for young girls and female teachers to emulate so that they grow to be independent decision-makers themselves. The issues of the glass ceiling and the labyrinth are hence interrogated within my study in view of how they limit women's promotion chances in the job market.

Women are capable of leadership, as shown by the increase in female heads in Zimbabwean schools since independence. Normore and Jean-Marie (2008) conducted a study on female secondary school heads in North America and concluded that female heads possessed many positive attributes relating to best practice which engender equity among the citizenry. Among others, the attributes include, being democratic, ability to engage students with compassion, practising participatory leadership style in addition to embracing relationship building and promoting unity between and among education stakeholders (Normore & Jean-Marie, 2013; Vali, 2010). Such attributes are foundational and fundamental to good governance regarding school leadership and management (Carli & Eagly, 2016). Given these attributes, women are therefore perceived to be consultative, collaborative and relationship-oriented which facilitates the achievement of desired outcomes (Earley & Weindling, 2004). Such an understanding of leadership creates a positive climate and generates a healthy school environment where stakeholders feel positive (Kanjere, 2008).

It is argued that men and women differ a little in the traits and abilities that are most relevant and fundamental to leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2009). In terms of school leadership effectiveness, Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and Van Engen (2003) observed insignificant differences between

males and females which does not justify gender disparities. According to this research and others, females are characterised as effective leaders owing to their great influence on students through their feminine nature (Elias, 2013). The authors further indicate that general intelligence associated with leadership effectiveness is equal in both women and men. Eagly and Carli (2009), further observed that emotionality, intelligence and empathy critical requirements the performance of managerial jobs, appear to be somewhat greater in women than in men. Taking this argument into consideration, it means that female leaders are more competent than their male counterparts. As Murakami and Törnsten (2017) posit, professional identity must not be gendered but should be based on professional tenets despite its challenges. Young (2015) argues that education has made significant changes over the years and is no longer stuck in the past policies. It has aided educational reforms and gender issues have not been side-lined in school syllabi and government policies. Demographic shifts have seen women gaining ground in numbers and empowerment matters. Discontentment however still exists as scholars look closely at leadership migrations or lack of parity. (Young, 2015).

Indications are that women in Zimbabwe have made strides in educational leadership since independence in 1980 and, as such, they need to have better representation in leadership. In view of this, Banks (2000) asserts that women and people of colour are discriminated against when it comes to leadership despite their abilities. The creation of more teacher training colleges under the Zintec Programme at independence in 1980 saw women going to colleges en masse thereby attaining qualifications in teaching. In addition, the Affirmative Action Policy of 1992 introduced positive discrimination that helped women get promoted to leadership positions in the social, political and economic spheres of life. Its value addition is in line with the 2013 National Constitution, which articulates the issue of gender parity. Musingafi and Mafumbate (2014) affirm

that the Affirmative Action Policy advocates for gender equality and the need to redress the gender-based inequalities inherent in our society. Further, the Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013) also asserts that the Affirmative Action Policy is premised around positive discrimination favouring women who were traditionally marginalised. It revokes discrimination based on sex and emphasises equality. This is further supported by the Bill of Rights that protects women and girls and their rights to equal treatment and rejects all customs and laws that infringe on women's rights. Furthermore, Musingafi and Mafumbate (2014) made reference to the Zimbabwean Government's firm stance on the protection of the girl child in particular and women in general from any form of gender-based treatment.

The issue of gender affirmative action was further explained as rectifying imbalances based on gender and the government stance to create parity. Such steps were aimed at creating opportunities for women in education as well as across all employment sectors. As indicated by Wadesango, Malatji, and Chabaya (2020), the issue of affirmative action is observed in other countries such as the United Kingdom, where it is referred to as Positive Discrimination (PD) and in India where it is known as Caste-Based Reservation (CBR). Such gender balance rectifying policies are perceived as forward-thinking and are advocated for in this research study. Such policies were meant to promote gender parity in all spheres of human life, including in educational leadership positions where headship was skewed towards males. Affirmative Action provided a legal framework to rectify such anomalies, in this case, in educational leadership. Before independence, school heads were called "headmasters" to show that the head at any school was always expected to be male. To date, in some cases, ironically, some old school labels on offices are still labelled "headmaster's office", thus still depicting the gender imbalance hangover existing in the Zimbabwean society.

This study intends to evaluate socially acceptable norms, culture, and values in order to understand how gender disparities are perpetuated and how they affect ascendancy to leadership positions as well as the provision of educational leadership in Zimbabwe by women. According to Muzvidziwa (2011), female primary school principals are perceived somewhat negatively when they address conflicts compared to their male counterparts. Zikhali and Perumal (2016) highlight this perception in their research on primary school female heads and posit that some of the stresses that school leaders experience is gender-related, emanating from the traditional notions that perceive men as leaders. In view of this notion, Mapolisa and Madziyire (2012) assert that culture regards women as domesticated and that they experience challenges balancing the multiple roles they must undertake. Female primary school heads experience a plethora of gender-related management challenges. There is a gap in the literature on how high school leaders in Zimbabwe respond to issues of negative behaviours by school communities towards female leadership which may contribute to these disparities. Narratives gathered from female school heads' lived experiences have the potential to help identify challenges, proffer solutions and suggest strategies for improving the professional standings of the current and future female heads.

1.2.1 The colonial link, gender and the law

Equality is a right enshrined in the Constitution of Zimbabwe (No.20, ACT 2013) under the full Declaration of Rights. Before independence, the Zimbabwean education system was tilted in favour of men and had insensitive gender employment policies. There were racial and gender imbalances. Under colonialism, black women were subjected to both sexism and racism. The school curriculum was gender-based with girls being taught cooking and typing. After attaining independence in 1980, the government instituted an education policy where education was considered a human right and gender-neutral. As Zvobgo (1996) suggests, that the Zimbabwean

government had the task to transform the education system to abolish the colour and gender band in the provision of education. This culminated in the current Constitution of Zimbabwe that embraces gender equality (Zimbabwe Constitution Amendment, No. 20, ACT 2013).

On the gender issue, the Zimbabwean Constitution Amendment (No.20) ACT 2013 Section 17.2 (p. 8) asserts that “*The State must take positive measures to rectify gender discrimination and imbalances resulting from past practices and policies*”. Past practices and policies had disparities of salaries based on gender. Women earned less than men even though they had the same job description and qualifications. Women would also leave duty for maternity and then re-apply to rejoin service after delivery. Technically, it means that women terminated employment to go and deliver after which they would reapply to start work anew. When Zimbabwe attained independence in 1980, the government sought to rectify such imbalances and malpractices. Despite the legally binding instruments, as well as government gender policies and ministries advocating for equality, there are still some levels of gender-based discrimination and impediments. In Zimbabwe, educational policies were designed to ensure post-independence gender equity.

The 2019 World Bank Data reports that Zimbabwe has a population of 14.65 million, of which 47.68% are men and 52.32% are women (World Bank, 2019). According to this demographic data, women and men are almost at par in numbers with a slight tilt towards women. Ironically, there are more men than women in positions of authority or positions of power. Based on this simple public information, one would expect more women in active leadership positions rather than men who are demographically fewer. Approximately two-thirds of secondary school teachers in Harare province are female, and out of the 96 secondary school heads, only 31 are females (National Association of Secondary School Heads, 2019). Furthermore, out of a total of 282 primary school heads in Harare, only 68 are female. At national level, leadership positions in Zimbabwe's

education sector are tilted in favour of men, with the most influential posts being held by men, both in the unions and government (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, 2016). Only 8% of a total of 162 senior educational personnel at the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) headquarters, provinces and districts are women (Chabaya, Rembe, & Wadesango, 2009). The disparities are reflective of endemic inequality.

Zimbabwe has 1,531 male school heads and 331 female school heads (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, 2016). These statistics appear contradictory to policy advocacy. This study explored the issue with a view to understanding what causes these phenomenal disparities. Such an occurrence has negatively affected female leaders in schools because of the prejudices and perceptions of fellow women and the male counterparts. In the available literature, the collective voice of female school heads is indiscernible as they describe the problems they face before and after being elevated to leadership positions in schools such as headship.

1.2.2 Gender disparity at a global level

Female teachers make up to 72.5% of the teaching workforce in South Africa (Skosana, 2018) compared to Zimbabwe (Zim Statistics 2017), where 70% of women are found in the teaching fraternity as opposed to school principalship in both countries. Concerning this, Faulkner (2015) and Naidoo and Perumal (2014) concur that culture and socialisation in South Africa are by nature patriarchal and affect women. The Rwanda Ministry of Education data in 2014 reported about three female head-teachers for every ten secondary schools, translating to 19% of women heading secondary schools compared to the 81% of men in similar positions (USAID, 2014). Education experts say this impacts the general performance of the education sector with regard to empowering women and girls in education (National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda, 2015). The picture that emerges is that the situation of gender disparity is prevalent in Africa.

There are still many challenges preventing gender equality in the Nigerian education system. Ibukun, Oyewole, and Abe (2011) concluded that male principals have more control over teachers and students than their female counterparts. In 2015, Joanne Lewa, the USAID representative in Afghanistan, reported that the first lady had advised women of that country to take charge of their future or someone would (Lewa, 2015). In her report to USAID, Joanne Lewa observed that women believed in the transformation of Afghanistan. However, there was gender imbalance in the country (Lewa, 2015). The United Nations Strategic Plan of 2018 – 2021 supports gender equality and women empowerment (United Nations, 2017). Its support is in line with the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals. One of its strategic priorities focuses on women's participation, leading and equal beneficiation from governance systems. The World Economic Forum (2020) report shows that countries with gender equality have more economic gains than those without. Furthermore, the USAID (2019) reports that women account for one half of the human capital in any economy, including in Zimbabwe.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Creswell (2012) asserts that it is advisable to study a problem if past studies have a gap or void in exposition of a specific problem. Creswell (2012) also argues that a research can be replicated if the context of the study is different, for example infusing different participants. In my case, I focused on both primary and high school female heads.

The most recent statistics provided by the Zimbabwe Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (2019) show that between 1979 and 2019, the number of teachers has increased from 2401 to 6 288. The number of secondary schools increased from 177 to 2401 during the same period. The report notes that out of a total of 2 725 970 primary school enrolments and 996 790

lower and 96 760 upper secondary school enrolments, females constitute 1 356 828 (49.77%), 539 811 (49.87%), and 45 874 (47.41%), respectively. Thus, females constitute 48% of public school enrolments across primary and secondary schools in Zimbabwe. Although this reflects a huge improvement in female access to formal education compared to the colonial era, numerous barriers continue to impede full access to education among female students in Zimbabwe.

The report above further explains that, of 72 512 primary school teachers, female teachers constitute 64.54% (46,800) while 64.54% of the primary school teachers are females, the percentage of females is much lower for senior positions of head and deputy head at 29.20% and 35.74%, respectively. The same is true for secondary schools where out of 46 160 teachers, 47.77% (22,051) are females, but females occupy only 16.41% and 26.16% of head and deputy head positions, respectively. Seniority in terms of qualification and experience are essential eligibility criteria for acquiring leadership positions. The report shows that female primary school senior teachers constitute 63.16% and 49.56% in lower and upper secondary schools. Patriarchal values and norms of behaviour are abundantly evident in Zimbabwe's education system, where women routinely suffer from social, political, economic and cultural discrimination (Wadesango & Karima, 2016).

The existence of disparities among Harare school heads cannot be overemphasised, as observed by the availability of only 30% female school heads in Harare in the schools in the Province. The 2020 Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) statistics indicate that there are 172 primary school heads, of which 104 are male, and 68 are female. There is a total of 96 school heads in secondary schools, of which 65 are male, and 31 are female. There are 7 180 primary school teachers, and out of this figure, 1 398 are male, and 5 782 are female. Secondary school teachers total 3 829 of which 1 256 are male and 2 573 are female. This shows a situation where, despite

women being more than men, but with more males when compared to females heading schools in Harare. Despite the "feminisation" of the teaching profession, as illustrated by about 70% of female teachers compared to 30% of male teachers, educational leadership remains a male domain. Given this background, it was prudent to explore female heads' experiences with a view to understanding the causes of the existing disparities in leadership positions through narratives.

1.4 Motivation for the Study (Purpose and Rationale)

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore, discover and evaluate the disparities and experiences of female school heads serving in Zimbabwean primary and secondary schools. The conclusions may help change the status quo of how women are perceived in educational leadership, and hopefully, some parity would be realised. Gender distribution of women in school management is uneven in most countries (Moorosi, 2010). The research rationale is to explore female school heads' experiences as they work to reduce or limit some disparities they face while practising as school heads.

During my internship practice as a school head in 2017, I was motivated by some experiences female heads shared with me regarding disparities in school leadership and at times, abuses they faced as they executed their duties. This practice, if not addressed, has the potential to negatively affect the quality and effectiveness of school leadership as practised by female school heads in Zimbabwe.

In Zimbabwe, there is no specific policy from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE) to address the predicament of the female school heads. People from diverse backgrounds apply for school leadership positions to achieve academic, social or economic emancipation. The

challenges experienced contribute to their failure to execute duties effectively, leading to the disparities in school headship.

During my studies at diploma, bachelors' and masters' levels, I discovered that there is no specific course that addresses challenges faced by female school leaders with the essential skills to encourage more females to be interested in leading schools. My motivation to conduct this study relates to the lack of information regarding the higher ranking educational leaders, laws governing educational leaders and MoPSE in monitoring this phenomenon. During my internship under a female school head, and social interactions with colleagues, the exposure I had left me with more questions, which further heightened my interest to conduct this study. I ended up with unanswered questions regarding the challenges, abuses, and prejudices female leaders face during their tenure of office. It is my thinking that female school heads need protection from societal stereotyping and discrimination they experience in the noble discharge of their duties.

During my training under a female mentor, I observed and witnessed some negative conduct and conversations because the school head was female. These observations and informal discussions with fellow female school heads indicated the need to understand some of the disparities and challenges that female school leaders face as they provide leadership in schools. Under the tutelage of a female head as an intern, I had an insight into female-headed schools. The Zimbabwean patriarchal society seems to accept female heads to some extent. At law, the Zimbabwean Constitution (2013) article 17.1 (p.8) clearly states that:

The State must promote full gender balance in Zimbabwean society, and in particular-
(a)The State must promote the full participation of women in all spheres of Zimbabwean society on the basis of equality with men;(b) The State must take all measures, including legislative measures, needed to ensure that-(i) both genders are equally represented in all institutions and agencies of government at every level; and (ii) women constitute at least half the membership of all Commissions and other

elective and appointed governmental bodies established by or under this Constitution or any Act of Parliament;(c) The State and all institutions and agencies of government at every level must take practical measures to ensure that women have access to resources, including land, on the basis of equality with men.

Women are allowed to head schools, but disparities exist as indicated by statistics from the Ministry of Education. It is the intention of this study to gather empirical evidence relating to the issue of disparities as experienced by practising female heads.

My rationale, from a theoretical framework point of view, is based on the transformational theory. The main aim is to develop a basis for developing a preliminary line of thinking regarding a phenomenon, to prove, support or merge when conducting a study. Parity needs to be tangible and observable from management irrespective of gender in schools. Past research has only looked at challenges faced by primary school female heads in Zimbabwe, and there is a void when it comes to studies that relate to both primary and secondary school heads. The dearth of research in this area gave me the impetus to study this phenomenon. These and other concepts were explored to establish the challenges female leaders faced in school leadership and how gender parity can be achieved and sustained going forward. I investigated gender issues in school leadership and proffer recommendations to policy-makers. This would guide the attainment of gender egalitarianism in education.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study hopes to contribute to national and international debates by providing insights into how gender disparities are being managed in Zimbabwe. It shall help policy-makers realise the need for concrete gender reforms, and add to existing literature on gender issues in education and guide future research on further studies. Studies have been conducted on gender issues in education. Previous studies conducted indicate that fewer women led schools in the first ten years since

independence (Mapolisa & Madziyire, 2012; Zvobgo, 1996). According to Chabaya et al. (2009), gender inequalities in Zimbabwe impede the advancement of female leaders. Independence brought emancipation, but women still trudge behind men due to limited exposure to leadership positions. After carrying out a qualitative study with 13 female teachers in Masvingo Province, Mapolisa and Madziyire (2012) indicate that, although these women were qualified for promotion in school headship, they were unwilling to apply for posts due to several reasons. Participants indicated that promotion would take them away from their families, others suggested low self-esteem, lack of spousal support, cultural constraints on women who leave families for economic reasons and general lack of confidence among themselves. The sources of their emotional stress were related to the plight of children, stereotypical gender expectations, lack of parental cooperation, and unrealistic professional and social expectations. The trend in Zimbabwe is that one leads schools in stages and usually starts from rural schools, peri-urban, high density then, if positions are available, prestigious low-density schools which is every head's wish.

The purpose of getting narratives from women leaders was to explore the gender-based challenges they face in school leadership. Current and future heads, policy-makers, and other stakeholders may benefit from such gender disparity topics across the country and beyond Zimbabwean borders. The findings of this study have the potential to benefit educational stakeholders and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE), including gender activists and non-governmental organisations in many ways that suit them. It will also reveal how school female heads compare with their male counterparts when leading educational institutions.

1.6 Aim of the Study

The overarching aim of this study was to explore gender disparities among female heads in Zimbabwe and establish how they are managing as they attempt to level to achieve equality. This

was done with a view to informing on how gender issues in educational leadership can be tackled given the gender policies in existence.

1.6.1 Objectives of the study

Key objective:

To study the experiences of female school heads with regards to gender disparities during their tenure of office.

Sub-objectives:

- To critically examine participants' conceptualisations of gender disparity and parity in school leadership.
- To describe the participants' experiences (including challenges) as female heads of schools in the quest to move from gender disparity to gender parity in educational leadership.
- To establish participants' mitigatory strategies to curtail the gender disparities status quo.
- To ascertain how gender barriers can be minimised and enact policies that can be more favourable to women.

1.7 Research Questions

This study was guided by the following overarching research question:

What are the experiences of female school heads with regards to gender disparities during their tenure of office?

The broad research question that guided this study was based on the disparities and challenges faced by female school heads in leadership positions. I used the research questions to reflect my purpose and the criteria of truth value, applicability and neutrality as shown below.

Sub-questions:

- i) What are the participants' conceptualisations of gender disparity and parity?
- ii) How do female school heads experience gender disparity and gender parity in their role as leaders?
- iii) Why are mitigatory strategies crucial to curtailing the gender disparities status quo?
- iv) How do female school heads think gender barriers can be minimised/eliminated, and policy be made more favourable to them?

1.8 Delimitations of the Study

This study focused on exploring gender disparity and parity with ten female school heads (five primary and five secondary) purposively selected from schools in Harare Metropolitan Province. As construed by Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018), Simon and Goes (2013), and Creswell (2012), delimitations are a researcher's boundaries to what he or she intends to study. It involves narrowing down the scope of one's research. In the case of this study, the geographical boundary is set, and the study phenomenon is clearly defined.

1.9 Discussion of Key Concepts in the Study

In order to facilitate a common and contextual understanding, definitions of key concepts are provided:

Gender

Gender refers to the social, economic and cultural attributes linked to one being male or female (Esplen & Jolly, 2006). It thus refers to the state of being female or male in respect to the social

and cultural roles befitting either males or females (Esplen & Jolly, 2006). The World Health Organisation (WHO) supports this definition when gender is referred to as the characteristics related to masculinity and femininity (WHO, 2021). Gender is about socially constructed roles and responsibilities that people consider applicable to women and men (Peace Corps, 2020). Thus, in this study, gender is taken to mean the array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis.

Gender parity

Gender parity is a generally gender-neutral methodology or equal treatment of persons in unequal situations (Musingafi & Mafumbate, 2014). This research is premised on the transformation from a gender disparity scenario towards gender parity. This is supported by Chisamya, DeJaeghere, Kendall et al. (2012), whose research in Bangladesh and Malawi highlighted that gender parity is compared with gender equity in any set-up. In view of this observation, Gadoth and Heymann (2020) also linked gender parity to gender equity and argued that such a development would lead to an improved system holistically. In this view, gender parity is strongly correlated with gender equity and gender equality. According to Eden and Wagstaff (2020), gender parity refers to men and women enjoying the same rights and opportunities across all sectors of the society through equal opportunities in economic participation and decision making and being accorded the same respect and is adopted as the working definition of gender parity in the current study.

Gender disparity

The European Institute for Gender Equality defines gender disparities as differences in women and men's access to resources, status and well-being, which usually favour men and are often institutionalised through the law, justice and social norms (European Institute for Gender Equality,

2021). Deriving evidence from a study which was conducted in India, Katiyar (2016) avers that disparity is discrimination, especially against women. This is illustrated when women are not treated at par with men in various spheres of life such as politically, socially, culturally, religiously and economically. These gender disparities may then result in having fewer women than men in leadership positions such as school headship.

School leadership

School leadership denotes the headship of primary and secondary schools. Hallinger and Huber (2012) describe school or educational leadership as generally inclusive of guiding, instructing and monitoring teachers and learners in an educational setting. The core qualities of effective school leaders include the use of contingent plans to effectively run schools by implementing strategies that promote teaching and learning. This is buttressed by Okumbe (1998) who is of the view that school leaders need to have high emotional intelligence and be strategists. Okumbe (1998) further explains that this is achievable through the use of tenets of organising, influencing, integrating, stimulating and evaluation.

Narratives

Narratives are a form of qualitative research in which the stories shared with participants become the raw data (Butina, 2015). It describes a chronicle of events. On the other hand, Riessman (2008) posits that narratives bring out the actual narration of events through stories shared by participants and meanings are brought out by the researcher. This has been affirmed by Webster and Mertova (2007), who say that narratives provide a framework for viewing the human and cultural sophistication whilst sharing descriptions provided by the study participants. In this study, narratives are the stories told and shared by participants with the researcher to understand their experiences as female heads of schools regarding gender disparity and parity.

Affirmative action

According to Wadesango et al. (2020), affirmative action provides special advantages guided by law and policies to address discrimination experienced by disadvantaged groups. The Zimbabwean government enacted this policy to move towards gender parity in various social spheres as the demographics indicated that there are fewer women than men holding influential positions such as in educational leadership. Given this definition, Skrentny (2018) describes affirmative action in relation to unequal sharing of power and resources and the situation is rectified through the practice of favouring individuals previously disadvantaged. Affirmative action thus seeks to redress injustices of the past where marginally few women occupied positions of authority. The equal and improved treatment of the marginalised addressed in affirmative action yields positive results when implemented. The affirmative action policy is supported by Chitsamatanga, Rembe, and Rembe (2020), who posit that implementation of affirmative action is crucial to improve the lives of those previously unfairly treated, like in the case of this study. These female teachers must rise just like their male counterparts to positions of headship.

1.10 Outline of the Thesis

This report consists of eight chapters, and the summary and sequence of each of these are presented below.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background to the Study

This introductory chapter highlights the focus of this qualitative study which is to explore gender disparities in school leadership positions. The chapter serves as an introduction to the study. It comprises an introduction, background to the study, motivation for the study, the statement of the problem, aims and objectives and research questions guiding the study. Furthermore, it identifies limitations of the study and spells out how they were overcome. The first chapter also presents

delimitations of the study, thus setting the boundary of the study. The chapter closes with contextual definitions of key terms.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This second chapter summarises findings and conclusions of research studies as discussed in existing and relevant literature pertaining to gender disparity and parity issues. It critically reviews the literature on leadership, female leadership, feminism, gender issues in education and disparities in educational leadership. This chapter carries useful empirical evidence that I referred to during data analysis and discussion of findings of the study.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

According to Sinclair (2007), a relevant theory that undergirds the phenomenon under study should be clearly discussed explaining how it will serve to inform the study. In this respect, this chapter discusses the theoretical framework that was used as a guiding compass for the research journey. This study was underpinned by the Transformational Theory. The theory is emancipatory in nature hence its appropriateness for informing this research. Its tenets are based on emancipation and social transformation which are key to this research.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

This chapter is devoted to the presentation of the methodology followed in the exploration of gender disparity and parity issues with regard to female leadership in schools. Included in the chapter are the descriptions of the research approach and design, data collection and analysis procedures. Such data analysis was aided by narrative vignettes and verbatim citations from the interviews. Methodological triangulation was carried out to eliminate research prejudice and for trustworthiness, I used interviews, field notes, and questionnaires. Issues pertaining to the

assurance of trustworthiness in qualitative enquiry are articulated in addition to providing definitions of key terms.

Chapter 5: Narratives of Female School Heads on Gender Disparities

This chapter introduces a descriptive analysis of the lived experiences, successes and challenges of 10 female school heads. This data presentation chapter showed participants' profiles and narratives. Chapter 5 covers their knowledge and encounters with gender disparities in educational leadership. The study employed a qualitative approach and used narratives in interviews to generate data from the participants.

Chapter 6: Strategies to Mitigate Towards Gender Parity

This chapter further undertakes a descriptive analysis, interpretation and discussion of the strategies employed by the research participants to alleviate gender parity. Chapter 6 focuses on data analysis of strategies employed by female school heads to move towards gender parity. The research findings were linked to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter 3. The chapter further highlights connections between the findings of the study and the research questions were also made, and the contributions, new insights as well as limitations of the study. In this perspective, my study reiterates that women are not passive recipients of these challenges but come up with mechanisms to mitigate and break the glass ceiling. I also brought out a descriptive discussion of the findings that may motivate more female heads to apply for leadership positions in schools. Pertinent results were then analysed through content analysis, as discussed in the methodology chapter of this study.

Chapter 7: Emerging Key Themes and Lessons Learnt

The major concern of this chapter is an evaluative analysis of the key themes that emerged and the lessons learnt. Chapter 7 therefore presents an evaluative analysis of emerging themes that are

considered key in the study as they directly address the research questions. It also looks at the lessons learnt in the study. This chapter is part of data analysis and premised on an evaluation of emerging key themes, discussions and links to the transformational theoretical framework. This process was field-driven based on findings from narratives. The key themes were aligned to the purpose of the study and linked directly to the research questions. Each finding led to a specific theme and undergirded by the transformational theoretical framework and literature related to the study. This chapter concludes by presenting data presentation and analysis phase of my research.

Chapter 8: Reflective Study Summary, Conclusions, Recommendations, Contribution to Knowledge and Implications for Further Research

Based on the findings of the study, this chapter presents the theoretical reflections of the study, conclusions, recommendations, contribution to knowledge and implications for further research. It explores the gender disparities in female leadership in Harare schools and the mitigatory ways employed towards gender parity. This concluding chapter therefore responded to the research questions referred to in the introductory chapter and linked the findings to the significance of the study. It accomplishes this through a presentation of the reflective study summary, conclusions, recommendations, contribution to knowledge and implications for further research. This final chapter also affirms that the data produced managed to shed more light on the initial research problem and on the supporting sub-research questions. This chapter also provides conclusions and recommendations for future research.

1.11 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have given a synopsis of the background of the research problem under probe and its setting in line with the gender disparities in female school leadership in Harare, Zimbabwe. In addition, I highlighted the research aim, objectives, research problem and stated the research questions. I explained what motivated me to take up this discourse and the delimitations to be

expected. Finally, the chapter concludes with an overview of the chapters of the thesis. I gave a brief of the research design and theoretical framework to be interrogated. The next chapter reviews national, continental and international literature related to the study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

“If education is given to a woman, then it would lead to the education of a home, a society and the world at large”.

(Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru)

2.1 Introduction

The review of related literature in this thesis is hinged on gender disparities in educational management and leadership. A literature review is described as a systematic, analytical, synthesis and critical evaluation of what other authorities have covered around one's area of focus (Hart, 2018). According to Creswell (2012), literature review concerns written journal articles or documents describing current and past information on the topic of interest. This explanation is supported by Snyder (2019), who asserts that literature review provides an overview of areas in which the focus is disparate and inter-disciplinary. This is therefore an excellent way of synthesizing study findings showing evidence and highlighting areas for future research. In this case, I conducted a literature review to situate my study in the broad literature concerning gender disparity and parity issues in the education sphere.

This study aims to add to the current and relevant literature about gender disparities in existence in the sphere of education. The purpose of the study was to explore female heads' experiences on gender disparities in educational leadership. Women are perceived to be affected directly or indirectly by the inconsistencies of societal treatment faced while in leadership positions. In an address at Women's Health Coalition in New York on the 16th of January 2004, the late former United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan, asserted that no development is more effective than the education of the girl child and the empowerment of women in any country. This indicates that, for any development to take place, women cannot be ignored as they are a strong force to reckon with in social transformation. Empowering women starts with educating girls with a view

to providing them with role models from whom they can get inspiration and motivation to be competitive in future leaders in institutions such as schools.

2.2 Towards Understanding the Concept of Gender

Gender is a social aspect that establishes itself in the life and social spheres of the relationship between men and women (Shohsanam, 2020). Gender is aimed at separating women from men socially and biologically (Ntibi, Agube, & Neji, 2020). In unpacking the concept of gender, special reference is made to female school leaders here, also known as school heads. According to Mazzuca, Borghi, van Putten et al. (2020), the term gender is defined as cultural or social distinctions related to one being female or male. Mazzuca et al. (2020), further explain that gender can be regarded as a personified social concept, including biological, physical, concrete aspects and abstract dimensions that are cultural or linguistic. The World Health Organization defines gender as the socially constructed characteristics of women and men associated with the norms, roles and relationships between men and women (World Health Organisation, 2021).

From the above definitions gender has a lot to do with one's sex and the roles associated with a specific gender. In this study, I explored the concept of gender as premised on one being male or female and the socio-cultural connotations associated with that. Society has specific expectations related to one being male or female. The lack of gender parity on leadership regarding female heads at primary and secondary school level triggered my interest on the gender issues underlying in school leadership. As pointed out by Avgeri (2015), educational management and leadership are stereotypically gendered and favouring males, as highlighted in the trait theory. The trait theory postulates that leadership is based on personality and is skewed towards the males who possess the leadership traits (Colbert, Judge, Choi et al., 2012). However, the Millennium Development Goal Number 3, now referred to as the Sustainable Development Goals in Fukuda, Fukuda-Parr,

Yamin, and Greenstein (2014), focuses on education for all, empowerment and recognition of women. The disparities in educational leadership affect the recognition of gender parity for women in all sectors of education. In Kenya, for example, Maina, Sikweyiya, Ferguson et al. (2020) observe that cultural and social injustices impede female inclusion rate in school administration as stereotypes proposed by men and society tend to discriminate against women.

Barriers to advancement based on gender are minimal but still evident. The glass ceiling or the lack of it shall be interrogated as this thesis unfolds. There is concurrence that women remain marginalized and become a source of unpaid domestic labour (Goethals & Hoyt, 2016; Khazan, 2016). Marginalization has seen the limiting of women's access to power and slowly becoming obsolete in developed countries although some levels of disparities are still evident. It is my conviction that, over the years, some previously observed barriers have been circumvented but not all of them. However, I aim to research more on this issue as I believe that female leaders and their competencies have to be observed in pragmatic ways not mere rhetoric.

2.3 Conceptualising Educational Leadership

A leader, as defined by Courtney and McGinity (2020), is one who commands direction, oversees and steers the organizational ship. One's gender may contribute to the leadership style(s) that one employs in pursuit of effective leadership. According to Gupta (2016), educational leadership styles for school heads vary and even more so for men and women. Hungi (2011) defines a great leader as one who is self-aware, understands the importance of communicating with community members and works towards building the community. The model head is one who is collaborative, receptive and provides leadership in exemplary ways in addition to being able to set examples and harnessing the power of teaching and learning (Hallinger, 2009). A number of countries are gravitating towards gender parity including in educational institutions. Gender stereotyping on the

surface is observed as resulting in women feeling inadequate and needing to be validated before they can be taken seriously in leadership roles. The gender parity movement has been moving but at a slow pace. Equal opportunity is necessary for parity to be experienced. As posited by Loeb, Kalogrides, and Horng (2010), the importance of gender balance in school leadership has been observed to matter a lot if success is to be realised hence the increased attention to recruitment of female heads.

A more equal workforce results in gender balance and research translates to more production socially and economically. This social transformation has to be a government priority as well. Pay equity and policies in Zimbabwe have shown a positive trajectory but the gender gap in statistics leaves more room for improvement. Australia is one example with a positive gender representation. The Australian bureau of statistics data for 2013 showed that there were 81% female teaching staff in primary schools and 59% female teachers in secondary schools (McKenzie, Weldon, Rowley et al., 2014). In positions of school principals, there were 57.5% female principals in primary schools and 42% female principals in secondary schools. In view of these Australian statistics, a positive view is observed towards parity compared to previous statistics of 53% in primary schools in 2010 and 32% in secondary schools in 2010. Transformational leadership implies a shared vision in conjunction with supportive stakeholders. This can largely be achieved through good public relations, a positive and strong characteristic that has been observed in most women leaders. Schools can reform better with women heads as socialising agents.

In a study conducted in the Kenyan education sector, Steyn and Parsaloi (2014) reported that women are crucial in leadership and, as such, they appeal for the removal of the glass ceiling which is an impediment for women advancement and development. They argue that certain factors have

to be addressed for women to accept leadership positions. The findings reveal the commitment of the Kenyan government to reduce feminine marginalization. With women under-representation in educational leadership and management positions, more in-depth national studies on school leadership and female representation in leadership in Kenya are necessary to guide policy and programme development on gender equality. As explicated in a different scenario, Asian women are not spared either as they practically run the homes making it difficult for them to pursue their academic and professional careers as motherhood is ranked first and therefore a priority (Lathabhavan & Balasubramanian, 2017). This alone is an indication that the issue of gender disparity is pervasive as it transcends international boundaries. To free women from the yoke of the phenomenon of gender disparity, governments all over the globe therefore need to work together. This may be difficult to achieve, seeing that some countries have strong cultural beliefs that do not regard women as equal partners.

2.4 Gender Inequalities

A review of literature by Wadesango and Karima (2016) and Chabaya et al. (2009) indicate an interest sparked by gender disparities debate and women discrimination when it comes to leadership positions. Gender inequalities are experienced across all nations be they developing or developed countries. Almost all countries have policies in place concerning gender awareness, but all of them show serious gaps when it comes to policy implementation. As pointed out by Chabaya et al. (2009), the Zimbabwean Labour Relations Act of 1985 outlawed discrimination based on gender but such policies have not done much in terms of implementation as the scale is still tilted towards perpetuation of disparity. The same can be said about the Equal Pay Regulations Act. While the salaries were made even, it is sad to note that decision-making powers have remained a

preserve for men in the majority of cases thereby systematically pushing women out of leadership positions.

Public Service Policy Circular No.11 of 1991 stipulates that women should be encouraged to apply for higher posts. In response to this statutory appeal, adverts in national papers and organisational memoranda now encourage women to apply for managerial posts but some women appear to be reluctant to take up these positions. Similarly, Coleman observes that in a society where men are more likely to be leaders and where women have been stereotyped into playing a subordinate and supportive role, women are less likely to plan a career that includes leadership (Coleman, 2001, 2007; Coleman & Fitzgerald, 2008). Gender equality results in doing everything possible for improving the way of living for women in the work force so as to encourage them to yearn for higher positions. Women too have been trying to achieve their goals. Due to existing disparities there is need for more feminine participation in the work force.

Reporting about India, Katiyar (2016) asserts that the country's illiteracy rate is high and the female populace is more affected than the men. Katiyar (2016) argued that human capital is essential for any country's growth and having more women in positions of decision-making helps lean towards gender parity. Katiyar (2016) further articulates that Indian women face so much discrimination that they end up falling behind men in most spheres of life including leadership positions in education. Female literacy is described as essential when it comes to a country's development as it reduces gender inequality. The Indian National Policy on Education of 1986 aimed at laying policies that eradicate gender disparities and equalised educational opportunities. Thus women participated in non-traditional roles. The UN Millennium Development Goals which were then stretched into SDGs, focused on gender parity and India also strived to comply although little has been done yet. Moreover, it has been observed that there is an inverse relationship

between literacy rates and gender disparity and almost all Indian states are observed as having less female literacy rates as compared to men. This obviously will have serious ramifications and implications for women participation in social, political and economic milieu of their own country.

In discussing the under-representation of women in senior leadership positions, Battaglia, Shah, Jalal et al. (2019) assert that the gender imbalances in leadership resulted in vast disparities. In addition, Chabaya et al. (2009) contend that the under representation of women school heads emanates from gender role stereotypes and this results in low self-esteem and lack of confidence amongst potential school heads. Such women, despite being overly qualified to take up leadership positions opt to remain classroom practitioners where they are not bothered by extra responsibilities.

2.5 Cultural Barriers in School Management

There is abundant literature on cultural effects on female leadership. Of much interest is the patriarchal aspect of culture that is mostly common in Africa and less so in other regions. According to Moorosi (2010), South African historical and traditional issues of race and ethnicity have cultural impositions when it comes to women aspirants and leaders in management. These cultural perceptions are in line with Mollel and Tshabangu (2014) who suggest that cultural discernment of women school heads affect their leadership qualities as the traditional norms expect them to be submissive to males. As observed by Atimati et al. (2014), there are fewer Nigerian women achievers in managerial positions who made an impact in leadership had good education. This means that, for women to be confident to take up leadership positions in educational management and leadership, they need to have good education. Yet, it is this empowering attribute which women are denied so that they are kept downtrodden. Findings from a study which was conducted in Cambodia by Vann (2015), concluded that there was gross marginalization and

limited room for growth of women in that country with implications for women in other countries as well. So, this means that, the issue of an invisible glass ceiling is a global phenomenon which women have to grapple with if they are to see light of day.

A substantial amount of research has shown that most people expect their leaders to be culturally masculine (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell et al., 2011). Some women are vilified for not being feminine which is synonymous with women if they are observed to be harsh or adamant in their decisions. Another school of thought indicates that, in order to cope with male dominated fields, women may want to think and act like men to earn respect. I intend to dig deeper in my study, especially when looking at the Iron Lady of Europe, Margaret Thatcher, who even went as far as having deep voice coaching in an attempt to be masculine (Williams, 2020).

The self-fulfilling prophecy seems to take its toll when women make decisions. It has been established that women make gender-based decisions when it came to their academic and professional life (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Their being female is said to steer their decisions towards gender-based acceptable positions as they are marred with negativity, inequities, doubts and prejudice. This is supported by Carter and Peters (2016) who confirm the under-representation of women in executive leadership in the United States of America. On the contrary, however, Eagly et al. (2007) posit that, females have as much effectiveness as men when it comes to leadership. The view by the preceding author labels women as competent in whatever they do.

According to Muzvidziwa (2014), institutional injustices are perpetuated by patriarchal societies in which women live. The argument is that, if women are empowered and gender sensitivity upheld, then the injustices previously observed can be reduced. In Zimbabwe, for example, despite having less female heads in schools, should those in power be fully supported by other women and

their superiors, some level of gender parity can be observed. Socially, just societies are achievable although more effort is required especially on the implementation side. It is Muzvidziwa's contention that traditionally male-dominated roles in educational environments should be navigated and the leadership labyrinth should create a new culture of gender awareness, tolerance and balance (Muzvidziwa, 2014). This is said to be achievable through creativity and transformational approaches that are associated with women. Lalla (2013) states that transformational leaders have the potential to affect their employees' perceptions on human capital benefits and consequently improve the efficiency of a system. Educational management systems have generally been organized in a hierarchical manner that place more men in leadership roles in which authority and power are highly structured. However, more women are entering leadership positions that traditionally have been the preserve for men.

When they carried a study in Malawi and Bangladesh, Chisamya et al. (2012) concluded and highlighted that gender parity measure is directly proportionate to gender equity. The researchers observed that, while the two countries had made strides towards women emancipation in education, more still needed to be done towards gender parity. Other gender related issues such as gender based violence were included and established as making young girls feel less confident as they grow. Furthermore, Chisamya and colleagues confirmed that gender discrimination was a hindrance to gender parity and such effects are supported by the low numbers observed as the academic ladder grows (Chisamya et al., 2012).

2.6 Marginalisation in School Leadership

Before independence, women in Zimbabwe would be discriminated against as observed when they had to reapply after maternity leave. They were required to reapply and start from entry salary level despite years served prior to the pregnancy (Zvobgo, 1996). There were fewer female leaders

than male leaders in both primary with even less in secondary schools. As observed by Zhou and Zvoushe (2012), pre-independence system had schools mostly led by male heads.

According to Gordon (1994), despite the government's stated commitment to gender equity, no meaningful change to redress gender inequalities in education occurred during the first 12 years following independence. As argued by Norkeliunas (2015), there are visible and invisible obstacles that women face as they develop and go up the leadership hierarchy thus limiting their professional growth. In this instance, Msila (2013) notes that, while there are positive changes in today's world, women leaders still have a long way to go to achieve parity in the workplace. This observation by Msila (2013) casts doubt on whether women will ever be able to break the so called glass ceiling as long as positions are occupied predominantly by males. Marginalisation of women's rights is a global cancer that should be eradicated over time. There used to be gender pay gaps but some countries have managed to narrow this gap, including Zimbabwe.

Pictures, stories and folk stories need a paradigm shift to clean the minds of people against stereotyping. Societies that are gender sensitive, are seen by more males doing traditionally female roles and there is gender blindness. For example, male nurses are now found in hospitals which was rare at independence in 1980 in Zimbabwe. Nursing was traditionally a female profession. Taking advantage of Zimbabwe's updated curriculum, gender biased roles need to be addressed to include seeing more women writing textbooks for gender balance to be achieved.

Little girls in primary schools and high school and female students need more role models to emulate. This will help in the socialisation as stereotypically women are perceived as home-makers, child bearers and home dwellers whilst fathers go to work. Socially, themes that segregate are observed in most spheres of human life. Women activists must move women from patriarchal

societies so that they are not perceived as weak and inferior compared to their male counterparts. Gender mainstreaming is a means aimed at achieving gender fairness as it looks at redressing the inequalities of the past. This issue was discussed at the United Nations 4th Conference for Women at the Beijing conference in China in 1995. Gender equality is a primary goal to reduce marginalization and strides have been made but more ground needs to be covered. In view of this robust literature, sex segregating data in the public domain has to be revised. Gender inequality remains a major barrier in the world and the primary goal is to reach parity through evaluating policies that promote inequality.

According to Kizilaslan and Diktaş (2011), schools are socialisation institutions therefore seeing females leading schools boosts the confidence of potential female leaders. Statistically speaking, the global population is tilted towards male dominance. Many countries are trying to narrow the gender parities in existence. It is argued that leadership has no gender. In view of this, competence must be the deciding factor for promoting women. In the history of Zimbabwe, it has had two female Permanent Secretaries in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education consecutively and some gender improvements in favour of women should be observed and respected. The ascendance of such women to very high position of authority should, in essence see many women aspiring to assume leadership positions in the school system based on the availability of role models. Taking advantage of the enactment of Affirmative Action Policy, female leaders such as permanent secretaries can make deliberate effort to persuade more women to apply for leadership positions and support them in ways that give them confidence to perform their duties.

In the Zimbabwean context in particular, black women were subjected to double discrimination on account of colour and gender, both in the world of work and in society. It is against this backdrop of racially nuanced inequalities, discrimination, unequal access to resources, and denial to basic

freedoms that led the military wings of the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the Zimbabwe African Peoples’ Union (ZAPU) to fight the colonial regime between 1966 and 1979. The few women who were in leadership positions were paid less than their male counterparts and if one would go on maternity leave, they risked losing their employment. The female leaders in schools were expected to reapply and start from scratch on return from maternity leave as if they had recently re-joined the education sector. Such was the extent of discrimination in the education sector that women never envisaged or envisioned a situation where such disparities would be corrected.

The 1980 Election Manifesto provided the basis for launching a socio-economic revolution to allow for social equality along the precepts of Marxist-Leninist socialism adopted by the government at independence (Zvobgo, 1985). This education policy aligned with the goals of scientific socialism, seeking to achieve equality in access to education and to better the plight of the black population. UNESCO (2011) reports that nowhere in the world has gender equality been fully achieved. Even in countries that rank highest in the world such as United States and elsewhere in Europe, there are gender gaps in areas such as economic and political spheres. The questions to ask therefore are: *Is gender parity achievable? Is it a mirage or utopia?*

Faulkner (2015, p. 44) observes that marginalization can be observed even at recruitment level in the education system in South Africa and other countries:

In many countries, senior education post selection boards are often comprised of male governors and businessmen, the latter who seem to adopt very traditional and patronizing attitudes taken from the business and corporate world on women’s suitability for leadership roles; and this appears to impact negatively on women aspiring to promotion in education contexts.

In an unrelated issue to educational leadership but similar to stereotyping circumstances, Lauzen (2014), whose interest was in film industry, observes that females in the industry are mostly younger than their male counterparts and have domesticated roles whereas men would be perceived as the working class. This shows that gender stereotyping might be cutting across all organisations. The author also notes that in male directed films, women protagonists are fewer in number as compared to men.

As Goethals and Hoyt (2016) assert, strong female role models are present in the annals of history, but they are also labelled and ridiculed in some instances. The authors cite Eleanor Roosevelt as a strong-willed woman who represented women's interests and expressed her opinion. Eighty years later, Hilary Clinton contested against Trump aiming for presidency in United States of America but negativity was observed, with some encouraging Trump to "Trump That Bitch" (Bock, Byrd-Craven, & Burkley, 2017). Some writers referred to her voice as screechy (Khazan, 2016). This sexist and negative reporting by journalists was also observed during Theresa May and Margaret Thatcher's campaigns and reigns as women leaders. What is clear is that women have always been looked down upon even in developed countries such as the United Kingdom and United States of America where human rights are fairly respected.

This is almost similar to the Zimbabwean situation where women face various political and economic challenges in their quest to ride to the top echelons of leadership. Reacting to the challenges women face, Mapolisa and Madziyire (2012) underscore the need to eradicate gender disparities and reduce the impact of gender stereotyping, thereby bringing more women on board. The economic and political crisis faced in Zimbabwe has destroyed the once coveted education system across the continent. Mapolisa and Madziyire further claim that the economic crisis experienced in Zimbabwe has made women vulnerable and exposed to abuse so that they get or

keep their leadership positions. Those who are already in leadership positions in schools cannot afford to let go as such positions come with some benefits of being a school head. In agreement, Carli (2001) says that women still remain underrepresented in senior management positions and corporate leadership.

2.7 Socially Misconstrued Theories against Women

Some gender biased sentiments have indicated socially misconstrued theories against women. According to Mapolisa and Madziyire (2012), men are considered more intelligent than women leaders in Zimbabwean culture. Based on their research, such notions indicate that theories against women competencies are still existent in some societies worldwide. This has the tendency to decrease women's propensity to rise to men's level when it comes to work place promotions. The researchers further observed that Zimbabwean women have been socially, politically, economically and culturally marginalized for a very long time, and lack the support of other females resulting in their lack of shared understanding. In the view of Chandler (2011), it may be inconclusive today that theories which socially misconstrue women decrease the amount of faith other women may have in female leaders. While women have adequate traits to lead organisations, the leadership labyrinth disturbs and frustrates this positive attribute.

In spite of significant advances in education and their active participation in different spheres of life, women remain underrepresented in leadership positions in politics and business across the globe (Pande & Ford, 2012). Women appear to be faced with some unseen disturbances when it comes to parity in leadership. It is unfortunate that, to date, men may be taking this issue lightly as parity is more spoken about in all spheres than is observable in practice. In a hypothetical educational context, women should be more than men in leadership positions as statistics indicate that there are more women in developing countries (UNESCO, 2018) such as Zimbabwe whose

population constitutes 51% females and 49% males. In the view of Goethals and Hoyt (2016), women are less likely to receive formal training and are at times deliberately left out of important networks. Consequently, women end up facing more challenges than men. According to Amondi (2011), as cited in Tshabangu (2014), women tend to have fear of failure and resultantly avoid criticisms thus adding to the lack of women in most leadership positions. In addition, Ryan et al. (2016) acknowledge that there is a glass cliff where women leaders are precariously appointed to positions that can lead them into pitfalls through positions with a higher risk of making mistakes that attract criticism and blameworthiness. Because criticism damages individuals' self-esteem and confidence, women deliberately avoid unnecessary backlash simply by not applying for positions that may eventually land themselves into trouble.

2.8 Liberal Feminism

For years, women have strived for recognition and equal opportunities across all spheres of life. Feminists have yearned for a social, economic and political balance irrespective of gender. For Fonow and Cook (1991), feminism is women-centred and resembles a transformation from male-dominated environment to a liberated setting. Feminism has four sub types, namely liberal feminism, radical feminism, socialist feminism and womanism. The one that is appropriate to this study is liberal feminism. It speaks about women empowerment and equal opportunities when it comes to leadership in institutions such as schools. This agrees with the Zimbabwean constitution that looks at correcting discriminatory gender-biased policies of the past. As Campbell and Wasco (2000) assert, this is in sync with the theory of change in gender equality and women empowerment. In the view of Gaidzanwa (2013), modern feminism has many facets and tries to embrace culture and traditions.

African countries have some powerful female leaders that were relied upon at some point in history such as Mbuya Nehanda (Zimbabwe) and Queen Nzinga (Angola). This is supported by Ahikire (2014) who says that, gender cannot be ignored despite some resistance in some spheres where females work in previously male-dominated arenas. Mapuva (2015) is also for this idea observing that, after independence, the Zimbabwean government sought donor funding for the construction of more schools which resulted in more girls attending school. It holds true that a sound educational background is congruent to better chances of leadership.

Examining the feminization of the Canadian foreign policy, Ibrahim (2020) concluded that the liberal feminist approach is gender sensitive and a notch towards gender parity. Liberal feminism has been described as socially transformational and forward looking towards gender equality (Banet-Weiser, Gill, & Rottenberg, 2020). As further observed by Ibrahim, feminization aimed at destroying gender discrimination and promote gender balance (Ibrahim, 2020). This is supported by Enyew and Mihrete (2018) who describe liberal feminization as individualistic and giving women individual voices. Developing countries such as Zimbabwe are still far from accepting feminism as it is against the cultural norms and expectations of a patriarchal society. Feminism goes way back to the 18th century where the liberal feminists felt that women were at par with men and equally rational (Ibrahim, 2020).

Another researcher, Kawewe (2001), analysed the liberal feminist perspective and how gender discrimination is perpetuated by cultural, political, economic and social decisions of the day. Women and children are greatly affected and if this theory is to be taken on board, it would help reduce the gender gap. On the other hand, Ncube (1997) explains that Zimbabwe is in sync with other countries in the drive towards gender parity and human rights respect. The author indicates that there were some colonial laws that worked to disadvantage women, but current gender reforms

have revised and improved the gender equality space. Wives were taken as perpetual minors but the gender policy made them independent and having some rights over themselves, including better working conditions and granting them the opportunity to own assets. Of course, such emancipation has always met with mixed social reactions as women were moving away from oppressive cultural norms.

2.9 Women and the Law in Zimbabwe

As propounded by Bruckmüller et al. (2014), having women in leadership is a positive initiative towards social and economic emancipation. Gender equality is explained as not just about being given leadership roles, but the type of leadership positions attained and how the work will be conducted. Bruckmüller et al. (2014) emphasize having women in position of power on the basis of quality of service provided not quantity. The argument is that, while gender parity is being advanced in favour of women, there is need to consider competence and qualification of those who aspire to fill positions of leadership.

Zvobgo (1985) reports that the legal age of majority act was translated into law in 1982 and it saw the emancipation of women who were perpetual minors prior to this law. It meant that once a woman attained 18 years, she was an adult legally and culturally. A 1984 court ruling in the interesting case of Katekwe vs Muchabaiwa demonstrated that women were indeed emancipated from male guardianship after 18 years which meant that fathers had no right to sue for seduction damages and demand lobola (bride price) but the independent woman could do it herself. What is on the ground may differ as the law is yet to align with customary marriage laws based on cultural grounds but the legal standing exists. The legal age of majority was meant to demonstrate equality between men and women. Matavire (2012) describes the patriarchal Zimbabwean traditional jurisprudence as having gender gaps yet to be addressed. Customarily speaking, women laws are

still biased in favour of men when one takes a closer look at what happens on the ground. The corrective African traditional law places more emphasis on the men as heads of families and women's grievances may not be given fair assessments and consequently infringing on their rights.

In support of the above, Chuma and Chazovachii (2012) assert that, despite the endeavors to bring parity and empowerment, gender equality remains far-fetched as men are major beneficiaries of prevailing disparities and resist equality. This is further supported by Chirimuuta, Bhukuvhani, and Gudhlanga (2012) who state that the existing gender disparities in Zimbabwe are premised on patriarchal, customary laws and a colonial legacy that disadvantages women. In other words, patriarchy is best defined as the male supremacy over women and children.

According to Mawire (2012), patriarchy is the control of women by men who will be having some tacit power over the women. This is further concurred by Nkomo (2014) who highlights that the Zimbabwean legislations, despite being gender aware, had some shortfalls when it came to enforcement. As such, women are still considered inferior in some spheres of life as observed in the small numbers when it comes to decision making positions such as the number of female heads as compared to men. They advocate for gender responsiveness especially in the curriculum so as to empower the girl child at school level leading to them looking forward to being leaders when they grow.

2.10 Women Leaders in the World

In view of world women leaders, Sirleaf and Oladejo (2020) assert that the world needs more women leaders since men have had the privilege to leadership since time immemorial. Looking at women leaders, Zimbabwe has had no female president to date despite some women having vied for presidency in previous general elections. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was the first female president

of Liberia and the first female president elected in Africa. In view of this, Hussen (2020) remarked that, Liberia has been noted to have formed a gender balanced cabinet in 2018 because of their female president who started her political career in 1972 and was elected president in 2006 and got re-elected in 2011. Hussen notes that President Sirleaf perpetuated economic growth, women's rights and the girl child's education. In 2011, Madam Johnson Sirleaf was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize for carving a better future for women, her peaceful struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peace-building process towards transition.

Africa has had another female President in the name of Sahle-Work Zewde of Ethiopia who is the historic first female president in Ethiopia and is a beacon of hope for most women presidential aspirants across Africa in particular. At global level, there have been women Presidents and Prime Ministers in countries such as Bolivia, Panama, Haiti, Philippines, Argentina, Costa Rica, Reino Unido, Brazil, Bangladesh, and Chile, Canada's first and only female Prime Minister Kim Campbell. Of much interest and admiration is Finland which has the youngest Prime Minister Sanna Marin aged 34, leading an all-female coalition committee, four of them under 35 years. Contrary to these assertions, other authorities such as Aristotle (Miller, 2017) were of the view that men are leaders by nature but achievements made by these women indicate otherwise.

Outside Africa, Williams (2020) refers to Margaret Thatcher was the first woman Prime Minister in the United Kingdom in 1979. The diversity she brought as a woman made international waves and she used her gender for the betterment of social transformation. Decades later, six women entered the race to be the first female presidents of The United States of America in 2020 but unfortunately they did not make it in the primary elections.

Women are hence thought of in a mode coined Think Crisis-Think Woman as they are problem solvers (Ryan et al., 2011). A study conducted on education and leadership in Pakistan observed that female school heads had better managerial behaviour in comparison to their male counterparts (Naeemullah, Muhammad, Muhammad et al., 2010). As asserted by Leithwood and Sun (2012), transformational school leadership (TSL) has significant improvement of students' achievement and as such, there is need for gender balance for the SDG goals to be achieved. As defined by Nanjundeswaraswamy and Swamy (2014), transformational leadership is a style of leadership that focuses on the development of followers and awareness of their needs. In view of this definition, Ezech et al. (2014) accentuate that women are associated with collaborative, interactive, transformational and democratic leadership styles whereas men are generally authoritative and lack the characteristics that make work to be done easily and enjoyably. With transformational leadership attributes, women are poised to be great leaders as they focus on idealized leadership, inspirational stimulation, intellectual stimulation, individualistic consideration and practice, contingent reward system (Eagly & Schmidt, 2001). According to Gastil (1994), democratic leadership style is a style that delegates responsibilities thereby empowering subordinates by including them in decision making thus making them a part of the organisation. This approach to leadership has the effect of allowing every member to participate fully for the good of the organisation. Equipped with proactive and democratic characteristics, female leaders can break the glass ceiling and become better leaders in the final analysis.

2.11 Sustainable Development Goals

It is Eden and Wagstaff (2020) contention that public policies are directly correlated to the gender injustice and labels some policies as grossly wicked. In the pre-independence Zimbabwe, there were gender discriminatory policies that did not allow automatic promotion for women as child bearing

and maternity meant resigning from work then reapplying after giving birth and starting from initial pay grade. The United Nations General Assembly converged on September 25, 2015 and adopted the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development in a bid to transform the world and leave no one behind in all spheres of life including education. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) include the SDG No. 5 that focuses on gender equality (United Nations, 2015a).

As described by Fukuda-Parr (2014), the 2030 Agenda is a goal-based on global governance with objectives to be achieved. This soft international law, according to Van Zanten and Van Tulder (2018), does not spare Zimbabwe whose thrust towards gender equality has to be observed. External factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic spread across the globe in early 2020 has slackened the pace of achieving these goals, including the SDG 5, which would have resulted in some gender parity in educational spheres. As reported by Lederer (2020), the UN Secretary-General has called the effect of coronavirus as the most devastating pandemic after World War 2 with catastrophic consequences. As observed by Alon, Doepke, Olmstead-Rumsey et al. (2020), the disastrous effects of COVID – 19 will fall disproportionately on women. The SDGs were initially part of millennium goals that included focusing on gender inequalities and lack of women empowerment (United Nations, 2015b). The millennium goals were later transformed to SDGs (United Nations, 2015b). The aim of the SDG 5 is multi-pronged, that is, elimination of gender disparities, girl child and women empowerment, eradicating gender-based violence. This was in support of both millennium development Goal Number 3 and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (United Nations, 1995).

According to Eden and Gupta (2017), gender equality is the equal treatment of men and women in the workplace. This is supported by O'Brien, Fitzsimmons, Crane et al. (2017), who say that gender equality is the fair treatment of all people irrespective of being male or female. Unfairness is said

to lead to gender stereotyping and segregation. UNCTAD (2016) declared that gender equality refers to the enjoyment of the same rights and opportunities, be they social, economic, political and decision making by women and men. Moreover, OECD (2017) postulates that gender equality is alluded to as a fundamental human right which should be enjoyed by all, irrespective of gender, for sustainable growth. SDG 5 strives for empowerment of women in and outside the workplace so that they are able to make independent decisions.

Peace Corps (2020) defines women empowerment as self-worthiness, ability to make decisions, access to equal opportunities and being able to make changes. Hudson, Bowen, and Nielsen (2020) posit that where women have been empowered, economic and social development has been heightened and where there is disempowerment, disparities have been known to take place. They posit that disempowerment has four dimensions, namely status which looks at equality, subordination and being superordinate, decision-making powers, conflict resolution and resource distribution. Furthermore, patrilineal networks are observed as perpetuating gender discriminatory practices. In addition, Hudson et al. (2020) assert that fraternal systems are negative as they encourage laws that disadvantage women, perpetuate preference of the boy child and laws that disadvantage women.

Policies in Zimbabwe such as the gender policy are in existence in writing and not followed by implementation. Lack of parity in school leadership is a practical example of what could have been but is not quite there. Hence, there is need for policymakers to have policy trackers that monitor and evaluate effectiveness of policies. Hewlett-Foundation (2018) and Head (2010) contend that there might be challenges as policymakers may make policy decisions in the dark leading to non-fruition of the intended purpose hence policy evaluation is crucial. According to Howes, Betteridge, Sause et al. (2017), policy capacity is lower in developing countries such as Zimbabwe than in

developed countries. Social institutions might have equal opportunities but lack parity in numbers thus showing a cause for concern. The Davos meeting of the World Economic Forum of 2020 emphasises the need to achieve the SDGs' ambitions despite the challenges (United Nations Global Compact, 2017). Such forums have encouraged developing countries such as Zimbabwe to push towards gender parity.

2.12 Gender Parity and Education

Gender parity in education and work force has a direct relationship (Gadoth & Heymann, 2020). Gadoth and Heymann (2020) observe that higher educational levels resulted in women being more productive, although disparities in numbers were still an issue. Gadoth and Heymann (2020) analysed the WHO final report on women and gender equity knowledge and established that there was a direct relationship between gender equality and its relationship with health, education, and labour. They concluded that gender imbalances are consistently linked with poor education and work outcomes. Gender gap elimination is hence possible but must not start at the working level but from socialisation at the school level. Those girls will make objective decisions and grow up knowledgeable, with improved longevity and consequently have the rigour to lead institutions such as schools. Gender parity is hence said to be translatable to increases in closing or reducing the existing gender gaps.

Recent reports by Gadoth and Heymann (2020) have indicated that at the global level, more than 5 million primary school girls are out of school compared to the boy child and only 3 in 4 girls manage to finish their secondary education. This means that about a quarter of girls do not finish secondary education, which is very unfortunate indeed if the statistics are anything to go by. These alarming disparities are perceived as resulting in less women in the formal work force leading to less representation and falling behind male's participation rate by 25%. This is also observed to

result in less compensation for work and reduced chances for promotion into leadership positions. In their view, Gadoth and Heymann (2020) posit that eliminating gender gaps in the labour market and education downstream reduces disparities upstream. Such availability of parity will give women decision-making powers, health knowledge for longevity and positive contributions in public life. Socialised gender norms leading to stereotyping are detrimental to fiscal growth as some women with leadership qualities can remain in the terraces due to uneven playing fields.

Zeng, Pang, Zhang et al. (2014) carried out a meta-regression analysis on gender inequality in education in China and concluded that, despite efforts toward equality, there are still some negative variations, especially according to location. Their results indicated the existence of gender disparities, but the gap has been narrowing since 1980. The improvements in gender equality in education since the 1980s in China were also mentioned as they discussed that such positive scaling towards parity had an impact on the Chinese economic growth over the years(Wang, 2010; Wu & Zhang, 2010).

The 2012 World Development Report emphasised gender and development and the need for parity in gender(World Bank Group, 2012). This supports the World Economic Forum (2020) that articulate that gender equality is positively correlated to national development and transformation. Such improvements are said to be inclusive of educational development. The girls who have equal educational opportunities are described as advantaged in terms of way of life, reproductive health and contribution towards economic growth.

The World Economic Forum (2020) recommends that developing countries recognise gender equality as an edge in economic and social growth. On the contrary, as of 2011, sub-Saharan Africa still had some girl children not in school, which was observed as slowing down economic growth.

One of the most populous countries, China also suffer from the inequalities of gender in school and consequently in economic growth (Zeng et al, 2014). Of the same thought is the 2012 UNESCO report that recorded more female secondary school drop-out rates in a number of countries (UNESCO, 2012). Other countries with girl child drop-outs twice as high compared to boys are Equatorial Guinea and Grenada. This is contrary to the SDG on the elimination of gender disparity at primary and secondary levels.

China's introduction of the one-child policy in 1979 to slow down its population growth did more damage when it came to gender inequality as parents preferred boy children compared to girls (Lee, 2012). Some ended up doing selective abortion, that is, infanticide, and neglect of new-borns if the ultra-scans showed that the child's gender was female. However, some improvement stemmed from the child policy as having one child meant that the child would get equal educational opportunities, and this is stated as a contributory factor to the vast Chinese growth to date (Lee, 2012; Tsui & Rich, 2002; Zeng et al., 2014).

2.13 Glass Ceiling

An implication of glass ceiling metaphor is that, women cannot advance to the highest levels of leadership but are held to a penultimate level, just below but in full view of the top. The image of a ceiling suggests that women face few challenges prior to reaching that penultimate level and that the path to further advancement is blocked for all women (Carli & Eagly, 2016, p. 516).

The glass ceiling is the assumed invisible barrier preventing one from reaching further heights or successes (Norkeliunas, 2015). It is referred to often in gender issues and cultural diversity. As pointed out by Bryant (1980), the glass ceiling has been in existence since the 1960s. The author further posits that the glass ceiling is composed of invisible barriers that prevent women from holding leadership positions. Gender-based discrimination is said to be more intense at higher levels in organizations such as, in the case of education, women headship. It is unclear exactly who

named the phenomenon, but the term was heavily used during the mid 1980s. The term is often used in the context of gender and age. Women who entered the workforce in large numbers during the late 1970s and early 1980s found themselves unable to advance beyond a certain level of management. By way of explanation, Pandey and Patnaik (2014) indicated that the phrase ‘glass ceiling’ denotes an invisible barrier preventing someone from future success. In the same vein, Hoyt (2010) observes that lack of parity between genders in leadership serves to illuminate the leadership labyrinth, or obstacles to women’s progress, also known as the glass ceiling. According to Rosenbach, Taylor, and Youndt (2014), making or expecting women to be full time home dwellers adds to the barriers that are responsible for their marginalization. It also makes women lose many opportunities due to cultural imperatives they are required to fulfil.

As articulated by Chisholm-Burns, Spivey, Hagemann et al. (2017), a US congresswoman, Geraldine Ferraro and the first woman to run for Vice Presidency stated that some women are born leaders. This was against the backdrop of Hillary Clinton, a former senator and state secretary had lost the presidential bid to someone who had never held a public office, to the current U.S President, Donald Trump. Furthermore, Chisholm-Burns and colleagues explain that, throughout all her campaign, Hillary was barraged by belittling assaults about her gender and supposedly lack of leadership traits. What is clear is that, while women may have what it takes to be leaders, they are generally demeaned, looked down upon and are eventually pulled down on the basis of their gender.

Despite steps towards ensuring gender balance in society, it has been affirmed that women are still facing imbalances on the job market (Bertrand, 2018). It is important to note that this is not only prevalent in education leadership but also in business and finance sectors, as, despite significant numbers in labour force, when it comes to decision making, women are underrepresented. Such

disparities are what constitute the glass ceiling effect (Bertrand, 2018). Additionally, Bertrand, Kamenica, and Pan (2015) strongly argue that one of the most prominent aspects dissuading women from climbing corporate ladders is the issue of wifely duties and motherly roles they are obliged to undertake in society. Resulting from these duties, women end up disadvantaged as they navigate a number of obstacles as they have to compete with men on the job market. In view of this, Bursztyn, González, and Yanagizawa-Drott (2018) highlight that, highly educated corporate ambitious young women scare away possible suitors due to their status. Because marriage is considered an important institution which every woman would like to enter, some women end up shunning high posts such as leadership positions in preference for inferior positions which are palatable for marriage.

According to Dahl, Løken, and Mogstad (2014), some countries such as Sweden, Norway and the province of Quebec in Canada introduced male paternity leave to try and share the childcare duties by both parents. This initiative was meant to bring about gender balance, especially as traditional stereotyping called for women to play the parenting roles whilst males advanced in their professions. However, it must be noted that such initiatives may not attract takers in societies that are predominantly patriarchal such as Zimbabwe and many others in Africa. They scoff at moves that attempt to remove men from their domineering position hence the issue of gender disparity remains in perpetuity.

The affirmative action policies in Zimbabwe and other countries sought to bring about gender balance in various spheres of people's lives. Such policies have gained popularity and have introduced some noticeable increase in women breaking traditional barriers. According to Dahl et al. (2014), the glass ceiling effect is being broken through this initiative of affirmative action. Gender quotas have been advocated for and put in place as the statistics in the Harare schools

prove. The numbers of women taking up headship positions in schools have increased slightly compared to what existed in 1980s although the numbers are still negatively skewed towards men.

Globally, in some European countries such as Norway, Belgium, France, Germany, Iceland, India, Italy, and Spain, as well as Israel, gender quotas have been advanced in the economic fields and women representation passed as law by legislators. Interestingly, the Germany government passed a reform in 2016 that validated the gender quota that corporate boards must have at least 30% women or the seat would be left vacant. Such robust legislations are proactive and will force implementation of gender balance issues to be taken seriously. Similarly in 2013, the European Union parliament passed a draft law proposing 40% female representation in corporate boards in 5000 listed companies by 2020 (Dahl et al., 2014). This shows movement towards the realisation that women need to be recognised just as men are. While the enactment of such policies is a step in the right direction, it is the implementation thereof that remains problematic. Zimbabwe has a number of such legislative instruments but very little movement towards achieving parity has been made.

The issue of underrepresentation of women in decision making positions has been deliberated upon at various platforms (Bertrand, 2017). However, some women are disadvantaged by lack of proper networks that should expose them to important opportunities. Moreover, when women are in power, it is expected that they will be better networked and positioned to promote other women into decision making positions as well. This assumption by Bertrand (2017) may suggest that it is common belief that men vote for other men and in the same vein women ought to vote for other women. This is only possible if there is parity. Of comparable thoughts is Babcock, Recalde, and Vesterlund (2017), whose study provided evidence that women are keener to take up other tasks when in leadership and not necessarily stick to their job descriptions. These are described as better

leaders who do non-promotable tasks that benefit the organisation and other women but with no direct benefits to themselves.

Describing the challenges that women face, Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017), report that they are bewildering glass ceilings that have to be broken as they obliterate equal opportunity and inhibit gender diversity. Therefore, it cannot be overemphasized that once there is a deficit of female leadership, role models are eventually reduced, further reducing female leaders thus leading to a vicious cycle of decreasing female leaders. As demonstrated by Cohen, Dalton, Holder-Webb et al. (2020), the glass ceiling discernments are robust and stem from the country's demographic character. The population of Zimbabwe has more women (51%) than men (49%), but when it comes to leadership in general and school headship specifically, there is a switch ironically, showing more men than women in leadership positions.

As expounded by Ryan, Haslam, Morgenroth et al. (2016), the glass cliff theory is a situation where women are given tricky leadership positions and expected to sink or swim. This is what led Kabir (2020) to explain that, women in leadership who would have broken through the glass ceiling even when at the same level as men, face an uphill battle, consequently pushing them over the edge and setting them up for failure. This is loosely defined as the Glass Cliff phenomenon. In essence, women leaders are not promoted in sincerity, but that they are sacrificed so that they fail dismally and an excuse is found to show that women are not competent hence their place is in the home.

2.14 The Glass Cliff

As women climb the leadership ladder and become substantive leaders, they may face higher order challenges at top management level. The glass cliff defines this phenomenon as the inclination for

women to be more likely than men to be appointed to leadership positions that are risky and precarious (Ryan et al., 2016). According to Groeneveld, Bakker, and Schmidt (2020), this may be another reason why women may be under-represented and shy away from taking leadership positions despite gender awareness proclaimed worldwide. This notion is supported by Darouei and Pluut (2018) who assert that the glass cliff denotes that women are offered risky jobs that predispose them to failure. Of similar views are Main and Gregory-Smith (2018), who studied the 1975 UK Sex Discrimination Act meant to eliminate labour market discrimination, but by 2015, only 25% companies had women in board positions especially after government pressure. What is clear is that organisations alone are not keen to see women holding high office position, they only respond positively when pressured by central governments to act in accordance with statutory provisions. As can be seen, the issue of elevating women in different organisations is still very problematic across the globe.

In the view of Sabharwal (2015), what happens to women when they start taking leadership roles is an extension to the glass ceiling. Furthermore, the glass ceiling metaphor stresses the challenges women face as they strive for upward mobility to assume positions of authority. Sabharwal further points out that steady positive progress has been observed in the area of women elevation, but some women are placed in risky and precarious positions thus making them move towards failure and pushing them towards the cliff. This is supported by Bruckmüller and Branscombe (2010) who concur that women are more likely than men to be given positions of leadership during moments of crisis. Moreover, history has been gendered with men playing stronger roles and women being stereotyped. In view of the glass cliff, experiments carried out by Bruckmüller and Branscombe (2010) established that men opted for a future male leader in an organisation but in the event of a turbulence, women leaders are brought to the fore to try and cushion the effects of that crisis. Thus,

women reach positions of leadership that are more likely associated with high risk of failure in tandem with the glass cliff phenomenon (Haslam & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Haslam, 2005).

Ryan, et al. (2011) consider the glass cliff theory as illustrating that women leaders are faced with conflicts to resolve impenetrable barriers to deal with and challenges to overcome. Moreover, Ryan et al. point out that, women are generally promoted during global recessions, so as to curb the problems associated with the financial crisis that predispose them to dismal failure. The glass cliff brings a new set of challenges that women face. It is emphasized by Ryan and Haslam (2005) that, when London Stock Exchange companies appoint women executives, it will be mainly because of poor performances in preceding months. In view of this observation, Haslam and Ryan (2008) further stress that the glass cliff phenomenon is sexist and discriminatory as it assesses female leaders' performance in times of distress than success, yet men are assessed during successful times. From the above exposition, it would seem as if women are tasked to resuscitate failing institutions which most likely would have been run down by men.

The glass cliff is often referred to as a 'Think Crisis-Think Female Theory' because of women's various strengths in disrupting and improving a discriminatory status quo (Ryan et al., 2011). The same authors further posit that, the glass cliff theory targets problematic leadership positions for women more than men. Such gendered scenarios perpetuate gender inequalities and further disadvantage women. According to Bruckmüller, Ryan, Rink et al. (2014), the glass cliff works against gender equality as it is discriminatory and sort of sabotages women. Organizational upper echelons of power end up offering precarious positions to women as they are called and promoted to put right situations in turmoil at times. Women may be tipped to prove themselves or fail and such scenarios may discourage other women to apply for leadership posts in the future

(Bruckmüller et al., 2014). Women fear to be put to such test as exemplified by the glass cliff phenomenon.

2.15 Looking Glass Self-Theory

“I am not what I think I am. I am not what you think I am. I am what I think you think I am”.

Charles Horton Cooley (Landvatter, 2013)

Cooley studied that in following or conforming to expected social behaviours, humans, including women, may end up doing what is socially right and not what they feel or think is right (Serpe & Stryker, 2011). As described by Cooley, the looking glass self-theory is the way we perceive who we are through the way other people think. This explains why women end up absorbing the societal expectations based on socialisation and cultural expectations. Behaviour expected of women, marriage, submission and other cultural duties at times take precedence for women over their education and professional development. Women’s lives are characterised with multiple roles since time immemorial and socialisation has pushed them to supportive roles. While some are breaking traditional barriers, some resistance to gender parity is evident. Some authorities realise that companies with more women in management have achieved more because of women’s successful practices. More role models need to be identified and encouraged to take up positions that inspire young women to come on board. Gender mainstreaming has to be upstaged in most governments’ objectives for the enhancement of women empowerment. Equality is necessary to realise more women leaders in schools. Access and opportunity is a necessary tool for gender parity hence cultures need to be more inclusive through diverse representation at all leadership levels.

2.16 Conclusion

This chapter buttressed literature related to the focus of my study. It looked at the concept of gender, educational leadership, transformational leadership, and liberal feminism, affirmative

action, cultural and patriarchal barriers, amongst other aspects. Most importantly, this chapter highlighted the need for countries to embrace gender parity to have social and economic growth as countries that did this have made significant progress in achieving their development agendas. There is evident gap in literature when it comes to leadership disparities in primary and especially secondary schools in Zimbabwean schools. Much of the literature was from Zimbabwe, Africa and the world at large. This shows the level of awareness in the world about gender disparities and women challenges in breaking the glass ceiling. The next chapter links the literature reviewed in this chapter to the theoretical framework underpinning this study.

CHAPTER THREE: TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP THEORY

In general, transformational leadership theory “begins with questions of justice and democracy; it critiques inequitable practices and offers the promise not only of greater individual achievement but of a better life lived in common with others”
(Shields, 2011, p. 2).

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed the literature related to this study. In this chapter, I used the transformational leadership theory (TLT) as the one most suitable for my study. It is the transformational theory (TT) introduced by Burns (1978) and propounded by Bass and Bass Bernard (1985). Its emancipatory nature befit the context of this research and underpins the theoretical perspectives, which guided this study. I shall further interrogate the main concepts central to this study in relation to the chosen theoretical framework of transformational leadership theory.

A theoretical framework aims to explain a natural phenomenon or social behaviours (Varpio, Paradis, Uijtdehaage et al., 2020). Furthermore, Osanloo and Grant (2016) clarify that a theoretical framework is derived from existing, tested, validated and proven literature. A theoretical framework thus serves as a guide to research (Durbarry, 2017). This means that a theoretical framework is a perspective that raises questions in line with a specific phenomenon and helps unpack the phenomena under study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Consequently, in view of these definitions, it can be understood that a theoretical framework is a lens through which the study is viewed, and issues are interrogated. Furthermore, the transformational leadership theory epitomizes a cornerstone in leadership studies (Antonakis, Day, & Schyns, 2012; Dinh, Lord, Gardner et al., 2014; Northouse, 2016). My research was focused on

female leaders and this theory is highly relevant to the modern socialisation which is change oriented and ideal for school leadership (Berkovich, 2016).

3.2 Background of the Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT)

To understand further the theory underpinning this study, a brief background of the (TLT) explaining its tenets and role in this discourse will help unpack the phenomenon. Shields and Hesbol (2020) explores the transformational leadership theory (TLT) and explained that it is ground in equity, parity and social justice. It is further described as against disparities, oppression and marginalization, which is evident in female school leadership. It hence is ideal for the study of school leadership and empowerment.

Transformational leadership theory draws its foundation from Burns' transformational theory, the two are intertwined, and from my understanding, TLT emanates from TT. I chose to pursue the TLT as it speaks more to a qualitative study and focuses on disparities whilst promoting more equity and inclusive participation. I observed that, despite TT being described as a positivist theory, it forms the basis of transformational leadership theory (Shields & Hesbol, 2020).

The Transformational theory sees a woman as trying to break out of previously restrictive environments and change towards empowerment (Bass & Bass Bernard, 1985; Burns, 1978). I hence acknowledge the complexity of transformational leadership. It is a wide approach but inclusive of social injustices, empowerment and culture change, tenets which I focused on in my research. TLT leaders are visionaries, catalysts, motivators, and goal-oriented, futuristic leaders who invoke group respect, shared vision, and improved culture. In my study, the leader is observed as a role model who has navigated the academic and professional labyrinth and broken the glass ceiling. Transformational leaders are viewed as challenge tacklers who consult subordinates in the

sense of oneness and ownership of the vision. Such scenarios lead to innovation and being good listeners. Lukes and Stephan (2017) emphasise the need for creativity in transformational leadership to generate new ideas and skills, open communication channels, implement innovations, overcome barriers, and get full support from superiors. When all this has been embraced, there will be practical solutions addressing the gender disparity problem leading to capital growth (Awang-Hashim, Kaur, & Valdez, 2019; Banks, Gooty, Ross et al., 2018; Michaelis, Stegmaier, & Sonntag, 2010; Osborn & Marion, 2009)

Transformational leadership is categorised into four scopes that are intellectual stimulation, individual consideration, idealized influence, and inspirational motivation. The original transformational leadership theory that Burns (1978) introduced in transformational theory emphasises the concept of empowerment. This theory is holistic in its approach as it looks at the leader, followers, vision and organisational goals. The teachers, most precisely, female teachers, see the leader as someone to be emulated and aim to achieve the same social and professional transformation.

Similarly, other researchers allude to the need for leaders to encourage followers to use their own initiatives so as to empower them (Eva, Robin, Sendjaya et al., 2019; Pradhan & Jena, 2019). This stimulation of subordinates is described as motivating as followers will end up thinking outside the box and come up with new solutions, thereby promoting innovation.

TLT draws from social justice, cultural responsiveness and many others for parity in education, themes that speak to my research (Shields, 2017). Shields further describes TLT as focusing on positive change, getting rid of social injustices, addressing power disparities, emancipation, interconnectedness, collectivism, equity, and justice. Sun and Leithwood (2012) postulate that the

concept of transformational leadership is intertwined with politics and requires a transformation by participants towards emancipation.

The TLT operationalises Burns' 1978 concept and emphasises how it leads to change and social transformation (Burns, 1978). It reflects a call for leaders to revolutionise themselves and their subordinates for a different social system (Shields, 2011; Shields & Hesbol, 2020). For this reason, the transformational leadership theory is described as questioning inequalities and lack of democracy and culturally relevant leadership (Khalifa, 2020; Shields, 2017). This study is strongly linked to the theoretical framework as it looked at the gender disparities in educational leadership in Harare, Zimbabwe.

Premised on the transformational leadership context, Leithwood and Sun (2012) allude to the notion that this theory is beneficial to leaders and followers as both are motivated to achieve more. Such merits were observed at the ten schools I engaged with as the school heads had merit awards or "secretary's bell award".

In the view of Creswell and Creswell (2017), this framework focuses on social injustices such as lack of empowerment, inequality, oppression, domination, suppression and alienation. It advocates for the voiceless and motivates them to stand for what they perceive as just and what they believe in. Female school heads have been described as transformational leaders in literature (Eagly et al., 2007). Pel, et al. (2020) contend that transformational leadership theory focuses on critical reflection and dialogue to support people to adopt their worldview – to move towards being agentic, inclusive, and open, all as ways of seeking social justice and equity. However, there have been some barriers here referred to as glass ceiling hindering total transformation in female educational leadership. This is supported by Eagly and Carli (2012) who postulate that glass ceiling

defines a situation whereby women face gender-based barriers when they are at management levels.

The glass ceiling defines a scenario whereby as women move up the hierarchy of leadership, the levels of obstacles become multiple, thus systemically curtailing women advancement to the top echelons of power. It is at this stage that gender-based discrimination is said to be more intense and more debilitating in organisations to the extent of immobilizing any advancement by women.

Pel et al. (2020) further postulate that social transformation aims at redesigning, re-evaluating and reinventing some elements for change to be observed. This can then lead to a hybrid scenario that would have corrected social mistakes or imbalances in the past. Leaders who embrace such thinking can easily be termed transformational leaders because they are contingent and diverse in the ways they provide leadership in their various institutions.

Transformational leadership is composed of four factors that are adopted by a transformational leader to achieve organisational goals (Bass & Bass Bernard, 1985). These factors guided me when researching the most appropriate theory to use in my discourse. First, for female heads to gain more supremacy and buy-in, they need to stimulate the interest of subordinates. Secondly, they ought to educate followers on the mission and vision of the school. Thirdly, they must motivate subordinates to gain more academic and professional qualifications so as to qualify for promotions and fourthly to cultivate the spirit of Ubuntu and esprit de corps in all conduct through looking beyond individualistic goals (Bass & Bass Bernard, 1985; Burns, 1978; Leithwood & Sun, 2012).

The issue of charisma was first highlighted by Weber (1947) and later supported by Burns (1978) and Bass and Bernard (1985), and many others. The afore-mentioned authorities felt that, with charisma, the subordinates would be motivated to work collectively with Ubuntu and achieve

organisational goals. Transformational leadership is capable of engaging followers at a higher level of motivation and getting them to want to achieve more and, consequently, be transformed or changed positively and goal getting way by the leader (Hallinger, 2003; Shields & Hesbol, 2020).

As Butcher (2013) observes, the issue of women leadership has been described as the road less travelled due to the never-ending barriers that inhibit the promotion of females to leadership positions. More specifically, female teachers find it difficult to move up the ladder due to numerous barriers that frustrate their zeal to apply for promotion. Women in top leadership are viewed in the context of always having to prove themselves (Cook & Glass, 2014; Longman & Lafreniere, 2012). According to Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017), the challenges women face as bewildering glass ceiling that have to be broken as it obscures equal opportunity and mutilates gender diversity. It cannot be over-emphasised that role models are therefore eventually reduced once there is a deficit in female leadership, further reducing female leaders.

Hancock, Darwin, and Walker (2018) examine gender imbalances and shortage of female sports leaders. They agree with Gee (2016) who researched the gendered leadership labyrinth and expressed that when Americans think of leadership, they are, in fact, referring to a man. This view is meant to support the thinking that men are born leaders, and as such, they are more superior to women. This thinking suggests that women cannot lead, or if they do, they are not good leaders at all.

Relative to this study, teachers are actually the first role models in education, and they should apply for leadership posts to encourage others to do the same. Interrogating the labyrinth of teacher leadership, Shirley and Miller (2016) advocate for gender sensitivity when it comes to narrative research management. Similar thoughts are echoed by Lipton (2017), Reis and Grady (2017) and

Foxx, Baker, and Gerler (2016), who argue for the need for more women in leadership as their skills are more favourable to stakeholders such as students and parents in the school context.

According to Pel et al. (2020), the transformational leadership theoretical framework looks at diverse transformations, including social relations, norms, and progress, to expand on available literature on gender disparities and find mitigation ways towards parity. The transformational theoretical framework was also used because it is applicable to the rationale and significance of this study as well as adding to the academic rigour of this study.

3.3 Linking Theory to Practice in Zimbabwe

This research is underpinned by the transformational leadership theory that looks at social revolution aimed at improving the status quo (Pel et al., 2020). This theory is located within situated perspectives on leadership and social transformation in leadership. The selection of this theoretical framework was informed by the social injustices in educational leadership, which is rife in the Zimbabwean education system. The gender disparities in this context are situated in their professional framework and their practice and occur at the leadership stage. It is the gender alienation of female heads which motivated a focus on gender disparities in educational leadership and the transformational theory as the guiding theoretical perspective. Amongst the gender and feminist theories, the TT was found to be the most appropriate theory for guiding my study (Mertens, Holmes, & Harris, 2009).

According to Pel et al. (2020), the transformational leadership theoretical framework looks at diverse transformations, which include, among others, social relations, norms and progress to expand on available literature on gender disparities and to find mitigation ways towards parity. As posited by Mertens (2008), transformational leadership theory is applicable to people who are

discriminated against or oppressed based on the basis of gender. According to Shields (2010), this theory is nomothetic in the sense that it looks at a number of events and is not fixed on a specific event (idiographic).

When Zimbabwe attained independence in 1980, it came up with an election manifesto that sought to right the wrongs of the past. There was evidence of gender-discriminatory policies and the new manifesto wanted social, political and economic justice to obtain in the country (Zvobgo, 1985). On paper, gender equality was going to be embraced, but the statistics in the public domain indicated otherwise. The UNESCO Report of 2011 highlighted that nowhere in the world has gender parity been fully attained (Hanson, Sykes, & Pena, 2018). Gender gaps are still in existence and there is a need for women to take it upon themselves to see this come to fruition. Brown (2004) highlights the transformation of points of view resulting in habit transformation.

This research sought and advocated for a buy-in from female school heads to mitigate the challenges resulting from disparities in the area of educational leadership. The Transformational theory is emancipatory as it helps break the chains holding the females from taking their leadership positions in large numbers. As Luse, Mennecke, and Townsend (2012) aver that a theory can be one or a string of concepts within a problem. The theoretical framework which shall shape this research is the transformational theory. Such social reformatory theories have been used or referred to in many studies relating to gender and cultural diversity issues. Because of its transformational nature and its ability to interrogate the status quo with a view to changing things for the better, I found this theoretical framework appropriate for undergirding this study.

3.4 Transformational Educational Female Leader

Transformational leadership theory had gathered extensive intellectual attention since its foundation more than four decades ago. It remains one of the most popular leadership paradigms in the annals of scholarly history (Antonakis et al., 2012; Dinh et al., 2014; Northouse, 2016). Its four dimensions promote Ubuntu, innovation, breaking barriers and empowerment. Such tenets propel organisational effectiveness as change is inevitable and mostly positive (Sotuku & Duku, 2012). It ultimately leads to social constructs that promote development and capital growth. The development of a leader and organisation includes the individuals as well in a transformational leadership scenario.

Transformational leaders are described as distinctive as they are grounded in the values such as equity, excellence, inclusion and social justice (Shields & Hesbol, 2020). This type of leader strives for change, equal opportunities regardless of gender and parity. As accentuated by Moyo et al. (2020), women in school leadership have the potential to implement social justice by making changes to the school environment. By so doing, the female leaders will reduce discrimination and marginalisation and motivate future female heads and the girl child to be positive about their capabilities.

Such initiatives have the propensity to reduce social inequalities in Zimbabwe and promote gender parity. However, women need motivation and encouragement from all stakeholders as they tend to lack confidence and self-efficacy given the unjust social backgrounds they had to deal with in the past (Mudau & Ncube, 2017; Muzvidziwa, 2012a). Societal transformation is based on a paradigm shift from gender alienation and practical implementation of gender laws. Some women who have the potential to lead but fear social norms are often ambivalent and lack confidence to join the social transformation wagon. The novelty of transformational group of leaders has seen

quite a number of women in leadership positions but the numbers against demographic characters do not add up (Pel et al., 2020). The transient numbers in the corporate circles are mainly for window dressing and not aligned to the constitution of countries such as Zimbabwe. The constitution advocates for equal representation in Parliament and House of Assembly but that is not what is on the ground (Muzvidziwa, 2010).

The three basic functions of a transformational leader are centralised on serving others, engaging them and inspiring them for greatness. Secondly, such a leader uses charm to lead subordinates and share the school vision and thirdly inspires the followers to aim higher and achieve their fullest potential. When the female teachers have followed what the leader will be doing they eventually cross over to the leadership wagon and reduce gender disparities in educational leadership. A transformational leader is hence a change agent aiming at changing the subordinates and institution in a positive and emancipatory way.

It is against this argument that the transformational theory is relevant in informing this study about women leading schools and how gender parity and equity can be realised. There are obstacles to be curtailed and socio cultural changes to be effected for the gender debate to be put to rest. The gender pay gap used to be in existence during the colonial era but that was corrected with the coming of the new political dispensation in 1980. A gender equal society is still the utopic dream towards social transformation. When a woman is elected into leadership, diversity may be experienced but not as much as can be observed based on the available statistics that indicate low numbers of women in school leadership.

The transformational theory looks at advocacy and participative concepts and is used when addressing issues of social injustices and underrepresented or marginalised populations such

women or children. It is a great way of empowering women and the participants in this study played a greater role in suggesting ways to resolve the gender disparity problem. They referred to the interpersonal roles of leaders and how they used such in their favour when dealing with the different people in their line of work such as parents, parents' representatives and learners.

The fluid nature of societal transformation was expressed to meet less resistance from women as they have a better way of dealing with diverse characters (Shields, 2017). Hallinger, Dongyu, and Wang (2016) looked at gender and school leadership and re-affirmed that female leaders are more participatory, democratic, task-focused leadership styles than their male counterparts and tend to rate higher than their male colleagues in leadership (Eagly, 1992; Eagly et al., 2003). TLT hence demonstrates how successful leaders such as women engage in order to create inclusive and empowering work environments in schools (Shields, 2009, 2011, 2017).

The TLT tenets are meant for progressive leaders as they are revolutionary by nature. They focus on change, private and public good, equitable change for the greater good, being culturally responsive, eliminating prejudices, balancing power and emancipation. Its normative nature promotes Ubuntu/Unhu and collectivism, which brings out Africanism in Southern Africa. The purpose is to promote 'doing together' irrespective of gender. Change is therefore inevitable in a transformatory environment as social revolution or transformations. In the same vein, social transformation in education results in systemic strategies that promote deeper understanding of emancipation of women due to equal educational opportunities.

There is vast literature on women leaders' achievements, and this has been observed as motivating other women and resulting in empowerment (Wakefield, 2017). Haron, Rela, and Saad (2020)

carried out research on transformational leadership in the civil service. Their findings showed positive effects of the four transformational leadership dimensions on their participants' creativity.

3.5 A Transformational Leader in African Ubuntu/Unhu Perspective

The late former president of South Africa and international icon Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu propounded the “Ubuntu” idealism and the group or collective solidarity it emphasised (Tutu, 2000). Oppenheim (2012) describes how Nelson Mandela connected Ubuntu sharing to enhancing the macro society in terms of human capital development, including awareness and practical abilities. Mugumbate and Nyanguru (2013) define the concept of Ubuntu/Unhu as an African philosophy that is depicted by “I am because of who we all are”. This theory has been applicable in different sectors, including management, such as educational management. The Ubuntu/Unhu idealism promotes consultative and collective leadership, which is a tenet of transformational leadership (Buqa, 2015; Jolley, 2011). In this regard, social justice and values are explicated by Ncube (2010) who posit that leadership is inclined towards ways of life, knowledge and abilities for transformation. When these are viewed in the light of good citizenship (*Ubuntu/ Unhu*), there are certain behavioural traits and beliefs that gather acceptance of such a leader by stakeholders. This then becomes the transformational leadership philosophy that should guide the 21st century leaders in general and females in particular (Ncube, 2010).

Majoko (2016) resonates with the above connotations and asserts that Ubuntu tenets include fairness and humanity valuation. Such may be loosely transferred to the issue of gender equality. The 20th century looks at equality amongst gender, and such change is crucial for any country's development. This agrees with Pel et al. (2020), who postulate that institutional change is facilitated by change strategies in response to the changing times.

Institutional changes have been seen in agencies headed by women, but more needs to be done because women leaders are few. Transformational engagements with the communities have proven that it can be done. Recently, one of the first world countries, the United States of America, had the first woman of colour, Vice President Mrs Kamala Devi Harris. This is sufficient evidence to demonstrate that it can be done and that women have the capability to lead. Germany's outgoing Chancellor Angelica Merkel left a trail of achievements and innovations that left the country with one of the most powerful economies and social transformations. She led 80 million Germans for 18 years, and that speaks volumes for a woman, given the gender disparities in leadership as a whole (Larres, 2018).

Unified voices of women agencies must be heard as there are a few in the decision-making roles already. It is disturbing to note that, in the case of Zimbabwe, despite women holding the third most powerful position in the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education for the past decade, gender disparity problems have not been adjusted and are still prevalent. A culture of change would be welcome in order to gravitate towards a culture of gender parity in all human spheres of life in general and education in particular. Narratives generated in this qualitative study with primary and secondary school heads indicated the need for social reforms in the educational leadership corridors to allow the opening up of the space for many who want to venture into leadership.

In support of the views above, Ncube (2010) posits that Ubuntu/Unhu and transformational leadership are intertwined. This is described as aiming for similar transformational goals. Values and beliefs are observed as aiding in transformation. Transformations do not just happen on their own, and as such, advocacy and lobbying require team work. Hence, women must be seen to be supporting other women if transformation is to be meaningful. Team work is a tenet embedded in Ubuntu/Unhu and calls for oneness for social and cultural transformations to be feasible.

Moreover, the transformational leader and theory observes esprit de corps and relies on one vision one result type of mentality, which stems from collectivism and not individualism. A transformational leader looks at the change in both educational and broader social context. The women in this study had records of achievements and evidence of hard work and tangible results reflective of real “utopias” (Wright & Pandey, 2010). It is inevitable that such positive paradigms will meet methodological challenges and glass cliffs, but such is expected in any meaningful transformation. Feminism is embedded in a transformational theoretical framework as it strives to empower women and change the gender disparities in existence (Gaidzanwa, 2013). Some gender policies are embedded in statutes, and there is a need to change laws so that they align with these statutes to remedy existing social injustice (Schot & Steinmueller, 2018).

3.6 The Labyrinth

The other aspect of guiding this theoretical framework is the labyrinth when it comes to the issue of gender parity. Eagly and Carli (2009) presented the challenges that women face, and which they find difficult to deal with. They are described as a labyrinth or a maze to be negotiated before gender alienation, or any form of recognition can be observed. The authors view the glass barrier as invisible to the women and cannot be seen on time. However, when merged, some of the obstacles can be pre-observed, such as balancing wifely duties and career demands. Such factors slow down women advancement.

As illuminated by Carli and Eagly (2016), the labyrinth metaphor demonstrates the complexity of the intricate maze that women must contend with before advancing to senior positions of authority. Some, however, reportedly navigate the maze and reach the epicentre of the labyrinth and lead

institutions. In view of this, Carli and Eagly (2016, p. 518) further explain this in one of their publications:

The labyrinth metaphor suggests that advancement is difficult but not impossible. Finding the centre does require effort and careful navigation, but it can be achieved. Consequently, unlike a glass ceiling or a sticky floor, the labyrinth allows some women to reach very high levels of leadership, yet the walls of the labyrinth remain in place to present challenges to the women who follow. If the path that men take is construed as a road (perhaps with some hills and potholes along the way), the labyrinth that women face clearly presents a more difficult path that requires more time to navigate and entails greater likelihood of failure. Some women will be unable to chart their way through and will get stuck in dead ends. Some may advance by persisting after experiencing setbacks and wrong turns and others by following the crumbs of those who came before them. The labyrinth is both optimistic in its acknowledgement that women do succeed as leaders and realistic in its reflection of the uncertainty of success.

The authors concur with Gee (2016), who researched on the gendered leadership labyrinth and found that, when Americans think of leadership, they visualise a man. Teachers are the first role models in education, and they should apply for leadership posts to encourage generations to come to do the same. Looking at the labyrinth of teacher leadership, Shirley and Miller (2016) emphasise gender sensitivity in educational management. Of similar thoughts are researchers who argue for the necessity of having more women in leadership positions as their skills and knowledge are more favourable to stakeholders such as students and parents/guardians (Foxy et al., 2016; Lipton, 2017; Reis & Grady, 2017).

The labyrinth indicates how women are expected to multi-task as they perform motherly and wifely duties such as to bear, rear and look after children, thus further disturbing their quest for climbing organisational hierarchies. Butcher (2013) described the aspect of women leadership as the road less travelled due to the existence in perpetuity of barriers that inhibit the promotion of females to leadership positions. This view is supported by Longman and Lafreniere (2012) and

Cook and Glass (2014), who regard women in top leadership as always having to prove their mettle.

3.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter highlighted the theoretical framework applicable to this study as the transformational leadership theory. The framework was found to be appropriate for informing this study regarding issues of gender disparity and parity in the sphere of educational leadership. The need for social reforms to curb gender disparities were discussed so as to achieve parity in social institutions such as in primary and secondary schools leadership. Consequently, the emphasis was on school leaders to be aware of their role as change agents in imbalanced spheres. It can be argued that gender disparities are in existence, but a paradigm shift towards equality for the world to attain gender equality must be vigorously pursued. The role of Ubuntu in the sub-Saharan context of humanness and collectivism was linked to the theory as the discourse elucidates that a transformational leader ought to promote the empowerment of followers to achieve organisational goals. Thus, the chapter discussed the tenets of transformational leadership and how such are of significance in today's world. The next chapter presents the research methodology adopted in this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

“People live storied lives. They tell stories to share their lives with others and to provide their personal accounts about classrooms, schools, educational issues, and the settings in which they work. When people tell stories to researchers, they feel listened to, and their information brings researchers closer to the actual practice of education. Thus, stories reported in qualitative narrative research enrich the lives of both the researcher and the participant” (Creswell, 2012, p. 501).

Chapter 3 highlighted the theoretical framework underpinning this study. I underlined that the transformational leadership theory is most appropriate for my research as it enunciated the need for leadership tenets grounded in equity, parity and social justice. This chapter articulates the research methodology for the entire research process, including its principles and procedures. The qualitative approach, which was adopted in this study as well as the research design, are also interrogated in this chapter. I proffer a justification for using the narrative design, interview data collection method, population, sample and sampling criteria. I also provide a description of the data analysis process. Finally, I propose the criteria for judging the trustworthiness of qualitative studies and the measures I took to ensure adherence to ethical considerations throughout the research process.

4.2 Role of the Researcher in a Qualitative Study

The qualitative researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. In qualitative research, the researcher is both the subject and the object of his or her research. In the views of Ochieng (2009), data are mediated through the human instrument rather than through inventories, questionnaires, or machines. This means that to obtain data in qualitative research, the inquirer plays a critical active role by asking questions to solicit information from participants. Because this study was qualitative, I was the main research instrument in this study as Savin-Baden and

Howell-Major (2013) indicate that qualitative research necessarily cast the inquirer as the primary tool for data collection and analysis. Being an instrument means that I was principally responsible for data collection and analysis. In view of this vital role in qualitative research, I kept a research journal in which I recorded my progress and anything related to my study. To fulfil the responsibility of being a research instrument, I asked probing and follow up questions to comprehend issues arising from participants' narratives during interviews. I avoided being biased but took narratives as individualistic information based on participants' unique experiences.

My background also made me more inclined towards a qualitative approach as I am a female teacher who later became a school owner and head and was acquainted with some of the disparities in educational leadership. I believe that statistical studies may not fully capture participants' feelings and lived experiences, hence the need to draw deeper meanings through narratives elicited by semi-structured interviews. The research topic itself entails using narratives as I aimed to get close to the source of primary data. I engaged in real-time conversations with real people (participants).

4.3 Research Paradigm

A paradigm is a philosophical perspective of knowledge and world views that guides research (Park, Konge, & Artino, 2020). Ling (2017) confirms the above assertions and illuminate that a research paradigm is a set of assumptions and understandings about key aspects of research. The paradigm wars between positivists /post positivists and the constructivist pave the way for other worldviews, such as the pragmatic and emancipatory paradigms, which are associated with vulnerable groups. The epistemology of this paradigm refers to the knowledge of what is known so far about the marginalised female leaders in high schools and how there can be more women in headship positions to have gender parity. Paradigms can differ in philosophical assumptions,

namely epistemological (knowledge), ontological (reality), axiology (values that guide research), methodological (data gathering) and contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Killam, 2013).

4.3.1 Emancipatory research paradigm

The research paradigm guiding this study is the emancipatory paradigm. A research paradigm is a theory or point of reference in research and a way of looking at worldviews widely used to understand a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016). It is a way of thinking about the world as the researcher conducts research. In the view of Hughes (2010), a paradigm is a way of categorizing complex philosophies and worldviews. Mertens (2010) identifies the major paradigms as positivism, interpretivism, emancipatory and pragmatism. I delved more into the emancipatory worldview as it was appropriate for my topic, purpose, literature and theoretical framework.

The emancipatory paradigm arose during the 1980s to 1990s era as a revolution to the post-positivist assumptions that imposed structural laws and theories that neither recognised the marginalized nor addressed issues of social justice (Creswell, 2012). Furthermore, Creswell et al. (2011) posit that the emancipatory paradigm is becoming increasingly popular with researchers. Emancipatory worldview tenets include it being based on political, consequences of actions, empowerment issue-oriented, problem-centred, collaborative, and pluralistic and is change-oriented (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998).

Emancipatory actions are focused on bringing about change and, after qualitative studies like this one, researchers create an action agenda for change (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998). It is my aim to help transform the unfair practices in the education system; hence change is imminent. It is focused on freeing individuals from societal constraints, which is why the study begins with an important issue currently prevalent in society (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998). Gender disparities are

commonplace in all societies, which is why this research was designed to break the cycle as I aim to create a political debate so that change would occur. Since emancipatory researchers engage participants as active contributors to the research, it is a collaborative experience (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998). The female heads are aware of the disparities, and addressing their challenges can motivate them to join the change processes for the betterment of peer women.

This paradigm, therefore, aims to come up with action research for its participants. It may be integrated into feminist theories that look at changing women's lives for the better. Creswell (2012) states that when an emancipatory paradigm has been actioned, an action agenda for change follows. Individuals are expected to free themselves from barriers emanating from their socialization, cultural or educational norms. It is not surprising that a political debate may follow as part of the change process with regards to disparity issues in educational leadership. The emancipatory paradigm to research is at times referred to as transformatory as it aims to transform systems.

4.3.2 Ontology

Ontology is concerned with the reality of phenomena and truth (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). As supported by Scotland (2012), my ontological notion is inclined towards the anti-positivist paradigm view that believes that there are multiple realities to be interpreted and hence looks at the meaning-making of thick data. This is also mentioned by Riessman (2008), who attests that narrative analysis used in qualitative studies asks and answers what, who, how and when questions about written and oral data.

Hence, the ontological view of this research is based on previous research that shows the existence of disparities, but less has been done to improve the status quo. As a girl child who grew up in a patriarchal society, my socialisation cannot be separated from this study. Gender inequalities have

been part of the culture and society in which I grew up. My collaboration with fellow women helped me understand the phenomenon of transformation from disparities to parity. The subjectivity of my research certainly had multiple realities as I relied more on stories generated from the participants. Reality is therefore continuously negotiated and needs to be questioned and debated should there be inequalities in a system as in the case of our Zimbabwean educational system (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

4.3.3 Epistemology

Ling (2017) explains epistemology as the understanding of the nature of knowledge and how it can be known. In the context of this study, my understanding of epistemology is how I intended to utilize the new knowledge to alleviate disparity problems in Zimbabwean schools. It requires different tools and methods for transformation to take place. Epistemology is a way of explaining the how of what we know (Crotty, 1998). It looks at the knowledge available and its source, and by its participative nature, this qualitative study will provide new knowledge and tools to my field of study. The statistics of female leaders indicate that, despite having more female teachers than males in Harare, when it comes to leadership, there are more female teachers but less female heads in Harare schools. I expect the narrative reports to provide knowledge through the lived experiences by school heads, their stories adding value to the existing body of literature.

4.3.4 Axiology

Axiology is based on judgments about the value or aims of research or the values of the researcher (Killam, 2013; Ling, 2017). The aim of this research was to cause a transformation in the uneven playing fields in the spheres of primary and secondary school headship. As a former female teacher and school head, I feel that my biases cannot be avoided as some of the experiences shared were in my social sphere, but I strived to remain impartial as expected of a credible researcher.

Disruptions of the inequalities in numbers were evident. The paradigm and theory implemented asks for action change, and as such, change is inevitable.

4.4 Methodology

Another aspect guiding this paradigm was how information was obtained through narratives and semi-structured interviews in my qualitative study (Mertens et al., 2009). This implicit methodological angle had an impact on the research outcomes as I related in verbatim what the ten female school heads narrated during my interviews. The narrations were emancipatory to the participants as my questions evoked a lot of interest and self-reflections in line with their roles at family, society and professional levels.

4.5 Research Design

This is a methodological blueprint indicating procedures on how research should be carried out (Creswell, 2014). It refers to guidelines that are to be followed when one is carrying out research. As asserted by Creswell and Creswell (2017), there are three types of designs in research, namely, qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods. As a novice researcher, I settled for qualitative research as undertaking the two (mixed) may be complex for a novice researcher. This type of research focuses on the experiences of participants and greater interaction with the researcher, which indicated greater feedback on my research questions. I wanted to obtain narratives from participants, and this was more aligned to the qualitative study that seeks to have understanding of lived experiences of research participants.

4.5.1 Narrative research design

Narrative research is defined as a research approach that focuses on telling stories through the collaboration of the researcher and the participant (Creswell, 2013) as well as studying individual lived experiences as a fountain of knowledge (Nasheeda et al., 2019). According to Haydon,

Browne, and van der Riet (2018), narrative enquiry emphasises forging a relationship between the researcher and the participant in co-creating participants' experiences (Khwaja & Mahoney, 2019). In the view of Khwaja and Mahoney (2019), narrative researchers have a critical role in listening and recording the narratives and acknowledging their role as active in the co-construction of the narratives. Creswell (2012) describes the narrative as a form of study where the researcher writes and records another person's stories or experiences as espoused below.

Narrative research designs are qualitative procedures in which researchers describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about these individuals' lives, and write narratives about their experiences. In education, these stories often relate to school classroom experiences or activities in schools (p.22).

Both the researcher and participant, therefore, have a stake in what comes out as narratives (Savin-Baden & Howell-Major, 2013). The issue of establishing the relational engagement in creating stories allows the researcher to pay particular attention to participants' lived experiences, usually done, as earlier discussed, through interviews and discussions (Hlatywayo & Hlatywayo, 2012). According to Riessman (2008), narrative research design refers to an entire life story that is woven from the threads of qualitative methodologies such as interviews, observations and documents. I adopted a narrative design to generate stories from primary and secondary school female heads about their lived experiences.

My design was shaped by narratives that matched the emancipatory paradigm chosen for this study. It is loosely referred to as a spoken or written account of something. Narratives provide links and meanings to theories and arguments. Creswell (2012) defines it as a study of experiences as expressed in lived and told stories of individuals. He further posits that:

Narrative researchers collect stories, documents, and group conversations about the lived and told experiences of one or two individuals. They record the stories using interview, observation, documents, and images and then report the experiences and chronologically

order their meaning. Narrative research methodology doesn't follow a rigid process but is described as an informal gathering of data (Creswell, 2010, p. 70).

The emancipatory theoretical lens helped advocate for women in educational leadership during this research. The narratives assisted in answering the research questions highlighted in this study through stories shared by the ten female heads in schools. One uses narrative research when there are willing participants intending to share their stories. In this case, there were female heads in school settings (Creswell, 2012). I managed to create rapport with my participants, who had practical and detailed insights (Creswell, 2012). As Percy, Kostere, and Kostere (2015) explained, narratives can be in the form of written or spoken presentations. Narrative stories have to be approached with serious consideration of the vulnerability of participants (De Jager, Fogarty, Tewson et al., 2017). It focuses on understanding and interpreting actual human feelings and sentiments. It is a story that relates the key events and facts about a person's life from a first-person perspective. Narratives infuse theory and practice in an academic sphere that brings out lived experiences and subjective perspectives. In view of this Butina (2015, p. 190) postulates that:

Narrative inquiry is a form of qualitative research in which the stories themselves become the raw data. This approach has been used in many disciplines to learn more about the culture, historical experiences, identity, and lifestyle of the narrator. The narrative approach involves inquiry directed at narratives of human experience or inquiry that produces data in narrative form. Examples of inquiries that yield narrative data include interviews that solicit stories or oral histories or written autobiographies and biographies. Defining features of the narrative approach include the collection of narrative (stories) from individuals or small groups. Most often, there is a collaboration with the researcher as storytelling engages the audience. These stories tell of individual experiences that often exposes the researcher to the identities of that individual. Narratives are often collected through interviews, but other qualitative forms of data collection, such as observations and documents, may be used.

The study intended to communicate with actual heads and hear their feelings, perceptions and wishes. In my narratives, I used an in-depth interviewing method that gave both the participant and myself room to discuss deeply and catch the outstanding moments of the school heads'

personal, professional and academic lives. Narrative inquiry is “the study of experience, and experience, as John Dewey taught, is a matter of people in relation to contextually and temporally. Participants are in a relation, and we, as researchers, are in relation to participants” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 189).

4.5.2 Narrative research process

This is one of the traditional qualitative methods approaches. Its methods are not rigid but entails five processes. The first step involves data generation through interviews and questionnaires in my case. The second relates to organising and preparing data into folders through conversion of the audio recorded tapes into transcriptions. The third step is about interrogating and coding the data generated. In the fourth step data are categorised into themes and lastly data are interpreted for meaning.

This approach focuses on exploring the lives of individuals and listening to their stories and experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The questions asked are meant to retrieve as much information as possible, and questions must be open-ended, and the primary source of data is the participant. Semi-structured and in-depth questions were used in addition to tape recording participants’ narratives. These are recommended for qualitative research as they are more participant-centred so as to solicit as much data from the primary source as much as possible (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Such interactive methods brought the researcher close to the source and got actual stories from participants.

4.6 Research Methodology

I opted for the qualitative research approach based on its in-depth and exploratory research methods outlined and discussed. Due to the subjective nature of this research, a qualitative approach was found to be appropriate as I intended to dig deeper into the lives of female heads.

The qualitative research approach used narrative design to generate thick data from participants (female school heads) in their schools. This approach emanated from the emancipatory paradigm that guided this study and gave the researcher room to question the status quo of participants. Their voices consequently came out in the stories they told (Creswell, 2012).

Qualitative research is said to be difficult to give a precise and delineating definition. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), this lack of a clear definition is because there exists no theory or paradigm that can be attributed to it entirely. The same authors point out that the research approach does not have specific methods or practices that can be entirely unique to itself. However, despite this ‘shortcoming’, qualitative research methods are reportedly becoming popular. Researches of late for reasons that could be more speculative than factual, as others say, could be because of its use of words and pictures that tell vivid stories than numbers do (Shakouri & Nazari, 2014).

The main thrust of the qualitative methodology is that of producing in-depth and illustrative information in order to make clear and comprehend the many dimensions of the issue under consideration (Queirós, Faria, & Almeida, 2017). In defining qualitative research, Burns and Grove (2009) have echoed that qualitative research is a systematic and subjective approach designed to illuminate and explicate daily life experiences and further give them proper meaning.

The research approach adopted for this study is the qualitative approach. Qualitative research has been described as being inductive in approach owing to the fact that the inquirer, in most cases, is interested in exploring meanings and insights of a phenomenon of interest (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The approach encompasses a wide range of data collection and analysis methods, which principally use purposive sampling, semi-structured and open-ended interviews (Gopaldas, 2016). Because it collects data in a natural setting where participants reside or are found and is thus

perceived as an effective model. It allows the researcher to develop a level of detail from their active involvement in the actual experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Qualitative research consists of interpretive material practices that make the world visible and is multi-method in outlook where the subject matter is interpreted from a naturalistic standpoint (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Unlike quantitative research which works with numerical data, qualitative inquiries collect and work with words from which interpretation is to understand life as experienced by social actors being investigated in a natural setting (Punch, 2013). As posited by Queirós et al. (2017), qualitative research is concerned with the deepening of understanding a given problem and not numerical representativeness. According to Walia (2015), this type of approach allows researchers to make observations of the world in its natural setting, interpreting situations to understand the meanings that people attach to day to day life.

As already highlighted elsewhere in this section, qualitative research is characteristically unconcerned with statistical methods of inquiry and analysis of social phenomena. To capture a whole range of attributes of qualitative research, Creswell (2012) outlines a number of them as the study being conducted in a natural setting, the researcher as a critical instrument to the study, utilises multiple methods and sources of data and data analysis is inductive. Furthermore, focus is on participants' meaning, the design is emergent, applies a theoretical lens and data are interpreted in a subjective manner to produce a holistic account of the phenomenon under consideration.

In this regard, Levin (2010, p. 8) maintains "quantitative research and statistical analyses do not tell the story about this issue." This is more aligned to the current research as the study intended to explore and describe experiences through narrative stories from female school heads. I adopted

a qualitative research approach mainly because it matched the requirements of the research paradigm adopted and articulated in this study.

4.6.1 Justification for adopting a qualitative research approach

Human behaviour is significantly influenced by the setting in which it is played out. Hence researchers are obliged to study that behaviour in those natural settings (Ochieng, 2009). I chose qualitative research because it is subjective and focuses on interacting with participants and making meanings out of data generated. This study studied participants in their natural settings, in which case, there was an interaction between the researcher and participants (Hart, 2010) during data collection. Qualitative research starts from the source, and in this case, the stories were gathered from the female school heads (participants) as I inductively uncovered deeper meanings from their storied lives (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). For Creswell and Poth (2016), any qualitative researchers intending to record actual events and stories must necessarily engage in a qualitative approach because of the issues discussed above.

Cognisant of the contribution of quantitative approaches in research and that research approaches can be used in concert, I still found it appropriate to employ a qualitative approach. Unlike quantitative approaches that rely on large samples, this is not the case for qualitative research, which is subjective and uses small samples for in-depth understanding and not preoccupied with issues of generalisability (DeFranzo, 2011). The qualitative approach looks at how and why a phenomenon happens and the need for further investigation (Terrell, 2012). This was my reason for using this approach as I explored and described participants' lived experiences of heading schools in a predominantly male environment. As has already been hinted elsewhere in this section, qualitative methodological approaches are exploratory in nature (Creswell, 2014; Magwa & Magwa, 2015).

The approach generates meanings that are unique to individual participants and therefore advances multiple realities. The small sample used in this study allowed me to explore the issue of gender disparity with a view to having a deeper understanding of the unique and multiple realities brought forth by participants. To elicit participants' responses, qualitative research employs semi-structured, unstructured or structured interviews (Brannen, 2017) wherein in this study, and I used semi-structured interviews. Such a method is flexible, allows for opportunities to probe, seeks clarification, and elaborates issues during data collection.

Because it seeks to understand human behaviour, qualitative research adopts a person-centred and holistic perspective that is participant-centred and seeks to hear personal views and stories of participants (Creswell, 2012). In its broader sense, the approach is accredited for its many advantages, which include being subjective and exploratory in nature, has interests in participants' experiences, and uses small samples for data generation in natural contexts. These are some of the issues that influenced my choice of adopting the research approach under discussion.

In justifying the utilisation of the qualitative research approach, Butina (2015) emphasised that this approach is used when there is a problem to be solved, an issue to be analysed, a phenomenon to be explored, or a theory to be developed. This is when one wants to know what people think, do, feel or know using exploratory and interactive methods such as interviews. This was exactly what I set to do in this study, and hence my adoption of qualitative research ahead of other approaches.

4.7 Selection of Research Participants

The research setting refers to the place where the data were collected. As previously alluded to, this study was conducted in Harare Province at participants' schools. Harare has 172 primary

school heads, of which 104 are male, and 68 are female. There is a total of 96 school heads, of which 65 are male and 31 are female, in secondary schools. Primary school teachers are 7180 in total, with 1,398 male and 5,782 female. Secondary school teachers total 3829, with 1256 male and 2573 female.

4.7.1 Population

A population is “a group of individuals who comprise the same characteristics (Creswell, 2012, p. 625). Gay and Weaver (2011) also assert that a population involves all the possible elements that should be included in the research. In this study, the population comprised 99 female school heads in Harare Province, which included both primary and secondary school heads.

4.7.2 Purposive sampling

To participate in this study, participants met specific selection criteria. The participants included in the research were purposively selected (Creswell, 2012) for their experience. This included having more than five years in educational leadership, the perceived experience of challenges women face in leadership, willingness to participate, and outstanding performance in their line of work, mentally sound to consent to the research and biologically female. This sampling criterion was most suitable as it selected participants that were relevant to the study. Availability, time and willingness to take part in the study also determined the final selection of the participants to participate in research (Creswell, 2012). The sample was purposive to suit the scope of the study whilst getting a reasonable representation of all the female heads in Harare province. The sample comprised only those participants from whom the best could be learned from their contribution thus I selected information-rich participants.

Only ten female heads from all seven districts of Harare Province were selected for this study. I purposively selected a sample size of 10 (5 primary and five secondary) female school heads who

had served more than five years in school leadership and stationed in Harare Province. Faulkner (2015) supports this notion by expressing qualitative research as describing and exploring a phenomenon using a small sample or single setting. Among the many reasons considered in selecting the ten heads were their work experience, qualifications, position in the teaching fraternity, and their assumed knowledge of disparities generally faced by female school leaders.

4.8 Data Generation Methods

There are a variety of data generation methods qualitative researchers can employ. There is a consensus among qualitative researchers that narratives from participants are collected through the utilisation of interviews (Butina, 2015; Khwaja & Mahoney, 2019; McAlpine, 2016; Overcash, 2004; Riessman, 2008). In addition to using interviews in narratives, Hlatywayo and Hlatywayo (2012) adds that conversations, artefacts, visuals and observations can be used to stimulate a dialogue or conversation. A variety of interview types include structured, unstructured and semi-structured interviews, which narrative researchers can employ to elicit responses from participants.

Interviews, whatever their nature, are key to obtaining narrative data (Overcash, 2004). However, Overcash (2004) further says importance should be on the type of interview as not every interview type may yield similar results. It is put on record that an interview is a verbal communication between the researcher and the researched where the researcher asks, in the majority of cases, open-ended and prompting questions that provoke and stimulate a lengthy narration of life experiences (Overcash, 2004).

4.8.1 Semi-structured interviews

From a whole range of interview types, I adopted the semi-structured interview method as the most preferred and appropriate to yield data in sync with the focus of the study. Semi-structured interviews are flexible as they allow researchers to follow interesting and emerging themes in data

as participants share their experiences through storytelling. In addition, there is room to seek clarification of issues from participants as well as elaboration. Such an approach allows researchers to learn about participants' experiences in all its complexity and entirety and, as Riessman (2008, p. 24) puts it, to follow participants "down their trails." Deriving inspiration from Riessman's approach to narrative research, I designed a loosely structured interview schedule with open-ended questions to allow for probing, clarification and elaboration.

Semi-structured interviews are detailed and have depth as they are participant-based. Rabionet (2011) concurs with Riessman (2008) that qualitative interviewing is a powerful tool that captures the peoples' voices in research. As described by Rabionet (2011), qualitative interviewing has six steps: interview type selection, ethical guidelines, interview protocol, conducting and recording the interview, analysing and summarizing the interview, and reporting findings. Furthermore, Rabionet (2011) confirms that semi-structured interviews narrow down the research scope and include ethical considerations in the introduction. Moreover, Stuckey (2013) asserts that semi-structured interviews solicit personal views from participants as they share information in their own words. This is said to respect the cultural opinions of participants as they speak in a way they are most comfortable.

In this study, semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allow face-to-face interaction with participants whilst discussing their successes and challenges in heading primary and secondary schools. Riessman (2008) confirms that single or several interviews allow long detailed sessions of personal stories during interviews, a thread that is intertwined in qualitative research. Personal interviews constitute one of the most important and valuable sources of information. According to Creswell (2012), interviews allow immediate feedback during face to face

interactions and that the researcher can guide the line of questioning so as to cover all questions and elicit sufficient and rich data.

However, it must be noted that, while semi-structured were the preferred means for collecting data, the researcher was aware that such interviews take a lot of time to be concluded. There is also the dimension that mounds of data are collected this way which may be difficult to analyse. Being mindful of these pitfalls allowed me to carefully plan so that participants were not hurried in the process of data collection.

4.8.2 Questionnaires

Questionnaires were used to obtain background information from participants and for triangulation purposes. The questionnaires were not used to generate narrative data but for obtaining biographical information about the participants. Patten (2016) describes questionnaires as economic and yielding quick responses that provide a snapshot to the data under study. Such information was found easy to tabulate highlighting the participants' age, qualifications, work experience, number of children and some background data relating to their lived experiences.

4.9 Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis in qualitative research refers to a process of making sense of the data generated (Bamberg, 2020; Bergin, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Butina, 2015). I used one of the 5 traditional approaches in qualitative studies, namely the narrative analysis because it gave me stories (raw data) experienced by school heads and was in line with my research focus (Butina, 2015; Overcash, 2004). Riessman (2008) and Butina (2015) further elucidate a typology of narrative analysis as thematic, structural, dialogic/performance and visual. Since narrative data analysis can be performed through these four approaches, I selected the narrative thematic analysis so as to identify the emerging key themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2012; Riessman,

2008). The narrative approach I used was intertwined with analysis that entails data organization and preparation, general understanding and description of the data, coding, categories, themes and findings (Butina, 2015).

Informed by the work of Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2017) and Schurink, Fouché and De Vos (2011), I could relate to the narrative research because it is inclusive of stories and interviews and that individuals' stories are best described by themselves. Holstein and Gubrium (2011) contend that in narrative analysis, participants tell their personal experiences and stories and these are analysed in coded themes. The merits of narrative research emanate from such background and the advantages of interacting with primary source making data generation easier and more accurate through follow up questions and clarifications direct from participants. The content obtained was my primary focus in this study. Having a small number of participants in a narrative approach gives depth to individual experiences shared during interviews. However, there is the disadvantage of participants' side tracking as they narrate their experiences but I would steer them gently towards the focus of the study. There was also the issue of time but I ample time in excess one hour and only one participant responded in 45 minutes and the rest did about an hour so it still fell in my prescribed time range. Of course, voluminous data is expected in a qualitative research more so when using narrative approach and this was then reduced to comprehensible categories during analysis.

In line with the narrative approach from which I generated data from 10 participants, the narrative analysis yielded five themes related to issues of gender disparities in educational leadership resulting in better comprehension of phenomenon under this study (Riessman 2008; Butina, 2015). I immersed myself in the data as I analysed the patterns and meanings resulting in findings. A qualitative research produces mounds of textual data and, as such, an analysis is employed to

reduce and make sense of the data. The data is principally verbal and in this study, notes were taken and an audio tape was also used to record the interviews. Creswell (2012) concurs with Victor (2009) in support of the notion that a narrative develops a conversation between the researcher and the participant.

Bottery and Wright (2019) postulate that the narrative approach entails descriptions of data generated which was explicitly covered in my research through a descriptive analysis of the lived experiences regarding gender disparities in educational leadership. The participants told experiences of successes and challenges in their leadership roles. The interview schedules had open-ended questions covering what emanated from the sub-questions and the broad research question. Depending on how the questions were asked, some questions had follow-up questions whilst some were expanded for clarity or emphasis.

The participants were at liberty to respond in a language they felt comfortable and competent enough to use between English and vernacular (Shona one of Zimbabwe's indigenous languages) after which I then translated the vernacular parts into English. A Wits colleague cross-checked the Shona translations just to make sure that the participants' views were not lost in translation. However, due to the participants' nature of work and status, they responded mostly in English, a language they were most comfortable with. Thus my analysis was narrative analysis emanating from the themes established in the discourse.

4.9.1 Issues of trustworthiness

The dichotomous debate between qualitative and quantitative methodologies continues when it comes to the trustworthiness of research. Creswell (2017) affirms that qualitative research is for making meaning out of subjective data, whilst quantitative research emphasises the strong demand

for validation and the ultimate truth. Leedy and Ormrod (2015) postulate that the methodological rigour and findings are important when one looks at the trustworthiness of research. Defining trustworthiness, Connelly (2016) posits that it is the degree of confidence in research data and research methods used so as to confirm the quality of research. Four criteria must be satisfied to ascertain such trustworthiness. These are credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Pandey & Patnaik, 2014).

4.9.2 Credibility

This term refers to the confidence in the truth of research (Tobin & Begley, 2004). In ascertaining credibility, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that several techniques address it. These techniques include prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, researcher triangulation, and use of more than one method of data collection. It is also recommended to do peer debriefing, which is meant to provide external checking mechanisms that validate the rigor of the research process. Credibility can also be facilitated by member checking, which tests if what has been reported came from the participants. The criterion of credibility is taken as the most important part of trustworthiness, and in my case, I had lengthy interviews with participants, and all information was documented. I provided sufficient detail of the research process and participants' profiles. Thus, credibility is crucial to validate the trustworthiness of findings in any qualitative research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015).

4.9.3 Transferability

Transferability refers to the issue of being able to transfer or pass on research results to another setting. It denotes the degree to which results of qualitative research can be transferred to other similar contexts with other participants (Tobin & Begley, 2004). In order to achieve this attribute, the researcher does this through purposeful sampling and thick description of the research process,

which include the context, participants and data collection. It is argued that without this account, it is difficult for readers or audience to determine the extent to which results ring true and that they were not fabricated by the researcher. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), rigour is tested when transferability is evident. In my research, I described the research context in detail, the entire research process and explained the reasons for using the purposive sampling method. The use of verbatim statements from the data collected allows for the transferability of the study (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). I employed these techniques to ensure transferability even though qualitative research findings cannot be valid for another context because such research is context-specific (Shakouri & Nazari, 2014).

4.9.4 Dependability

Bitsch (2005) defines dependability as the stability of the findings of qualitative research over time. In order to determine this criterion of dependability, participants must engage in evaluating the findings and the interpretation and recommendations to make sure that they are all resulting from the data generated from the field and provided by the participants doing the evaluation. Dependability is established by audit trail, triangulation and replication. In this study, I described in detail the research methods that I used: narratives and interviews and thematic data analysis. The evident transcriptions and trails of confidential audio recordings also add to the dependability of my study.

4.9.5 Confirmability

Confirmability is concerned with establishing that the interpretations made by the researcher are a result of the data generated, as well as showing how the conclusions and interpretations have been reached (Tobin & Begley, 2004). According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), confirmability is established when all the other criteria have been achieved. This means that researchers need to

provide reasons for their theoretical and methodological choices as the study unfolds. Learning from this piece of advice, I explained why I adopted the emancipatory paradigm as well as qualitative approach, design, data collection methods and analysis procedures. This was sufficient to provide confirmability in this study.

4.9.6 Triangulation

This is used to improve the quality of a study by use of multiple methods in data generation. It can be, environmental, methodological, multiple researchers, data sources, theoretical or data analysis triangulation (Magwa & Magwa, 2015). In this case, I used methodological triangulation as it assists in confirmability of results that they were true experiences of participants and not my own preferences. In this vein, I used narratives and bio graphical questionnaires aided by the field notes I took during discussions. Triangulation of data gathering methods assisted the research in respect of believability, truthfulness and authenticity (Bisman & Highfield, 2012). In the spirit of triangulation, I used methodological triangulation in the form of semi- structured interviews and questionnaires so as to have different but complimentary data forms. I also gave the participants writing paper and interview questions for them to study prior to interview.

4.10 Ethical Considerations

In any research that involves humans as participants, Rabionet (2011) posits that there is a need to respect ethical guidelines and moral considerations. The ethical considerations in qualitative research give participants the right to withdraw from the study at any given time if they so wish (Patton, 2014). It focuses on being sensitive to participants age and status, respecting their privacy, protecting their confidential information and upholding their dignity.

In this light, I sought and obtained the necessary written permission from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education of Zimbabwe. I also complied with the University Of Witwatersrand

(Wits) Ethics Committee on what needed to be done before undertaking this study. The Ethics Committee helped me shape my methods and verified my consent form, participant information letter and introductory letter to affirm my compliance with protecting the participants' rights to participate and freedom to withdraw at any given stage during the discussion. As highlighted and emphasized by Rabionet (2011), the following ethical procedures were adhered to in this research: need to clarify my research purpose, privacy, confidentiality, informed consent, level of risk, fairness, and impartiality, participant information protection and anonymity of participants.

After careful perusal of all the requisite documents and corrections, the Wits Ethics Committee approved the study, and an ethics certificate was issued to me. With this certificate, I was ready to go into the field to collect data. I realised that it was inevitable during interviews to give away actual names during narrations, so I cleaned my data after transcriptions. There is a need to protect the participant and change any details that may give away the true identity of the participant (Floyd, 2012). However, such alterations do not affect the data generated or thematic analysis. I was the custodian of confidential information shared during this study. I had to change the names of participants and schools and any other identifying information that would link them to the data collected. My additional ethical responsibility was to conceal the names of the participants, and it was imperative that I was the only one who knew their true identities (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

4.11 Limitations of the Study

As Bhakar and Mathur (2016) have attested, all research studies have limitations to a certain extent. I studied only one female from each of the seven districts out of 31 female heads in Harare. This sample was relatively small and may not produce results that other researchers may consider credible, particularly those from the positivist research stable. However, since this was a

qualitative study, which is premised on small samples, the issue of generalisability falls away. The focus of qualitative research is to facilitate in-depth understanding and not generalisability. The focus of the study was solely on female school heads in Harare Province districts. Through thick description of the research process, participants' profiles and member checking and debriefing, I provided sufficient rigour to allow other researchers to compare the findings of this study with what happens in their areas.

Another limitation was accessing the school heads for data collection, and sometimes they were unavailable when I needed them. This was due to the fact that their offices are usually and characteristically busy, and they run tight schedules. To overcome this limitation, I made advance bookings and gave them interview questions to guide them on narratives prior to meeting them. I gave them the liberty to determine when I would meet them for individual interviews. This advance thinking allowed me to build rapport, which is important if one wants to build trust which will enable participants to give information freely. This approach worked well for circumventing the challenge of participants' unavailability.

The issue of qualitative data analysis using the thematic analysis technique was somewhat challenging for me as a novice qualitative researcher doing it for the first time at a very high level of doctoral studies. Because of its nature, qualitative studies produce large volumes of textual data, which, if not handled carefully, can confuse the researcher to the point of losing focus. To resolve this challenge, I solicited the services of a colleague experienced in qualitative data analysis using the thematic approach. With this help, I was able to make sense of the data. I must, however, acknowledge that qualitative data analysis requires commitment without which themes may be challenging to come up with and end up with meaningless data and no study at all.

There were COVID-19-related challenges that saw a general slowdown in the speed at which things were going. Because of the lockdown imposed in Zimbabwe and elsewhere, including South Africa, the University of Witwatersrand, where I was a student, experienced a general slump in academic activities. I could not visit the country to consult with my supervisor, which I used to doing every other two months. This left me with anxiety as I did not know if what I was doing without occasional consultation was in line with expectations. However, online communication with my supervisor was kept open, albeit at a reduced frequency. All sources of information, such as libraries where I used to go for studying, were closed, and it became difficult to find other pieces of information. Despite this challenge, I had to use more online sources rather than hard copies to find information. Also, the challenge of internet connectivity and the exorbitant cost of data in Zimbabwe were challenges.

4.12 Conclusion

This chapter described the research methodology which I used to generate and analyse data. The purpose was to study the gender disparities observed in primary and secondary schools in Harare province. I discussed the ontology, role of the researcher in qualitative research, emancipatory paradigm and emphasised the use of a qualitative approach in my study. The chapter also discussed the use of semi-structured interviews as a data collection method, population and sampling procedure, data collection instruments, as well as strategies used to ensure adherence to ethical standards, trustworthiness and the pilot study used in this research. I used the qualitative methodology to elucidate the experiences of school heads as they discharged their duties (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Bryman, 2016). The next chapter presents data generated in the field focusing on lived experiences, successes and challenges of the 10 participants.

CHAPTER FIVE: NARRATIVES OF FEMALE SCHOOL HEADS ON GENDER DISPARITIES

“Gender Inequalities are rampant... equality is just but lip service”. (Rudo, 2020)

5.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter presented and discussed the research methodology adopted in this study. The current chapter introduces a descriptive analysis of the lived experiences, successes and challenges of the 10 participants who took part in the study. This chapter covers participants’ knowledge and encounters with gender disparities in educational leadership which I explored. The study employed a qualitative approach and used narratives and interviews to generate data from the participants. The critical research questions that guided the interview questions are re-stated as a recollection of the study focus.

5.1.1 Research question

This study was guided by the following overarching and research question:

What are the experiences of female school heads with regards to gender disparities during their tenure of office?

5.1.2 Sub-questions

In addition, this study was guided by the following overarching sub-questions:

- What are the participants’ conceptualisations of gender disparity and parity?
- How do female heads experience gender disparity and gender parity in their role as leaders?
- Why are mitigatory ways crucial to curtailing the gender disparities status quo?

- How do female school heads think gender barriers can be minimised/eliminated and policy be made more favourable to them?

Biographical and background data were gathered through questionnaires. The questionnaires were not used to generate narrative data but biographical data that is presented in Table 5.1. Out of the 10 participants, 5 were primary school heads while the other 5 headed secondary schools. The narratives shared in-depth experiences of participants heading schools in the Harare province of Zimbabwe.

Due to the large volume of data generated in this study, data presentation, analysis and findings were split into three chapters. The first chapter (Chapter 5) presents the participants' profiles and narratives (stories). Chapter 6 focuses on data analysis of strategies employed by female school heads to move towards gender parity. Chapter 7 presents an evaluative analysis of emerging themes that are considered important in the study as they directly address the research questions. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews, which elicited narratives, each one lasting an average of 60 minutes. To protect the identity of the participants and their schools, they were given pseudonyms. All the names in the table and discussions that follow are not the participants' real names. As discussed in the methodology chapter, ethical issues were adhered to throughout the research process. Nine of ten participants agreed to be audio-taped during interviews, while one declined for reasons she did not divulge. Nevertheless, she agreed to be interviewed, and I had to endure the laborious task of writing down notes while she narrated her story. This process was rather difficult as I had the dual responsibility of listening and writing, and I could not always keep pace with her talking. Resultantly, I missed some of the things she was saying.

Before starting every interview session, I asked for participants' permission to tape-record the interview. After I was done with data generation, I then transcribed all audios to produce textual data to interact and manually analyse it. The narrative and thematic analysis of narratives was then carried out as part of my data analysis process.

5.2 Biographical Profiles of the School Heads

Table 5.1 below illustrates the participants' profiles showing their biographical data and school characteristics, which are then followed by the participants' profiles and the stories they shared. The first five are primary school heads, and the last five are secondary school heads.

Table 5.1: Profiles of the participants showing their biographical data and school characteristics

Participant	Tariro	Pindukai	Tadiswa	Mbali	Nyaradzo	Rudo	Fadzai	Tavonga	Natsai	Nyasha
Age	61	60	51	55	62	61	60	61	57	40
Academic Qualification	A level	O level	A level	O level	A level	A level	A level	A level	O level	A level
Professional Qualification	Master in Education	Bachelor in Education	Bachelor in Education	Bachelor in Education	Certificate in Education	Master in Education	Doctor of Philosophy	Bachelor in Education	Certificate in Education	Bachelor in Education
Teaching Experience	9	8	8	13	12	5	5	7	5	5
Deputy Headship	5	5	3	5	7	6	5	6	5	1
Experience as School Head	17	18	14	8	8	22	20	14	24	5
Marital Status	Married	Married	Married	Widowed	Single	Married	Divorced	Widowed	Married	Nun
Children	4	4	3	4	1	4	nil	7	4	nil
Co-Ed/ Same Gender	Co-ed	Co-ed	Co-ed	Co-ed	Co-ed	Girls only	Girls only	Co-ed	Co-ed	Girls only
Enrolment	1754	1571	1966	2864	1630	901	1080	2538	1683	525
School Type	Gvt (P)	Gvt (P)	Gvt (P)	Gvt(P)	Gvt (P)	Gvt (S)	Gvt (S)	Gvt(S)	Gvt (S)	Church(S)
Location	Low Density	High Density	High Density	High Density	Low Density	Low Density	Low Density	High Density	High Density	Low Density
Staff by Gender	39 female 2 Male	33 female 2 Male	37 female 6 Male	45 female 9 Male	35 female 3 Male	46 Female 40 Male	43 Female 15 Male	77 Female 31 Male	36 Female 14 Male	35 Female 15 Male

(Source: Field Data, Harare, 2020)

KEY: Co- Ed =Combined Educational School (Mixed Gender); Gvt (P) Government Primary; Gvt(S) Government Secondary
High density refers to township schools, and Low Density refers to Suburban and town schools.

High density refers to township schools found in high population areas, and low density refers to suburban and city centre schools located in more affluent and low population areas; these are mostly former white schools during the colonial era.

5.2.1 Analysis of the biographical data

The data above reflect the age range of the participants. The youngest was 40 years old, and the oldest was 62 years old. Seven of the ten participants were ≥ 56 years old and above. Three of the women's highest academic qualification was an ordinary level certificate, and seven had advanced level qualifications. These exam boards followed in Zimbabwe are specific to schools that use the Zimbabwe schools examination council (ZIMSEC) or the Cambridge system, where students partake in Ordinary and Advanced level exams. In terms of professional qualifications, two had a certificate in education, five had bachelor's degrees, two had masters' degrees, and one participant had a doctorate. With regards to school geographical location, five were in high-density areas and five in the city centres or low-density areas.

When one looks at the table carefully, it is evident that all schools headed by the ten participants had more female teachers than male teachers. Furthermore, the one with the lowest number of male teachers vis-a-vis females had 39 females against two male teachers. The schools headed by the participants I engaged with had students ranging from 525 as the smallest girls-only school and the largest enrolment had 2 864 students being a co-educational school.

There were three female heads from girls-only schools and seven who headed co-educational schools. The school heads teaching experience ranged from 5 – 13 years. In terms of deputy headship, they had one to five years experience, and headship ranged from five years to the longest-serving who had 24 years experience. In terms of marital status, three were single, one divorced, two widowed, and five married. In terms of children, two had none, one had one child, one had three children, five had four children, and one had seven children.

The data obtained may directly or indirectly impact the management skills of the female heads and challenges emanating from issues such as maternity leave if one had children, attending out of town or overnight workshops if one is married, and community-based challenges based on age or school enrolment. These issues will be expounded on during data presentation and discussion as the chapters unfolds going forward.

5.2.2 Detailed profiles of each participant

The social characteristics in the above Table 5.1 include variables and demographics such as age, academic and professional qualifications, length of service in the school, marital status, number of biological children, mixed or same gender of students, school enrolment by gender, school responsible authority, school location, and number of teachers by gender.

Participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identities. The sub-headings were derived from the participants' narratives as I engaged with them during interviews. Important citations that spoke to my research were captured verbatim. I then used individual sub-headings to write participants' views.

5.2.2.1 Participant 1: Tariro

“Genuine Promotion or Affirmative Action?”

Tariro was 61 years old and had a Master's degree in educational leadership and management. She had 17 years of headship experience. She was married with four children. Tariro was the head of a primary school with 1755 co-educational students. Her school was located in a low-density suburb with two males and 39 female teachers. Tariro embarked on teaching as a social expectation, as was the trend those days. Women were expected to be mainly teachers or nurses. Her high school teacher recommended her for a teaching programme, and that is how she ended up being a teacher. Her initial dream was that of being a nurse. She ended up being a teacher by default and then fell

in love with educational psychology until she ended up running one of the most popular primary schools in terms of academic results in Harare province.

A male colleague accused her of having landed the position of head through an Affirmative Action Group that fights for gender equality. She experienced gender imbalances during her educational journey, especially when it came to leadership appointments that did not consider where aspiring heads' families lived. In view of this, Tariro lamented that:

I really had to make noise to go back to my family. Instead you were told these are the schools available take it or leave it.

Tariro indicated that her motherly nature led to most parents confiding in her when it came to psycho-social support of their children. She was grateful to her family's social and financial support during the time she was pursuing her studies. Her spouse and family excused her from cultural duties that would have made her spend more time at home than at work. This did not mean that she did not partake in the activities but rather would do them whenever she had the chance to do so. In any case, there are some certain activities that compelled her to attend, even when her school responsibilities were pressing.

5.2.2.2 Participant 2: Pindukai

"I am not a female head, I am a school head and roles do not change because of gender."

Pindukai was not comfortable with voice recording; therefore, notes were taken during the interview. She had a Bachelor of Education degree with 18 years of experience in school headship. She was married with four children. Pindukai headed a government primary school. The school had a total enrolment of 1571 students and a staff compliment of 35 teachers (2 males and 33 females). Pindukai had won several merit awards for working hard. She had worked hard to raise

the standard of her high-density school. She won three merit awards consecutively and was praised for her efforts in reviving the school that had once been operating below expected standard.

Through the support of the School Development Committee (SDC), she managed to do major renovations and purchased valuable assets such as a school bus, floor tiles, and revamped school toilets that had become unusable. She was inspired by the matriarchal characters in her life, such as her mother, a nun and one of her former female line supervisors. Her former supervisor encouraged her to take a leadership position when she was invited to headship. She had developed leadership skills over time at micro and macro levels. Her predecessor's head was female, and she did not come across any gender-biased attitudes when she took over. Pindukai was sincerely supported by her family as they accommodated her busy schedules and was available when she felt overwhelmed with her work.

5.2.2.3 Participant 3: Tadiswa

“It’s about our brain and intellectual power and not only about physical power.”

Tadiswa was in her early 50s and had a Bachelor of Education degree. She had 14 years’ experience in educational leadership. She was married with three children. Tadiswa had 966 male students and 1000 females and was heading a high-density government primary school. She was assisted by six male teachers and 37 female teachers. Tadiswa experienced gender bias at the beginning of her career. Because her mother was sick then, she could not discuss with her the horrible experiences at work but would just cry behind closed doors to vent her frustration. She was insulted and harassed by male colleagues who said, “because she wore a skirt, she thinks with a skirt”. But through the years, she picked up the courage to overcome such critics and now believed women are just as competent as men. Tadiswa was inspired by her two sisters, one of whom was a church leader and later became a school head. Her accomplishments included improving the Grade 7 pass

rate at the three institutions she has worked. She had been a cluster leader and had done construction projects at the school. She received psycho-social and financial support from her family.

5.2.2.4 Participant 4: Mbali

“I walk in all roles...Women do not know how to support or complement each other.”

Mbali was 51 years old. She possessed a Bachelor of Education degree and had ten years headship experience. Her motivation and role models were her infant school teacher and college mathematics lecturer. She was inspired by their passion and leadership qualities. She led a high-density primary school of 2864 students. Her staff was composed of 9 male and 45 female teachers. Her personal achievements included purchasing a school bus, improved pass rates, management of assets and coordination of school goals and vision. Mbali was a widow with four children. At times teachers looked down upon single widowed heads, but Mbali was not bothered. She commented:

At times responsibilities clash but one has to work tirelessly. There is not enough time to rest since I undertake a dual role of being a father and mother at the same time.

She observed that teachers generally prefer male heads to female heads. However, she was gender-sensitive and expressed that female heads can be more understanding of their female teachers' problems more than men do. She faced challenges in her multiple roles as a widow and a school head, especially from her parents' body, but she soldiered on and received tremendous support from her children and line supervisors.

5.2.2.5 Participant 5: Nyaradzo

“I don't know if they react to me this way because I am a female head... I thought if there had been a male head they would not react that way. So they discriminate

against a female head because some of the things don't make sense, they take advantage of the fact that I am female."

Nyaradzo was in her early 60s and was a holder of a Master of Education degree. She had more than 21 years classroom teaching experience and eight years of school headship experience. She was single and had one child who supported her endeavours. Nyaradzo led a low-density primary government school with 793 male students and 837 female students. Her staff comprised 3 male and 35 female teachers.

Nyaradzo's role models were her mother, sister in law and friend. Their conduct had taught her to be sincere, hardworking and results-oriented. Such traits made her complete her Master's degree in Educational Administration, maintain high pass rates, mentor other teachers and find inward satisfaction. Being a single mother gave her room to achieve all her work goals without home disturbances. She experienced a few gender-biased situations whereby male colleagues were not keen on supporting her efforts. She also observed that some roles should be given to women, such as those involving accountability of money as they fear to misappropriate funds and go to jail. Furthermore, she felt that women should also take the role of sports coaches because they were punctual and committed.

5.2.2.6 Participant 6: Rudo

"Gender Inequalities are rampant... equality is just but lip service."

Rudo was the head of an all-girls day and boarding secondary school with 901 students. She had a master's degree and had over 22 years school leadership experience. The government school she headed had 40 male and 46 female teachers. Her accolades included being a top female school head in the cluster, top girls school, top headmistress award, top female academic, best girls' high

school award. Rudo represented Heads Associations at Provincial and National levels as treasurer and chairperson.

Rudo started her career as a teacher, then got promoted to deputy head, then eventually to head. As in Tariro's case, Rudo also grew in a society where women were expected to become teachers or nurses. She opted for the teaching profession. Some of her transfers were because of family commitments, but most were competence-based because she was a 'seasoned head', better skilled to lead former Group 'A' schools. She had experience in heading both co-educational and same-gender schools. When she replaced male heads, the male students would try to undermine her authority, but they would then fully support her after proving herself. In the same vein, female students would expect leniency from a female head, but it came to their realisation that the head was firm in her conduct. One school where she once served had a culture of mischief, but she was able to deal with it in a way that brought sanity among mischievous learners. Resultantly, the spirit of hard work and respect was inculcated, and the school started to tick. Rudo experienced tribalism, gender stereotyping and gender imbalances in her professional life. The formerly tribalistic community eventually appreciated her after observing several school improvements, including solar power installation, sinking a borehole, improved academic results and, consequently, the school's students began to proceed to advanced level on merit.

Rudo observed that women tend to pull down other women, though that was also experienced by men. She noted that women were usually asked to do the opening and closing prayers at workshops while men's input in discussions were respected more. Through her leadership prowess, she was elected chairperson of the National Association of Secondary Heads (NASH), a very high post indeed in the education sector in Zimbabwe. This proved beyond reasonable doubt that women were worth their salt as, for several years, she steered the association with diligence and success.

Rudo got inspiration from her role models, who included her sister, her brother's wife and the first head she worked under. Rudo had supportive children who encouraged her to give her best at work. She derived strength from the use of an open-door policy where parents/guardians, teachers and students knew that they could approach her on any matter and be listened to unconditionally. She was so tenacious that she faced school challenges head-on. She also fought for what was right irrespective of her gender.

5.2.2.7 Participant 7: Fadzai

“Women should empower other women”

Fadzai led schools for 20 years. She was soft-spoken but firm in her management style, something that made some male colleagues underestimated her for. She led an all-girls government boarding secondary school with a student population of 1080 students. Her staff complement included 58 teachers (15 males and 43 females). She was exposed to rural, peri-urban and urban schools. Her inspiration came from her mother and sister who were exposed to schools through work and teaching, respectively. Fadzai then preferred teaching to nursing. She managed to improve pass rate at her school. She was also interested in sports and culture leading to her school receiving merit awards over the years. She consequently secured scholarships for her students abroad and in Zimbabwe. She also exposed her students to overseas tours and produced well rounded and knowledgeable students. Although she was divorced with no biological children, her marital status worked in her favour as she could work late and travel with students without any home obligations tying her down. Fadzai thought there was gender bias from male teachers as female teachers who would try to support her were labelled puppets. However, this was never a deterrent as she still implemented her resolutions for the good of the school and national development agenda.

5.2.2.8 Participant 8: Tavonga

“Gender parity needs to be seriously considered”

Tavonga was praised by both male and female colleagues in educational leadership. When some foreign investors built a school in one of the high-density suburbs, her name was nominated as a suitable female candidate to lead the state-of-the-art school. However, she faced some gender-based challenges during her tenure at the school. She ended up going back to her former school, where she had left a mark. The parents’ body and some teachers had problems with females being given a school of such magnitude. She gave established it and gave her best, but when she felt that her efforts were not being appreciated, she went back to her former school and continued her good work. She was a mature lady who held a Bachelor of Education degree and over 12 years’ experience in headship. She was a widow who received support from her seven children.

Tavonga led a big government secondary school with an enrolment of 1 200 male and 1 338 female students. Her teaching staff was composed of 31 males and 77 female teachers. Her role models were her parents, a cousin who was a teacher and her ordinary level English teacher. She admired teachers’ etiquette and eloquence and wished to be one, one day. She felt teachers could control others at the home and in the community.

Her achievements included awards of heading the best school, the first school to have a culture centre in Harare, the best school that became a referral centre for other heads to learn things, many building infrastructure, a profitable fish pond and paved school pathways. Tavonga’s challenges came when she tried to balance the duties of a mother and father for her children at the same time being a school head. She said she was overwhelmed. She indicated that it sometimes affected her school leadership role when she said:

Being a widow, I have to play both roles of a father and mother and this is problematic from my side and from my husband side. I am supposed to play the fatherly role and it affects my leadership – I tend to be overwhelmed.

5.2.2.9 Participant 9: Natsai

“Social training is a necessary tool”

Natsai was considered an iron lady in her district because of the strictness with which she treated her staff and students. She had more than 24 years teaching experience and school leadership. She was in her late 50s, married with children. She received the much-needed social support from her family. She headed a government secondary school with a student population of 1683 made up of comprising 936 male and 747 female students. The school was located in one of Harare’s high-density suburbs. She supervised a total of 50 teachers (36 male and 14 female teachers).

Natsai was inspired by her female Fashion and Fabrics teacher and a fellow outstanding female head. Her accolades included merit awards, good infrastructure and improved pass rates in Grade 7 results. She experienced gender bias when she volunteered to be a marker for Grade 7 national exams. A male teacher who was aware of her position as Head made sexual advances to her which she scoffed at. Having been rebuffed, he falsely accused her of being incompetent and reported to the Examination Board that she made lots of errors during marking. She was about to lose her position as a marker, but she managed to exonerate herself by exposing the teacher for sexual harassment. After she was awarded her job back, she then quit the extra job as a marker knowing she had cleared her name from any malpractice.

5.2.2.10 Participant 10: Nyasha

“The other problem is that there is lack of respect from women for women leaders...I became a Head in my mid-30s. To me it is a mature age because we have seen CEOs in their 30s”

Nyasha was in her early 40s and had a degree in Business Studies with a major in Finance. She questioned the intake of female students at a State University as she observed some disparities in female enrolment, not because there were fewer females that had applied. Their applications had not been considered. The disparity was even apparent with other courses at the university when they were put in study groups for assignments. In one study group, there were eight men and only one female. She also observed this disparity when at high school with male teachers running the sciences departments', especially in mathematics. It, therefore, did not surprise her that there were disparities in leadership.

Nyasha had more than five years' experience in school leadership and was a catholic nun. She led an all-girls high church school with a staff compliment of 50 teachers (15 males and 35 females). She did not really have a role model but wanted to be unique and explore her unique talents. Her compassion for the girl child led her to join the teaching profession after her business degree. One of her top achievements was taking over leadership of a church school as an African female after more than 125 years of white German Catholic Sisters' leadership. Heading such a school had some racial challenges, but she was shaken. After five years of her leadership, the school surpassed the standard that existed before her joining the school to become head. She considered her fellow religious sisters as family from whom she got moral, emotional and religious support. Being a religious sister, she surrendered herself fully to the school community leadership as she had no husband and children that could be hindrances to the execution of her duties.

5.3 School Heads' Narratives

The findings were theorised in line with the research questions, literature review and theoretical framework highlighted in the previous chapters. I presented the narratives in paraphrase form and used mostly direct quotations to capture the participants' voices. Content analysis was employed.

5.3.1 Gender disparity and parity

The majority of the female participants I engaged with had knowledge of parity and disparity as they experienced discrimination in their line of working one way or the other. They understood disparity as the inequalities in educational leadership and parity as equality or fairness irrespective of gender. Most of the heads had a sound idea of what gender parity and disparity is. The following excerpts are provided to show how some school heads conceptualised gender disparity and parity.

Tavonga narrated that:

When you are talking of gender parity, you are looking at equal abilities, equal distribution, and taking people as equal despite their gender. Then disparity, is when we have got so many things disturbing that system of parity, which can be disturbed by politics, culture or social setup.

In addition, Tadiswa described parity and disparity in the context of equality and inequality as captured in the following excerpt:

What I understand about that is that there is some difference between men and women. In as much as we do our work, in different sectors, regardless of it being in education or not in education, there is some difference somehow. So that difference is what we may want to look at as disparity, we are not equal, there is inequality.

Mbali conceptualised gender parity as:

Looking at the equality and fairness in terms of male and female getting the same opportunities. Disparity is the difference in numbers of males and females.

Natsai concurred with the above assertion and said:

Gender parity is equal treatment of people while disparity is the opposite.

Likewise, Nyaradzo explained that:

Disparity is unequal treatment of people. More girls, less boys there is disparity.

Tavonga went on to clarify that:

Gender parity, needs to be considered a lot. For example if we have district schools inspectors (DSIs) who are male at District level no females, schools inspectors are male, DSI male, Provincial Education Director (PED) male, may be the new deputy PED is female, how much influence does she have? The disparity issue is just too much. When implementation of things is needed, nothing is suggested from bottom going up, it comes from the top going down (yet we have more females in most schools).

Research participants' views resonated with literature as gender refers to personal and social constructs. There is no need to have disparities in leadership as it results in the stratification of power (Chisamya et al., 2012; Gadoth & Heymann, 2020). Gender disparity is therefore the inequality between men and women in all spheres, including school leadership (Katiyar, 2016). When the issue of disparity was looked at in Harare province, one could not help but notice that statistics show that there are more female teachers than males in schools. However, higher up the ladder, there were more male school heads than their female counterparts.

When looking at participants' reactions and the transformational leadership theoretical framework engaged within this study, there is an evident need for a change towards gender parity. One has to look at disparities in light of the possible changes that can be implemented so as to change this mind-set to parity (Chabaya et al., 2009). Gender inequalities obstruct the social transformation and development of women. As posited by Creswell and Poth (2016), the transformational theory focuses on eradicating issues that include suppression, alienation and hegemony.

5.3.2 Years of headship service

The participants had varying levels of experience in headship positions which ranged from 5 to 24 years. The Zimbabwean Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education had a policy in the 80s and 90s whereby a head's position was categorized according to the student population. The more the number of children, the higher the position of the school head. Small schools had heads at a lower

level compared to their bigger school counterparts, but this came incrementally. Fadzai expressed that heads were not automatically awarded Head 1 positions that had large student populations. Instead, they would be appointed to small schools to start with. They had to work extra hard at these small schools compared to their counterparts to be promoted from Head 3, 2 and eventually Head 1. These small schools were usually located in remote rural areas. In fact, one had to be a deputy head 1, 2 and 3 before being eligible to apply to be head. However, according to Natsai, this policy of categorising heads was done away with by the Ministry of Education in 2001. The Ministry of Education announced that a Head is a Head and was equal in headship irrespective of school size or location. This new approach allowed female heads to come to the forefront and be allocated schools to start as heads which was not based on levels.

Bush, Bell, and Middlewood (2019) and Adams, Kutty, and Zabidi (2017) postulate that leadership encompasses educational administration and is centralised on relevant professional development and monitoring of school functions. Both responsibilities are found in both primary and secondary settings irrespective of school location and enrolment.

5.3.3 Reasons for working at different schools

The school heads asserted that different professional and social reasons caused movement from one school to the other. Some teachers were appointed to headship after successfully applying for headship positions. Others were appointed on promotion from the classroom teacher or teacher in charge (TIC) or Senior Mistress to Deputy Head then Head. Such was the case, according to my first interview with Tariro. After completing her form 4, she told me she was selected to take up a teaching post after her brilliant participation in the schools' programme entitled '*Education for Living*'. This is how she found herself in the teaching profession. Using her teaching experience, she then applied for a headship post and was successful. Some of her other colleagues were

recommended by their teachers to do nursing posts, something she personally preferred. These were immediately posted to local hospitals for training. Generally, some school heads moved from school to school during the head 3, 2, and 1 as was the case then. Others changed schools because of family locations and commitments, and some because promotion would be available at different schools.

5.3.4 How the school community respond to female leadership

5.3.4.1 Learners

In general, most learners seemed to be more accommodating and respectful of female heads because of their motherly nature. Some would test the head's tenacity and effectiveness first before accepting her. In view of this, Fadzai articulated that:

During my tenure as Head, I discovered that many learners had a lot of respect for me. Once they know that you are principled and that you support them in their educational endeavours, they demonstrate a lot of respect for you. The learners respected me a lot because I am fair and firm with them. When it comes to the educational issues, I support them without any reservations. I want them to do well to make sure that they succeed. I always try to provide inspiration to these young learners so that they follow me as a role model.

In concurrence, Tariro elaborated that:

I have noted that girl children in the school and all learners in general are undoubtedly receptive to my leadership. This could be because we have more female teachers than males in the school. There are 39 female teachers against 2 male teachers. Since more teachers are female, this motivates female students and we do not discriminate against the boys during our interactions. We also give them the opportunity to do what they can as boys. During examination girls tend to outperform boys.

Tariro expressed the view that male students would try to undermine female teachers first then change for the better after the head stood her ground, as the following citation reveals:

Schools Y and Z were co-educational. Initially when I assumed headship, the boys tried to undermine my authority but later on they realised that we meant business and they changed to being fully supportive of me. Equally, the girls initially thought that

since we are of the same gender, they had nothing to learn from me. However, with the passage of time, they realised that we wanted them to realise their dreams at school. They changed their perception of me and cooperated fully. What happens first is that learners want to put you to test, if you stamp your foot down, you win the war and their respect as well. So learners normally want to see whether you have them at heart or not, but prior to that, they are mischievous and they just want to test you but afterwards they realise you mean business.

5.3.4.2 Parents

On the other hand, parents were used to males being in headship positions, which required female heads to prove themselves before being accepted by them. Some parents' bodies, such as school development committees (SDCs), were supportive, but some had ill intentions when it came to tenders and supply of goods and services to the school. In view of this issue, Tariro had this to share:

Parents are very positive but we have some male parents who have issues with female leaders.

In addition, Nyasha indicated that school parents can have differing views. In her case, she also had some issues of discrimination. In view of this, she explained that:

Let me give you my life background, where I am coming from. You see, I have come to school S as the first black Head. For more than a century the school was headed by white heads. We are heading towards "X" years mark. I am the first African head and a woman for that matter to head the school which over the years has been in the hands of white female heads. This little background tells a big story. My experience with parents tells me that, some of our African parents do not have faith and confidence in people of their own colour. But for me it is really sad because it does not really affect the way I do things. By nature I do things that I believe in and I don't really worry about what the other persons think about me. So because of that I always find my way through. So I think when I look at my relationship with parents at school S, I have a group of parents that were led by the white heads, who found it very difficult to appreciate and accept that, first of all, a black person is leading and secondly that it's a woman. Also my age does not really add any advantage to myself. I became a Head in my mid-30s. To me it's a mature age. You don't have to be 60 to get a responsibility or to get a job or to apply for a job of responsibility. You don't have to. How do you measure maturity? Do people look at the number of years or it's all about competence. Firstly is the person suited for the job and can they perform. I think it's varied, I don't want to say, I always have problems with parents. There are some

parents that really appreciate the fact that I can work and can relate with and understand children of the 21st century which maybe failing to do at home. So I think I have a mixed bag of parents.

5.3.4.3 Teachers

As far as teachers were concerned, male teachers in some cases undermined the authority of female Heads and were not so supportive. Quite a number of insubordination cases were experienced from some male teachers which included lack of respect, absenteeism, reporting for work late and refusing to comply with female heads' orders. Heads found some female teachers from the city (urban areas) to be more critical of female heads than female teachers from rural areas.

Females from urban areas were said to be judgemental of female heads based on one's dress-code, hairstyle, the car she drives, where she lived, the high school she attended as a student and whether she had any exposure of teaching or heading an affluent Group A-rated school. Tariro supported this notion by saying

At school "M", people really looked down on me because I was coming from former Group B School and school "M" school being a former Group A school was viewed as being upper class school.

Natsai agreed to this when she said:

The reason why I am saying I was tried and tested at school X is because when I joined that school, I was from the rural setup and you know with Harare teachers, they are pompous and they would say we cannot be led by someone who has come from the rural setup. What does she have? They even want to know about your background, what she has as personal belongings and so forth. They also want to know even your marital status and anything related to that. So what they did is that they actually resisted me. They did not want to help me. But what was interesting was that the school was dilapidated and needed refurbishment which I later did.

Pindikai concurred when she observed that:

Resistance is from the females. Most times resistance is from those who have failed to make it in life and secondly they do not have enough qualifications to prove themselves and they do not have the ability to improve themselves.

Female heads had to go the extra mile in proving themselves to female teachers. However, in some cases, females were supportive of their fellow female heads, as highlighted by Tadiswa, who observed that:

We are in good books and we work together well. Our school has more females than males and I am happy that our pass rate is quite high. We have never gone below 90% for the past 5 years. We try as much as possible to work together as a family. You always have one or two rotten eggs of course, but the generally higher percentage pass rate is a result of collective hard work.

Tavonga indicated that she had a good working relationship with most of her staff and motivated them to do even better, as testified below:

As is always expected, some staff members render support while others do not. You don't really need to have support from all of them. It is the environment at the work place that should be favourable to prompt every worker to do their best. In fact, I am a listening head who believes in the democratic principles of headship. I always consider their challenges and make an effort to work them out. In drafting school timetables, we consider distances they have to travel to school as most of them use public transport which currently is very limited due to COVID 19 pandemic- induced restrictions. Those that come from very far we give them slots after the first two periods in the morning as way of accommodating them by allowing them to arrive at school. With staff development sessions mounted at the school to internally upgrade staff, a lot has been learnt. When I transferred from the school more than 20 staff members also decided to leave. I don't know the reasons but you can infer.

Tavonga has been moved around a lot, and in all cases, it was to revive schools that were almost derelict or had some crisis of some sort. She once left the school to head another new school, and when she left, some staff members left the school as well, another school had dwindled, and she was summoned to revive it.

5.3.4.4 Line Supervisors

Some heads were fortunate to receive all the support from their line managers such as line supervisors (District Schools Inspectors (DSIs) and Provincial Education Directors) (PEDs). These

line supervisors would advise on guidelines such as labour disputes, school policies, conflict resolutions, accounting issues and spearheading of fundraising initiatives.

On the other hand, some line supervisors were labelled as corrupt and supported some factional groups in schools that would work against their heads. Although DSI's were quick to carry out investigations of false allegations made by staff or parents, some of these would be malicious, false and made out of jealousy, intimidation and means of getting the female Heads fired. Thankfully, most of the challenges would then be proven false. Most allegations resulted in female heads being falsely accused of misuse of school funds. In such cases, the female heads had to fight back and defend their integrity. This was supported by Fadzai who had this to say:

At that higher level, the DSIs understand that they have to work with women. They are careful when they are dealing with us as women because they know we can answer back, we know our rights, we know what we are supposed to be doing. So you find that they are quite cautious, but here and there they tend to look down upon us because we are of a different gender. In working with these supervisors, I have often sounded the fact that men and women are equal, as the latter are equally competent in their conduct as heads of institutions. I am not like their wives that they can give orders to. Schools are run on the basis of policy which every leader, male or female has to follow. We are all heads and we are at the same level.

5.3.4.5 General community attitude

The communities at large were said to be judgemental and sceptical at first, but once a head had proven herself in terms of efficiency and effectiveness, the communities would then be supportive. Some were said to be helpful only if there was something in it for them. However, the general consensus was that most heads worked well with their SDCs, and the few challenges they faced were resolved in the end. The following excerpt from Mbali is provided to testify this:

At the first school, they were asking for me to come back and finish projects. As I indicated, the parents themselves have no problem, but you have some individuals who for some reasons have ulterior motives. At the school where I am, there was an SDC Chairperson who wanted to politicize the school. He was trying to control the school using his political power. He also wanted to tether me to the party which I snubbed.

The moment you do that you are bound to be manipulated. The school is governed by Government and I comply with government regulations and statutes and I would say no to other programmes that he would like to come up with. He would try to organize unauthorized meetings for people to attend at the school without seeking approval or notifying the school. He would want to organize meetings unrelated to school for war vets to come. I would ask them to seek permission first from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education first before the meeting would take place. That scared him stiff and would stop being bully. So you see, you only need to be brave as a woman to get things going.

Rudo concurred when she articulated that:

The community tends to appreciate the head whenever students' results come out positive in addition to successfully implementing developmental projects. But as usual, before you prove yourself they show some hostility. There is a general phobia of change as they will not be sure about the attributes of incoming person particularly if the person is female as we are generally looked down upon. But the moment people get to know that their children are benefiting because of your presence, they will now accept you and begin to support you. Prior to that, you have challenges whereby anonymous letters are written denigrating you with a view to discrediting you so that you leave the place. You don't know where they are coming from and what not and so on. The idea is to make life difficult if not impossible for you. When they see positive results coming, they become supportive. But as usual, you get one or two, despite the good effort, who are still negative and would want to just pull you down. At some schools for instance, at school M we have challenges of competing pressure groups. No matter how much you excel, they will try to find something negative about you.

5.3.5 Challenges faced by female heads

5.3.5.1 Level of acceptance as school heads by colleagues

Female heads also faced gender bias attitudes towards them from both male and female colleagues. Some assumed that they did not attain their role as heads through merit but through the influence of politically motivated pressure groups such as 'Affirmative Action Group' that elevates females to positions of power. Female heads had to go an extra mile in proving their competence compared to male counterparts. Furthermore, some female colleagues just doubted their credentials, assuming they would have been promoted via dubious other means. In view of this, Mbali asserted that:

The other problem is lack of respect by other women for women leaders such as female school heads. It is a very sad and unfortunate situation where women have a tendency to want pull their own kind down. As women, we are supposed to support and empower each other. It is something that is lacking from women from different walks of life. I look at them and wonder where it is coming from. Why do they treat others the way they do? Personally, I think that there is lack of respect for themselves or maybe they are having issues somewhere. I really don't know why women act the way they do. I don't take it like as a personal thing because I feel that those people need to come to a stage where they have personal confidence in themselves to believe that someone can do even a challenging task. It is sad that women don't support each other, but I personally don't base my work on the support I get from people, because I didn't come to work to solicit for support, I came to do work.

Female heads also faced insubordination from both female and male teachers who repeatedly absented themselves from work without good reason. On the issue Tavonga commented that:

When I came back to "Chihuta" location, remember I was a teacher here before promotion. So when I came back, I faced resistance. I was a teacher then came back as Deputy Head / Acting Head then became Head. Everything that I would say, I would find it written and sent somewhere. I would receive anonymous letters asking me to leave the school or I would face unspecified action.

In some cases teachers reported late for work, an indication that they lacked respect for female heads. The following narrative by Fadzai demonstrates her concerns:

Sometimes working with the females can be difficult. They want to talk too much. They do not support you fully so that we collectively produce good results for our school. Together we can then move forward. Sometimes they don't support you at all, but there are some who will stand by you through thick and thin, but those are few. Most are those people that just want to sit in the classroom, sit in the staff room, and mark their books and some who will help you. They are there, who will ask you what can I do, but these are few. For the gentlemen I think they naturally find it difficult to work with female leadership due issues to with gender role socialisation. When you ask them to do a task, they tend to question my authority and they mumble as they go away to undertake the task though. When you are a leader people should just have that respect. In order to have things done, you have to stamp your authority and most of the time when you stamp your authority, they will know that you are the boss there. Sometimes you find some male teachers who want to come late to work almost every day. You have to follow them up and you have got to be firm with them. They can make deliberate mistakes and if you don't do something, they take advantage and derail everything.

Natsai also observed that:

For me the male teachers are so supportive. I might be having problems with the deputies, but not the teachers. Deputies are behind us but are not following us. They

are chasing after us with the feeling that you must move then I will take over. And at times they actually fool themselves, that if this person is no longer at the school, he or she might be better and he will end up influencing the teachers, that this is their policy. Although it is not possible to prove information coming through rumour, it is alleged that certain female heads were attached romantically to certain officials and had received headship posts through their liaisons (labelled carpet interviews).

5.3.5.2 Conflicting responsibilities

A number of challenges were highlighted by all the participants. Most lamented over the difficulty in striking a balance between family expectations and satisfying the core duties of school headship. There are roles and responsibilities that one needs to attend and participate in duties that would consume time and take her away from the roles of the Head. Some of the challenges mentioned include the motherly duty of having to stay home and nurse a sick child or spouse was also required of them. Furthermore, other conflicting responsibilities mentioned were when the female Head had to be away from the family for a couple of days attending workshops outside the city such as NASH conferences in areas away from their homes for a prolonged period of time. Moreover, the other challenge would be when the Head was still in her child bearing years and falls pregnant and had to take maternity leave to have a child. Nyaradzo mentioned facing a challenge whilst working for a non-governmental school for children with disabilities. She was required to undertake so many roles that were not in line with the job description of a Head. She had a huge responsibility to source funding for the overheads expenditure of the school such as salaries, rentals and day to day running of the school. She later relinquished her post because she was overstretched, was vulnerable as a female and could not cope with the responsible authorities' demands.

Some female heads asserted that their spouses lost the zeal to support their wives as they became more and more powerful in their leadership roles. They felt that they were tested on weighing whether to continue in leadership roles or withdraw and be more submissive as housewives. They felt that some female heads end up losing their husbands to concubines as, at times, they become

busy to the extent of neglecting their matrimonial responsibilities. More male gender bias behaviours were also seen in their lack of respect for female heads during meetings where some female heads faced humiliation from male teachers undermining their authority and embarrassing them in public. Some female heads also faced sexual harassment from their male counterparts and those in high offices such as District Schools Inspectors and Provincial Directorate. It has also been assumed by most people that women rise to headship positions after giving sexual favours to senior male supervisors. This attitude deters many females from applying for headship positions, fearing that they may fall victims to sexual harassment or abuse. There were known cases of some female heads that had fallen prey to sexual advancements so that they secure headship positions. This was singled out as a challenge by other female heads as they felt the need and pressure to prove that they got the posts purely on merit.

5.3.5.3 Lack of adequate staff development

The school heads were mostly promoted based on merit, experience, qualifications or through referrals by immediate supervisors (D.S.Is). Some were trained and gained leadership skills through being a deputy or senior teacher for some time shadowing the school head, but some did not get any formal training but did what they could under the circumstances. Staff development sessions were done holistically but could not cater for individual differences.

Most of the heads had been promoted to headship without adequate financial knowledge on how to run the school finances. Staff development concerning finance and general administration of a school was greatly needed. Most Heads were promoted without any formal financial literacy qualifications and were not adequately prepared to run all the different facets that come with being the head. School Development Committees (SDC), that is, the parents' bodies, were said to be inconsistent in their help to heads of schools. Female heads also lacked support from parents

concerning raising fees to meet the needs of the school. There was also of lack of support from PEDs to approve school fees increases. In some instances, SDC Chairpersons would disregard female Head's authority and would authorize some financial transactions without the knowledge of the Head from the student levies. This caused friction between Heads and SDC chairpersons. This scenario is clearly evident in Nyaradzo's narration:

I think I should tell you the truth, I worked productively with the previous SDC. The current one, is giving me headaches. They comprise members who are civil servants and those who are not employed. The calibre of people who make up the SDC now have problems if they see me holding a cool drink. If they see me driving my Ford Ranger, they have a problem. They always whisper to one another about where I got money to buy such an expensive car. Maybe their reaction is due to the fact that I am a female head. I thought if there had been a male head they would not react that way. So they discriminate against female heads. Some of the things don't make sense, they take advantage of the fact that I am a female head.

Lack of transparency from some of the SDC chairpersons in choosing cost effective suppliers to carry out maintenance work or procurement led to conflict of interest. The contract would be approved by SDC chairpersons who stood to gain from scrupulous deals and tenders. Schoolheads' training failed to highlight the role of SDCs thereby causing challenges. In some instances, heads were unable to fully scrutinize illicit financial dealings of SDC chairpersons. Such gaps in knowledge created problems as heads were not informed of their limits and their role.

5.3.5.4 Gender bias attitudes experienced by female heads

Because of socialisation, in the Zimbabwean culture, it is normative for males to feel more superior to females due to issues to do with patriarchy. Tadiswa described a situation whereby, if a female drives a car incorrectly down the road, she would face verbal abuse and insults from male drivers. A husband and wife may both be heads of different schools, but it is expected of the wife to conduct chores when they return home. But the husband would have time to unwind and read a paper in front of the television despite their jobs being equally demanding and operating at the same level.

At staff workshops, men are always given priority to speak while the female are asked to assist in praying, leading the national anthem, catering and serving the guests. When a female is appointed head following a successful interview, her position is questioned whether she used other means to obtain the job such as affirmative action or through using her sexuality to manipulate the panel's decision (sexual insinuations) or could be having an affair with an influential member of the panel. Women are not well represented in high powered positions. There seems to be a glass ceiling they reach as they go to the top. At universities, the entry requirements are lowered for women, implying that women are not able to achieve high points like men. Tariro pointed out that the entry requirements to be considered for an engineering degree at universities was 15 points for males and 12 for females in support of the affirmative action programme.

It is not taken into consideration that women have chores and lots of responsibilities to do at home compared to their male counterparts who have ample time to study without any interruptions. Female heads who were either pregnant or breast feeding were not entered into the database to attend upcoming workshops and training courses. Other female heads who were young (as in the case of Nyasha) were questioned whether they had the capabilities of running well established schools of over 120 years.

Some female heads found that there was a discrepancy in the way they were treated compared to their male counterparts. Gender bias existed between the two. The disparity in numbers would mean that if there was any voting to be done, males will be more and if the decision favours males, numbers will consequently be against them. Female heads found that they were excluded from certain workshops. Important local and international work-related workshops were attended by male heads. In cases where visitors came to see model schools, the majority of schools headed by

male heads were visited thus demonstrating a lack of equal opportunity between male and female heads. Female heads' schools were considered as a last resort.

Natsai reiterated the gender discrimination experienced at school level:

As a female head, I faced challenges of resistance from the teachers, from the rural area to the urban setup, that's at Nehanda school. And also even when I came to this school Kaguvi, because of my firmness, I faced some challenges. Normally in the urban setup teachers don't want to teach, they just want to come and register their presence, do one or two lessons then they disappear for their unsanctioned other business. So when you try to be firm there will be resistance. Normally they write anonymous letters so that they can distract your attention. That is the challenge we face. We are glad that even the Ministry realised that where there are anonymous letters they ought to investigate and most of the time they find that things are going well.

The school female heads asserted that there existed a social construct that stereotypes female heads as being inferior to men. Natsai went on to explain that gender biases had been going on for long;

Long ago there were certain workshops that were held, and they would say ladies you do not need to attend because the workshops are going to be held during late hours of the day and out of town. As ladies you might be pregnant or breast-feeding and it would not be convenient for you to attend, so it would not suit someone who is breast feeding. So automatically you will be left out on the workshop invite. And unfortunately once you are left out, you are completely left out because everything is recorded on the computer and those who attend are listed as people to invite next time. So should there be another workshop called upon you will not be included. So the invite will continue to be directed to those who attended the last workshop, and because you did not attend because you will not be in the computer database and consequently not receive an invite. Sometimes you are pregnant and these other issues that you cannot go, because you are not feeling well, but with a man no problem he is always available to attend all workshops.

They felt that there was need for an immense paradigm shift that recognizes that females were just as competent and should be given equal opportunities with men. This was clearly articulated by Mbali who stressed that:

The other problem is that there is lack of respect for women leaders by other women. It is a very sad situation. As women, we are supposed to support and empower each other. It is something that is lacking from women of different walks of life. I look at them and wonder where is it coming from and why do they treat other women the way

they do. Personally I think that there is lack of respect for themselves or maybe they have issues somewhere. I really don't know why women act the way they do. I don't take it personally, because I feel that those people need to come to a stage where they have personal confidence in themselves to believe that someone can do even a challenging task, which they think is challenging. It's sad that women don't support each other, but I personally don't base my work on the support I get from people. I simply do my work the way it should be done following all laid down rules, regulations and protocols. You would expect better from women, but what do we see, we see the opposite.

Natsai felt the need for spouses of leading women to accept that their wives were capable of making decisions at work and at home. She felt that most make improper decisions based on assumptions that women with high posts were arrogant:

Let's say I make a mistake generally, the husband might end up saying, you are doing that because you are the leader at the school, and you want to be a leader at the house. So whenever we have a disagreement, you find that he won't take that lightly. He will say you are saying that because you want to be the head and because of this character of being a leader you don't want to succumb to a man's pressure. And this resulted in me being separated, I stood my ground and he eventually reconciled and came back.

One of the major issues pronounced by participants was the lack of financial resources to sustain the growth and progress of schools. The economic environment of the country also made it virtually impossible to have free flow of finance. The country faced economic challenges which had been compounded by hyper-inflation. Nyaradzo lamented that teachers and support staff were not spared by the current economic situation and are sympathised with.

The hyper-inflationary environment resulted in the skyrocketing of prices of basic goods and services thus making it difficult for parents to sustain paying school fees as when needed to do so. Heads woes were worsened by the novel Covid-19 pandemic that resulted in school closures on a number of times. This means that there was no income in schools thus stagnating development programmes. Because there was no sufficient income, it was even more difficult for parents pay levies to assist schools to provide for their teachers and students with adequate personal protective

equipment (PPEs), fumigation chemicals and hand sanitizers. The year 2020 goes down in history as a very difficult year and showed women heads more challenges emanating from lockdowns as not enough income from school fees was received. The other challenge highlighted was the lack of support from seniors in authority. Challenges were observed when seeking approvals for tuition fees to fund projects in school as there was also lack of resources to fund the projects. Schools implored their seniors that they be given the permission of running projects that boost the school finances with less red tape and bureaucracy.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I presented the data, participant profiles and shared their narratives with regards to gender disparities in school leadership. This was the qualitative data generated through interviews and narratives shared by 10 participants in Harare province. Thus, the in-depth data indicate robust narratives expressed by women leading primary and secondary schools. There was a level of consistency in successes and challenges and some divergence on some aspects highlighted during interviews. The participants indicated some of the causes leading to gender disparities in educational leadership. The next chapter focuses on data analysis and a discussion of measures that can be implemented to achieve gender parity I presented data from the questionnaires and the ten semi-structured interviews. It is therefore evident from the findings that the majority of respondents to the questionnaire were above 50 years, married and with children and had more than five years' experience in school leadership. The next chapter shall focus on the strategies employed by the school leaders in pursuit of gender parity in educational leadership.

CHAPTER SIX: STRATEGIES TO MITIGATE TOWARDS GENDER PARITY

*“A female leader should not feel small. You should feel you are a leader. You can do it.”
Tavonga (2020)*

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the data generated from the female school heads through narratives and interviews. The chapter presented the profiles of the participants who expressed their views on gender disparities in school leadership. All participants were willing to share their academic and professional journeys, and discussed their successes and challenges. The in-depth qualitative data indicated robust narratives expressed by women leading primary and secondary schools.

Chapter 6 highlighted the strategies school heads employed to counter challenges that cause disparities, and such measures focused on parity. The current chapter highlights how female heads strived for women’s agency towards parity as they are ones who are subjected to social and cultural constraints in the course of their work. The study argues that women are not passive to these challenges but develop mechanisms to mitigate and break the glass ceiling. The study also brought out a descriptive discussion of the findings generated that may motivate more female heads to go for leadership positions in schools. Mitigatory strategies towards parity were noted from the shared narratives by the female heads. Pertinent findings through content analysis were also provided.

This was also underscored by the narratives generated through interviews, and such a qualitative methodology provided sufficient data to work with. The semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to share their journeys, share personal views and their more than five years’ experience gave them the springboard to come up with mitigatory ways and strategies towards tipping the gender scales towards gender parity. I recorded and transcribed all the narratives except one from a participant who preferred not to be recorded, so I took notes during the interviews.

6.2 Data Presentation and Discussion

6.3.1 Mitigatory ways employed by female school heads when faced with challenges

All participants proffered several strategies employed towards gender parity and equality. They promulgated ideas such as inviting prominent motivational speakers to speak to women about the leadership at women-only gatherings. In addition, participants suggested staff development workshops to inform women about the possibility of being competent school heads without any gender restrictions. This contributes to dispelling fears of holding high positions such as headship.

Female heads that I engaged with had a positive attitude towards challenges. This is in line with the transformational theory that focuses on improving the status quo. They described themselves as empathetic because most of the challenges people face at family level are known more by women than men. They also regarded themselves as having exposure to discipline issues and lenient on meting out punishment on students but would rather counsel to correct wayward behaviour. The motherly approach adopted by female heads was said to be positive for the students in changing their ways for the better as the student will always want to feel appreciated. The female heads expressed that in Zimbabwe, the economic challenges caused by inflation are resulting in negative social effects such as domestic violence and broken families. This made school leaders social counsellors as they seemed to be more sympathetic to parents' problems. They advised and suggested solutions for the benefit of the student, thereby fostering good relationships with the parents.

6.3.2 Female school leaders association

Rudo, Tavonga, Fadzai and Natsai felt the need for the urgent establishment a female school leaders' association to advance issues to do with parity. They felt overwhelmed by male

counterparts during elections and discussions as the numbers were not in their favour. In view of this, Natsai affirmed that:

Female heads should create time to meet and discuss their successes. At first I was the only female Head in Chaminuka District (not real name) but now we are 6 female Heads in the area. It used to have no females in the past but now because of gender balance, there are females coming up. In the past the females used to say they cannot take up the posts because they did not want to leave their husbands and be separated from their family. But now they are coming up though slowly.

Rudo suggested more workshops stressing gender parity as a positive move towards equity (mitigation). Emancipation and transformational changes are necessary as women are change agents and need to be more actively involved in planning as per national gender policy. They need to be exposed to leadership positions even as junior teachers. Women were advised to assume small leadership posts at school where they need to be accountable.

The 2015 Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), number 5 that looks at gender equality, is another ammunition that must be used by school heads to push for parity. Zimbabwe complies with the United Nations and World Health Organisation requirements and, as such, these exceptional frameworks must be included in their proposals for gender parity. Social progress can be achieved through the coordination of all umbrella bodies that support equality and equity in gender. There is a need to investigate what is slowing down pace given the national, continental and international acts in full support of gender parity. Gender-sensitive approaches are feasible and can yield the desired results. Proactive measures should be observed to remove gender biases to push more women into key management positions.

Affirmative action seeks to redress previous discrimination, especially on women and having such quotas in place benefits women in, according to the greater opportunities, especially in leadership roles and heads associations. This speaks to the theoretical framework of transformational uprise

that upholds women as capable and having the potential to inspire future leaders. The colonial background indicates past injustices against women, and as such positive discrimination of affirmative action will be in order. This is in line with complying with the tenets of the Zimbabwean constitution. The SADC gender quotas highlight the need to implement and ensure gender parity at all levels (Morna & Dube, 2014). Dube and Dziva (2014) observed that despite the tenets of the 2013 constitution (Section 8, 17 and 56) and SADC protocol regarding 50/50 representation in both house of assembly and local government level, current ministerial representation leave a lot to be desired in terms of gender parity.

According to international literature, there is a link between school effectiveness and female leadership whereby Eagly and Carli (2012) assert that female leaders have proven that it can be done. The issue of numbers vis a vis gender needs to be redressed for gender parity to be achieved practically as it needs to be more than just policy oratory, but tangible results have been observed when women have been appointed schools.

Eden and Gupta (2017) and O'Brien et al. (2017) maintain that gender equality is the equal treatment of men and women in the workplace. Women school leaders are therefore in line with global gender parity policies and should be accorded a chance to run schools. Mawire (2012) and Nkomo (2014) agree that the patriarchal control in African countries such as Zimbabwe has led to the non-practical application of the documented legislature on gender. In light of these assertions, roles and responsibilities have to be equally shared, and if a woman qualifies for a post, measures should be in place to encourage her to take up the post. Favourable conditions have to be observed so as to support the women to occupy the decision making roles. Husbands and extended family have to be aware of the wider social implications of giving women support so as to curtail the social gender norms that discriminate women.

The questionnaires had some background questions that indicated that most women that participated in the interview had female role models and looked up to such to be who they are today. They were asked how such role models influenced their career paths which illustrates how gender mainstreaming has become a force in community development (Loeb et al., 2010).

As far as I can determine from my study, the transformational theoretical framework and related literature, the fact that women are socialised under patriarchal societies make some of them take a supportive role instead of decision making roles. The study findings reveal that most school heads families support them, and that there is a need for fellow women to support other women in leadership (Faulkner, 2015).

6.3.3 Current and open door policy

Three of the school heads (Rudo, Tavonga & Nyaradzo) concurred that they adopted an open-door policy for all stakeholders to discuss issues before they escalated using the '*School Policy*' provided by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education Policy as a template to deal with any issues that arise pertaining to the running of schools. The school policies are aligned with Ministries statutory instruments. Tavonga had some advice for female heads when faced with challenges when she said that:

You stand your ground and they need to know who you are because people are different. The staff need to know who you are so you can manage them. Or else you will not make progress. You need also to be familiar with current policy, and be one who does not waiver. You have to work hard and achieve goals, if you do not, you will face challenges. If you do your work you will never face any problems with them. A good leader should be exemplary. In fact, in leadership people also look at the way you dress and carry yourself. The way you dress, walk and talk should mirror the authority that you hold. You must command respect and earn it by the way you carry yourself. You need to be impartial towards teachers and not have favourites. Teachers should feel embarrassed that they have not done their work by themselves instead of being asked to do their work, a thing which is embarrassing.

The current Zimbabwean constitution, with regards to gender laws and policy shows a paradigm shift between pre-independence and post-independence Zimbabwe. The gender parity laws have shown positive discrimination in tandem with those in other countries such as South Africa, where women are underrepresented as well. Tavonga indicated that heads should apply their understanding of labour law when it came to human relations issues. Furthermore, she advised that:

School heads should be straight forward and be principled. Don't measure yourself against others – just be yourself. But taking your role as a leader so that the school can move. You just have to study the type of community you are working with. It's not always you the leader who is right, the community may also be right. You just have to advise one another on why you are doing certain things. You have to find diplomatic ways that you can communicate with for the people to understand. There is no proper formula because people have different characters. You have to see what works in your situation.

Moreover, in the same context of mitigation strategies, Nyaradzo added that:

I can say one of the strategies is that I stick to the policy and refer to it to deal with matters that arise. I sit my teachers down and tell them what the policy states. If they break the policy it can attract a charge. I explain, I negotiate with them. I refer to the policies and then I am a counsellor so I counsel them.

Rudo, who had 21 years' experience as a head also expounded the need for open-door policy when she said:

I have an open door policy at my school. If there is anyone who has something, that person can come and inform me about what is happening. It helps a lot because if you cling onto bureaucracy, even some of the colleagues whom you work with will not inform you. You will miss many things if you shut your door. So I always have that open door policy to allow all stakeholders to come and share their concerns with me. That way I keep abreast with what's happening around me and the school.

Nyaradzo further concurred to the effective use of an open door policy to resolve conflicts when she said:

During meetings I tell them, I have an open door policy and they are free to offer any suggestions. They should not discuss with each other but approach me and hear it from me.

6.3.4 A school head as a community pillar

Nyaradzo indicated the need to respect school children's rights and be a mother to the students by protecting them from incompetent teachers:

So with teachers the way I deal with them is that I am a parent to students. I stand for them. If a teacher works hard, I have no problem. If he does miscellaneous stuff but when he gets into the class and delivers, I have no problem with that because I am standing for the children. I don't want any teacher who gets in the classroom and waste the children's time. I don't like that. I will not get along with such a teacher and when I confront the problem, I tell the truth. I do not beat around the bush because in the end you will be blamed for the failures. With the teachers I have to be strict.

Rudo observed the need to have good public relations with all stakeholders, especially on the challenge of cultural differences. A female head was said to be quite likely to seek advice from the community and be listened to when seeking assistance, as affirmed by Rudo and Nyaradzo.

The school heads had vast knowledge on ways of mitigating challenges they faced. Nyaradzo spoke of using her understanding and using her discretion with members of staff when they had problems, as was the case when she had a female teacher who was persistently late for work. She then held a private meeting with the teacher, who disclosed her personal challenges due to HIV and AIDS repercussions, after which she was assisted accordingly. Nyaradzo expressed the need to be aware of the current economic situation in the country and felt that women were more sensitive to such problems:

I have noticed that because of the current economy people come to school with lots of burdens and at times they cannot cope... you really need to listen to their issues. Otherwise you can miss it. You really need to listen to what they say especially the issues of bus fare and food. Zimbabwe has dire economic challenges. The teachers we are having right now also have children in schools especially in secondary schools. They want to pay rentals and they don't have money. It's true even when they say in the media that teachers are getting less than USD\$35 (as of 2020 salary schedules).

So how do you expect such a teacher to come and deliver? It's not easy and they have to be understood.

Some heads were instructed by other parents to confront fathers who were not paying school fees (Tariro). In most cases, these intervention strategies were successful and some fathers paid school fees immediately after having previously refused to do so. Heads also had a positive impact on the families of their students in effecting change for the better. A consideration for favourable working conditions for women of child-bearing age that want to be the head was highlighted as an important strategy to lure female aspirants to apply for headship positions. The heads expressed that they acted as counsellors to parents, students and teachers alike. They felt that this helped them overcome some challenges. Female heads explained that they were able to understand the concerns of the girl child better than males. Natsai reiterated the international mantra that *'If you educate a girl child, you educate a nation'*.

6.3.5 Positive pass rates

Another aspect that kept on being referred to was the issue of good pass rates. The majority of the heads expressed that they earned respect as female heads because they were result-oriented, and that worked in their favour, and they then got validation through that route. Nyaradzo affirmed that:

Our pass rate is very good because we always exceed 96% mark so they like the way we do academic business here. So when 5 units (highest Zimbabwean primary school pass) are being asked for, we have them. Last year we had 12 students with 5 points So you can see that the school is doing well and parents like our hard work culture.

6.3.6 Professional advancement

Nyaradzo emphasised the need to keep on studying and advancing professionally so as to be eligible for promotions:

Like I said before, ask them to read, you cannot be the head if you just remain with a diploma.

The participants described women's personal achievements as a mitigatory strategy which enables them to overcome social and work-related barriers and insinuations that women are not effective leaders (Carli & Eagly, 2016). The heads which I interrogated in this study shared some of their achievements such as building more classrooms, refurbishing toilets, buying school vehicles, starting income-generating projects such as poultry and market gardening. Furthermore, to prove that these women made positive strides in their leadership roles, such accolades include the secretary bell award, that is, the highest merit award given to an individual or institution by the permanent secretary of education in the Zimbabwean Ministry of Education. Natsai emphasised the need to keep working hard irrespective of the school setting or your profile as a head for the realisation of set goals, as this raised the bar for most women. In view of this she reinforced that:

You work hard to prove to them that it is not the place that matters, it is the results out of that place. For your information, I am one of those heads that was just born a leader because when I was promoted to be a head, I had no degree. I do not have an 'A' Level, I am an 'O' level student who later learnt through distance education (Zimbabwe Open University distance learning) to obtain a degree. So I think you have something to write about. I improved and started personal staff development from a holder of a certificate to a degreed person.

6.3.7 Cultural transformations

The absence of the culture of matriarchy in Zimbabwe leads to fewer women vying for posts if the number of men wishing for such a post is high. In contrast, school heads organisations such as NAPH and NASH need concrete gender policies that guide them during elections. Of comparable thoughts are Lipton (2017) and Reis and Grady (2017) who contend that female leaders are more sensitive to the needs and feelings of students and parents. The findings suggest that some schools actually improved pass rates and effectiveness after female school leaders such as Tavonga, Natsai and Rudo were appointed as heads. The findings suggest that most female teachers qualify to head

with the relevant experience and qualifications but face extreme barriers to achieve this. Nyasha hammered on the need to remain positive to all staff members, even amid a plethora of challenges:

The other mitigatory way is focusing on the positive. So I think from what I have said, I work with a very good group of teachers, and I think the honest truth is we have lots of good mornings, where we meet in a positive space. So I think putting myself most of the time as someone that exude positive energy, I think that is really the best thing. Because positive energy really boosts you up and gives you more determination than focusing on people who are really negative. I say focusing on people who are negative it ruins your life at the end of the day. So I focus on the positive and every single day I have renewed energy and focus. In that way I have managed to remain happy through tribulations and challenges.

Another positive aspect of being a female head was the opportunity of being given first preference in some workshops or meetings where female representation would be required to balance the gender inequalities. Some workshops were said to call for 50% representation, according to Pindukai, and automatically a female head would then stand a chance, whereas the men usually outnumbered the women. Women showed the ability to exert their agency to achieve a gender scale tipped towards parity (Smith, Fisher, & Heath, 2011). Tariro, Fadzai, Tadiswa, Pindukai, Natsai, Rudo and Nyasha expressed this notion in their narratives when they said they stood for what they believed in and held their ground in all arisings and did not back down when they were right. Kizilaslan and Diktaş (2011) refer to schools as socialisation institutions, and as such much importance must be attached on how they are run as they have a bearing on the future of any country, Zimbabwe included. Such transformations will certainly cause a paradigm shift from a culture of gender disparity to a culture of gender parity in educational leadership.

6.3.8 What can be done differently to improve female heads' roles?

To help with strategies to undo the existing disparities, heads were asked about improvements they intend to see so as to curb the challenges. Natsai commented that:

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education must continue to have this issue of saying if you are a deputy don't ever envy or do anything bad to the head thinking you will head that particular school. That way you can only be a school head somewhere. By doing that they will be saving the lives of the heads. Otherwise they will die of stress not "juju" (witchcraft) because if someone is influencing teachers to resist your administration, it means that it is a problem every day to solve.

The participants expressed delight in having some gender-based changes in the education sector. They wished for holding staff development for heads and teachers on roles and responsibilities to avoid stepping on each other's toes. There was a general need to hold well-calculated meetings that touched on different school-related issues, especially finances, leadership styles, and how to deal with common challenges. There should be better and more effective communication between Heads and Ministry that are based on trust. As expressed by Tariro, there was a need for gender balance to be implemented as the positions get higher so that more women are seen at the top. She advocated for more affirmative action groups in favour of women to resolve the gender imbalance in leadership positions.

There is need for schools that the Ministry recommends as model schools to receive documented recognition. There is a need to empower female teachers by assigning them leadership roles in order for them to gain the confidence to apply for positions of leadership. In view of this background, Faulkner (2015) argues that the assertion that the gender discriminatory socialisation of women makes them believe that men are superior. Some end up lacking in confidence, and some end up seeking decision making roles when advanced in age. There have only been two female permanent secretaries in the Ministry of Education since independence in 1980. The female heads also felt the need for more to be done legislatively for better female legal representation. These changes would subsequently create a vast amount of opportunities in the education sector as well.

Women face a myriad of disparities but those interviewed shared narratives that highlight how they are coping and encouraging other future female heads to join them. Some Heads noted that it was difficult to effect change and better the conditions for other heads, considering that women were very poorly represented at the top in the Ministry. There were fewer women in high positions in the Ministry. Therefore, it was hard to effect change and have significant influence. However, the following choices and opportunities were volunteered by the participants: heads should make decisions based on the best interests of the students and the school at all times and aim to achieve big during their tenure and leave a good reputation and legacy. Gender parity and disparity need to be considered as there are more males appointed such as DSI positions at the district level and less female inspectors.

The study participants had some tips for those aspiring to be future school heads. These tips included being straight forward, having foresight and being critical and quick thinkers. They explained the need to withstand pressure (Nyasha) and have the ability to multi-task, being open-minded and goal-oriented. She emphasised the need to stand one's ground as captured:

Initially when I took over from my previous head, the challenge I faced first of all was discrimination on the basis of gender and age. I had to actually deal with physical or verbal abuse. People just complaining about one thing or the other. Then you say at the end of the day, I can't just stand here and be afraid of people. I am here for this job and I will do it so that people know that I am not just here to be terrified or belittled. With time people got to know that I am not afraid.

Another angle that Fadzai brought up was the need to motivate staff and work as a team. This is supported by the transformational theory, which is a reaction to the existing injustices and the need for change.

Prospective heads were advised to pursue studies not only in administration but child-sensitive social policies. Natsai highlighted the need to incorporate slow learners and assist them in

achieving high grades and establishing sound school-community synergies. She advised that heads should not be selective; they should take all learners on board rather than inclining themselves to academically gifted students. They should make provision for students who are not academically inclined but have visible talents in other vocational areas such as food and nutrition, fashion and fabrics and other skills-related subjects. Almost all heads stressed the issue of integrity. Mbali asserted that there was a need for strategic meetings to develop staff with a bias towards leadership/finance and administration. Tariro called for the will to research, read and keep up to date with current leadership trends. Tavonga emphasised the need for correct decorum, etiquette and humility. She stressed the need to know socializing boundaries and maintain professional parameters. Nyaradzo highlighted the need to strike a balance between work and home life. Natsai hoped that female leaders would not procrastinate or be complacent but aim high. They should continue breaking records of achievements.

Tadiswa added that potential female heads should continue to develop themselves by studying to obtain doctoral qualifications. Nyaradzo reiterated that female school heads should stand for their rights and do everything by the book, and not get involved in corrupt or illegal activities that put them in jeopardy. Pindukai expressed the need to identify weak teachers through lesson observations and reshuffle under-performers through staff appraisals to keep standards high. The women leaders in primary and secondary schools agreed on ensuring that teachers understood their roles and had to be monitored so as to achieve organisational goals.

6.3.9 Reasons why not many female teachers apply for headship positions

This question was asked to elicit the reasons why some deserving female heads did not go into leadership. One would be able to find mitigatory ways or solutions to that, thus resulting in more women taking up headship posts. The school heads mentioned that headship posts are usually

located in remote rural areas where aspiring heads just go to take up the posts and transfer in no time. However, transferring to better and less remote areas may be difficult once one agrees to take the post there unless one has strong connections with people in higher offices. This was the challenge of taking up posts in remote rural areas, which takes one away from her family and friends. Generally, aspiring female heads were reluctant to take up those posts hence the fewer women in headship positions. This was unlike male aspirants who did not care much about working far away from family as long as the wife remained behind to look after the home. Females also faced disapproval from their spouses for wanting to relocate out of town away from their family. They were usually perceived as wanting to neglect their marital roles as wives and mothers. Some other females were bound by a strong culture that demanded them to fulfil their roles as married women (Mapolisa & Madziyire, 2012). Women were at times disadvantaged by maternal roles and, as such, motivation was described as necessary to encourage them.

Gender roles amass domestic responsibilities on women especially those married with children and as such, some women may forgo their career advancement to focus on family without being under too much pressure (Miller, Duque, & Shrum, 2012). This required female heads to be present for the family and all that accompanied with being married. Furthermore, their remuneration for the extra responsibility was not much and, as such, they did not want to take the trouble of using the little they got for transport. This was very expensive. It was not worth the risk if there was no additional income for the extra responsibility. There was no difference between a teacher's salary and that of a school head. This lack of recognition did not attract female teachers to apply for headship positions. They found it difficult to make any sacrifices when they left their families and risked having their husbands taken by other women or engage in extra-marital affairs. Doing so put them at high risk of divorce or contracting diseases and die prematurely. All these were

considerations that female teachers put on the table before making a decision to apply for headship posts in remote rural areas. Some just dreaded the thought of having to deal with learners, teachers, parents and other stakeholders who had their expectations and energy usurping demands.

6.3.10 Regrets on being a school head

I interrogated participants about their regrets whilst serving as in the schools. Their narratives would serve to make recommendations at the end of my research and document any reasons for regrets addressed to keep the female heads in leadership. The majority of school leaders who participated in the study indicated that they were happy with their work and had no regrets in carrying out the roles mentioned above. They were keen to tackle challenges as they came whilst striving for excellence in school leadership. They were aware of the need for teamwork and highlighted how they tried to manage all stakeholders in schools to achieve set goals. Seven out of ten female heads expressed no regrets of becoming the head. The others had a few issues they were not happy about, such as increased stress levels caused by poor remuneration in the civil service. One of the heads (Nyaradzo) said some female teachers did not apply for headship positions because they were afraid to be accountable for public money. They feared being arrested and going to jail if there were any fraudulent activities that could incriminate them. This was a risk they were not willing to take. Nyasha indicated that being a school head gave her room to make decisions, but she would not want to be more than the head. The following statements encapsulate her feelings:

I don't regret being a head but I don't like to be more than a head because if I go to this other district, I end up not being a decision maker. When you are at district, you are no longer a decision maker, you will be implementing what is being delivered to you from the top. Your potential will not be seen. I don't regret being a head.

This was supported by Nyaradzo who accentuated that:

I have never regretted (being a school head). It's always my nature to improve. I want to climb up the ladder. I don't want to be stagnant. I want to be able to say something good about my professional journey. I taught Grade 7s as a teacher for more than 20 years and where ever I was I would come out with good results. I am results- oriented. So for me to wish to have remained a teacher, I would not want that, I want to climb the ladder. I want my students get good grades. At a broader perspective I now want the school as a whole to do well with results. But I would not want to go back to be a classroom teacher...To remain a teacher is to be stagnant maybe it's because of my age (62). I do not want to be a DSI (senior position). I want to fix the school on the ground and improve the school.

The research findings on what the school heads in this research attributed their success to include their soft business skills, knowledge of educational policy and professional qualifications. Such sentiments reflect the same qualities that were given by the participants when advising future female leaders as professionalism, positive attitude and tenacity when faced with stereotyping. In this view Nyasha said:

Maybe sessions and seminars where female teachers can have time with their heads talking about their experiences, their joys, their challenges, how they are overcoming them and also just encouraging others to say ladies we can do it.

Oplatka and Arar (2017), Hallinger and Bryant (2013) and Bush et al. (2019) describe educational management and leadership in the context of the roles and descriptions of a school leader. They describe a school head as having a number of roles that are interpersonal, informational and decisional roles. School leadership encompasses a number of primary functions that include planning, defining the organizational mission and vision, achieving it, organizing; structuring work to be done to achieve organizational goals, leading; directing others towards objectives, controlling; monitoring and correcting work and monitoring progress.

The interpersonal roles of being the head, leader and liaison officer play a crucial role in leading a school effectively (Adams et al., 2017). The informational role of being a spokesperson and information disseminator, information control centre, and monitoring is going on in a school

(Okumbe, 1998). The decisional roles relate to being an entrepreneur in school projects and efficient use of resources, disturbance handler, resource allocator and negotiator (Hallinger & Chen, 2015).

The glass ceiling is the unseen barrier preventing women from reaching the upper stratum of the corporate ladder. This social barrier can be broken, but some struggling institutions then hire women in the name of culture change to be the ones to fix the problems, albeit with the risk to fail. However, some women in this research managed to break the glass ceiling then stayed on top despite an array of challenges. Unfortunately, not all women are as successful and hence fell off the glass cliff (Rabionet, 2011; Ryan & Haslam, 2005; Ryan et al., 2011). In the academic world, many women have been approved on merit but had to prove themselves in terms of competence. Some leadership issues are generic, but some are gender-specific. As Loeb et al. (2010) assert, the importance of gender balance in school leadership has been observed to matter a lot if success is to be realised hence the increased attention to the recruitment of female heads.

Although women are breaking through the glass ceiling, they have a long way to surpass the previous disparities. In Kenya, for example, Maina and Ishmail (2014) observed that cultural and social injustices impede female inclusion rate in school administration as stereotypes proposed by men and society tend to discriminate against women. My use of the emancipatory paradigm was meant to underscore the need to mitigate against gender disparities and achieve parity. Carli and Eagly (2016) support this and appreciate that women leaders have proven to navigate the gender labyrinth and assume leadership of schools rather than leave men domineering in school leadership. The Gender Diversity in Silicon Valley report shows that only 11% of those in executive positions are women in Silicon Valley (Bell & White, 2014) despite that the world statistics have shown that the number of women is higher than that of men.

Looking at regional countries such as South Africa, the commission for Gender Equality in South Africa, as narrated by Aschman (2014) has some mitigatory measures in place towards parity. Its main tenets look at the conformity with the world laws on gender and its constitution. The South African gender quality commission's main tenets look at implementing gender equality and protection from gender discrimination in all spheres, including formal institutions such as schools and having 45% female representation in parliament. Eagly describes women as hardworking, committed and team players, consequently, they are more likely to achieve goals. Going back in history, the Ivy League institutions would not hire women to lead their colleges.

The participants' profiles in Chapter 5 indicate that experience played a pivotal role in dealing with some discriminating inevitable in their line of work. There were deeper narrations from the older heads, which may be attributed to their long years of service. It also indicated that their generations needed more years in service to become school heads as all government schools' heads were above 50, and the one from a faith-based school was the only one aged 40 who started heading at 35.

6.3.11 The colonial link and gender

The colonial period was, to some extent, against women leadership and hence promoted gender alienations (Zvobgo, 1996). Over time, the Zimbabwean gender policy has also made strides towards parity. Looking in the annals of history as elaborated by Madhuku (2001, pp. 3-4) the colonial laws regarded women as perpetual minors and discriminated against them to a greater extent:

The position of women before independence was intricately linked to the colonial oppression of black people in general and women in particular. Legislation explicitly discriminated against women in the field of employment. The governing legislation on individual employment was the Master and Servants Act (Chapter 268), which came into force on 29 November 1901. The legislation did not have any anti-discrimination provision and therefore left it to the common law which allows discrimination on the

grounds of sex. Under the Act, a married woman could not validly enter into a contract of employment without the consent of her husband. Section 16 of the Act provided that: "All contracts of service stipulating for the service of a married woman shall be made and executed by her as well as by her husband, except where she is living apart from her husband, in which case her signature or consent alone shall suffice. The powers of the husband were so compelling that on marriage, a husband could terminate the contract of employment. This was provided for in section 28 of the Act in the following words: If any female servant marries during the contract of service, her husband may at any time subsequent to the marriage and by giving seven days' notice to the master, dissolve the contract and remove his wife from her master's service.

Such discriminatory laws made it impossible for women to make personal and professional decisions as the husband could easily change that scenario. Women hence had to get permission from their husbands to work and advance academically and professionally. However, the current legislature is in sync with the demands of the world, and the current Zimbabwean Constitution Amendment (No.20, ACT 2013) Section 17.2 (p. 8), asserts that:

The State must take positive measures to rectify gender discrimination and imbalances resulting from past practices and policies.

As posited by Zvobgo (1996), at independence, the Zimbabwean government had the task of transforming the education system to abolish the colour and gender band in the provision of education. This culminated in the current constitution of Zimbabwe which embraced gender equality (Zimbabwe Constitution Amendment (No.20, Act, 2013).

Before Zimbabwean independence in 1980, female teachers or civil servants lost seniority rights when they went for maternity leave and had to reapply after childbirth (Madhuku, 2001; Zvobgo, 1996) as women could be dismissed on the grounds of pregnancy or sent on unpaid maternity leave. However, this was rectified in the public service statutory instrument 347 of 1986 (Madhuku, 2001).

Zimbabwe now celebrates international women day and, as such, motivates women by recognising them as equals. The 2013 Zimbabwean constitution, which is the supreme law of the land, has provisions that show support of gender equality, fair governance, and non-discrimination of women. Female leaders should take advantage of such and advocate for positions to be set for women. The constitution, in line with clear policies and strong support from education authorities, can see more women being members of heads associations. Such a measure can encourage more women to join those already in leadership. Interestingly, none of the school heads had female school development committee chairs as women, but that is not the focus of this study. Parent involvement in the appreciation of gender laws will also go a long way in recognising that women leaders are equally competent to run schools.

The results of the study, as presented above, show gender disparities in educational leadership. In this study, the narratives from primary and secondary school leaders in this qualitative study show that women have what it takes to manage schools. Barriers and challenges are evident, but some measures can be implemented to neutralise the disparities. The influence of traditional discriminatory roles is observed in some women, even refuting leadership posts for various reasons, but a balance in roles was suggested. There is a general apathy to attend staff development meetings so as to be well trained to carry out all administration duties in schools. There is a need for an association of women school leaders to give more responsiveness to feminine disparities in the hope of curbing gender disparities is thus a major contribution to new knowledge.

The participants attributed one of the causes of gender disparity as lack of support from other women. As such, workshops were suggested to educate women on the mutual benefits of supporting each other. Such moves would then look at aspects that demotivate potential women leaders, such as low self-esteem, lack of confidence, lack of support from family members,

influences of peers, and family socialization. It was pointed out that many women in the current education system have the potential to be leaders as their academic and professional qualifications qualify them, but some have excuses and fears that can be curbed during women in education workshops.

The heads expressed regret that other female teachers with relevant qualities were not applying for headship positions for various reasons. Some female teachers with higher degrees were said to be reluctant to take up educational leadership seriously because they were too occupied with family roles and or lacked confidence. Some women were said to be conditioned in the belief that leadership is challenging and is meant for men. However, embracing each other and sharing ideas with those in management may convince them to apply for leadership positions when advertised. In addition, seminars and workshops could scale up the parity levels.

The statistical demographics show that male heads taking a lead may be a deterrent as women could assume that there are more males than female leaders hence the discouragement. When asked about who determines promotions to headship, the participants noted that it was their line supervisors and other superiors. If the line supervisors are predominantly male, this may be a deterrent when one looks at having more women on board. Culture and gender role expectations of women is a challenge, but the participants in this study indicated that these barriers can be overcome.

6.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, chapter 6 analysed and discussed research findings on the mitigatory measures taken by women school leaders in their transition towards gender parity in Harare province, Zimbabwe. The major disparities highlighted in the preceding chapter were

addressed by some mitigatory suggestions discussed with the 10 participants. These included acquiring and expanding relevant qualifications, understanding ministry policies, being effective managers with goals and intrinsic motivation, striking a work-life balance. The findings show consistency in mitigatory factors such as commitment to goal achievement, being assertive, balancing the multiple roles, and striving for what they believe in. The chapter also discussed strategies that each participant used to manage those challenges perpetuating gender disparities in educational leadership. Thus, my research findings also mirror what other writers have identified as gender blindness by some superiors when it comes to preaching gender parity but ignoring the lack of implementation and parity on the ground. Other recommendations included the need to be effective and transformational leaders being adequately trained. In a nutshell, the data presentation chapters have shown that gender parity is achievable despite the current challenges as some women have managed to break the glass ceiling. In the next chapter, I present and discuss the themes, trends and patterns that emerged from the presented data.

CHAPTER SEVEN: KEY THEMES EMERGING AND LESSONS LEARNT

“Let a head be a head despite being a male or female. If you find you are unable to do it, then don’t take up the role. The roles define you as a head whether you are male or female” (Nyaradzo, 2020).

7.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter interrogated the strategies employed by female school heads towards gender parity. It looked at the ways that can reduce gender disparities highlighted in Chapter 5, and since the female heads are physical agencies towards gender equality, they proffered some solutions to the existing inequalities. This chapter shall focus on the key themes emerging and lessons learnt during this research.

Chapter 7 is part of data analysis and is premised on an evaluation of key themes emerging, discussions and links to the transformational theoretical framework. It is field-driven based on findings from narratives. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 were aimed at data presentation, analysis and discussion of findings. This chapter may not exhaust all themes that emerged from this research but focus on the elaboration of the main themes. The key themes are aligned to the purpose of the study and linked directly to the research questions. Each finding led to a specific theme and undergirded by the transformational theoretical framework and literature related to the study.

The key emerging themes, which are the focus of this chapter, were generated from the various narrations from participants’ responses to the interviews and addressed the broad research question which underpins this study. These themes are; underrepresentation in decision making with sub themes on social barriers and cultural expectations, gender discrimination and sub themes of stereotyping and inadequate gender mainstreaming, traditional beliefs and a sub theme of patriarchal culture, humanist philosophy of Ubuntu/ Unhu/ Idea of Collectivism and inadequate leadership capacity.

This chapter therefore analysed and discussed the emerging themes on the disparities in primary and secondary school leadership in Harare. The chapter concludes the data presentation and analysis phase of this study.

7.2 Discussion of key emerging themes

As explained in the two previous chapters, data were generated from 10 female participants (school heads) who shared their experiences in the light of existing gender disparities in educational leadership. The following broad research question guides the analysis and findings:

7.2.1 What are the experiences of female school heads with regards to gender disparities during their tenure of office?

The broad theme spoke to the core of the disparities and parity challenges in Zimbabwe. Through interviews with female participants, my qualitative discussions yielded rich and illuminating feedback as they were aware of their successes and challenges on gender disparities in existence in educational leadership. NASH and NAPH statistics (2020) reflect that out of 96 secondary school heads in Harare, 65 males and 31 females. On the other hand, out of a total of 282 primary school heads in Harare, 104 are male, and 68 are female, indicating an imbalance in Harare schools. However, this may not be a true reflection of what is happening in Zimbabwean schools as my delimitation was Harare.

It appears there is a lack of equal representation between men and women in educational leadership. The numbers of females heading schools are a cause for concern as it does not reflect the country's demographic character. Statistically, there are more women (51%) than men who constitute (49%) based on the 2012 national population census (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency, 2016).

7.2.2 Answering the research question formulation

The four sub-questions which constitute the problem formulation of the broad research question are addressed in this section. Answering the sub-questions first will summatively answer the broad research question. All answers were based on the findings of this study.

7.2.2.1 What are the participants' conceptualisations of gender disparity and parity?

This question is answered in Chapters 2 and 5. The literature review shows that the general academic debate around gender is centralised to the social constructs related to being male or female. The female participants also aired their views on gender disparities and parity as the inequalities or lack of fairness based on one being male or female. The participants indicated that gender parity emphasizes a setting free of gender stereotyping and discrimination, which also translates into better gender egalitarianism in access to school leadership positions in schools. Nyasha (participant number 10) referred to gender disparity and parity as quantitative inequality between males and females.

7.2.2.2 How do female heads experience gender disparity and gender parity in their role as leaders?

This question is answered in Chapter 5 and 6, whereby female school heads narrated their stories and the successes and challenges they meet in their line of work. They lamented that the gendered inequalities indicate that there were some factors being perpetrated against women ascending the professional ladder. They faced underrepresentation in most associations, including national ones and discrimination from colleagues both male and female.

Through interviews with female participants, my qualitative discussions yielded much feedback as they were aware of their successes and challenges in gender disparities. I noted that the statistics indicate the imbalances in Harare schools. Although this may not be a true representation of what is happening in Zimbabwean schools, it shows a general status of lack of equal representation in

educational leadership. Rudo (participant number 6) expressed much sadness when she commented that numbers do not lie. Women school heads numbers leave a lot to be desired as the country's demographic character and female teachers' data speak otherwise.

7.2.2.3 Why are mitigatory ways crucial to curtailing the gender disparities status quo?

It may seem like impossible, but mitigatory strategies are crucial in the achievement of gender parity. The majority of the participants in this research, especially Tavonga, Rudo, Pindukai, Natsai, Tariro and Fadzai brought out various ways that can be employed to curtail disparities, and these are important for equality and equity in school leadership. They agreed that when women are in decision-making positions, they can motivate other women to climb the leadership ladder and consequently inspire the girl-child and teachers in lower positions. Women are deemed motherly by nature and observed as effective leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2012).

Despite some negative undertones, it was noted that the participants in this study were pro-active in that they displayed confidence and competence in leading schools. This kind of resilience and optimism were their characteristics despite the challenges they faced. For instance, Natsai and Tavonga managed to motivate their support systems (teachers and ancillary staff) through being interactive, socially engaging and having good communication skills. Such interpersonal attributes enabled them to foster professional bonds with students, teachers and parents for the common good of the development of their respective schools.

Tariro spoke of being academically and professionally empowered, which enabled her to motivate staff. In school administration, the principle of delegation is an important aspect that transfers the passion for effective management to other teachers. Teachers were to be elected to positions of

leadership, such as heads of departments and sports directors. When they get promoted, they can easily glide into leadership roles with minimal challenges.

7.2.2.4 How do female school heads think gender barriers can be minimised/eliminated, and policy be made more favourable to them?

Female participants in this qualitative study highlighted several ways through which gender barriers can be removed or minimised. In line with the Zimbabwean constitution that promotes gender equality, women can insist on a decisive policy on gender parity so as to have their positions as women legally protected. There should be further research to explore policies and how they can be more directive/proactive in stating actual numbers of women school leaders per province in relation to the total populace. Such decisive gender trajectories could result in positions being allocated to women and as such, will not be replaced by men. Rudo suggested that, at the national level, the executive must have 50% seats reserved for women on a rotational basis such that a man can be a chairperson for a term, after which a female must replace and so forth. Such conditions will be a more concrete decision towards parity.

7.3 Reflections

The women's narratives portrayed their personal, academic and professional journeys. Participants had more or less similar challenges and mitigatory suggestions to balance the gender scales. Each female participant revealed detailed stories of their lived experiences and how they have managed to break the glass ceiling into leadership. Some of their stories were sad, others inspiring, and yet others reflected some deep-seated anger over some injustices of the past.

This study also found a disturbing trend where some female heads are sent to troubled schools so as to resuscitate them. The glass cliff theory asserts that women are given leadership positions that predispose them to failure due to the problematic nature of the institutions they are allocated. This

notion was observed in a number of narratives, such as in the case of Natsai, Rudo and Tavonga when they were allocated struggling schools characterised by challenges. This was done to make the female leaders go and revamp the near collapsing institutions. Indeed, they had to go and prove their mettle by turning around the fortunes of the schools. Such scenarios support the glass cliff theory whereby women are offered precarious positions that have a high chance of making them fail. Such glass cliff sentiments may result in a lack of role models as an integral part of women leadership, thereby decreasing the number of women who take up leadership positions. Furthermore, Tariro observed that female students relate more with female heads, and as such, the more female heads there are, the more leadership opportunities they provide for those aspiring to take up leadership positions in the future.

7.4 Key Themes Emerging from the Data

The key themes that emerged from the data provided common and yet diverse perspectives based on the different stories shared by the different participants. Themes were derived from narratives shared, and they gave a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of participants in view of the schools they led. After undertaking a rigorous qualitative thematic analysis of data generated from participants' narratives, five themes emerged. The themes that emerged are underrepresentation in decision making with sub themes on social barriers and cultural expectations, gender discrimination and sub themes of stereotyping and inadequate gender mainstreaming, traditional beliefs and a sub theme of patriarchal culture, humanist philosophy of Ubuntu/ Unhu/ Idea of Collectivism and inadequate leadership capacity.

7.4.1 Underrepresentation in decision making

The issue of gender disparity and parity was highlighted and addressed in the first question and lack of equal representation stemmed from such disparities. It was a recurring key theme

throughout this study. All participants' narratives indicated that the issue of parity was only addressed on paper through the enactment of policies and statutes, but little was done on the actual implementation of such policies.

The female heads brought up the issue of under-representation in decision-making committees affecting their day to day life at work. This was clearly articulated by Rudo, who lamented that there was only a single female representative in the national association for secondary school heads (NASH). This was described as unfortunate and demotivating on the part of female school heads as it reflected that if there were any arguments that required voting, men's voices would obviously prevail as men would naturally support their own kind. She expounded that, currently, there was only one female who had been elected to the high post in heads' association of all the secondary schools in Zimbabwe. The lady was elected Chairperson of NASH for a specific province and consequently became an executive member. She elaborated that there used to be two (2) female representatives in 2019, but the other lady was outvoted, and was then replaced by a man. This shows that all men might have made efforts to make sure that only one lady remained in power. Sufficient effort could still have been made to replace her with another lady, but this was not to be. At the time of data gathering, there was only one female representative out of 14 members who constitute the executive.

Rudo also explained that the posts for Provincial Education Directors were advertised, but it was rare for women to be selected to take up the positions. At the provincial level in the education system, women were not fairly represented as there were no women at that level during data gathering for this research. Participants indicated that men outnumbered them, and it was only in 2020 where three female PEDs out of 10 held such posts.

The Permanent Secretary of Education was usually a male, but the previous two terms at the time of this study had women being appointed to that post. In defining the parity issue, Nyasha described parity as something measurable and quantifiable, as shown below:

It is something that is measurable. Something you can quantify...but you are looking at actual numbers. If its disparity, there is no balance. But if there is gender parity...there is balance.

From the discussions I had with the female heads, it was noted that should one decide to follow a professional course and consequently go job hunting, the balance of the multiple roles may reflect the glass ceiling phenomenon. Parity sentiments were highlighted by the school heads whereby women had to be excused from some fora due to family commitments. They felt that when that happens and suppose there was voting taking place, there would be fewer women as compared to men.

7.4.1.1 Social barriers

Natsai observed that young ladies were expected to get married and look after the family. The motherly role was identified as a social barrier where one would need time to satisfy marital obligations such as bearing and rearing children as well as managing the home. Such duties usually took place alongside work commitments which might consequently disadvantage the female teacher or head.

Three female heads who were not married indicated that their marital status worked to their disadvantage as having a husband was an impediment and therefore limiting. Fadzai indicated that, because she did not have a husband and children, she performed her duties to her full potential as she observed that her counterparts were disturbed by family ties. Rudo and Natsai indicated that marital problems emerge as women's positions got stronger. In view of this, Rudo asserted that:

Married women are expected to play feminine roles as wives such as washing, cooking for the husband and children and at the same time are expected to attend work meetings. It is therefore difficult at times to fulfil both requirements satisfactorily. No wonder why most women with leadership roles are single. Some expectations from husband disregard women's leadership positions. It calls for an understanding husband. Where this understanding is non-existent, marriages usually break up and the woman continues alone but maintains her job.

The participants suggested the need to have stereotyping eradicated in the national constitution and for a gender balance to be realised. There is a need to mount workshops on the theme that stress the vitality of gender parity in societal organisations. In her view, Rudo thought this would be a positive move towards equity. Having more women in school leadership was described by Rudo as a motivator to girl children who are future leaders and should grow with the right mindset of achieving and sustaining parity. Natsai subscribed to this assertion and added that:

We will be dealing with the children and as you might be aware, children want motherly love...I subscribe to the thinking that when you provide educational opportunity to girl children you are on your way to achieving sustainable national development. Girls and women are drivers of development. Denying them this opportunity is detrimental to national building.

Likewise, Fadzai felt that female heads were doing more for their schools than male heads. She asserted that:

If I had an opportunity I would give resources to female heads. Female heads are effective. If you go to schools run by ladies, are neater than those run by men. Women emphasize so much on cleanliness and good appearance. We are mothers we want the best for the children. We have that motherly care which is important. Yes, if I had resources I would give them to the female heads because they always come up with novelty. I want women to lead these schools in their numbers to reflect that we are more than males. The prevailing situation in terms of representation by women in school headship is disturbing as we second class citizens who should subservient role to men. No, we are not.

It was observed that there were more female classroom teachers than their male counterparts. The girl child is more likely to open up to a female head about her condition than a male head. Tariro had this to say:

I have noted that my girl children in the school are more receptive to my leadership. This could emanate from the fact that we have more female teachers in the school. We are 39 against 2 male teachers. Those are the people they are interacting with, the girls are more, the children respond very well. There are more female teachers than male and this tends to motivate female students.

The participants felt that if there had been more female heads in schools, it would motivate more female teachers to apply for leadership posts. Tavonga felt that women were achievers and boasted that this could be testified by her students and superiors alike, as captured in the following excerpt:

They believe I am an achiever because even on the WhatsApp group that was formed by former students, they are just talking about me...They believe that I am an achiever. Even the District Schools Inspectors believe that I am an achiever including Head Office. To me it is a calling, I am here to serve and that I do wholeheartedly even though the road may be rocky sometimes. In any case that's part of growing in the business of management.

7.4.1.2 Cultural expectations

Data from the narratives indicated that there were some cultural expectations and some family barriers that have to be foregone when a woman decides to be a leader. To corroborate Rudo and Tariro's sentiments on gender disparities, the traditional gender roles are identified as perpetuating gender disparity and motherhood micro-aggressions (Elinsky, 2020). She described motherhood aggression as a double punishment for women when they have to be a woman and a mother at work, resulting in her being overwhelmed. Resultantly, this leads to some dropping out of the working environment for the sake of their mental and physical health. Moorosi (2010) agrees to this when she asserts that South African historical and traditional issues of race and ethnicity have cultural impositions when it comes to women aspirants and leaders in management.

As discussed in the literature and in line with findings in this study, the glass ceiling is the assumed invisible barrier preventing women from reaching further heights or success (Norkeliunas, 2015). This aspect is referred to often on gender issues and cultural diversity (Zikhali & Perumal, 2014). There were more male than female heads countrywide at the time of this research. A study

conducted by Shava and Ndebele (2014) demonstrates the uneven playing field in the whole Zimbabwean education system.

Although South Africa adopted a new constitution that enshrines gender equality, it is still lacking in some respects (Moorosi, 2009), and as such tangible benefits to women are proving challenging to realise. From a transformational theory, this finding suggests that female leaders are well equipped to lead schools and if given a chance, they can perform with the same level of leadership and proficiency as men or even surpass them. This suggests that female school heads have the capability to transform the way things are done for the benefit of national development.

7.4.2 Gender discrimination

The issue of gender discrimination was observed to be prevalent at both family and professional level. All the heads I engaged within this study experienced discrimination from all stakeholders such as students, teachers, parents, line supervisors and the community in one way or the other. Nyaradzo felt that male teachers behave in certain ways because of their gender. In view of this, she said:

I have two male staff members (gentlemen) at my school. When I ask them why they are always late for work they do not give convincing responses. I have always interpreted this to mean that they are disrespectful of me because I am a female leader. We have 3 male teachers...They always come up with excuses of why they are not punctual. They do not want to be led by a woman, that's how I see it. I think they take advantage because they are working with a female head. They think a school is like home where they want to be respected as fathers in homes. We can't have that.

Most stakeholders were described as having reservations about female heads. However, when female heads proved their mettle, they were usually embraced after working hard to produce something tangible, usually a development project. As captured below, Tavonga lamented that the discrimination was so visible at times:

We entered the merit awards and it was very clear that we were the best and came first. Unfortunately, I was told No you missed by half a mark and the merit award went to a school headed by a male. I could not understand the half mark. Come the following year that is when I got the merit award. Then in 2012, we scooped the merit award. I repaired all classrooms, bought furniture for students as, prior to that, students sat on half bricks or on the floor. In addition, I got all broken windows fixed, drilled a borehole, and bought an electric sewing machine to allow children to do practical lessons on sewing. In our Food Technology Department, I purchased electric stoves, made sure they had everything, enough canisters, pots other critical utensils. We even had interactive boards that can record and can remain teaching students when the teacher is away. You see, I did so much for the school.

In addition, Tadiswa asserted that men were troublesome to deal with as they demanded to see her certificates accusing her of not being qualified to be the head. In addition, female heads faced biased attitudes from difficult members of the SDC (school parents' board) who doubted their competence to run the school because they were women. Tavonga, Tadiswa, Rudo and Pindukai expressed that some ladies felt bullied by the parents' representative boards (SDCs) who would try to impose changes on schools especially if the school leader is female. Rudo, Tavonga and Natsai spoke of anonymous letters that would be sent to the Ministry, discrediting them, citing issues of incompetency. Natsai commented that:

Oh they did not like me. Anonymous letters were being written, then I told them I want you to continue writing these anonymous letters because that's the way Harare can know me. Go to Maya Province (not real name) they know me. If you tell them they will say yes we know her. Then in Harare it's a big province, for them to know me, write about me. Really they got to know me because there were times I could go with a basket of evidence to the Ministry. (Kikikikiki laughs)

7.4.2.1 Stereotyping

The prejudices faced by female heads from stakeholders were described as visible, especially when one started headship. All ten participants highlighted the lack of enough role models in educational leadership based on the low numbers of female heads. Most women were described as being stereotyped, especially if they took over from a male head, as happened at a school alluded to by Tariro. This was described as unfair as the ladies challenged the school community to test the

competences first before judging them. The participants felt that they were trying their best but still were met with prejudices. Natsai stated that one has to fight and prove their mettle to reduce intimidation and bullying as she asserted that:

I had been recommended to go and mark examinations, but because the supervisor (a junior teacher) had made advances towards me which I declined, had wanted to find a fault in me. He took it up and I found myself receiving a letter from higher authorities stating that I had failed to mark properly so I am no longer a marker. Then I brought to their attention the issue of sexual harassment from the supervisor who once put his hand in my pocket around my waist. So they had to reinstate me. That is when I later said, let me quit. So these are the problems that may happen, if teachers are put on better positions than the heads even for voting, they think they are higher than you and want to belittle you.

Women are in a quagmire and need a lot of national support to implement a paradigm shift towards social justice/gender parity in educational leadership. Some male teachers were described as insubordinate by Fadzai. Of similar thoughts was Tavonga, who accentuated that:

Some challenges you face as female heads, is that some male teachers, they feel a female should not head a school, and when they answer, you can tell by the patronising language. I tell them that you can only use that kind of language to your wives its fine but not to any other female. You can do that with your wives. If you feel you don't want to mix don't force others to do so. Let's work here and not influence other people. If you are a teacher just do your job.

Natsai also shared her experiences with teachers and how she groomed a male deputy head to lead one of the biggest school in the country:

I was tried and tested because I was sent to Nehanda High (Not real name) after someone had recommended because the head was going on study leave and he was tasked to find someone who could do the good job since that was a mega school. It's me that made him the head of such a big school. When I got to Nehanda High. Murume (not real name) was a Senior Teacher and I identified him and said he was supposed to be in administration. I appointed him to be in charge of one of the satellite schools. So from there I groomed him and he became deputy of the same school and head of the same school. But it was after I had identified him.

The reason why I am saying I was tried and tested at Nehanda High is because when I joined that school, I was from the rural setup and you know with Harare teachers,

they are pompous and they would say we cannot be led by someone who has come from the rural setup. What does she have? They would ask rhetorically. They even want to know about your background, what are her personal belongings? So what they did is that they actually resisted me. They did not want to help me. But what was interesting was that the school was slowly falling apart. There were no doors, workshops were not functioning. Sewer was even flowing in between the blocks. Yet it was one of the biggest schools in the country. So I had those things fixed in less than 5 months.

It was after such a mammoth test and validation that the subordinates eventually accepted her, and such prejudices were expressed by more than half of the participants, Natsai went on to say:

Then everybody started to come and say, you know what madam, at first we did not know that you are such a workaholic. I upgraded the salaries of the workers because they were not being given enough. I did quite a lot. If you go there they will tell you that Natsai (pseudonym) is quite someone.

In line with what the participants endured and achieved in their line of duty, Hallinger (2009) believes that a model head is collaborative, open to new ways and exemplary. Moyo et al. (2020) assert that schools are vehicles to be used towards societal transformation, and female leaders can redesign schools to reduce gender stereotyping and, by so doing, create gender awareness and balanced culture. The changes employed by the school heads go to show that social transformations are necessary for change to be realised. Furthermore, as agencies of their own emancipation, female heads have shown that it can be done (Moorosi, 2012). The female heads felt that an effective school head should have a feeling for the people he or she serves and try to be empathetic with all stakeholders such as parents, teachers and learners, Nyaradzo attested that:

Let a head be a head despite being a male or female. If you find you are unable to do it, then don't take up the role. The roles define you as a head whether you are male or female.

Reviewed literature substantiates the findings from this study. Gender bias underscores the gender difference between men and women and the distinct roles they play in society. According to Mapolisa and Madziyire (2012), male leaders are considered more intelligent than women leaders in Zimbabwean culture. Such gender bias has been in existence but has been overtaken by events

as the majority of the participants were happy to have broken the invisible ceiling and were enjoying their roles as female heads of schools. Aschman (2014) accentuates that the South African Commission for Gender Equality, in line with 20 years of democracy in the same country, had made notable strides towards equality. The summit of 2014 appreciated the gains towards true gender equity and equality but highlighted the need to do more for women and children.

7.4.2.2 Inadequate gender mainstreaming

Generally speaking, gender mainstreaming is inadequately budgeted for, resulting in gender disparity in most sectors, including education. The gender laws and full subscription of countries to international gender laws do not ensure effectiveness on the ground. There is a need for standardised frameworks that monitor and evaluate the progress, at least on an annual basis. In such ways, shortfalls and gaps can be identified and rectified. Ratified statistics would mean that the tenets of the constitutions would be respected. Women as agencies of their emancipation towards non-discrimination must see the gender quotas in action and benefit from them. Gender fora in schools are non-existent and such associations will begin the social structures that push the gender agenda forward.

7.4.3 Traditional beliefs

Linked to the above theme is the theme of patriarchal culture and traditional beliefs. Tariro, Rudo and Natsai spoke strongly about their background and early memories of feminine socialisation. They indicated that young ladies were meant to be either teachers or nurses. When they were growing up, society defined medical doctors, engineers, and school heads as masculine occupations that no woman was supposed to dream about. Natsai was bitter that at some point, her husband could not handle her success and neglected her and the family, but when he realised that she was determined to succeed as a mother and a school head, he reconciled with her. She told him that he

was married to a school head and he was supposed to accept it as she was not going to neglect her career because he felt threatened by her success. Below is what she shared in her story:

My husband once moved out for more than 3 years leaving myself and children behind. He wanted to mess around and wanting me to accept it because he is a man. So I said no, and he went away. Fending for the family alone was a challenge but it turned out to be a blessing, because when he went away, God made me realise my potential. I moved on, not moving on because I fell in love but moving on in terms of having things called my own. I later realised that this potential I have at work I can also put it to other things in terms of starting a business. With good leadership skills at work I managed to focus on other things. I told myself that I have seen the negative things, let me see the positive side of things and whatever I want I implemented it without hesitating. In most cases, whatever women do, will be at their best. I have never made decisions that go wrong. I was limited when my husband was there but after he left I managed to change things the way I wanted them to be. Then when he returned, I said No I should continue doing what I want. When he returned he was now poor. Before I used to ask for his approval to do anything even to ask for money to buy groceries but after that episode I do what I want to do. I once cried then said thank you God. I managed to fund my daughter studying in India at the second largest university in the world. So if you are not strong at work, the problems you have at home will filter at work and you are bound to fail. So these are the challenges I faced.

Those who were not married felt they had room to do more for the schools they headed without family constraints, as most married ladies said they kept on changing schools because of family ties. Fadzai asserted that having no children of her own gave her room to expose her students to regional and international trips, which attracted more students to her school. In the same vein, Nyasha concurred that her attention was focused on the students as she had no biological children.

The participants proclaimed the need to prove themselves to be respected by students, staff and parents. Tariro spoke of how she was said to be riding on the successes of the previous head when she took over a thriving school:

Parents are very positive but we have some male parents who have issues with female leaders...You guys are riding on the popularity of the school. He realised we were doing better than the former head. It was male-led before but we managed to surpass whatever it is that he was doing. It all comes from our cultural background where

people look at women and stereotype them. But basically we have proved ourselves. We have stood the test of time.

7.4.3.1 Patriarchal culture

Fadzai narrated how gender biases called for a leader to be equally tenacious to survive. She felt that the Zimbabwean patriarchal society still has a negative influence on female participation in leadership positions as some men look down upon women leaders which is illustrated in the citation below:

Gender biased attitudes are there. There are some males who don't believe in women at all, so you find that it's there. Even the teachers when they are in the staff room, male teachers tend to look down upon female teachers and they call them names. Sometimes it's quite nasty. It's not very good. So the women have to fight that, they have got to fight hard so that gender bias is eradicated. We want people to understand that female heads can think just like male heads do. Women have the potential to lead schools to prosperity. Women have the potential to lead in many areas.

Similarly, on this issue, Nyaradzo made the following observation:

I don't have any problem with female teachers. You may find one or two who may want to do things their own way. Generally female teachers are cooperative, receptive, respectful and appreciative of female school heads. There are 38 female teachers and 3 male teachers at my station. Male teachers always come up with lame excuses on why they are late for lessons. That's a sign of disrespect, that's how I see it. I think they take advantage because they are working with a female head. The issue that is subtle is the issue of gender. They want to make themselves like fathers. Some even think that because they have been to the school before me then I know nothing. Unbelievable!

Contrary to the above assertions, Mbali shared the issue of socialisation impacting on acceptance or rejection of a female head. She faced challenges with women who preferred male and not female -led schools:

Male teachers do things that are positive but some women tend to look down on other women. There is an element of jealous and competition. They also think that you have deprived a man of a headship post. If a man is a captain or soldier you should not take his post. A woman finds it difficult to get inspiration from other women. They generally suffer from the 'pull her down syndrome.' They think that men are made to rule. As

women, we are not assertive and are jealous of each other. This stems from the socialisation process.

To counteract this problem, Fullan (2011) posits that a school head should stand her ground and use policy to effect necessary changes to achieve set objectives. Faulkner (2015) was of the same view when she noted that sexist attitudes are major in the stereotyping issues in existence. Most of the participants spoke deeply about their wish to break the glass ceiling from a young age and had to do more to get substantiation in their line of work. The glass ceiling phenomenon is emphasised by the increase in female heads after independence, and this has been a positive move, but more can still be done. Rapaciolli (2012) concurs that balancing work and life responsibilities is a major barrier to the feminine glass ceiling as women have too many roles to contend with.

The female heads who were interviewed felt that at times women are offered promotions to leadership positions, but because superiors do not consider the women's families, some then refuse to take up the posts. As female heads, they had to be content with dual roles. Other feminine or motherly roles such as child-bearing and maternity leave may also result in women's inability to fully compete with men as they may need some time off work. Yet during such times, positions they qualify for may be taken by other candidates. They had to wear different hats in different scenarios to make things work. The majority of the female heads engaged in this study had to balance family and work. However, there have been notable policy steps towards gender parity after independence although challenges still exist where women are not fully represented in decision making positions (Mayimele, Ndudzo, & Ndlovu, 2020).

7.4.4 Humanist philosophy of Ubuntu/ Unhu/ idea of collectivism

Closely linked to the above challenges, another theme that came up prominently in the study from all ten participants' narratives was the issue of Ubuntu. Certain reactions and empathy towards the

people we interact with emanating from the idea of humaneness, also called Ubuntu/Unhu, which Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela propounded as the collective solidarity of humanity (Tutu, 2000). This is observable in most female leaders.

Interviews gave room for a deeper understanding of what the school heads wanted to share when engaging with the people mentioned before. The lack of support for women from other women was another problem that deviates from collectivism and was highlighted by Rudo, Natsai and Nyasha during interviews. The feeling of backing other female leaders and putting one in someone else's shoes (Ubuntu) was found to be lacking. Although some women were seen as supportive when it came to their female leaders, many were described as having 'a pull her down syndrome' that discouraged existing and future female heads. Most female heads felt the need to stick together as women so as to reduce gender disparities in existence. The power of collectivism was advocated for as opposed to individualism. In view of this, Pindukai commented that:

...resistance is from the females...most of the times resistance is from those who have failed to make it in life and secondly they do not have enough qualifications to prove themselves and they do not have the ability to improve themselves. Or they feel they do not click with you. Personality clashes are common. Or maybe they are thinking they do not want to conform to new things and are still living in the past. Or they do not want to give credit to improve things.

Natsai commented that impartiality and support towards male and female staff was an advantage:

Female teachers emulate me quite a lot. The majority say, madam you are our role model. The way you handle things and the way you even treat the male counterparts, you are a role model. We are doing quite a lot because we are seeing you. When I came to this place, I was the first to drive a car. Nearly all the female ladies now drive their own cars. They are now saying you are a role model, we just want to be like you. The male teachers are so supportive. I might be having problems with the deputies, but not all the teachers.

Teaching was noted by Tariro and Rudo as a gendered profession from a young age as women were socialised to be teachers and nurses. Such social expectations are perceived as based on the

motherly nature of women, which then translates to their roles as female school heads and better interaction with stakeholders.

The transformational theory focuses on a paradigm shift from disparities to parity and the progress made by women in leadership. The women are observed as striving to meet their employees' basic needs to satisfy their motivation, commitment to achieve organisational goals. Sadri and Bowen (2011) assert that there is a need for intrinsic motivation to guide individuals towards the achievement of certain goals. Motivated workers, in this context, will be teachers who will be working under the female heads. they are expected to support their leaders through hard work and producing quality results and being good citizens who show humaneness. Maslow (1943) theory of self-actualisation speaks about the transition. D'Souza and Gurin (2016) refers to it as individualistic transition, growth motivation, and altruism. Therefore, women leaders are seen as selfless in their pursuit of gender balance. They are also viewed as transformational characters that help in the achievement of their objectives (Mawere, Mubaya, van Reisen et al., 2016). Furthermore, management, interpersonal roles, working conditions and benefits are hygiene factors in his Two Factor Theory of Motivation, whilst a sense of recognition, achievement, individual growth, advancement and responsibility are motivating factors (Sanjeev & Surya, 2016).

Mudau and Ncube (2017) assert that leadership considers knowledge, world views, values, beliefs, and abilities for transformation, and all this encompass a way of behaviour and citizenship. The female heads felt that good citizenship (Ubuntu/Unhu) would go a long way in setting women up as leaders capable of leading and ruling not only in education but also in corporate organisations.

Similarly, viewed from a social control perspective, a school is a transformational agent, but some of the girl children may be disadvantaged through dropping out of school. At the global level, more than 5 million primary school girls are out of school as compared to the boy child (Gadoth & Heymann, 2020). For those who manage to go to secondary school, 3 in 4 girls manage to finish their secondary education. This means that there will always be fewer women in the population educated enough to compete in the male-dominated fields.

7.4.5 Inadequate leadership capacity

The demographic data obtained from questionnaires indicated that relevant qualifications helped the heads when addressing the complexities of school leadership. All participants had qualifications ranging from certificate in education up to doctoral level. However, it is against this notion that some gaps in crucial leadership skills were observed.

One of the themes that will need further research on is the lack of financial management knowledge as an administrative skill required in school management. The majority of women heads, that is, eight out ten of the participants, had serious shortcomings in financial management, and one even pointed out that some women refuse to be heads because they do not want the financial responsibility that comes with it.

The majority of heads expressed the need for financial management training for female heads as they commented on question 10 of the questionnaire that focused on general leadership skills and areas requiring reinforcement in the smooth running of schools: What was difficult (in school leadership) and how did you overcome it?

Below are some of the responses which were given by participants in view of this question.

Tariro complained that *“Financial management was a challenge for me since I had no background information on the requirements of the job.”* Rudo reinforced that *“Financial management was done as some form of staff development, hence the foundation was porous. Continuous and constant practice made me overcome the challenges.”* Pindukai buttressed that *“Financial management was difficult for me.”* Fadzai stressed that *“Finance management – it demanded a lot. Financial management was not taught at teacher training college”*. Tavonga was outsourcing assistance: *“Accounts: cash books, I had to work together with the accountant and learn by doing the work.”*

Natsai said: *“Financial Management, I had to continue liaising with school bursar since the position demands being the accounting officer.* Mbali said, *“I have a daughter who has a degree in accounts who staff develops me at home”*. Nyaradzo lamented that *“Financial Management was difficult and I continue to learn about it and practical work makes me a better manager.”*

Such fears were perceived as emanating from accountability issues at the end of the day and if one lacks the financial skills, there is a risk of being punished for financial discrepancies. As pointed out during the interview, Nyaradzo indicated that some women refused to take up headship positions because they feared making mistakes with public funds, which would lead to prosecution. It is this unpleasant experience they detested.

In view of this issue, Tavonga concurred with Nyaradzo and commented that:

We need several workshops as leaders on many aspects to do with school management, including school financial management. Since school heads are the chief executives of the institutions, they need to know the goings-on in books of accounts for the schools. We cannot rely on clerks or bursars. We need to learn how we are supposed to supervise the bursar. This is only possible if workshops that deal with specific issues are mounted. There is no effective communication given on how you will work together with the bursar. Training is needed between the head and the bursar to complement each other for the good of the school. Auditors stress me, they say so many things. I turn around and say do you realise that I am not the deputy head. It's the deputy head

that deals with procurement in the procurement committee so discuss with the deputy head, I only authorize.

From the findings, it can be concluded that despite strides made towards parity, there are still some challenges that result in fewer women taking headship posts. Some women indicated that they would rather remain as heads and not go for further promotion despite being labelled as effective heads. Tavonga observed that training should start at the grassroots level to master skills overtime at the school level as suggested:

Another strategy is to give them more leadership posts within the school. Leadership posts within the system include being senior women, head of a house, and head of a form. At our school we have divisional heads, where one is a head of form one stream, head of form 3 – 4 and so forth. Those holding Heads of Department positions are already in it and can decide to apply for the posts after realising that it is doable.

This could be done to curb the lack of familiarisation on job descriptions and prerequisite skills in the higher offices. In view of this, Natsai insisted that:

I don't regret being a head. But I don't like to be more than the Head because if I go to the district office, I end up not being a decision-maker. When you are at the District you are no longer a decision maker, you will be implementing what is being delivered to you from the top. Your potential will not be seen. I surely don't regret being a head.

On the other hand, and apart from other soft skills, the female heads felt let down by the system for them to function more effectively. Tavonga expressed some distress when she narrated how at times, they are put under the same umbrella as schools and because some schools like hers are big, some suggestions may not work. As such, they need to be staff developed separately for added efficiency:

Like on the issue of covid-19, each one of us is doing something different and I remember something being put on the group for heads that had something for foot bath and I asked how it works? It's a good idea for someone, but look at me with a school of 2500. They are supposed to consider numbers of learners. So some suggestions don't work. When I was talking to the DSI about the issue of the Ministry will give our learners face masks. So I said what may work at a smaller school not at our school

which are big. There is need for workshops to assist us do our work in a professional way.

Literature suggests possible reasons for this phenomenon as Makura (2012) postulates that there is a lack of adequate preparation of school heads and as such Zimbabwean school heads adopt ad hoc survival tactics when thrown in the deep end. This results in a paucity of leadership skills such as financial management. Related literature made reference to the strides made by women towards gender parity, and the fact that some women have taken leadership offices at the national, regional and global level goes a long way in indicating that the goal towards parity is feasible.

Countries such as Finland, Brazil and Ethiopia have had female heads of state. Social change is inevitable in the 21st century, and it is commonly referred to as the feminisation of management (Boussard & del Peso, 2020). Schools are, therefore, not left out in this social transformation. They are social change agents that can institute changes. Such transformations describe women as transformational leaders as they can multitask and play motherly roles in schools.

The glass ceiling has since been broken, and female heads are proof that women can deliver in terms of decision making roles in education. Age has not been a factor, as witnessed in the case of a 40-year-old head (Nyasha) who started heading a school at 35. She broke the gender and age glass ceiling in the leadership journey and overcame the challenges.

7.5 Lessons Learnt

The objective of this thesis was to identify leadership and gender challenges faced by female school heads in school leadership. The findings and themes proffered were in respect of the research aim and objectives of this qualitative study. My discourse showed a plethora of gender disparities in the educational leadership sector of our system. It is against this background that I came out with some lessons learnt from the discussions of findings:

The female heads in primary and secondary schools were young, middle-aged, and some were more mature. Their marital status varied as some were single by choice, married, with or without children. Overall, they all had responsibilities as they have to wear different hats in their line of duty and at home/family level. For this, there was a need for psycho- social support from their spouses, friends, and work mates to work. Such measures would reduce the myriad of gender barriers experienced at different levels of society.

The female heads were overwhelmed by the multiplicity of roles worsened by the challenges they faced from all stakeholders. This could be mainly because of the patriarchal culture and traditional beliefs that support the notion that a woman is a wife and mother first, then an employee last.

The gender disparities women faced emanated from colonial rules that made women perpetual minors and placed them lower than men at a professional and salary level. These inequalities meant that women would miss career advancement opportunities during maternity and nursing periods. A few women leading schools were effective and were awarded accolades. These were regarded as results-oriented.

Female leaders were able and had proven that they could transform leadership in schools from disparity to parity if only there were policies in place that insisted on equal representation. The academic pool to pull future female leaders from is vast.

Female school leaders who would have been promoted to higher offices such as district schools inspectors, school inspectors, provincial education directors, permanent secretaries and ministers should pull other women up the ladder.

When in the leadership offices, female school heads should have relevant academic and professional qualifications, have integrity, be knowledgeable, be assertive, have good time management skills and communication skills.

Some cultural practices also perpetuated gender disparities as men were favoured to lead than women due to the patriarchal systems in developing countries such as Zimbabwe. Such beliefs indicate the negative socio-cultural beliefs that go to the extent of having other women voting against women leadership preferring men.

I learnt that in Zimbabwe, there is awareness of gender issues but no emphasis on the implementation part, which results in disparities. There is a disjuncture between the policy and practice.

The long-standing issue of stereotyping must be addressed even though the curriculum and textbooks must show gender equality. The current ones show women doing motherly roles such as cooking, washing and other feminine roles whilst the husbands are seen at work in hospitals as doctors and bank managers, yet that stage has been surpassed. I am yet to come across a textbook showing a female school head or a bus being driven by a woman to show parity.

7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, findings were derived from the female primary and secondary school leaders in relation to each research question. The theoretical framework, as well as the literature review, were presented and discussed. In a nutshell, there are significant gender disparities in school leadership in general and Harare province in particular. This chapter has attempted to integrate some aspects of the existing literature and theoretical framework with the key themes that emerged from the research findings as discussed. It generated five themes, namely underrepresentation in decision

making with sub themes on social barriers and cultural expectations, gender discrimination and sub themes of stereotyping and inadequate gender mainstreaming, traditional beliefs and a sub theme of patriarchal culture, humanist philosophy of Ubuntu/ Unhu/ Idea of Collectivism and inadequate leadership capacity. It also accentuated lessons that I learnt during my research in relation to the gender disparities faced by female school leaders in Harare, Zimbabwe. The window dressing of gender policies needs to be truncated, and pragmatism and workable practices be witnessed in educational plans. The next and final chapter gives the summary, conclusions, contribution to knowledge and recommendations in relation to the results and sought to answer the main research question and the sub-questions. Recommendations for further studies are also proposed.

CHAPTER EIGHT: REFLECTIVE STUDY SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

8.1 Introduction

The previous three chapters focused on data analysis. The first chapter (Chapter 5) presented participants' profiles and narratives (stories). Chapter 6 focused on data analysis of strategies employed by female school heads to move towards gender parity. Chapter 7 presented an evaluative analysis of emerging themes that are considered key in the study as they directly address the research questions. It also looked at the lessons learnt in the study.

This concluding chapter responds to the research questions referred to in the introductory chapter and links the findings to the significance of the study. It accomplishes this by presenting the reflective study summary, conclusions, recommendations, contribution to knowledge and implications for further research. This final chapter also confirms whether or not the data produced managed to shed more light on the initial research problem and the supporting sub-questions.

8.2 Reflective Summary of the Study

This research explored the gender disparities in female leadership in Harare, Zimbabwean schools and the mitigatory ways employed towards gender parity. In this section, I briefly reflect on the synopsis of the eight chapters of this research, drawing out the salient issues that were of significance in the discourse, thereby summarising the study.

Chapter 1 is an introductory and background chapter that presents the over-arching aim, the motivation of the study, statement of the problem, questions and delimitations of the study. I wound up with the definitions of key terms and chapter overviews. The background to the study also established that over time, women have demonstrated their capabilities in leadership and have

been described as being transformational in their leadership as they are able to change things for the better. Disparities are visible in Zimbabwean schools, and this study observed that there are about 70% of female teachers in Harare province. Females account for about 30% of leaders in both primary and secondary schools when it comes to leadership. According to Earley and Weindling (2004), women are known to possess varied characteristics such as resilience when things are seemingly insurmountable, perseverance, confidence, and nurturing spirit and being good at multitasking as well as being visionaries. All these are not easily observable by an independent observer in a patriarchal society such as Zimbabwe.

Earlier research done in Zimbabwe by Mapolisa and Madziyire (2012) indicates that the social norms and women socialisation demand that they be submissive to their fathers, husbands, sons and brothers. Culture has always defined women as belonging to a male member at the family level such that even after a husband has died, the son automatically becomes the head, and if there is no son, her father or brothers reclaim ownership of her. This is the status quo that the emancipatory paradigm intended to interrogate. Those women who have managed to navigate the labyrinth can motivate other women to come on board (Carli & Eagly, 2016) and assume leadership of schools rather than leave men domineering in school leadership.

I aimed to explore the gender disparities among the female heads in Zimbabwe and how they were navigating the terrain as they attempted to level the playing field. The research aimed to close the gap between the numbers of male and female school heads in the Zimbabwean education system, specifically in Harare.

Chapter 2 reviewed literature related to the study at the national, continental and global levels. This chapter summarised findings and conclusions on research studies discussed in existing and

relevant literature pertaining to gender disparity and parity issues. I interrogated what other authorities say about leadership, female leadership, feminism, gender issues in education and disparities in educational leadership (Shohsanam, 2020). This chapter carried critical empirical evidence that I referred to during data analysis and discussion of findings of the study.

Chapter 3 interrogated the original transformational leadership theory introduced by Bass and Bass Bernard (1985) and, due to its emancipatory nature, considered appropriate for informing this study. Its tenets are based on emancipation and social transformation, which were key to my research (Shields & Hesbol, 2020). However, it can be argued that gender disparities continue to exist, but a paradigm shift towards equality for the world to attain gender equality must be vigorously pursued. I delved into the transformational leadership theory which underpinned this study.

Chapter 4 outlined the research methodology employed to generate and analyse data. This chapter discussed the research approach, research paradigm (emancipatory), ontology, epistemology, axiology, research design (narratives), research methodology, selection of research participants, generation methods, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, data analysis, issues of trustworthiness, such as credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability. Ethical issues and limitations of the study were also discussed.

In chapter 4, I used a qualitative approach that resonated with the narratives I used as my design so as to capture the voices of the participants. The study was carried out in Harare with five primary and five secondary school female heads. The data were generated from narratives that were obtained by means of interviews, field notes, and questionnaires during narrations, and

clarifications were sought and follow up questions asked. I also rephrased and clarified questions if the participants required further explanations (Creswell, 2010).

I later coded, categorised and put data into themes during narrative analysis, as illustrated by Riessman (2008) and Butina, (2015). Such data analysis was aided by narrative vignettes and verbatim citations from the interviews. Methodological triangulation was carried out to eliminate research prejudice, and for trustworthiness, and in this case, I used interviews and questionnaires.

I also used literature and a theoretical framework to substantiate my research. In compliance with the Wits Ethics Committee requirements, I sought necessary permissions from the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe, and an ethics certificate was awarded from my university. The participants read the participants' information sheet and the tenets of the consent form, after which they signed the consent form, which emphasised their anonymity and protection of their persona and schools throughout the research. They were also informed of their voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any point during the research.

Chapter 5 focused on data analysis and discussions, and it focused on the participant profiles, their narratives and disparities they faced in their line of duty. I presented the data, participant profiles and shared their narratives with regards to gender disparities in school leadership. This was the qualitative data generated through interviews and narratives which were shared by 10 participants in Harare province. The in-depth data indicate robust narratives expressed by women leading primary and secondary schools. There was a level of consistency in successes and challenges and some divergence on some aspects highlighted during interviews. The participants indicated some of the causes leading to gender disparities in educational leadership.

Chapter 6 was also a descriptive analysis of findings that focused on the mitigatory ways towards gender parity. Chapter 5 and 6 also analysed the data in relation to the literature review and the theoretical framework. The social injustices in the educational fraternity towards female leadership have to stop at some point and be transformed into a new era of equality and non-marginalization (Thornburg, 2014).

Chapter 7 was evaluative and looked at the empirical data from the narratives. It yielded five themes, namely underrepresentation in decision making with sub themes on social barriers and cultural expectations, gender discrimination and sub themes of stereotyping and inadequate gender mainstreaming, traditional beliefs and a sub theme of patriarchal culture, humanist philosophy of Ubuntu/ Unhu/ Idea of Collectivism and inadequate leadership capacity. It also underscored lessons that I learnt during my research. The window dressing of gender policies to be curtailed, and pragmatism and workable methodologies to be observed in action plans.

In conclusion, Chapter 8 gave feedback on the research questions referred to in the introductory chapter and linked the findings to the significance of the study. It focused on the presentation of the reflective study summary, conclusions, recommendations, contribution to knowledge and implications for further research. This final chapter confirmed that the data produced managed to shed more light on the initial research problem and the supporting sub-research questions.

8.3 Reflections

The significance and purpose of this research were centralised on the exploration of the experiences and leadership challenges that female school heads encounter while leading schools. Zimbabwean female educational leaders in primary schools faced several challenges (Makura, 2009; Muzvidziwa, 2011; Zikhali & Perumal, 2016). They mentioned stereotyping as the major

cause of women taking up headship positions in primary schools. These shortcomings could be attributed to a lack of academic and professional qualifications and maybe the unwillingness of females to take up leadership positions. A study conducted by Mapolisa and Madziyire (2012) on the dilemmas of 54 primary school heads found out that female heads have been socially, politically, economically and culturally disadvantaged and were not as successful as their male counterparts.

Several researchers concur that barriers impede more women from taking up headship positions (Makura, 2009; Muzvidziwa, 2011; Zikhali & Perumal, 2016). They all focused on primary school heads, deputy heads, teachers in charge and teachers. Though gender challenges might be similar, they did not look at secondary school heads specifically. They also used case studies and interviews in their research whilst this research is based on participants' narratives.

Samples were selected from the female school heads in Harare province. The participants selected were expected to provide their experiences as female schools heads in Zimbabwe, given the disparities in existence and their strategies to move towards gender parity. They were purposely sampled and had a minimum of five years in school leadership. I adopted a qualitative approach with a narrative design to use semi-structured interviews to obtain narratives and capture the participants' actual experiences.

8.4 Conclusions

This study was underpinned by the following research aims and objectives: To explore gender disparity among the female heads in Zimbabwe and how they were navigating as they attempted to level the playing field. The key objective was to study the experiences of female school heads with regards to gender disparities during their tenure of office. This was followed by the sub-

objectives that looked at 1) To critically examine participants' conceptualisations of gender disparity and parity in school leadership 2) To describe the participants' experiences (and challenges) as female heads of schools in the quest to move from gender disparity to gender parity in educational leadership 3) To establish participants' mitigatory strategies to curtail the gender disparities status quo and to ascertain how gender barriers can be minimised and policy made more favourable to women.

The broad research question was based on the experiences of female school heads with regards to gender disparities during their tenure of office. This was broken down into sub-questions: What are the participants' conceptualisations of gender disparity and parity? How do female heads experience gender disparity and gender parity in their role as leaders? Why are mitigatory strategies crucial to curtailing the gender disparities status quo? How do female school heads think gender barriers can be minimised/eliminated, and policy be made more favourable to them? Furthermore, the study was bound by the overarching research question that states that: What are the experiences of female school heads with regards to gender disparities during their tenure of office?

8.4.1 Teachers and school heads statistics by gender

To put the disparities into perspective, I summarised the statistics of 2020 in Table 8.1 below.

Table 8.1: Harare province teachers and school heads statistics by gender

	Females	Males	Total	Females %
Primary School Teachers	5 782	1 398	7 180	81%
Primary School Heads	68	104	172	40%
Secondary School Teachers	2 573	1 256	3 829	67%
Secondary School Heads	31	65	96	32%
Total School Teachers	8 355	2 924	11 279	74%

Total School Heads	99	169	268	37%
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Source: (MoPSE Statistics, 2020)

8.4.2 Empirical analysis

The empirical data analysis yielded five themes: underrepresentation in decision making with sub themes on social barriers and cultural expectations, gender discrimination and sub themes of stereotyping and inadequate gender mainstreaming, traditional beliefs and a sub theme of patriarchal culture, humanist philosophy of Ubuntu/ Unhu/ Idea of Collectivism and inadequate leadership capacity. Narratives from the school heads indicated their concerns and wished to see parity in leadership.

8.4.3 Theoretical analysis

The transformational theory was most suitable for this emancipatory research as, according to Pel et al. (2020), this theoretical framework interrogates diverse transformations, which include, among others, social relations, norms and progress to expand on available literature on gender disparities and to find mitigation ways towards parity. Bass and Bass Bernard (1985) and Burns (1978) propounded the transformational leadership theory and assert that it aims to reverse social injustices in organisations. This is supported by Mertens (2010), who asserts that the transformational theory is applicable to people who are discriminated against or oppressed based on gender (Mertens et al., 2009).

8.4.4 Evaluative analysis

The disparity issue is a national, regional and global issue addressed at several fora such as the Gender Affirmative Action Policy (1992); Nziramasanga Commission (1999); National Gender Policy (2004); the SADC protocol on gender and development (2008); Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development (2005); Beijing conference (1995); United Nations

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, CEDAW (1979) and Sustainable Development Goals SDGs (2015). Unfortunately, most countries have it on paper, but little implementation is observed especially in developing countries such as Zimbabwe (Muzvidziwa, 2012b). The demographic data speaks of more women, the number of teachers indicates more female teaching staff, but the numbers are reversed with more male school heads than females when it comes to leadership. This is observed in the SADC and at the international level (Azcona, Bhatt, Davies et al., 2020; Crawford, Cofie, McEwen et al., 2020; Englehart & Miller, 2020; Forere & Stone, 2009; Kanengoni-Malinga, 2016; Morna & Dube, 2014; Moyo et al., 2020; Simonovic, 2014; Yaliwe, Selebogo, & Ojakorotu, 2013).

8.4.5 Gender disparity and parity

The study revealed that gender disparity and parity are a topical issue that needs to be addressed as soon as possible. My participants had vast and comprehensive knowledge of the disparity and parity concept. Their narratives indicate theoretical and practical knowledge of gender issues in education which is not incorporated in the constitution and the gender policy in Zimbabwe. The participants I engaged with through narratives cited several challenges that militate against the smooth transition from gender disparity to parity.

This anomaly was reinforced and supported by the statistics in the public domain where females are underrepresented (Meyer, Cimpian, & Leslie, 2015). Primitive as it may sound, the male population still feels entitled when it comes to decision-making posts within the education systems. Gender disparities are intensified when the few women in upper leadership posts do not advocate for the elevation of their female counterparts.

The study also established that female heads had made strides in leadership, and it was clear from the findings that if more school heads are given leadership roles, they could surpass the current numbers. By making such strides, female heads were making mitigatory ways to curtail the gender disparities status quo. They were diligent in their professional conduct as observed in Chapter 7 and such accolades, for example, high pass rates and school infrastructure improvements have made them more visible despite their small numbers.

For equal representation to be observed, there must be a gender parity policy in place for all government statutes. Policy can then be made more favourable through better implementation and follow ups in terms of what will be practised. These must be implemented with effective monitoring and evaluation systems in place. This will be in line with the SADC Protocol and the national constitution of Zimbabwe.

8.4.6 Gender discrimination and stereotyping

This study also established that discrimination and stereotyping was still rife, with women being given tedious duties at crucial meetings. The participants stressed that women would be asked to lead the national anthem, opening and closing prayers and catering. They felt that they were not allocated adequate duties that were of decision making context. The participants felt that such minor roles discouraged potential and existing female heads as they thought they had so much to offer. This reinforces findings made by Muzvidziwa (2012b) and Zikhali and Perumal (2016).

On the other hand, it was observed in this study that the female heads who had major roles were quite committed to their duties and delivered set objectives. In essence, the female heads were viewed mainly as inferior and allocated minor roles or bypassed. Vocal and aggressive ones were the ones who ended up having major roles, but due to low numbers, it would also mean fewer

women in higher posts(Karim & Beardsley, 2017).This study also established that fellow women were, at times, not supportive of their fellow female school heads and would vote for men if given a choice.

8.4.7 Patriarchal culture and traditional beliefs

The female respondents stressed that their culture put the men on a pedestal, and breaking the glass ceiling was not easy. The greater incidence of male heads in schools showed great disparity, and nothing much was being done to have the scales positively skewed towards parity (Mutangirwa, 2016). Many of the respondents narrated the lack of support from the women in higher offices as they felt that this could be rectified by having clear policies on gender parity.

In support of the above, Mapolisa and Madziyire (2012) indicated that a vicious cycle is observed in the lack of female leaders, which will mean fewer women in higher and decision-making positions. This, however, does not rule out the fact that female leaders, if given a chance, will excel in such posts, and the few in the offices at present are not deterred.

8.4.8 Humanist philosophy of Ubuntu / Idea of collectivism

This study established that the humanist philosophy of Ubuntu is critical in female leadership. Women heads who were engaged in this study expressed their strength in leadership based on their motherly and compassionate nature. This corroborates with the findings by Chabaya et al. (2009) who observed that one has to have self-awareness and know how others react to the way you lead. Ubuntu shows how others behave and how it affects you as a leader, and that brings out one's strengths and weaknesses. Strengths help one know how much one can take and thrive on whilst weaknesses show what needs working on and limits.

The issue of inadequate support from other women, especially female teachers, was shunned by participants in this study. The study revealed that some women are still jealous of female heads and look down upon when they are still new in the system. The situation was described as rather unbearable when one got allocated a city school whilst coming from a rural setup. This scenario was observed to be distressing the new and young female heads, some of whom would be intimidated out of the system. The participants in this research explained that they had to develop a thick skin to survive, and yet in the spirit of Ubuntu (oneness, citizenry) people are just meant to feel for each other and support those in power. The study also revealed that the idea of collectivism was essential as leadership should embrace transformational knowledge of worldviews and how each one has a role to play towards equality (Ncube, 2010).

8.4.9 A gap in leadership skills

This study established that despite the training female heads underwent, a gap needs to be addressed regarding their leadership skills. The problem of inadequate financial management training was identified amongst the challenges female heads faced and even asserted that it was another reason other women refused to lead for fear of being convicted should there be problems balancing the books. While cases of disparities are rife and posed a major challenge, female heads felt the need for gender-specific staff development sessions to fill some gaps they felt affected them more as women (Grove & Montgomery, 1999). The researcher also observed that the female heads did not get adequate internship before being given key leadership positions (Makura, 2009).

8.5 Recommendations

This study makes several recommendations whose implementation could help reduce the gender disparities in our education system in Zimbabwe. Many of these recommendations emanated from the suggestions made by the participants engaged in this research. As discussed in the preceding

chapters, the government of Zimbabwe has gender legislation and policies in place. Still, there is a mismatch when it comes to the implementation on the ground. In my view, there is a lack of coherence between the policy and practice, and as such, some of my recommendations address that disjuncture.

The recommendations will assist education ministries at the national, regional and global levels, the non-governmental organisations with a special interest in social justice in education, gender and policy ministries, policy-makers and legislatures, cultural leaders, parents, teachers and children irrespective of gender and any other interested parties striving for gender parity and equity. I also suggested issues for further research.

The study solicited information from female school heads to proffer recommendations to shift from gender disparity to gender parity in school leadership through narratives. Despite the overwhelming effects of issues to do with gender disparities in school leadership, some mitigatory ways can be employed to better the situation.

This study also established that female leaders on the ground could help curb some of the causes of gender disparities if embraced. This assumption was reinforced and supported by four school heads (Rudo, Tavonga, Nyasha& Fadzai) who participated in this study. They advocated for a women-only association that caters for gender-specific challenges affecting women. More recommendations were made from the data analysis and discussion of findings.

8.5.1 Professional qualifications

Top on the list of recommendations is to do with educational qualifications. For women to participate fully with the male gender, they ought to have the requisite professional knowledge such as the Bachelors in Educational Management or Masters in Educational Management for

starters. Academic qualifications or a teaching diploma without a management degree does not suffice as colleagues and parents question credibility if one does not possess the requisite management credentials. Female heads ought to use any spare time to develop themselves and utilise school holidays when they are not as busy to upgrade themselves professionally. Teacher training and universities must be gender-sensitive and encourage women to take up management skills-building programmes and managerial modules that equip partakers fully on leadership. Teachers' colleges and universities, which train teachers, should offer courses that equip students fully on leadership roles, its challenges and opportunities. Lastly, women should be encouraged to actively assist each other through interacting and teamwork.

8.5.2 Keeping abreast with gender policies for awareness

Knowledge is power, and female heads must be aware of gender policies in the country so as to use them such that when they present arguments against disparities and inequalities they do so from an informed position. This also affects all females in the teaching fraternity who may not be aware of their constitutional rights and laws that are meant to protect them. Being well informed can help during headship association elections and selections. Forming a female heads association will help look at aspects affecting women, women empowerment and how injustices can be rectified.

By sharing experiences and mitigatory ways, women can become stronger and have a better future as they will be operating from an informed position. Successes and challenges can be shared through such fora to empower each other. Newly appointed female heads will have a starting point in terms of induction and mentorship. Moreover, women should also support their own and scaffold each other, sharing notes on expectations when in the higher offices. They should engage

with women support groups such as The Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe (WCoZ) and The Zimbabwe Women Resource Centre and Network.

The affirmative action policy should be more practical and not just for window dressing. This will see more women in decision making roles and not only as low-level practitioners. Their supportive role must graduate towards leadership, and such actions will have the gender scale positively skewed towards female leadership.

8.5.3 Advocacy towards emancipation

Women need to be practically emancipated and have their association for female school heads apart from the existing combined groups. That way, they can discuss their problems as women and advocate for policies that protect them. Staff development tailor-made to cushion any gaps in leadership skills can be more effective that way. Female leaders and other stakeholders need to have an informed translation of the rationale and context of gender policy, sustainable development goal number five and gender equality tenets in the national constitution.

8.5.4 Social transformations

There is a need for social development in Zimbabwean society and collective work against gender discrimination (Mudau & Ncube, 2017). The vulnerability of women because of gender abuse and stereotyping needs to be dealt with at the grassroots level from the girl child up to adult females for complete social transformation (UNESCO, 2021).

8.6 Implications for Further Research

In this qualitative study, I explored the lives of female leaders leading schools in Zimbabwe. Their lack of fair representation was a bone of contention with respect to gender parity tenets. My results cannot be generalised, but having about 37% female representation in Harare schools exposes us as a country and women's vulnerability is increased. There are enough women in the country's

teaching fraternity to allow for the selection of potential women leaders and balance the gender equation. The implications of the disparities in existence are disturbing, and more can be done to balance the gender scale. Several authorities I interrogated in this study affirmed this (Eagly et al., 2007; Loeb et al., 2010; Mapolisa & Madziyire, 2012; Moorosi, 2012; Muzvidziwa, 2010; Muzvidziwa, 2011; Muzvidziwa, 2013, 2014; Muzvidziwa, 2012b; *The National Gender Policy (2013-2017)*, 2004; Nziramasanga, 1999; Parsaloi & Steyn, 2014; Shava & Ndebele, 2014; Zikhali & Perumal, 2016). The transformational leadership theory I used indicates the reality of implementing a social transformation in education and shift towards parity (Antonakis et al., 2012; Mertens et al., 2009; Northouse, 2016; Pel et al., 2020; Shields, 2010).

My research partially fills the disparity gap in academic discussions, and there are several other ways it can be expounded and developed. The avenues for further research I discuss here are in no way comprehensive but strike me as crucial to pursue. I felt that the one-hour sessions were not enough for the participants who had so much to share, and had we had more time, I am certain more narratives would have come out of the meetings. The female school heads digressed in some instances, indicating that they had other pertinent information to share but was not the focus of this study.

This study is probably not the first to look into female school heads' leadership and gender challenges in primary and secondary schools in Zimbabwe. There is still more room for further research in line with the issues listed below:

The current study was a research on gender issues in higher education, focusing on just female participants. It was based on female primary and secondary school heads, and more probing is essential for tertiary institutions. Moreover, I did not look at gender issues in the Ministry of

Primary and Secondary Education posts higher than school leadership such as District Schools Inspectors, Schools Inspectors, Provincial Education Directors, and Permanent Secretaries.

Another possible area for future research is a male perspective on how women lead schools will be of interest. An analysis of the Constitution of Zimbabwe (2013), the Gender Policy and the Zimbabwe Labour Act Chapter 28:01 (amended as of January 2006) ought to be investigated in terms of implementation and adherence. There must be an analysis on why Affirmative Action is not being used as a strategy to end gender disparities in female leadership in Zimbabwean schools and the relevant associations such as the National Association of Secondary School Heads (NASH) and National Association of Primary School Heads (NAPH). It will also be interesting to have research on the servant leadership of female school heads and explore its boundaries. An exploration of ethical leadership and Ubuntu with regards to female school heads will shed more light on the challenges women face. Underlying issues that affect single and widowed female school heads, the experiences of female deputy heads and why there are gender disparities if we have more female leaders serving as deputies for several years before being promoted to headship positions are other issues worth investigating.

Further, my study was a qualitative one based on narratives. Hence my sample was small. It is therefore prudent to have a quantitative study that utilises larger samples. In addition, this research was conducted in an urban setup. It would be interesting to conduct a similar study in other settings.

8.7 Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes immensely to the body of knowledge on gender issues in education, school leadership and school policy-makers. The disparities and parities problems in this research affect how we, as a country, respond to gender issues.

8.7.1 Contributions to policy implementation

My study concerns how Zimbabwean policies marry with practice on the ground with regards to gender issues (Chirimuuta et al., 2012). My discourse also speaks to the statistical data on population by gender, the feminisation of the teaching profession against the disparity of female school heads in the primary and secondary schools. My study findings show that women leaders are under-represented in Zimbabwean schools. Secondary school heads may suffer from some distinctive barriers levelled against them that may not be experienced in primary schools. They often have to deal with issues of adolescents' discipline, improper associations, examination administration fallacies, school disciplines and staff turnover based on specialist subjects, to name but a few. The general primary school challenges from previous research in Zimbabwe might not have covered all these areas. This research aimed to explore gender disparities experienced by female primary and secondary school heads in Harare Province using the narrative study. A study of its kind based on Harare Province specifically had not yet been done.

8.7.2 Contribution to gender agencies

This study had the potential to add to the body of literature with regard to what is on the ground in schools. It is my belief that strides have been made towards women empowerment, but there is a need to motivate them actually to move from disparity to parity. The findings of this study assist future, and current school female heads in embarking on this leadership journey prepared to reduce the presented challenges.

This study established that the circumstances at schools show vast disparities as the number of female school leaders has a significant gap compared to their male counterparts. However, the narrations and discussions with practising female heads indicated that it is plausible to move towards parity through mitigation strategies at various settings. This corroborates findings by

Chireshe (2012), who advocate for women empowerment in all social spheres. The transformational theory (Pel et al., 2020) reflects the zeal for women leaders to get emancipated and not be passive recipients of gender parity but active contributors (Moyo et al., 2020).

8.7.3 Contribution towards further gender awareness

This research garnered enough contributions towards gender disparities in educational leadership. The gender policies in place have to be implemented, and female school heads have to familiarise themselves with them to benefit effusively. The gender frameworks are not doing much for females in leadership or those aspiring to be leaders. 50/50 representation ought to be seen in all educational departments, and if the women are emancipated and demand the ratification of the gender justices, parity will be achieved. Female leaders are characterised by interconnectedness, compassion and can lead schools effectively (Moyo et al., 2020). This study has the potential to add to the current body of knowledge on female school leadership disparities as well as explore new ways to achieve gender parity in educational leadership. The focus of this study was exploring female leaders' experiences and what makes them fewer in headship posts. The study was unique in the sense that findings were addressing topical issues regarding both primary and secondary schools' female leadership in Zimbabwe. An emancipatory paradigm has not yet been clearly done as the common one has been interpretive. As opposed to case studies and just interviews done earlier, the narratives brought another angle to the gender debate as well.

Contribution to new knowledge includes having a formal proposal to NASH highlighting the need for an only female association so as to have women conferring on their own. Moreover, gender

polices must have monitoring and evaluation when it comes to gender parity in associations and schools.

8.8 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research has contributed robust findings on social injustices with regards to gender disparities in Harare schools, Zimbabwe. This study presented evidence to answer the question on the existence of gender disparities in primary and secondary education and suggested mitigatory ways towards gender parity. The research established that female heads, despite their low numbers, are leading schools meritoriously, as observed by their merit awards in various capacities of education. It is a fact that discrimination and marginalisation are still in existence and causing socio-emotional problems for the women when faced with patriarchal spouses and find problems with the power their wives attain as female heads. Both male and female teachers were observed as reacting differently to the female school heads. It is recommended that the spirit of gender equality, collectivism and transformation be observed for gender parity to be achieved in both primary and secondary schools. This chapter presented the main conclusions, recommendations, contributions to new knowledge and suggested areas for future research. It responded to the research questions and acknowledged that the data generated managed to address the initial aim of this study. A summary of findings emanating from gender disparities in school leadership in Zimbabwean schools was proffered. I can confirm that the broad research question has been addressed and the research aim and objectives achieved. I also focused on the conclusions drawn from the transformational leadership theoretical framework, review of related literature, the methodology and the qualitative data generated. Subsequently, the recommendations emanating from the findings were made for future researchers interested in gender issues in educational leadership. Several government policies need to be amplified to match the tenets of Sustainable

Development Goals, Beijing Conference recommendations, SADC Protocol, and Zimbabwean Constitution and Gender Policies in Zimbabwe.

EPILOGUE

“Here is to the women who cracked glass ceilings so that others would shatter them.”

I wanted to do this research so much and embarked on the PhD journey with enough heads up on the challenges and expectations involved. I was ready though I was oblivious of the magnitude of the mammoth task ahead. I always finish what I start, but I suffered a dual family bereavement just as I finished my initial draft. My supervisor, coordinator, and friends had to pull me out of an emotional dungeon for me to finish the race. The two men I had started PhD research journey with were not going to finish with me. I lost my Dad and Husband in the space of four days, and that emotional impediment was too huge to bear, devastating and nearly insurmountable. The heavens, angels, supervisor, relatives and friends played a crucial role to make sure I stayed on my academic track and honour the memories of the two great men who loved me until death. May their souls rest in eternal peace.

The *Zimbabwean Sunday Mail* national paper of February the 7th (2021) had a headline that indicated that the Grade 7 results statistics had more girls out-performing the boys. It spoke to my research and inspired me further. Having the young girls of today leading in the grassroots results of Zimbabwean schools foretells a brighter and more gender positive future. As I look at the pre-colonial period, it was unheard of to have girls leading in any academic results as they were marginalised quantitatively due to multiple roles they had to undertake and endure (Zvobgo, 1985).

As a female teacher and a school leader, my personal experience motivated me to conduct this study as I cannot detach my socialisation from the research. As an African and Zimbabwean woman, I have lived with gender disparities and grew to appreciate the extra mile women must make to be recognised. The study revealed that women’s personal agency makes them change

agents for achieving gender parity. Moreover, the current Zimbabwean constitution and international and national pressure groups have emasculated the previously accommodated discriminatory stereotypes.

Liberia, Estonia, Germany and the United States of America, to name but a few, have embraced women leaders, and such ladies did not disappoint. They broke through ceilings and survived glass cliffs whilst making pathways. Most recent is the history-making celebration of the shattered glass ceiling by Kamala Harris, USA Vice President. Her 2020 landmark victory shook gender corridors and inspired the girl child world over.

The data generation process was my most enjoyable phase, and it was so affirming for me. The women I engaged with had so much to share and enlightened me on what is required for parity to be realised. Their narratives and responses indicated some deeply rooted gender inequalities that need urgent attention and implementation of reforms for progress to be observed. These women speak on behalf of female leaders in all four corners of the world, who are trailblazers in the gender equality beliefs, and I emulate such. Empowerment is the way to go, especially by those who would have made it into power. Unfortunately, some women do not empower their fellow women when they have been elevated in leadership circles. After cracking the glass ceilings, they must bring up their fellow women to shatter them.

The literature review I interrogated indicated a lack of practical solutions to this global phenomena. What is encouraging is what I realised in my theoretical framework; there is room for social transformation, and parity is possible. What is encouraging is that most countries, including Zimbabwe, have started working towards gender parity.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Researcher's Letter of Introduction



Appendix 1: Participant's Letter of Information

Dear Madam

My name is Vongai Blessing Chakanyuka and I am a PhD student in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Wits University in Johannesburg. As part of my studies, I must undertake a research project and I am investigating this research topic: **FROM GENDER DISPARITY TO GENDER PARITY IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: NARRATIVES OF FEMALE SCHOOL HEADS FROM HARARE PROVINCE, ZIMBABWE**. The aim of this research project is to find out the reason for the existence of gender disparities in school leadership through narratives from female school heads

As part of this project, I would like to invite you to take part in an interview. There will be a questionnaire to know more about your biographical information followed by an interview. This activity will involve you and your educational leadership experiences and will take around 45 to 60 minutes. With your permission, I would also like to record the interview using a digital device.

You will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this study, and there will be no disadvantage or penalties for not participating. 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 nor your schools name or any identifying information and the information you give will be held securely and not disclosed to anyone else. After completion of the project, research data will be stored in password protected

Appendix 2: Participants' Informed Consent



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Appendix 2: Participant's Informed Consent

Research Topic: **FROM GENDER DISPARITY TO GENDER PARITY IN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: NARRATIVES OF FEMALE SCHOOL HEADS FROM HARARE PROVINCE, ZIMBABWE.**

RESEARCHER: VONGAI BLESSING CHAKANYUKA

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 that my participation will remain anonymous. YES NO (PLEASE CIRCLE)

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 anonymously by other researchers following this study. YES NO

Signature of participant:

Name of participant:

Date:

Appendix 3: Biographical Data of Participants

Appendix 3 - Provisional Biographical questions to inform and develop purposeful narratives between participant and researcher (Vongai). Section A focuses on experiences as a girl child, school, tertiary and family life.

SECTION A

TABLE 1. Tick appropriate box

AGE	30- 40 ☐	41- 50 ☐	51-60 ☐	61 + ☐	
ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS	Z.J.C ☐	“O” Level ☐	“A” Level ☐		
PROFESSIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	Certificate of Education ☐	Diploma of Education ☐	Bachelor of Education ☐	Master of Education ☐	PHD (& above) ☐
NO. OF YEARS AS A TEACHER	1-5 Years ☐	6 - 10 ☐	11-15 ☐	16-20 ☐	21 & above ☐
NO. OF YEARS AS A DEPUTY HEAD	1-5 Years ☐	6 - 10 ☐	11-15 ☐	16-20 ☐	21 & above ☐
NO. OF YEARS AS A SCHOOL HEAD	6-10 Years ☐	11-15 ☐	16-20 ☐	21 & above ☐	
MARITAL STATUS	Single	Married	Divorced	Widowed	
NO. OF CHILDREN	1 -2 ☐	3-4 ☐	5-6 ☐	7-8 ☐	9 & above ☐

TABLE 2.

SCHOOL	ENROLMENT	LOCATION	STAFF BY GENDER
Government ☐	Male ☐	High density ☐	Male ☐
Private ☐	Female ☐	Medium density ☐	Female ☐
Church ☐		Low density ☐	
Other (specify) ☐			

SECTION B: Semi Structured Interview Questions

The interview will be centralised on your teaching and professional aspirations and life as a female school head in a Zimbabwean setting.

1. What do you understand by the terms gender parity and disparity?
2. a) How many years have you served as a school head and at how many schools?
b) Why did you move if you led more than one school?
3. How do you think the following groups of people (Male & Female) respond to the way you lead and why:
 - Learners
 - Parents
 - Staff members
 - Line supervisors (District Schools Inspectors - D.S.Is)
 - The community in general.
- 4) What do you consider to be the challenges you face as a female school head?
- 5) What mitigatory ways do you implement to cope when faced with challenges?
- 6) If you had a choice and opportunity, what would you do differently to improve female heads roles at schools?
- 7) What would be your advice or heads up to future female heads?
- 8) What do you consider to be the positive factors of being a woman principal?
- 9) Did you at any given stage regret your decision to be a school head and wish you had stayed a teacher or deputy, explain?
- 10) What strategy would you recommend to influence more women to apply for headship posts?
- 11) Describe your awareness of gender biased attitudes in your career and as a school head?
- 12) **Share any particular stories you personally experienced in your line of work as a school leader that may reflect some gender bias.**

Thank you for your time

Vongai Blessing Chakanyuka

Appendix 4: Ethical Declaration by the Researcher and Supervisor

SIGNATURES (REQUIRED)

Declaration: We, the signatories, declare that all information on this form is correct and that we will strive to maintain the highest ethical standards in this research at all times, according to disciplinary and university expectations, recognising that ethical practice in research is always a continuing process.

I recognise that it is my responsibility to conduct my research in an ethical manner according to Guidelines of the University of the Witwatersrand, according to any laws and/or legal frameworks that may apply, and according to the norms and expectations of my discipline. In preparing this Application for Ethics Clearance form, I have consulted the **Guidelines for Human Research Ethics Clearance Application / Non-Medical** (available on this website <https://www.wits.ac.za/research/researcher-support/research-ethics/ethics-committees/>) and have familiarised myself with the ethical guidelines specific to my discipline.

☒ Yes ☐ No

By signing this form, the researcher and supervisor of this project undertake to ensure that any amendments to this project that are required by the Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) are made before the project commences.

	Date	Name	Signature
Applicant	24/01/20	YONGAI B. CHAKANYUKA	GBY
Supervisor	24/01/20	GEETA MOTILAL	

Appendix 5: Application Letter to Ministry of Education Zimbabwe for Research in Schools



Wits School of Education (Parktown Campus)
27 Saint Andrews Road
Parktown, Johannesburg
2193
19 March 2020

The Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (Zimbabwe)
Harare Province
Zimbabwe

Dear Sir/Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH- VONGAI BLESSING CHAKANYUKA (Student No. 1987250).

This is to confirm that **VONGAI BLESSING CHAKANYUKA** (Student No. 1987250) is formally registered as a PhD student in the School of Education (University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg). As part of her degree requirements, she is expected to conduct research at some of your schools. Her study title is: **From Gender Disparity to Gender parity in school leadership: Narratives of female school heads from Harare Province, Zimbabwe**. Kindly allow her to conduct this research in your schools.

The study aims to explore the views of female school heads regarding issues of parity in school leadership in Zimbabwe and shall use semi-structured interviews and documents reviews to generate data.

Dr S.E. Mthiyane; Wits School of Education; University of the Witwatersrand
27 Saint Andrews Road, Parktown, 2050

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Tel: +27(0)11 717 3092; Fax: 086 406 4087
Email: Siphiwe.Mthiyane@wits.ac.za

PLEASE TAKE NOTE THAT:

There will be no financial benefits that participants may receive as part of their participation in this research project.

Their identity will not be divulged under any circumstance/s.

All their responses will be treated with strict confidentiality.

Fictitious names will be used to represent their names.

Participation is voluntary; therefore, they will be free to withdraw from the research at any time they so wish without incurring any negative or undesirable consequences/penalty.

For further information on this research project, please feel free to contact her supervisor, Dr Geeta Motilal at 011-717 3207 or E-mail: Geeta.Motilal@wits.ac.za.

Yours sincerely

Dr S.E. Mthiyane (Senior Lecturer & HoD – Division of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies)

Wits School of Education.

Telephone: 011 717 3092
Siphiwe.Mthiyane@wits.ac.za

Dr S.E. Mthiyane; Wits School of Education; University of the Witwatersrand
27 Saint Andrews Road, Parktown, 2050

Tel: +27(0)11 717 3092; Fax: 086 406 4087
Email: Siphiwe.Mthiyane@wits.ac.za

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Appendix 6: Permission from Ministry of Education Zimbabwe to Conduct Research in Schools

*All communications should be addressed to
"The Secretary for Primary and Secondary
Education
Telephone: 794895, 796211
Telegraphic address: "EDUCATION"
Fax: 794505*



Reference: Vongai Chakanyuka
Ministry of Primary and
Secondary Education
P.O Box CY 121
Causeway
HARARE

12 November 2019

Vongai Blessing Chakanyuka
University of Witwatersrand
Wits School of Education
Parktown
Johannesburg

**Re: PERMISSION FOR VONGAI BLESSING CHAKANYUKA (1987250) TO
VISIT SCHOOLS IN HARARE PROVINCE FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES.**

Reference is made to your application to collect data for your PhD studies from the
above stated schools within Harare Province on the research titled:

**"FROM GENDER DISPARITY TO GENDER PARITY IN SCHOOL
LEADERSHIP: NARRATIVES OF FEMALE SCHOOL HEADS FROM
HARARE PROVINCE, ZIMBABWE."**

Permission is hereby granted to notify the Wits Ethics Committee that the Ministry
will support your PhD in Educational Leadership research in our schools.

J.T Dewah
Chief Director Curriculum Development and Technical Service
For: **SECRETARY FOR PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**



Appendix 7: Editor's Note

Client: Vongai Blessing Chakanyuka

Thesis title: From Gender Disparity to Gender Parity in School Leadership: Narratives of Female School Heads from Harare Province, Zimbabwe

Thank you for allowing me to edit and format your doctoral thesis, titled “From Gender Disparity to Gender Parity in School Leadership: Narratives of Female School Heads from Harare Province, Zimbabwe”. Below is the summary of the editing that was done:

- **Formatting**
The structure of the thesis was formatted – font and paragraph consistent, the document was justified, and the pages numbered.
- **Editing**
Spelling errors were corrected, the use of contractions was written in full, and acronyms were ensured to be spelt out the first time. The author tends to write long sentences with several conjunctions. Long sentences were broken down into shorter sentences where appropriate. For most of the methodology and results component of the chapters, the authors’ use of passive phrases was corrected into active and affirming words where necessary. The use of tenses was edited as appropriate.
- **Referencing**
The referencing style was edited to be consistent with the APA 6th edition format as recommended by the client.
- **Technicality**
The language used in the thesis was edited to academic writing where necessary.

Editor: Dr Adedayo Ajidahun

E-mail: presskhora@gmail.com

Phone number: 078 178 1423

Appendix 8: Proofreader's Note



UNIVERSITY OF ZIMBABWE

Department of Languages Literature and Culture
University of Zimbabwe
PO BOX MP 167
Mount Pleasant
Harare
Zimbabwe
23 January 2022

Proofreading / Language Editing Certificate

To whom it may concern

*This is to certify that I proofread and edited the thesis **From Gender Disparity to Gender Parity in School Leadership: Narratives of Female School Heads from Harare Province, Zimbabwe** by Vongai Blessing Chakanyuka in line with professional language editing standards prerequisite for thesis submission.*

I corrected wrong punctuation, misplaced punctuation marks, spelling, sentence construction, tense, number and concord and minor language errors. I also pointed out ambiguities in meaning and, where applicable, suggested adjustments to the sequence and/or construction of sentences and paragraphs which negatively affected the flow of the argument and/or undermined the cohesion and coherence of the same. To the extent possible, I either removed or rephrased unnecessary repetitions of ideas and inappropriately used words. Finally, I checked the correspondence between in-text references and the authors' reference list, indicating omissions and errors where applicable. I also dealt with word and paragraph spacing errors. I also dealt with colloquial language e.g. "come down with it" and metaphorical expressions which undermined the formality of the document e.g. "a pie in the sky", "navigating the terrain", "levelling the play field" and unnecessary verbosity which compromised the comprehension of crucial information in the document.

I wish the author success with the final submission and trust that the thesis will impact as intended by the researcher.

Kudzai Gotosa (Dr)

kgotosa

Email: kudzaigotosa@gmail.com