

**GENDER EQUITY STRATEGIES FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF WOMEN
PRINCIPALS IN SOUTH AFRICAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

By

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ABSTRACT

There is unequal treatment of female and male school principals, whereby male principals are respected and trusted more than female principals. This study is focused on strategies that can be employed for the appointment of females as gender equality is emphasised in the workplace. The study revealed that (a) females are promoted as principals but at primary schools as their management skills are undermined for them to lead secondary schools, (b) lack of support from the family structure which forms the root of gender stereotyping and in the workplace, as workshops are not continuously offered for staff development and (c) lack of confidence in female principals because of inadequate qualifications. This study used the qualitative study method whereby semi-structured interviews were conducted with three purposively selected participants – a male principal, a female principal and a male circuit manager. Participants shared a common view that if females were supported enough, they would make great principals – they have got potential. Moreover, strategies were outlined that can support female principals as (a) campaigns that advocate gender equity in the workplace focused on addressing men, (b) Continuous Professional Development offered by the Department of Education that will enhance the skills and knowledge of principals and (c) formation of Professional Learning Communities that would help groups of principals with shared information, challenges and strategies. Further research should be conducted on how the identified strategies could be implemented for the balancing of gender equity in the workplace and this would need participants from the offices of the Department of Education.

Keywords: Culture, discrimination, feminism, gender equality, leadership, secondary schools, stereotype

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DH	Departmental Heads
DoE	Department of Education
DP	Deputy Principals
EEA	Employment Equity Act
EEA	Employment Equity Act
GEA	Gender Equity Act
NQF	National Qualification Framework
NSC	National Senior Certificate
PED	Provincial Education Department
PHD	Pull Her/Him Down
PLC	Professional Learning Communities
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SACE	South African Council For Educators
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers Union
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SMT	School Management Team

1. BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

Post-1994, South African educational systems had to be reformed to accommodate the changing world (Ahmed & Suk Daven, 2021). Among the changes that took place is the focus of this study – gender equity as a process of being fair to women and men. This ensures that women are compensated for the social and historical disadvantages that occurred in the past so that women can be employed and occupy higher positions such as leadership roles in educational institutions.

Feminist theory is the selected conceptual framework for my study. This theory articulates how men and women differ greatly (Powell, 2018). This theory stipulates how women are treated and how they are perceived; even though they have undergone an academic transformation, they are still seen as incapable individuals about work matters who belong in the kitchen, taking care of their children and husbands – this is a form of gender stereotyping (Powell, 2018). The burning issue at hand is the perception of society at large that views women as failures in the principalship role. There is an element of undermining women, who are seen as incompetent individuals when it comes to leadership roles. This leaves them feeling empty and afraid to take risks as they think they will fail (Ndlovu & Gerwel Proches, 2019). They do not feel confident in their abilities; thus, they are left feeling small and afraid of proposing ideas – this whole practice results in the violation of the human rights of women (Ramcharan, 2022).

In addition, the Theory of Marxism and women's liberation is grounded in the slavery and discrimination of women (Marx, 1973). Pre-1994, women were oppressed and did not have opportunities to pursue careers or schooling. When democracy came into the picture, educational systems had to change to incorporate world changes – one of these changes being gender equity in workplaces (secondary female principal appointments) (Moorosi, 2010). Post-1994, there was a slight change where women were employed but were not promoted to principal positions. If they were appointed to principal positions, they were undermined by society and received no respect from their colleagues – these experiences left schools in chaos (Bettini et al., 2022). According to Sinden (2020), democracy brought changes for women whereby it was constituted that more than 50% of women must be in leadership positions. South Africa has not

reached the target of 50% which constitutes equity, with female principals at 36%. According to Buthelezi and Makhoba (2020), Circular 09 of 2020 from the Gauteng Province supports the notion that equity in the workplace, 50:50, has not been achieved according to the implementation of the Employment Equity Plan, as more men are employed in leadership positions compared to women.

Moreover, there are challenges that female principals come across, as indicated by the underperformance of their schools, which highlight problems with leadership within the schools (Ndlovu & Gerwel Proches, 2019). This is what this study focused on, and attention will be drawn to the perspective of challenges female principals encounter so they can be understood and therefore addressed so that they do not have an impact on upcoming female principals and can leave a mark of stability and support to the ones already appointed as principals. In addition, Zikhali and Smit (2019) note that female principals leave the system because of the challenges they encounter. The main focus of this study, identifying these challenges, was considered by looking at what other researchers have found in relation to this topic (from the perspective of the literature review); once the study identified any knowledge gaps, gender equity strategies were formulated. Furthermore, these challenges make it very difficult for other female principals to be appointed as there is no trust in them – this impacts the objectives of equity in the workplace (Brion & Ampah-Mensah, 2021).

According to Iyekolo et al. (2020), there is a rise in the number of female teaching staff within developing countries but there is still a sense of discrimination and a low percentage of females occupying leadership roles. From my perspective, I agree with what the latter researcher has said, the reason being that in South Africa, females are being appointed as teachers but only a few are promoted to principal positions. Furthermore, the number of female school leaders is relatively low compared to male principals (Fuller et al., 2019). From my point of view, I support Fuller et al.'s (2019) statement, as the level of respect and trust given to female principals is low when compared to male principals.

From the point of the literature review, my study is supported by researchers like Bush (2022), with strategies to assist appointed female principals under the proposed document called "Succession planning for school principals". There was a need for this preparation to take place so that the level of dysfunctional schools would drop, as a

school's performance is based on the school's management. Brauckmann et al. (2020) agreed with Bush (2022) and added that professional development for principals was needed. I, therefore, endorse this initiative of supporting principals as the management of the school is regarded as the engine that will facilitate the effective operation of the school.

According to Kılınç et al. (2021), Turkey is also reforming gender equity in the workplace and women must also be appointed to managerial positions comparably to South Africa. Moreover, Du Plessis et al. (2019) are in support of what the above-mentioned researcher has indicated and developed lenses and scale items to measure the insight of school principals. This was formulated after 1994 when women were promoted and challenges surfaced. From my point of view, my study focused on raising gender equity strategies in the appointment of secondary school principals by identifying challenging areas for female principals and how they can be resolved to maintain the balance of the gender equity plan.

Furthermore, Alhassan and Duorinaah (2020) stated some reasons why females are not appointed as principals, one of which was socio-cultural barriers – this refers to norms originating from social and cultural values and practices that were formed during the apartheid era that still stigmatise women in this democratic era. Lastly, Kossek et al. (2017) presented stereotypes as cultural beliefs that posit women as people who belong doing household chores and are under their husbands as the head of the family. This notion explains exactly what is happening in the workplace. Women in leadership positions are undermined by their colleagues, both men and women and society at large (Hideg & Shen, 2019). Therefore, the main problem statement for my study was how gender equity can be raised in the appointment of women in principal positions at South African secondary schools.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research question that this study sought to answer is: How can gender equity be raised in the appointment of women in principal positions at South African secondary schools?

The sub-questions are:

- What does gender equity entail in the workplace?
- How can gender equity challenges that female leaders face at secondary schools be resolved?
- Which development strategies can help female leaders grow professionally towards their appointment as future principals?

3. AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The research aimed to investigate how gender equity can be raised in the appointment of women in principal positions in South African secondary schools.

The objectives of the research were:

- To explain gender equity in the workplace.
- To explore how gender challenges that female leaders face at secondary schools can be resolved.
- To offer development strategies that can help female leaders grow professionally towards their appointment as future principals.

4. CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

Gender: Gender from the perspective of this study is defined as the variety of physical appearances relating to females and males that differentiate them concerning the roles they play in society – but paying more attention to the roles they play in schools as principals (Lindsey, 2020). The reason why gender is part of this study is because this study addressed gender imbalances in terms of the treatment of female principals compared to male principals.

Equity: Equity refers to fairness and justice. Therefore, this study is grounded in historical events whereby women were not fairly treated compared to men. Post-1994, there were changes where women were given opportunities to be in leadership positions. Currently, women are leading, but there are challenges that they face. This study addressed strategies to promote gender equity in workplaces (Morley, 2018).

Principals: According to Grissom et al. (2021), principals are appointed officials that manage the day-to-day activities of the school. This is a person who occupies the highest managerial and leadership position in the school, ensuring that the school functions effectively. Principals are at the centre of this study, as it sought to find out how female principals can be assisted, so that they can be seen as leaders with competencies and skills who can take schools far, without being belittled.

Secondary schools: According to Lopez and Rugano (2018), secondary schools are institutions of learning that offer education after primary school. Secondary schools are managed by principals that at times can be female principals. From the perspective of this study, female principals encounter challenges as they lead these secondary schools.

Women leadership: According to Zulu (2011), women leadership entails characteristics such as employing transformational leadership styles; being sexless, collaborative and participatory; servant leadership; having integrity and professionalism; sharing information and power; and having strong communication and interpersonal skills. These characteristics of leadership allow female principals to lead effectively which would benefit the educational sector in promoting gender equity and is an important concept for my study.

5. LITERATURE REVIEW

Section 1 of the research report contained a summary of the entire research project. Furthermore, sections 2–4 outlined the core purpose of the study by outlining the aim, objectives, problem statement and clarification of concepts of this study. From this section of the study, I explore the theoretical framework of this study by reviewing previous research on gender equity strategies for the appointment of women principals in South African secondary schools and compare this to women principals abroad.

5.1 Theory of Feminism

The importance of the theoretical framework in the research process is to lay the foundation of the study that gives it direction and focus; moreover, it helps the study identify the limits to generalisations that are commonly made. This research adopted the feminist perspective as the theoretical framework by Hooks (2000), whose belief is

based on deconstructing male-controlled domination in social institutions from many parts of the world (Mutekwe, 2012). Feminism is not limited to understanding gender inequality practices but also the politics of male domination (Meena et al., 2017). Its application is evaluating women's lived experiences and social roles in the social institutions in which they are working (Mutekwe, 2013). The feminist perspective has three dimensions: radical, liberal and Marxist-socialist feminism. These dimensions are explained in the subsequent sections of liberal feminism.

Gender inequalities are prevalent in the field of education, thus feminism was chosen to drive this study as it is in line with the field of educational leadership and management. According to Young and Skrla (2003), feminism has brought changes in the field of education over the past years. This leads to more research being conducted based on feminism and leadership and results revealed that the androcentric perspective is contrary to the fundamentals of feminism, and takes over leadership practice and theories (Shakeshaft, 1995).

According to Epp et al. (1994), androcentric is defined as unfair treatment of female experiences as male experiences are given superior treatment. For Shakeshaft (1995), according to the universal reality, leadership roles are seen as mostly suitable for men. Furthermore, according to the universal reality in the context of educational leadership, other researchers agree, such as Eicher-Catt (2005), who asserts that a leader is a male-identified concept. According to Gill (1997), many researchers believe that males must be leaders.

According to Hooks (2000), feminism as a theory aims to combat gender inequalities and grant justice to females. Therefore, feminism was regarded as a suitable theoretical framework for this study as it focuses on the undermined gender and yet encourages women's freedom. Furthermore, Hartmann (2003) claims that feminism exposes that women are not treated the same way as men and that there is a need to seek liberation and justice for women. According to Oplatka and Hertz-Lazarowitz, (2003), if men and women were treated the same, this could positively influence effective school management. The reason why I related feminism theory with this study is that feminism theory gives a clear explanation as to why women are undermined in principal positions in education, in this case, secondary schools (Hooks, 2000).

One major thread of feminism is to eradicate male domination that resists and ignores female contributions to education (Blackmore & Kenway, 1993; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Grogan 1999; Gupton & Slick, 1996; Shakeshaft, 1995). According to Spender (cited in Acker, 1994), human knowledge is proof of male decisions. I agree with the latter researcher, that practically within the educational field, particularly in management and leadership, women are not given the respect that men get. Women are undermined and their decisions are criticised compared to those of men.

According to Blackmore and Kenway (1993), the unequal treatment of men and women in terms of appointments for leadership positions, whereby men are seen as true and strong leaders and women are seen as incompetent leaders, must remain as such. I strongly disagree with the researcher's point of view as it is against gender equity, which points out that men and women are the same and should be given equal opportunities. According to Blackmore (2013) and Purnell (2007), improvement and resolutions to the dilemmas of female principals remain challenges. I understand these researchers' sentiments as this study's focus was on "gender equity strategies for the appointment of women principals in South African secondary schools". Furthermore, this study focused on the implementation of gender equity, where women are prioritised and given equal opportunities when it comes to employment; however, in the appointment of females, there are challenges that they encounter. This research report intended to address the strategies that could be put in place to support appointed female principals and advocates more appointments of female principals as per the gender equity principle.

Feminism has other theories that are affiliated with it. However, this study only focused on four and Figure 1 was developed to explain the concept of feminism in more detail.

Figure 1
Model of Feminist Theory

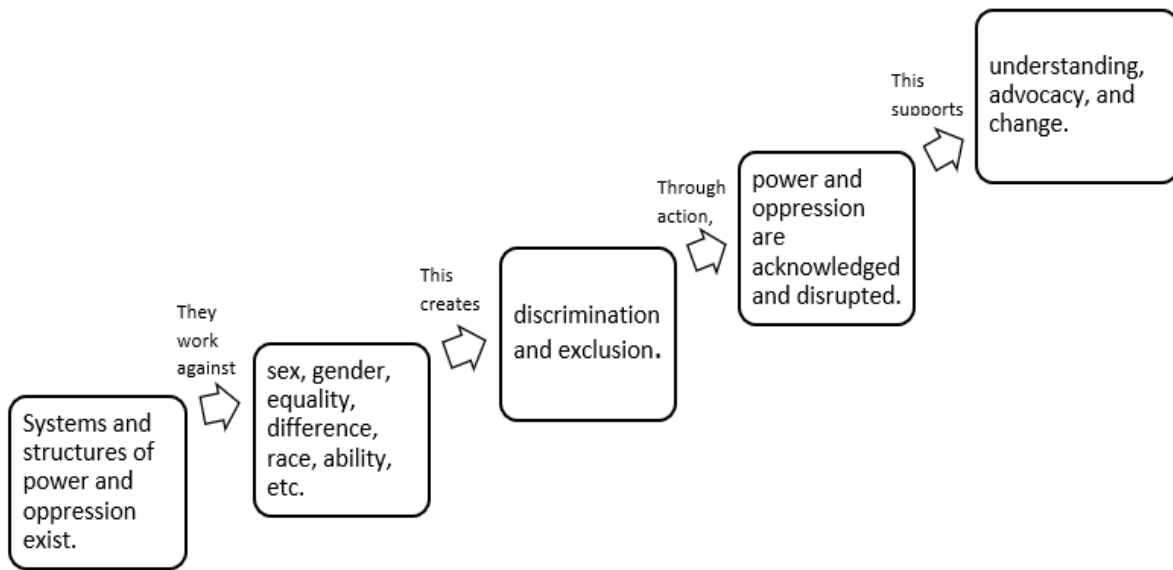


Figure 1: Feminism theory developed by Egbert and Sanden (2019)

I will now explain liberal feminism in more detail.

5.1.1 Liberal feminism

According to Korteweg and Yurdakul (2021), liberal feminism is one of the earliest forms of feminism, pointing out that women’s status in society is centred on the isolation of women from men thus resulting in unequal opportunities. The primary objective of liberal feminism is to do away with gender inequality. Liberal feminism perceives society as individuals who are equal and therefore must have equal rights. According to Law (2019), liberal feminism is indeed aiming to change people’s perspectives and aiming to change society’s views regarding women who are often seen as people who cannot lead, work or go to school (Bragg et al., 2020). This mentality is the underlying contributing factor to the challenges female principals have endured.

Wolf (2007) states that women’s status within society is grounded in unequal opportunities and segregation from men. Liberal feminism aims to eliminate gender inequality. Moreover, liberal feminism beliefs are rooted in the traditions of philosophical liberalists and British and French feminist theory (Herouach, 2019). A society within the eyes of democracy constitutes people subjected to equal human rights as they are seen as equal human beings irrespective of their gender (Cole,

2022). Female principals are not perceived as transformational leaders, as liberal feminism points out that women have been segregated from men. Women's leadership skills have been undermined by society and men are given more respect in leadership positions than women. Liberal feminism is in the process of constructing change in social structures and changing the attitudes of people (Verloo, 2018).

The primary objective of liberal feminism is to improve the condition of females by seeking to grant equal opportunities (Hartmann, 2003). This feminism is aimed at eradicating all stumbling blocks to education as a contributing factor to inequality for women as it disadvantages them in performing to their full capacity (Grogan, 1996). Hooks' (2000) view regarding liberal feminism is that it fights against gender discrimination and stereotypes and calls for equal opportunities. I, therefore, laid the groundwork for this study using the conceptions of liberal feminism, as it notes that women are not treated as per the human rights advocated in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (RSA, 1996a). Furthermore, in agreement with the constitution, women are free and yet are not supported as leaders in principalship appointments in secondary schools. This theory of liberal feminism was relevant to this study as it encourages female educators, departmental heads, deputy principals and lastly principals that they are capable, competent and talented enough to carry out the principalship role. This theory was developed because women were previously disadvantaged, in the sense that they were not allowed to take up leadership and managerial positions. The current situation is that women are in leadership positions but there are challenges that they face in the workplace; for instance, they are often not respected as their leadership skills are undervalued, particularly at the secondary school level. This problem is often seen when the school underperforms in the Grade 12 results. According to Coffey and Delamont (2000), affirmative action is a strategy that strives for gender equity in the workplace by developing positions for female principals.

Liberal feminism pays attention to the ability of women so they can maintain their equality through their own choices and actions (Marille, 1996). As a result, female principals should align with the views of liberal feminists to equalise both the political and legal rights of women against those of men (Mutekwe, 2013). Liberal feminism is falsely accused of carrying the notion that "women are naturally less active and intelligent as compared to men". I strongly disagree with that statement as women are

capable and powerful beings who can become transformational leaders if they are supported. Looking at the current systems put in place, women can occupy leadership positions but they are undermined, which prevents them from performing to the best of their abilities (Kanter, 2017). As a result, this creates challenges and this formed part of this study.

This selected theory for this study served as an important tool as it guided this study in following this philosophical point of view. This research project used liberal feminism theory as it aimed to empower women in the workplace to balance gender equity – this is the primary objective of liberal feminism theory. Moreover, this theoretical framework was relevant, as it seeks to eradicate gender imbalances between women and men, where men are treated as superior to women in school principal appointments. The theory outlines that women were historically disadvantaged because of their gender. This calls for a mind shift in society and the workplace.

Liberal feminism is on the move to eradicate barriers caused by education that see women as the disadvantaged gender. It has been developed to encourage women to be acknowledged for who they are with their talents and be given an opportunity to perform to their potential level (Ford, 2018). Furthermore, it promotes equality and fights against gender stereotyping and sex (Stromquist, 2022).

From my point of view, the background of this study allowed me to have a look into what has been happening in secondary schools and get a clear understanding as to why female principals underperform in their leadership roles. Moreover, liberal feminism supports this study, as it seeks strategies that will help female principals be respected and valued in their work and be treated like men (Cole, 2022). If the objectives of liberalism and gender equity are to be achieved, then the first step is to abolish gender inequality as an unfair and unequal treatment of women in society (Belknap, 2020).

5.1.2 Socialist feminism theory

According to Wang (2017), gender inequality and social class are two principles that ground the socialist feminism theory. Furthermore, this theory believes in economic and cultural action to challenge capitalist systems (Mohajan, 2022). It advocates equal opportunities for both women and men and a balance in domestic work in the

household, whereby men are advised to help women in cleaning, washing and cooking as they are viewed as a basic skill for any human being. Moreover, it believed that if women are perceived as “slaves” in the house, this will force them to depend on men for survival and will deny the primary objective of gender equity that strives for women to be employed in the workplace and prioritised for leadership positions (Brown, 2017). I agree with socialist feminism as it supports my study – it aims to do away with the slavery of women and advocates equal opportunities for women and men. It also calls for policies to be developed which would state that men must help with household chores as a way of reducing stress and family burdens that are on the shoulders of women; this would give them an opportunity to go out and work without the stress of childcare, laundry and cleaning the house (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018).

5.1.3 Black feminist theory

As a researcher, I realised that I could not leave out Black feminism as it also links to this study. In South Africa, women are often oppressed in three ways – as Blacks, as employees and as women (Dominelli, 2017). Women are oppressed because of cultural beliefs and practices (Dominelli, 2017). Moreover, the oppression of women is from men’s point of view, that men’s roles are described outside the family domains and women are associated with private domains. For instance, previously, women were seen as individuals who should not go out to school and work and had to remain at home, taking care of the house and children; whereas men were allowed to work, go out and have fun. Men are treated in a way that would incur disrespect if they were asked to do house chores as these are for women (Nkosi & Mulaudzi, 2017).

Black feminist theory promotes that the life experiences of Black women must be taken into consideration, as Black feminism highlights race discrimination that was practised in the past. Post-1994, democracy changed many practices, bringing positive change into people’s lives (Brooks, 2017). According to Moraga and Anzaldúa (2022), a strategy to free Black women from the hands of oppression is to allow women to freely express themselves and not silence them and to further their studies.

5.2 Legislative Gender Policies and the Appointment of Women Principals

The primary objective of these legislative gender policies aimed at providing a clear and understandable picture as to how development for individual potential can be

facilitated (Hankivsky, 2022). Regarding this study, I tried to find out how females can be supported in the challenges that they face in their appointments as women principals. These gender policies have been guided by practices, procedures and laws that have been passed to ensure equal opportunities for men and women in the workplace (Kabeer, 2021).

Legislative gender policies are drawn from the events of the past as women were sidelined. Currently, gender equality is operational but there are still gaps that need to be closed in the appointment of women principals. There is one major aspect that fosters discrimination in terms of gender and that is religious, cultural and customary practices, as these practices do not equate women's rights with human rights. Women and men culturally are not seen equally and this can bring turmoil into the workplace. There are programmes, such as affirmative action, that are aimed at developing women economically as they were historically unfairly treated – this is done by hiring and promoting women (Ezorsky, 2018). I will briefly discuss three legislative gender-related policies.

5.2.1 The South African Constitution (South Africa, 1996a)

On 4 December 1996, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa was approved by the Constitutional Court as the supreme law of the land. This constitution was against discrimination. It saw all people as being equal irrespective of their gender. It highlights issues of gender and therefore fits well with this study as it advocates fair treatment of men and women. For instance, below are selected quotes directly from the constitution that are related to this study:

- ii. "Equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms. To promote the achievement of equality, legislative and other measures designed to protect or advance persons, or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination may be taken".
- iii. "The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth".

The importance of the two above-mentioned laws to my study is that the laws support equality. In my study, the aim was to promote and strive for a solid equality system in workplaces by identifying strategies that could be put in place to assist appointed female principals with the challenges that they face in their workplace. These strategies would help women lead in a conducive work environment that allows them to feel free, accepted and respected.

5.2.2 Employment Equity Act South Africa (RSA, 1998)

The objective of the Employment Equity Act (RSA, 1998) was to address gender imbalances in the place of work by initiating that social institution leaders, for instance, must formulate plans to promote employment equity and that these plans must be approved by the Department of Labour (Bishu & Headley, 2020). Furthermore, this act outlined affirmative action as an act that promotes opportunities for minority groups; in the case of this study, female principals, ensure equal treatment in the workplace (Bayefsky, 2017). Moreover, the Employment Equity Act addresses gender imbalances in the workplace and promotes the employment of women. Indeed, women are being employed now and appointed as principals but are not given the same respect men get from the community – in fact, their leadership skills are undermined. These are the challenges female principals face that this study sought to address.

5.2.3 National Education Policy Act South Africa (RSA, 1996c).

This National Education Policy Act (RSA, 1996c) aims to achieve equitable education opportunities and the redress of past inequality in education provision, including the promotion of gender equality and the advancement of the status of women in South Africa. Furthermore, the National Education Policy of India (Kasturirangan, 31 May 2019) proposed that if gender needs to be treated equally there must be “access”. This access refers to women being allowed access to schooling and work environments. The proposal in India is what is currently happening in South Africa where women are allowed to go to school, work and even occupy leadership positions; however, there are challenges that they face, because they are women. The South African government saw that women had been discriminated against throughout their lives and action was needed to correct the imbalances of the past (Crenshaw, 2017). Gender equality in Canada is also prioritized, as it has domestic and international legal

frameworks that support women going to school and having the right to socialize and have fun without the stress of taking care of their families alone. They also need to be employed and promoted to leadership positions (Paxton et al., 2020).

5.3 Gender Challenges in the Appointment of Women Principals

This section focuses on the underlying factors that pose challenges as to why women are not trusted to be successful principals in secondary schools. The discussed factors are gender stereotypes, cultural and religious practices, historical perspectives on female leadership, and lack of qualifications. These are factors rooted in the practices of the past during the apartheid era.

5.3.1 Gender stereotyping

According to the founder of the word “gender stereotype”, Lippmann (1922) defines it as a way of categorizing men’s and women’s capabilities in terms of their gender that results in fixed thinking. This grouping of individuals means people are seen to share characteristics, for instance, if a woman is seen as a weak, low-minded person who fails to take informed decisions, then all women are seen like that. Gender stereotyping overlaps into duties that are segregated according to men and women. In the past, women were seen as people who would give birth to children, raise them and look after the household; men were people who were physically fit to go and work for their families and were considered the head of the family who would take final decisions in the household on behalf of women (Mill, 2018). According to Dang (2017), this is one of the underlying factors that currently hinder women from attaining leadership positions.

Moreover, stereotypes affirm beliefs and values; for instance, in the past, women were seen as caregivers and were not allowed to pursue a career – changing this mindset is a challenge as many still believe that women cannot lead in society which is why women in leadership positions are not respected and trusted like men (Diekman et al., 2019). According to Vial et al. (2018), compared to men, women are evaluated less favourably by others for leadership roles. This finding can best be explained by role congruity theory, which is grounded in social role theory and examines the extent of congruity between gender roles and leadership roles. When women do break through traditional gender stereotypes and display the behaviour and characteristics of leaders,

they are also evaluated unfavourably because they are displaying behaviours incongruous with their gender.

When women are in leadership roles, there is evidence that they underpredict their performance compared with men. This may be the result of a lack of self-confidence, learnt gender roles and self-sexism among other explanations. This is a particular concern because leader self-awareness is a precursor for leader effectiveness. In other words, this could create a self-fulfilling prophecy and continue the unfortunate cycle of women's perceived lower leadership performance (Fiske, 2010).

5.3.2 Cultural and religious practices

Even though there are Constitutional laws that have been passed they are not effectively operating because of cultural and religious practices (Raday, 2003). Individuals have been granted human rights that are against discrimination on the ground of race, sex and religion. Culture and religion have similar perspectives about men and women. These two practices perceive men and women differently. For instance, women both culturally and religiously, are seen as people who are caretakers, people who have to obey the rules that are made by men and who are not allowed to make decisions about their lives without consulting men (this happens usually in marriages) (Okin, 2022). All these practices result in gender inequality as women are seen as inferior. That is why women leaders in the workplace are not taken seriously as men are referred to as the heads of their families.

According to Subašić et al. (2018), the Gender Equity Act wants men and women to be treated the same but cultural and religious practices often make that impossible. In the religious sphere, men are often considered as the head of the family, as people who must be respected at all costs and as people who must also be taken care of by women. The norms of some cultures and religions seem abusive to women whereas the constitutional law aims at making women free (Coomaraswamy, 2017).

5.3.3 Historical perspective on female leadership (discipline in schools)

According to Moyo and Perumal (2020), experiences of women in leadership as female principals show that stereotyping is one of the major contributing factors as to why female principals are not respected. Men are still seen as people who have the skills

and abilities to lead schools. These norms cause gender discrimination that is practised by both colleagues and society at large. Furthermore, it negates the notion of gender equity in the workplace (Swemmer, 2021). Awareness must be created so that people can be educated in terms of world changes and aware of female empowerment. The undermining of female principals of secondary schools often turns the school into a playground, as learners tend to be disrespectful and no longer take teaching and learning as their primary objective at school – this often affects the failure rate as teachers are not supporting the principal (Husain et al., 2021).

5.3.4 Lack of adequate qualifications

In terms of the Employment of Educators Act (RSA, 1998), an educator's entry level into the educational sector to become a teacher is at REQV 13 (a three-year qualification) which must include appropriate training for educators. Currently, educators are being approved or accepted into the system at a REQV 14 (equivalent to a degree), according to the Education Labour Relations Council (2008). This simply means that for one to become a teacher, one must have a four-year qualification that includes teacher training. Irrespective of this, the South African Council for Educators (SACE), sees a qualified teacher as an individual with a three-year qualification plus teacher training (REQV 13).

According to Welch (2009), data derived from public schools revealed that 13% of South African teachers are unqualified in terms of the Employment of Educators Act definition. This definition states that each teacher appointed must have a senior certificate (grade 12 NSC certificate), a three-year qualification and professional training as an educator. In accordance with the ERLC standards, 40% of teachers are unqualified thus revealing that 60% of these teachers are females. I interpreted that the reason for women being unqualified is because of the events of the past. According to Chuta (2017), women were not allowed to go to school but had to rather work on farms or were sent into early age arranged marriages. This information may also reveal some of the underlying factors of why women in the educational system are unqualified which could be due to family attachments. This simply means that after a woman has obtained a REQV 13, she no longer furthers her studies. She gets married, gives birth to children, raises them and takes care of her family. It differs greatly from male teachers as they are goal oriented. After achieving a REQV 13 they enrol for the REQV

14; this furthering of studies gives men a great opportunity to be appointed to leadership positions (Mestry, 2017).

5.4 Development of Women Towards Principalship Appointment

Aspects that need to be taken into consideration when promoting females into principal-ship positions will be discussed. Moreover, strategies will be identified that need to be implemented to support appointed females so that they can effectively carry out their work.

5.4.1 Hire qualified and suitable candidates with leadership and management in education

According to McCartney and Campbell (2006), leadership and management are two interlinked concepts that are most often discussed in behavioural science. Leadership is defined as the ability to influence other people to work hard so that organizational goals can be achieved. According to Muteswa (2016), a leader has characteristics such as having a clear vision, being confident, being goal-driven and dedicated, and being knowledgeable. These characteristics affirm that everyone can be leaders, irrespective of their gender, for as long as they can be guided, supported and trained, (Boerma et al., 2017).

From my point of view, this simply means that leaders cannot only be males, as leaders are people with vision and leadership traits and these leadership characteristics need to be sharpened by training and development programmes.

According to Abdalla and Ali (2017), management is the process of leading, organizing and planning for the achievement of organizational goals. Furthermore, a leadership and management qualification would make a huge impact in the appointment of women principals as it would give them confidence in their work and sustain their integrity in society. In this manner, if women develop their careers by obtaining relevant qualifications, this would help reduce the level of gender inequality in the workplace and would foster respect for women (Gipson et al., 2017).

5.4.2 Importance of effective management and leadership in schools

According to Preston and Barnes (2017), effective leadership is a process that reveals a strong character. According to Engelbrecht et al. (2017), leaders must have integrity, honesty, trustworthiness and work ethics. Furthermore, a leader should act in line with how they speak and earn the right to be responsible for others' success (Blanchard, 2018). A foundation of good and strong leadership involves good communication skills. Communication is the process of exchanging information – within that process, there must be a speaker and a listener. Good listening skill is one of the traits that makes a leader effective, as it brings a sense of understanding, and leads to mutual respect in the workplace (Bovee & Thill, 2017).

One other element that would make management and leadership effective is emotional intelligence. According to Gómez-Leal et al. (2022), emotional intelligence is a process of being aware of your own emotions and that of others. This process helps in not triggering anger in others and us. I regard this as a behavioural trait that not everyone has. A good and effective female leader must be emotionally intelligent as this will benefit her and her colleagues. Concerning my personal experience in the field of work, most women are not emotionally intelligent as they tend to take everything personally which leads to conflict in the workplace. Appointed female principals must be emotionally intelligent and know how to distinguish between personal and professional matters. Professional decisions should not be taken from their point of view. They have to be strictly professional and stop favouritism in the workplace as it also causes conflict (Robbin & Coulter, 2017).

5.4.3 Programmes that promote gender equity

Gender equity refers to fairness for women and men unlike in the past when opportunities were only given to men (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018). Democracy introduced changes and women were recognized and strategies implemented to compensate them for what was taken away. Equity strives for the notion of “all voices matter”. This simply means that women have the right to stand up and live their lives freely (Mgbako, 2016). As already indicated, women in leadership positions are not respected and this is against gender equity and results in gender equity gaps.

According to Fleischmann and Burgmer (2020), affirmative action is a policy that offers opportunities to groups of people that were previously sidelined. Regarding this study, this group is women; the affirmative action policy is aimed at giving them a chance to work and occupy leadership positions. This study focused on gender equity strategies as a way of closing the gaps so that gender equity as an established act can be effective and serve its purpose. I acknowledge that women are currently being prioritized in the workplace but there are challenges that they face, mainly because they are women (Cook & Fonow, 1986). These challenges are the result of how women were perceived in the past and how culture and religion see women. Furthermore, these challenges that women encountered, make it difficult for them to perform at their level best in the workplace.

Equality is one of the movements that was founded by Deneuve and Firth (1994) to fight for human rights internationally. Moreover, an organization as a school to achieve its objectives needs to work alongside different stakeholders such as government officials, the media and religious leaders. Regarding religious leaders, this will help them to change the mindset of their congregations and is an advantage because churches are being attended in large numbers, if the religious practice is supporting and practising gender equality then it will serve as a driving force for respect of women in the workplace (Bercot, 2021). Strategies to overcome challenges faced by female principals include, for instance, people being educated about gender equality and the importance and value of women in the workplace. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was founded in 1989, it aims to empower women and girls by offering them computer literacy lessons, lessons on financial literacy and job-seeking skills (Todd, 1989). Furthermore, this organization had programmes for teachers, and it seeks to grant equal opportunities to all women (Storey, 1989).

One other organization is the “employee pool” which was started in 1998 for employees who had previously experienced discrimination in their place of work (Barber, 1998). This organization aims to foster a working environment that is conducive and welcoming to all employees and for them to feel comfortable. This is an organization that operates under the norm that “each and every employee contributes something back to the organization”.

Another secondary objective of this organization was based on the development of skills and knowledge for employees for them to be successful in their career paths. Linking this statement with practices in the educational field, some workshops are specifically for content knowledge. According to Ford et al. (2018), mass meetings like the ones for trade unions, for instance, SADTU, must be for educating people about the importance of gender equity and respect for all in the workplace.

5.4.4 Create awareness about gender equity in the workplace

According to Aragonés-González et al. (2020), gender equity awareness contributes positively to educating women and men about gender equality, the consequences of gender inequality and the advantage of a society that is gender-equal. Furthermore, raising awareness has the benefits of improving mutual understanding, developing competencies and skills, and exchanging ideas for societal change (Walumbwa et al., 2017). This awareness campaign would help to address challenges arising from gender inequality, and it would no longer be practised in the workplace (Andrade, 2022).

There are several ways in which society's and colleagues' perceptions about women in leadership positions can be positively turned around. For women to be valued and trusted to lead schools, the visibility and number of women in leadership need to be increased. Women should not be put in positions and just left to perform their duties; they must be supported so that they can be respected. For instance, organizations like the (CEDAW) can become educational stakeholders to help eradicate the perception of women not being adequate leaders. According to Rehof (2021), CEDAW is an organization that aims to establish substantive equality for women where men will move away from all forms of discrimination against women. Moreover, Hellum (2021), supports the movement of stopping discrimination of women from the Nordic Region by introducing Nordic gender equality and controversies that aim to eliminate gender (female) discrimination. Furthermore, Fredman (2016) agrees with Rehof (2021), that it is an integral part of universal human rights that women must be treated with dignity and respect.

5.5 The Gap in the Literature

The knowledge gap that I identified while doing the literature review was that I could not find reasonable strategies that could be put in place to help and support the appointment of female principals. It is of great importance to have these strategies in place to promote the objective of gender equity in the workplace (Steinþórsdóttir et al., 2017), which is that women who are employed and occupy leadership positions should get the same respect and treatment that men get. This literature gap is addressed by the findings from the participants (data collection), as these strategies are the focus of this study as per the title: "Gender equity strategies for the appointment of women principals in South African secondary schools". While there were more articles about gender equity strategies from other countries, there were very few in the South African context.

5.6 Summary

The researcher identified Feminism (liberal feminism), as the theoretical framework of this study. Literature was based on leadership and management traits, challenges women principals encounter and strategies on how gender equality can be practised in the workplace, to ensure that women are involved, accepted and respected. So that women and men are not treated differently. This would foster peace and harmony in the workplace for all people. The next section will be explaining the research design and methodology of this study.

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1 Introduction

The previous section presented the literature from research conducted on similar phenomena as this study which was gender equity strategies for the appointment of female principals in South African secondary schools. This section will outline the research paradigm, research methodology and design used in this study. It will discuss in detail the selection of participants, collection of data and measuring of trustworthiness. In conclusion, the section highlights the ethical considerations undertaken during the entire research process.

6.2 Research Paradigm

According to Chilisa et al. (2017), epistemological and ontological assumptions are the foundation of all research paradigms. Therefore, assumptions are hypotheses – the philosophical point of view underpinning each paradigm cannot be disproven or proven as each paradigm is valued based on its own merits and how suitable the philosophical point of view relates to that study (Ataro, 2020).

A paradigm is demarcated as a pattern that has a set of authentic assumptions and a design for data collection and interpretation. Moreover, a paradigm is a worldview, point of view and framework that is grounded upon assumptions and philosophies based on the nature of knowledge and the social world, lastly, the perspective of the research – that is how the researcher views and understands the world, together with its reality (Žukauskas et al., 2018). Furthermore, according to Nieuwenhuis (2017), a paradigm is a set of beliefs and assumptions about the reality of a given world. I understand a paradigm as a system of how people think about the world. According to Creswell (2017), research is conducted to understand a phenomenon, that is, how one views the world. There are three significant aspects of research based on the paradigm, namely ontological assumptions, epistemological assumptions and methodological consideration.

According to Dinsmore (2017), philosophy is an umbrella that covers ontology and ontological assumptions and is focused on reality. These sets of assumptions give a researcher an overview of the world's reality. Furthermore, Gruber (1993) states that it is a borrowed concept from philosophy and explains the existence of human beings. Ontology brings out conceptualization in the process of researching (Maison, 2017). This study is grounded in interpretivism, as it sees the researcher and the world's reality as inseparable. Moreover, the knowledge of an individual is based on lived experiences that are shared in the process of data collection and in this way, the data collected can be interpreted (Burns et al., 2022).

According to Hajar (2021), epistemology is not like ontology as it focuses on the nature and different forms of knowledge. Assumptions of epistemology are concerned with the creation of knowledge, and how it can be accessed and therefore communicated – this refers to what to know (Koveshnikov et al., 2019). Furthermore, epistemology

seeks answers as it asks questions, for instance, what is the relationship between what can be known and the would-be knower? (Muñoz-Bandala, 2022). This study used constructivism as the epistemological approach – it is described as an approach that affirms that people have their own understanding and knowledge about the world. This is through the experiences they have and when gathering data, participants will reflect on those lived experiences (Charmaz, 2020). This simply implies that the researcher will construct meaning from the participants' data who had their own life experiences concerning the presented phenomena.

According to Peng et al. (2021), methodological consideration is defined as an action plan that has several choices of methods accessible to users for them to have a choice of methodology that they want to employ in their study; for example, such methodologies are qualitative, quantitative and mixed-research method (Cheung, 2020). Therefore, it can be argued that methodology in the context of research is concerned with why, what, where and how data is gathered and analyzed. Moreover, methodology seeks to answer how the researcher would find out what is believed to be known (Frantz & Siddiki, 2022).

The philosophical point of view of my study is in line with the interpretivist paradigm in research. The interpretivist paradigm allowed me to interpret the elements of the study whereas interpretivism looks for human interest in the study (Günbayi & Sorm, 2018). Regarding interpretivism, reality is seen through social constructions such as instruments, shared meanings, consciousness and language (Creswell, 2015).

According to Latham (2022), interpretivism is related to the philosophical position of idealism and its role is to cluster diverse approaches that include social constructivism. Furthermore, the interpretivist approach allowed me to act as a social agent and accept that people are different and therefore their lived experiences and perceptions regarding the world would be different. Interpretivism is grounded in two belief systems that are relativist ontology and transactional epistemology. According to Jaca (2018), the naturalistic approach is used for data gathering while the interpretivist approach is used for data collection methods such as interviews and observations. According to Creswell and Poth (2016), regarding the interpretivist research paradigm the study undertook, meanings are drawn towards the end of the research process.

An interpretivist paradigm attempts to comprehend the research problem from an individual's different viewpoint through their own experiences. The purpose of this approach is to allow people to share how they view a phenomenon which can show differing perspectives and provide insight into how a particular group of people make sense of their situation or the phenomenon they encountered (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). Therefore, my study aimed to explore in depth how the appointment of female principals in high schools can be raised. The reason why I chose the interpretivist paradigm is that reality is perceived from different angles by different people – this emphasizes that one phenomenon can have different interpretations (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020) – in this study, people's interpretations and interactions with their social environment was studied. Furthermore, I was able to gather rich descriptive data regarding the gender equity strategies for the school appointment of women principals in South African secondary schools. Data was collected from the perceptions of a male a female principal and that of a male circuit manager.

6.3 Research Approach and Design

The research approach is described as the structure of the research, most importantly it included the choice of participants and the data collection methods to be used. This study used a qualitative research approach (Rahi, 2017). The reason why qualitative research was chosen for this study is because of its suitability to answer the set of research questions, therefore making provision for the results to be trustworthy and valid (Bakker, 2018). Moreover, qualitative research is defined from the naturalistic point of view whereby the research sought to understand the phenomena from various groups of people within their natural settings (Boaz et al., 2018). The qualitative approach provided the following benefits to my study compared to the quantitative approach (Elsbach & Stigliani, 2018).

- The provision of different lived experiences of people. The qualitative research method allowed me to conduct interviews with a set of questions that were asked to three participants, to get their different views about the problem being researched.

- The ability to conduct cross-case comparisons and analysis. As data was collected from different people, I was able to compare the responses of participants after the analysis of the data.
- The provision of individual case information. Each participant shared their information concerning how they perceived the phenomena. This benefited me as it helped me to explore the phenomenon.
- Helpful in explaining a complex phenomenon. A phenomenon is a question that needs to be answered, therefore, those questions were answered by participants and different views from different people were acquired.
- Data is categorized in accordance with participants' own meaning. After participants had been interviewed, data was transcribed from recordings into written data, following how participants responded to the questions. Themes were formulated thereafter.

According to Yin (2009, 2012), the research design for this study was a case study, as it studied a phenomenon from different points of view and drew meaning from the phenomenon being studied. A case study answers the 'how' and 'why' questions (Nieuwenhuis, 2007). A case study offers a multi-perspective analysis that takes into consideration the inputs of all parties involved including any sidelined minority group (Nieuwenhuis, 2007).

According to George (2019), a case study aims to study a phenomenon widely and draw meaning from the studied phenomenon. Moreover, a case study allows the incorporation of data collected from different participants to be interlinked as findings in the research report (Hennink et al., 2020). Therefore, the qualitative research approach helped me to understand gender equity strategies for the appointment of female principals in secondary schools and the challenges they faced. In addition, the origins of the challenges were identified, for instance, cultural practices, which were one of the challenges women face as leaders in schools. The following section discusses the sampling technique that was employed in my study.

6.4 Sample of participants

According to Saunders and Townsend (2018), a population is a group of people who are drawn from an area of interest of the study, whereby those people have lived experiences linked to the phenomenon being investigated. Therefore, the population of my study consisted of a principal of primary and secondary schools and a circuit manager in the Sekhukhune East district, Moroke circuit.

In this study, I purposively selected one female primary principal, one male secondary principal and one male circuit manager. As the topic of my study was based on the “Gender equity strategies for the appointment of female principals in secondary schools”, I, therefore, saw the need for two different genders to be interviewed. According to Ngozwana (2018), it is of great importance for a researcher to select a sample that will be able to achieve the objectives of the study.

According to Klar and Leeper (2019), the process of selecting participants refers to the identification of suitable people within an area of interest linked to the study. My study adopted purposive sampling, as it is one of the methods used in qualitative research. Purposive sampling refers to the process of choosing participants that are perceived as being suitable for the purpose and aims of the investigation (Sibona et al., 2020). The selection of this sample was guided by the main research question:

- How can gender equity be raised in the appointment of women in principal positions at South African secondary schools?

The following section will provide the context of my study.

6.5 The Context of the Study (including biographical information of participants)

Data was collected from one female school principal, one male school principal and one male circuit manager. The schools were both public schools, situated in the deep rural area of Burgersfort (Sekhukhune East district), Moroke circuit. Participants were selected in accordance with their work positions, namely principals and a circuit manager. Working experience in terms of the years served in the educational system as managers was one of the requirements – the more working experience they had, the better understanding of the aspects of management and leadership in schools.

Table 1: Biographical details of the participants

Participant	Institution	Gender	Years of experience as managers	Years of teaching experience
1	Primary school	Female	2 years	25 years
2	Circuit manager	Male	15 years	10 years
3	Secondary school	Male	29 years	3 years, 3 months

Participants 1 and 3 were principals. Participant 1 had 25 years of teaching experience and two years as a principal. Participant 2 had 10 years of teaching experience and 15 years as a circuit manager. Participant 3 was a teacher for three months, then promoted to a head of department position for three years where he performed the duties of the deputy principal while occupying the head of department position. In 1993, he was promoted to the principal position and had 29 years of experience as a principal.

This study's site of research was based on the choice of participants. These participants were chosen to gather rich information on how gender equity strategies in the appointment of female secondary school principals could be planned and implemented as a measure to support gender equality in the workplace. I think a male and female principals have different lived experiences with the presented phenomena and the circuit manager as the manager of the principals will also have his own lived experiences. Abonyi et al. (2022) argue that female and male principals are not perceived the same way by society. This inspired me to choose participants that could highlight their lived experiences from the gender difference perspective based on the primary and secondary schools they were leading.

A district is defined as a local hub for Provincial Education Departments, ensuring that all learners have access to quality education. For the context of this study, the focus was on Sekhukhune (Sekhukhune East) in the South-Eastern part of Limpopo which is known as South Africa's most Northern Province. This district shares boundaries with the Capricorn and Mopani districts in the north. This district was established in the year 2000 and was named after the Bapedi King, Kgosi Sekhukhune, and is one of the five districts in Limpopo. Most schools in this district are in deep rural areas.

6.6 Data Collection Methods

Data was gathered from two schools (primary and secondary schools) and one circuit office on arranged dates and times. The study used semi-structured interviews as the main method of data collection and a focus group interview.

According to Creswell (2017), semi-structured interviews are used in research to verify information that emerges from other data sources. Semi-structured interviews are used in qualitative studies which is why it was employed in this study. The semi-structured questions are formulated in an interview guide before the interview takes place, even though the questions do not have to be in a set order. Predetermined open-ended questions were set for the interviews, to gain rich data from the participants (Conrad & Tucker, 2019). Each interview session was about 45 minutes, and they were held after working hours. The interviews were conducted on Zoom which allowed the participants and me to converse without a time restriction.

After conducting the semi-structured interviews, I conducted a focus group interview. The focus group interview consisted of one primary principal, one secondary principal and one circuit manager. A focus group is defined as a small group of participants who focus on a particular topic (Morgan, 2018). According to Nyumba et al. (2018), the focus group aims to bring participants who share common views to allow the researcher to collect data. For my study, one focus interview was conducted. I found the focus group essential for this study as it provided an additional source of data and was helpful with the triangulation process of data (Aguilar Solano, 2020).

According to Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik (2021), one objective of interviews is for a recording to be made to analyze the ideas of people who had lived experiences of the phenomenon.

6.7 Data Analysis

According to Akinyode and Khan (2018), data analysis is known as the process of organizing the raw collected data. This process entails a breakdown of basic research components for research questions to be answered. Coding of data refers to the process of analyzing qualitative data collected by breaking them apart to see what it produces, before being put back together in a meaningful way (Elliott, 2018). Furthermore, Gibbs (2018) argues that coding is the process of breaking down the collected data. The coding of the collected data consisted of three stages: open coding, axial coding and selective coding. According to Williams and Moser (2019), the objective of coding is to help the researcher, after the breakdown of data, generate themes. These themes are generated as similar meaningful data collected is organized to assist in highlighting what is important to the study, which in this study was investigating which gender equity strategies could be implemented to raise the appointment of women principals in secondary schools. The following section will discuss the trustworthiness of this study.

6.8 Trustworthiness

The qualitative method of research is seen as experimental. Researchers that used the qualitative method use different forms of strategies to ensure that the collected data is valid – that process is called the trustworthiness of the data. It consists of strategies such as triangulation, persistent observation, peer review, member checks and leaving an audit trail.

Conferring to Shenton (2004), credibility forms part of Lincoln and Guba's four criteria of trustworthiness together with dependability, transferability and conformability. Credibility links to events like continued involvement, insistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing and negative case analysis which are used to confirm that results were acquired from relevant sources. In this study, the following credibility measures were used to make sure that the gathered information was valid. Responses from the participants during the interviews were recorded and notes were taken. The recordings of the interviews were transcribed for an in-depth description of the findings to be provided.

Transferability in qualitative study ensures that the designated case allows the person who is reading it to decide whether they believe the findings might apply to another context (Shenton, 2004). Measure for trustworthiness in preference to external validity/generalization (Shenton, 2004). To ensure transferability, the following question posed by Shenton (2004) was taken into consideration – would the transferability and generalization of the gathered data occur in other schools or circuits in the same province or other provinces in the country? The data collected was analyzed focusing on the two principals and one circuit manager's perceptions regarding gender equity strategies to raise the appointment of women principals in secondary schools in South Africa.

Dependability shares similar content to reliability, where triangulation is involved and an audit trail is needed to make sure that a reconstruction of events is made possible (Shenton, 2004). To ensure the study's dependability, processes have been reported in detail (Shenton, 2004).

Conformability includes using peer debriefing leaves an audit trail to make sure that the results obtained were from relevant sources and not just made up by the researcher (Shenton, 2004). The analysis of data from interviews led to the formulation of new questions that were asked participants to ensure that the data was triangulated during the focus group interview.

6.9 Role of the Researcher

Participants were called to make an appointment with them. I honoured the time slots given to me and explained that I was carrying out a mini dissertation from the University of Johannesburg. I asked them if they would be my participants, where data would be collected from them in the form of interviews; furthermore, I explained that participating in this study was voluntary and that they would not receive any remuneration. Their personal information, together with the schools and circuits they worked in would remain anonymous (anonymity). They had the right to withdraw from this study at any time if they felt uncomfortable.

6.10 Ethical Considerations

All my participants were adults above 18 years of age. Two were managers of schools and one was a circuit manager and set interview questions were not based on their practices. For this study, I wanted to explore gender equity strategies to raise the appointment of female principals in secondary schools in South Africa. According to Fatema et al. (2017), informed consent is needed before data can be collected. Therefore, I wrote letters to the people I wanted to be participants and requested permission to work with them. Moreover, I applied for an acceptance letter from the Limpopo Department of Education so that they could give me permission to carry out this study and gather data from their officials.

6.10.1 Voluntary participation

I made my participants aware that their participation in this study was voluntary and reminded them that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty (Arifin, 2018). Furthermore, I made it clear that there would be no hard feelings if they did not want to participate or wanted to withdraw.

6.10.2 Confidentiality and anonymity

According to Favaretto et al. (2020), confidentiality and anonymity are regarded as principles of academic research; for confidentiality to be practised, the names of participants have not been mentioned in this study. The names of the schools and the name of the circuit office were also not disclosed and do not appear in this research report. The collected data was only used for the purpose of this study. The practice of confidentiality encouraged participants to be more open in the provision of their views. Pseudonyms were used to protect the participants' identities so they could remain anonymous.

7. FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

Data collected for this study revealed that there is a lack of confidence in principals, one of the causes being the lack of adequate qualifications, (see section 5: 5.3.4). The findings were linked with the theoretical framework section of this study, in section 5, as it was depicted before collection of data was done and lack of adequate

qualifications was presented as a challenge within the field of leadership and management.

This section focuses on analyzing the collected data. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews via a Zoom meeting and one focus-group interview. When data was analyzed, themes and sub-themes were created. The themes are as follows: lack of training, motivation and support; societal perceptions of culture and stereotyping; and implementation of strategies to support gender equity in the workplace. In the following sections, these themes will be discussed. The following codes are used to identify participants: participant 1, line 10 of the interview transcript – P1: L10.

Table 2: Themes and sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Theme 1: Lack of leadership training, motivation and support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Poor performance ● Phd syndrome (pull her/him down) ● Unsupportive family structures ● Inadequate Professional Learning Community programmes
Theme 2: Societal perceptions of culture and stereotyping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Masculism versus feminism ● Leadership meant for males ● Gender segregation in appointment of principals
Theme 3: Implementation of strategies to support gender equity in the workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Affirmative action ● Employment Equity Act ● Self-development through acquisition of relevant qualifications ● Male workshops on gender equity ● Accessible mentoring and coaching sessions

7.1 Theme 1: Lack of Leadership Training, Motivation and Support

Findings from the focus group revealed that participants 1, 2 and 3 understood what leadership is. Leadership is defined as a process of providing direction, motivating people and executing organizational plans (Kotter, 2017). P3 (L2–3) gave this description of leadership:

Leadership is regarded as a process of leading a group of people (teachers), in an institution (school).

Moreover, P1 (L4–6) supported the response from P3:

I agree with the response of P3, in addition, leadership is an ability of an individual to influence or guide other individuals. For example, a principal in a school is a person who has an influence on teachers to do their work.

Lastly, P2 (L7–10) agreed with P1 and defined leadership as

a leader is someone who has traits such as vision, hard-working and risking taking. I agree with the response of P1, on the point that is someone with an influence. A leader must lead by example, followers have to take from the leader's doing. A leader can't preach excellence and fails to practice it.

Moreover, lack of leadership refers to a situation where the management of the organization failed to instruct members of the team so that their efforts can be coordinated; for instance, this could be a situation where the principal shows poor leadership skills by not instructing teachers on what is required (Turner & Baker, 2018). If the Department of Education does not offer quality and consistent training to both newly appointed principals and those that have been in the position, this not only have a negative impact on the development of those individuals but also the progress of the educational sector (Demarle-Meusel et al., 2020). According to Mestry (2012), training for workers is an essential tool that enhances the development and progress of staff and the organization as a whole. In the school context, if principals are trained and workshopped from time to time this would affect their confidence – an increase in the performance of management could increase the pass rate of the school. According to Moorosi and Komiti (2020), consistent training and development of principals is one core area that must be continuously practised. Moreover, training could change their

point of view, create room for change and help them have a vision going forward. This would grow the schools they are managing, as they would believe in themselves and their capabilities in innovating and implementing new practices in the workplace (Dilshad et al., 2019).

Three sub-themes were identified under the theme of lack of leadership training, motivation and support, namely, poor performance, Phd syndrome (pull her/him down), unsupportive family structure and inadequate Professional Learning Community programmes.

7.1.1 Poor performance

According to Makgato and Mudzanani (2019), poor performance is generally known as a state where an employee's performance is below the set standard. Furthermore, in education, poor performance is defined as an inability to reach the target set by the Department of Basic Education (DBE); for instance, if the department set a pass rate target at a school of 65% and the school pass rate is 48% that is poor performance (Tingle et al., 2019).

According to Rubin et al. (2020), training employees does not only benefit those individual employees but the organization itself. For example, if the DoE gives principals consistent training, they would be confident enough to carry out their duties because they are supported. The development training will not only benefit the principals, but also the DoE will benefit because they have invested in the education of learners through paying their school funds (Sayed et al., 2020).

According to Mestry (2017), trained, motivated and supported principals will produce good results, where many learners will pass with good results and the number of dropouts will be reduced. P1 (L31–35) stated that motivation is important for principals as part of the process to reach the goals within a school. Motivation is also an essential tool that keeps all stakeholders in schools moving forward without tiring to reach school goals (Vachhani & Pullen, 2019).

P2 asserted that from his professional experience as a circuit manager, *women have the potential to succeed*. This was supported by P3, a male principal, who in his professional experience, felt that *women have good qualities to be leaders and they lead successfully*. Furthermore, P2 (L59–60) noted:

Females have potential only if they will be given the support (consistent) and the chance.

The support that P2 is talking about is the provision of workshops by the DoE. These workshops must be consistent as they serve as motivation and a source of support for principals through this journey of leadership and management. P1 (L84–88), in agreement with P2, affirmed that her experience as an appointed principal and working without the support of the DoE is very frustrating – monitors or inspectors will come to assess the school and want to find everything in order, but where does the knowledge of how to manage and lead a school come from? She explained:

Department of basic education needs to offer continuous support to the principals. For example, I was appointed in 2021. There is no workshop that I have ever received concerning how to manage a school as a principal. It becomes devastating as you don't know exactly what is expected from you and yet monitors will come for you. (P1: L 84-88)

This results in principals lacking confidence and once they feel that way it affects the performance of the school negatively (Bassett & Shaw, 2018). The above statement links to the theoretical framework of the study (see Section 5). This study adopted the feminism theory, a theory that fights against more power being given to men and discrimination against women (Biana, 2020) – feminists have also brought changes in the field of education. Furthermore, the data collected links to the theoretical framework of this study “lack of confidence in principals” (see Section 5 of 5.3.4.), because one of the causes is a lack of adequate qualifications. This would affect the self-esteem of female principals if they led educators who are more qualified than them; this could lead to a lack of respect in the workplace. Moreover, solutions were generated as the development of women towards the appointment of principal-ship (see Section 5 of 5.4 from 5.4.1 to 5.4.4).

According to Ndebele (2018), giving the necessary support that is continuous to female-appointed principals would break the ceiling of gender inequity practices in the workplace. P2 (L78–83) shared the same views as P1 and explained:

Confidence is another aspect that females lack, I spotted it when many women don't apply for managerial positions. Furthermore lack of confidence in a Departmental Head, who can't do duties because they are afraid of their followers. For example, a Departmental Head can't go for a class visit because the CS1 teacher will be talking badly about the Departmental Head to the colleagues.

P2 outlined the negative impact of the SMT's lack of confidence as it prevents effective leadership and management from taking place. This is the major reason that female principals are seen as weak – it is mainly because of the lack of support that results in their lack of confidence in turn resulting in an inability to effectively carry out their duties (Naidoo, 2019). The data in this section on the principals' lack of confidence in the school links to the theoretical framework, namely: 5.4.2. Importance of effective management and leadership in schools. Under this identified strategy it was noted that according to Preston and Barnes (2017), effective leadership is a process that reveals a strong character. According to Engelbrecht et al. (2017), leaders must have integrity, honesty, trustworthiness and work ethics. Furthermore, a leader acts in line with how they speak and earns the right to be responsible for others' success (Blanchard, 2018). A foundation of good and strong leadership involves good communication skills. Communication is the process of exchanging information, within that process, there must be a speaker and a listener. Good listening skills is one of the traits that makes a leader to be effective, as it brings a sense of understanding, leading to mutual respect in the workplace (Bovee & Thill, 2017).

According to Melese (2019), a lack of support and motivation does not only occur at work, it also takes place in households, especially those of married people. For example, married female principals find it difficult to attend workshops provided by the DoE that take days and require them to sleep over. From the literature review of this study, the lack of support from home is supported by the theme "gender stereotype". Section 5 (see Section 5 of 5.3.1) of the theoretical framework stated that gender stereotype overlaps with duties that are segregated according to men and women. In

the past, women were seen as people who give birth to children, raise them and looked after the household and men were people who were physically fit to go and work for their families and were considered the head of the family and would take final decisions in the household on behalf of women (Mill, 2018). When linking this section of the theoretical framework and the data findings, it brought to attention that women were undermined at home and that is why they are not supported both at home and in the workplace. Furthermore, the reason why women are subjected to discrimination is due to cultural practices. In Section 5 (of 5.3.2), the theoretical framework highlighted that women both culturally and religiously are seen as people who are caretakers, people who have to obey the rules that are made by men, people who are not allowed to make decisions about their lives without consulting men (this happens usually in marriage) (Okin, 2022).

Husbands often do not approve their wives to be in leadership positions and female principals often end up delegating duties to their deputies which is a loss for the principals as they miss out on being developed. Husbands must understand, support and encourage their wives to go for development training, for their benefit and dignity in the workplace (Hodges, 2017).

Furthermore, P1 (L79–83) said:

All they needed is support from their homes, in particular married women, their spouses need to be supportive and understanding that going for workshops and a number of days, doesn't necessarily mean that they are going there to be with other men, or they are neglecting their families. Men have to stand firm by them by showing support and understanding.

From the focus group, the above statement was supported by P2 (L65–69):

Women can be great leaders, only if they are supported both from home and at work. Colleagues, mainly men tend to look down upon women, they undermine them. This kind of act needs to be dealt with, let men be aware that women have capabilities.

7.1.2 Phd syndrome (pull her/him down)

According to Kyei (2022), this is an act that takes place in society, in particular with working-class women and men, where colleagues look down on each other and do not want to help one another. This act often extends to sabotaging each other, with the intention of bringing someone down; this is caused by the fear that someone could end up being better than others in the workplace. Such behaviours interrupt the smooth operations of schools, as this act instils fear, causes trust issues in the workplace and results in a toxic workplace. From my point of view, this is caused by a lack of training, because if people are trained in a way that motivates them to look at a colleague with an eye of “this is an individual, who is unique, with his/her skills and abilities that I can learn from”, then colleagues will not see each other as competitors and threats. There is a lack of motivation and self-development in communities at large because colleagues in the workplace come from different backgrounds.

P1 (L106–107) regarding this view said:

There are people with a tendency of PhD (pull her down) syndrome. These are people who are planning and patiently waiting for your downfall.

According to Minibas-Poussard (2018), PhD syndrome is a work-related practice among colleagues. This syndrome’s main cause is hatred towards a person whose downfall they are waiting for. It is not gender-based, both females and males practice PhD. They can form a group that is against and plans to sabotage one person, for example, teachers as staff members would plan to sabotage their principal (Mashaba & Maile, 2018).

P3 shared that the strategy he employed for his staff, is to engage them so that they are focused on the vision of the school and feel welcomed as part of the school (Tepayakul & Rinthaisong, 2018). P3 (L21–23) held this view:

I also develop a variety of committees to give them duties to take care of. I can say, I gain strength from the people I work with, as I believe in teamwork and I established that as a principal, I don’t do all things by myself. I make sure that I engage to develop them.

The focus group shared that a conducive work environment is an environment that is positive and healthy for the well-being of all staff members. P3 (L21–25) explained:

A positive work environment is an environment that allows people to work in a conducive environment. In my institution, I ensure that all staff members are engaged in school affairs, for example, there are a number of committees that all staff members form part of. I want them to be engaged and take responsibility for them to feel that they are part of the school.

P1 (L13–15) concurred with what P3 by stating that in creating a positive work environment,

I ensure that there is effective communication and transparency in the affairs of the school with my followers (teachers). I ensure that I respect teachers as it will allow them to respect me back.

In P1's response, the issue of respect was highlighted. Respect in the workplace is known as treating people with dignity by actively listening to them and taking other people's suggestions into consideration (Robotham & Cortina, 2021). In Section 5, (see 5.3.4) of the theoretical framework of this study, it was noted that an aspect of disrespect in the workplace is essentially caused by inadequate qualifications of appointed principals in the school. It was stated by Welch (2009), some teachers are unqualified in schools as per the guideline of the Employment of Educators Act, due to several years the teacher served, will be promoted to leadership positions with inadequate qualifications thus conflicts being caused as the people with adequate qualifications are not being promoted.

I interpret the events of the past as the reason why many women are unqualified. According to Chuta (2017), women were not allowed to go to school but had to work on the farms or were sent into early age arranged marriages. This information may also reveal another underlying factor for unqualified women in the educational system which is family attachments. This simply means that, after a woman has obtained a REQV 13, she no longer furthers her studies. She gives birth to children, raises them, gets married and takes care of her family. It differs greatly from male teachers, as they are goal oriented. After achieving a REQV 13, they enroll for the REQV 14, and the

furthering of studies gives men more opportunities to be in leadership positions (Mestry, 2017).

7.1.3 Unsupportive spouse

According to Priyanka et al. (2022), an unsupportive spouse in a relationship is described as someone who will not be there for their partner emotionally. When a wife or husband needs their spouse, they are not there to offer a helping hand. Married female principals have many responsibilities in their homes and at times, they are unable to carry out their duties at work because of their unsupportive husbands (Murakami & Törnsten, 2017). For example, an unsupportive spouse might be someone who will not allow their wife to attend work functions or workshops. P1 (L79–83) concurred:

All they need is support from their homes, in particular married women, their spouses need to be supportive and understanding that going over workshops and for number of days doesn't necessarily mean that they are going there to be with other men, or they are neglecting their family.

The focus group revealed that there is no support for women and this practice from home escalates to their place of work. P2 (L65–69) noted:

Women can be great leaders, only if they are supported both from home and at work. Colleagues, mainly men have a tendency of looking down upon women, they undermine them. This kind of act needs to be dealt with, let men be aware that women have capabilities.

P3 (L6–9) revealed:

Gender-based discrimination is prohibited, women and girls are still exposed to discrimination and denied what the Gender Equity Act has granted them. There are still imbalances in terms of gender. As women are still disrespected and not seen as leaders, yet they have abilities.

Lack of support for women held back the progress of the aims and objectives of the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998, as some women cannot be employed because of marriage issues; others are employed but there is no support for them to prosper in

their career field (Male & Wodon, 2018). Moreover, this study's aim and objectives were to address the above-mentioned inequalities of women who cannot be employed because they are married and women who are employed and promoted into leadership positions (as principals) but are not given sufficient support, from their homes. This study's theoretical framework, socialist feminism theory has been discussed as a theory that is guided by two fundamental principles, which are social class and gender inequality. Moreover, the two fundamental principles are linked to economic and cultural practices in the capitalist system (Hesmondhalgh, 2017). The theory seeks equal opportunities for women and men and advises that household chores are not for women only, men can help in the house as a reduction of workload for women (Cerrato & Cifre, 2018). Furthermore, socialist feminism believes that if women are to continue being dependent on men, women will be seen as slaves, and this will disadvantage the gender equity act's aim and objectives which wants to see women being given equal opportunities (Khalifa & Scarparo, 2021).

P2 (L9–17) focused on women who are employed but face gender equity challenges in the workplace:

There is a positive atmosphere in the workplace, with many primary female principals, and many secondary male principals. This has been a concern I was personally battling with, why are females appointed to be principals of primary schools not secondary schools those female appointed principals are managing well in their primary schools but why are they not being appointed in secondary schools and placing males in secondary schools? This is rooted from stereotyping, it indirectly says females cannot lead secondary schools successfully by implementing discipline in there. So, females are not yet given a fair chance in leadership roles within the educational sector.

This response serves as proof that females are still undermined even after the publication of the Employment Equity Act of 55 of 1998. This study sought justice to be served for women (Miotto et al., 2019).

7.1.4 Inadequate professional learning community programmes

According to Brown et al. (2018), a Professional Learning Community (PLC) is a formed group of teachers who share ideas to enrich their teaching practice and for the creation of a learning environment with the purpose of learners reaching their fullest potential. A PLC does not only work in favour of teachers but also principals, whereby they can group themselves to share management and leadership strategies – this will result in supporting one another and motivating each other.

From the focus group, P1 (L76–78) shared:

Developmental activities need to be implemented by the Department of Education. For instance, Professional Learning Communities need to be formulated. Workshops alone are not enough.

Moreover, from the focus group, P2 (L32–38) pointed out that:

As a circuit manager, the developmental programmes that are available for principals are workshops related to the discussion of issues impacting schools and trying to resolve the problems. In the Limpopo Department of Education, there are no specific programmes that are for female principals. In order to promote gender equity in the workplace, this kind of workshops that are specifically for genders needs to be implemented. As they would be bringing awareness to people of respective gender (either males or females).

The circuit manager emphasized the importance of the workshop that that could be implemented by the Department of Education, taking into consideration the implementation of Professional Learning Communities for the principals, as this practice would help principals to connect and share ideas, (Nasreen, and Odhiambo, 2018).

Furthermore, from the focus group, P1 (L27–31) concurred with P2 and stated:

As a female principal, ever-since I was appointed, I haven't got training based on how to lead a school from the department. The workshops that I attended were not meant for first beginners, were workshops for principals as usual

discussing critical issues affecting schools. Personally, I feel like Department of Education is failing us, they don't support us and yet expect results from us.

According to my point of view, it is evident that the DoE is not doing justice in supporting principals in schools by providing developmental programmes and networking mechanisms for them to enhance their leadership skills (Sutcher et al., 2017).

In Section 5 (see 5.4.1), when discussing the resolution to challenges that are faced by female principals, it was suggested that qualified and suitable candidates must be employed by the DoE. This is to ensure that the appointed principal is qualified and that the key roles and responsibilities of the position will be performed to the optimal level. Creativity and community learning will be enhanced in the process (Lian, 2020).

Under the sub-theme of Section 5 (see 5.4.1), "Suitable and qualified candidates with leadership and management in education qualifications must be hired or promoted into principal posts", according to McCartney and Campbell (2006), leadership and management are two interlinked concepts that are most often discussed in behavioural science. Leadership is defined as the ability to influence other people to work hard so that organizational goals are achieved. According to Muteswa (2016), a leader needs characteristics such as a clear vision, confidence, drive and dedication, and must be knowledgeable. These characteristics affirm that not everyone can be a leader; leaders are only the few individuals that are born to lead. Furthermore, the latter statement is supported by the saying that "leaders are not made but born" (Boerma et al., 2017, p. 81).

One benefit of PLC programmes is that the team will be made up of people with similar professional roles and responsibilities; they would share their experiences and help with solutions. In this regard, female principals would not feel alone and left out after their appointment to carry out managerial roles in schools. From the focus group, P3 (L76–78) stated that:

Developmental activities need to be implemented by the Department of Education. For instance, Professional Learning Communities need to be formulated. Workshops alone are not enough.

From the interview with P1 (L35–38), the participant supported the establishment of PLCs for principals to be effective as suggested by P3 in the focus group:

In the process of exploring other activities that could make the school to grow, I engage other people (as in my colleagues), this opens an opportunity for a Professional Learning Community, where sharing of ideas takes place and we learn from one another.

Furthermore, P2 (L101–102) in agreement with P1 maintained:

Leaders gain more when other leaders are met (PLC). This should be done more often as to share ideas and strategies.

Furthermore, this will reduce the work burden on female principals' shoulders as they would be supported and motivated. P3 (L21–23) shared his strategy for reducing his workload as a principal:

I developed a variety of committees to give them duties to take care of. I can say, I gain strength from the people I work with, as I believe in teamwork and I established that as a principal, I don't do all things by myself.

For P3, the emphasis should be on the creation of gender workshops that would serve as education, particularly for men.

P2 also agreed with P1, that the formation of PLCs would help to make significant changes and improvements in the leadership and management sectors. Professional learning communities (PLCs) promote co-operation for student achievement. In the context of this study, PLCs would encourage cooperation amongst principals for the primary benefit of assisting each other with strategies that could be implemented for the development of their schools. They could share the different leadership styles in relation to different problems or experiences in their schools which would benefit the learners (Haiyan & Allan, 2021). According to Voelkel and Chrispeels (2017), the other benefit is that PLCs build strong relationships between members of the team, for instance, if principals have been meeting together and supporting one another, they would understand each other's skills and capabilities. If one principal comes across a challenge in the workplace, they could call another principal whose skillset could help address the problem and ask for advice. In this way, the problem could be solved and

the image of the school would be protected and maintained. This links to Section 5, (see 5.4.2), “Importance of effective management and leadership in schools”. For management to be effective, firstly, they must be more knowledgeable about the managerial activities of the school. In my opinion, a principal must have obtained a qualification in leadership and management. Addressing PLCs, it would not serve a purpose if a principal who is not knowledgeable is part of a PLC, as they will not share anything concrete in this forum (Namwong, 2021).

7.2 Theme Two: Societal Perceptions of Culture and Stereotyping

According to Turek et al. (2022), stereotyping fundamentally has two spheres, social and cultural, as stereotyping is a social perception and a cross-cultural psychological issue. This means that stereotyping is a problem caused by the mental state of an individual whereby an undermining element is included. Regarding this study, stereotyping is a factor that undermines the abilities and skills of women. It is caused by culture that gave men the power to lead households – automatically, men were seen as people who could lead even in the workplace. Men were given authority to make decisions which women were told to obey; they had to follow men’s instructions, as the word of a man is final and should not be questioned in anyway (Manzi et al., 2019). In the households where this culture is practised, there are set of rules and regulations for men and women. Women are seen as people who must complete household chores, be at home to take care of the children and husband, and also be respectful. Recognized sub-themes are masculism versus feminism, leadership is meant for males, and gender segregation in principal appointment hence discussed as follows:

7.2.1 Masculism versus feminism

Masculinity refers to attributes that highlight the acquisition of wealth, gender differentiated roles and ambition (Wagle et al., 2020). Masculinity is formed by characteristics such as assertiveness, leadership, independence, courage and strength in Western society. Furthermore, the above descriptions of masculinity point out clearly that culturally, men were given more opportunities than women. P3 (L25–30) explained why men are seen as people who can lead better than women:

There is an issue of gender bias, females are gender biased because of the stereotypical assumptions that women's thinking is low, women can't lead, women's network is poor. Men because of masculinity they think they are powerful other than women in terms of networking. In unequal power relations, women are looked down upon, being disrespected and ill-treated by their colleagues. Female principals' treatment is not good as it pushes away the aims and objectives of the gender equity policy.

P3 pointed out that men disrespect women because they are culturally gifted with being in control at home and then apply it at work. P1 (L54–60) concurred with P3 and stated:

[It is a] societal mindset due to what happened in the past, where women were discriminated against men, this led to trust issues for females not being seen as people who can't lead and manage secondary schools, I would like to support this with an idiom in my mother tongue that says: 'Ya eta ke tshadi pele e wela ka leopeng', this simply refers that women are not meant for leadership as they don't have qualities to lead but I disagree with it because men and women both have their own flaws.

Moreover, P2 (L51–54) agreed that both males and females use similar leadership styles, except that females show more sympathy and few are very firm; males are people who implement without considering how it will impact others, as long as it helps in achieving the goal.

P2 emphasized that female principals are not firm when making decisions. Sinyosi and Potokri (2021) concur with the view of P2 stating that one weakness of women is their lack of backbone – there are policies that need to be followed that are clear and sound but women have too much sympathy when discipline needs to be implemented.

In Section 5 (see 5.3. from 5.3.1 to 5.3.4) of the theoretical framework, challenges of female principals were identified in the leadership journey. Underlying contributing factors of challenges are culture and stereotyping, as they have given men more power over women. It started at home, and the practice is brought into the workplace for the imbalances of gender equity to occur (Kabeer, 2021).

This norm causes gender discrimination that is practiced by both colleagues and society at large (Moyo & Perumal, 2020). Furthermore, it extinguishes the notion of gender equity in the workplace (Swemmer, 2021) – femininity is regarded as a trait that is more about nurturing and caring behaviours and being aware of the environment (Sudkämper et al., 2020).

Moreover, society perceives women as people who should be concerned about the quality of life in their households, loving and shy. To be regarded as a woman, one must be able to do house chores, be loving and respectful towards their men, and look after the children and the whole family (Finch & Groves, 2022). This societal perception delays women academically and professionally and this was highlighted by the theoretical framework as an issue that originated from stereotyping and cultural practices. According to Hudson-Weems (2019), African women ought to reclaim themselves from slavery practices that were caused by culture, as they can then develop themselves and go into their chosen career fields and even leadership roles such as principals. As we are in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, things have changed. Women are categorized as the working class – women are leading as principals in schools thus they are undermined and taken for granted by their colleagues and society (Pech et al., 2020). P3 (L42–44) said:

Both male and female principals are all active, all decisive in decision-making, they can relate to educational policies, and they are good in management. They are both good, they can all become successful principals of schools.

The participant made it clear that females can also lead successfully. I think it is only rooted in the psychological sphere of individuals to downgrade and undermine the capabilities of female principals. The theoretical framework discussed liberal feminism that pays attention to the ability of women so that they are able to maintain their equality through their own choices and actions (Law, 2019).

P2 maintained (L64–66) the following:

I don't think leadership roles are suitable for males but stereotype makes it appears like that. It is for all of us, is just that the appropriate exposure to women is not given support.

The participants made it very clear that females are undermined because of their feminist characteristics. This view was supported in the focus group by P1 (L70–74):

There is a difference in leadership skills between women and men, men are people who don't negotiate, they tell and that's it. Women are people who are understanding and too soft, in this regard I agree with Participant 3, as he stated that as women's weaknesses. One more thing, most women have an attitude, their way of communicating with others is inappropriate.

The theoretical framework of my study suggested that women and men were not treated the same in the workplace. For instance, male principals are given more respect than female principals (Zuma, 2018). Moreover, traditionally, women are seen as nurturing, caring and reserved people whereas men are seen as people who are self-confident and competitive; those traits are mistakenly attributed to men because of their masculine strength (Lips, 2020).

7.2.2 Leadership is meant for males

According to Sandström and van den Besselaar (2018), a male leader is someone authoritative, strong and powerful, and decisive. Female principals face different expectations as they are seen as weak. Findings have shown that leadership is not only for men but is for both males and females as it is grounded in the definition of, leadership qualities that can be developed no matter the gender, as being born a leader is limited to only those few, (Aslam, 2018). This definition proves that women can be born or developed to become leaders because of their talents and skills they possess. P3 (L49) maintained the following:

I don't agree with this statement, is a fallacy. There is no difference between males and females in leadership traits.

P2 (L56–60) strongly agreed with P3 and had this opinion:

Males and females don't differ that much, one thing I have learnt about female principals is that their surrounding is clean. Moreover, females once they grab an opportunity fly with it, they are very determined. Females have potential only if they will be given the support (consistent) and the chance.

P2 further elaborated this point by saying:

Women are determined and once they are tasked they do what is expected of them, they only lack the support that will be continuous.

P1 (L78–79) in agreement with P2 and P3:

Female principals normally engage more in terms of leading. They are determined and committed to their work. It is more evident that women can be successful in leading secondary schools, only if they are supported and motivated.

From the focus group, P2 (L65–69) stated:

Women can be great leaders, only if they are supported both from home and at work. Colleagues, mainly men have a tendency of looking down upon women, they undermine them. This kind of act need to be dealt with, let men be aware that women have capabilities.

Section 5 of the theoretical framework (see 5.4): development of women towards the appointment of principalship that addressed activities that can be implemented for women to be supported within their field of work (teaching). One of the strategies (see Section 5 of 5.4.1), identified as to hire qualified and suitable candidates with leadership and management qualifications in education. Women must further their studies so that they can be identified and respected in their workplace and society at large (Ziegler et al., 2020). Another strategy (see Section 5 of 5.4.3), is for schools to develop programmes that promote gender equity in the workplace. This could be in the form of workshops that can be held by the principal with her colleagues on the teaching of equality and respect for each other in the workplace (Parsons, 2017).

7.2.3 Gender segregation in appointment of principals

According to Martínez et al. (2021), gender segregation in the appointment of principals within the educational sector simply means that females are appointed as per the guidelines of the Gender Equity Act but there is still exclusion within the process. This means that more female principals are appointed in primary schools and

more males are appointed in secondary schools to be principals. P1 (L15–20) held the following view:

Going on the broader scale that is within my circuit ... my worry is that there are many female principals appointed in primary schools and many male principals appointed in secondary schools. I see imbalances there, why are women taken to primary, not secondary schools, I personally concluded that is because of “their feminine” traits of not being strong, liking to negotiate and partly the inability to command.

Moreover, P2 (L71–77) in agreement with P1 maintained that

during the interview process, scores are manipulated denying a rightful person an opportunity. This is usually practised during the process of interviewing secondary school principals, whereby a preferred candidate will be a male against a female that qualifies because it is according to society’s perception that females can’t instill discipline, so rather they lead and manage primary schools. My wish is to see balance in the appointment of female principals in secondary schools because I strongly believe that they have capabilities.

From the findings, I can see that this is not a fallacy but a practised norm. This outlined how females are not trusted to lead secondary schools. P1 (L73–76) explained:

Females tend to be poor in implementing discipline, because they have so much empathy towards people. Females are mothers, in everything they do, they do with mother’s care and love that has too much understanding in it, thus decreasing the level of firmness within them.

The latter statement serves as a reason why females are appointed at primary and not secondary schools and this perception originated from a cultural point of view. This was supported by P1 (L63–66) who stated:

Culture underestimated the ability of women, because the chores it gave women are tiring activities that prevents them from showing their potential. Females are making great leaders out there, the problem is the stereotyping that segregates them and makes them be seen as weak people.

Moreover, P3 (L51–53) in agreement with P1 stated:

Women are very good in leadership, men grew up with the ego that they are the best leaders. Because previously if were the appointments of leaders such as kings, for example, men were appointed but females make successful principals.

P3 (L59–64) from the focus group emphasized his point and revealed:

There is no difference regarding the leadership skill of a man and women, they can all become successful principals of the school. The only problem is men, men are chance takers, their approach has an attitude of them being the best and knowing what they are doing and yet many mistakes are committed. Women are very careful and dedicated to their work, whereas their weakness is being too much soft and understanding.

Moreover, this links to Section 5 (see 5.1), under the theoretical framework in terms of the universal reality that leadership roles are suitable for men, yet feminism theory goes against that idea as it supports women’s development in society (Hartsock, 2017). Furthermore, affirmative action supported the notion of women being developed and being given a chance to also lead in their place of work (Sharma, 2017).

7.3 Theme Three: Implementation of Strategies to Support Gender Equity in the Workplace

Taking into consideration the topic of this research study is “Gender equity strategies for the appointment of women principals in South African secondary schools”. Therefore, this study seeks to identify the strategies that could be implemented for aims and objectives of gender equity to prevail in the educational sector when appointing school principals. Females must also be given a chance to lead secondary schools. Within the Fourth Industrial Revolution, there are appointments of female principals but there are still challenges that they are facing, unlike male principals. So this study needed to outline plans that would support long-appointed and newly appointed female principals, for them to maintain their dignity in the workplace. Sub-themes of this theme are: Affirmative action, the Employment Equity Act, self-development through acquisition of relevant qualifications and accessible mentoring and coaching sessions.

7.3.1 Affirmative action

Affirmative action in employment refers to giving people who were previously disadvantaged opportunities such as marginalized women. Therefore, affirmative action calls for equal and fair opportunities to be granted to women. Practically, women are being appointed in workplaces and some are promoted as principals, fulfilling leadership and management roles. P3 (L55–57) noted the following:

Challenges I noticed, females are taken for granted by males. Women's decisions are not supported. Women's approaches are not taken as they are seen as ideologies of a woman. Men's decisions are supported and taken.

These are still issues that need to be resolved which is why the focus of this study was to explore gender equity strategies for the appointment of secondary school female principals as they face great challenges in their leadership journey. P1 (L112) mentioned '*affirmative action*' as a strategy to address gender imbalances.

P3 (L60) added:

More females must be employed in institutions, and every institution must have more females than males.

The mentioned point of view supports the objectives and aims of gender equity in the workplace (Kollmayer, Schultes, Lüftenegger, Finsterwald, Spiel, & Schober, 2020). According to Leal Filho et al. (2022), one of the global goals of gender equity that was relevant to my study is ensuring full participation in leadership and decision making. Moreover, this allows women equal opportunities to be part of leadership and decision making as previously, job opportunities were given to men. Therefore, this issue is being redressed and it is advocated that women be prioritized when principal positions arise in the workplace (Riyani et al., 2021).

P2 (L86) suggested:

Training, women must be given a chance and be tested on the ground and continuous support.

This simply means that there is hope in the leadership skills of female principals and that the only problem is that they are not supported (Eagly & Carli, 2018). For example, women in leadership are in a dilemma as they are expected to be decisive and strong like men. According to Perumal and Moyo (2019), this shows the expectations of society – because of their feminist traits, they have sympathy and are nurturing, but are then seen as weak leaders. Furthermore, if women leaders are decisive and strong, they are labelled bossy managers with attitudes. This enforces the issue of support – women do not get adequate support from society and colleagues (Ndebele, 2018). Female principals are advised to have a backbone, believe in themselves, and have a vision that will help their schools grow (Kotter, 2017). Focus group, participant 1, (lines 30-34), stated:

Women in leadership roles can feel like they're in a bind. As leaders, they're expected to be strong and decisive. As women, they're often expected to be nice, nurturing, and cooperative. While a male leader may be praised for a take-charge attitude, a woman may be called bossy or abrasive for the same behaviour.

7.3.2 Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 2008

The Employment Equity Act No 55 of 2008 was established with the purpose of achieving equity in the workplace by practising fair treatment and endorsing equal opportunities. This act intended to do away with discrimination in the workplace. This study focused on one form of discrimination which is gender discrimination. Gender discrimination is where females and males are not treated equally. This study wanted to explore the strategies that can be used to enhance the appointment of female principals in secondary schools. Female principals are not trusted to lead secondary schools, hence they are being appointed as primary school principals. In essence, employment equity has not been met. P3 (L55–57) said:

Challenges I noticed, females are taken for granted by males. Women's decisions are not supported. Women's approaches are not taken as they are seen as ideologies of a woman. Men's decisions are supported and taken.

This shows that female principals' capabilities and abilities are undermined. Therefore, an employer has to ensure that there is fair and equal treatment and opportunities for all employees. P1 (L113) concurred:

Employment equity was endorsed as one of the strategies that could be implemented in order to help females to be recognized and respected in the place of work.

P3 (L63–65) agreed with the above statement:

Women's rights are enshrined in the constitution. Women's rights, be respected by male counterparts. Males need to undergo the gender-based workshops to fully address males egos to the effect that there is no difference to males' and females' leadership skills.

In the focus group, P1 (L81–82) noted that *“Bringing awareness of the aims and objectives of Affirmative Action and Gender Equality in the workplace, to do away with gender-based discrimination”*.

This served as evidence that there is a need for education based on human rights, non-discrimination and the objectives of the Affirmative Action and Gender Equality policies in the workplace. This kind of education could bring changes to employees' perspectives as members of the teaching staff could be changed for a better positive work environment (Keddie & Ollis, 2019). As the theoretical framework, feminism theory was adopted and is defined as a theory developed to fight against gender imbalances and aims to give women freedom (O'Reilly, 2021). This theory is aligned with the topic of this study *“Gender equity strategies for the appointment of women principals in South African secondary schools”*. This shows the link between the topic of this study and the theory chosen as the framework of this study (see Section 5).

7.3.3 Self-development through acquisition of relevant qualifications

Naidoo and Mestry (2019) emphasized the need for and importance of self-development through acquiring relevant qualifications. One of the main benefits of having a recognized qualification is that one becomes a competent worker. Education enriches one with knowledge and skills. To be appointed as a principal, an individual must have undergone training and acquired a leadership and management qualification. This person would be theoretically aware of what leadership and management entail with an efficient approach when getting things done. P3 (L42–44) concurred:

Both male and female principals are all active, all decisive in decision making, they can relate to educational policies and they are good in management. They are both good, they can all become successful principals of schools. If women can study further and have higher NQF levels, then they will be respected, they will know what they are doing in the workplace and this will increase their level of confidence.

Moreover, P1 (L117) said:

Women must acquire relevant qualifications (self-development).

The latter view was supported by P2 (L79–80) in the focus group:

Furthering of studies for employed people is essential and appoint of suitably qualified candidates in terms of qualifications is also essential.

P2 (L88–89) added:

Willingness to be mentored (female principals). For them to be recognized and supported, they need to double their efforts through education.

According to Wills, (2019) doubling efforts through education is a process of furthering studies while working; for example, a teacher was employed with a bachelor's degree qualification, while working let the teacher register part-time Honors degree qualification. One of the greatest reasons for furthering studies is that education can shape a person into a better human being – that is the power of knowledge. From the data collected during the focus group session, P2 (L79–80) emphasized the point of furthering studies:

Furthering of studies for employed people is essential and appoint of suitably qualified candidates in terms of qualifications is also essential.

According to Welch (2009), data derived from public schools revealed that 13% of South African teachers are unqualified in terms of the Employment of Educators Act definition. This definition states that each teacher appointed must have a senior certificate (grade 12 NSC certificate), a three-year qualification and professional training as an educator. In accordance with the ERLC standards, 40% of teachers are unqualified thus revealing that 60% of these teachers are females. I interpret that the

reason why women are unqualified is because of the events of the past. Taking into consideration the highest percentage of 60% being women, this links back to Section 5 of the theoretical framework (see 5.3.1 and 5.3.2) where stereotyping and cultural practices were identified as the main causes for discrimination against women in the workplace (Gay, 2018).

7.3.4 Accessible mentoring and coaching sessions

According to Vikaraman et al. (2017), a mentor is a senior colleague who gives direction or guidance in the context of work. A mentor influences the professional and personal growth of a mentee. Coaching is a way of training, instructing or counselling an individual, for their skills to be developed and productivity to be enhanced. Female principals would need people who will support them in the form of training and workshops that will guide them on what should be done in the workplace. This can be in the form of a Professional Learning Community and Continuous Professional Development. P1 (L108–109) had the following view:

Lack of support, particularly from the Department of Education. Lack of training from department officials.

The above quote was supported by P3 (L39–45) in the focus group:

There are no workshops that are meant for only women. From my point of view, women have potential and capabilities, there is no problem with them. The people that needs their own gender-related workshop are males. Men look down upon females in the workplace and this was generated by cultural activities that took place in their respective homes. Basically, this kind of attitude is brought into the workplace and disturbs the process of leadership and management for women. Women can lead, I see no problem with female principals.

From the theoretical framework, (see section 5), according to Epp et al. (1994) androcentric is defined as unfair treatment of male and female experiences, as male experiences are given superior treatment over women's experiences. According to Shakeshaft (1995), the universal reality sees that leadership role are mostly suitable for men. Furthermore, some researchers agree with this universal reality in the context

of educational leadership, such as Eicher-Catt (2005) who asserts that a leader is a male identified concept. According to Esser et al. (2018), many researchers believe that leaders must be males.

8. SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

8.1 Summary of the Study

Gender equity strategies in the appointment of female principals seek to identify more strategies that can be employed other than affirmative action and employment equity to eradicate gender imbalances in schools, thus giving female principals the support and motivation needed to do their work. Teaching male principals about diversity and human rights in schools is necessary as males often do not see females as people who can lead therefore leading to disruptions in the management of the schools. Awareness programmes and campaigns through workshops should be implemented that would teach members of the staff that they need each other for the growth of the school.

This study also focused on the root problem of the ill-treatment of female principals in schools which was identified as culture and stereotyping (see Section 5 of 5.3.1 and 5.3.2). In the past, men were given authority by the culture; now that we are in the 4IR era, things have changed and therefore, living in a democratic world calls for fair treatment, acknowledgement of human rights and equal opportunities for all. Giving previously disadvantaged people an opportunity and first preference women are included. That is why this study sought ways to promote and support female principals to be appointed in secondary schools not only in primary schools. This investigation sought help for females to receive fair treatment and fair opportunities, the same as their male counterparts. This is in line with the Gender Equity Act 39 of 1996, the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 and affirmative action that were established with their aims and objectives that have not yet been achieved because of barriers to their accomplishment.

Other challenges that were identified during the data collection process from the participants were:

- Lack of support from the DoE in the form of a lack of consistent workshops and training for female principals.
- No availability of gender sensitivity policies drafted by the DoE that should be given to schools as a guideline on how gender issues must be approached and to initiate respect for differences in schools.
- Lack of support from their spouse (married female principals). Therefore, strategies were also identified to promote the appointment of female principals. For instance, furthering studies and acquiring relevant qualifications as women can help them to gain respect, this is linked to the theoretical framework of Section 5 (see 5.4.1). There should be implementation of affirmative action and employment equity in the allocation of secondary school posts to ensure that there is a gender balance in the appointed principals.

This study used a qualitative research method and interviews to collect data from three participants, namely the circuit manager, and a female and male principal. Data was collected in the Limpopo province, Sekhukhune district, and Moroke circuit. Furthermore, the sampling technique used was purposive sampling. The paradigm used was interpretivism and this study employed a research design of a case study.

8.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations are provided for the challenges to be resolved that female secondary principals face in their leadership and management journey. Therefore, this study focused not only on the appointed female principals but also sought to assist and make it easier for upcoming female principals. It was hoped that the findings would help them to face the challenges and allow the practice of affirmative action to take place and the fulfilment of the objectives of the Employment Equity Act.

8.2.1 Upgrading qualifications for women leaders

A qualification is obtained after one has completed training or a course at an institution of higher learning. It is of great importance and encouraged that workers must continuously upgrade their qualifications as a way of developing themselves (see section 5 of 5.3.4). One role of a teacher is that of a lifelong learner. This implies that a teacher keeps on learning new things every day in the classroom during the process of teaching and learning but it is not enough; teachers need to upgrade their qualifications and move to higher NQF levels. For instance, if a teacher is employed without a four-year degree, let the teacher study part-time to get an Honours degree and then further to the level of a master's degree to qualify to become a principal. This will help them when they are appointed as principals as they will have attained the highest NQF levels. This also means that colleagues of the principal will not have higher qualifications than the principal because if that is the case, it often stirs up disrespect in the workplace. Colleagues might have the attitude that they are better than a female principal who is not as qualified as them. It is not the responsibility of teachers applying for principalship positions to have the correct and suitable qualifications. The DoE officials should not appoint people who do not qualify for those positions.

Secondly, the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) should not influence who gets principalship positions. This practice of randomly appointing people based on a particular group's interests and favour results in appointing people who are not suitable and qualified. Moreover, appointed principals who are appointed because of favour and not qualifications are unable to lead and manage schools – these are often women. This act tarnishes women's reputations as successful principals. In my opinion, principalship posts should be given to the most suitable and qualified candidates as this impacts the principal's level of confidence. The level of confidence of a person who is at the NQF level 9 will not be the same as the person who is at a lower NQF level.

Table 3: The National Qualifications Framework and Qualifications

NQF levels	Qualifications
1	Grade 9
2	Grade 10 and National (vocational) certificates level 2
3	Grade 11 and National (vocational) certificates level 3
4	Grade 12 (National Senior Certificate) and National (vocational) certificate level 4
5	Higher Certificates and advanced National (vocational) certificate
6	Diploma and Advanced Certificates
7	Bachelor's degree
8	Honours degree
9	Master's degree
10	Doctor's degree

Source: South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)

8.2.2 Focus on women principals and awareness programmes

The study further suggests that the DoE must draft a policy based on gender sensitivity, social unity and diversity in schools. Consistent workshops on gender sensitivity must be held to educate both males and females that they are all equal in the workplace. They need to respect each other and work as a team because they need to share their unique skills and talents to grow and develop the school. One other important aspect is to train principals on how to handle gender-related conflicts in the workplace as leaders. Principals must be given consistent training as a gesture of support to enable them to perform at their optimal level. With the above-mentioned strategies, gender tolerance in the workplace will increase, where men will have respect and trust

women's capabilities and skills. Moreover, the challenges female principals face in schools will be minimised and this will allow the implementation of gender equity in the workplace.

8.2.3 Appointment of female principals

As this study focused on gender equity strategies to increase the appointment of women principals in South African secondary schools, a strategy needs to be employed so that women can be seen as adequate principals for secondary schools. For example, the DBE could introduce a female bursary. This would be a funding system that would allow females to further their studies, for them to acquire the relevant qualifications that would make them suitable and qualified principals. Secondly, workshops can be created based on women empowerment to encourage them to believe in their capabilities so that they can apply for principal positions. Often, women do not apply because they fear leading the whole school (including teachers, learners and managing of day-to-day activities).

Thirdly, introduction and implementation of Professional Learning Communities- Professional Learning Community (PLC) in education refers to a group of teachers that meet regularly to share ideas and strategies to improve how they impart knowledge in the classroom. This PLC does not only refer to teachers; principals can use it to their advantage, meeting with other principals for group collaboration for their professional development and growth. When meeting as principals (leaders), they will be able to share their strategies and approaches. One benefit of this is that sharing inclusive practices will enhance their level of competency. Principals should not only form a WhatsApp group for sharing information about meetings and which reports are needed from them to be completed and submitted, but they should also use social media platforms, like a WhatsApp group, to share their professional experiences and ways to resolve matters, if there are any. This will also help them socialise and will bring out the best in them, as they will be supporting and motivating each other. It also unites the principals in the group, and no one will carry the heavy burden of management alone.

8.2.4 Restructuring of the requirements for the appointment of the principals

From my professional experience, promotional posts are being sold. There are a group of people who are hungry for power and status in the community. These kinds of people have no intention of taking the school to greater heights. They are only looking after their benefits primarily and a raise in salary and status in the community (see Section 5 of 5.3.4). It is the DoE's responsibility to see to it that they set requirements for the appointment of principals, mainly the educational level. A principal must be someone who has qualifications from NQF levels 8 to 10. As this person would have studied and conducted research, it gives the impression that they would be able to solve organizational problems, interact with people and have effective communication. A candidate that is appointed as a principal must have a qualification in leadership and management. This serves as an investment for the DoE as the appointed principal will have background knowledge about the activities of management and leadership. This would also enhance productivity in the school in the sense that learners would be passing and teachers would be doing their work teaching. It would also reduce the level of misunderstanding in the workplace, as the principal would be good at applying emotional intelligence and good approaches to followers, thus resulting in the reduction of conflict in the workplace.

8.3 Limitations of the Study

According to Akanle et al. (2020), limitations of a study are described as barriers that prevent the study from acquiring the required results for the set questionnaires of the interviews. For instance, this study was conducted in Limpopo province, in the Sekhukhune East district, Moroke circuit, with three participants. This implies that the study was narrow as the data collected was only from three people out of the entire population of Limpopo. In other words, there may be aspects of the topic that did not come to light because of the limitation of the participants to of this study.

The challenges I encountered in this study occurred during the phase of data collection and analysis, whereby I had to wait for six weeks to receive the acceptance letter to conduct the study within the province. I managed to collect and analyze data during week seven. Personally, this was a time constraint. When looking for participants, I wrote letters to them – two accepted and one declined. I had to look for a male principal

and successfully found one. The other challenge that had a negative impact on my progress was load shedding, as once the electricity went off the network coverage became weak and meetings on Zoom require connectivity. Time restraints were also a factor as the participants and I were not from the same area. I was based in Sekhukhune South and all my participants were from Sekhukhune East. If I had electricity, they did not have electricity.

I had to conduct one interview with the circuit manager over the phone because he was affected by load shedding in his area and could not connect from his site. With the other two participants, interviews were done through Zoom but at times the network was poor and I struggled to hear what the person was saying. Therefore, I had to go back again to confirm exactly what they had said when I was transcribing data. In this regard, time as a factor was a limitation in this study.

This study used three participants which was a limitation due to the amount of data collected. The study could have benefited from interviewing more participants to obtain more in-depth data on the given topic.

8.4 Recommendations for Further Research

As this study focused on gender equity strategies for the appointment of female principals in secondary schools, it identified the strategies that could be implemented in order to increase the appointment of female principals in secondary schools. These recommendations for further research link to the given strategies under theme 3 of the data analysis (see Section 7.3).

8.4.1 Provision of workshops (consistent) based on leadership roles of a manager

This simply means that the DoE must provide consistent leadership and management workshops for principals. There are workshops that principals attend but they are focused on solving the poor performances of schools and on how conducive learning and teaching can be implemented. These kinds of workshops do not help principals when they return to lead their schools; they need managerial related workshops where they are taught about leadership theories and policies and are given scenarios (depicted as problems) where they have to come up with solutions to solve these problems.

8.4.2 Workshops based on gender sensitivity in the workplace

These should be internal workshops that are permitted by the DoE to be held in schools, for gender awareness to be created amongst colleagues, (see section 5 of 5.4.4). In particular, the aim for this workshop would be to change the mindset of male colleagues about female colleagues and to instill respect and team building amongst colleagues of different genders. This should be done as men often tend to disrespect women, as at home, men are regarded as the head of the family, are the ones given chieftaincy and lastly, they are the ones to make final decisions. The mentality that they are superior to females has a negative impact in the workplace. These kinds of workshops will instill knowledge of gender equity in the workplace and would bring a positive atmosphere of respect at the schools.

8.4.3 Creation of professional learning community programmes

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are programmes that consist of people that share common goals. For the context of this study these were principals. Principals need to come together and network to help and educate each other, which would make the principals' journey less lonely and frustrating. For example, one PLC could be formulated for all principals of a circuit; they could also create a group on WhatsApp so that the times of the meetings can be saved.

Therefore, further research must focus on how these strategies can be implemented; it must come up with mechanisms that would ensure that the strategies are put in place and are effectively operating and bringing change within the educational sector. Further research must focus on the DBE and outline what strategies they have put in place to raise gender equity in appointment of principals. Furthermore, the DBE should formulate policies that will enhance the appointment of female principals in secondary schools.

8.5 Conclusion

The main objective of this investigation was to seek ways in which females could be appointed as principals in secondary schools. This qualitative study has recognized the strategies that are needed for the appointment of female principals which are categorised into four forms of help:

- Supporting and motivating the appointed female principals.
- Increasing the rate of female principals appointed in secondary schools.
- Educating men about gender equity in the workplace and doing away with their perception that “leadership roles are for men, undermining women”.
- Self-development through furthering studies, for them to gain respect and be trusted.

From the collected data, two participants made it clear that there is not enough consistent support from the DoE and this has a negative impact on principals. Furthermore, these participants pointed out that there is still a gender imbalance in terms of principal appointment. Female principals are given primary posts and male principals are given secondary posts – this practice has the rationale behind it of “women cannot maintain discipline in secondary schools” – this is a sign that women are still being discriminated against. This study did not only focus on the strategies to balance gender equity through the appointment of female principals but also the challenges that female principals face in their workplace. This study was grounded in what happened during the apartheid era with regard to women which is the core problem that made the topic of this study to be investigated. For example, this study identified culture and stereotyping as underlying factors that greatly contribute to the segregation of gender roles, responsibilities, skills and capabilities.

All the challenges that female principals face in their schools end up affecting the entire operation of the school. This study also found that females are not only encountering problems at work but also at home and highlights that everyone in society needs to be made aware of gender equity and help do away with discrimination against females.

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Appendix 1: Ethics Clearance

2016/REC Registration Number REC-110613-036



ETHICS CLEARANCE

Dear Molebogeng Nelly Mohlala

Ethical Clearance Number: Sem 2-2022-110 (221187411)

Topic: Gender equity strategies for the appointment of women principals in South African secondary schools

Ethical clearance for this study is granted subject to the following conditions:

- If there are major revisions to the research proposal based on recommendations from the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee, a new application for ethical clearance must be submitted.
- If the research question changes significantly so as to alter the nature of the study, it remains the duty of the student/researcher to submit a new application.
- It remains the student's/researcher's responsibility to ensure that all ethical forms and documents related to the research are kept in a safe and secure facility and are available on demand.
- Please quote the reference number above in all future communications and documents.

The Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee has decided to Approve with minor changes

- Grant ethical clearance for the proposed research.
- Provisionally grant ethical clearance for the proposed research
- Recommend revision and resubmission of the ethical clearance documents

Kindly be informed that this ethical clearance is only valid for three years.

Kindly note
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mdu Ndlovu".

Prof Mdu Ndlovu

Chair: FACULTY OF EDUCATION RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

18 November 2022

Appendix 2: Permission Letter



LIMPOPO
PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

CONFIDENTIAL

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

Mahlala MN
P O box 112
Nebo
1059

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

1. The above bears reference.
2. The Department wishes to inform you that your request to conduct research has been approved. Topic of the research proposal: "GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGIES FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF WOMAN PRINCIPALS IN SOUTH AFRICAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS".
3. The following conditions should be considered:
 - 3.1 The research should not have any financial implications for Limpopo Department of Education.
 - 3.2 Arrangements should be made with the Circuit Office and the School concerned.
 - 3.3 The conduct of research should not in any way disrupt the academic programs at the schools.
 - 3.4 The research should not be conducted during the time of Examinations especially the fourth term.
 - 3.5 During the study, applicable research ethics should be adhered to; in particular the principle of voluntary participation (the people involved should be respected).
 - 3.6 Upon completion of research study, the researcher shall share the final product of the research with the Department.

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH : MAHLALA MN Page 1

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

The heartland of Southern Africa-development is about people

- 4 Furthermore, you are expected to produce this letter at Schools/ Offices where you intend conducting your research as an evidence that you are permitted to conduct the research.
- 5 The department appreciates the contribution that you wish to make and wishes you success in your investigation.

Best wishes.



Mashaba KM
DDG: CORPORATE SERVICES

02/02/2023

Date

Appendix 3: Research Instrument

Questionnaires for semi-structured interviews:

Topic: gender equity strategies for the appointment of women principals in South African Secondary Schools.

Questionnaires

1. Briefly describe your roles and responsibilities, within the educational sector.

How is the atmosphere in the workplace in regard to gender equity?

2. How do you deal with your emotions and emotions of your colleagues?
(Emotional intelligence)
3. Where do you draw your strength from?
4. What are underlying factors contributing to male and female principals not being treated the same?
5. What is your intake about culture and stereotype in relation to imbalance of treatment given to a male and female principal?
6. From gender's perspective, how are types of leadership styles approached?
7. What is your perception regarding male and female principals?
8. Does two genders possess different attributes to leadership traits?
9. What is your intake about leadership being a role suitable for males?
10. Can you share your personal experience in regard to male versus female principals?
11. Which challenges did you come across in your leadership role, related to gender equity in the workplace?

12. What are intervention strategies put in place to help close gaps of the societal perception of female leaders? (Strategies applicable in institutions and society at large).

13. Are there any comments?

Questionnaires of the focus group interview:

FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULE

OPENING: TAKING THIS MOMENT TO THANK YOU FOR GRANTING ME AN OPPORTUNITY TO COLLECTIVELY INTERVIEW YOU.

QUESTIONS:

1. What is leadership?
2. How do you create a positive work environment in the workplace? (leadership skills)
3. What developmental programmes are there for female principals?
4. Which activities do you offer to principals as things that are exciting and yet they are learning at the same time?
5. What is your view regarding female and male principals leadership skills?
6. In your opinion, how can female principals be supported?

CLOSING: THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING BY ANSWERING THE SET QUESTIONS.

Appendix 4: Turnitin

Turnitin Originality Report

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Appendix 5: Editor's Letter

Nikki Watkins

Editing/proofreading services

Cell: 072 060 2354

E-mail: nikki.watkins.pe@gmail.com

22 August 2023

To whom it may concern

This letter confirms that I have done language editing and proofreading of the master's thesis:

**GENDER EQUITY STRATEGIES FOR THE APPOINTMENT OF WOMEN PRINCIPALS IN
SOUTH AFRICAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

by

MOLEBOGENG NELLY MOHLALA



Nikki Watkins
Associate Member

Membership number: WAT003
Membership year: March 2023 to February 2024

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www.editors.org.za

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