FEMALE PRIMARY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN THE BOHLABELA DISTRICT OF MPUMALANGA: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation: 'Female Primary School Leadership in the Bohlabela District of Mpumalanga: Challenges and Strategies' is my own work. All the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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ABSTRACT

This study focused on the challenges female school principals face in managing their schools effectively and the possible strategies to overcome these challenges. Ten schools from Mpumalanga province were purposively selected as research sites. Participants were the school principal and a member of the school management team of each school. Individual interviews with the school principals and an open-ended questionnaire to the school management team members were used to collect data. The findings revealed that a lack of confidence in female leadership with related gender discrimination, a lack of support and respect from staff and the community, and unfair practices with the promotion procedures of women are the main challenges that hamper female leaders in managing their schools well. The fostering of a positive attitude towards female leadership, a strong support system, female leaders empowering themselves and an effort to build good relationships with all stakeholders represent solution strategies.

Keywords: Female leadership, school principalship, female leader competencies, female leader challenges, gender bias, cultural obstacles, countering strategies, professional development, interpersonal relationships, relational leadership.

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CHAPTER 1
ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1   INTRODUCTION

The democratic dispensation promulgated in South Africa in 1996 was perceived by many people as a signal for equality, justice, equity and non-discrimination. However, after 16 years of political independence the battle for women empowerment in the education sector still rages on (Steyn, 2006:40). The question to be asked is why such stereotypes about female inferiority still prevail. Does it relate to a cultural, social, and politically related gender issue that influences some people to still think that women are inferior to their male counterparts, or are there other reasons for this sustained perspective?

Women constitute almost double the number of male educators in South Africa. According to education statistics for South Africa for 2008 it is asserted that of the 385 860 educators in the country's schools, 259 996 are female while 125 864 are male (DoE, 2008:4). This represents a national ratio of 2,07 female educators for every male teacher. Given this scenario, it should be logical that the number of female school principals should outnumber their male counterparts. However, there are fewer women in school principalship positions (Steyn, 2006:46). The question could be justifiably asked as* to whether the implication is that men are more competent than women, and, if this is not the case, what are the management-related challenges faced by female school principals and how could these challenges be overcome?

Coleman (2006:16) argues that family values, undemocratic procedures and sexist practices in the South African education system still haunt the under–representation of females in school principal positions. It seems that despite the many changes in the education system which were meant to spruce the image of female school principals, negative attitudes and discriminatory tendencies against women in educational leadership positions still tend to erode the impetus to promote women to key educational posts (Coleman, 2006:72). Steyn (2006:48) observes that even the few

females that are promoted to school principalship positions are confronted with trying and sometimes complex challenges which men in similar positions do not face.

The experiences of female leadership in South African schools remain largely under-researched, and, given that educational training is dominated by male thinking, managerial positions are mostly understood from that perspective. This perspective is, however, not adequate for female school leaders as they work diligently to address the inequalities and complexities of the various educational landscapes in South Africa. This study on female school leadership, therefore, explores the diverse and complex challenges faced by female school principals who are often publicly devalued and criticized and who often lack the support of their colleagues because of their gender. Findings of the investigation will be used to provide strategies for counteracting the challenges faced by female school principals.

1.2   BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Considering the fact that there are significantly fewer female school principals in South African schools than male school principals, regardless of a 2:1 ratio of female teachers to male teachers (DoE, 2008:4), the question remains as to what the major reasons are for this skewed situation. To provide an initial answer to these questions based on a review of the literature, this study pursues the topical issue under four sub-headings, namely gender and equality, women as leaders in education, challenges faced by female school principals, and developing a model for counteracting the challenges.

1.2.1   Gender and equality in education

The constitution of South Africa which is the supreme law of the country provides for equality and non-discrimination on the basis of race, gender, social background and creed. Chapter 2 of the constitution (RSA, 1996(a)) sections 9(2) and 9(3) state that the state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on the grounds of race, gender or sex. What this implies is that legally the scenario in the South African

education system where women are under-represented in leadership positions of schools is constitutionally not viable and therefore an issue worth investigating.

Cheng and Shum (2001:23) observed that women under-representation in managerial positions and the challenges they face can be attributed only to their gender. Bowen (2005:17) also observes that the under-representation of women in leadership positions such as school principals and the challenges they meet such as criticism by even fellow female educators all hinge on gender. It seems that a general perception prevails that women are subservient to men hence they cannot lead competently. The less value assigned to the capacities of women to lead and manage results in attitudes that favour males over females for school principal positions (Njorge, 2005:3). Such negative attitudes towards women become discriminatory action which pervade across the teaching fraternity when women seek for senior positions in schools.

The teaching profession in South Africa has long been characterized by an unequal representation of women educators. In this regard Pigford and Jansen (2005:115) argue that women in South African schools do not find it easy to be promoted to leadership positions because they have to fight the gender struggle in the system. The fact that leadership in many South African schools is male dominated, points to a gender struggle which is exacerbated by a legacy of oppression (Njorge, 2005:7). This weighs heavily on female educators who need to emancipate themselves from the male dominated system.

1.2.2   Women as leaders in schools

The debate whether female school principals can manage their institutions competently as compared to their male counterparts can be attributed to the social and cultural stereotyping prevailing in some communities of South Africa. Despite clear policies on gender equity some socio-cultural stereotypes undermine women's ability to manage schools (Coleman, 2006:89). Although women are often under-appreciated, they represent a powerful and untapped natural resource and they are a stabilizing force in any organization. The capability, capacity and impetus of women in management

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positions are in fact proved by the many schools that prosper under female principals (Higgs, 2006:29).

Due to the prejudices that prevail in many South African communities, some female school principals find it difficult to function effectively in the schools they lead (Botha, 2007:11). The tendency to view women as inferior to men exacerbated these prejudices which militate against female school principals being able to prove more convincingly that they are competent to lead in their schools (Higgs, 2006:65). The implication is that they have to overcome the resistance from fellow educators and the community and they have to work harder than their male counterparts to prove that they are capable leaders. Bowen (2005:72) emphasizes that female school principals working in male dominated communities are faced with stereotypes of females having lesser competencies than their male counterparts. The implication is that female school principals are entangled in diverse and complex situations which require a true female leader to prove her mettle.

1.2.3   Challenges faced by female school principals

The challenges that female leaders in schools face can be categorized as societal, cultural, teacher-related and system-related problems (Pigford & Jansen, 2005:91). These categories form the core of this study on the challenges that female school principal's face and possible ways of overcoming these obstacles.

From the process itself of selecting leaders - which is male dominated - female educators have to convince that they can be on par with the perceived male domain of leadership. Once appointed as a school principal, female educators have to work harder to convince fellow educators, the learners and the extended community they are able to act as a manager/leader (De Vos, 2005:71). Therefore female school principals have both internal and external forces which militate against their possible appointment and work performance as school leaders.

The underlying reason for the challenging environment in which female school principals have to function due to male prejudice is based on cultural norms and values pertaining to the position of women in the contextual society (Cheng & Shum, 2001:101). The assumption based on socio-cultural stereotypes is that men are better leaders than women and women can only be good followers (Cheng & Shum, 2001:103). Such socio-cultural indoctrination impacts negatively on female school principals' work environments and demands a concerted and collective effort to emancipate women from these stereotypes.

1.2.4   A model for counteracting the challenges faced by female school principals

Considered as a simplified representation of reality, the following by Boone and Kurtz (2004) serves as a road map which may be used by female school principals to solve the challenges they meet in the execution of their daily duties. The model hinges on five pillars of management, namely transparency, participative management, legitimacy, accountability, and representativeness (TPLAR) (Boone & Kurtz, 2004:89).

Schools are institutions deliberately established to pursue goals that relate to teaching and learning so as to develop learners to eventually become responsible adults. When a school principal is appointed, he/she is the legitimate official to run the school and is accountable for all school activities. The duties of managing, supervising and administering school functions cannot be carried out by school principals single-handedly; school principals need to work with and through others. These other role players comprise of educators, the school management team, the school governing body, officials from the Department of Education, parents and learners (Steyn, 2006:110). With reference to the school's mission statement which spells out the vision, values and purpose of the school's existence and endeavours to realize the set goals, the female school principal may use TPLAR in the following ways to guide her in her leadership tasks.

Transparency

Transparency is defined as openness insofar as the making public of information affecting people is concerned (Owens, 2001:89). In terms of school management a female school principal could use transparency in all decision making processes in the school. Thus transparency should be evident in all the school principal's management functions of planning, organising, supervising, directing, coordinating, reporting, budgeting and evaluation. Steyn (2006:115) emphasizes that transparency should be maintained at all levels of school management to include pupils, parents, teachers and DoE officials.

Participative management

Participative management entails that all interested parties should have a say in decisions which affect them (Steyn, 2006:113). Thus, the principal should involve all stakeholders in the drafting of the school's mission statement from which all other school programmes and activities are inclined.

Legitimacy

Legitimacy refers to the authenticity accorded to the principal and the school by all role players (Steyn, 2006:118). Legitimacy can only be ascertained through democratic leadership and goal attainment. Thus a female school principal can be viewed as affective hence legitimate if the school eventually achieves its envisaged corporate goals.

Accountability

Coleman (2006:29) defines accountability as being liable for your actions. Thus, school principals are liable for any activity that happens at their schools whether they are directly or indirectly involved in those activities. This implies that school principals

should devise mechanisms for monitoring pupils, teachers and school activities inside the classrooms, outside the classrooms and beyond the school boarders.

Representativeness

Representativeness implies that the school principal promotes participative management. This can be done through involving various persons, groups and the community through consultation. It further implies that school norms, values, beliefs and aspirations should be known by all role players and these role players should be working collectively to achieve the set goals. Owens (2001:61) asserts that schools are social systems consisting of interrelated and independent parts. A school therefore has elements and sub-systems which interact in pursuance of goals.

Considering the TPLAR model of Boone and Kurtz (2004), the female school principal could infuse transparency, participative management, legitimacy, accountability and representativeness (TPLAR) in all the spheres of management to gain support from all stakeholders and in order to defuse side-stepping, stereotyping, prejudices and insubordination. At the same time and because all role-players are actively involved, it becomes easy to determine and resolve conflict and to evaluate school functioning and school performance on a formative and summative level.

1.3   MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

The challenges faced by female school principals are the main focus of this study. There are a number of factors that motivated the researcher to embark on this study. The researcher has been teaching at the same school for ten years and has worked with a male and later a female school principal. She observed that there is no difference in terms of the execution of management and leadership roles as portrayed by the two principals. She has concerns with the fact that regardless of the over-representation of female teachers, there are fewer female school principals in schools as compared to their male counterparts. She became aware of the challenges faced by female school

principals because of their gender and she started wondering about ways of counteracting these challenges viably.

The researcher is, therefore, motivated to investigate the challenges faced by female school principals and ways of overcoming these challenges. Because of her experience as an educator and a head of department, the researcher is exposed to the problems experienced by female educators serving in leadership positions. In this regard the study is anticipated to serve as a contribution to the lives of women who are managers of schools and to those who want to occupy leadership positions by identifying possible challenges they are likely to meet and how to possibly counteract these challenges.

1.4   PROBLEM STATEMENT

The issue that women are under-represented in educational leadership positions is evident. The fact that they form the bulk of the teaching profession work force (DoE, 2008:3) indicates the prevalence of societal wrong. This needs to be studied so as to contribute to an eventual rectification of the situation. In light of this, the following question was formulated:

- How can the challenges faced by female school principals be counteracted?

In order to find answers to this main research question the following sub-questions were formulated:

- What are the challenges faced by female school principals?

- What are the reasons for the challenges faced by female school principals?

- What strategies can be provided to counteract these challenges?

1.5 AIMS OF THE STUDY

While the affirmative action policy on females has been hailed globally as a milestone in the females' emancipation process, few insights exist as regards to women's challenges in leadership. These challenges include attitudinal, institutional and socio-cultural obstacles (Coleman, 2006:81). This study seeks to reveal the specific challenges confronting female primary school principals as they strive to manage their schools efficiently and effectively. Using their challenges as a basis, strategies will be developed to overcome the challenges faced in schools by female school principals. The following aims were accordingly formulated:

- To determine the challenges faced by female school principals in the management of their schools;

- To understand the reasons behind the challenges faced by female school principals, and

- To determine strategies for counteracting the challenges faced by female school principals.

It is envisaged that the strategies will not be a preserve for women leaders only but could also be used by both genders in their leadership positions. The strategies are, however, aimed at enhancing the school effectiveness of schools led by females as it is focused on the job-related challenges faced by female school principals.

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design constitutes the blueprint for the collection and analysis of data in order to find relevant answers to the research questions. The research methodology which refers to the general approach that the researcher takes in carrying out the investigation and which represents all the tools of the research project (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:12) is discussed next. With this study on counteracting the challenges

faced by female school principals, data was collected by both a literature study and an empirical investigation to find answers to the postulated research questions.

1.6.1   Literature study

A literature study was conducted to determine the "why" and "what" of the challenges faced by female school principals in the execution of their managerial tasks. The data gathered from literature was critically synchronized, synthesized and evaluated in response to the research questions.

The focus was on female school principals, the challenges they face in their everyday duties and how they can overcome these challenges. With the literature study, details were explored pertaining to gender and equality in education, including aspects such as the frequencies of females in leadership positions, criteria for the appointment of school principals, socio-cultural stereotypes with regard to female managers, and existing strategies to overcome the challenges faced by female school principals. The literature study includes a focus on international and national perspectives with regard to the challenges that female school principals face.

1.6.2   Empirical investigation

The success of an empirical investigation is contingent on the clarity and completeness of the structure and implementation of the research design.

1.6.2.1   Qualitative research paradigm

Chasi (2000:46) emphasizes that a research design should entail a clear and thorough description of the format and plan of the investigation that will be carried out. The investigation in this study comprises of a qualitative approach that was focused on understanding the specific case, namely the challenges faced by female primary school principals in the executing of their job-related tasks.

Creswell (2003:98) and Leedy and Ormrod (2005:94) state that qualitative research is used to understand the complex nature of phenomena. Qualitative research is, therefore, descriptive, interpretive, analytical and evaluative in order to gain a deep understanding of the behaviour and perceptions of relevant people. Based on the qualitative research approach in which a problem is studied in-depth over a specified period of time (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:135), this investigation on female school principalship was conducted over a specific period of time within a particular group of individuals, namely female school principals at primary schools.

1.6.2.2   Sample and sampling procedure

Gall, Borg and Gall (2003:125) view a research sample as selected units from a defined population. Creswell (2003:101) elaborates on this by pointing out that a research sample denotes a portion of the elements of a defined population whose characteristics equal or approximate those of the parent population from which the research sample is selected.

With this investigation and based on convenience, ten primary schools were purposively selected as research sites from the Bohlabela District in Mpumalanga. Five of the research sites were public schools in the urban environment while the other five schools represented public schools in the rural area. The reason for including both urban and rural schools relates to accommodating possible differences with regard to the challenges female school principals face pertaining more distinctly to either urban or rural environments.

From each of the ten schools, the school principal and a member of the school management team (SMT) were selected as participants. The reason for selecting school principals as participants relates to the fact that they are the subject of the research thus being in the best position to contribute rich data to the investigation. The reason for selecting SMT members as participants relates to the fact that they work closely with the principal in managing the school's functioning and therefore have insight into the school principal's work performance and work-related challenges. The

school principal participants were female whereas the SMT member participants were both male and female. In order to ensure that a deep understanding was gained from the information provided, the participants were purposefully selected based on their work experience, so the school principal participants all had at least five years of experience as school principals while the SMT members had at least two years' work experience as members of their schools' management teams Such experience was necessary as the participants were anticipated to provide detailed and convincing managerial information to aid in answering the research sub-questions and ultimately the main research question, namely as to what challenges are faced by female school principals in the management of their schools and what possible strategies could be used to counteract these challenges.

1.6.2.3 Data collection

Data was collected using in-depth individual interviews and questionnaires with open-ended questions.

Individual interviewing as a direct verbal interaction between the researcher and the interviewee allows interviewees to "speak their minds" and to lend themselves to in-depth investigation particularly with regard to personal accounts of experiences and feelings (Macmillan & Schumacher, 2006:97). The researcher used individual interviewing as a data collection instrument to interview the ten school principal participants representing the ten research sites. On account of their leadership roles as executive heads of their schools facing challenges related to all school matters including gender issues, the school principals were in a position to provide information-rich inputs on the management position of a female school principal.

To supplement the data collected via interviewing and due to time constraints, a questionnaire consisting of five open-ended questions was completed by the ten participant members of the school management teams of the ten research sites (Annexure C). The participant SMT members were able to provide relevant information

to the debate on the gender-related challenges facing females in leadership positions at schools as they are closely involved in school management activities.

An interview schedule was developed as a guide to refer to during the interviews so as to ensure that all important aspects were dealt with during the individual interviews (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:97). Questions representing essential themes to be addressed during the individual interviews were included in the interview guide and all responses by participants were followed up by prompting questions for further and deeper inquiry (Annexure D). A first question related to asking participants to share their experiences on the challenges they perceive female school principals to face in the execution of their managerial tasks.

1.6.2.4   Data analysis

Gay and Airasian (2003:91) assert that data analysis in qualitative research is primarily an inductive process of organising the data and deducing relationships. Data analysis therefore involves an inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns (Macmillan & Schumacher, 2006:98). With this study, an analysis and interpretation of the findings took place during and after data collection. New themes that arose from the responses from the participants were incorporated into the interviews conducted thereafter. Interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants and were transcribed thereafter for thorough coding in order to identify emerging categories and sub-categories. The views of the ten school management team participants were analyzed question by question. The analysis of the responses on each question included themes and sub-themes.

The analyzed data with emerging categories and themes was then used to answer the research questions. A critical synthesis of all the views from the different participants was given to suffice the data analysis process which in essence depicted the answers to the research questions.

1.6.2.5 Validity and reliability

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2006:119) assert that validity and reliability in qualitative research serves the purpose of trustworthiness and transferability. Validity in qualitative research is determined by the data to be collected and the methodology used (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:100). In this study, data was collected from the female school principals of the ten public schools. These were the subjects of the investigation who are directly affected by the problem at hand, namely the challenges that female school principals face in managing their schools.

Furthermore, school management team members who were both male and female members and who worked with the female school principals also gave their views and experiences on the problem. Thus, the views could be deemed trustworthy as they came from the officials directly involved in the day to day running of the school.

Reliability in qualitative research should address the issue of transferability (Creswell, 2003; Gay & Airasian, 2003; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). In this study, the focus was on the views and responses of the research subjects as collected via interviewing and the completing of the questionnaire with open-ended questions. The data is deemed reliable as it came from the affected subjects. Aspects addressed during the interviews were determined from a literature review and the questions from the questionnaire were well structured to extract only views pertaining to challenges. Although it is mainly the responsibility of the investigator to see relations and transferability possibilities in research findings (Macmillan & Schumacher, 2006:97), it should be possible to transfer the findings to another school with similar characteristics, namely a school that is managed by a female school principal.

1.6.3 Ethical issues

Human beings are not guinea pigs to be experimented with and research participants need to be protected from any harm before, during and after the study (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2006:14). In this investigation, ethical considerations were put in place to

safeguard human dignity and safety. Permission for the study was sought from the Department of Education through the circuit office in Mkhuhlu, Mpumalanga province (Annexure A). The twenty participants used for the investigation were approached individually by the researcher who explained the essence of the study to them. The participants were informed that they had the right to participate or to decline the request to participate or to stop their participation at any time during the process of the investigation. They were requested to complete consent forms to confirm their understanding of participation and that they agreed with arrangements made (Annexure B). Furthermore, participants were ensured of anonymity throughout the research process and no names or telephone numbers were written down anywhere.

1.7   CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

The following terms are key concepts in this study:

1.7.1   School management challenges

School management is considered as comprehensively pertaining to a collection of school functions and processes which include decision making, problem solving and action planning (Cronje & Smith, 2002; Hall, 2002; Szilagyi, 2001). It involves integrating human, material, financial and time resources to accomplish the envisaged corporate goals of the school. The obstacles encountered to realize the school goals through school management are considered the challenges encountered by the school principal.

1.7.2   Context bound challenges

Context bound challenges that female school principals face relate to the obstacles and hindrances which they experience in their specific environments. These challenges include societal, cultural, teacher-related and system-related challenges (Coleman, 2006:119) which differ from context to context such as a primary school in the rural parts of Mpumalanga province and a primary school in the city of Chicago, USA.

1.7.3   Gender

Gender denotes those societal roles attached to men and women by the society (De Vos, 2005:17). Thus, from the societal perspective, men and women may have different roles hence some cultural stereotypes still believe that women cannot lead schools as competently as their male counterparts (Bowen, 2005:19).

1.7.4   Cultural challenges

In line with the findings of Higgs (2006:39) culture is what makes a people, a people. In the context of this study on female school principal challenges, culture denotes not only the outer manifestations of language, dress and dance, but also denotes especially people's beliefs, values and practices. It is in these beliefs and values that there exist certain stereotypes which believe that men are better leaders than women.

1.7.5   Gender stereotypes

Stereotyping represents the perspectives of some people who are biased and prejudicial about certain groups. Stereotyping represents the belief that a characteristic applies regardless to a whole group of people.   People that stereotype have preconceived ideas about certain groups, e.g. women (Brennan, 2007:196). With regard to principalship and gender stereotyping, these people can believe and say that women cannot lead schools effectively.

1.7.6   Societal challenges

A society is an organized community sharing the same kind of life and governed by beliefs, values and aspirations for a common purpose (Higgs 2006:88). In this context, certain societies have certain beliefs which favour men at the expense of denigrating women. Women are regarded as secondary to men and are hence subservient to them. In this regard societal challenges for women pertain to convincing society of the contrary.

1.8   PROGRAMME OF STUDY

The research will be conducted according to the following structure:

Chapter one as the orientation chapter provides a general orientation to the study. This includes a formulation of the research problem followed by an explanation of the research design and research methodology employed in order to find answers to the postulated research question.

Chapter two compromises of a literature study on the 'what' and 'why' of challenges faced by female school principals. The competencies demanded from school principals and the causes of the limited representation of females in school leadership positions are elicited. The effectiveness of school leadership, male versus female, is considered and the specific challenges that female school principals encounter are determined. All of these themes are discussed by following the approach of first considering the situation as it manifests in developed countries, followed by considering the situation in developing countries, and lastly focusing on the situation within the South African context.

Chapter three represents the research design and research methodology for the empirical investigation. Discussions in this chapter will describe the type of research paradigm employed, the research instruments used, sampling procedures and data collection and data analysis techniques.

Chapter four as the research findings chapter comprises of a discussion on the findings of the empirical investigation.

Chapter five as the final chapter consists of a summary of the literature findings and the findings of the empirical investigation followed by conclusions drawn and deductions made, accompanied by suggestions for further research.

1.9   SUMMARY

There are many challenges that female school principals face in their day to day managing of their schools. Many attempts have been made to enlighten society on gender issues and on the fact that there is no difference in terms of leadership capabilities between men and women. Some socio-cultural stereotypes, however, still remain believing that women cannot lead schools as competently as their male counterparts.

There are reasons such as history that cause this impasse with regard to women competence such as the colonial legacy which viewed women as inferior to men and cultural beliefs in black groups that women are the servants to men. These stereotypes still manifest in the current disparity with regard to women representation in school principalship positions albeit their position of being in the majority in terms of the total teacher corps.

Education as a product of society is dynamic. Changes to this kind of female stereotype thinking are eminent. Women should pursue their emancipation and men should rationally continue to support this emancipation so as to ensure that leaders are judged by their competence and not their gender for the sake of improved practice and societal progress due to competent leadership.

CHAPTER 2
THE MAGNITUDE AND NATURE OF FEMALE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL CHALLENGES: A LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   INTRODUCTION

Problems faced by female school managers who are operating in historically male dominated institutions attract the attention of social scientists from a wide variety of academic disciplines. Central to this analysis is a concern about the societal related hindrances encountered by female school principals in their exercising of power and their developing of power relationships with the communities they work in as well as with their colleagues (Botha, 2007:19). Female school principals are often generally denied access to the levels and kinds of power that are crucial for the performance of their core duties. Even if they acquire a measure of power, they are constrained by some societal norms and intra-organizational pressures that make it difficult; however, it is not impossible for them to exercise their duties (Coleman, 2005:51).

There are still a number of committed female teachers who are not interested in climbing the top echelons of school leadership although they are competent to do so. Their reasons may vary from perceiving school leadership as a male domain to associating leadership with too many challenges (York-Barr, 2009:256). However, many advantages for female school leadership may be offset by the disadvantages that flow from prejudice and discrimination directed against women as school leaders. Mostly this discrimination is associated with cultural and societal connotations (especially in developing countries, but not exclusive to developing countries) that women cannot ably lead as well as their male counterparts (St Pierre & Pillow, 2001:98). This tends to underlie the misconception about women leadership in schools.

With this chapter the focus is on the challenges that female educational leaders encounter internationally and locally. Themes that are discussed pertain to the following:

- The competences demanded from school principals
- The main causes for a lack of female school principals
- The effectiveness of school leadership: male versus female
- Challenges faced by female school leaders to manage their schools
- Strategies to curb the challenges female school principals face

Prior to addressing these themes, feminism theory is discussed as it applies to this investigation on female primary school leadership.

2.2   FEMINISM THEORY

In most contemporary studies there is increasingly the notion that women have some advantages in terms of leadership style but suffer some disadvantages from prejudicial evaluations especially in masculine organizational contexts (Sands, Kickul & Ingols, 2005:106). The fact that most schools in South Africa are administered by men and that the interviewing panelists are predominantly male may put women at a disadvantage although there is no proof that men are better school principals. In fact Acker (2010:196) argues that women school leaders are passionate school leaders who are mostly at par or better than their male counterparts. Smit (2013:207) agrees with the latter by asserting that many socio-cultural stereotypes still regard female school leaders as inferior and yet there is no basis or proof to this male domineering unfortunate premise.

Be it cultural, attitudinal or prejudicial, worldwide there tends to be some element of perceiving female school principals as not equal to their male counterparts with regard to work-related competencies. The female school principals who excel are often viewed as "men" or the "iron ladies". This exposes the societal ills that should be addressed. Hence, advocates of equality, equity and egalitarianism contributed to the development of feminism theory. Feminism theory is based on the philosophy that women should have political, economic and social rights equal to those of men as their competencies for contributing to social development are on par with those of their male counterparts (Trickett, Watts and Burman, 1994:82). This enhanced the formation of movements to win such rights for women (Trickett et al., 1994:82).

The specific goals of feminism have been a reaction to the particular forms of sexism and prejudice resulting in gender inequalities that exist at a particular moment in a particular context (Yoder, 2005:210). Thus, there is a link between diversity and feminism but this is contextual and much depends on societal values and beliefs. The question therefore is, if all people are deemed equal by society, why should certain quarters of the world view women differently? The link between diversity and feminism points out that feminist knowledge is based on the premise that the experience of all human beings is valid and must not be excluded from our understanding of human potential in totality, whereas patriarchal knowledge represents the perception that the experience of half the human population needs to be taken into account and the resultant version can be imposed on others (Tricket et al., 1994:85).

Thus, there seems to be a culture (a people's way of life as reflected by their values, beliefs and aspirations) that women are less able than men. This places women at a disadvantage in many spheres of constructive functioning. Feminism advocates for a scenario where society at large desists from viewing women as deviant, problem generators, victims or subordinates of men (Gardiner, Enomorto & Grogan, 2000:189). The feminist theory advocates for humankind to perceptively consider women as active agents with positive strengths who construct knowledge with self-awareness, creativity and intelligence. In this regard relational knowing, which draws on feminist attributes, contributes to a different way of leading in schools in that leadership as relation-oriented behaviour emphasizes the influence of leadership as a relation action. Concepts such as care, vision, collaboration, courage and intuition provide conceptualizations for the practice of relational leadership which differs from the traditional managerial language of control, hierarchy, authority and division of labour (Smit, 2013). Whilst relational and traditional perspectives of leadership are at opposite ends of a continuum of leadership actions, relational leadership is not exclusive to female school principals. Smit (2013) points however to the significance of an increased presence of women in school principal positions as a corollary to the widening acceptance of the idea of leadership as relational.

As a point of departure the perception of gender difference in terms of different experiences, different approaches and different styles of leadership is not argued. What is agued is the prevailing attitudes and preconceived assumptions concerning women competencies in leadership positions. This is the reason women in education worldwide have always faced the "glass ceiling" of under-representation in leadership positions (Gardiner et al., 2000:85). This "glass ceiling" has caused informal barriers to women's ascension to education leadership positions and constitutes a negative stance regarding women leaders' valuable contribution to societal improvement and this is what feminist theory is pursuing to counteract.

2.3   THE COMPETENCIES DEMANDED FROM SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

The term leader is viewed by Siwerthone (2001:97) as a person who compels compliance or induces compliance from subordinates. Smith (2002:133) understands a leader to be a person who occupies a leadership position in a formal or informal structure in different problem situations. Kart and Rosenweig (2009:322) analyse the activity of leadership by asserting that school leadership is the task of directing groups' activities. They emphasize that leadership is also applicable to a person who, in the absence of the designated leader, carries primary responsibilities for the organization's functions.

With regard to the school situation Sergiovanni (2000:99) declares that the leader is the school principal and that the school principal takes responsibility and accountability for school functioning and for carrying out the duties of the school leader irrespective of gender.

2.3.1   The demands on school principals in developed societies

From the perspective of developed countries school leadership is understood to require the ballast of a comprehensive range of skills to meet the current challenges of principalship. These challenges relate to a vast array of skills, knowledge, and expertise to adhere to accountability and efficiency demands applicable to a knowledge-based

environment (Sergiovanni, 2000:101). The accountability demand of the school principal as leader relates, for example, to balancing the need for continuity and stability within the school community with the increasing demand by policy-makers and the wider community for change, innovation and transformation.

With regard to competencies required from school principals to meet the demands for change and innovation, Kast and Rosenweing (2007:359) advance the following knowledge and skills required from able school principals. The school principal should be a servant of the people in that he/she is at the institution to advance the core business of the school which is teaching and learning in an enabling environment and is answerable to all key stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education, teachers, learners and parents. Through such interaction, the school principal manages the human resources, i.e. the teachers, support staff and learners, so that the envisaged corporate goals of the organisation are realized. The school principal also manages resources and implements policy for the success of the school with all actions focused on achieving the primary organizational goal of preparing learners for a qualitative life in a knowledge-based society.

2.3.2   The demands on school principals in developing societies

The turn of the millennium has witnessed invigorated women participation in educational leadership in developing societies (Roder, 2005:17). This strengthened participation by women in leadership positions can be mainly attributed to feminist theories that are being pushed globally by civil society and which therefore also affect third world environments (Sands et al., 2005). If a school should be viewed as an enterprise, articles in newspapers reveal a cultural realignment in the modern society as media announce that women have "the right stuff" (Sharpe, 2002) and that the future of schools as business enterprises depends on women (Heffermen, 2002:9). In this regard Colin (2012:78) holds that men could become losers in a global school leadership campaign that values mental power over physical might, not insinuating that men are not clever, but men value physical ability. For this reason the clamouring for equal opportunities in top leadership positions, regardless of gender, has never been echoed

before more than it is emphasized now (UNICEF, 2005:10). The demand for a fifty-fifty representation by women in leadership positions in South African schools therefore seems rational given the fact that in South Africa women constitute more than half of the population (DoE, 2008:07).

The quest for equal and equitable representation by women in school leadership positions brings challenges with which women leaders have to grapple. The challenges and obstacles which female school principals or women in leadership positions in general face are well documented and include challenges that relate to attitudinal, institutional and socio-cultural obstacles (Yonder, 2005; Watson, 2008; York-Barr, 2009). These challenges are pertinent in most African and Caribbean countries where women are distantly under-represented in key decision-making positions. With regard to the attitudinal challenges to female leadership it mainly pertains to societal and/or cultural premises that have permeated most developing communities.

Findings carried out by the Simmons School of Management in March 2003 to 2004 on 500 professional teachers in 25 developing commonwealth countries showed that to a certain extent women have themselves to blame for their marginalization as leaders (Sands, Kinkul & Ingols, 2005:2). Of the 500 participants surveyed, 54% of them did not aspire to attain higher leadership positions in the schools where they work. In fact, of the 500 participations 45% actually emphasised that they are comfortable with being good followers and opted out of leadership as the parental roles which they fulfil at home are substantially more important in terms of time allocation and dedication than being in a leadership position in their professional lives.

Within the African context specifically, five clusters of work-related problems confront female school principals and although these problems are not exclusive to female school leadership, they manifest in a specific way for female school principals due to preconceived gender bias. These clusters of problems relate to the following:

- The teachers
- Lack of financial resources

- The community

- Balancing instructional and managerial duties

- Lack of physical, didactical and human resources such as a lack of enough classrooms with enough space in each classroom, lack of enough books, and a lack of sufficient and experienced teachers.

With regard to teachers as a factor that hampers female school principals in their carrying out of their leadership activities, some African societies have a patriarchal culture where women leaders are not easily and readily acceptable. In such instances, for example, teachers (both male and female) would display negative attitudes towards the female principal by non-cooperation or even verbally abusing her (Zama, Hope & Persress, 2008:94).

For a school to run efficiently and effectively it needs financial support from the parents, funders and government. Parents being the key stakeholders have to support the school and when they resent the school principal and sabotage her by not paying school fees, school programmes come to a halt and the female school principal is deemed to have failed (Sands et al., 2005:13). This reluctance to pay school fees due to a negative attitude towards female school principals is not uncommon in many developing communities (Powell, 2008:78). The situation very often prevails that some parents and some other community members deliberately and due to sheer default are uncooperative with regard to female leadership. Parents can even team up with a clique of teachers to create disharmony in the school. Powell (2008:8) cites a case in Uganda where parents deliberately did not pay school fees, some transferred their children to another school headed by a male school principal and others refused to attend school meetings called for by the female school principal. In many instances, however, such actions occur while some other members of the community are grappling with the reality that a woman is heading their school and with these members of the community then gradually starting to accept the condition as normal and positive. In such cases the female school principal is in the midst of attempts to 'unseat' herself from bias and stereotypes pertaining to female leadership.

In relation to role conflict and due to the fact that balancing instructional and management duties in terms of ensuring sufficient resources is a challenge for many school principals regardless of gender, Zama et al. (2008:95) point to the exacerbated effects for female school leadership. In this regard the dynamism of education entails that school principals should be dynamic in order to ensure sustained performance at their schools. The focus of the government in many developing countries - especially with regard to the African countries where internal conflict is very often prevalent - is more inclined towards defence and arranging for peace and security with education usually allocated a paltry part of the budget (Powell, 2008:83). In such conditions, the school's dire need for classrooms, text books, specialist rooms and libraries is thwarted. When these schools are run by female school principals, it very often, and due to deep-rooted gender-related prejudice, results in a stereotyping of the female gender as being incompetent to arrange for the needed resources.

Thus, female school principals in developing communities experience major challenges that relate to attitudinal misconceptions. In most instances the situation is exacerbated by the fact that these categories of misconceptions all represent a combination of multi-faceted challenges.

2.3.3   The demands on school principals within the South African context

One pertinent question to ask with regard to the equality of South African gender representation in school leadership is whether the female/male teacher ratio in South Africa is real. Considering the number of female school principals, which is 29.36% and female deputy principals which is 42.64% in South Africa in the Mpumalanga province, for example, it is clear that gender inequality is the main bone of contention (Mpumalanga Department of Education, 2013:5). Considering the fact that promotion to the post of the school principal position should be preceded by management experience as deputy school principal, the possibility of many potential female school principals to surpass their male counterparts is viewed as a pipe dream (Steyn, 2006:13).

Because of the reality of what is really experienced in practice, aspiring female teachers feel threatened by the superiority of men in senior positions in the school (Lumby et al., 2010:33). Many potential female leaders in South African schools feel their attempts and inputs to effective school management is not recognised and understood for what it should be recognised for, namely work performance (Higgs, 2006:6). The reason for this relates to the fact that the emphasis on women in leadership positions as expressed by the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) pertains to gender policies and quota systems pursued for gender representation without really focusing on the value and impact of female school leadership on school improvement and societal development (Smit, 2013:139). Another general challenge facing the gender struggle in South African schools relates to the fact that few women understand the concept of gender struggle as the legacy of oppression is still weighing heavily on women in a male dominated government and Department of Education (Powell, 2008:87).

The challenges that female school principals face who manage to climb the ladder of female leadership includes, amongst other, process related obstacles. From the process itself of selecting the best candidate for school principalship which is in many instances male dominated, short listed female educators have to excel in order to convince the male dominated panelist interviewers that they are equally competent or more competent than the male candidates shortlisted for the same post (Smit, 2013:141). Once appointed to the post, the female school principal has to convince the learners, educators and the community beyond any questionable doubt that she is an able leader (Zama et al., 2008:98). Thus, female school principals have more internal and external forces militating against them than their male counterparts.

Coleman (2006:17) views the challenges faced by South African female school principals as predominantly confined to rural and peri-urban communities where traditional values and beliefs still determine societal practices. Although the South African constitution (1996) is vocal on non-discrimination on grounds of race, gender and creed, deep-rooted misconceptions in especially rural-oriented communities still view women as secondary to men with regard to work performance in general which then also includes management competencies (Lumby et al., 2010:39). Within the

school context, challenges often experienced by female school principals include uncooperative teachers working towards making the school dysfunctional (Powell, 2008:79). This they do by being in-subordinate to the female school principal hence school effectiveness declines. When that happens the female school principal is deemed underperforming.

The parent and extended community often join the negativism against female leadership as instigated by some teachers who contest female leadership. Parent community negativism manifests in an unwillingness to cooperate with regard to, for example, paying school fees, partaking in fund raising efforts, and attending school meetings as arranged by the school principal (Mnduli, 2002:32). Parents who are negative to female school leadership also transfer their children to neighbouring schools that are headed by male school principals (Zama, 2008:99). With reference to section 20 and 21 of the South African Schools Act of 96, parents through their School Governing Body (SGB) have the authority to manage and maintain the school to advance the best possible learning outcomes for learners. If some parents opt to shun and denigrate the female school principal for reasons related to deep-rooted prejudice against women in managerial positions, school functioning suffers with a resultant negative impact on learner development, thus jeopardizing the purpose for which the school was established (Steyn, 2006).

Kruger (2007:88) cites professional growth as crucial to school leadership. Many female school principals, like their male colleagues, only pursued a life-long study approach after attainment of their initial qualifications (Nguni, 2006:30). Due to school-based management approaches, however, the demands on the school principal's instructional leadership skills and management competencies are increasing (Marishane, 2013:125). As leaders of teaching and learning, the challenges which school principals face, relate to ensuring that their technical competencies remain intact. If teachers perceive their school principal to be academically inferior to themselves, they will always challenge their school principal's decisions which, due to deep rooted prejudice based on gender, are exacerbated when the school principal is a female (Mnduli, 2002:36).

2.4 THE MAIN CAUSES OF A LACK OF FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN SCHOOL PRINCIPAL POSITIONS

The fact that women are under-represented in school leadership positions is conspicuous worldwide. Although it is expected to be less of a problem in developed societies due to democratic dispensation which manifests in equality and equity among its entire people, female representation in management positions still remains unsatisfactory when demographic realities are considered (Cheng & Shum, 2001:165). In developing societies reasons for female under-representation in leadership positions pertain to an array of intertwined conditions that are inspired by long lasting stereotyping and prejudice (Lumby et al., 2010).

2.4.1 Causes encountered in developed societies

Schools have always been seen as central to nation building because they are agencies of change. However, since the beginning of the 21st century, schools have been placed under the microscope for, amongst other reasons, the absence of women leaders in schools as evidenced in countries like the USA, the UK, Canada and Australia (Powell, 2008:90).

The main causes of women shying away from such positions as school principalship do not relate to family responsibilities only. Vecchio (2002:123) observes that any possible female advantage in school leadership is often upset by the array of disadvantages that flow from prejudice and discrimination directed against women as leaders. Prejudice with regard to the unfair evaluation of women competencies based on stereotypical judgments of the female group as a whole rather than focusing on the behaviour and competencies of the specific individual results in many potential female leaders relinquishing the possibility of managing a school (Lumby et al., 2010:8). Thus, incongruity between expectations about women (the gender role) and expectations about leaders (leader role) underline the prejudice against female school leaders even in developed countries. Some social groups of people in developed countries are automatically activated when applying judgments to the opposite sex. In many instances

these people link management with being male or female (Copland, 2001:81). These perceptions are linked to general societal expectations such as, for example, the fact that for women to be considered instrumentally as competent as men, perceivers need to be given clear evidence of the women's greater or superior performance compared to their male counterparts (Earley, 2002:102). This results in women being expected to over-compensate in their managerial activities to convince stakeholders of their leadership competencies. In this regard Vecchio's (2002:128) investigation confirmed the unjust prejudice against women by means of the Goldberg paradigm experiments which involved the evaluation of resumes for possible work opportunities. With all of the fictive resumes representing the same standard of work-related competencies and "applicants" having the same age and the same number of years of work experience, half of the reviewers evaluated 'resumes' with a female name attached to the 'resume'. Meta-analysis of these Goldberg experiments showed that 34 males compared to only 26 females were preferred for work appointments.

With regard to women's reasons for declining, or resigning from school principal positions, studies in the USA, UK, Canada, Wales and Australia revealed the following:

- School-based management approaches result in school principals being held accountable for everything that takes place at the school. This, together with job-related stress from the pressure of long working hours, budgets cuts, overcrowding, and shortages of resources result in senior female teachers shying away from principalship positions more often than their male counterparts (Vecchio, 2002:129). In many instances women's shying away from these high demands on school-based leadership positions is inspired by the fact that women remain the family caretaker regardless of their managerial obligations (Awumbila, 2006:66).

- Time fragmentation and the way time, space and communication patterns are structured often results in managers having virtually no time for reflection or talk with trusted colleagues about concerns and fears. The leader can easily be isolated and have to bear the burden of leadership alone which in many

cases is considered not worth the effort of leadership for women who are not necessarily the breadwinner (Copland, 2001:93).

- Earley (2002:115) advances that in western countries the female school principal may encounter an unsupportive external environment with regard to matters that include the growing pressure of being accountable for high-stakes standardized assessment which is accompanied by a set of local, state and federal mandates on evidence-based management.

- The perception that education has become an economic/political football in which the principalship is not valued is influencing many potential female leaders to relinquish the pursuing of a leadership position (Vecchio, 2002:130).

- Family and personal life are compromised as the female school principal has to balance home obligations with demanding school leadership responsibilities (Awumbila, 2006:67; Earley, 2002:116).

- The mere exposure to a selection process that can be complex and intrusive serves as barrier to many female educators with good potential for leadership positions (Williams, 2001:110).

Cooley and Shen (2009:122) observed additional factors as obstacles for women participation in school leadership positions. One such factor relates to an increasing pool of generation-based perceptions that teaching and leadership positions in teaching are not viable as a life-long career. In this regard Cooley and Shen (2009:122) reported a 50% attrition rate in the first five years after graduation for teachers in both England and USA. Another issue of discontent among female educators who may harbour notions of promotion is that the overwhelming majority of leadership positions in developed countries held by females are held by females in particular groups. In England, for example, the majority of females holding school principal positions in primary schools are white with black teachers feeling increasingly alienated from school leadership positions (Earley, 2002:115).

Comprehensively considered there is evidence that in developed countries there are also circumstances that militate against women to become school principals.

2.4.2   Causes encountered in developing societies

In addition to the generally known challenges associated with school leadership positions, literature relates additional hindrances for female school principals as obstacles intensified by their gender roles. Women are usually absent from education management positions in especially developing countries, especially the sub-Saharan African societies (Andela, 2008:4). Their absence is caused by structural, cultural and societal obstacles to their advancement although some of them display a great determination and resilience which empower them to develop satisfactory leadership careers (Zama, et al., 2008). In Zimbabwe for instance men dominate significantly in school leadership positions while women play subservient roles in most areas of leadership endeavour (Nguni, 2006:101). An investigation into women advancement in education conducted in the north and southern African countries of Ghana, Cameroon and Burundi revealed feelings of isolation, the strain of coping with sex stereotyping, and community related problems linked to discrimination for being female as hindrances to female leadership (Steyn, 2006:51; Zama et al, 2008:143).

Linked to the perception of male domination of school principalship are the problems female school principals' face which are partially rooted in the pattern of gender socialization and the belief system on gender such as that a woman's place is exclusively at home taking care of family needs (Yoder, 2005:120). These prejudices and discrimination against women's competencies and position in a male dominated work environment result in women themselves developing lower self-esteem that suppresses their achievement motive. Stemming from the negative societal perceptions and the fact that educational training is dominated by male thinking, leadership and managerial positions are mostly understood from that perspective, namely as a masculine construct based on masculine values (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000:71).

With the report of the UNESCO world education forum of 2000, however, a link was identified between gender and management capacity sentiments. The report propounds that, because women chose school principal as a career that was viewed by society as a male domain, they tend to introduce a deviant pattern in that role since it is viewed as a challenge to sex roles stereotyping (Graen, 2009; UNESCO, 2000:19; Yoder, 2005:117). This deviancy introduced a focus on relational knowing, which draws on feminists attributes to leadership (Smit, 2013).

2.4.3   Causes encountered in the South African context

In South Africa, when school principal positions are advertised, fewer women than men apply (Nguni, 2006:19). At times some regions have to concertedly encourage women to apply (Sands, Kickul & Ingols, 2005:4). The initiative from government to prioritize the promotion of women to leadership positions is, however, contingent on women liberating themselves. Albeit a positive development, the initiative of affirmative action by means of which gender equity policies are implemented to arrange for fair female representation in leadership positions has caused major problems in local societies. Reinhan (2007:110) argues that some women are appointed to management positions when they least desire or expect it. A case in point is when a dedicated teacher in the classroom is encouraged to accept the appointment as school principal to balance the gender ratio for school principalship as stipulated by affirmative action policies. The competent and content classroom teacher could be turned into an incompetent school principal who feels inadequate and ill prepared for the challenging position of school principalship (Lumby et al., 2010:18). Nevertheless, some South African women display a great determination and imagination to develop a satisfactory managerial career (Coleman, 2006:72).

Despite many efforts for women emancipation, women in management positions in South African schools are still in the minority (Botha, 2007:121). Due to negative and primitive cultural beliefs that women are subservient to men, people's perception of leadership has remained attuned to associate leadership with males. This is also applicable to the South African society where the perception still prevails that men are

leaders and women able supporters in whatever sector, whether it be political, social, economic or education (Lumby et al., 2010:6). These distorted perceptions impeding women from ascending to leadership positions relates to a colonial historical background in which Africans were made to believe that their knowledge system was primitive and that, as Africans, they needed white leadership to survive (Acker, 2010:93). This perception was filtered to women with their inferior disposition further intensified as their status, according to the African tradition, was being classified together with children, thus undermining their perceived leadership potential substantially (Acker, 2010:95).

The ideology of looking down upon African women with respect to their leadership skills was further perpetrated by the apartheid regime in South Africa, which segregated people according to race and culture. Women faced triple oppression as they were oppressed by colonial perceptions, their own communities and also by the apartheid regime (Nguni, 2006:5). Their knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, experiences and self-esteem were denigrated to zero (Higgs, 2006). Mertz (2005:95) emphasizes this extensive discrimination against black women by pointing to the example of Florence Nightingale who was made a heroine in nursing schools and history while Cecilia Makiwane, the first qualified black nurse in the South African history books with equal heroic performances, was never mentioned. Thus, apart from gender bias in general, the historical dictates of South African history negated the capabilities of black women to influence or lead (Higgs, 2006:17). Although efforts are made to enlighten society through Ubuntu, the historical connotations which impeded women's emancipation and advancement are still evident. This is exemplified in education where proportionately few women are in leadership positions. More so, the existing female school principals encounter challenges inflicted by men and some of these school principals are removed from their posts and replaced by men (Mertz, 2005:98).

2.5 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: MALE VERSUS FEMALE

Countries, their education systems and individual schools are experimenting with new approaches to education management that are deemed right for the 21st century. Glatter (2002:88) proposes three broad interrelated but consecutive approaches to educational management. These are the initial public administration approach, the new public management approach, and the organisational learning approach. School leaders are always indebted to demands from all stakeholders and as such they should act as change agents in directing school learning and programmes focused on learner learning towards the envisaged corporate vision, mission and goal setting for determined outcome accomplishment.

With reference to the question as to whether school leadership can be argued as a gendered concept, Glatter (2002:103) asserts that gender and leadership should be clarified with regard to determinants for male/female differences in leadership positions if such particular determinants realistically prevail. Ackerman and Ostrowki (2002:140) view gender as culture's social construction of differences between sexes. These include the different traits, roles, behaviours, attitudes and aptitudes male and female are understood to display on the basis of gender which reinforces claims of membership in a sex. In this regard expressions such as 'gender practices', 'gender language' and 'gender jobs' emphasise the tenet that gender involves a process of social construction which makes gender a central explanation of organisational behaviour phenomena including leadership position and leadership behaviour (Zama et al., 2008:191).

Whether there is any difference in work performance between a female school leader and a male school leader remains a moot question. Historically, gender precluded most females from becoming school principals (Nguni, 2006). As a result, the assumption that males were better suited than females for leadership roles was accepted as true and unquestionable (Yoder, 2005:134). The gradual increase in female school leadership, with the possibility of assessing school leadership performance in schools, provide evidence for the fact that female work performance equals that of their male

counterparts (Steyn, 2006). And even though studies by behavioural theorists such as Bowen (2005), Coleman (2005), and Acker (2010) reveal that in general schools that are managed by female school principals perform on par with male managed schools, with the indication that female leadership in general represents a more caring leadership style (Smit, 2013), many socio-cultural stereotypes still regard women as less equal with regard to work performance than men.

Schools run by female school principals perform well like the schools that are managed by male principals. Without looking at gender there are many factors that impact on the success of the school principals. Literature reveals that female school principals succeed in their leadership through strength of their conceptions and through their personality which in general tends to be more caring than the personalities of their male counterparts (Smit, 2013; Coleman, 2003; Udjombala, 2002). It further indicates that these female school principals manage to raise learners' performance by the compassionate way in which they display their leadership and management roles.

Notman (2009:6), in a multi-national study of successful school leadership in primary and secondary schools in different countries, discovered that female school principals were successful as they managed to change their schools and raised the student achievement due to their tendency to lead from the middle. These successful female principals unified their school and the community behind a vision of fostering a sense of belonging, emphasizing the importance of teaching and learning, improving behaviour through positive discipline management, innovative curriculum development, and by being visible and tuned to the community. More emphasis was on the school's expectations and their focus was on developing the school in totality (Notman, 2009:3). As female leaders they succeeded equally with what their male colleagues were achieving. With regard to the South African context, and with reference to the geographical area on which this research on female leadership is focused, the report on the 2012 National Senior Certificate (NSC) grade 12 results from the Bohlabela District in the Mpumalanga Department of Education pointed out that there is an improvement in learner performance at schools led by female principals (Mpumalanga Department of Education Bohlabela District, 2012). One school led by a female school principal

performed exceptionally well, as in the year 2011 the pass rate was at 80,6%, then for 2012 the pass rate increased to 98.1% (Mpumalanga Department of Education Bohlabela District, 2012). Yearly the school's performance increased and this provide evidence that women leaders are capable as their male counterparts of producing well-rounded individuals.

Motivation is another factor in which female school principals are as capable as their male counterparts to improve learners' performance. Female school leaders' empathetic motivation of their staff contributes positively in lifting the morale of the educators and learners. Udjombala (2002:54-55) discovered that female school principals achieve equal quality teaching and learning through motivation, class visits and teachers' professional development as male school principals. The female school leader, however, indirectly influences the staff through motivation which improves staff's commitment to work due to the female leader's approach to leading that tends to be more benevolent than that of male leaders. Motivation can also change the working conditions as it can be done in a compassionate way with regard to professional development, award giving, praising people, inspirational motivation, and encouraging staff members to enroll in upgrading courses and for higher qualifications (Udjombala, 2002:75-76).

Superior organisations and effective leaders use a variety of principles and techniques to motivate followers and to achieve their organizational goals. One of the primary ingredients for motivating people is to create a powerful vision in the sense of having a clear idea of where the organisation or part of the organisation is going and how it is going to get there (Gustav & Puth, 2002:141). In this regard female school leaders prove to be as able as their male counterparts in creating such vision (Notman, 2009; Smit, 2013). Female school principals build and maintain a highly motivated workforce and they succeed in promoting achievement and learning as well as high morale and commitment by staff. Through motivation the school standard is uplifted and the learners' performance automatically increases (Udjombala, 2002). Female leaders are successful in their leadership and there is evidence as their schools are performing as

well as those that are led by male principals. It is therefore clear that gender in leadership does not impact negatively on leadership successes.

2.6 CHALLENGES FACED BY FEMALE SCHOOL LEADERS IN THE MANAGEMENT OF THEIR SCHOOLS

In an investigation into female leadership that was conducted at schools in Uganda, Liberia and the Ivory Coast, female school principal participants reported their leadership roles as problematic because of prevailing societal and cultural beliefs on gender disposition as held by the indigenous inhabitants (Oduro & Macbeth, 2003:148). Even learners and some fellow teachers reported to view female leaders in schools as being less competent than their male counterparts (Oduro & Macbeth, 2003:149). The Pan African Centre for Gender, Peace and Development carried out an investigation into challenges faced by women in their quest to gain equal opportunities to leadership positions.

Challenges which impede African women from climbing the leadership ladder related to issues of balancing the triple roles to be fulfilled at home, in the community and at work (Rademeyer, 2008:4). In Kenya, for example, women are considered to be a mother for all with related tending responsibilities, whereas in Liberia obligations to children and extended family caring responsibilities impact negatively on opportunities for women to pursue careers or to be promoted ultimately to executive leadership positions (Nguni, 2006:140). It is further indicated that in most African countries young girls in desolated rural areas attend school to a certain level and then drop out or leave school after seven years to assist with home and family tasks while boys are encouraged to complete extended levels of education (Rademeyer, 2008:4).

Awumbila (2006:95) points out that in most developing countries, even if a woman assumes a leadership position, she still needs men's collaboration to support her actions and decisions or else the influential men will work towards her downfall. This relates to the fact that men are still considered the sole decision-makers in patriarchal

developing societies and when women in these societies rise to leadership positions, this rise is encountered as uncomfortable.

This results in situations where women, even if they rise to leadership positions, their decisions are still determined by men with the female leader acting only as the ceremonial spokesperson of the specific setting (Oduro & Macbeath, 2003:109). Research by Nguni (2006:140) in north, central and west African countries confirmed the deep rootedness of patriarchy with male supremacy and dominance resonating across the social, economic, political and cultural systems of these countries, thus placing women school leaders in challenging and demanding positions.

For the purpose of this study, gender is viewed as the roles ascribed to men and women by society. In the same vein equality is viewed as the leveling of the playing field between the genders with regard to work performance in order to arrange for equal work and promotion opportunities for both men and women. Gender equality therefore plays a pivotal role in women emancipation and advancement in all organisations, including the school as an organisation. With consideration of the South African context and as was pointed out in paragraph 2.3.3, the constitution of South Africa which is the supreme law of the country provides for equality and non-discrimination on the basis of race, gender, social backgrounds and creed.

As stated in the constitution, the state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on the grounds of race, gender or sex (RSA, 1996(a):7). What this implies is that legally the scenario in the South African education system where women are under-represented in leadership positions points to discrimination. Cheng and Shum (2001:23) and Bowen (2005:17) observe that women under-representation in managerial positions and the challenges they face can mainly be attributed to gender, with little evidence of competency inefficiency. They further assert that women school principals face tri-multidimensional challenges and all these are gender-related (Bowen, 2005:18; Cheng & Shum, 2001:25).

The tri-multidimensional challenges which women are facing in the working environment and which are gender-related pertain to the following (Bowen, 2005; Cheng & Shum, 2001):

- Task accomplishment style
- Interpersonal style
- Decision making style

With regard to task accomplishment, Bowen (2005:27) asserts that female school principals in South Africa face challenges which are gender related and which are not experienced by men in similar positions. In line with what was pointed out in paragraph 2.3.3, these challenges include criticism on their work performance by the community and fellow female educators with related constant antagonism from male aspiring educators. Such negative gender-related tendencies against women make many female educators with well-developed leadership abilities fear to delve into the male domain of school principalship. And for the ones with ambition, promotion to leadership positions is a challenge as they have to fight the gender struggle in the system (Coleman, 2006:91).

Interpersonal relationships are also a challenge encountered by females in leadership positions at schools. Interpersonal relationships, according to Kuye, Thornhill and Fourie (2002:58), have the ability to maintain and improve the employee's feelings of self-worth and competence, to give feedback on specific actions and their respective effects, to ensure that employees use the appropriate consequences in order to manage their actions, to provide employees with clarity with regard to the requirements of their jobs, and to clarify the results and measurement criteria with regard to their tasks. Without interpersonal relationships there will not be a positive working environment prevailing in the work place. In paragraphs 2.3.2 and 2.3.3 it was pointed out that female school principals are encountering a problem as parents and teachers team up to create disharmony in schools and teachers become uncooperative which results in a dysfunctional school. This has been supported by Zama et al. (2008:94) who indicate that teachers tend to display negative attitudes towards female school leaders and even verbally abuse female school principals. Verbal abuse, uncooperative

teachers, and parents teaming up with teachers against female leadership represent challenges that female school principals are facing in their quest for interpersonal relationship forming (Lumby et al., 2010:34).

There is still disparity between men and women with regard to decision-making. Women leaders still face challenges when they have to carry out their leadership activities in decision-making. In paragraph 2.3.2 it has been indicated that women are under-represented in key decision-making positions and this under-representation has been supported by Awumbila (2006:95) when pointing out that men are still considered as the sole decision-makers. Even when occupying leadership positions the female school principals' decisions are not considered and this is supported by what has been pointed out in paragraph 2.3.3 with regard to teachers challenging the decisions of the female school principals.

It is evident from realities in South African school practices that there are more male deputy school principals than female deputy school principals. But literature indicates that in general global terms gender equity in leadership positions still has a long way to go before equality is achieved as women are still under-represented in leadership positions. Coleman (2002:3) discovered that in England for the period 1997-2001 the ratio of male deputy principals to female deputy principals was 60% to 40%. This was supported by Lumby et al. (2010:27) who indicated that in South Africa (Gauteng Province) the percentage of female principals was 37 and 46 for female deputy principals for the 2008 school year. In the Mpumalanga province the gender ratio for 2006 revealed that women made up 51% of the population and men 49% but the female deputy principals' percentage was 42.2% (DoE, 2008). The statistics indicate that the Department of Basic Education needs to work towards achieving 50% representation of women in the school leadership post levels. The fact that those to be promoted to school principalship need to have management experience as deputy school principals implies and confirms the eventual male domination of school principal positions. What is also evident is that the heads of department (HOD) in schools are also predominantly male. Mndluli (2002:10), for example, points out that in Kwazulu-Natal there were 183 male HODs and 179 female HODs for the 2001 school year. Mndluli further indicates

that in high schools in Kwazulu-Natal male HODs represented 67,4% and female HODs 32,6% of the total HOD population for 2001 (Mndluli, 2002:11).

Lumby et al. (2010:5) emphasize that in many countries males move faster up to the leadership positions. For the South African Department of Basic Education to close the gap that still exists between male and female leadership representation, there must be an equity plan that must be managed in order to achieve 50% gender equity. The few HODs who are female are to a large extent near retirement and many of them retire before they ascend to deputy school principalship (Mndluli, 2002). It is therefore evident that gender equity within the South African school context with regard to school principal appointments which are based on competencies only to do the task, without any form of gender bias, still needs to be achieved.

As was pointed out in paragraph 2.4.2 the fact that women continue to be under-represented in school principal positions is not peculiar to the South African context only but pertains to all developing countries. And as was stated in paragraph 2.5 that in general schools that are managed by female school principals perform on par with male managed schools, with the indication that female leadership in general represents a more caring leadership style, many socio-cultural stereotypes still regard women as less equal with regard to work performance than men. It remains a fact, as was pointed out in paragraphs 2.3.2 and 2.3.3, that many female school principals are still often engulfed in a barrage of challenges that militate against their effectiveness due to gender-related socio-cultural discriminatory prejudices.

In order to categorise the problems female school principals in South Africa face, Kruger (2007:85) determines the following four groups of challenges:

- Societal
- Cultural
- Teacher-related
- System-related

With regard to the societal challenge, and as was evident from paragraphs 2.4.1, 2.4.2 and 2.4.3, many communities still view women as subservient to men. This is applicable to the South African context where in many instances men are still viewed as born leaders and women as good followers (Coleman, 2006:17). Given this scenario, the learners, educators and parents of such communities sub-consciously harbour salient perceptions which make the female school principals' work difficult. Kruger (2007:88) observed that in South African communities female school principals are devalued, side stepped, not supported, ignored, patronized and silenced because of their gender. In such situations the female school principal's work is compromised and is prone to constant criticism from fellow colleagues and aspiring prospective school principals who are not as competent as the female school principal to lead the school (Kruger, 2007:89; Mertz, 2005:98).

Culture is what makes a group of people different from other groups. It manifests through attributes like dress, song and dance, and also through perceptions and attitudes towards life and people. In some communities of South Africa where women are still perceived to be inferior to men, women are not easily accepted as school principals and when they are appointed to leadership positions, patriarchy may ensue (Reynolds, 2002:106). Patriarchy in such schools usually manifests through manipulation, the exercising of power over females, double standards and stereotyping of the female gender (Zama et al., 2008:94). Such challenges complicate the female school principal's task to lead her school effectively.

Female school principals also face teacher-related challenges. As it is natural human phenomena to resist change due to unfamiliarity with the unknown, many teachers (both male and female) are resistant to change. For many decades there have been mainly male school principals in most South African schools and when a female school principal was appointed teachers would not support her (Lumby et al., 2010:25). Two cases are reported in the Mpumalanga Province where the appointed female school principals were not allowed into their schools to resume their duties after the male school principals had retired. In both cases teachers wanted the male deputy school principals to take over from the retiring school principals. The instigators (teachers of

the respective schools) mobilised learners and parents to barricade the schools so that the female school principals would not enter (Smit, 2013:137-143). Thus, in many South African communities there are still elements of negativism towards women in school principal positions, diminishing women's ideas, efforts, capabilities and leadership activities in the communities as trivial (Smit, 2013).

With regard to system-related challenges for female school principals, the selection and recruitment of school principals in South Africa has some hindrances that militate against opportunities for women to be considered for leadership roles. Since there are fewer female deputy school principals at district level that can apply for promotion to school principal positions, they have to exceptionally impress as being more competent than the male applicants who are convincingly in the majority (Kruger, 2007:449). The female applicants are in many instances seen as delving into a man's domain and once selected they have to work harder than men in similar positions in order to justify their appointment (Kruger, 2007:449; Reynold, 2002:110).

It is thus clear the challenges female school principals still face in many societies are deeply rooted in societal perceptions of women's disposition with regard to the related competencies. The implication is that female school principals have to face male prejudice based on cultural norms and values with regard to the positions of women in the social context (Coleman, 2006; Higgs, 2006; Kruger, 2007; Mndluli, 2002). Based on socio-cultural stereotypes, the premise is that men have better work performance competencies with regard to being a school leader. Such socio-cultural indoctrination impacts negatively on female school principals and demands a concerted collective effort of inducing a paradigm shift with regard to competent female school leadership for the betterment of society.

2.7   SOME STRATEGIES TO CURB THE CHALLENGES FEMALE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS FACE

Due to school-based management approaches, school leadership responsibilities are increasing constantly and dramatically with school leadership accountability becoming more data and evidence based daily (Watsons, 2008:11; York-Barr, 2009:112). Against

this background and because they know that they are under strict scrutiny by the communities in which they work, female school principals must strive to execute their duties above the expected standard.

The female school principal must empower herself by developing some strategies to counter the prejudices, stereotyping and discriminatory tendencies exerted on her. In addition to the TPLAR (transparency, participative management, legitimacy, accountability, and representativeness) approach by Boone and Kurtz (2004) for good work performance by school principals (par 1.2.4), York-Barr (2009:116) provides a broad outline of the strategies that female school principals can employ in order to alleviate the challenges they may encounter in their schools. These strategies pertain to:

- Professional growth
- Personal traits
- Management style
- Teacher relationship approach
- Community relationship approach

With regard to professional growth it is important that the female school principal should have expert knowledge on management approaches and activities to ensure that her subordinates recognize her academic and professional prowess (Kruger, 2006:448). If the female school principal has the same or inferior qualifications than her teachers, they may challenge her position with related expertise and they may find a leeway to side step and despise her (Kruger, 2006; Mndluli, 2002). Thus, female school leaders should be knowledgeable and should exude superior professional knowledge on school issues such as policy interpretation and curriculum implementation. The female school principal should ensure that she is contextually literate and she should remain a lifelong student by constantly consulting recent literature on school improvement for the sake of improved teaching and learning (Acker, 2010:71).

Some crucial personal traits assist school principals to gain the support from subordinates. Personal traits such as humility, simplicity, approachability, being caring, being compassionate and having tolerance assist leaders with the developing of trust between their staff and themselves and these traits also help to calm would be opponents who may have had an inclination of negativism against the female school principal (Watson, 2008:118).

The school principal's major role of management, leadership and supervision has changed from a pure task-oriented approach to managing and directing people to a more relational approach of working with and through staff to achieve the envisaged corporate goals as spelt out in the schools' mission statement (Smit,2013; Watson, 2008:117). This is achieved through the following:

- Providing learners, teachers and parents with a more caring and customer-friendly interface (Watson, 2008:118).
- Giving stakeholders more say in issues that concern them (Botha, 2007:122).
- Treating stakeholders as co-partners of the school rather than subordinates (Acker, 2010:98).

In this regard and with reference to a focus on relationship building with teachers, Reynolds (2002:107) advocates a dynamic but caring school principal who focuses on pupil learning by creating a constructive and functional school programme and school practices by means of shared decision-making. This democratic leadership approach is particularly focused on teachers who are considered as professionals with expert knowledge in their specific subject domains and with the acknowledgement that these teachers could either support or destroy the female school principal, depending on the female leader's proactive behaviour, or the absence thereof.

Contemplating the school principal's relationship with the community, it is important to consider that every school exists in a community which has a particular culture that reveals its values, beliefs and aspirations (Botha 2007:150). The female school principal must therefore adapt to the dictates of the community where she has been posted. She

must be part and parcel of that community and take part in their activities (Botha, 2007; Kruger, 2007). As innate members of the community parents are the key stakeholders of the school who are legally bound to take active part in the governance of the school by means of the School Governing Body (SGB) arrangements (RSA, 1996(b):14-15). Parents therefore communicate with the school through their representatives in the SGB and they are thus fully aware of what is happening with regard to school functioning. The community in which the school is embedded can constructively support the female school principal, or can reprimand her and arrange for destroying her reputation, depending on the female school principal's proactive measures for collaboration with the external community (Botha 2007:122).

2.8   SUMMARY

In addition to the challenges of managing their schools successfully, female school principals have to cope with problems relating to deep-rooted prejudice and stereotyping that perceives women leaders as weak, motherly and incompetent for managerial positions. To ease this discrimination, female school principals must be focused on unquestionable competence with regard to work performance.

With this chapter the challenges that still haunt female school principals were elicited. According to the phenomenon of socio-cultural stereotypes, women are believed to not be able to lead schools as competently as men. Authorities argued, however, that although such a scenario does exist, female school principals can use certain strategies to alleviate the challenges they face. These strategies range from personal traits, management styles, to communication networks. Education being a product of society is dynamic and changes to counteract the stereotyping of women as incompetent for managerial positions are inevitable. Women should continue to fight for equality and equity based on competency in school principal work performance. Enlightened men in society should rationally continue to support the noble cause of judging female school leadership solely on work performance measure. In the next chapter the research methodology and research design for the empirical investigation on female leadership is discussed.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN FOR THE EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

3.4   INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the distinction between the research design and methods used for this investigation. The research paradigm that informed the study is discussed in section 3.2. Section 3.3 outlines the research design used while 3.4 discusses the research approach. In section 3.5 a description and analysis of the location of the study is articulated while 3.6 reveals the target population. Sample size and sampling techniques used are explained in section 3.7. In section 3.8 the instruments used for data collection are discussed and 3.9 outlines the validity and reliability of the instruments and methods used in the investigation. Data collection procedure is dealt with in 3.10 while 3.11 discusses data analysis procedures. In section 3.12 the study discusses ethical considerations put in place before, during and after the investigation. The chapter is summed in section 3.13.

3.5   RESEARCH PARADIGM

In order to decide on which design, methodology and data sources that were appropriate to use in this study it was important to consider the research aim and the nature of the research questions to be addressed. It will be recalled that this research aims to examine and explore thoughts and understanding of female primary school leadership (principals) in Mpumalanga Province. This is based on the manifestations of their challenges and strategies they use in their schools they head. Contingently the study sought the female principals' views on their routine, challenges and strategies they employ in order to make their schools efficient and effective in terms of teaching and learning. This is the core business of schools and school leadership.

The school of thought that informed this study is phenomenology. This is explained in detail in sections 3.3 and 3.4 below. Phenomenology allows the researcher to imagine himself/herself in the shoes of primary female leaders in this context. From this point of

view the female primary school principals are allowed to speak for themselves and state the challenges they meet in the execution of their duties and relatedly outline the strategies they "employ" to overcome them. The next section clarifies the choice of phenomenology within a specific context of research design and qualitative approach.

3.6 CLARIFYING RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

McMillan and Schumacher (2006:36 clarify research design as a conceptual imagery or an architectural impression of what the product of the research is expected to look like. Creswell (2008:113) shows that design is part of methodology. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2006: 198) define methodology as a coherent group of procedures that complement each other and have the goodness of "fit to deliver" data and findings that reflect the research question(s) and suit the purpose. Leedy and Ormrod (2010: 203) add weight to the above assertion as they argue that methodology focuses on the process and kind of tools and procedures used while a method is a way of doing one thing.

In terms of research design, the architectural imagery of the researcher is a coherent and accurate picture of values, meanings and understanding of how female primary school leaders integrate human, financial, material and time resources in order for their schools to function and achieve the set envisaged corporate goals. Thus, this study adopted the qualitative approach which encompasses phenomenology as its branch.

3.4 QUALITATIVE APPROACH

To show the relevance of the qualitative approach, the study reflects on the historical background and the theory and describes the different qualities of the qualities of this approach which motivated the researcher to adopt it. This background is given to place the methodology selected for the study in its proper historical, theoretical context and to show how the methodology especially phenomenology as principles relate to the method. The background will also indicate that methodologies and methods overlap and that while adopting one methodology, researchers often draw from other methodologies and methods to address specific problems (Gay and Airasian, 2003:98).

3.4.1   Background and relevance of the qualitative approach

Gall, Borg and Gale (2003:98) trace the origins of the qualitative paradigm to the mid 1970s and asserts that the qualitative paradigm is a product of the nineteenth century epistemological debate over the two major paradigms that guide educational inquiry- positivist and interpretative paradigms. Specifically the limitations of the positivist scientific method was that it failed to address the problems of understanding motives and bases of beliefs, habits and other socio-psychological preferences of people. The finality of the debate about the use of the two paradigms and how they affect research projects like this one is that researchers use each of these paradigms where it is suitable. In this study therefore the qualitative approach was deemed suitable because of its attributes outlined below in table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Basic qualities that distinguish qualitative research

What it does	Captures and discovers meaning of experience
Properties	It has concepts that are presented in the form of themes, generalisation and taxonomies.
Advantage	Allows creation of measures in an ad hoc manner, often specific to the individual setting or researcher.
Form	Data are often in the form of words from documents, observation or interviews.
Procedure	Research procedure are particular and replication is rare, Analysis proceeds by extracting themes from evidence and organizing data to form a consistent picture
Theory	Theory can be caused or non-causal and is often inductive

Adapted from Johnson and Cristensten (2010:202-207)

Thus, the qualities of the qualitative approach outlined above informed the researcher as they were found to match the study. The researcher wanted to capture the experience of female primary schools principals of Bohlabela District particularly the challenges they face and strategies they use to minimize them.

The data was collected through captured views in form of words which were later grouped under themes and generalizations made to answer the research questions. Ad hoc settings were permissible for example on distribution of questionnaires, their collection and interviewing the research participants.

 The prime advantage of applying the qualitative approach on female primary schools leadership is that one is able to interpret the world from the point of view of school principals' perceptions. From table 3.1 it can also be inferred that the relevance of the qualitative paradigm to the study is that it emphasizes the situational context, observing performance in the natural setting rather than in a test situation. It rejects sophisticated statistical analysis and randomized designs.

3.5   DEMARCATION OF THE STUDY

The study area was delineated into conceptual and geographical areas. In this section, both of these areas will be discussed to show female primary school leadership in Bohlabela District highlighting challenges encountered and strategies used to minimize them.

3.5.1   Conceptual delimitation of the study

Leedy and Ormrod (2010:55) on delimiting the problem area, indicate that what will be included in the study is stated in the problem(s). They also contend that, as part of delimiting the problem area, the researcher must state what will not be included in the study. This study investigated the challenges faced by female primary school heads of Bohlabela District. The study also solicited for strategies used by the school leaders in order to minimize the challenges. Besides the challenges and strategies, the investigation explored these school leaders' experiences regarding promotion of female teachers in the education sector as well as why there are few female school principals in schools.

The study did not compare female school leadership with their male counterparts to gauge competencies. It did not also involve district officials in the higher offices to get views on whether there is a difference in competencies between female school principals and their male counterparts.

This was avoided as the sample size would be large and would mean more time and financial resources in order to interact with all the research participants at the various research sites.

3.5.2   Geographical delimitation of the study

The research was conducted in the Bohlabela District of Mpumalanga Province of South Africa. The study focused on one circuit (Mkhuhlu) because it is closer to the researcher. Financial constraints and time factor inhibited the researcher from targeting schools led by women which are far away from the researcher.

 Accordingly therefore ten primary schools led by female school principals from Mkhuhlu circuit were purposively selected. The ten became the research sites and these have Grade R to Grade 7. Mkhuhlu Circuit has 17 primary schools. The researcher was also prompted to select Mkhuhlu Circuit because in 2010 a female school principal was removed by the community for allegedly incompetence. This Circuit is boardered by the R526 road which leads to Kruger National Park on the South, Bushbuckridge to the North and Hazyview town to the West. The number of the learners in the ten research sites ranged from 195 to 820, educators per school from 7 – 22 and support staff 2-4.

3.6   TARGET POPULATION

The target population was ten female school principals of ten primary schools in Mkhuhlu Circuit of Bohlabela District (Mpumalanga). Also targeted were the School management Teams (SMT).

The ten school female principals were the subjects of the investigation as they are the once who meet challenges and respond with strategies to minimize them.

 The school management Team (SMT) comprise the vice principals, the various heads of department (HODs) and subject heads in each school. These are the officials who help the school principal with crucial decisions in order to make the school functional. The SMT members were targeted because they are well positioned to identify the challenges faced by the principal and school management as a whole and how they solve them.

The challenges articulated by the ten female school principals and ten SMT members would therefore give a clearer picture of the evidence to answer the research questions.

3.7   SAMPLE SIZE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUES

The purposive sampling technique was adopted for this study. In this method a sample is drawn for a purpose. Mkhuhlu circuit has ten female primary school principals. All of them were used as the research subjects. Leedy Ormrod (2010:180) asserts that when the population targeted is small, all the entities should be included in the study to minimize bias.

The SMT members for each school may range from five to fifteen. These are key role players in school leadership. They head departments and help the principal in the day to day running of the school as they are part of the decision makers. Their inclusion was vital as it would reveal whether they were functionally with the school leader or not. From each of the ten schools the researcher targeted one SMT member and the female leader. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents, the school principals were coded SP1 to SP10 while school management teams were coded SMT1 TO SMT10.

3.8 INSTRUMENTS FOR DATA COLLECTION

The investigation is a case study because it studies a specific group of people over a specified period of time. As Gall, Borg and Gall (2003) assert, a case study is an in-depth study that is carried out on an individual, event, programme or group of people in a particular area over a specified period of time. This study was confined to the Mkhuhlu Circuit of Bohlabela District in Mpumalanga province. The female school principals were studied over a period of one year. The descriptive survey method was used as the method for soliciting and gathering data through oral interviews and questionnaires. Leedy and Ormrod (2010) argue that to enhance the validity and reliability of a research study, descriptive surveys involve the identification of the population, the sample and research instruments such as questionnaires, interviews and observations schedules. Gay and Airasian (2003) elaborate when they argue that the descriptive survey method aims at collecting data from the representative groups of people from which inferences may be drawn about a people as a whole. In this connection, the researcher believed that the sample of female school principals constituted a representative population from which inferences could be drawn.

Data was collected using in-depth individual interviews and questionnaires with open-ended questions to descriptively answer the postulated research questions as pointed out in paragraph 1.6.2.3. An example of the questionnaire used with this study to collect data on female leadership appears as Appendix D. To supplement data collected via the individual oral interviews with the ten school principals, a questionnaire consisting of five open-ended questions was completed by the ten participant members of the SMT of the ten research sites.

3.8.1 Questionnaires

A questionnaire was one of the two ways in which data was collected in this study. According to Rossouw (2003:127) the questionnaire as a data collecting instrument refers to different situations such as when the questionnaire is completed by an interviewer in a direct person to person situation, and when the questionnaires are

mailed or handed to people for completion without the assistance of the researcher. The questionnaire as data collection instrument is less time consuming, and it can reach a large number of people (Rossouw, 2003:129).

For this study the questionnaires had five open–ended questions which were designed to extract relevant views from the research participants. The five open-ended questions gave freedom to respond more widely. The questionnaire was completed by the ten participant members of the SMT members of the ten research sites as pointed out in paragraph 1.6.2.3. The questions were aimed to allow the participants to freely express their views, attitudes, feelings, beliefs and aspirations uninterrupted as they were expected to individually complete them during their own spare time. The data collected through questionnaires was used to "fill the gaps" that may have been left out by the responses to the interviews.

3.8.2   Interviews

Face to face or oral interviews were carried out with the principal at their schools. The researcher used semi-structured interviewing as a data collection instrument. The interviews were conducted individually with the ten school principal participants at the ten research sites as highlighted in paragraph 1.6.2.3. All interviews were conducted in English. Individual interviews as a direct verbal interaction between the researcher and the interviewee allow interviewees to "speak their minds" and to lend themselves to in-depth investigation particularly with regard to personal accounts of experiences and feelings (Macmillan & Schumacher, 2006:97).

Rossouw (2003:143) points out that a research interview is a conversation between the researcher and a participant or participants with the specific objective of gathering information about a topic that is being investigated. Each female principal from the ten research site was interviewed individually. Hennink (2011:109) describes interviewing as a one-to-one method of data collection that only involves the interviewee and the interviewer. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees.

The individual interview strategy was opted for because of the following reasons:

- The face to face interview has the advantage that the researcher is able to establish rapport with the interviewees. This is important as the researcher is likely to get their cooperation, trust and high responses as an interview is a special way of knowledge producing conversation. Christensen and Larry (2011:56) point out that an interview is where an interviewer asks the interviewee a series of questions, often with prompting for additional information.

- A face to face interview allows the interviewer to clarify and rephrase the questions when necessary. This helps in yielding valid and reliable responses from the interviewees. Further, probing also enhances the content and quality of views and experiences expressed. An interview is a form of social interaction (Welland & Pugsley, 2002:33).

- Unlike with questionnaires where some participants may fail to return them, oral interviews ensure a hundred percent extracting of responses from participants and it provides a quick and easy way of obtaining data, and is economical of the interviewer's time (Dyer, 1995:58).

- An individual interview has its major strength of providing volumes of information about the interviewee (Greeff, 2011:342).

Although the oral interview has numerous advantages, its major "handicap" is that it is time consuming. Approximately one hour was spent with each interviewee. As pointed out in paragraph 1.6.2.3 and in line with the work of Macmillan and Schumacher (2006:97), an interview schedule was developed as a guide to refer to during the interviews so as to ensure that all important aspects were dealt with during individual interviews. The interview schedule appears as Appendix E.

3.9   VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Validity of the instruments and methods is the extent to which it measures what it purports to measure (Leedy and Ormrod, 2010:92-93). Reliability refers to the

consistency or replicability of the measurement. It can also mean the characteristic of an instrument to measure an attribute several times with the same outcome on all occasions (Cohen et al 2006:183-185). The instruments developed for this study were specifically designed to capture specific views pertaining to female school leadership viz challenges and strategies. The views of the sample of twenty were expressed in words. These were qualitatively analyzed in accordance with the research questions.

The use of dual methods to solicit data was purposely done in order to collect exactly what the research subjects view as challenges and what those who closely work with them say. These two sets of officials are the once legitimately appointed by the Department of Basic education (DBE) to run the schools. Their views are therefore regarded as valid and reliable as these are the authentic school managers.

To add to the validity and reliability of the data collection and instruments used, the researcher used "thick description" of the views expressed by the research participants. This added value to the study as detailed description of views enabled the readers to clearly find answers to the research questions.

The researcher also took the collected views and analysis she made to two colleagues at her workplace. One holds a masters' degree I education and the other a doctorate. The two were able to analyse the investigation findings and assist with structuring it.

Lastly the researcher took the research findings to the research participants and asked for their input if any. All of them asserted that the findings were real and reveal what transpired in their schools.

3.10   DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Data for this qualitative study was collected using two methods namely face to face interviews with the ten female school principals and questionnaires with semi-structured or open ended questions.

The interviews were conducted with the ten female primary school principals in their offices at their respective research sites. Firstly appointments were made with them and on the agreed scheduled date the researcher visited them. It took the researcher ten days as each interviewee was interviewed for about thirty minutes. All the interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees.

In conducting the interviews, the researcher was informed by literature on the qualities of a good interview as articulated by Cohen et al (2006:112), Leedy and Ormrod (2010: 146-152) and Creswell (2008:107). The following techniques were used during the interview:

- The interviews had a beginning and end
- The same standard questions were asked to all interviewees in the same order.
- The interviewer remained neutral throughout the interview
- The interviews were conducted with the interviewer and interviewee alone.
- The interviewer kept a professional tone throughout and maintained a businesslike focus.
- The interviewer set the pace and direction.

After each interview the interviewer politely thanked the female school leader and left.

Questionnaires explained in 3.8.1 were also used to collect data but from each of the research sites. The researcher visited each of the ten research sites and after going through all formalities purposively selected one HOD or a vice principal to answer the four research questions.

The selected participant was first approached individually and informed of the study and ethics outlined in section 3.12 above. He/she was asked to fill a consent form (see appendix C). The participant was then given the questionnaires on a Monday and on Friday the completed questionnaires were collected and participants individually thanked.

3.11   DATA ANALYSIS

Analyzing qualitative data requires understanding how to make sense of text and images so that the researcher can form answers to the research questions (Creswell, 2008:243). Analysis involves working with data to ensure that the data are organized and interpreted. Gay and Airasian (2003:91), as pointed out in paragraph 1.6.2.4, assert that data analysis in qualitative research is primarily an inductive process of organising the data and the deducing relationships. Data analysis therefore involves an inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns (Macmillan & Schumacher, 2006:98). Initial preparation of the data for analysis requires organizing the vast amount of information, transferring it from spoken or written words to a typed file and making decisions about whether to analyse the data by hand or by computer (Cresswell, 2008:245).

The thematic approach was used to analyse collected data. Out of the four questions asked for both sets of the research participants the data was arranged in categories to answer the research questions. For example question 1 sought experiences regarding the promotion of female school principals. Three themes emerged thus

- Fairness of the due processes
- Challenges female teachers face
- What they are doing about it

The researcher would then summarize (comments) on what each or group of principals would say about the fairness of selection. Some would say the same thing others differ. For example SP1, SP3 and SP7 argue that the process is not fair because the short listing is not fair because the short listing is manipulated.

The same procedure was followed when dealing with views from the SMT members. The detailed data analysis is carried out in chapter four below.

3.12   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

When humans are used in any research, their safety, integrity and dignity should be upheld before, during and after the study (Barbie & Mouton, 2002:106). In order to uphold ethical considerations for this investigation on female leadership, the researcher put in place certain relevant measures that are discussed next.

Permission to conduct the study was requested from the Mpumalanga Department of Education through its circuit at the Mkhuhlu offices. The ten school principals who were purposively sampled were given official letters to confirm their voluntary participation. The ten SMT members were also shown the permission letter and asked to confirm their voluntary participation by completing the consent form (Appendix C)

The ten participants were informed of their research rights pertaining to the following (Cresswell, 2008; Christensen & Larry, 2011; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005):

- Their participation was voluntarily and non-remunerated. This is an educational academic investigation; their contributions are meant to benefit the system (through ideas).
- They were to remain anonymous by not divulging to anyone that they are participants. They were also not to write any form of identification on the questionnaires. Such as names, cell phone numbers or home addresses.
- Their views are to be treated confidentially as the researcher will not divulge what they said throughout the study. The researcher would refer to individual participants as SP1 to SP10 and SMT1 to SMT10.
- The participants and any other person can confirm the validity of permission to conduct the research by accessing the letter of permission from the Mpumalanga Department of Education.
- Participants could withdraw their participation at any point in the duration of the research if they decide to withdraw for whatever reason(s).
- That they would be given the research findings before finalization so that would approve or disapprove findings.

The researcher participants completed consent forms (Appendix C) which showed that They had agreed to voluntarily take part and that they would uphold the research ethics of the study,

3.13   SUMMARY

The chapter focused on the research design and methodology for the empirical investigation relating to the challenges faced by female school principals and strategies to counteract these challenges. The descriptive survey method was preferred to other methods because it fitted well with this qualitative case study which was focused on a deep understanding of the challenges of female leadership in order to develop counteracting strategies. It allowed use of questionnaires with open-ended questions and semi-structured individual interviewing within the parameters of the participants' and researcher's time as actively involved teachers and school managers. The research sample comprised ten female school principals and ten SMT members and they were purposively sampled. The discussion also highlighted how validity and reliability of the study were embraced. To safeguard all the participants and their respective schools, sound ethical principles were considered and put in place. The next chapter (Chapter 4) discusses the research findings in detail.

CHAPTER 4
THE RESEARCH FINDINGS ON THE EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATION

4.1   INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the research data collected from interviews with the ten female primary school principals and the data from the questionnaires with open-ended questions to the School Management Team (SMT) members will be presented as analysed and interpreted research findings. As the purpose of the study was to investigate the challenges faced by female school principals to perform their tasks and to determine ways of overcoming these challenges, all information gathered was analysed to find its essential meaning. In chapter four the researcher, therefore, communicates what was learned. The research findings from the data collected from interviewing were focused on how the school principals, as the real people whom this study on female school leadership is about, experience their task fulfilment. Research findings from the questionnaires with the SMT members extended the findings on female school leadership challenges in the sense that the SMT members who closely work with the school principals provided their perspectives on the challenges encountered (par 1.6.2.2).

As a preview to what will be discussed, it was clear that female school principals are still encountering challenges that disturb them when they execute their duties. They are under-represented in leadership positions and men are still seen as the suitable candidates for the promotional posts. Most women are trying to leave their fears and climb the ladder of leadership but they are being discouraged and disappointed by the obstacles that are blocking their ways. As was pointed out by Coleman (2003:5), there are barriers and difficulties for women who are occupying roles or seeking to occupy roles as leaders. These barriers and difficulties were also found still to exist in the Mpumalanga province.

4.2   BIOGRAPHICAL DATA ON THE RESEARCH SITES AND PARTICIPANTS

A first step with the empirical investigation was to collect applicable biographical data on the research sites and research participants. This biographical data served as the basis underlying the data that was collected, analysed and interpreted as research findings.

4.2.1   Research sites

With regard to the research sites, data was collected regarding the size of the schools in general, the home environments of the learners generally prevailing, and the ethnic groupings represented at the schools.

4.2.1.1   Size of the school

The research was conducted at the Bohlabela District of Mpumalanga province in South Africa. Ten primary schools led by female school principals from the Mkhuhlu Circuit in the Bohlabela District of Mpumalanga were selected as research sites. The ten research sites are primary schools operating from Grade R to Grade 7. The number of learner enrolments for the different research sites ranged from 195 to 820, the number of educators per school ranged from 7 to 22 and the number of support staff per school ranged from 2 to 4.

4.2.1.2   Learners' home environment

The ten research sites are situated in the remote rural areas characterized by a large population of women and children. Male representation in the area is limited because the majority of the male population migrates to the urban areas every year in search of employment. The result is that women and orphaned children are taking care of the families. Most of the families are headed by women as single parents who are not employed and by children who are orphaned by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The number of families consisting of both parents and with both parents employed represents the extreme minority in the area.

Some of the school-going age children go to school without eating and rely on the daily meal they receive from the school nutrition programme. Many of the school-going age children have to work after school with a large majority of them burdened with the responsibility to take care of their siblings after school. In some instances, even in the primary school, girls have babies of their own who are left in the care of grandmothers while the mothers attend school.

4.2.1.3   Ethnic grouping

With regard to ethnic grouping, the ten research sites are representative of two main groupings, namely the Xitsonga and the Sesotho groups. Five of the schools are dominated by Xitsonga speaking people because these schools were built in the former Gazankulu homeland for the Xitsonga ethnic group. The other five schools are dominated by the Sesotho speaking people as these schools are situated in the former Lebowa homeland that was demarcated for the Sesotho people. However, due to developments and a gradually open and accommodating approach to other people, lots of siSwati and Zulu speaking people are moving into the applicable areas.

4.2.2   Research participants

The participants comprise of ten female primary school principals and ten SMT members. The SMT members represent both genders with seven members being male and three female (par 1.6.2.2).

4.2.2.1   The working experience of the school principals as teachers

The ten female school principals' working experience as a teacher ranged from fourteen to twenty five years. Eight of these leaders gained their teaching experience in different schools whereas two female school principals gained their working experiences at the same school.

All ten female school principal participants gained their teaching experiences under different leadership. Eight of the ten participants gained their experience under male leadership and two under female leadership.

4.2.2.2 The working experience of the school principals as school leaders

The ten female school principals' experience as managers ranges from five to eighteen years. All of them gained their management experiences in the same school. When they became school principals they were between 33 and 46 years of age. The composition of the staff of the female leader participants is mainly older female teachers with a few old male teachers. The age of these older teaching corps are between 40 and 59 years of age. The reason for the more mature age of the staff is the fact that government decided on the closing of the colleges of education in the middle of the 1990s. Since then there were no newly appointed young teachers in the area in which the primary schools that serve as research sites are based, only in high schools where there are young teachers who received their teacher training at universities.

The work-related responsibilities of the female school principal participants are in general the same. They are working with educators who have good experience in teaching and they are also interacting with educated and uneducated parents. Learners in their schools are from different backgrounds varying from backgrounds where parents provide good support to their children and are involved in their children's progress at school to parents who are indifferent to school affairs and to their children's well-being in general. As leaders, the school principal participants are faced with different activities that make the school to be functional. Every day they make sure that teaching and learning is taking place in all the grades. The school principal participants receive visitors daily from different offices for different reasons. Teachers also visit the school principal participants on a daily basis in their office to discuss school-related issues. In many instances staff approaches the participant school principals also with their personal problems. There are different meetings that the school principals have to attend on a regular basis such as school principal meetings, SGB meetings, staff meetings, parents' meetings and meetings that are organized by the circuit manager or

by the district office. As is the case in all schools, the participant school principals have to monitor all the activities at school in order to report to the Department of Education on a regular basis.

The female school principals, like their male counterparts, are expected to attend to all activities without fail because, as the executive leaders of their schools, it is their responsibility to ensure that the school runs smoothly. It is obvious that in order to manage as effectively as possible, all school principals, including female leaders, need all the support, acceptance, encouragement and motivation which they can get from the different stakeholders at their schools.

4.2.2.3   The working experience of the SMT members as teachers

The SMT members who participated in this study are males and females. Their working experience as teachers ranges from eight to twenty two years. Their working experiences as teachers were not acquired at one school only, but at different schools in different school districts. The quality of their teaching-related experience as acquired at various schools differed because they had different school principals who had different styles of managing their schools. The SMT member participants were active as school teachers as they were serving in different structures at their different schools. Some participants performed leadership responsibilities with extracurricular activities as they were chairpersons of sports, music, and culture associations. Other participants were assisting with administrative and secretarial-related responsibilities and acted as financial officers and as assessment team members at their schools. They were also elected as master teachers responsible for organizing workshops with educators to discuss and assist one another with curriculum-related matters.

4.2.2.4   The working experience of the SMT members serving as school management team members at their schools

The SMT-related experience of the SMT member participants ranged from two to twenty one years. Their SMT-related experiences were in the same school. Their duties were

to assist the school principal with the general management of the school, monitoring teachers' activities, advising the school principal on school-related matters, and assessing teachers' and learners' performances. SMT member participants were also responsible for the drawing-up of the school's time table and for organizing workshops for the professional development of staff. Their school principals valued the input of the SMT member participants because, by doing all of these duties, the SMT member participants were supporting their female leaders in their pursuit of well-functioning schools.

4.3   DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

The research finding discussion consists of two sections. The first section is focused on a discussion of the findings from the analysed and interpreted data collected via interviewing of the female school principals. This discussion is followed by a second section representing the findings interpreted from the data from the questionnaire with open-ended questions collected from the SMT members of the different research sites.

4.3.1   Research findings from the data collected via interviewing

With reference to the interview schedule (Appendix E) that was based on the conducted literature review (chapter two), the following four research questions, with follow-up prompts, represented the structure for the interview discussions with the female school principal participants:

- What is your experience regarding the promotion of woman as school principals?
- In your view why are there so few female school principals?
- What challenges do female school principals face in schools which men in similar positions do not face?
- Which strategies could be used to rectify this anomaly?

Based on these four questions, seven themes emerged as categories representing research findings from an analysis of the data collected via interviewing. The seven themes pertain to aspects relating to the promotion of women as school principals, gender discrimination with regard to leadership positions, the lack of support for female leadership, the lack of confidence in the leadership abilities of women, the lack of respect for female leadership, a feeling of inferiority due to environmental influences and possible strategies to counteract the challenges relating to female school leadership. These seven themes are discussed next. For the sake of authenticity and confidentiality, the participating school principals will be referred to as SP1, SP2 and so on.

4.3.1.1 The promotion of women as school principals

One of the aims of this study was to determine the challenges faced by female school principals in the management of their schools (par 1.5). With reference to the first research question, namely the experience of female school principal participants regarding the reality of being promoted to a school leadership position, the school principal participants highlighted the problems they encountered when they were promoted as school leaders.

They started by pointing out what kind of leadership positions they held when they were promoted to the position of school principal. Some of the participants were deputy school principals, others were acting as school principals, and some served as HODs of their specific learning phases, whereas one of the participants was not in a leadership position when she was promoted to the position of executive school leadership. Participant SP2 pointed out that she was just a Foundation Phase teacher when she was promoted to school leadership.

When asked why her managerial development was not a gradual movement through the different levels of management and leadership positions, it became clear that she was at the right place at the right time as the SGB refused to recommend the acting school principal as he/she was accused of misusing the school funds. Due to the

Foundation Phase teacher's good performance as a teacher and a leader in the carrying out of her teaching responsibilities, it was decided to recommend her to the principalship position regardless of her lack of formal managerial experience. All the participants confirmed that they applied formally for the position of school principal and that they were promoted after undergoing the whole process of short circuiting and interviewing by an official interview committee.

It was clear from the interviews with female school principal participants that they encountered traumatic experiences which related to gender bias in their schools' internal and external environments during the process of their promotion to school leadership. In the following paragraphs these experiences are discussed.

Participant SP1 highlighted the peculiar situation she was exposed to when the school principal of her school retired. She pointed out that as the deputy school principal the SGB requested that she *"act as the principal of the school"* (SP1). The SGB were supportive to her during her position as acting school principal, but when the post was advertised, they started "*ignoring me and discussing me with other teachers" (*SP1*).*

According to participant SP1 it was obvious that the SGB acknowledged her abilities as a school leader and was, therefore, most willing to support her temporarily, but due to prolonged, deep-rooted prejudice against female competency for leadership positions, the SGB could not contemplate her as the permanently appointed school leader. However, due to her leadership abilities which overshadowed those of the other participants, the panel shortlisted her and after the interviews were conducted, "*I got the position … It was not easy as they planned to have a male leader" (*SP1).

Participant SP10 also acted as a school principal and with all the qualifications she had, when a school principal post was advertised at a neighbouring school, she applied and she was one of the five candidates selected to be interviewed. After the interviews were conducted, the panel determined her as the second in line for the position. The first candidate, who was a male candidate, declined. Due to this, *"I as the second candidate was appointed as the principal" (*SP10)*.* It was clear from the interview with participant

SP10 that her promotion to the school principal position was an initially traumatic experience due to underlying prejudices from the school's parent community. Participant SP10 explained as follows: "The *day I was introduced to the SGB and the staff, parents with some SGB members refused to accept my appointment as they were in favour of one male HOD who was acting as a deputy principal. I was rejected and denied the opportunity to lead!" (*SP10*).* Participant SP10 explained the parent community's opposition to her appointment as school principal which related to the parents refusing to send their children to school with her as the school leader.

This situation lasted for four weeks after which the conflict was resolved with the Provincial Education Department intervention. When asked about the situation at school after the Departmental intervention, it was clear that the parent community eventually accepted her as their children's school principal based on a gradual awareness of her competencies to ensure that their children receive the best education possible within context. Coleman (2006:81) argues that female teachers can prove that they are equal or even better than their male counterparts through determination and hard work.

For participant SP4, the situation with her promotion to the position of school principal was very similar to that of participant SP10 insofar as that the union, the SGB and the traditional leader of the community rejected her appointment as school principal. Different to participant SP10, participant SP4 was a member of the teaching staff of the school where the school principal position became vacant. Participant SP4 explained the intensive stressfulness of her endeavours in the face of her sustained perseverance with pursuing that which she knew she could do well, namely managing the school towards good learner performance. In that regard she emphasized that the "*union disputed my appointment four times*" (SP4). She emphasized that she adhered to all requirements pertaining to having the applicable qualifications, having acted as an HOD when the school principal post was advertised, applied officially, *"was shortlisted, then interviewed and then finally appointed as the school principal"* (SP4)*.* All of these actions were challenged when *"the SGB, the union and the traditional leader complicated things by refusing to accept my appointment"* (SP4).

Unlike the circumstances with the appointment to school principal of participants SP4 and SP10 where their appointments to school leadership were opposed by the parent communities of the applicable schools, participant SP2 encountered friction from the internal environment of the school when the school principal position became vacant. She pointed out that some of the SMT members and an educator of the school where the school principal post was advertised decided to resign immediately after participant SP2 was promoted to school principal.

As a Foundation Phase teacher from a neighbouring school applying for the school principal position, participant SP2 was thoroughly aware of the tension amongst staff about her appointment. In her own words, *"I could see that my colleagues in the new school were noticeably affected by my appointment"* (SP2)*,* something that related to the fact that *"they were hoping that the acting principal in that school was going to be promoted"* (SP2)*.* Although the matter was eventually resolved and participant SP2 was accepted by the staff on account of her good qualities as a leader, the initial tension resulted in a confirmation of the decision of two members of staff to resign due to her appointment. Their sustained decision of resignation resulted in participant SP2 feeling inferior initially for the position of school leadership.

The appointment of participant SP7 as the school principal of a farm school did not cause any frictions in either the school's internal or external environment as all stakeholders were thankful for the presence of a competent school principal in a remote rural environment. Participant SP7 explained that few people are prepared to live far away from their families and that the main challenge she encountered with her promotion to school principalship was "*to leave my family which, as a married person, is strenuous" (*SP7)*.* The confusing situation of supportive colleagues changing into competitors was experienced by participant SP3 who explained that when she was appointed as the school principal, her colleagues with whom she interacted supportively and trustingly "*started to compete with me* [her] *instead of assisting me* [her] *in managing the school"* (*SP3).*

Similar to participant SP2, participant SP4 applied for a school principal post in another area. Apart from being a female placing her in a disadvantaged position with regard to leadership promotion possibilities, she was not aware of the fact that the underlying feeling in the area was that only people from the specific area are considered applicable for the promotion position. Due to her qualifications and work experience she was found the most applicable candidate, but after her appointment she encountered the area as a hostile place and people in the internal and external environment as angry with her. Educators from that school departed on a conspiracy "*to take me out of the school*" (SP4). Part of the conspiracy was "*to accuse me of applying corporal punishment and stealing learners' food*" (SP4). Based on an investigation of the accusations, participant SP4 was found not guilty with the accusations having no merit other than to disfigure her as a foreigner to the specific environment. Along the same lines participant SP8 initially also experienced the environment in which she was promoted as school principal as hostile as she was told that she was a foreigner to the community. In her own words, "*I was told that I am not a daughter of the soil*" (SP8).

It was clear from the interviews with the participant school principals that their promotion to the position of school leadership which was meant to be a positive and constructive event was in fact debilitating and stressful. What was positive, however, was that with perseverance to overcome the crucial challenges, the female school principals were eventually able to continue with the leadership task of managing their schools and were accepted as the rightful managers of the schools to which they were promoted as school principals.

4.3.1.2 Gender discrimination with leadership positions

Gender discrimination has been identified by all the participant school principals as a pertinent challenge that hampers them in their management of their schools as female leaders. Gender bias is a barrier which female school principals are facing on a daily basis. This discrimination relates to the historical deep-rooted perception that men are leaders and women are followers. Participant SP3 mentioned her encountering of gender bias when she was not perceived to be the school principal, but presumably the

school secretary and was requested *"to call the principal"* (SP3*). She emphasized that regardless of the sign on her office door which clearly indicated that the specific office is that of the school principal and with her sitting in the office, the visitors still requested her to call the school principal. In her own words*, "I was devastatingly surprised when visitors arrived and could not see a principal in a woman!"* (SP3)*. Participant SP4 also remembered that after her appointment as the school principal she was introduced to the traditional leader, an event that she optimistically looked forward to. However, instead of welcoming her and assuring her of his support with the management of the school for constructive learner performance, the traditional leader blatantly said, *"a woman cannot manage this school"* (SP4)*. The traditional leader told her that "*he was not expecting a woman but a man because the school is big*" (SP4) insinuating that a woman would not have the competency to manage a school of such magnitude. Participant SP4 admitted her desolation with the remark of the traditional leader because she realized that with that statement she was evaluated and rated incompetent "*based on the gender discrimination of a respectful person of the community"* on whose support for the school principal task she relied.

In her school environment, participant SP10 was not considered the school principal regardless of the fact that she was appointed to that position and fulfilled all the tasks and responsibilities pertaining to that of the executive leader of the school. She explained as follows: *"I was not called the principal of the school but the male deputy principal was referred to as the principal and nobody rectified it"* (SP10)*. She pointed out that even the SGB members who were part of the interviewing committee for the school principal appointment supported what was happening and they sometimes commented categorically that "*they will only consider a man as the real principal but never a woman"* (SP10)*.

It was also evident from the interviews with participant school principals that the discrimination they experienced also related to an encountering of a tendency of reluctance from staff to cooperate when the school principal is female, or to concertedly discredit the female school principal. In this regard participant SP2 pointed out that

some of the members of staff were hesitant to be elected to serve in different school structures because "*they were avoiding to be led by a woman*" (SP2).

Along the same lines participant SP1 experienced the discrimination against female leadership intensely when she, in her capacity as school leader, had to reprimand a male deputy school principal to do his work properly for the sake of effective school functioning. His response was that he "*cannot be told what to do by a woman because I* [he] *is not a child but a man who has a family*" (SP1). Part of the approach to disregard the female school principal was the strategy of the male deputy school principal to "*hide information* [or] *disappear without reporting*" (SP1). Participant SP4 initiated the promotion of one of her school's HODs to the position of deputy school principal to the expense of her own position because "*now that he is a deputy principal he influences staff against my female leadership*" (SP4). Participant SP4 pointed out that she was falsely accused by the promoted HOD in an endeavour to discredit her. In her own words, "*I was charged for things that I did not do because of him* [male HOD]" (SP4).

It became clear from the interviews with female school principals that discrimination against female leadership was still relevant and that this discrimination was associated with the assumption that leadership was an exclusive male domain. For that reason, expressions like "*this can only be done by a man not a woman*" (SP8) is something that female school leaders have to cope with. Further, when a humanely natural mistake is made by a female school principal, instead of protecting and supporting her in the rectifying of the mistake , a comment very often made is "*Ah, what are you expecting from a woman*" (SP9).

4.3.1.3   A lack of support for female leadership

One of the challenges faced by female school principals is a lack of support from their school's stakeholders (par 1.2.3; par 2.6). The female school principal participants maintained that they work very hard, but that they do not get the necessary support from the different stakeholders such as the educators, the members of the SGBs, the

unions, the parents, and the community leaders. In many instances a lack of support is especially significantly felt with regard to their male colleagues.

Participant SP10 singled out the SGB as not being supportive as they were favouring the acting deputy principal as the person who should have been the school principal. The SGB's lack of support was evident in the fact that when they were invited to a meeting they were always having excuses not to attend, or they would sit in the meeting without participating in the discussions. Participant SP10 explained her frustration when the financial official in the SGB decided to safeguard the school cheque book and refused to pay for the school's electricity which was then cut off. However, when parents complained about the electricity problem, *"I* [school principal] *was the one to be blamed for bad management resulting in a lack of electricity"* (SP10). A lack of support from the SGB who are expected to accompany learners on school trips resulted in an incident where learners had to visit another school, but they were instructed by the chairperson of the SGB to evacuate the transport vehicle without communicating anything with either the school principal or any educator. When participant SP10 confronted the SGB chairperson about the matter she was told that *"those learners are their* [parents'] *children, they have got rights to take a decision about them"* (SP10)*.*

Participant SP1 emphasized the crucial importance of stakeholder support for school effectiveness because, as the executive leader of the school *"dedicated support is needed to be able to function effectively"* (SP1)*.* In that regard participant SP1 distinguished the SMT as often not being supportive because *"they often turn their backs against me during and after meetings" (SP1).* Part of the lack of SMT support pertains to the misconduct of the deputy school principal *"who will, when I am not at school, disappear without reporting" (*SP1)*.* The same applies to educators who will, when they discover that the school principal is attending a meeting somewhere else *"*start behaving badly and forget about their responsibilities*"* (SP2). Participant SP3 concurred with the other school principal participants about the misconduct of teaching staff when the school principal is not present at the school premises. She explained that she had experienced such a situation first hand, namely that when she returned to the school unnoticed after having attended a meeting *"learners were running around and*

making noise" (SP3) and that "while the *educators and SMT members were there to maintain discipline and to teach"* (SP3)*.* When asked whether teacher misconduct is not also relevant when male school principals have to leave the school premises, participant school principals admitted that teacher misconduct is a general problem, but due to deep-rooted gender bias against female leadership, such misconduct is intensified when the school leader is female.

Related to the lack of support from the staff for female leadership, female school principals are working under severe pressure to try and overcome the lack of support of a malicious nature created by some SMT members and educators. Participant SP3 explained that regardless of inviting all SMT members before every staff meeting for a session to plan together the items to be included on the agenda and to share responsibilities in dealing with the items, some SMT members will prefer not to attend and then *"during the staff meeting will oppose everything I come up with" (*SP3)*.*

Some educators, on the other hand, maliciously decide to take the opposite direction than what was decided on during staff meetings. Participant SP4 proclaimed that she always consults and relies on the SMT and educators for advice on how to improve their performance as a school, but that *"they* [SMT and educators] *always act negatively and refuse to share their views*" (SP4). This lack of support for female leadership also includes a lack of support amongst male peers. In this regard participant SP8 pointed out that every time she sought the advice of a male school principal, "*I was always given a negative response from him*" (SP8). Due to these different manifestations of a lack of support for female leadership specifically, female school principals are being blamed for a lack of knowledge and skills to manage their schools effectively, thus sustaining the deep-rooted prejudice against female leadership competency.

In a follow-up prompt on the kind of support that is required from the staff and the SMT for female leadership, it was clear that this support relates to aspects that are considered the default actions of any dedicated teacher or member of the SMT such as *"being responsible in doing what has been planned at school … teaching learners"*

(SP9), or *"being active as elected members of different committees fulfilling their duties"* (SP7).

Participant school principals admitted that some members of staff and SMT members give their support and endeavour to do the right things all the time. However, some members of staff and of the SMT constantly provide opposition which impacts negatively on proper school functioning. As proclaimed by participant SP2, "*As a principal I need support to be able to manage effectively but without support I will just run around trying to do everything and I will not succeed"* (SP2)*.*

With reference to the support needed from the extended community, participant SP6 emphasized that female school principals work in communities that are not supportive of female leadership. Although schools are imbedded in communities to serve those communities and therefore rely on the communities for the communal well-being of the school, some communities behave as if the school belongs to the school principal and is therefore the school principal's sole responsibility. Instead of *"supporting the principal to protect the school"* (SP4), these communities will *"turn a blind eye"* (SP4) to any harm done to the school.

In response to the question whether this lack of community support is not relevant to male leadership also, it was clear that due to deep-rooted cultural-related perceptions on female disposition, a lack of community support was especially relevant with regard to female leadership. In addition to the lack of community support, female leadership also experiences a lack of support from unions. And although unions will always support the educator with the approach that the school principal is always wrong regardless of the gender of the school principal, participant SP7 emphasized that this approach is especially applicable to female leadership*, "the female principal is the one that is ALWAYS wrong"* (SP7)*.*

4.3.1.4　A lack of confidence in female leadership abilities

It became clear from the interviews with school principal participants that a lack of confidence is considered a significant challenge for female school principals. This lack of confidence is double-edged in the sense of stakeholders lacking confidence in female school principals which in turn has a rippling effect on female school principals questioning their own competency. The result is that, although women also meet the requirements for school leadership promotional posts, more men are appointed to these positions. Against this background, participant SP2 explained that she encountered her lack of fluency in English as a serious problem to herself because she knew that, although all school principals in the specific environment struggled with English as their second language, her lack of mastering of the English language would be placed in the spotlight. She explained her discomfort with English and the influence thereof on her career development as follows:

> "*I had a serious challenge of not being fluent in English and that created a discomfort to me because I realized that as a principal I will have visitors from different offices, in meetings with other principals I have to participate actively and raise my suggestions or views and at school when we have meetings there will be discussions on different issues and I start wondering as to what will happen especially because I am a woman. What are they going to say about me? I then saw myself as the wrong person for the position and that nearly destroyed me"* (SP2)*.*

Along the same lines participant SP1 also admitted that she "*had a challenge of how to address educators and other colleagues in English"* (*SP1).* Due to her lack of fluency in English, which was a challenge commonly experienced in the rural environment, she realized that *"the educators will start criticizing me and doubting my leadership"* (SP1)*.* It was clear that self-confidence which plays an important role in the life of every person is especially also crucial in the life of female school principals and, when this confidence is

questioned by oneself and the community, it becomes difficult for the female leader to prosper.

Participant school principals explained how their self-confidence was significantly challenged with the encountering of hostility from the school's internal and external environment having a hampering effect on their work performance. In this regard participant SP4 noted that the community leader said it openly that he cannot accept her to be the principal of the school. She explained as follows: *"I was so disappointed because he did not have confidence in me and he was not ready to give me a chance. Because of that I could not freely actualize my potentials"* (SP4). Along the same lines participant SP6 explained how an attack on her confidence developed into what she called a personal barrier to face her leadership tasks appropriately. She explained that she lost confidence in herself as a school principal due to the criticism from her staff which she experienced as personal attacks. She proclaimed that due to her own way of dealing with the criticism from staff, "*it started destroying me because, instead of taking advice and consult others to get more information, I judged myself harshly*" (SP6).

Related to the negative way of treating criticism as a personal attack, participant SP7 mentioned the challenge to her self-confidence due to realizing that she lacked sufficient knowledge and skills on leadership. She explained as follows: "*As a principal I know that without enough knowledge and skills on leadership I cannot succeed as there are policies that have to be implemented and I am the first one to know how to implement them*" (SP7).

Participant SP8 encountered the same attack on her confidence when she recalled her lack of knowledge and skills pertaining to school leadership. She emphasized that *"as a principal I was not trained and knowledge of how to be a good leader was not there"* (SP8). This lack of professional training in leadership competency which was a common problem experienced by all school principals across both genders was an intensive problem especially for female school principals due to cultural-related biased against female leadership. Participant SP8 emphasized that the feeling of incompetency due to

a lack of formal training in school principalship prompted her *"to work hard and try to gain my confidence"* (SP8)*.*

The lack of professional training in school leadership was exacerbated by the continuous changes taking place in the education system and especially with regard to the implementation of curriculum changes with which school leaders were confronted on a daily basis. In this regard participant SP9 explained the influence of managing the implementation of a changed curriculum on her feeling of control and having confidence in what she was doing. She said: *"When we have a new curriculum as a principal I start panicking because for me to assist educators I must know exactly what is expected from them. So I have to provide the necessary support to educators so failing to do that they start losing their trust in me and as a result I also lose my confidence"* (SP9)*.* Related to the capacity to manage curriculum implementation effectively was the demand for a comprehensive interpreting of departmental policies effectively in order to convince others of her ability as a female school principal.

Participant SP10 remarked that due to the fact that the Department of Education is represented by school principals in their consecutive schools, the onus is on school principals to be fully knowledgeable on each and every policy from the Department of Education. In order to convince as a school leader, this is especially applicable to female school leadership because, as participant SP10 explained, "*I realized that if I as a female principal was not acquainted with a policy, educators and other stakeholders will immediately start to take advantage of me and that will lower my morale and I will start blaming myself as a person who is failing to lead effectively*" (SP10)*.* The implication was that female school principals have to go the extra mile to ensure they are fully knowledgeable about each and every departmental policy in order to convince as a leader on what was still considered as male turf. The importance of being fully conversant with policies from the Department of Education was also important in order to be assertive in union engagements. In this regard participant SP5 emphasized the importance of understanding policies thoroughly so as to implement them correctly in order to avoid *"unions blaming me of failing to manage the school and of treating educators badly"* (SP5)*.*

What was clear from the interviews with female school principals was the fact that although school principals of both genders encountered challenges influencing their self-confidence negatively, it was female school principals especially who suffered by trying to sustain their morale due to the discrimination that still prevailed against female leadership. It was clear that the underlying sentiments still pertained to negating women leadership capabilities. Participant SP3 explained the thorniness regarding female leadership confidence and the effect thereof on constructiveness as follows: *"As a leader I am expected to be extra-ordinary for people to accept me. The SGB always utter negative statements about me that shows a lack of confidence in me as the school principal and it affects me as I end up feeling uncomfortable and feel less equipped to manage the school"* (SP3)*.*

4.3.1.5 A lack of respect for female leadership

A pertinent contributory factor to the challenges faced by female school leaders is the lack of respect from the different stakeholders, namely the staff, the parent community and the extended community. With regard to the lack of respect for the female school principal forthcoming from the teaching staff, participant school principals all had incidents to recall. Participant SP2 pointed out that it was especially the male educators who have been at the specific school before she was promoted to school principal who were not ready to take instructions from her because, according to them, *"they are the first people to be in that school so I must not try to undermine them as the principal"* (SP2)*.* Participant SP1 also commented about the male educators who are not respecting her as the female school principal and even when male educators are caught failing to comply with the school policies, *"they will not acknowledge their mistake and apologise"* (SP1). It was pointed out, however, that male educators are not the only staff undermining the female school principal's authority.

Participant SP1 also experienced the wrath of a female SMT member who attacked her and accused her of being incompetent. *"She* [SMT member] *also refuses to take instructions from me"* (*SP1*)*.* For participant SP10 the disrespect from her members of

staff took on a physical character. She explained as follows: *"I was physically attacked by an educator who came to my office calling me names"* (SP10) whereas participant SP7 was verbally attacked when *"the acting deputy principal verbally attacked me* [her] *in front of learners and educators"* (SP7). All of these confrontations seemed to relate to school principals implementing policies and encouraging educators to do the same which some educators refuse to do resulting in assaults on female leadership and a hampering of the smooth running of school functioning. Participant SP6 added that a lack of respect for female leadership was also encountered among male peers who are supposed to share competency with all their peers including their female school principal colleagues. She pointed out that during meetings, *"male principals comment in an unacceptable manner about female colleagues' weakness without advising them on how to deal, for example, with disputes and conflicts"* (SP6).

Apart from a lack of respect from school staff and peers, it was clear from the interviews with participants that parents are also undermining the authority of female school leaders. Participant SP8 pointed out that although invitation letters are always sent out to parents to attend parent meetings, many do not attend and when decisions are taken and implemented, "*I will be accused by these parents for taking decisions without discussing or for not being transparent"* (SP8). The disrespect of parents for female leadership manifests itself in improper behaviour of a barbarian nature in that when parents *"have problems with educators they will come to my office shouting and screaming … when I try to address the issue they will shout at me … assault me of failing to control the educators"* (SP2). Participant SP10 pointed out that in one of the meetings with parents, "*I was told to go and work in the admin clerk's office because I cannot manage the school well"* (SP10).

The lack of respect for female leadership from the parent community was also experienced with regard to the broader community. In this regard participant SP1 proclaimed that she had been verbally attacked by a general worker in front of learners, educators and other support staff. The attack resulted in the worker reporting the school principal at the labour offices. However "*he did not win as he was just undermining me as a woman*" (SP1). For participant SP5 the lack of respect from the wider community

pertained to the disrespectful approach publicly communicated against female school leadership by the community leader. Participant SP5 explained as follows: "*The traditional leader in front of people disrespected me by saying it openly that he is not ready to accept me as the principal of that school because according to him women are weak" (*SP5*).* She admitted her dismay with these words because she was relying on the respect and support from the community leader *"so that people from the community copy from him"* (SP5)*.*

What also became clear from the interviews with participant school principals was that a lack of respect for female leadership was not the only problem encountered in the specific environment. A lack of professionalism and dedicated teaching was a generally encountered problem insofar as that "*educators are expected to respect the principal and to respect their profession, but when I am not at school attending workshops or meetings, they will not teach but they will do their personal things and forget about the learners*" (SP7). Participant SP3 concurred that a lack of respect from the educators for the female school principal included a lack of basic work ethics and professional conduct. She explained that as the school principal she was always running around to make sure that teachers and learners are in class because "*educators sometimes sit in the staff room after break … they do not go to their classes to teach … learners run around without a teacher and when I caution them* [the teachers] *they will respond harshly instead of apologizing*" (SP3). For participant SP4 the lack of respect for the school principal was also a more complex issue of a general lack of morality and dedication in that teachers very often go out during school hours without requesting permission from the school principal or any member of the SMT and, when reprimanded, such teachers *"become aggressive and threaten to report to the unions or to deal with me personally*" (SP4). In this regard participant SP7 proclaimed that a total lack of respect for anyone or anything in general can destroy female leadership as well as the well-being of the school and the well-being of the entire society because, "*it lowers everyone's morale and develops fear and dissatisfaction*" (SP7). Within such a debilitating environment female leaders have to interact with stakeholders who cannot, or do not want to accept females as school principals.

4.3.1.6 Coping with stereotyping women as inferior

It was clear from the interviews with female school principals that they struggle to escape the deep-rooted prejudice against female competency. This stereotyping of women to be inferior to male performers hampers female school principals to achieve their goals of being good and successful school leaders. Participant SP1 indicated that she is still affected by the stereotyped norm of leadership where *"only men are regarded as leaders and women as followers"* (SP1).

Participant SP1 explained this stereotyping as the reason why women still refuse to apply for promotional posts and believe not to be competent enough to compete with men. Participant SP2 concurred with this approach of feeling inferior to men leadership due to long lasting stereotyping. She explained as follows: *"I doubted myself when I was invited to an interview knowing that I was going to compete with men. Even now I cannot speak well when I am with male colleagues because I think they are more intelligent than me. During meetings even if I have a point to rise I will keep quiet without trying because of fear"* (SP2). When prompted about what it was that she was afraid of, it was clear that participant SP2 was afraid of being revealed as inferior to male competency due to prolonged stereotyping.

This prolonged stereotyping which developed from the past *"when people perceived women as weak"* (SP3) is sustained regardless of the fact that female leaders prove the opposite. In this regard participant SP3 pointed out that her school is functioning well. However *"I am a woman and I am still accused of not doing things well because I am a woman"* (SP3). These accusations in many instances relate to staff not feeling comfortable in being led by a woman as more men are in leadership positions which fosters the perception that "*leadership is men's world*" (SP4). Due to this perception of leadership residing with men only, male teachers themselves feel inferior and not being respected when tasked by a female. Participant SP4 explained as follows: "*When I give instructions to male educators they also feel inferior and think that I am not respecting their headship*" (SP4). This situation was also experienced by participant SP10 who realized that stakeholders felt inferior to be led by a woman which was the reason why

she "*was rejected by parents led by the SGB with a male teacher who was referred to as the principal by other parents and some members of the SGB*" (SP10). Her appointment as the school principal made the teacher to realize that "*he will not be called a principal any longer*" (SP10) which made him feel inferior resulting in destroying good school functioning.

The prolonged stereotyping of women as being inferior to men manifested in a hostile approach of receiving school principals at their schools which resulted in a hampering effect on school leadership effectiveness. In this regard participant SP5 explained that the way she was received at her school as the school principal contributed to an overwhelming feeling of fear due to having experienced that she was rejected by the people which she expected support and which then hampered her in executing her daily tasks. Participant SP7 agreed on the hampering effect on self-efficacy of doubting female principals' capabilities because, as she explained, "*I sometimes feel inferior and guilty of not belonging there and as a result there is fear of not being good enough for the position" (*SP7*).*

What was also clear from the interviews with school principal participants with regard to the perception of female inferiority was that regardless of the evidence of excellence with female leadership, people are still not comfortable to be led by women. In this regard participants all agreed that even when female school principals excelled in producing good results in learners' academic performance and in other issues such as discipline, cleanliness and leadership, female leaders are still accused of not being fit to be leaders. Regardless of a comprehensive good performance, participant SP8 proclaimed as follows: "*I am always reminded about my gender as people feel inferior to be led by a woman*" (SP8). Along the same lines participant SP9 pointed to the anomaly occurring in staff meetings when educators who are against female leadership would refer to well-performing schools to learn from those that are successful and that are led by a female school principal. As emphasized by participant SP9, *"I am surprised when they pick up schools that are led by women meanwhile they undermine their capabilities"* (SP9)*.*

4.3.1.7 Strategies to counter female leadership challenges

A final aim of this study was to determine strategies for the counteracting of challenges faced by female school principals (par 1.5; par 3.1). From the interviews with female school principals it became clear that the strategies to counter female leader challenges relate to a change of attitude towards female leadership, being responsive to the endeavours of the female school principal, and empowerment in the form of increased knowledge and skills of school leadership. The first two strategies rely on the support of the different stakeholders whereas the strategy of empowerment is the responsibility of the school principal herself.

With regard to the need for a change of attitude towards the competencies of the female leader, participants agreed that stakeholders must have a positive attitude towards the competencies of the female leader and her capabilities of managing the school effectively. In this regard the appointment of school principals must not be spoilt by gender bias but must always be focused on *"promoting the person who is most competent to manage effective teaching and learning"* (SP1)*.* In this regard support from the different stakeholders can encourage and motivate female leaders to function optimally in favour of improved school success. For participants SP5 this support to female leaders is especially applicable to male colleagues because *"if men accept change and start supporting women leaders everything will improve for the best"* (SP5). For this improvement to happen, "*male colleagues must act appropriately as followers and must stop undermining female school principals' authorities*" (SP5). Participant SP6 emphasized that "*encouragement and support build strong working relationships*" (SP6) which form the backbone of every well-functioning school. With this building of healthy work relationships participant SP10 concurred by emphasizing that *"good relationships motivate subordinates to support female school principals and they will feel free to consult anyone for information to increase their abilities*" (SP10). These increased abilities will then relate to proper information from stakeholders which in turn will capacitate female leaders to lead successfully "*through the support and respect received from different stakeholders*" (SP10).

Participants had agreement on the fact that the empowerment of female school principals relate to a consistent increase of the knowledge and skills on effective leadership. This empowerment is the responsibility of the school principals themselves to attend leadership-related workshops and seminars to gain knowledge and skills in order "*to do the right things right*" (SP3) so as "*to boost their morale and build their self-confidence*" (SP4).

A pertinent factor of empowerment for the female leader is to ensure that she is well acquainted with all the different departmental policies because "*one should know all the departmental policies in order to manage well*" (SP7). Participants agreed that to consult with other school principals and informative stakeholders have a positive effect on morale. Further, increased knowledge that is equated with increased power ensures that "*no one will take advantage of them* [female leaders]" (SP7).

It was clear from the interviews with female school principals that effectiveness in terms of appointing the person who best meets the requirements for managing the school to excellence, regardless of gender, is non-negotiable. As a democratic country all citizens must benefit from the best service possible and in order to provide the best service within the school context, the person most appropriate for arranging best services must be promoted to school leadership. In this regard participant SP9 emphasized that by "*respecting women's rights as school principals they will have courage to work hard and prove to everybody that women can lead as effectively as men do… even better than men*" (SP9).

4.3.2 Research findings from the data collected from the questionnaire with open-ended questions

The questionnaire with open-ended questions was administered to the ten SMT members of the ten primary schools that participated in this study. As was explained in paragraph 1.6.2.2, the reason for administering a questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions to SMT members was to obtain extended information on female school leadership relating to the perspectives and opinions of co-managers involved with the

executive school manager in the encompassing school management activities. The following four open-ended questions were included in the questionnaire (Appendix D):

- What are your experiences regarding the promotion and practice of female school principals in school?
- In your view, why are there so few female school principals in schools?
- Are there any differences in effective functioning between schools run by women and those run by men?
- What challenges do female school principals face in schools which men in similar positions do not face?

In addition to these four questions, a last question was asked that pertained to providing any additional comments with regard to female school principalship which the participants deemed necessary to share (Appendix D).

The information collected from the questionnaire to SMT members complemented the data collected via interviews. From the five open-ended questions included in the questionnaire (Appendix D), four themes were determined which are: the promotion and practice of women in leadership positions, differences in schools run by men and women, a lack of confidence, and discrimination against female leadership. These themes are discussed next. For the sake of confidentiality, SMT members are referred to as SMT1, SMT2, and so on.

4.3.2.1 The promotion and practice of women in leadership positions

From the responses by SMT participants two themes emerged, namely that of the lack of sufficient numbers of female school principals due to long lasting stereotyping and the fact that female school leaders are competent leaders and managers. With regard to the lack of sufficient numbers of female school principals, participants were in agreement that in the past the promotion of women to leadership positions was not treated fairly due to stereotyping which resulted in male educators not being comfortable to be led by female school principals.

Further, due to the fact that the promotion of women *"was not fair as qualifications were not considered but gender was used"* (SP8), the female school principals who were appointed suffered as they were expected "*to work even harder to prove that they can do what men do*" (SP8). However, as participant SMT1 stated, "*democracy rescued women as gender equity is now considered"* (SMT1). The result is that women are now recognized for leadership positions and their numbers are growing slowly but steadily.

With reference to the growing numbers of female school principals participants pointed out that it was high time that women be recognized for their contribution to leadership positions as female input is bringing positive changes to the education system. In this regard it was pointed out that "*the system will be complete if we do have balanced numbers of male and female school principals so that together they will share ideas and be successful as leaders"* (SMT4).

This opinion was shared by both the male and female participants and participant SMT2 emphasized that he strongly feels that the perception that *"women were disadvantaged as they were regarded as being incapable so they were seen not to be fit to lead or to control male and female educators" (*SMT2) should be ended. It was pointed out, however, that although there is change when looking at the statistics of women who are promoted to leadership positions, the number of male school principals is still much higher than those of female school principals. Participant SMT7 proclaimed that he is of the opinion that a concerted effort should be pursued "*to recruit female leaders to close the gap that has been opened previously*" (SMT7).

Concerning the fact that women are competent to act as school principals, participants agreed that their experiences of the competencies of female school principals are all positive. It became apparent from the answers of the SMT participants that *"female principals show commitment and dedication towards their work and this show that they are capable as leaders like men"* (SMT3)*.* Participant SMT6 had the same experience of his female school principal which he described as follows: "*She is hard working, innovative, transparent, very organized and able to apply all types of leadership"*

(SMT6). With all of these positive comments regarding the qualities and competencies of female school principals participant SMT10 concurred by pointing out that she could not understand why women were excluded from leadership as those who are appointed as school principals "are *doing a very wonderful job*" (SMT10). With reference to her school's female school principal, participant SMT10 added the following qualities to the list of qualities pertaining to female leadership as communicated by the SMT participants: "*My principal is responsible, honest and reliable and she always strives for perfection. Her concentration is very good and she is straightforward"* (SMT10).

4.3.2.2   Differences in schools run by male and female leaders

SMT participants had agreement on the fact that schools run by female school principals are as well managed as the schools headed by male school principals. As is the case with many male school principals, female leaders "are *performing well because they are hard workers who have passion for their work and they want to make sure that teaching and learning take place as best as possible"* (SMT7).

Although there are no significant differences between male and female headed schools, participant SMT6 encountered female leaders to be more focused on the cleanliness of premises and the accuracy of filing systems because "*schools run by female school principals are usually clean and their filing system is very good"* (SMT6). With regard to crucial issues such as discipline and learner performance, *"female leaders are on par with their male colleagues as the performance of learners is the same and discipline is also well maintained"* (SMT3).

Differences were, however, pointed out between male and female leadership approaches. These differences pertained to female leaders being more responsive to relational leadership and being tentative to a human oriented approach in addition to a task approach towards leadership. With regard to relational leadership, participant SMT5 explained that the female school principal allows the educators *"to be part in decision making"* (SMT5) for the sake of ownership-taking of school functioning. Relational leadership also pertained to female leaders being attentive to the inputs and

feelings of stakeholders with the approaches of "*consult and invite ideas from others*" (SMT10)*, "have good relationships with one another*" (SMT4) and "*use emotions*" (SMT8) for a deep understanding of people and school issues.

What also became evident from the answers from SMT participants is that female school principals, due to their motherly instincts, tend to be at the school and in the school all the time. In this regard participant SMT2 emphasized that "*female principals always stay at school*" whereas participant SMT4 pointed out that their female school principal "joins *the educators in the staffroom during break so that they can interact freely without disturbances*" (SMT4). These motherly instincts combined with dedicated work results in female leadership representing a practicing of "*both a professional and a mother role*" (SMT1) which serves to motivate educators to work in line with departmental policies and to meet deadlines while focusing on good relationships with one another.

4.3.2.3   A lack of confidence by female school principals

Participants agreed unanimously that it should be logical that female school principals will lack confidence as school leaders as they were exposed to a deep-rooted stereotyping of females being inferior to males with regard to leadership. For that reason female educators "*have always been led by men* so *they think they cannot manage schools effectively*" (SMT2) and they therefore "*feel comfortable to be followers*" (SMT8). The fact that the total number of female school principals has always been limited could then be attributed to everyone's perception, including that of women, that "*leadership posts can only be handled properly by males irrespective of qualifications and experience*" (SMT3).

The prolonged stereotyping of women to be inferior to men resulted in female school principals not being able "*to exercise their power due to lack of confidence*" (SMT7) which also contributed to "*lowering the morale of these leaders as they think they cannot manage well*" (SMT1) and therefore "*doubting themselves*" (SMT1). This feeling of inferiority based on prolonged community stereotyping is exacerbated by different

stakeholders such as male educators who *"do not want to accept the female principals' leadership and they undermine these leaders' authority"* (SMT5).

The result is that female school leaders *"become scared and lose their confidence due to what they are experiencing"* (SMT5), namely a hostile environment which still perceives female leadership to be inferior to male performance. All of these manifestations result in a vicious circle of people finding it difficult to change their perception about women leaders. This struggle with a perception change includes potential women leaders themselves with the result that female school principals *"undermine themselves"* (SMT6) believing that male leadership should be accommodated at all costs.

In this regard participant SMT10 emphasized that the female school principal in their school *"is not confident enough"* (SMT1) as she cannot take a decision on her own without consulting the acting deputy principal who in turn *"misleads her by giving wrong advice"* (SMT10).

4.3.2.4   Discrimination against female leadership

Deeper insight was gained from the answers of participant SMT members on the discrimination against female leadership due to prolonged stereotyping based on gender bias. It became clear that discrimination against female leadership related to historical arrangements where girls were not allowed to attend school because they had to take care of their younger brothers and sisters and when the perception prevailed that *"sending girls to school was a breeding ground for prostitution"* (SMT1).

These arrangements and perceptions affected women for a very long time resulting in the approach that female leaders *"are not judged because of their performance as leaders but because of their gender"* (SMT1). The impact of this discrimination on females in general and female leaders specifically occurs then also as a result of the influence of female discrimination on the male gender. In this regard participant SMT7 pointed out that male educators find it difficult to faithfully carry out instructions from

female leaders as the male educators interpret these instructions as undermining themselves when they *"allow a woman to tell them what to do"* (SMT7). As proclaimed by participant SMT7, male educators *"take these instructions personal, meanwhile it has nothing to do with gender but it is work that has to be done"* (SMT7).

Due to the fact that women were considered *"to work in the kitchen"* (SMT3), they were never exposed to the concept of *"being leaders one day"* (SMT3). It became clear from the answers of the participants that women are still affected by that treatment because even when promotional posts are advertised, *"only few women would apply"* (SMT8) because the general perception, even amongst potential female leaders, is *"I cannot do this because it is meant for men"* (SMT6). What was also clear from the answers of participant SMT members is that when women do have the nerve to apply for school leadership and they are successfully promoted, they are exposed to toxic situations prevailing in a hostile community.

Participant SMT10 shared her experience of the unacceptable behaviour of stakeholders towards a female who was appointed school principal and then abused *"only because of being a woman"* (SMT10). The appointed female school principal *"was undermined, abused verbally and physically and chased out of the school so that she opens space for a man to lead the school"* (SMT10). It was clear, according to participant SMT10, that stakeholders *"were acting as animals because they were uttering statements about the appointment of a female leader that were so disturbing"* (SMT10). What exacerbated the toxic incident was the fact that some women stakeholders also participated in the abuse of the newly appointed female leader for no reason other than having been influenced by the deep-rooted perception of the inferiority of women for leadership positions. Participant SMT5 also referred to the attitude of a traditional leader who categorically stated that he cannot accept a woman to occupy the principalship position in his village.

Members of the different research sites' SMTs who took part as participants in this study on female leadership also agreed on the fact that gender discrimination still contributes to hampering the performance of female school principals. This hampering

effect is destructive to effective teaching and learning as female school principals who have the support of the different stakeholders are acting as competent school principals.

4.4 SUMMARY

The research findings throughout this chapter reported all the information received from the ten female school principals and the ten SMT members of the selected primary schools that served as research sites. The findings revealed that the female school principals have leadership-related challenges they are facing every day. The challenges disturb female school principals in managing their schools effectively and efficiently.

The findings from the interviews conducted with female school principals and the answers from SMT members to open-ended questions revealed that a lack of confidence, gender discrimination, a lack of support, a lack of respect and unfair practice during the promotion of women are the main challenges that hamper female leaders in managing their schools well. With regard to strategies that can assist in dealing with the challenges female school principals face, it was highlighted that positive attitudes towards female leadership, a strong support system, empowerment initiatives by the female leaders themselves, acceptance of the fact that female leaders are competent to act as leaders, the building of good relationships, and respect for each other can help to change the situation.

In the next chapter a summary of findings will be provided in which recommendations will be made based on a better understanding of the situation of female school leadership and with a view towards improving conditions to ensure that female school principals contribute to improved teaching and learning based on valid leadership competencies.

CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1   INTRODUCTION

In this study the specific challenges are revealed that confront female primary school principals as they strive to manage their schools efficiently and effectively. The main focus of the study on female leadership challenges was supplemented by determining strategies to overcome the identified challenges. Various challenges were elicited that female school principals still have to cope with and it was clear that many of these challenges still pertain to deep-rooted gender bias. Although female leaders are proving that they are as effective as their male colleagues with school leadership, and in many instances appreciated as such by the specific school and outside community, many instances still prevail of female school principals having to face the barrier of a rigid and misplaced perception of female inferiority for the task of leading a school.

In line with the motivation for study discussed in paragraph 1.3, the study was conducted in anticipation of contributing to the working lives of women who are managers of their respective schools and those who want to occupy leadership positions in future by determining common ground on general challenges and possible ways of overcoming these challenges.

5.2   SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The first aim of the study was to determine the challenges faced by female school principals in the management of their schools. These challenges are gender related as men in similar positions are not experiencing the same leadership obstacles (par 1.5). Gender related tendencies against women make many female educators with well-developed leadership abilities fear to delve into the male domain of school principalship resulting in the under-representation of women in leadership positions (par 2.3.3). This occurs regardless of the increasing demand globally experienced for change, innovation and transformation to arrange for gender equality with regard to leadership

representation (par 2.3.1). The first aim of the study was, therefore, to explore the diverse and complex challenges faced by female school principals who are often publicly devalued and criticized and who often lack the support of their colleagues because of their gender (par 1.1). This happens in South Africa regardless of the fact that the constitution of South Africa, as the supreme law of the country, provides for equality and non-discrimination on the basis of, amongst other aspects such as race, social background and creed, gender (par 1.2.1). Female leaders' experiences regarding the reality of being a school principal were explored via individual interviewing, with further nuances of female leadership challenges gained through an open-ended questionnaire to school management team members (par 1.6.2.2; par 3.4). Through a literature and empirical study, the specific challenges confronting female school principals and ways of counteracting these challenges have been revealed. As exposed by sands et al 2005, Acker 2010 and Smit 2013 women seem to receive a "raw deal" when it comes to selection and the execution of their duties.

Female school principals are still encountering challenges that relate to attitudinal, institutional and socio-cultural obstacles when they have to manage their schools (par 2.3.2). With regard to attitudinal obstacles, these obstacles are experienced the moment female educators consider applying for leadership positions. In the past, the structure and staffing of schools did not provide for women to fulfill leadership positions. Gender was being used to discriminate against women and to deny them the opportunity to occupy middle level leadership positions or to enjoy being executive leaders of their schools (par 2.4).

During the process of promotion, gender discrimination instead of leadership competencies is used to select the successful candidate (par 4.3.1.1). Even when a female candidate is promoted to the position of school leadership based on her formal application for the position and her success with the process of short circuiting and interviewing by an official interview committee who finds her to be the best candidate for the position, she still encounters negative attitudes such as a lack of respect from the different stakeholders (par 4.3.1.5). The result is that female school principals are still in

many instances denied the opportunities to contribute their valuable ideas to the education system due to the harsh judgments by different stakeholders (par 2.2).

With reference to institutional obstacles, the female teacher population in South Africa represents 51% of the total teacher corps (par 2.6). The percentage of females serving as school principals constitutes only 29% (par 2.6) which confirms the institutional obstacles to adequate female leadership representation. The lack of sufficient leadership representation relates to potential female leaders lacking confidence in themselves due to not being provided with sufficient opportunities to practice their leadership skills within the school working environment (par 4.3.1.4). They therefore do not apply for leadership positions. This is despite their large numbers of 51% of the teaching force while on 29% are in leadership positions (Lumby et al 2010).

The lack of sufficient opportunities to apply their leadership skills is the result of not being acquainted with Departmental policies as females are not sufficiently exposed to the application of these policies. Lack of professional training in school leadership further contributes to female leaders feeling uncomfortable and not having proper control over their leadership responsibilities. These are exacerbated by the fact that when they do apply for leadership positions and are successful, all of their actions are constantly questioned and criticized resulting in female leaders starting to question their own competence in motivating and providing professional support to their staff and bringing out the best in their teachers through leadership (par 4.3.1.6).

With regard to social-cultural obstacles, the traumatic experiences female school principals encounter with their leadership appointments relate to the primitive cultural beliefs that women are in general subservient to men and that leadership is therefore an exclusively male competence (par 2.4.3). The result of these socio-cultural stereotypes is that women are still regarded as less equal for leadership positions with this perception militating against females' effectiveness as leaders (par 2.3.2; par 2.3.3).

These challenges are experienced in the school's internal and external environments. With regard to challenges in the internal environment, female leaders have to cope with

the opposition of colleagues who were initially supportive and collegial team workers, but who became unilateral and hostile once their female colleagues are promoted to school principalship (par 4.3.1.1). In many instances this opposition is the result of staff not feeling comfortable to be led by a woman. Female leaders therefore have to cope with colleagues - mainly, but not exclusively men - who oppose their leadership position right from the start based on the deep-rooted perception of women to be followers rather than leaders (par 4.3.1.2). Male colleagues feel themselves to be inferior when they have to accept instructions from a female school principal (par 4.3.1.6).

With regard to challenges from the external environment, female school principals experience oppression based on skewed perceptions of female leadership. The community leader, for example, could not imagine a situation where he had to liaise with a female in a leadership position (par 4.3.1.5). Some parents, on the other hand, are flabbergasted when they visit the school and then have to undergo a paradigm shift in the sense of accepting that the person whom they thought to be the secretary is in fact the school principal (par 4.3.1.3).

Discrimination against women's competencies and position in a male dominated work context results in female leaders having to function in a hostile environment where they lack the support of the different stakeholders (par 4.3.1.3). Female school principals, like their male counterparts, need the support from the different stakeholders such as the parents, the SGB, the teachers, the unions and the community leaders because through support the school principal's morale is boosted and a better service is provided based on a team approach and ownership-taking. This is not happening as many competent women do not apply for leadership positions fearing the obvious, that the post is for men (Nguni 2006:21).

Parents support the school firstly by paying school fees, and when they resent the school principal and sabotage her by not paying school fees, school programmes come to a halt and the female school principal is blamed to have failed as a leader (par 2.3.2). When parents team up with a clique of teachers to create disharmony in the school that is run by a female school principal, the female leader has to put in a huge effort and

work very hard under severe pressure to try and overcome the orchestrated resistance against her (par 4.3.1.5). The lack of support is also evident from the teacher corps refusing to share their views on school functioning with the female leader. The lack of support for female leadership is also experienced from the broader community that does not support the female school principal, but rather constantly criticizes her. As a default approach, teacher unions are always blaming female school principals without evidence (par 4.3.1.3). This lack of support for female leadership inhibits female school principal performance resulting in female school principals being blamed for insufficient knowledge and skills to manage their schools effectively.

Due to the cultural–related biased against them, female school principals lose their confidence as leaders. However, to a certain extent women have themselves to blame for their marginalization as leaders (par 2.3.2) and them feeling threatened by the superiority of men in senior leadership positions (par 2.3.3). Due to the fact that female teachers have always been led by their male counterparts, they believe they are not competent enough to manage a school and are comfortable with the position of being a follower (par 4.3.2.3). Further, although English as second language is a barrier to all second language speaker school principals, female leaders are more sensitive and judgmental about their inadequacy to communicate properly via English (par 4.3.1.4). Due to prolonged deep-rooted bias against female leadership, women themselves still perceive their position as followers rather than as leaders (par 4.3.1.6). This can be overcome by side-stepping stereotyping and dynamically leading the school to achieve its corporate goals (Acker, 2010).

Regardless of the many challenges associated with female leadership, female leaders do not refuse the promotion granted to them. They accept their deserved promotion based on a process of selecting the best candidate for school principalship whereby shortlisted female educators have to excel in order to convince the male dominated panel of interviewers that they are equally competent, or even more competent than the male candidates shortlisted for the same post (par 2.3.3). Female school principals want to convince all stakeholders and they are determined to occupy the principalship position as best they could without despairing and declining the leadership positions

offered to them. This they want to maintain regardless of the rejection encountered from the internal and external environment after their promotion. Female leaders are motivated by the assurance that they adhere to all requirements pertaining to having the applicable qualifications and competencies to manage their schools effectively regardless of stakeholder opposition (par 4.3.1). This stakeholder opposition pertains, amongst others, to be judged harshly because of gender when a human mistake is made (par 4.3.1).

Strategies to counter the challenges female leaders experience relate to changing the general attitude towards female leadership, being responsive to the endeavours of the female school principal for school effectiveness, and empowerment for school leadership in the form of increased knowledge and skills on school principalship (par 4.3.1.7). With regard to a change of attitude towards female leadership, the female leader can have a constructive input herself by creating a school atmosphere based on relational leadership. By utilizing relational traits that pertain to humility, approachability, being caring and compassionate, and having tolerance for the inputs by others, female leaders can gradually convince stakeholders of their sincerity with leadership and effective school functioning (par 2.7).

This can result in trust and good relationships between the staff and the female school principal which is improved by being accessible, making stakeholders realize that their female leader is concerned about their personal problems and wellbeing. Good relationships can motivate subordinates to support and be responsive to female school principals allowing female leaders the opportunity to consult anyone for information to increase their abilities (par 4.3.1.7). Good relationships which will support female leaders to lead successfully can encourage them to work hard and prove to everybody that women can lead as efficiently as men do. This will result in a positive change of attitude towards female leaders and a responsiveness to the appointment of a school principal solely based on competence to manage teaching and learning successfully (par 4.3.2.2). Using the TPLAR model popularized by Boone & Kurtz (2004) female school leaders may overcome these hurdles.

The professional growth of a female school principal, which is her own responsibility, can empower her to counteract the challenges she is facing with her leadership tasks (par 4.3.1.7). Female school principals must have sound knowledge and skills on the proper management of their schools to convince their staff of their academic and professional prowess (par 2.7). When school principals have only the same qualifications as their staff, some teachers might challenge the female leader's position and find a leeway to side step and despise their leader (par 4.3.1.7). The female school principal must also ensure that she has knowledge of the specific context in which the school is situated and she must remain a lifelong student by constantly consulting recent literature and authorities on school improvement for the sake of improved teaching and learning (par 2.7; par 4.3.1.7). Apart from focusing on developing and maintaining good relationships with all stakeholders, the female school principal must ensure that she gains superior professional knowledge on policy interpretation and curriculum implementation (par 4.3.1.7).

5.3   SUMMARY

From the literature study findings and findings from the empirical investigation it is clear that female school principalship entails particular challenges relating to sustained deep-rooted misconceptions on female competence for school leadership. Regardless of the proper management of their schools, female leaders constantly have to compensate with increased effort to convince stakeholders of their knowledge and skill to manage their schools properly. The conclusions deduced from this study on the challenges faced by female school leaders and strategies to counter the challenges are discussed next.

- **Female school principals must empower themselves**. Professional growth is important for all school leaders, but especially for female leaders to ensure that their subordinates recognize their academic and professional prowess. Improved knowledge and skill will boost female leaders' morale and build their self-confidence (par 2.7; par 4.3.1.7).

- **Female school principals must rely on relational leadership**. Through personal traits such as humility, approachability, being caring and compassionate and having tolerance, female leaders will be able to develop trust and good relationships in order to gain the support of the different stakeholders (par 2.7; par 4.3.1.7). Smit (2013) emphasizes this as he argues that women are the once who should emancipate themselves from this premise.

- **Female leaders must know the context of their schools**. Female leaders must be part and parcel of the community where they are posted and they must take part in community activities to convince the community of their good intentions with school functioning (par 2.7; par 4.3.1.7).

- **For the sake of proper school functioning and societal development**, **the person who best meets the requirement for managing the school to excellence, regardless of gender, should be appointed.** For this reason, shortlisted female educators' competencies must be considered as valuable as those of their male counterparts because all citizens must benefit from the best service possible in order to provide excellence within the school context (par 2.3.3; par 4.3.1.7).

5.4   RECOMMENDATIONS

For proper school functioning in terms of ensuring that the candidate with the best developed leadership skills is selected for school leadership, regardless of gender, and in order to counter deep-rooted misconceptions on female leadership:

- Female school principals and prospective female school principals must be subject to continuous and rigorous professional development programmes initiated by themselves to improve their leadership knowledge and skills (par 2.7; par 4.3.1.7)

- Female school principals must focus on relational leadership by embracing humility, approachability, being caring, being compassionate and being tolerant in order to develop trust and good relationships so as to gain the support of all stakeholders (par 2.7; par 4.3.1.7).

- In order to convince all stakeholders and the broader community of their good intentions with school leadership, female school principals must be part of the community by being actively involved in community activities (par 2.7; par 4.3.1.7).

- School principals must be appointed based on their leadership competencies only with no consideration of gender (par 4.3.1.7).

5.5   SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES

- As this study focused on challenges faced by female school principals in a desolated area of a rural-oriented province of the country, further studies are suggested on female challenges in other provinces with more urban-oriented populations to determine whether there are differences in female leadership challenges regarding rural-oriented and urban-oriented environments.

- For the sake of comparison and to determine how acute bias against female leadership still is, further studies are suggested where male school principals and the challenges they are experiencing are the main focus. Challenges experienced by male school principals as compared to those experienced by female school principals should then be compared.

- Parents' perceptions on female leadership should be studied.

- Learners' perceptions on female leadership should be studied.

5.6   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are limitations with this study on the challenges female school principals are facing in the carrying out of their leadership tasks. The first limitation relates to the limitedness of the research sample.   Only ten female school principals and ten SMT members from ten schools in Mpumalanga province were selected as participants for a qualitative study on female school principal challenges. A broader study with more school principals representing different provinces with different geographical orientations in terms of rural and urban areas would have shed more light on the essence of the challenges female school principals face in the executing of their leadership tasks. However, although only a small sample of information-rich participants were selected for data gathering and therefore this could be considered as a limitation to the investigation, the collected data provided a rich source of information on the challenges of female leadership.

Another limitation is that data was collected via individual interviewing and a questionnaire consisting of five open-ended questions only. A deeper understanding of the phenomenon of female leadership could have been gained with additional data collecting methods such as observation of the daily school functioning of a school managed by a female school and the conducting of interviews with the teaching and non-teaching staff, and with learners, parents and other members of the broader community such as the community leaders.   The data that was collected, however, provided viable information on female school principal challenges and ways to counter these challenges.

5.7   CONCLUDING REMARKS

The female school principals who participated in this study on female leadership applied for their school principal positions and were successful due to their proven competencies. Regardless of their experience as teachers, HODs and deputy school principals, they were faced with challenges as leaders that related to deep-rooted bias against female leadership. These challenges influenced the female leaders negatively in

the sense that they started to question their own leadership competencies which impacted negatively on effective school functioning.

In order to counter the gender bias related challenges, female leaders need to focus on their own professional development and the application of relational leadership whereby stakeholders support and good-will are encouraged. Through consistent good performance based on leadership knowledge and skills and resilience with the accommodation of stakeholder input by means of humility, approachability, being caring, compassionate and tolerant, female school leaders will eventually counter deep-rooted gender bias and convince stakeholders of their contribution to effective school functioning.

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APPENDIX A

Enquiries: Mnisi CT   PO Box 247
Tel: 013 7086775   MKHUHLU
Cell: 0826436014   1246
                                                             21 March 2013

The Head of Department

Mpumalanga Department of Education

Dear Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IN BOHLABELA DISTRICT

I am writing this letter to request permission to conduct a research study at ten primary schools in Bohlabela District (Mkhuhlu Circuit) during the period January and February 2014. My research is focused on the **"Female primary school leadership in the Bohlabela District of Mpumalanga: Challenges and strategies".** This study is in partial fulfilment of the MED degree in Education Management at the University of South Africa. The study is carried out under the supervision of Prof. H.M. Van der Merwe.

In carrying out the research, one interview will be conducted at each selected school: an individual interview with the school principal. A questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions will be given to one school management team (SMT) member to complete at each research site. Ten schools are purposively selected because they are headed by female school principals. The time required for conducting the interview in each school will be approximately thirty minutes. When conducting the research the following conditions will prevail:

All collected information will be treated with confidentiality.

No disturbance will be caused to the school's normal tuition process.

Schools' names will not be reflected anywhere.

Participants' names will not be reflected anywhere.

All interviews will be recorded and transcribed as soon as possible to enhance accuracy in summarizing and analysing information.

Participation is voluntary and participants may withdraw without reprisal.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours Sincerely

Mrs. Mnisi CT

APPENDIX B

Enquiries: Mnisi CT

Tel: 013 7086775

Cell: 0826436014

PO Box 247

MKHUHLU

1246

21 March 2013

The Principal

Primary School

PO Box ------------

Dear Madam

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IN BOHLABELA DISTRICT

I am writing this letter to request permission to conduct research at your school as one of the research sites for my study that includes ten primary schools in the Mkhuhlu Circuit of the Bohlabela District of Mpumalanga. The research will be conducted during the period of January and February 2014. My research title is as follows: **"Female primary school leadership in the Bohlabela District of Mpumalanga: Challenges and strategies".**
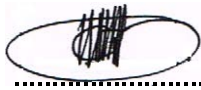
This study is conducted in partial fulfilment of the MED degree in Education Management at the University of South Africa. The study is carried out under the supervision of Prof. H.M. Van der Merwe. In carrying out the research I kindly request an individual interview with you as the school principal. I further request that a questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions be given to one SMT member at your school to complete.

The time required for conducting the interview with you as the school principal will be approximately thirty minutes. When conducting the research the following conditions will prevail:

- All collected information will be treated with confidentiality.

- No disturbance will be caused to the school's normal tuition process.

- The school's name will not be reflected anywhere.

- Participants' names will not be reflected anywhere.

- All interviews will be recorded and transcribed as soon as possible to enhance accuracy in summarizing and analysing information.

- Participation is voluntary and participants may withdraw without reprisal.

Thanking you in anticipation

Yours Sincerely

....

Mrs. Mnisi C.T

APPENDIX C

A QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION WITH FEMALE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM MEMBERS IN THE MKHUHLU CIRCUIT OF THE BOHLABELA DISTRICT OF MPUMALANGA PROVINCE ON FEMALE PRIMARY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

This is conducted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Education in the subject Education Management at the University of South Africa (UNISA). The aim of this study is:

- To determine the challenges faced by female school principals in the management of their schools.
- To investigate the major reasons behind the challenges faced by female school principals.
- To determine strategies for the counteracting of challenges faced by female school principals.

The anonymity of participants will be upheld and information will be kept strictly confidential. Your name or any other identifying details will therefore not be recorded at all. You do need to sign this communiqué to give me permission to conduct the interview.

You may refuse to answer any of the questions and you may stop participating at any time during the investigation. Your participation is highly appreciated, but entirely voluntary.

Do you have any questions about your participation in this investigation?

…..................................……………………………………………………………………

…………………………………………………………………………………………………

INFORMED CONSENT

I……………………………………………………………………………………………….

Hereby consent to participate in the investigation on the leadership of female school principals.

Interview	Date	Interviewee
……………………	……………………………………..	……………………………………..

APPENDIX D

QUESTIONNAIRE WITH OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS TO MEMBERS OF THE SCHOOL MANAGEMENT TEAM

SECTION A. BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

INSTRUCTIONS TO PARTICIPANTS:

Please indicate your choice by ticking in the appropriate box or write down your response in the space provided.

1. Gender

Male	Female

2. Age range

30-35	36-40	41-45	46-50	Over 50

3. Number of years in your present position

0-5	6-10	11-15	15-20	Over 20

4. Highest qualification

Diploma	BA degree	BED HONS degree	MED degree	Doctors degree

5. Subject specialization e.g. English and Geography

SECTION B: Female school leadership in schools

1.   What are your experiences regarding the promotion and practice of female
        school principals in schools?

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2.   In your view, why are there so few female school principals in schools?

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3.   Are there any differences in effective functioning between schools run by women
        and those run by men? Please elaborate clearly.

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4. What challenges do female school principals face in schools which men in similar positions do not face?

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5. Do you have any additional comments relating to female school leadership?

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR THE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

- What are your experiences regarding the promotion of woman as school principals?
- In your view why are there so few female school principals?
- What challenges do female school principals face in schools which men in similar positions do not face?
- Which strategies could be used to rectify this anomaly?

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Nelspruit 1200
Government Boulevard
Riverside Park
Building 5
Mpumalanga Province
Republic of South Africa

Litiko leTemfundo   *Umnyango weFundo*   *Department van onderwys*   *Umnyango leTemfundvo*

Enquiries: AH Baloyi
Tel no: 013 766 5478

MNISI C.T.
P.O. BOX 247
MKHUHLU
1246

RE: APPLICATION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN BOHLABELA DISTRICT

Your application (dated 24 April 2013) to conduct research in ten primary schools of Mkhuhlu Circuit of Bohlabela District was received on the 11 April 2013. The tittle of your study is "Female Primary School Leadership in the Bohlabela District of Mpumalanga: challenges and Strategies."

Your request is approved subject to your observing the content of the departmental research manual which was send to you earlier. You are also requested to adhere to your University's ethics as spelt out in your research ethics documents.

In terms of the attached manual (2.2. bullet number 4 & 6) data or any research activity can only be conducted after school hours as per appointment, however, your research method will require you to be at school during working, therefore you should request the principal of the school to make arrangements which will not disturb the smooth running of the school. You are also requested to share your findings with the relevant sections of the department so that we may implement your findings if that will be in the best interest of department.

MPUMALANGA
A Pioneering Spirit

a.baloyi@education.mpu.gov.za.

SUPPORTED/~~NOT SUPPORTED~~

For approval

_____

_____

_____

J. Moyane   22 | 05 | 2013
DDG: CURRICULUM: **DATE**
MRS. LH. MOYANE

APPROVED/NOTAPPROVED:

_____

_____

_____   _____
MRS MOC MHLABANE   **DATE**
HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Research Ethics Clearance Certificate

This is to certify that the application for ethical clearance submitted by

Mnisi CT [765-513-4]

for M.Ed study entitled

Female Primary School Leadership in the Bohlabela District of Mpumalanga: Challenges and Strategies

has met the ethical requirements as specified by the University of South Africa College of Education Research Ethics Committee. This certificate is valid for two years from the date of issue.

Prof CS le Roux   27 November 2013
CEDU REC (Chairperson)

lrouxcs@unisa.ac.za
Reference number: 2013 November/765-513-4/CSLR

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PUBLISH ABSTRACT ONLY AGREEMENT

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	Abstract no.

PERSONAL DATA

1. Last Name   First Name   Middle Name

    Mnisi   Celia   Tintswalo

2. Year of Birth (Optional)   3. Country of Citizenship

    1970   South Africa

4. Present Mailing Address
    Street address:

    Stand 665 A   Mkhuhlu Township

    City   State/Province   Postal code   Country

    Mkhuhlu   Mpumalanga   1246

    Future Mailing Address
    Street address:

    City   State/Province   Postal code   Country
    N/A

    Effective date for future mailing address (mm dd yy)   N/A

    E-mail address: celiamns@gmail.com

Do not write in this space
Vol/Issue
School Code
Abst. Length

MASTER'S DEGREE DATA

5. Full name of university conferring degree, and college or division if appropriate

    University of South Africa

6. Abbreviation for degree awarded   7. Year degree awarded

    MED in Education Management   2016

TITLE/SUBJECT AREA

8. Enter the title of thesis. If thesis is written in a language other than English, please specify which language and translate title into English. Language of text: English

    Title: Female Primary School Leadership in the Bohlabela District of Mpumalanga: Challenges and Strategies.

9. Subject category of thesis. Please enter four-digit code from "Subject Categories" on following page.   0514

10. Please append an abstract of no more than 150 words describing the contents of your thesis. Your completion and submission of this form through your graduate school indicates your assent to UMI publication of your abstract. Formulas, diagrams and other illustrative materials are not recommended for abstracts appearing in *Masters Abstracts International.*

Author Signature: _____   Date: 25 August 2015