

Gender Dynamics in Educational Leadership: Challenges Faced By Female School Principals

ABSTRACT

Women are breaking the social norm of being led by men, due to persistence of stereotypical cultural practices, socialization and biases against women that may explain the poor representation of women in leadership roles. The objectives of the study were to determine: challenges faced by female administrators and strategies used to resolve the challenges. The study adopted the interpretivist paradigm and used a sequential exploratory design through a qualitative research approach. A purposive and convenience sampling strategy was employed to select 12 female administrators for participation in semi-structured interviews. This study employed thematic analysis to uncover recurring patterns and themes within the interview data. This study explored the challenges faced by female school administrators, who battle gender stereotypes, a confidence gap, and opposition from some teachers. Despite these hurdles, female leaders can persevere through hard work, clear vision, and emotional intelligence. The research also identified strategies like adhering to guidelines, achieving academic results, and maintaining composure to further empower female administrators. Additionally, open communication, collaboration, and a strong track record can help build trust with teachers and pave the way for aspiring female leaders. This research recommend that clear Ministry guidelines, leadership development programs, and a deeper understanding of gender bias are crucial to creating a more equitable and supportive environment for female school administrators.

Keywords: Administrator, Leadership, Gender Stereotype, Equity

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Women in Leadership: A Global Perspective

Despite progress, women remain underrepresented in leadership positions globally. This is due to social barriers and ingrained biases that limit their opportunities for economic participation, education, and political representation. While some developed countries boast female heads of government, these are exceptions rather than the norm (Al-Kahlan & Khasawneh, 2024). Africa demonstrates significant strides towards gender parity in leadership (Jere, 2018). Ethiopia's recent appointment of a female head of state and a cabinet with gender parity is a milestone. Rwanda stands out with the highest female parliamentary representation globally (Thwala, 2023). The under-representation of women in educational leadership persists, even though women dominate the teaching profession ((Nkambule & Perumal, 2024; Keregero, Dlamini & Keregero, 2018). Cultural assumptions about female leadership potential contribute to this phenomenon. In patriarchal societies like Eswatini, traditional beliefs and social norms discourage women from pursuing leadership roles (Perets, Davidovich & Lewin, 2023)

However, the tide is turning. The evolving job market favors skills women often possess, such as communication and collaboration. Women are increasingly breaking through the "glass ceiling" in leadership positions (Netchaeva et al, 2015; Glass & Cook, 2016). Challenges remain. Women often underestimate their abilities and face additional hurdles once in leadership roles. They may be perceived as less assertive or competent than their male counterparts, and their leadership styles may be questioned.

Despite these obstacles, women bring valuable skills to leadership. They tend to be collaborative decision-makers, fostering open communication and stakeholder engagement. These traits are increasingly sought after in the modern workplace. The focus is shifting from "can women lead?" to "how effectively do women lead?". Women leaders offer unique strengths that benefit organizations. Their presence in leadership positions is crucial for achieving true gender equality and societal progress.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite a predominantly female teaching force in Eswatini, as evidenced by Nkambule and Perumal (2024), women are significantly underrepresented in leadership positions within the education sector. This phenomenon is not unique to Eswatini, as Mabuza (2020) highlights the global trend of women being concentrated in lower-level teaching positions. Statistics from the Ministry of Education in Eswatini support this observation, indicating a dominance of female teachers but a scarcity of female administrators. This underrepresentation can be attributed to persistent cultural norms and biases that discourage women from pursuing leadership roles. Traditional socialization often reinforces the idea that men are better suited for leadership positions, leading to the underrepresentation of women in educational administration. The Eswatini government has taken steps to address gender disparity through the Election of Women Act of 2018, which aligns with the country's commitment to international instruments promoting gender equality, such as CEDAW and the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development. These initiatives suggest an anticipated shift towards greater female representation in leadership positions.

1.3 Research Objectives

While the Ministry of Education data reveals a gradual increase in female leadership roles (headships and deputy headships) in Lubombo region's secondary schools between 2015 and 2019, a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon is needed. This research is framed by the following research questions:

1. What are the subordinate-derived challenges encountered by female educational leaders?
2. What are the effective strategies that female leaders can employ to mitigate and overcome the challenges they encounter?

By addressing these objectives, this research will contribute valuable insights into the experiences of female educational leaders in Eswatini and pave the way for fostering a more inclusive and equitable leadership landscape within the education sector.

1.4 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Feminist Standpoint Theory as its guiding framework. Feminism, according to Rodriguez, Barthelemy and McCormick (2022) encompasses the pursuit of women's rights based on gender equality. It delves into the theoretical, philosophical, and political aspects of achieving this equality across social, political, and economic spheres. Building upon this foundation, feminist theory, as described by Khalid, Manzoor and Nargis (2024) extends this discussion into a broader theoretical and philosophical discourse. It seeks to understand the root causes of gender inequality by examining the lived experiences of women in various social roles. This theory's application extends across diverse fields, including anthropology, sociology, economics, education, and philosophy.

A core tenet of Feminist Standpoint Theory is the analysis of power relations inherent within the social order. This perspective, as emphasized by Cohen, Kassan, Wada and Suehn (2022), highlights the importance of amplifying the voices of marginalized groups, ensuring they are not silenced. Khalid, Manzoor and Nargis (2024) further emphasizes that feminist theory strives to understand the power imbalance between genders, the nature of women's oppression, its historical evolution, its interaction with other forms of oppression, and ultimately, to identify pathways to overcome this oppression. Disch and Hawksworth (2016) reinforce this notion, highlighting that Feminist Standpoint Theory inherently promotes inclusivity and justice, advocating against any form of human rights violations.

In the context of this research, Feminist Standpoint Theory provides a lens through which to examine the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions within Eswatini's education sector. It allows us to explore the lived experiences of female educational leaders, the potential power dynamics at play, and the potential barriers they face in achieving leadership roles.

1.5 Gender Stereotypes in Public

Despite progress, women worldwide face unequal opportunities. They are underrepresented in leadership positions across all sectors, from business to politics (Keregero, Dlamini & Keregero, 2018). This lack of representation stems from several obstacles, including discriminatory laws and limited access to education and resources (Nkambule and Perumal, 2024). From a young age, we are shaped by stereotypes. Phrases like "a woman's place is in the home" create beliefs about ourselves and others. These stereotypes can be self-limiting. For instance, a woman with equal verbal and math skills might underestimate her math ability due to the stereotype of math being a male domain (Glass & Cook, 2016). Social role theory suggests these stereotypes arise from the historical division of labour, where men were breadwinners and women were homemakers. As societal roles evolve, these stereotypes need to be challenged.

Eswatini exemplifies the global struggle for gender equality. Women make up over half the population, but hold only 22% of parliamentary seats, highlighting their underrepresentation in leadership (International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics, 2019). The country has never had a female head of state.

1.6 Gender Stereotypes at Work

More women are joining the workforce, but few reach leadership positions (Thwala, 2023). This underrepresentation can be attributed to cultural biases questioning women's suitability for leadership. In Africa, traditional beliefs and societal expectations can make it difficult for women to challenge these norms. Research shows women are underrepresented in high-paying, physically demanding jobs, while being overrepresented in service-oriented roles (Nkambule and Perumal, 2024). This reflects the association of certain skills with masculinity and femininity (Keregero, Dlamini & Keregero, 2018). However, these lines are blurring. Men are entering traditionally female-dominated fields, and vice versa (Mabuza, 2020). While progress has been made, dismantling gender stereotypes remains crucial for achieving true workplace equality.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

This study employed an exploratory sequential mixed methods design. A research design, as defined by Asenahabi (2019), constitutes the overall blueprint for integrating various study components in a logical and coherent manner. This ensures the research effectively addresses the problem under investigation. The design of the study is the descriptive design which employed the qualitative approach. A descriptive research is a design used to describe systematically and accurately the facts and characteristics of a given population or area of interest, to provide an accurate portrayal or account of characteristics of a particular individual, situation or group; these studies are a means of discovering new meaning, describing what exists, determining the frequency with which something occurs as well as to portray the characteristics of persons, situations, or groups (Gravlee, 2022). According to Cresswell (2014), this is a research design widely used as indicated by theses, dissertations and research reports of institutions

The target population for this study comprised female administrators in secondary and high schools within the Lubombo region of Eswatini, along with the teachers under their leadership. A purposive and convenience sampling strategy was employed to select 12 female administrators for participation in semi-structured interviews. Two research instruments; semi-structured interview guide and focus groups were developed and used.

The researcher adopted a flexible approach to conducting interviews, opting for the semi-structured format. According to Asenahabi (2019), semi-structured interviews (SSIs) are conducted conversationally with individual respondents. They utilize a blend of closed-ended and open-ended questions, often incorporating follow-up inquiries such as "why" or "how." The educators signed a consent form where they agreed to be recorded and interviews were done in the comfort of their offices and recording was done using a smart phone. For focus group, permission was sought from the Regional Education Officer (REO) to use

the educators during one of their meetings that is normally on Mondays at the REO's office.

Cresswell (2014) discusses Guba's four criteria that he believes qualitative researchers should consider when pursuing a trustworthy study. Data trustworthiness encompasses four key components: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Guba's constructs correspond to the criteria employed by positivist researchers:

Credibility: Credibility addresses the question of how congruent the findings are with reality. The researcher established credibility by triangulating methods of data collection through the use of both semi-structured interviews and survey questionnaires. As Cishe, (2017) suggests, employing multiple methods of data collection and analysis provides a more robust foundation for the research.

Transferability: Generalizability refers to the extent to which the account of a particular situation can be applied to other individuals, times, or settings beyond those directly studied (Cresswell, 2014). Transferability is established by providing evidence that the research study's findings could be relevant to other contexts, situations, times, and populations. Therefore, the researcher meticulously described the research context and assumptions that were central to the study.

Dependability: Dependability is analogous to reliability, signifying consistency in observing the same findings under similar circumstances. To address the issue of dependability, the processes within the study were reported in detail. This allows a future researcher to potentially replicate the work and obtain similar results.

Conformability: Conformability refers to the degree to which others agree with or corroborate the research findings (Ali & Usman, 2018). The researcher ensured in-depth methodological descriptions to allow for scrutiny of the research results' integrity. Additionally, methodological triangulation was achieved through the utilization of a mixed methods approach.

This study employed thematic analysis to uncover recurring patterns and themes within the interview data. Cishe, (2017) describe thematic analysis as an iterative process that involves continually revisiting the entire dataset, the coded extracts under examination, and the evolving analysis itself. The aim, as outlined by Ali and Usman (2018), is to identify significant or intriguing patterns (themes) within the data and leverage them to illuminate the research question. This thematic analysis followed a seven-stage process: familiarization, initial code generation, cross-interview thematic pattern identification, theme review, theme definition and naming, and final report generation.

3.0 Results AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Challenges Faced by Female Administrators

Gender Stereotype Challenges

Significant progress has been made by women in the corporate world over the past five decades, with many achieving leadership positions despite initial challenges (e.g., Heilman). However, research suggests that unconscious bias still plays a significant role in promotion decisions, hindering women's advancement. Gender stereotypes and prejudice remain a threat to women's careers, as evidenced by Science News (2018). This study explores how female school administrators experience gender stereotypes from both teachers and the community.

Gender Stereotypes from Teachers: While some research suggests a decline in gender-related barriers, this study indicates that female administrators still face stereotyping from some female teachers. This lack of support is concerning, as Liswood (2015) highlights the importance of women supporting each other's professional development. Similarly, Britton (2017) observed instances where women were seemingly penalized by female colleagues for deviating from gender norms. The findings of this study align with Liswood's (2015) observations regarding negative behaviors some women exhibit towards female leaders, potentially due to the "power of dead-even rule" (Liswood,

2015). This concept suggests an unconscious tendency for women to maintain a perceived balance in power dynamics. Cooper's (2016) work on the "Queen Bee" phenomenon further underlines the complexities of women's relationships in competitive environments. However, this study contradicts the notion that all women lack solidarity, as some female teachers undoubtedly support their female superiors.

Gender Stereotypes from Male Teachers: The study also reveals that male teachers may undermine the leadership of female administrators. This aligns with Perets, Davidovich and Lewin (2023) research suggesting that some men perceive female leaders as a threat to their masculinity. These feelings may manifest in dismissive attitudes towards female leadership, potentially leading to comments questioning a female administrator's competence.

Gender Stereotypes from the Community: The research indicates that the community also plays a role in perpetuating gender stereotypes. Similar to Liswood's (2015) work on workplace stress, female administrators may face an initial presumption of incompetence until they prove otherwise (Thwala, 2023). Furthermore, the study suggests that the community may judge female administrators based on gender rather than qualifications, requiring them to demonstrate their effectiveness through student performance. This aligns with Britton (2017) concept of the "prescriptive stereotype," where societal expectations regarding gender roles can lead to the perception that women lack the necessary leadership qualities. Additionally, Perets, Davidovich and Lewin (2023) highlights the "lack of fit" perception between women and power. The study suggests that some community members may simply be accustomed to male leadership in schools and require time to adjust to the presence of female administrators.

3.2 Challenges of Occupying Positions Dominated by Males

The Confidence Gap and Female Educational Leadership: Historically, educational leadership roles have been predominantly held by men, with women often remaining in classroom positions. This research highlights the challenges faced by women in male-dominated environments, including a lack of

confidence and the need to constantly prove their leadership capabilities (Britton, 2017).

The research also identifies a phenomenon where female administrators initially experience feelings of intimidation in their leadership roles. These feelings may lessen as they gain experience and demonstrate their effectiveness (Keregero, Dlamini & Keregero, 2018). Sandberg (2013) notes a tendency for women to attribute success to external factors, further contributing to underestimating their own capabilities.

However, as female administrators lead their schools to positive academic outcomes, improved infrastructure management, and a well-disciplined student body, their confidence grows. This finding aligns with Britton (2017) which emphasizes the pressure women face to constantly prove themselves. Similarly, Baltazar (2015) suggests that women may need to project a stronger image and provide additional demonstrations of competence.

The research concludes that female administrators often work harder than their male counterparts to achieve recognition and establish their credibility (Britton, 2017). This reinforces the perception that women's competence needs constant validation (Baltazar, 2015). Further investigation is needed to understand the root causes of the confidence gap and develop strategies to empower women in educational leadership positions.

Opposition to female educational leadership: This study explores the challenges faced by female school administrators due to their gender. A significant source of opposition comes from male teachers, who may feel threatened by women in leadership positions. Netcheva, Kouchaki, and Sheppard (2015) suggest that male employees may perceive female supervisors as a threat to their masculinity, leading to resistance and disrupted workplace dynamics. These findings suggest that a shift in traditional gender roles at work may create friction with some male teachers.

The research further indicates that male teachers may challenge decisions made by female administrators, particularly when those decisions differ from

their own suggestions. This behavior may stem from a social belief that female leadership undermines male identity. Ferguson (2018) provides evidence supporting this notion, suggesting that male subordinates can experience heightened feelings of threat when working under female superiors, leading to assertive behavior. In the context of this study, this suggests that male teachers may feel threatened by female leadership and resort to assertive tactics to reassert their perceived dominance.

The patriarchal structure of Eswatini, where men traditionally hold positions of power, may also contribute to these dynamics. This cultural norm positions men as the primary problem-solvers, potentially leading to resistance towards female leadership initiatives. Gender stereotypes, as discussed by Phelan & Rudman (2010), often portray men as more competent and assertive leaders, further reinforcing this dynamic.

Furthermore, the study reveals a lack of cooperation from some male teachers towards female administrators. Miltersteiner et al. (2020) suggest that societal preference for male leadership can perpetuate patriarchal ideologies, leading men to feel a stronger entitlement to power. This can leave female administrators feeling ostracized and undermined.

The research also identifies experiences of incivility from teachers, ranging from snarky comments to outright rudeness. The study acknowledges that male dominance in society could also be a contributing factor. The uncivil behavior may be a reaction to a perceived loss of power by men accustomed to holding authority. Further research is needed to determine the specific sources of this incivility.

3.3 Strategies used to Resolve Challenges Faced by Female Administrators

Possessing High Standards of Professionalism

Developing a clear vision: A crucial strategy identified by the participants was the development of a clear and well-communicated vision. Mohd-Adnan and Valliappan (2019) define a visionary leader as someone with the ability to create and articulate a unifying vision that provides purpose and direction for the entire organization. Raghuvanshi (2016) emphasizes the importance of effective communication in visionary leadership, highlighting the leader's ability to articulate dreams and goals in a way that resonates with the team. Similarly, Apriyani, Sutisna and Suharyati (2019) advocate for clear communication with stakeholders, including them as partners in achieving the organization's vision. By involving stakeholders and clearly communicating the vision, female administrators can potentially mitigate some of the challenges they face.

Managing emotions for effective leadership: The administrators also emphasized the importance of emotional intelligence (EI) in effective leadership. Perets, Davidovich and Lewin (2023) defines EI as the set of emotional and social skills that influence how we perceive and express ourselves, manage relationships, and utilize emotional information effectively. Mohd-Adnan and Valliappan (2019) highlight the role of EI in managing stress and conflict through intelligent management of one's own emotions and those of others. Effective emotional intelligence can help female administrators build rapport with their subordinates, potentially reducing opposition from teachers, as suggested by Davies and Maldonado (2015). These authors emphasize the role of emotional intelligence in fostering a positive work environment characterized by high morale, cooperation, and teamwork.

Demonstrating high work performance: The study participants also identified high work performance as a key strategy for overcoming societal biases. Hickman (2014) associate strong work ethics with professionalism and the

ability to work effectively under pressure, build positive relationships, and demonstrate diligence and resourcefulness. These qualities can help female administrators build positive relationships with their subordinates, potentially dissolving opposition from teachers. Raghuvanshi (2016) describe work ethic as a commitment to core work principles. By demonstrating unwavering commitment to their work, female administrators can challenge societal norms that portray women as less capable leaders, as suggested by Keregero, Dlamini and Keregero (2018). Strong work ethic can also enhance the chances of female administrators being appointed to leadership positions.

Maintaining composure during challenges: Finally, the research highlights the pressure on female leaders to maintain composure, especially during difficult situations. Davies and Maldonado (2015) points to the prevalence of societal beliefs about women's heightened emotional expressiveness, which can negatively impact perceptions of their leadership abilities. These beliefs, as noted by Burton (2019) may contribute to the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles. Therefore, it is crucial for female administrators to maintain composure during challenging times and avoid letting emotions cloud their judgment.

Adherence to Ministry of Education guidelines and regulations

Utilizing ministry of education guidelines: The administrators emphasized the importance of adhering to Ministry of Education guidelines in their daily activities. Watkins (2022) describes these guidelines as professional standards for the entire educational system, encompassing best practices for various aspects of an administrator's role, including preparation, hiring, development, supervision, and evaluation.

Demonstrating effectiveness through results: The female administrators also stressed the importance of achieving strong academic results to counter negative gender stereotypes in leadership. Burton (2019) acknowledges the

pressure on female leaders to work harder than their male counterparts to achieve success.

Furthermore, the study participants suggested that building a strong reputation through high performance can garner trust and respect from the community. Hickman (2014) define reputation as the overall perception of a leader's ability to meet stakeholder expectations. By producing strong academic outcomes, female administrators can demonstrate their capabilities and build a positive reputation within the community. This positive reputation can ultimately earn the trust and respect of the community.

The research suggests that negative attitudes from teachers and the community often stem from a lack of confidence in female leadership. However, these attitudes can shift when schools achieve strong academic results under female leadership. Burton (2019) highlights how societal stereotypes about female leaders can create bias and discrimination. These stereotypes can hinder women from achieving their goals. The findings of this study suggest that by demonstrably improving their schools' academic performance, female leaders can challenge these negative perceptions and foster a more positive image within the community. Bear, Cushenbery, London and Sherman (2017) support this notion, suggesting that women in leadership positions often feel pressure to outperform their male counterparts due to historical power dynamics. Successfully achieving strong academic outcomes can be a powerful way for female administrators to demonstrate their worth and challenge these ingrained perceptions.

Maintaining firm stand in the face of intimidation.

Maintaining composure: The administrators emphasized the importance of remaining calm and composed when facing intimidation. Hickman (2014) advises leaders, particularly women, to project confidence and control. However, Thwala (2023) suggest that women can effectively navigate these situations by combining assertiveness with kindness and helpfulness.

The research suggests that emotional intelligence (EI) plays a crucial role in managing intimidation. Mohd-Adnan and Valliappan (2019) highlight the importance of emotional regulation for effective leadership. Leaders who struggle to manage their emotions are unlikely to succeed. Social interactions with teachers and the community are a core aspect of a leader's role. Emotional awareness and regulation are therefore critical factors impacting the quality of these interactions.

Maintaining focus: The female administrators also stressed the importance of maintaining focus on the school's vision in the face of intimidation. Lambersky (2016) define a visionary leader as someone who provides direction, support, and guidance to achieve the organization's mission. By staying focused on the school's vision, administrators can resist distractions caused by intimidation, as suggested by the study. Similarly, Al-Kahlan and Khasawneh (2024) describes visionary leaders as possessing a clear and positive image of the future that inspires, motivates, and guides the organization towards achieving its goals. By setting direction and maintaining focus, female administrators can resist intimidation and influence their team towards achieving shared objectives.

Finally, the research suggests that a strong work ethic can mitigate feelings of intimidation. By consistently demonstrating efficiency and competence in their leadership roles, female administrators can dispel doubts and project a sense of capability.

Making the teachers confident of your leadership capabilities

Enhancing understanding and collaboration: The female administrators emphasized the value of clear and open communication. Apriyani, Sutisna and Suharyati (2019) highlight the importance of effective communication skills for leaders. Leaders who clearly articulate expectations and values foster appreciation and trust within their teams. Similarly, Salicru (2017) suggests that open communication can be a powerful tool for building trust between supervisors and subordinates. By utilizing effective communication, female

administrators can establish clear expectations with teachers, fostering a collaborative work environment that can ultimately lead to increased teacher confidence in their leadership.

Fostering teamwork and trust: The study participants also suggested that effective communication promotes teamwork. Lambersky (2016) emphasizes that clear communication of expectations for teamwork and collaboration is essential for building a strong team culture. Apriyani, Sutisna and Suharyati (2019) concur, suggesting that effective communication is crucial for coordinating activities, reaching decisions, and establishing partnerships within an organization. Open communication skills can contribute to the development of a strong team dynamic, which in turn fosters trust and confidence between leaders and subordinates.

Demonstrating competence: The administrators further suggested that their perceived competence is a key factor in gaining teacher confidence. Salicru (2017) emphasize the importance of competence in establishing trust between leaders and employees. Competent leaders possess the necessary skills and knowledge to fulfill their leadership roles effectively. Therefore, as suggested by Al-Kahlan and Khasawneh (2024), female administrators who demonstrate competence can cultivate trust and confidence among teachers.

Building loyalty and transparency: The research also highlights the benefits of an open-door policy for promoting communication and building trust. This suggests that encouraging open communication from subordinates can lead to increased motivation and loyalty. When employees feel valued and their voices are heard, it can contribute to a more positive and productive work environment. Lambersky (2016) further supports this notion, suggesting that effective communication leads to increased trust in management. By implementing an open-door policy, female administrators can promote transparency and collaboration, ultimately building trust and confidence in their leadership.

Developing a good reputation

Developing a strong track record: The administrators emphasized the importance of dedication and a strong track record in current roles. Mohd-Adnan and Valliappan (2019) highlight how a positive reputation can lead to faster career advancement and increased opportunities for leadership positions. By consistently demonstrating competence and achieving positive outcomes in their current roles, aspiring female leaders can build a strong reputation that positions them well for future advancement. This suggests that a reputation for effectiveness grants individuals greater power and influence within an organization.

Cultivating self-confidence: The research also highlights the importance of self-confidence for effective leadership. Salicru (2017) describes high-performing leaders as those who possess competence and confidence in their ability to influence others. Similarly, Perets, Davidovich and Lewin (2023) emphasizes the critical role of confidence in enabling leaders to motivate and influence their teams. By fostering a positive self-image and belief in their leadership capabilities, aspiring female leaders can enhance their effectiveness.

Seeking leadership development: The female administrators suggested that pursuing leadership development opportunities can be beneficial for aspiring leaders. Diko (2014) suggest that leadership training can equip individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to be effective leaders. These programs can foster motivation, creativity, teamwork, and problem-solving skills, ultimately building trust and confidence within teams. Belet (2016) supports this notion, suggesting that leadership development programs can enhance interpersonal and social competencies, leading to more effective leadership. Therefore, participation in leadership training programs can empower aspiring female leaders and provide them with the necessary tools for success.

4.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study explored the challenges faced by female school administrators and identified a variety of strategies they can employ to overcome these obstacles. Female school administrators face a multitude of challenges related to their gender. These challenges include gender stereotypes from both teachers and the community, a confidence gap that can hinder their advancement, and opposition, incivility, and lack of cooperation from some teachers, particularly males.

These challenges create a complex environment where female administrators must constantly navigate societal biases and prove their competence. Despite these obstacles, the research also demonstrates the resilience and determination of female leaders who achieve success through hard work and positive outcomes for their schools. By developing a clear vision, managing emotions effectively, demonstrating high work performance, and maintaining composure under pressure, female leaders can establish themselves as capable and deserving of their positions.

Furthermore, adhering to Ministry of Education guidelines, achieving strong academic results, and maintaining a firm stand in the face of intimidation are additional strategies that can bolster the effectiveness of female administrators. Building trust and confidence with teachers through open communication, fostering teamwork, and demonstrating competence are crucial for creating a supportive and productive school environment.

Finally, aspiring female leaders can enhance their readiness for leadership roles by building a strong track record, cultivating self-confidence, seeking leadership development opportunities, and actively pursuing opportunities for growth. By implementing these strategies, women can overcome existing challenges and pave the way for a more equitable future in educational leadership.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings, here are some recommendations to address the challenges faced by female school administrators and promote a more equitable and supportive environment. The Ministry of Education should provide

clear and consistent guidelines for educational leadership roles, promoting best practices and ensuring professionalism. Also, there is a need to offer programs and resources to support all leaders, including female administrators, in achieving strong academic results. Understanding the root causes of gender stereotypes and the confidence gap by delving deeper into the origins of these biases, targeted interventions can be developed to promote gender equality in educational leadership. Educational institutions also need to develop strategies for promoting gender equality. A further study should explore methods for creating a more supportive environment for female administrators, fostering collaboration among teachers, and dismantling existing power structures. cultural influences on gender dynamics is also critical in studies of this nature, thus there is a need to foster understanding of how cultural norms impact gender roles in educational leadership so that strategies can be tailored to specific contexts. By implementing these recommendations, educational institutions can create a more equitable and supportive environment for female school administrators, ultimately benefiting students and the educational system as a whole

Consent

As per international standards or university standards, Participants' written consent has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)

Option 1:

This paper represents the original work of the author. As this paper was a thesis and was bulky, Gemini AI was employed as an AI-powered language tool to assist with the editing and proofreading process. This includes, but is not limited to,

1. Grammar and spelling checks
2. Sentence structure refinement.
3. The author retains full responsibility for the content and ideas presented within this paper.

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