Challenges and Opportunities for Females in Educational Leadership: Perspectives from Departmental Heads in South African Schools

Buhle Stella Nhlumayo[1] & Sindile Amina Ngubane[1]
1) *University of South Africa,* South Africa

Abstract

Current research on educational leadership indicates that women in various school management levels face numerous challenges in fulfilling their duties. Departmental heads, occupying the third tier in school leadership hierarchies, often experience significant difficulties in their role as curriculum managers. This paper presents findings from a broader Women in Research-funded project titled *Women in Leadership and Management*, which examined the challenges faced by departmental heads in relation to their gender identity. Grounded in role congruity theory and utilizing phenomenology as the research approach, data were gathered from four departmental heads across selected schools in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Thematic analysis revealed several persistent challenges: neglect from senior leadership, limited support from various stakeholders, excessive workloads resulting in low morale, and ambiguity regarding their leadership responsibilities. These issues suggest systemic gaps in leadership structures that fail to provide the necessary guidance and resources for departmental heads. The study underscores the importance of establishing clear role definitions and expectations, informed by policy and consistently implemented by school management teams. Furthermore, it highlights the need for targeted support systems to empower female departmental heads, enabling them to thrive and contribute meaningfully within their leadership roles.

Keywords

Desafíos y Oportunidades para las Mujeres en el Liderazgo Educativo: Perspectivas de Jefas de Departamento en Escuelas Sudafricanas

Buhle Stella Nhlumayo[1] y Sindile Amina Ngubane[1]

1) *University of South Africa,* South Africa

Resumen

La literatura actual sobre liderazgo educativo señala que las mujeres en distintos niveles de gestión escolar enfrentan numerosos desafíos en el desempeño de sus funciones. Las jefas de departamento, ubicadas en el tercer nivel jerárquico del liderazgo escolar, suelen ser las más afectadas, especialmente en su rol como gestoras del currículo. Este artículo presenta los hallazgos de un proyecto más amplio financiado por Women in Research titulado *Mujeres en el Liderazgo*, cuyo objetivo fue examinar los desafíos que enfrentan estas líderes en función de su identidad de género. Basado en la teoría de la congruencia de roles y empleando la fenomenología como enfoque metodológico, el estudio recopiló datos de cuatro jefas de departamento en escuelas seleccionadas del área de Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, Sudáfrica. El análisis temático reveló varios desafíos clave: abandono por parte del liderazgo superior, escaso apoyo de los distintos actores, sobrecarga laboral que genera baja moral, y ambigüedad en las funciones de liderazgo. Las implicaciones prácticas destacan la necesidad de establecer roles y expectativas claramente definidos, guiados por la política institucional, así como brindar el apoyo necesario para que las jefas de departamento puedan desarrollarse y desempeñar eficazmente sus funciones de liderazgo.

Palabras clave

Liderazgo educativo, jefas de departamento, teoría de la congruencia de roles, desafíos en el liderazgo, oportunidades en el liderazgo

T he school management team (SMT) comprises the school principal, deputy principal (DP), and the departmental head (DH), where DHs are tasked with the complex responsibility of leading the process of learning and teaching in the school (Mthethwa, 2011). The National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement of 2012, indicates that a primary school has three phases (Foundation, Intermediate, and Senior phases), and in secondary schools, the phases are arranged according to the subject specialisations (Department of Basic Education (DBE), 2012). Based on their roles in their departments, Tlali and Matete (2021) assert that DHs are referred to as subject leaders, middle managers, curriculum coordinators, and or curriculum managers. DHs are also referred to as the middle managers in the school hierarchy and they act as a link between the teachers and the school principal (Bambi, 2013; Matete, 2018). These authors also highlight the pressure that DHs experience in executing their curriculum manager role in the school, as they must ensure that all teachers under their jurisdiction are inducted, mentored, monitored, evaluated, and provided with all the required tools to perform their duties. Depending on the number of learners in the school; while performing these duties, DHs are supposed to teach and supervise teaching and learning too.

According to the Personnel Administrative Measures of 1999, DHs are allocated 85% to 90% of teaching time (DBE, 1999). Among the many responsibilities of DHs, they are mainly responsible for teaching, extra and co-curricular, personnel responsibilities, and general/administrative duties which include managing school stock, textbooks, and equipment for the department, and budgeting for the department, among other duties. While being responsible and accountable for these functions and operational roles, DHs tend to be confronted with other challenges that threaten the peace and security of their job. Among these are the negative attitudes, incompetence, and absenteeism from the teaching and support staff. To this list, Suleman (2015) further adds the challenges of lack of involvement from parents, learners' unruly conduct, disappointing learners' academic performance, insufficient budget, and lack of resources and physical facilities. The magnitude of and dealing with these challenges becomes compounded when the DH in charge is a female. Moomba et al. (2023) report that teachers exhibit a high rate of permission-seeking conduct to stay away from work further adding absenteeism to the challenges faced by DHs. Moomba et al. (2023) further state that teachers tend to test the leadership skills of female departmental heads, thus compromising teaching and learning. A study conducted by Singh (2017) revealed that issues of gender discrimination and bias play a role in determining the level of functioning, success, and competence when the DH of a particular unit is female.

Contrary to the current setup where women's leadership seems to be perceived as a favour, not a right, the following policies and legislation demonstrate it to be a critical imperative to building inclusive and equitable societies. Universally, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979 as an international treaty to eradicate discrimination against women at all societal levels and promote gender equality. The CEDAW binds all member states to fully implement the pronunciations of the treaty to promote the full participation of women in leadership and critical decision-making. The Beijing Platform for Action, promulgated in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women, includes strategic objectives and actions for

advancing women's rights and gender equality. It also provides a framework for governments to promote women's leadership and participation in all spheres of life, including political and economic leadership. This policy agenda also applies to both the basic and higher educational sectors. The African region prides itself on the African Union's Gender Equality Strategy, which promotes gender equality and the empowerment of women across the African continent. It also, like the global policies, encourages African member states to commit to increasing women's participation in leadership roles in various sectors, including education. At the Southern African Development Community (SADC) regional level, there is a SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, which is aimed at achieving gender equality and empowerment of women in SADC member states. This protocol also binds SADC member states to commit, implement, and constantly monitor targets and measures to increase women's representation in leadership positions and decision-making roles. Locally, South Africa is lauded for developing robust frameworks and protocols for gender equality aimed at promoting gender equity and protecting the rights of women. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) grounds gender equality in the country through Section 9, which guarantees the right to equality and prohibits discrimination on various grounds, including gender. Section 10 also guarantees the right to dignity, which includes protection against gender-based violence and discrimination. Based on the constitutional provisions, the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (2000) seeks to promote equality and prohibit unfair discrimination through Section 6 which shuns unfair discrimination based on gender, among other grounds, and Section 13 which provides for the establishment of the Equality Court, which deals with cases of discrimination and promotes gender equality. One would expect that, based on this provision, educational entities would set up Equality Courts to safeguard the sustainable presence of women leaders. The Employment Equity Act of 1998 promotes equity in the workplace by advocating for equal opportunities and fair treatment. Section 6, particularly, prohibits unfair discrimination in employment on the grounds of gender and more. Equally, Section 15 necessitates that employers develop and carry out affirmative action measures to promote equity, including equitable gender representation. Other legislations that promote gender equality include the Labour Relations Act (1995), the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (1997), the Domestic Violence Act (1998), the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act (2007), and the South Africa's National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality (2000).

Having read and discussed the related literature from other researchers, we then wondered if the female leadership in this context had the same experiences, how they manifested, and how they dealt with or coped with them. This paper, therefore, presents and discusses the findings to the following question: What are the challenges faced by female departmental heads in their domain of leadership in selected KwaZulu-Natal schools? The authors then aim to use the experiences of these DHs to propose appropriate interventions towards making female leadership a safe space for career progression and contribution towards effective curriculum implementation.

Review of Related Literature

Some policies and frameworks advocate for female leadership at all levels of leadership. According to Ng'etich (2024), women leaders always experience gender discrimination and stereotypes that undermine their authority and leadership capabilities amongst both men and women. Omojemite, Cishe, and Zibongiwe (2024) point out that societal and cultural stereotypes regarding gender roles tend to affect career progression among women. Grace and Lumadi (2023) postulate that due to institutional and structural barriers, women experience limitations in access to resources, professional development, and decision-making platforms. Titi Amayah and Haque (2017) and Bailey-Morrissey and Race (2019) also highlight inadequate access to supportive management structures as another barrier that women leaders face. Beyene et al. (2019) point out that many women leaders experience gender-based violence and harassment, which affects their effective leadership and mental wellbeing. As much as most researchers highlight that, due to their roles in family nurturing, women tend to be affected by work-life imbalance. Nehemia and Lenkoe (2023) postulate that women leaders' professional growth and job wellness are affected by having a large share of family responsibilities.

Educational management scholars indicate a myriad of opportunities that may arise out of negative experiences. For example, Banda (2022) argues that women need to familiarise themselves with the current policies and legislative provisions that promote new opportunities for women in educational leadership. This necessitates constant evaluation and monitoring of policy implementation through the introduction of quotas and affirmative action to improve women's representation of diverse groups of women as leaders. Wanjiku et al. (2020) indicate that due to existing policies and legislation, there has been an increase in women's leadership training programs, mentorship programs, and scholarship opportunities. Networking and advocacy are other developmental opportunities that Wanjiku et al. (2020) argue enable women leaders to share best practices, support each other, and influence policy changes. Networking events allow women to be recognised and visible amongst their peers and beyond. As most research is not done for the sake of it, but to use evidence to influence practice, Moyo (2022) highlights the change in attitudes and increasing societal acceptance and support for women leaders, hence nurturing a more inclusive educational setting.

In the context of South Africa, there have been headways in educational leadership, and different scholars have performed research to follow the trends. Harber & Harber (2021) highlighted the discriminatory attitudes that make most people question the leadership capabilities of women leaders. Fleisch and Schöer (2024) and Makoelle, Makhalemele and du Plessis (2021) also agree that the stereotype that only men make good leaders has a negative effect on women's career progression. Like the case of researchers from the SADC context, Akinola and Naidoo (2024) indicate that women leaders' career advancement is always delayed due to having to strike the work-life balance and the lack of supportive policies that are family-oriented, women leaders hardly maximise their job performance. Moodly and Toni (2019) are also of the view that institutional barriers lead to limited access to developmental opportunities like meaningful and ongoing context-based mentorship and networking platforms. Research by Elboj-Saso et al (2022) also reveals that women leaders refrain from taking up leadership

positions because of violence and harassment. Those already in leadership tend to limit their ideas and execution to avoid general hostility from fellow managers and colleagues.

Like with the SADC context, Govender (2022) indicates that policy and legislative support, meaningful networking (Jansen & du Plessis, 2023), enabling educational programs and initiatives (Mabasa, Morukhu & Maluka, 2024), and positive societal attitudes (Mutekwe & Khumalo, 2023) are the opportunities that can enhance effective women leadership. As the above literature demonstrates, existing studies have not delved deeper into what affects women leaders in KwaZulu-Natal. This paper accounts for the status quo after the COVID-19 pandemic, when approaches to leadership have been influenced by the new normal.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is framed by the role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders by Eagly and Karau (2002). This theory argues that this perceived incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles leads to two forms of prejudice: a) that males are better leaders than females, and b) that a female leader's authority is generally undermined, compared to that of their male counterparts. The theory further argues that female leaders, at all levels, have difficulty in achieving success in their leadership roles. DHs are middle managers who are directly involved with the functioning of their departments, and they suffer at the hands of the teachers based on their gender identity. There is perceived friction when the DH is a female who is tasked with managing a specific unit.

Stereotypically, males are credited with agentic characteristics, depicting them as strong, bold, influential, sovereign, autonomous, self-assured, and inclined to act as leaders. Stereotypes regarding females depend on social characteristics representing them as caring, accommodating, gentle, understanding, nurturing, sensitive, and emotional (Koburtay et al., 2019). Generally, social traits are ascribed to females by society; however, females are rated less agentic by males than by females (Hentschel et al., 2019). Role congruity theory argues that agentic qualities are compatible with the qualities of successful leaders, while social characteristics are unrelated to the attributes of successful leaders. Consequently, males are presumed to be more qualified for leadership than females (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Methodology

We employed an interpretive qualitative paradigm using phenomenology as a mode of inquiry. Operational and functional roles in leadership and management are the lived experiences of the women departmental heads. Female departmental heads are confronted with a constant struggle to prove their worth, fight to perform their duties, and deliver on their responsibilities, as they must constantly demonstrate to their line managers and their subordinates that they are equal to the task. Data were generated through in-person semi-structured interviews with the three female departmental heads from the same education circuit. It is during these interviews that

participants described the challenges that were their lived experiences. Participants were able to describe the exact experience such that the researcher could carefully draw out the essence of what was described (Stolz, 2023). Semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to probe and the participants to answer competently, unreservedly, and proficiently to the interview questions. To observe ethical issues, we obtained ethical clearance from our institution and applied for and obtained permission from the school principals as gatekeepers. Purposive sampling was used to select the three DHs based on their positions in the management hierarchy of the school, and they were the appropriate participants to answer the research question. Guided by Braun and Clarke (2006), we employed thematic analysis to analyse the data. Thematic analysis enabled us to identify patterns, similarities, and any interconnection between the responses of participants. Denzin (2012) defines data triangulation as the use of data from different participants from different research sites, and as we employed member-checking, we were able to solicit feedback from participants regarding the data we generated.

Table 1
Profile of the Research Participants and Research Sites

Participants and schools	Number of learners in the school	Qualifications	Age	Number of years as a teacher	Number of years as Departmental Head
DH 1 School 1	345	M.Ed.	37	15	4
DH 2 School 2	456	B.Ed. Hons	40	17	7
DH 3 School 3	569	M.Ed.	47	22	8
DH4 School 4	1048	BA, PGCE	38	16	8

Keys. M.Ed. – Master of Education, B.Ed. Hons – Bachelor of Education Honours, BA – Bachelor of Arts, PGCE – Postgraduate Certificate in Education

Table 1 provides a brief demographic outlook of the participants and their research sites. Four purposively selected primary which had female departmental heads were located in one education district. We used the following pseudonyms to identify participants in this paper. Departmental Head 1 to Departmental Head 4: DH1 – DH4 School 1 to School 4: S1 to S4

Findings

The findings are presented in the section below, using the participants' verbatim quotes. The themes from the data include lack of support from different stakeholders, work overload, and role ambiguity in leadership functions. These are discussed in the following section.

Lack of Support from Different Stakeholders

When asked about the level of support that they receive from stakeholders, participants indicated that there was a total lack of institutional and collegial support. Given the amount of work that DHs are expected to perform, it would be generally fair to assume that there is a need for the support they require to perform maximally. DH1 stated that there was a lack of support from fellow females. She said:

"The problem is that the females do not support the other females. That's the problem right now. Other female colleagues just work towards your downfall and cannot wait to see you fail in your position. So, if we can support each other as females, we can make a lot of difference". DH1

As part of the school management team, other external stakeholders have a responsibility to support DHs in the execution of their duties; however, according to DH3, this is not always the case. She said:

"Our biggest challenge is one of the teacher unions that is holding a huge number of teachers. In my former school, I was an Acting Departmental Head. They gave me high hopes for the position, and I had proven myself, but they ended up giving it to someone who we found out later that she paid for it". DH3

"Even the school governing body does not care how diligent you are, and how hard you have worked, they will give the position to the next male in line. It is sad. Also, in the performance of your duties, there is just no support". DH2

"There is a lack of balance in terms of gender and race. Positions are given to males, and it goes a step further to say white males are at a greater advantage. With us, if you happen to get the position, you are all on your own because even the school principal will leave you to do everything". DH4

Being a DH means that one is tasked with managing and leading a unit or department in the school while being fully responsible for their subject allotment. This puts pressure on how they perform their job, and they require support from their colleagues, the school principal, the school governing body, and other external stakeholders. Female DHs tend to suffer in the performance of their duties owing to their gender identity. The data reveals that female DHs are not supported in the performance of their duties, and this has resulted in occupational stress, which may lead to lower productivity, employee burnout, and health-related problems.

Work Overload

In response to the question about work-related challenges that participants were facing, the emerging theme was being overloaded with work. Participants indicated that they performed duties outside of their jurisdiction according to the Personnel Administrative Measures of 1999 (DBE, 1999), which amounted to work overload, as this was above what they were supposed to do as DHs. This is what DH1 said: "We have the PAM document that details what each person in the hierarchy is supposed to do, and the job description, but I don't think my principal knows that I know about the PAM document". DH1

DH2, DH3, and DH4 added that the work overload challenge becomes worse when you are a female, this is what they shared: "It becomes worse if you are a female DH because the principal knows that you can multitask and just throws everything at you, for me it is not fair and it takes a toll on my health". DH2

> "What we normally do as female DHs, male DHs cannot take it. They stick to the job description in the PAM document and the principals, I have a feeling that principals are a bit scared of male DHs and they go easy on them". DH3

> "I am a subject teacher, I manage the department, I deputise for the principal, and I am responsible for parent involvement, sick and misbehaving learners, and absent teachers. One day is just not enough and I find myself taking work home. I am just overloaded with work". DH4

> Data reveals that female DHs face the challenge of being overloaded with work because of their gender identity. Gendered expectations, societal norms, and organizational structures often contribute to the disproportionate burden on females in different levels of leadership. When overloaded with work, these female DHs experience burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and lower effectiveness in their roles, all of which can negatively affect both individual and school effectiveness.

Role Ambiguity

Emerging from the data, participants revealed that there is a phenomenon of role ambiguity regarding their duties as functions within the school leadership hierarchy. Role ambiguity means that DHs find themselves transgressing into others' functions or being given duties that belong to others within the school management team.

> "Even when the principal, is around, teachers report to me when they are absent. However, my understanding is that they should report to the principal, and then he informs me so that I can arrange the replacement, but I do not need to know the teachers' secrets and whereabouts, I only need to see them in class, teaching". DH1

"I have the same challenge, such that teachers find themselves doing double reporting. Another problem is that in my school, we have a male deputy principal who is just doing nothing and now I must do my job and his job too".DH2

"As I said earlier, we have the PAM document that outlines the duties of each member of staff, but I find myself forced to do what I am not supposed to do. The other DH, who is a male, flatly refuses to do what is not in his job description. Yes, sometimes when you are a female, the school leadership just tosses you around". DH3

"I also experience the same challenges, for me as the only DH in the school, I am responsible for all phases and to say I do more work than the principal is an understatement. He is always away and the only thing he does is sign documents, otherwise, I head the whole school". DH4

Female DHs may already face heightened scrutiny in traditionally male-dominated sectors. However, when role ambiguity is present, these female leaders might experience increased stress because they must navigate not only the ambiguity in their roles but also the additional pressure to prove themselves as competent leaders. Role ambiguity leads to uncertainty as female DHs juggle several functions in the school. This uncertainty about role responsibilities can impair decision-making abilities, as female Department Heads might hesitate to make choices without clear guidelines or expectations, which can lead to inefficiencies and delays, negatively impacting job performance.

Discussion of the Findings

The data findings reveal that female Departmental Heads (DHs) are confronted with a plethora of challenges ranging from their welfare on the job to their functional roles. The lack of support for female DHs is an indication of the ingrained and deep-rooted gender biases and prejudices against women. From the data, it can be gathered that male figures in these positions do not suffer the same fate. This lack of support for female DHs can be attributed to the traditional relegation and stereotyping of women to non-leadership positions (Nhlumayo & Nkosi, 2024). Like most managers, some school principals would choose male employees over female employees as they seem to situate female employees as subordinates regardless of their positional power in the leadership hierarchy. This leads to female DHs making sacrifices for professional acceptance, which ultimately leads to emotional fatigue and stress. Female DHs are in leadership positions, and the challenges they encounter are solely based on their gender, affecting their abilities to lead effectively. Without being supported, the leadership of female DHs becomes subjected to negative perceptions portraying them as inefficient in their leadership. Lack of support also refers to a lack of leadership development for female DHs, which principals are supposed to provide. Benan and Olca (2020) argue that this tendency to afford female leaders fewer leadership development opportunities than male leaders results in them being perceived as incapable leaders.

Work overload tests career resilience, and career resilience leads to less passion for work, which can ultimately lead to compromised work performance. Data reveals that female DHs are overloaded with work as compared to their male counterparts. This work overload to which female DHs are subjected impacts their life, psychology, work-life balance, and their job performance. Female DHs do not seem to have a structure where they can report issues of work overload and receive organisational support. Therefore, they end up using resilience and what De Clercq and Pereira (2024) refer to as organisational forgiveness as a coping strategy. To circumvent a situation where employees' self-esteem is tarnished in the face of work overload, and to mitigate miserable job feelings, managers must create an atmosphere where employees can express their frustrations about heavy workloads without fear of being victimised, and where possible solutions can be shared.

Findings further revealed that role ambiguity affects female DHs' job performance as they end up overstepping others' roles and functions. Role ambiguity, which occurs when individuals are unclear about their job responsibilities, expectations, or performance criteria, can significantly affect job performance, particularly for female DHs. Data reveals that role ambiguity can have more pronounced negative effects on females in leadership positions due to various social, organizational, and gender-specific factors. role ambiguity can have a particularly detrimental effect on female DHs by increasing stress, lowering confidence, and impeding their ability to lead effectively. By providing clear job descriptions, supportive networks, and fostering a culture of open communication, through the leadership of their principals, schools can mitigate these negative impacts and enable their female DHs to thrive in their leadership domains.

Implications for Practice and Conclusion

This paper proposes that schools should work to ensure that the roles and responsibilities of female department heads (DHs) (and all leaders) are clearly defined. Having well-articulated job descriptions and expectations can help reduce ambiguity and unnecessary work overload. School principals have a responsibility to conduct regular check-ins with all personnel, review their workloads, and clarify priorities so that they help female DHs manage their responsibilities more effectively. This paper further advocates for mentorship programs that can help female DHs navigate work overload by providing them with guidance and emotional support. Furthermore, school principals should provide professional development with opportunities for female DHs to connect with other female leaders or peer groups so they can share strategies and coping mechanisms regarding the challenges they face.

Acknowledgments

References

Akinola, D. A., & Naidoo, P. (2024). Breaking the glass ceiling: an examination of gendered barriers in school leadership progression in South Africa. *Cogent Social Sciences*, *10*(1), 2395342. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2024.2395342

Bailey-Morrissey, C., & Race, R. (2019). The lived experiences of black women leaders: Barriers to progression. *Race, Education and Educational Leadership in England: An Integrated Analysis*, 121-42. https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350068629.ch-006

Bambi, A. (2013). *The Role of Heads of Departments as Institutional Leaders in Secondary Schools: Implication for Teaching and Learning*. Masters Dissertation. University of Johannesburg.

Banda, S. A. (2022). *The study on effective implementation of school leadership improvement program in selected schools of Lusaka district.* Masters Dissertation. The University of Zambia.

Basic Conditions of Employment Act (Act No. 75 of 1997). (1997). Government Gazette. (No. 18491) https://www.gov.za/documents/basic-conditions-employment-act

Benan, K. Y., & Olca, S. D. (2020). Gender-based tokenism: Qualitative research on female-dominated and male-dominated professions. *Istanbul Management Journal, 88*, 85-125. https://dx.doi.org/10.26650/imj.2020.88.0004

Beyene, A. S., Chojenta, C., Roba, H. S., Melka, A. S., & Loxton, D. (2019). Gender-based violence among female youths in educational institutions of Sub-Saharan Africa: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Systematic Reviews*, *8*, 1-14. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s13643-019-0969-9

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996). (1996). https://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/constitution/

Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act (Act No. 32 of 2007). (2007). https://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/acts/2007-032.pdf

De Clercq, D., & Pereira, R. (2025). How overloaded employees can use resilience and forgiveness resources to overcome dissatisfaction and maintain their knowledge-sharing efforts. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, *33*(2), 390-415.. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOA-10-2023-4056

Denzin, N. K. (2012). Triangulation 2.0. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, *6*(2), 80-88. https://doi.org/10.1177/1558689812437186

Department of Education. (1999). *Personnel Administrative Measures of 1999*. Government Printer.

Department of Basic Education. (2012). *National Policy Pertaining to the Programme and Promotion Requirements of the National Curriculum Statement of 2012*. Government Printer.

Domestic Violence Act. (1998). (Act No. 116 of 1998). https://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/acts/1998-116.pdf

Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders. *Psychological Review, 109*(3), 573–598. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.109.3.573

Elboj-Saso, C., Iñiguez-Berrozpe, T., & Valero-Errazu, D. (2022). Relations with the educational community and transformative beliefs against gender-based violence as preventive factors of sexual violence in secondary education. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *37*(1-2), 578-601. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260520913642

Fleisch & Schöer (2024), B., & Schöer, V. (2024). The effects of teaching assistants on letter knowledge of foundation phase students in South Africa: Findings from an exploratory trial. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*, *7*, 100383. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2024.100383

Govender, S. D. (2022). *The implementation of gender equality policies in achieving sustainable development goal 5 in the Sedibeng District Municipality* Doctoral dissertation. North-West University, South Africa. https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0110-4023

Grace, Z. M., & Lumadi, R. I. (2023). Challenges of women leaders in South African schools: Towards a resolution. *African Journal of Gender, Society & Development*, *12*(1), 107. https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-aa_jgida1_v12_n1_a6

Harber, C., & Harber, C. (2021). Everyday Schooling: Preserving the Status Quo or Worse? *Post-Covid Schooling: Future Alternatives to the Global Normal*, 1-35. https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-87824-5_1

Hentschel, T., Heilman, M. E., & Peus, C. V. (2019). The multiple dimensions of gender stereotypes: A current look at men's and women's characterizations of others and themselves. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *10*, 11. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00011

Jansen, C., & du Plessis, A. (2023). The role of deputy principals: Perspectives of South African primary school principals and their deputies. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *51*(1), 157-175. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143220975764

Koburtay, T., Syed, J., & Haloub, R. (2019). Congruity between the female gender role and the leader role: A literature review. *European Business Review*, *31*(6), 831-848. https://doi.org/10.1108/EBR-05-2018-0095

Labour Relations Act (Act No. 66 of 1995). https://www.gov.za/documents/labour-relations-act

Mabasa, F., Morukhu, D., & Maluka, R. H. (2024). The impact of talent leadership on attracting and retaining high-value professors at historically disadvantaged higher education institutions in South Africa. *Journal of Business and Management Review*, *5*(2), 151-161. https://doi.org/10.47153/jbmr52.9152024

Makoelle, T. M., Makhalemele, T., & du Plessis, P. (2021). *School Leadership for Democratic Education in South Africa*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003121367

Matete, N. E. (2018). *Challenges Faced by Heads of Departments in Maseru School*. Masters Dissertation. National University of Lesotho, Roma. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2020.1851672

Moodly, A. L., & Toni, N. (2019). Do institutional cultures serve as impediments for women's advancement towards leadership in South African higher education?. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, *33*(3), 176-191. https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC-18b0bad4f8

Moomba, I., Mulubale, S., Mundando, J., Munkoyo, D. N., & Kaumba, C. (2023). Uncovering administration challenges faced by female social sciences heads of department in selected secondary schools of Lusaka Urban District in Zambia. *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies, 43*(4), 30-39. http://dspace.unza.zm/handle/123456789/7981

Moyo, Z. (2022). Confronting Gender Inequalities in Education Leadership: A Case of Zimbabwe. *Gender Questions*, *10*(1). https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-genderq-v10-n1-a6

Mthethwa, F. G. (2011). *Challenges facing heads of departments in rural schools*. Doctoral dissertation. University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Mutekwe, E., & Khumalo, P. N. (2023). Prejudice against female instructional leaders in South Africa's rural secondary schools. *Contextualising Rural Education in South African Schools*, *3*, 202. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004547025_013

Nehemia, N. M., & Lenkoe, N. M. (2023). The impact of South African culture on the work-life balance of women in leadership positions. *International Journal of Innovative Research and Scientific Studies*, *6*(2), 212-226. https://doi.org/10.53894/ijirss.v6i2.1218

Ng'etich, B. K. (2024). An analysis of the roles played by the Kenyan government and the faith-based organizations in curbing gender disparity in public primary schools in Central Pokot Sub-County, Kenya. *Journal of African Interdisciplinary Studies*, *8*(5), 36-56.

Nhlumayo, B. S., & Nkosi, N. (2024). Are you the first lady? A demand for resilient leadership practices for women leading selected South African rural primary schools. *Research in Educational Policy and Management*, *6*(2), 104-116. https://doi.org/10.46303/repam.2024.25

Omojemite, M. D., Cishe, E. N., & Zibongiwe, M. (2024). Gender stereotyping and social norms: Exploring theoretical perspectives and educational implications. *Research in Social Sciences and Technology*, *9*(3), 77-92. https://doi.org/10.46303/ressat.2024.48

Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (Act No. 4 of 2000). https://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/acts/2000-004.pdf

Singh, S. (2017). Gender, conflict and security: Perspectives from South Asia. *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, *4*(2), 149-157. https://doi.org/10.1177/2347797017710560

South Africa's National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality (2000). https://www.gov.za/documents/other/womens-empowerment-and-gender-equality-south-africas-national-policy-framework-01

Stolz, S. A. (2023). The practice of phenomenology in educational research. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *55*(7), 822-834. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2022.2138745

Suleman, Q., & Pakhtunkhwa, K. (2015). Managerial challenges faced by fresh directly appointed secondary school heads in Kohat Division, Pakistan. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, *5*(5), 91-104. https://d1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net

Titi Amayah, A., & Haque, M. D. (2017). Experiences and challenges of women leaders in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Africa Journal of Management, 3*(1), 99-127. https://doi.org/10.1080/23322373.2017.1278663

Tlali, T., & Matete, N. (2021). The challenges faced by heads of departments in selected Lesotho high schools. *School Leadership & Management*, *41*(3), 194-210. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2020.1851672

Wanjiku, S. M., Karobia, A. W., & Njeru, J. K. (2020). Women in the education sector: Monitoring and evaluation of women empowerment and educational leadership. *International Journal of Education and Learning Systems*, *5*. http://iaras.org/iaras/journals/ijels