

**CHALLENGES FACED BY FEMALES OCCUPYING LEADERSHIP POSITION
AT SELECTED SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS,
SOUTH AFRICA**

BY

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DECLARATION

I, Tshipani Rosina Arlucia, student number 15018015, affirm that this thesis submitted to the University of Venda for a Master of Commerce degree is my work and has not earlier been submitted to any institution of higher learning. All sources used in this study are acknowledged in the text and a list of references is provided.

Signature:



Date: 28 March 2021

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my late mother **Mrs Maemu Tshipani Mavhina**, my pastor **Mrs. Violet Mathobo**, and my sister, I would not have made it without their support. **Mr Sibeli Tshitereke** who really encouraged me not to give up when things were tough. Lastly my friend **Mr. Avhantodi Jonathan Kwindi** you are my pillar of support and inspiration and you will always be.

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Abstract

Women are often discriminated in many environments including the workplace and home front. Women in leadership positions are not an exception. In South Africa, the problem can be traced back to the Apartheid era. Since the dawn of democracy in 1994, South African government enacted legislation and policies that redress colonial imbalances by ensuring fair treatment and participation of females in the economy and leadership positions. Despite these provisions, more than 26 years into democracy, women are still discriminated and deprived of opportunities such as leadership positions in higher education institutions. Hence, this study investigated challenges faced by female leaders in institutions of higher education in South Africa. The study employed a qualitative approach, where data was collected using interviews from 20 purposively selected respondents from two selected higher education institutions in South Africa. Thematic analysis was used to analyse data. Gender stereotyping, gender equity, discrimination, inadequate mentoring, training, safety, and security concerns are major challenges facing women in higher education institutions' leadership positions. Work-life balance also posed a major challenge given gender assigned roles. It is, therefore, recommended that enhancing more mentorship programs for women in leadership will fight discrimination and increase the number of women in leadership positions.

Keywords: Challenges; Gender Stereotype; Higher Education Institutions; Leadership; Leaders.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction and background to the study

Leadership composition in higher learning institutions is generally described as “masculine” across the world (Zhao & Jones, 2017). It reflects an environment where majority of women struggle to reach top management levels (Mabokela & Mlambo, 2017). Female leadership is a topical issue globally (Sebola, 2015). The underrepresentation of women in executive positions contrasts with their large visibility in lower ranks. Men still dominate top management positions in governance and other professions over time, this culminated in sidelining women (Williams, 2014). Moodly and Toni, (2019) noted that despite the appointments of female Vice-Chancellors (Nelson Mandela University in 2017 and the University of Cape Town in the year 2018) since 2015, women filled up four out of twenty vice-chancellor vacancies in South Africa (Macupe, 2020).

Historically, it is believed that men are better leaders when compared to women, hence leadership has inevitably carried the notion of masculinity (Sadie, 2005). Men are socialized as leaders, while women are taught to submit to men in general (Mwando, Mamimine, Kanokanga, & Chamutingiza, 2014) There is evidence of social exclusion in an overarching analyses of academia in South Africa (Pifer, 2018). According to David (2016), academia perpetuate social inequalities, and slowly respond to change, thus, fostering inequality between males and females. These gender imbalances have become evident even in economics, science, and research leadership positions, especially at corporate management levels (Ernst & Young, 2017). Leadership is defined as the capacity to inspire a group of people towards the achievement of predetermined organisational goals (Robbins & Judge, 2008).

It occurs either formal or informal and can be used by leaders and non-leaders. As stated by Vender (2014), leaders demonstrate talent, drive, will-power, applied wisdom, allegiance, ethical behavior, emotional intelligence, veracity, self-awareness, and resilience. Leadership is also defined as a process of social persuasion where the leader influences people to voluntarily participate in meeting organisational goals. It is, therefore, crucial for leaders know the complexities of the dynamic global environment (Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2014).

Leaders are required to understand leadership better, than putting emphasis on skills and traits used to achieve these responsibilities. There are nine functions of leadership including serving as the public face of an organisation, communicating the vision and mission of an organisation and build culture, strategizing and deciding what to focus on, select and build up the right people and establishing a decision-making process (Heilman, 2012). Effective leaders always ask survival questions considering the fast-changing environment. A successful leader understands and successfully deals with internal and external social changes for the survival of the organisation. It is, therefore, important that leaders deeply understand the concept of leadership. This includes learning how to deal with chaos that impedes leaders to move forward, achieve, and develop in and outside the organisation. Learning about leadership has become prominent, with many players offering educational and leadership training programs (Haber & Komives, 2009).

Women in higher education institutions are faced with many challenges; this may be because women's access to leadership is relatively recent (Redmond, Gutke, Galligan, Howard & Newman, 2016). The environment of female leadership positions improved from the 1990s to date. The introduction of leadership and diversity training programs increased and attracted people's attention (Leatherwood & Williams, 2008). According to Helgesen (2012), several female characteristics make good leaders. Socially, it is believed that women are sensitive and emotional. As such, they cannot handle leadership positions. Commission on Gender Equality (2005), argues that these beliefs are embedded in the common stereotypical ideas that inform perceptions about women's capabilities to do well in leadership positions. This is perpetuated despite that, female leaders value relations with subordinates and are successful in using direct communication. Furthermore, female leaders value the benefits offered by a diverse workforce and hardly ever group their work, which benefits the ability to have a clear insight into the work environment (Redmond, Gutke, Galligan, Howard & Newman, 2016). Chin (2007), alleged that, female leaders seldom use hierarch in their management styles, and rather prefer to lead from the center of the organisation. Helgesen (2012) adds that such, leaders see a big picture, hence realize steps that need to be followed to achieve organisational goals. Furthermore, (Ackerman, Folta, Nelson & Seguin, 2012) argue that female leaders are generally good communicators, and are empathic, humble, patient, and strong.

Prigent (2011), adds that, in comparison to men, female leaders see power differently, and have a different attitude to power. This is why Nanton (2015), recommends that female leaders must work on leadership culture first, as the formal goals of an institution tend to be undermined by irrational social forces, as noted by Selznick, (1948). Such leaders see beyond the limitations of routine tasks and standardized settings (Budrina, 2012). Literature shows that there are variations and similarities in the way men and women lead (Coleman, 2004; Grogan & Brummer, 2005). Pounder & Coleman (2002) found that men were traditionally identified as rational, confident analytical, and goal-oriented whereas, women are generally sensitive, emotional, cooperative, and intuitive.

Due to a broader understanding of leadership dynamics, studies attempted to establish the distinction between the male and female leadership styles (Mitroussi & Mitroussi, 2009). The scarcity of female leaders rendered them almost invisible and their different ways of leading are probably taken for granted (Hong, 2018). Weyer (2007) states that there are norms that guide performance tasks of leaders. Gillet-Karam (2009) points out that if gender assigned roles influence behavior, leadership roles will likely modify this relationship. Despite the debate on gender and leadership, there are growing interests in research on female leadership styles. Studies on female leadership styles conclude that women are better leaders in relationship teaching, learning, and community building (Coleman, 2003).

Women lead more flexibly, intuitively, and holistically as noted by Lyman (2009). Coleman (2003), argued that women embrace superior leadership styles. A study by Al-Shaddi (2010), found that female leadership challenges are evolving from their abilities and nature. Kindness, and the use of emotional methods without considering personality strength, characterize female leadership (White, 2011). The debate on female leadership in leadership research requires more attention because it does not fully reflect the demographics in South Africa or the demographics of higher learning institutions. (Macupe, 2020). It is even more interesting for feminist researchers who are inclined to believe that women do indeed have different leadership capabilities than men (Rhode, 2017).

Male leadership culture in South Africa is performance-oriented, and focuses more on competing, winning, dominating, controlling, and directing, whereas, female leaders emphasize teamwork, sensitivity, empowerment, self-disclosure, and indirect forms of directing and controlling (Robins, 2001). There are different leadership styles distinguished by different scholars (Franzen, 2005; Garcia-Morales, 2008; Lyman, 2009; Stelter, 2002). The female approach to leadership exhibits higher levels of transformational leadership behavior (Eagly, 2003). Zulu (2011), states that female leadership is traditionally associated with transformational, collaborative, and participatory leadership styles. Furthermore, literature shows that women prefer collaboration, accessible, caring, and supportive (Coleman 2005; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2009).

Female leaders in higher education institutions require an empathetic collaboration process among all the parties involved. In addition to achieving broad institutional objectives, female leadership and its feminine nature is faced with negative beliefs emanating from gender stereotypes (Al-Shaddi, 2010). This study focuses on challenges faced by female leaders in higher education institutions. The researcher discussed three leadership styles which are traditionally associated with female leadership, which are transformational, transactional and democratic leadership styles. Transformational leadership influences the attitudes and expectations of employees from the organisation. This helps members to develop a common mentality on how to accomplish the organisational goals. Transformational leaders encourage others to perform beyond expectation and this is crucial for the transformation of higher education institutions in South Africa (Ndlovu *et al.*, 2018).

According to Garcia-Morales *et al* (2008), transformational leadership style is directly related to performance compared to transactional leadership. This approach to leadership empowers others and is an effective tool for women in educational leadership because it advocates for more women who are already in leadership and those who aspire to be leaders. Female leaders are more empathetic and good listeners and tend to use this skill to cultivate self-interest to individual employees. Holck *et al.*, (2016) indicate that women show more respect for human dignity and exhibiting qualities in empowering leadership.

Muzvidziwa (2013), argued that although transformational leadership is challenged for being gender insensitive in some instances, communication skills on gendered analysis help to understand that female leader may share information, train, and sensitize subordinates on gender issues. The transactional leadership style is result-oriented. This style exists within the established organisational structure and in this case, success is measured based on organization's system of rewards and penalties (Johnson *et al.*, 2016). Transactional leaders depend on authority given to an individual based on the organisation's hierarchy and delegated authority. Such leaders are more concerned with maintaining a routine, through managing individual performance and facilitating group performance using the reward system (Ndlovu *et al.*, 2018).

Transformational and transactional leadership styles are antagonistic on underlying management and motivational theories. Thompson (2019), illustrates that a transactional leader focuses on the organisation, supervising employees, and ensuring group performance, while a transformational leader focuses on the change that must occur within the organisation. Democratic leadership style refers to a participative leadership style, this is because decision making under a participative leadership style involves employees as part and parcel of the process. A democratic leader keeps his or her employees updated about the affairs of the organisation that affect their work. Furthermore, such leaders involve employees in decision making and problem-solving. In this scenario, a leader plays the role of a teacher who has the final say, after gathering enough information from employees before decision making (Khan *et al.*, 2015).

Democratic leadership is guided by a set of key organisational principles such as ensuring that employees adhere to the purpose and goals of the organisation and subordinates assume more responsibilities. Drugus & Landloy (2014), states that a democratic leader treats subordinates with respect and has total confidence in them, hence, the decision-making process is highly decentralized based on mutual respect. It is important to acknowledge the diversity of leadership styles with varying advantages and disadvantages. Each leadership style is situational, for instance, the democratic leadership style is preferred for highly qualified and morally developed people. On the other hand, underdeveloped people require an autocratic style (Redmond *et al.*, 2016). It is a callous mistake for a leader to implement a single style in all situations presented before him/her.

However, in the information age, modern world people are conscious and aware, which naturally gravitate towards the democratic leadership style. Well qualified and influential characters have a chance to handle their followers better, through the application of any leadership style (Khan *et al.*, 2015). Female leaders are inclined to the transformational leadership style as it is in synch with their feminine values of nurturing and care. Literature shows female leaders employ participative and collaborative leadership styles (Coleman, 2003; Franzen, 2005; Lyman, 2009). Female leaders encourage inclusiveness and use collaborative decision making when adopting this style (Rosener, 2011). Coleman (2003), points out that exposure to the field of education influences leaders to be more democratic and participative. Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt (2001), observed that attitudinal bias against female leaders which emanates from gender stereotypes and many leadership roles that render democratic and participative styles are more favorable to women.

1.2 Problem statement

Researchers identified many leadership challenges faced by females (Kiamba & Wagadu, 2008; Thuyle, 2011; White, 2012; Wilkinson, 2009). Transformation in South African higher education institutions saw women being elevated into leadership positions since the dawn of democracy (South African History, 2015). Regardless of successes in empowering females, female leaders are still faced with structural hindrances in the workplace; they are not afforded equal opportunities against their male counterparts in leadership positions in higher education institutions. This is evidenced by the existence of females as chancellors in South African institutions of higher learning (South African History, 2015).

There is noncompliance in regard to the legislative framework introduced by the government to redress the gender inequality imbalances from the apartheid era. There is lack of support for female leaders which emanate from stereotypes which state that women are followers, not leaders. As a result, Naidoo (2013), argues that they are undermined and treated unequally at their workplace. Women in leadership positions has attracted huge interest among scholars (Oakley, 2000; Powel & Graves, 2003; Adler & Izraeli, 2003).

Though there is a consensus that female leaders are faced with several challenges due to their gender, there has been no consensus on the nature of these challenges; that is whether they are general and apply to all women irrespective of sector or context. There is a pattern that suggests that female leaders face significant challenges in their careers which make their leadership less successful when compared to male leadership (Davidson & Burke, 2004). Roth, Purvis, and Bobko (2012), stated that women have a higher altitude for leadership performance than men who have lower reactions on vision and strategy. This subject, therefore, remains a fertile study area especially in developing countries such as South Africa, which is in quest of implementing policies from its constitution meant to redress the apartheid imbalances and subsequently deal with challenges faced by female leaders.

A review of the literature in the background of the study shows that most studies on challenges affecting female leaders were conducted outside South Africa and largely in the context of developed countries. Johnson and Thomas (2012), studied female leaders in higher education institutions in South Africa and found that women are considered outsiders and are often invisible and voiceless within their academic environments. This study, therefore, investigated whether challenges faced by other female leaders globally apply to the South African higher education institutions settings.

1.3 Study objectives

The study investigated challenges faced by South African female leaders in higher education institutions.

1.3.1 Specific objectives

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To identify the challenges faced by female leaders in South African higher education institutions.
2. To establish whether challenges faced by female leaders in other countries can be compared to the South African higher education settings.

3. To determine the strategies which could be used to address challenges faced by female leaders to help them overcome and succeed as leaders in higher education institutions.

1.4 Research questions

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. What are the challenges faced by female leaders in higher education institutions?
2. Are female leaders in South Africa experiencing the same challenges as those experienced by women leaders in other countries?
3. What strategies can be used to address the challenges faced by female leaders within higher education institutions?

1.5 Significance of the study

The results of the study could help ease the challenges faced by female leaders in higher education institutions through increasing awareness and bringing the predominant challenges affecting female leaders to the fore. Understanding these challenges may help higher education institutions on how best to address them, so that other female leaders who will occupy leadership positions would not face the same challenges. It may also provide a platform for women in leadership to provide possible solutions to the challenges they face in executing their leadership responsibilities.

1.6 Definitions of key terms

1.6.1 Leadership is a transactional event that occurs between the leader and the followers, it is an interactive event and is concerned with how the affects followers and the communication that occurs between leaders and followers, leaders direct their energies toward individuals who are trying to achieve something together (Larry, 2020)

1.6.2 Challenges

A challenge is something that by its nature or character serves as a call to make a special effort, a demand to explain, justify or difficulty in an undertaking that is stimulating to one engaged in it (Macmillan, 2017)

1.6.3 Leaders

A leader is someone who can see how things can be improved and who rallies people to move toward that better vision. Leaders can work toward making their vision a reality while putting people first. Just being able to motivate is enough, leaders need to be empathetic and connect with people to be successful (Morgan, 2020).

1.6.4 Gender stereotype

Gender stereotype is a generalized view or preconception about attributes or characteristics, or the roles that are or ought to be possessed by, or performed by, women and men. A gender stereotype is harmful when it limits women's and men's capacity to develop their personal abilities, pursue their professional careers and or make choices about their lives (Hammal, 2019).

1.6.5 Higher Education Institutions

Higher education institutions are organisations that grant professional qualifications including academic degrees and certificates in several fields. For example, universities or universities of technology as alluded to by HESA (2011).

1.7 Summary

This chapter introduced the study, provided the background of the research, and reviewed preliminary literature, Furthermore, it presented an explanation of the problem under investigation. Aims and objectives have been specified, the significance of the study highlighted and key terms defined. The next chapter outlines the review of literature on the challenges faced by women in higher education institutions' leadership positions and how they affect female leaders from achieving their institutional goals.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

The first chapter introduced the entire study, by stating the aim to be achieved and questions to be answered at the conclusion of the study. A variety of different sources of literature were searched to answer research questions, while theoretical framework has been used to explain the topic better. Chapter two explores literature on leadership challenges faced by female leaders from different countries. The literature was studied from journals, articles, publications, and dissertations done by other researchers. This chapter preliminarily reviewed challenges related to the topic under the study. The review of the study gives a firm foundation for advanced knowledge. This review facilitates theoretical development, exposes gaps in the literature, and identifies areas where there is excess research. The literature review was conducted thematically following the objectives of the study as a framework. The study on challenges faced by female leaders in higher education institutions is particularly pertinent considering the commitment to transform higher education in South Africa.

2.2 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework recognizes and acknowledges that women and men are different. As such, it is understood that gender socialization plays a significant role in determining behavior and associated roles. Hence, challenges faced by female and male leaders differ. Three theoretical lenses in this study conceptualized the concept of female leadership and these are Social change leadership theory, Facilitative social leadership theory, and the Feminism theory. Two of the theories, namely Social change leadership theory and Facilitative social change leadership theory appeared to have gaps in addressing the challenges faced by female leaders. However, the Feminist theory was the main theory that informed this study.

2.2.1 The Social change leadership theory

The theory of Social change leadership (SCLT) was proposed by a group of professors in 1993 at Fort Hays (KS) State University. As a result, the leadership education program was developed based on the Social Change theory (Roth, Purvis & Bobko 2012). The theory is centered on creating change in the personal, organisational and societal spheres. (Lay *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, it creates social change agents that decisively deal with community challenges. Three foundational principles govern this theory and these are creating change, partnership, and civic leadership. The theory contends that leadership is not about the behavior of leaders rather it is about what followers and leaders do together for the achievement of organisational goals (Burack & Bashshur, 2013). In this theory, leadership is a purposeful, collaborative, and values-driven process, as opposed to title or position. Advocates for SCLT, stand for people working together to efficiently initiate change to solve both internal and external daily problems in the immediate environment (Crawford *et al.*, 2000). Leadership has not been a key concern in the field of women's studies, social change is the key to the development of women's studies, In a nutshell, it looks at the "what, how, and why" of leadership to generate change at an individual, organisational and societal level by developing social change agents that solve community problems (Crawford *et al.*, 2000).

2.2.2 Facilitative social change leadership theory

The Facilitative social change leadership theory mixes the aspects of SCLT and Transformational leadership theory (Robert Greenleaf, 1977; Robbins *et al.*, 2008). Its thrust is on problem-solving in community, organisation, and personal spheres through the empowerment of community members who are the social change agents. Leaders in the 21st century play a frontal role in leading and implementing the envisaged social change. Danton (2008), is of the view that often conventional approaches meant to handle social change do not work, or fail. This theory places the duty to work with dissatisfied employees in the organizations on leaders (Fall, 2009).

In the Facilitative social change leadership theory, a leader involves followers and allows them to participate in decision-making. Moreover, facilitative leaders promote interaction among employees and leaders. This theory is an adaptation of Transformational Leadership Theory, Social Change Leadership Theory, Social Change Theory, and the work of Tichy and DeVanna (cited in Northouse, 2004). It points out how leaders can be effective through empowering

followers in an ongoing consultative process to address variations in the cultural environment both internal and external. Leaders follow procedures, rules, and policies, and encourage thinking outside the box. Leaders of this caliber learn through trial and error methods (Fall, 2009). Such leaders are willing to take risks and share several common beliefs. A facilitative leader believes that the community improves through change.

However, facilitative leaders are fully engaged in generating or responding to change for the organisations to prosper and tackle their problems by frequently changing environments (Fall, 2009). The facilitative leaders know the importance of gaining individual and group support as an agent that promotes social change. These leaders believe in empowering others which results in knowledgeable and involved employees that are ready to implement and address the needed change. A person who subscribes to Facilitative Social Change Leadership theory accepts and understands that conflicts are a norm and part of human interaction (Balkundi & Kilduf, 2005). In fact, due to pressure for social change within an organisation, conflicts are a necessary evil for positive change in the process and are not always to be taken as a negative event. Undoubtedly, such leaders understand the importance of handling controversy civilly, because of its potential to breed tensions among the participants. Furthermore, leaders in this category understand that differences of opinion and vision always occur in the change process, and this is a valuable tool for a facilitative leader (Balkundi & Kilduf, 2005).

2.2.3 Feminism theory

Feminism is defined as a movement to end sexist oppression. It is the term given to the feminist movement and the anti-social dominance of men as advocates for equal rights for women (Hooks, 2000). Feminists are people (primarily females) who advocate for the eradication of prejudice, and other forms of coercion from society (Friedman, 2011). Feminist scholars argue that issues of gender, race, location, and class affect one's well-being (Moosa & Tuana, 2014). Enarson *et al.*, (2007) observed that gender literature tends to ignore differences between men and women caused by factors like race, class, geography, ability, and education.

The SCLT and the FSCLT have gaps in dealing with women as individual leaders; they are focused on both male and female leaders (Ferguson, 2009). Feminist theory is designed, in part, to make

the perspectives, experiences, and voices of women heard, since they were traditionally overlooked (Hartstock, 2004; Naples, 2003). A study focusing on lived experiences and perceptions about life from the eyes of women is critical, because it helps create a balanced view and understanding of women's issues and potentially influence the social order (Wood, 2005).

Feminist theories are diverse and examine all their experiences of gender subordination, roots of female coercion, and further show elements that perpetuate gender inequality while in the process offering different remedies for gender inequality (Jones & Budig, 2008). Radical feminists regard sexism as the oldest and most persistent form of cruelty against women and argue that the removal of patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality is important in ending sexual oppression (Weyer, 2007). This can be achieved by improving women's control over their bodies, which includes their sexuality, childbirth, and motherhood (Lober & Judith, 2005). Psychoanalytic feminism applies to theories on gender inequality; it seeks to correct the masculine bias in psychoanalytic theory. The study followed the feminist theory.

It is an extension of feminism in hypothetical, imagined, or philosophical discourse. It focuses on the analysis of gender inequalities, oppression, and stereotypes (Chodorow & Nancy, 1991). According to Turner & Maschi (2015), the feminist theory states that the inferior status delegated to women is a result of social inequality. It is believed that political, economic, and social relationships shape the personal status of women. This is another reason why women should have equal access to all forms of power. In this case feminist theory provides in-depth insight into sympathetic and solving issues related to female leadership. In the African context, feminism addresses cultural issues related to the multifaceted experiences of all women, from all cultures.

Feminist theorists, many hail from West Africa, Nigeria. In her article, "West African feminisms and their challenges," Nkealah (2011), discussed the several forms of feminism in Africa. First, she pointed out that Walker (1979), did not form part of African feminism. The fact that the theory concerns African women in the diaspora, cannot be an accurate portrayal of African women in the mainland. While it is true that African women for example from Egypt, Kenya, South Africa, and Senegal, share common traits, variations in how they understand gender and gender struggles differ (Kolawole, 2011). Hence, the experiences of women differ from one culture to another. Thus, it is

a mistake to merge all women with an unrealistic expectation of likeness, but on the contrary, it is crucial to recognize and respect differences that exist (Kolawole, 2011).

What happens in Western countries and African countries is not the same, so things don't have to be universal. African feminists evoke the experiences of women from the African context; their lived realities.

The fact that the terrain of challenging patriarchal power is overly complex must be kept alive (Lewis, 2009). Eco-feminism is a theory that argues that the stand point of patriarchy is dangerous to women, children, and other organisms in existence (Griffin, 1978; Merchanant, 1980). It posits that the earth resembles a nurturing mother, the conceptions of nature and gender. The theory compares society's treatment of the environment, fauna, and resources with that of women. The eco-feminists are of the view that male-controlled philosophy stresses domination and control of women and nature, both of which are considered unsystematic. According to Ecofeminism, a patriarchal society is a social structure that developed over the past 5,000 years, whereas, matriarchy, is the original hierarchy.

2.2.4 The standpoint theory

The standpoint theory propagated by Cockburn (2010) considers that through their different activities and experiences, females and males create their realities. It seeks to go beyond the analysis and description of roles played by social locations in structuring and shaping knowledge. Males and females often hold different positions and responsibilities through the concept of gender development. This has culminated in men and women having different control over and use of resources, and often having different views and needs (Cockburn, 2010). Thus, affecting decision-making authorities in household and community settings as they play different roles in the society.

The standpoint theory emanates from Marxism. It is argued that men and women are an oppressed class that tend to seek knowledge of how they became oppressed, something the privileged class finds no need for. Inspired by Marxism, in the 1970s feminists began to scrutinize how disparities between men and women influence knowledge production. Smith (1997), and Collins (1997), approached epistemology from the perspective of human sociology rather than sociology that

discriminates against other people. Collins (1997), saw both men and women as part and parcel of social cohesion and they outlined several dimensions of the idea of standpoint theory.

Collins (1997), considered groups as composed of features that go beyond the individual experiences of individuals within them when evaluating the idea of a standpoint theory of females. The Socialist/Marxist theory only regard women as victims of an economic status overlooking the fact that both men and women are victims, though with varying vulnerability levels.

Gramsci (1971), and Lukács (1923), regarded men to be better positioned. However, in the 1970s, feminist socialist philosophers relied on the Standpoint theory to understand forms of thought that originate from the exploitation and oppression of women due to gender assigned roles or social order. As Collins (1997, p. 375) asserts that “Standpoint theory argues that groups who share common placement in hierarchical power relation also share common experiences in such power relations”. These experiences can also be interpreted in the same way by group members, hence, they are as important as individual issues in social sciences.

Collins (1997), points out that this theory is relevant in explaining and unpacking female experiences from across different racial, economic and ethnic groups. Gramsci classified slaves, peasants, religious groups, women, different races, and the proletariat as colonial populations who are socially, politically, and geographically excluded from the hierarchy of power (Gramsci, 1977). Gramscian concept of sub-alternity (social, political, and geographical exclusion) applies to those groups in society who are lacking autonomous political power. Gramsci argued that sub-alternity included people from different religions or cultures and the marginalized communities forming union teams and organised struggle against white, male-oriented establishments of power. Gramsci (1977) argued that form of government did not exist simply at this level but was formulated within the thoughts, beliefs, and actions of everyday people that could or might not have seen themselves as a part of union teams.

2.2.5 Intersectionality in the context of feminist scholars

Intersectionality exhibits similarities in the theoretical foundations regarding the concept of fault lines. It is a held perception about group processes characterized by members with common denominations like age, gender, and nationality that serve as boundaries in groups (Lau &

Murnighan, 1998). Its framework is built on simultaneity, multiplicity, and relationality. This theoretical grounding appeared in the mid-1960s in the United States based on survival struggles.

According to Hull, Bell-Scott & Smith (1982) it was influenced by the narrowness of white feminism. As opposed to group-level phenomenon, intersectionality is focused on how power is configured, as well as the disadvantaged, and privileged status at a personal capacity in a social structure.

The theoretical lenses enhance insight into matters of social injustice and inequality in organisations, increasing the potential effect of social change. Intersectionality enables individuals, scholars, and practitioners to analyze and evaluate the complex experiences that occur in different social categories and systems and the implications therein. Feminist scholars have put together the issues of gender, race, location, and class as the factors that affect one's well-being (Moosa & Tuana, 2014).

These scholars studied literature on gender and climate change portray women and men as a similar group. This ignores the variations that emanate from the race, social class, geographical location, individual ability, and level of education (Enarson *et al.*, 2007). Moosa and Tuana, (2014) studied the importance of intersectional and contextual studies in examining gender interaction against other forms of social variance, like socioeconomic class or rurality, to create different experiences based on social categories of women and men. However, Arora-Jonsson (2011) challenged the universal claims regarding how women are vulnerable, instead of calling for a more contextualized gender analysis that addresses indigenous gender roles and ideologies. Arora-Jonsson (2011) argued that it was no accurate that women are subjected to unfair treatment as opposed to males, instead gendered vulnerability depends on the type.

The mother of African feminist theory, Lewis, (2009), criticizes the intersectionality approach as it suggests that the population that is mainly affected is the female race as they are more vulnerable in patriarchal societies. African feminism goes beyond women living in Africa to include those living overseas. A contributing factor to this is that, many African feminists lived abroad. Even Africans living abroad, at one point in time would have had lived realities as Africans, so their experiences matter. The African feminists bring up experiences from the African context, and it is

far from being constructed in simple opposition to Western feminism. Feminism on the African continent constitutes numerous heterogeneous experiences and points of departure (Goredema, 2014). African feminism brings in the issue of self-definition, whereby Africans research on their continent, telling their own stories.

2.2.6 Social construction theory of gender

The researcher also looked at the social construction theory of gender propagated by Butler (1991) that supports the issue that males and females are nurtured by society. The social construction of gender is a notion in feminism and sociology about how gender and gender differences work in societies (Lindsey, 2015). Society and culture allocate gender roles that are regarded as suitable for a person of a specific sex. Some studies have demonstrated the gendered nature of access to material and non-material resources which has varying implications for the long-term development of males and females and to the intergenerational transfer of assets, human resources, privilege, and disadvantage (Bird, 2007).

Gender, kinship, and inter-generational relations operate within households, markets, communities, and states and those groups subordinated in intra-household relations carried disadvantages which translated into power deficits in relations outside the household (Tsikata, 2015). The ongoing construction of distinctions between ‘male’ and ‘female’ and the growth of social expectations onto those categories have wider implications (Fenstermaker & West, 1991). Engels (1975), established the theory that the coexistence of class and gender oppression explained the subordination of females in society. This was evidenced by long hours’ females spent laboring in farms and domestic chores like cooking, washing, and fetching water (Ndenyele & Badurdeen, 2012). Marxist / socialist feminism argues that working-class women are exploited more than middle-class women. Furthermore, these feminists argue that the latter exploit or sometimes profit from working-class women’s exploitation (Bulbeck, 1998).

2.3 The Legislative Environment in South Africa

South Africa, like other societies in the world, is severely affected by female stereotyping which emphasizes that women are weaker sex and cannot be effective leaders (Lawson, 2008). Gender stereotypes challenge female leadership in two ways, through a complex leadership maze. The first

is by casting doubt on women's leadership qualities; and second, by forcing them to fulfill these doubts personally (Thompson 2017). This indicates that women leaders are forced to frequently question their leadership competence (Marumo 2012).

Since the end of apartheid in South Africa, laws were rectified to address different forms of inequality, including gender discrimination (Maseko 2013). The legislative structures for gender equity have been in existence for more than two decades with constitutional institutions existing to foresee such implementations (Sebola 2015). Despite the presence of male-domineering leadership culture, gender stereotypes, South African women have risen into leadership positions in higher education institutions (Person, Saunders & Oganessian 2014). Generally, in South Africa people believe that men are better leaders than women (Saunders & Oganessian 2014). The Employment Equity Act No 55 of 1998, The Gender Bill on Equality and Women Empowerment are important policies that could be useful in addressing the challenges facing women in higher education institutions leadership positions and other sectors.

2.3.1 The Employment Equity Act No 55 of 1998

The Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998 is broad and contains more than one article. Article 6 of the (EEA) contains the gist of the prohibition of the Act which states that no one "may unfairly discriminate, directly or indirectly, an employee, in any policy or practice of the employment, for one or more reasons, including race, sex, pregnancy, marital status, family responsibilities, ethnic or social origin, color, sexual orientation, age disability, religion, HIV status, conscience, beliefs, political opinion, culture, language and birth" (Department of Labour, 2015). However, women continue to face discrimination and encounter bottlenecks that deter them from accessing leadership positions (Kossek, Su, & Wu, 2017).

The study focuses on section 6 of the (EEA) because it has aspects that could be useful in addressing the challenges facing female leaders in higher education institutions. The EEA states that direct discrimination would be established where an employer treats a woman less favorably than a man in the same position (Department of Labour, 2015). Most women in leadership positions experience discrimination. Gender-based discrimination is an overt action taken against women by a men or women (Bruce, Battista, Plankey, Johnson & Marshall, 2015).

2.3.2 The Gender Bill on Equality and Women Empowerment

The Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women Bill came into force in 2003 (Department of Labor, 2015).

Its main objective was to establish a legislative framework for empowering women; align existing legislation on women empowerment, to appoint, represent women in decision-making and position of power, and provide for matters connected therewith. The bill seeks to address challenges associated with the appointment and representation of women in decision-making structures and related issues. This may include the challenges facing female leaders in higher education institutions. Empowerment refers to a significant shift in how one experiences power obtained through individual interactions in the social world that build self-confidence, networks, and consciousness of genuineness in an individual (Cattaneo & Goodman, 2015).

2.4 Challenges faced by females in other countries

The following countries were compared to South Africa on challenges that face female leaders.

2.4.1 Challenges faced by females in China

Many cultural values in China have their roots in Confucianism (Smith, 2014). The patriarchal family model which has long been the custom of Chinese society is also based on Confucianism and its teachings (Sunkonen & Valjakka, 2016). Women play supportive roles in the family and often treated as almost invisible (Leutner, 2005). A person in Confucianism is always viewed through their relationships with other people, for women this means their relations to their male family members (Sunkonen & Valjakka, 2016). Chinese women have been identified through their relationships as someone's daughter, someone's wife, or even someone's mother, not as individuals (Sunkonen & Valjakka, 2016).

This could also be something that stems from the collectivistic nature of Chinese culture, where a person is hardly ever an individual, but most often a part of a group (Rosenlee, 2006). Foot binding in which a girl's feet were bound by forcing toes down under the heel is one of the historical customs to China and Chinese women, eventually break bones on their feet, making it difficult for them to walk. This practice had many reasons behind it, one of which was to make women weak

and stay inside the house rather than work, or do any labour for that matter (Sojo *et al.*, 2016). The stereotype of feeble females in Chinese society was further strengthened by the custom of feet binding (Wiesner- Hanks, 2001). China seems to be affected by the legacy of communism and its ideas of equality (Grant Thornton International, 2016).

Women seem to be affected by Communism and collectivism on balancing family and work. Chinese people regard sacrificing family time for their careers as a benefit for the whole family rather than something to be frowned upon (Knipfer, 2015). In China, the idea of leadership as a paternalistic act has long been a norm from the Confucian philosophy (Peus, 2015). This combined with the cultural mindset that women are supposed to be man's subordinates' challenges women in leadership positions (Zhu, Konrad & Jiao, 2016).

2.4.2 Challenges faced by females in Saudi Arabia

In the Middle Eastern countries, Saudi Arabia is among the most gender-biased nations on earth (Shannon, 2014). Female leaders in Saudi Arabia are confronted by several challenges in their work environment such as social, religious, cultural and organisational (Hodges, 2017). Saudi females are also affected by technical lack of empowerment, and self-challenge respectively (Abu-Khdair, 2012). In Saudi Arabia, there is a guardianship policy that forces a woman to get permission from a male, usually her husband or father, to travel and work (Forsythe, 2009).

This policy creates challenges for women in leadership positions who do not have family support related to their work, hence, they might not be allowed to travel for work purposes (Forsythe, 2009). In the workplace, Saudi women in leadership positions face complex laws, rules, and social practices that affect their daily practice their right to move freely (AbalKhail, 2017). The strict Islamic cultural values of this Middle Eastern country expect women to prioritize their families, not their careers (Al-Ahmadi, 2011).

This culture can cause people to question female leadership abilities (Alomair, 2015). However, scientific evidence in the professional environment in Saudi Arabia indicates that women in leadership are as effective as men (Al-Shamrani, 2015). Gender discrimination in Saudi Arabia prevents women from attending strategic meetings, restricts access to important information and resources and prevents them from networking with other leaders (AbalKhail, 2017). Furthermore,

women find it difficult to participate in the public domain such as academic conferences, due to family responsibilities and cultural issues related to international transport and travel, behind the policy of guardianship (Almansour & Kempner, 2016).

2.4.3 The challenges faced by females in the United States of America

In the United States of America (USA) female leaders are faced with the harassment challenges (Brown, 2017). Most women in leadership positions experience harassment and it involves any form of negative relational contact, individual use of culture in an intimidating, unfriendly, or aggressive working environment (Neall & Tuckey, 2014). Many American female leaders stay single or are divorced or widowed because they could not effectively achieve a balance between their leadership roles at work and their families (Thuyle, 2011). The female leaders in America are faced with challenges such as balancing family and work tasks, culture, sex, low self-respect by their colleagues, and lack of support from work and in the communities.

2.4.4 The challenges faced by females in India

India once set aside as destitute and indisposed, is now one of the biggest and expeditious mounting economies in the world (Silong *et al.*, 2016). Yet India's intensifying and splendid economic growth has a dark shadow looming due to its prevalent discrimination and other intimidations towards women (Singh & Prasad, 2014). Indian female leaders are mostly affected by work related issues such as hostile comments, intimidations related to sexual assaults, and other sexual advances (Brown, 2017). Sexual harassment is the most persistent and serious challenge faced by women in the workplace (Fitzgerald and Betz, 1983; Gutek, 1985).

As a result, women in leadership are negatively affected, because these challenges can result in a decline in their leadership efforts. Sexual harassment has a negative impact on women in both long and short term. In the short term, women may lose confidence and quit their leadership roles. In the long run, chances for women to progress in their careers become limited as gender inequality is maintained within the organisation (Nieva and Gutek, 1981).

2.4.5 The challenges faced by females in Kenya

Female leaders in rural areas are mostly affected mainly because of prejudice, the fact that men, in general, are entrusted with the custodianship of culture (Turner and Maschi, 2015). In Kenya, the ideology of despising African women's leadership skills was also implemented by the colonial government, which separated people based on race and culture (Choge, 2015).

Resultantly, women suffered double oppression because they were oppressed by political regimes and their communities. Kenyan women in educational institutions are affected by several cultural issues. Firstly, women leaders must convince men in their institutions and surrounding communities that they are capable leaders (Kalawole, 2011). Hence, they need to work harder, unlike their male counterparts who are easily accepted by their communities. Secondly, women leaders are scrutinized for their outfits, especially if they should speak at meetings, with some communities in Kenya not accepting women who wear pants. Thirdly, men find it difficult to submit to female leaders. Finally, women are challenged by people who think that they do not know about work related problems (Choge, 2015).

2.4.6 Challenges faced by females in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, women are expected to be involved in several social responsibilities regardless of the positions they occupy at work (Girma, 2012). Participation in activities such as attending weddings and funerals is regarded as one of the major challenges for female leaders in Ethiopia. Consequently, when they try to conform to their gender roles, they do not adequately meet the requirements of their leadership roles (Girma, 2012). The Ethiopian culture has impeded female autonomy in all spheres of life (Cherinet & Mulugeta, 2013). Women are forced to spend more time and energy on household chores, family, and other social responsibilities which makes it quite difficult for female leaders (Mengistu & Lituchy, 2017).

2.4.7 Challenges faced by females in South Africa

In South Africa, apartheid was also used as an instrument of segregation for women and as such, they were relegated to second-class citizenship status (Msimang, 2011). Consequently, women shunned way leadership positions for fear of being labeled names (Msimang, 2011). During the apartheid era women were regarded as outsiders in their academic environments (Johnson &

Johnson, 2012). In the year 1956 on the 9th of August, South Africa saw over 20 000 women marching to Pretoria Union Building, demonstrating and submit a petition to Prime Minister J. G. Strijdom against women carrying passes (South African History Online, 2015).

Demonstration against pass laws organized by the Federation of South African Women, defied the idea that a “woman’s place is in the kitchen”. Instead, it declared that a woman’s place can be everywhere including leadership positions (South African History Online, 2015). The start of democracy in South Africa ushered in policies such as Affirmative Action, Employment Equity Act No 55 of 1998, and the Women Empowerment and Gender Equity Bill to redress the past inequalities that were embedded in the apartheid regime government system (Sebola, 2014). The Republic of South Africa has enjoyed great recognition in terms of women's representation in political offices (Apleni, 2012). Higher education institutions have changed following the announcement of the mergers (Lethoko, 2016). Since then, women’s representation in leadership has significantly improved (Sebola, 2014).

The presence of women in leadership ensures gender equality in educational change and development. It is also, a way used to ensure social justice through gender equality in leadership positions (Coate & Howson, 2016). Despite the efforts to redress gender inequalities in South Africa, women in higher education institutions are still confronted with vast structural leadership challenges (Sebola, 2014). Women face social and environmental challenges affecting their leadership abilities (Chin, Lott, Rice & Sanchez-Hucles 2007). As a result, women resort to the use of legal force to fulfill their leadership roles in higher education institutions (Chin *et al.*, 2007). Women possess distinct leadership attributes and abilities in leading higher educational institutions, despite being confronted by many challenges (Al- Hussein 2011). Women’s eligibility, their professional and leadership competence sometimes supersedes men (Wilkinson, 2009).

Leadership necessitates numerous leadership abilities regardless of gender (Al- Jaradat 2014). Furthermore, women fail to balance between family and work responsibilities and tend to achieve less in building relations with others in higher education institutions (Hazifazlioglu 2010). Female

leaders are also poorly supported at home and in society as leaders (Monty 2012). Burns & Martin (2010) discovered that in higher education institutions, women are not trusted and respected as leaders, compared to their male counterparts. Personal challenges include abilities, emotions, division of labor, and leadership qualities (Almaki; Silong; Idris & Wahat 2016; Al-Shaddi 2010; White, 2012).

Gender stereotypes challenges include gender role expectations (Zinyemba, 2013), work and family life balance, and casting doubts (Al- Hussein 2011; Marumo 2012).

2.5 Organisational challenges faced by females in leadership

Organisational challenges refer to the administrative organisation that prevents one from achieving academic goals as a leader in an organisation (Al-Mingash, 2007). Organisational challenges are indorsed to the lack of persistent legal controls to which leadership should report controlling the work (Abu-Khader, 2012). Organisational challenges impact the success of female leadership as they are limited in executing their duties, because of the third parties they need to consult before taking final decisions (Almaki *et al.*, 2016).

A study by Al-Ghazali (2010) indicated that some challenges women face relate to the culture and policies of the organisation which includes lack of coordination between several departments or faculties in higher education institutions like cultural and social restrictions. Centralization of authority to men hamper women's ability to make decisions and to lead effectively (Almenkash, Abdulaziz, Shaman, Haijan & Dagsh, 2007). Influential networks are critical to women's success in leadership (Ho & Hallman, 2016). The organisational challenges also influence female decision-making power, which results in poor performance (White 2012). Therefore, organisational challenges can cause divisions among staff who support female leaders and those who always find fault in female leadership (Hlatwayo & Hlatwayo 2014). Women are underrepresented in top leadership positions in many organisations and industries (Zinyemba 2013).

This may be because of prejudiced attitudes fostered by both men and women but have become unrecognizable but very harmful (Jones, Peddie, Gilrane, King & Gray 2016). Subsequently, some subordinates may fail to comply with female leader's instructions, which negatively impact the

progress of women in leadership (Vescio *et al.*, 2005). Too much criticism from their counterparts makes women lose focus and confidence in their leadership (Boltman & Deal 2017). Workplace relationship is another organisational challenge that female leaders are faced with; most employees bond on the lines of similar interests (Fall, 2007).

Since few female leaders are in leadership positions, they find it difficult to get other women who can mentor them (Laff, 2006). Job stress, technology, and role ambiguity have also been identified as possible organisational factors that affect all employees, but can have a more negative impact on female leaders (Shobitha & Sudarsan, 2014).

2.6 Personal challenges

Drew (2010) termed personal challenges as attributes with destructive effects on leading successfully. It is believed that women in leadership positions face more challenges than male leaders (Fanny, 2017). Many of these challenges probably stem from society and the leadership traits female portray (Outland 2017). Thus, it is difficult for women to reconcile their work and family duties (Rehman & Roomi 2012). Resultantly, women prioritize family more and become less engaged in their leadership roles, which require more time due to their combined professional and family roles (Panigrahi 2013). Longer maternity leaves may negatively impact women's careers, including progression in leadership hierarchy (Hideg, Krstic, Trau & Zarina, 2018b) because organisations may require uninterrupted work schedules. A female can work more hours per week; that may conflict with family responsibilities.

Furthermore, this influences how females lead based on the double roles they must play at home and work (Zulu, 2007). Traditionally, societal norms determine that domestic errands belong to women as their primary role, thus, any role that alters this belief causes role conflict (Almaki *et al.*, 2016). This is why Hideg *et al.*, (2018a) argued that parental leave policies should accommodate males and allow them to take up family roles traditionally reserved for women. If this happens, there would be a fair division of labor within the household, and lead to women having more opportunities to advance in their careers.

2.7 Cultural challenges

Cultural challenges relate to the beliefs held by both men and women in the workplace or society in general about women as leaders (Abu-Khdair, 2012). Research has recently indicated that leadership roles' perceptions have been changing, communal characteristics and skills that include persuading, dominating, and helping are increasingly becoming more crucial for effective leadership (Hentschel, Braun, Peus & Frey, 2018).

However, female's accession to leadership positions remain stagnant (McKinsey, 2018). Most African cultures regard men as good leaders, hence men continue to regard women as unfit for leadership positions, because they do not satisfy the norm (Hlatwayo & Hlatwayo 2014; Naidoo, 2013; Nauret 2011; South African History on Line 2015). Leadership is seen as a male domain and the cultural construction of leadership is responsible for differences between men and women (Kiamba 2008). It is believed that men are leaders, and women are followers (Hlatwayo & Hlatwayo 2014). Merchant (2012) noted that despite changes in the legislation and progress of women into leadership positions, structural arrangements in higher education institutions still resemble a hierarchical and competitive model centered around male leadership models, and women are therefore, supposed to adapt.

Dougherty (2009) contends that culture itself elevates women's hopes based on attitudes, learned behavior, and routine practices that are experienced and reinforced. Culture can make it difficult for women to lead the way they want (Thuyle, 2011). Culture considerably limits the effectiveness and satisfaction of the role of female leadership (Akao, 2008). Studies on female leadership have also revealed that women experience skewed employment opportunities and role conflicts as well as patriarchal rigidity towards female leaders (Sperandio, 2009). These macho factors of men looking down on women as followers who belong to the kitchen barefoot and pregnant stem from culture, whether Western or African and creates challenges for women who are in leadership positions (Weyer, 2007).

2.8 Physical and technical challenges

These are the obstacles associated with the physical work environment and technical supplies that can make it difficult for female leaders to achieve the goals (Al-Mingash, 2007). These challenges

influence the leadership role of women and inhibit them from using the authoritative power to fulfill their leadership roles in higher education institutions (Chin, Lott, Rice & Sanchez-Hucles, 2007). Mobility is also a challenge for women leaders, said it is not easy for women to find work outside their home and therefore, makes continue working as leaders (Brown, 2017).

2.9 Mentorship challenges

According to Arifeen, (2010), mentorship is identified as the key factor that contributes to the success of women in higher education institutions leadership. Having mentors reduces the stress levels in the workplace. Mentoring is regarded as a strategic tool that has the potential to attract and retain high talent and quicken leadership reparation. Male mentors have used their power to open doors and help women overcome their challenges as leaders (Vamos, 2014). Lack of mentorship and limited training negatively impact the performance of women in leadership (Tlaiss & Kausser, 2010). The female mentors, often younger than the men, offer other women self-awareness, which does not help much for women to fulfill their leadership responsibilities (Zulu, 2007).

The ability of women to be appointed to high-level leadership positions is greatly compromised because they rarely receive the quality mentorship they need and when provided, it is relatively inferior to that given to men, particularly in organisational hierarchy (McDonald & Westphal, 2013). Scholars focus more on sponsorship, another form of mentorship where sponsors share both prestige and opportunities. This influential and specific professional connection is linked to leadership effectiveness (Catalysist, 2011). Women in leadership positions face unique challenges in finding sponsors; women have limited access to social networks that can deliver information about leadership expertise (Ho & Hall, 2016). Simple advice from mentors is the most important support in leadership that a person requires than a financial incentive, in providing a full support system for female leaders (Sebola & Khalo, 2010).

2.10 Gender stereotype challenges

Gender stereotypes promote gender bias in an organisation and limit men and women by dictating the capabilities of each gender and this slows down women's careers and performance (Heilman, 2012). These are challenges that create unique dilemmas for women within their roles as leaders

(Love, 2013). Like other societies across the globe, South Africa is heavily affected by the stereotyping that assume women as the weaker sex and cannot be effective leaders (Lawson, 2008).

Women across the world continue to experience gender bias, this hinders their progression in leadership at political, social, and organisational levels (Seierstad, Warner-Søderholm, Torchia, & Huse, 2017). This bias may be reflected in interactional behaviors of leaders in board rooms, which may negatively affect the organisational performance and leadership effectiveness (Buse, Bernstein, & Bilimoria, 2016). Globally women face many challenges originating from social expectations and gender assigned roles. These gender assigned roles force women to focus more on home responsibilities, husbands, and children (Zinyemba, 2013). Women are regarded as gentle, weak, and less engaged in work than men (Al-Hussein, 2011). Therefore, gender stereotypes negatively affect the performance of female leaders because they lack motivation, confidence, and competence and are stressed by the responsibilities.

In male-dominated domains gender stereotypes are a disadvantage to women as they are less likely to be associated with leadership in comparison to males (Koenig, Eagly, Mitchel & Ristikari, 2011). Women in leadership positions experience disturbance with unfamiliar and dissimilar behaviors of other leaders in organisations. These disruptions can subvert individual confidence and work capabilities. This is mainly because it is characterized by misunderstanding, deliberate intimidations, pressure from outside, and resource limitations (Fiksel, Polyviou, Croxton, & Pettit, 2015). Women continue to be disadvantaged through gender stereotypes within leadership, political, and business domains (Latu, 2011).

The gender stereotype has deeper implications on the identity of women and female leaders who have experienced this situation tend to separate family identity from their professional identity (von Hippel, 2011). The harmful effects of these stereotypes on cognitions related to female leadership are dangerous. They can cause women to leave managerial positions and fields of activity that evoke such stereotypes threats (Latu, 2011). As a result, their actual performance on multiple leadership tasks is affected. Issues such as influencing and motivating employees, the

threat of stereotypes leads to decreased performance, and negotiation skills are also affected in leadership (Hoyt & Blascovich, 2010).

2.11 Family and work-life challenges

Work and family are important aspects of adult lives (Zhang & Liu, 2011). The idea of work and family gained significance from government, academics, and practitioners (Harris & Foster, 2008). Research in this domain is mainly focused on the spouse and the family support (French, Dumani, Allen & Shockley, 2018). Work-life balance in the African context is a major problem that confines women in employment, because they usually combine paid work activities with their domestic duties (Okonkwo, 2012). The participation of women in the workforce and leadership roles led to much stress at home and in the lives of women and increased as they attempted to balance their responsibilities in their homes and careers (Valk & Srinivasan, 2011).

A significant number so women fail to balance between work and life responsibilities, whether married or single (Mooney & Ryan, 2009). To help women improve their performance in leadership positions, Ely, Stone & Ammerman (2014) recommend career support. Studies show that women, are expected to focus more on family duties such as looking after only their children, husbands, and extended families than men and this is more likely to occur in traditional societies (Abu-khdair, 2012). It tends to be difficult for female leaders to decide whether to say "no" or "yes" to their family and work, causing them to spend long hours at work and find it difficult to meet the demands of society and family (Brown, 2017).

Women are also required to do more housework and these role expectations become a significant barrier to women's academic career progression (Neale *et al.*, Ozkanli, 2010). In addition to their leadership roles, many women remain the primary caregivers of their families (Hughes, Ginnet & Curphy, 2009). Female leaders are faced with a challenge to choose between their families and careers, henceforth few female CEO's limit or do not have children because they fear the impact this would have on their careers (Welch, 2007). Some female leaders voluntarily leave their jobs to take care of their families (Wallace, 2008). Role ambiguity is another factor that affect the work-life balance and it occurs when one is not clear about the expectations of the role he or she is assigned to (Vanniarajan & Jayanthi, 2012).

The role pressure that comes from role ambiguity has a significant influence on work-life balance and that is higher amongst female leaders (Mengistu, 2012; Mengistu, Hoobler & Tadese, 2015). Women in leadership find themselves in difficult positions to juggle between family responsibilities and their demanding jobs because they are entitled to other responsibilities (Northouse, 2016). Women in leadership positions should be able to use their experience to make choices and use their influence to manage impressions of their power, status, and legitimacy in alignment with their character (Cheung, Lindsey, King & Hebl, 2016). When women prove to be successful in their leadership roles, they are judged as violating gender-prescriptive norms and contextual expectations (Randsley de Moura, Leicht, Leite, Crisp & Gocłowska, 2018).

Women are known to have better people-orientation skills (Haque *et al.*, 2017); they engage in group leadership frameworks, are sociable and community-based (Lemoine, Aggarwal, and Steed, 2016). Their social identity influences decision-making, social capital, cultural capital, and discriminatory capacities (Vinkenburg, Jansen, Dries & Pepermans, 2014). A woman's heightened sensitivity to issues of well-being and social justice enables her to be a real agent of change (Karam and Jamali, 2013).

2.12 Challenges faced by females in other sectors

The challenges women face in leadership positions are not limited to institutions of higher learning only, but are common throughout all other industry sectors. For instance, these challenges exist in the construction, finance, and business sector. Literature evidence is provided in the next paragraph.

2.12.1 Challenges for females in the Construction sector

The construction sector makes a positive contribution to the South African economy. Moodley (2012) studied the role of women in the South African construction industry and it was revealed that men still dominate. Aneke, Derera, and Bomani (2017) found that women entrepreneurs also struggle to enter the industry. Of the few that penetrate the industry, still face more internal

challenges regarding access to opportunities. Ginige *et al.*, (2007) investigated the career development of women in the construction sector.

The results showed that women in leadership face challenges centered on gender stereotypes. Additionally, the fact that corporate culture in the sector is determined and controlled by men made it difficult for women to be accommodated (Ginige *et al.*, 2007). Limited access to markets, limited access to information technology, difficulties in obtaining finance, poor connections, support services, and unfavorable policies and regulations are some of the issues that describe challenges women face in the construction sector (Adesua-Lincoln, 2011). Sexual harassment by male colleagues and senior managers is also a common occurrence in the construction industry (Harbal, 2012). This explains why over a decade ago, Coyle and Flannery (2005) concluded that in general, male domination in most industries predisposes women to intense gender stereotypes. These are part of the factors that make it difficult for women to form formal networks to harness resources and information necessary to succeed in the sector.

2.12.2 Challenges for females in the Finance sector

In the financial sector, women's challenges are compared to those experienced by men when working long hours and when required to withstand the pressures of high-altitude careers (Janasz & Sullivan, 2004). In addition, they also face their peculiar challenges (Hewlett, 2002). Female managers find it difficult to gain recognition for their achievements and to reconcile professional and personal life. They also have difficulties in finding mentors and building strong support systems (Mavin 2006). Women face challenges such as gender biases, work-life balance, and professional development, as well as cultural stereotypes that are not gender-specific (Catalyst, 2008). Women take on a variety of roles, including mothers, career women, and wives (Oakley, 2000).

Women are generally viewed differently in leadership positions, because of their feminine responsibilities (Lane and Piercy, 2003). Women are not fully involved in the organization compared to men, especially female mothers. They are non-feminine when they act like their male counterparts, nor are they seen as overriding when they adopt a collaborative leadership style (Lane & Piercy, 2003). The expectations of women leaders are different from those of men. Women are

projected to adopt a compassionate leadership style, and there is discomfort in receiving instructions from a woman.

Furthermore, women who openly talk about their career achievements and skills are criticized. Comparatively, women are subjected to they need more external validation than their male colleagues (Lips, 2000). Financing is considered the 'lifeblood' of any business, large or small (Singh, 2012: 51). Women entrepreneurs are struggling with financial constraints, capital flow and fail to source external funding mainly due to the absence of substantial securities and credit in the market (Phillips *et al.*, 2014).

Mavin (2006), highlighted that women are generally not respected by older male subordinates. The study suggests that this stems from cultural norms and perceptions of women and leadership by men. The old boys club controls business, politics and membership criteria based on gender and exclude all women from membership (Solovic, 2001). Formal authority and competition are transferred in informal groups and sub-cultures. This helps to spread information *via* grapevine for important decision making (Oakley, 2000; Solovic, 2001). The boys club has unwritten rule of no females allowed, which makes females in top management feel alone and isolated. This boys' club mentality enhances female exclusion due to the meeting places, such as golf courses and cigar lounges (Solovic, 2001).

2.12.3 Challenges for females in Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is defined as the start, formation, construction, development, and maintenance of a business; the building of an entrepreneurial team and mobilizing require resources to seize a market opportunity to generate wealth and capital gains in long-term (Maziriri & Moloji, 2014). It is estimated that women entrepreneurs constitute about a quarter to a third of formal businesses globally (Nxopo 2014). Entrepreneurship is a male-dominated phenomenon, but time has changed, making women the most memorable and inspiring entrepreneurs of the 21st century, amidst male domination in industries like construction (Vinesh, 2014). Over the years things have changed. In our modern world, women now have cognitive agility both mentally and physically in business ventures. This highlights their capability and competence in trades that men do and have the potential to perform even better (Singh 2012). Van der Merwe (2008) adds that female

entrepreneurs increased in numbers in the last decade. Interestingly, women start businesses to take charge of personal and professional aspects of their lives.

However, women entrepreneurs face many obstacles that stop them from being successful and it requires them to use extra mental effort to tackle challenges (Luiz & Mariotti, 2011). Most female entrepreneurs face gender discrimination, gender bias, or gender stereotypes and face discrimination in a male-dominated society that prevents them from succeeding. Discrimination is defined as the unjust treatment of people of a certain group (Mandipaka, 2014). Discrimination still exists in South Africa, particularly gender discrimination. Summarily, gender inequality still sees many South African women struggling to access equal rights and benefits like South African men (Mandipaka, 2014).

In addition to the risks that entrepreneurs face, women face additional problems of being a woman in a male-dominated society (Mitchell, 2004). The main difficulty is the reluctance of banks to extend credit, lack of support, negative socio-cultural attitudes, and gender discrimination or prejudice (Valla, 2001). Although female entrepreneurs work in the same environment with male entrepreneurs, gender biases are embedded in society that prevents women from actively participating in the economy and accessing business and development services (Sinha, 2005).

2.13 Strategies that could be used to address challenges faced by female leaders to help them overcome and succeed as leaders in higher education institutions

The challenge of gender bias can be eradicated if the government, organisations, and society refine implemented policies to address grey areas and mitigate this challenge through continuous dialogue. Roberts (2018), posited that together, women and men have the potential to eliminate gender bias by changing the work environment climate. Through female empowerment, a positive social change within them can nurture a paradigm shift that will create consciousness against men's gender bias toward women (Roberts, 2018). Organisational culture needs to shift to discourage discrimination against females (Smith, 2014).

One can realize the state of self-actualization to adopt a righteous behavior. In this case, one chooses a journey that leads them to an ideal self and to work in excellence towards achieving

humanness (Fernando & Chowdhury, 2016). Women in leadership positions experience gender bias embedded within organisations.

The organisational culture comes from social information processes and the meaning individuals within an organisation attach to guidelines, practices, and protocols they experience (Schneider, Ehrhart, & Macey, 2013). Roberts (2018), suggested mentoring, education, coaching, networking, and self-promotion as strategies to overcome prejudice and gender stereotypes (Kulik & Metz, 2015). Skill management systems and leadership potential programs can help in identifying individuals with the potential to be leaders in the foreseeable future (Church *et al.*, 2015). The government of South Africa must enforce affirmative action policies (Hideg & Ferris, 2017) or female board member quotas (Morgenroth & Ryan, 2018) to ensure that female participation in leadership positions continues to grow.

Sojo, Wood, Wood, & Wheeler, (2016) argued that the use of quotas and setting targets for female in leadership positions may help grow female representation in leadership roles. Affirmative action policies are an effective way of fostering diversity and increasing the traditionally disadvantaged groups' representation in organisations (Morgenroth & Ryan, 2018). The government needs to put measures in place to monitor policy enactment to encourage and ensure more female representations in the applicant pool, which will cause a change in the status quo as there will be an increase in female representation in management (Johnson, Hekman & Chan, 2016). Leaders can provide appropriate actions as role models and change attitudes that currently hinder women from showing their full potential in leadership positions (Clerkin & Ruderman, 2018).

Women's perspectives on diversity can highlight the social injustice of minority and disadvantaged women based on age, ethnicity, and race to creating possibilities for positive social change (Holck *et al.*, 2016). Women must spearhead gender diversity to change the environment for women in general (Kulik & Metz, 2015). Bierema, (2016) stated that women's development as leaders is responsibility. Women can employ interventions to instigate social change and address organisational behaviors against bias, through such actions, they will become aware of implicit gender bias and their contributions to gender discrimination (Derks, Van Laar & Ellemers, 2016).

2.14 Summary

Reviewed literature shows that feminist theory informed this study. This is because the other two theories (Social change leadership theory and Facilitative social leadership theory) has gaps in addressing the challenges faced by female leaders. Like any other society across the globe, South Africa is heavily affected by the stereotypes and this poses challenges to female leadership. Thus, there are complex leadership tangles which ultimately cause women in leadership positions to question their leadership competencies. However, despite the traditional dominant male leadership, South African women have also moved to leadership positions in higher education institutions.

Male dominance is a common trait nurtured by social and cultural constructs across the globe. As a result, women seem incapable and weaker to lead when compared to men. Most African cultures have determined that only men make good leaders, therefore, there are constant attitudes towards women in leadership positions because they do not fit the norm. Women in leadership positions face organisational, personal, cultural, physical, and technical challenges and these limit their ability to achieve the objectives assumed. Female leaders lack mentoring and usually have limited training and this negatively impacts their leadership performance.

Women in leadership positions face challenges, through gender stereotypes and social settings, which transcends the workplace, industry, and commerce. The government and other relevant stakeholders must follow up on policies in place and affirmative action to ensure gender inequality is fully addressed and to certify constant female participation in leadership roles. The subsequent chapter focuses on the methodology that was adopted to address the research objectives. It looks at the research approach, research design, and sampling method; describes the data collection method and data analysis technique used.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the procedures and methods employed to conduct this study. The chapter provides the procedures and processes followed to arrive at the scientific conclusion about the phenomenon under study. It, therefore, describes the research approach, design sampling as well as sampling methods that were adopted to investigate challenges faced by women in higher education leadership positions. Furthermore, it describes how data was collected and analysed.

3.2 Research paradigm/philosophy

The epistemology research paradigm and an interpretative paradigm for data collection and analysis were employed (Creswell, 2016). These paradigms emphasises subjective experiences and meaning, therefore, the researcher's subjective views were crucial for the study results. An interpretive approach allows a researcher to view the world through the experiences of participants and its main purpose is to understand and interpret day-to-day activities, experiences, and social structures (Rubin & Babbie, 2017). The subjectivity allows the researcher to view a specific problem from different dimensions. Blumberg *et al.* (2011), explains that in the world and the social order are subjectively constructed and evaluated by people.

From this viewpoint, the dynamism of the world is centered on the belief that the truths of today are not the truths of tomorrow. Hence, new knowledge is constantly generated through research projects. Livesey (2011), posited that people interpret the social world differently, depending on the situation. Interpretivism contradicts the viewpoint that research is independent of the researcher's view of life. Thus, as a social being, the researcher's interpretation is socially constructed, and it reflects their norms, values, and beliefs (Blumberg *et al.*, 2011:17). The interpretive paradigm seeks methods that help to deeply understand how humans interact with their immediate environment and their role in social cohesion around them.

Hence, it is mostly subjective than objective (Thanh & Thanh, 2015). The researcher carefully listened to the audio recordings at the end of the day after every interview session.

3.3 Research approach

A qualitative research method was followed in this study. Kumar (2014), posited that qualitative research follows an open and flexible approach to inquiry, fits into the philosophy of empiricism, and seeks to understand the diversity as opposed to quantification, the narration of feelings, insights, and experiences. This was congruent with the study, which aimed to investigate and explore leadership challenges faced by female leaders in some South African higher education institutions.

The researcher wanted to understand the meaning of the world as socially constructed. Thus, how do people make sense of their world based on their experiences (Parkinson & Drislane, 2011). Welman *et al.*, (2005), assert that qualitative research is primarily concerned with subjective data that originates from the views or opinions of participants and the researcher about their world or situation. Bless, Smith, & Kagee (2012), assert that qualitative research uses a range of methods that use qualifying words and descriptions to record and study aspects of social reality. Thence, the researcher allowed the participants to use their own words.

3.4 Research design

For this study, the researcher used a descriptive case study design with explanatory features since it aligns with the study's objectives and the nature of the research. This followed the sequential explanatory model strategy that collects and analyses qualitative data (Cameron, 2009). This method was used because it permitted the investigator to ask the participants open-ended questions, where respondents could elucidate their experiences in their own words. Through this approach, first-hand and in-depth information was obtained. The researcher gained an extensive understanding of the phenomena, by asking open-ended questions that allowed respondents to share rich insights about the studied phenomenon.

3.5 Target population

According to Neumann (2011) target population includes all the units of analysis from which the investigator wishes to make specific conclusions. In this study, the target population was 720 participants, consisting of 10 female leaders from the University of Venda and another 10 from the University of Limpopo. The targeted participants were both in the academic and administration fields for a period ranging from three to ten years.

3.6 Sampling method

Purposive sampling is when a particular case is chosen because it illustrates some features that are of interest for a particular study (De Vos *et al.*, 2011). The researcher employed purposive sampling for the study to select female leaders in the academic and administration field from the two institutions with work experience between three and ten years. The technique suited the study because it best explored the research objectives and was more suitable for the context in which the study was carried out. It also enabled the researcher to make a representative sample, because the sample was composed of elements that contained the most characteristics that served the purpose of the study, depending on their opinion or purpose, making the representation subjective (Kumar, 2014).

3.7 Sample

A sample is a set of items or individuals carefully chosen from a population for analysis or a portion that is representative of the entire population. Therefore, it is composed of a few individuals from whom one collects the required information (Kumar, 2014). The sample of this study was 20 women in leadership positions, consisting of 3 women in academic leadership positions and 7 women in administrative leadership positions from the University of Venda and another 4 female academic leaders and 6 women in administrative leadership positions from the University of Limpopo.

3.8 Data collection method

Data collection was conducted over a period of two months. This entailed several activities such as identifying relevant participants, getting their consent as well as agreeing on dates and times of the meetings. Some participants change the scheduled appointments and that meant the researcher had to make other appointments and look for other participants with the same characteristics.

3.8.1 Interviews

An interview is a common method used in qualitative research data collection methods. It is essentially a face-to-face interaction between two or more persons with a specific purpose in mind. Researchers obtain information through an interface with individuals known or expected to possess the knowledge they seek (Kumar, 2014). An interview allows the researcher to probe for more information. All interview sessions were verbatim, recorded and transcribed before it was analyzed according to the emerging themes.

3.8.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews are face-to-face interviews between the researcher and the informants that are conducted several times, in which participants are asked about perspectives on their life, experiences, or situations, and expressed in their own words (Kumar, 2014). A semi-structured interview is an open, discovery-driven method that is ideal for describing both the process and the results of the interview from the perspective of the target audience. The face-to-face interview is a one-person interview conducted by trained personnel.

The purpose of the interviews was to thoroughly explore the interviewees' perspectives, feelings, and perspectives on the leadership challenges faced by female leaders in some South African higher education institutions. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. It involved the implementation of several predetermined questions and special topics thereby allowing consistency in gathering relevant information (Struwig & Stead, 2016). These questions were asked to each interviewee in a systematic and consistent order. Interview sessions were guided by the semi-structured questions which entailed pre-determined questions that were consistently presented to all participants.

Interviews were conducted individually with each participant using a similar interview guide. The researcher was taking notes from participants using pen and paper, and voice recorder. Structuring of the semi-structured interview enabled the participants to explain the phenomenon in detail without limitations. Open-ended questions also give the participants the liberty to respond in their own words. In return, the researcher obtained a full and clear meaning as well as understanding what the participants said.

3.9 Data analysis

Data analysis involves classifying, gathering, manipulating, and summarizing data to make meaning of the studied phenomenon (Creswell, 2016). It can be done in different forms depending on the design, nature of the research questions, and nature of the study. In summary, the analysis was conducted to formulate themes and topics that define patterns of behaviour on leadership challenges faced by women. The researcher used the content analysis technique to analyze data. Thematic content analysis denotes the collection and analysis of textual content (Struwig & Stead, 2007). The investigator developed common themes that describe women's leadership challenges.

This information reflected common factors that participants encountered in their daily activities as leaders. The main idea of content analysis is to summarise large volumes of text into fewer categories. The assumption was that words which were often mentioned are the words that reflect the greatest concern. The transcription of verbal data allowed the researcher to develop a better understanding of the data. The researcher verified the reliability of the transcripts by reading them while listening to the recordings. The data was coded and collected; there was a long list of various codes identified by the researcher in the dataset. The researcher designed and refined a series of themes.

3.10 Ethical consideration

It is of great importance for researchers to integrate ethics in their research to avoid any harm to their participants. This also enables the participants to take part in the research knowing the purpose, dangers, and benefits of the investigation.

The participants were informed about the purpose of the study; confidentiality of their inputs and that findings would be reported anonymously. Consent to take part in the study was also obtained. The participants were informed of their right to participate or to stop at any stage of the investigation should they wish to do so. Ethical considerations also include issues of anonymity and no harm.

3.10.1 Informed consent and voluntary participation

Informed consent involves informing the participants of the type of information they need, the purpose of that information, and how it will affect them directly or indirectly (Kumar, 2014). It also consider how the participants are expected to participate in the study and how this would affect them directly or indirectly. According to Welman and Mitchell (2005), the researcher obtained the necessary authorization from the participants after the participants were fully and genuinely informed of the purpose of the study. This means that before conducting the interview; the researcher should explain to the participants that participation is voluntary. The researcher observed this ethical consideration by educating participants about the risks and benefits associated with participating in the study and consent was given.

3.10.2 Confidentiality

Personal and sensitive information that provided by participants was protected and not made public to anyone besides the researcher. In this study, the participant's identity remained anonymous and the information was kept confidential as much as possible.

3.10.3 Anonymity

The researcher used pseudonyms and the participants were labeled with letters of the alphabet as a participant, A, B, C, D, E, F, G, and so on, so that people could not match a given response with any respondent (de Vos *et al.*, 2011). When participants knew of the anonymity, they could express themselves freely without fear.

3.10.4 No Harm

No harm refers to the absence of injury to study participants, regardless of their voluntary consent to the study (de Vos *et al.*, 2011).

Thus, the researcher made sure that the participants would not suffer any harm, either emotionally, physically, or psychologically. In the event of harm, participants would have been removed from the study and offered counselling as needed. The researcher avoided inflicting anxiety and psychological discomfort by appropriately asking questions without judging participants. The researcher was also very patient with the participants as they recounted their ordeals, where some of the experiences were sensitive and painful.

3.11 Summary

This chapter identified the approaches and the tools that were used in this study, to meet the objective. It highlighted the research paradigm, research method, research design, target population, sampling method, the sample, data collection method, tools, data analysis, ethical consideration of informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and no harm. The next chapter outlines the results and findings of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presentation results from the investigation on challenges faced by female leaders in selected South African higher education institutions. The objectives of this study were: to identify the challenges faced by female leaders in South African higher education institutions, to compare whether challenges faced by female leaders in other countries are applicable in the South African higher education settings, to determine the strategies which could be used to address challenges faced by female leaders and help them overcome and succeed as leaders in higher education institutions.

4.2 Demographic characteristics of participants

The study consisted of 20 participants who shared their views and experiences on the challenges faced by women in higher education institutions' leadership positions.

4.2.1 Age of participants

The number of women in leadership positions who participated in the study from the two Universities was 20, as shown in Table 4.1. The age categories range between 30 and above 60 years old. The respondents between the ages of 30-40 years constituted 30%, while those between 41-50 years made 20% of the total population. Those between the ages of 51-60 years make up 35% and those of the age 61 and above constitute 15% of the participants. The number of women in leadership positions between the ages of 30-40 years is relatively high as women climb the corporate ladder and it is lower between the ages of 41-50 years as these women face personal challenges of balancing home and work responsibilities.

The number of women in leadership positions increases between the ages of 51-60 years as a result of their drive to lead, work incentives, and finding a balance in their home and work responsibilities. However, when they get to the age of 61 and above, they are no longer as energetic and want to maintain their roles in the workplace.

Table 4.1
Participants' age

Age in years	Frequency	Percentage
30-40 years	6	30%
41-50 years	4	20%
51-60 years	7	35%
Above 61 years	3	15%
Total	20	100%

4.2.2 Educational qualifications of participants

The participants' academic qualifications were also probed in this study. 20% of the participants had Honours degrees, none had a Bachelor's degree, 40% had Masters Degrees and 40% had Doctoral degrees, as illustrated in Table 4.2 below. There are no women with only a Bachelor's degree qualification in institutions of higher education leadership positions. This may be because women do further their education before starting to work. The number then picks up to 20% with Honours degrees as they start to have confidence in their abilities and qualifications.

The number of participants grows to 40% with Masters Degrees; this is as a result of more opportunities opening up for them up the corporate ladder and legislature supporting their cause. The number of women with Doctoral degrees in leadership positions is maintained at 40%. This results from sheer hard work and dedication to their work, despite the stereotypes, organisational and personal challenges.

Table 4.2
Participants' educational qualifications

Highest educational qualifications	Frequency	Percentage
Bachelor's degree	0	0%
Honors degree	4	20%
Master's degree	8	40%
Doctorate degree	8	40%
Total	20	100%

4.2.3 Employment experience of participants

Table 4.3 shows the employment experience of participants. 20% have less than 5 years of experience. 45% have between 5-10 years of experience. 35% have experience of between 11-20 years of experience. None of the participants have experience that goes beyond 21 years. Only 20% of the participants have less than 5 years of experience and this is because they are still starting their careers and do not have much experience to catapult them to leadership positions. As the work experience grows to between 5-10 years, the number of women in leadership grew to 45% and this is a reflection of growing their careers despite the personal and organisational challenges.

Since they would have managed to establish a balance in their work and family responsibilities, the slight drop of women in leadership roles between 11-20 years of experience to 35% might be a result of pressure from organisational and personal challenges.

Table 4.3
Participants' employment experience

Employment experience	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 5 years	4	20%
5-10 years	9	45%
11-20 years	7	35%
Above 21 years	0	0%
Total	20	100%

4.2.4 Marital status of participants

Table 4.4 presents marital status of the participants. Sixty-five percent of the participants are single, 25% are married and 10% are divorced. Most of the participants are single (65%) and this is because these women focus on their professional careers so much that there is little or no time left for a family. The 25% that is married is constituted of women who have managed to establish a balance between work and family life. The 10% divorced is made up of women in leadership positions who may have experienced personal and family challenges, but decided to continue building their professional careers.

Table 4.4

Participants' marital status

Marital status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	13	65%
Married	5	25%
Divorced	2	10%
Total	20	100%

4.3 Challenges faced by women in leadership position in South African Institutions of higher education

The experiences and views of the study participants were related to challenges faced by female leaders in higher education institutions as shown in Table 4.5 below. The participants provided important insights on how female leaders are misunderstood, undermined, and how they are discriminated based on gender stereotypes and age. The participants revealed that the legislative framework is only good on paper and some are even pasted on the walls, but they are not helping them to develop in their career.

Table 4.5

Themes and sub-themes generated from the interviews

Theme	Sub-themes
Challenges faced by female leaders in South African higher education institutions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Misunderstanding • Undermining • Balancing work and family responsibilities • Legislative frameworks in South Africa • Discrimination • Gender equality • Gender stereotype • Mentorship and training • Safety and security

4.3.1 Misunderstanding

This theme relates to the research participants' experiences and views on being misunderstood and their colleagues' mindsets. This is confirmed by one of the participants who mentioned that:

“The main challenge that I have is that you find that you don't have the same understanding of what you are doing with the people from different departments that you depend on, when delivering the services that you are offering. Those who don't have the same understanding tend to impose the way of doing things which is different from what you are doing. So there is a tendency of imposing their way of doing things into my way of doing things and my understanding is that if what I am doing is not against the policy of the institution, we should come to a point where we have the understanding to say allow me to do things this way”. (PB: aged 40 years)

The colleagues' mindset often led to a misunderstanding between the leader and the colleagues.

Another participant stated that:

“To avoid misunderstanding if you want us to do things differently from the way we are currently doing, you must give me a reason. The same should also apply to me as a leader that if I refuse to take suggestions. I must also give an explanation, because I don’t want to create a wrong impression of being bossy but I must show them that we are a team working towards the achievement of the organisational goal reason instead of just saying no because it will create an impression of someone bossy instead of a team player. But whatever I am doing as long as I am within the confines of the policy, I will push for the implementation that way”. (PA: aged 52 years).

4.3.2 Undermining

Goodall and Osterloh (2015) are of the view that men seemingly exaggerate their leadership abilities, whereas females have less-confidence in themselves. Women must do more than men to prove themselves, as a result, they have to work extra hard, outperform, and over exceed set standards to prove their competence and to avoid being undermined (Pew, 2015). This is confirmed in the following participant’s view:

“When you are a woman of a caliber you are shunned. When people look at you it’s like they want to believe that you are a man trapped in a woman’s body. You are ostracized, labeled and if by any chance you don’t get married, soon they will be suspecting that there must be some gender identity problems. This is also about females themselves; I have been to meetings where females don’t talk, not because they don’t have ideas. You find that you are the only female talking, such that men begin to be skeptical and say maybe she is not a woman because they undermine females.

From a female’s point of view, they have been raised to undermine themselves in believing that the role of a woman is to be pregnant, bare feet and in the kitchen. Women don’t want to emerge above average.

You don't want to be seen as emerging above average, because there you are more vulnerable; you are more susceptible. If any stone that comes, you are the first to be hit. So, I am sure many women don't want to emerge above average because of fear” (PH: aged 37 years).

Regarding the issue of being undermined as leaders, the participants felt that they are not equally judged in the workplace and should prove themselves more than men before they are valued as good leaders. Another participant confirms this by saying:

“When a woman gets up to speak men will judge her differently to what they would with a male colleague. People just generally trust males than they trust women. I remember addressing a meeting somewhere and heard some men saying “Ehh is that a woman” so you see those kind of attitudes that undermines women. And I would like to say I am 100% female and believe there are more women out there whose talents, expertise and what they want to do is plundered by the fact that they think that if you emerge as a fierce and knowledgeable female leader you are not feminine enough. It is unfair that I must go the extra mile to achieve that level of trust when a male just gets it instantly” (PL: aged 42 years).

However, middle-aged female leaders reported having found the power in their femininity and being able to act authentically:

“I find it challenging to work with people without a sense of urgency and self-confidence. I also find it distracting and it slows down the progress in our organisation, most especially when it is done by women because to me it just seems as if they are doing that intentionally to undermine my leadership. Women try too hard to be what we are not to impress others, just be yourself and do your work the best way you know-how and show you are competent. You can have a work persona and be authentically feminine” (PD: aged 56 years).

Participants revealed that the issue of being undermined is also done by other women towards female leaders because they also carry the notion of male superiority.

“There is something that I have learned about people who come to me with an attitude of undermining my abilities to perform my duty as a leader, and that kind of attitude is not only applicable to the male colleagues but females too. You find that the person undermining you don’t possess the knowledge that you have, and at times when you show them how things are done they doubt you and when they go to consult the higher authority to confirm, they find that what you are doing is the correct way. At times women are more undermining than men” (PF: aged 39 years).

4.3.3 Balancing family and work responsibilities

Female leaders are not only employees, but they also play a vital role in caring for their homes. During the interviews, the topic of balancing the family and work-life appeared to be one of the challenges for participants, although those who are married are getting full support from their husbands. Even those who are single and have grown up children complained that:

“Balancing work and family responsibilities is the biggest problem for me and I am still trying to sort it out. I am a director here at work, but when I get home, I am a mother, wife and play many other roles to my immediate and extended family. My husband is very supportive of what I do at work, but he still wants me to do my wifely duties without any excuse” (PC: aged 45 years).

Another participant said that:

“I try by all means that the work and family responsibilities complement each other. I know I have to go home and make time for my family. Before I sleep, I have to check on the emails to see what it is that came through when I was busy with household chores and reply to the emails. No matter how hard you try to have the two balanced. I find that most of the time work takes over my family time” (PG: aged 53 years).

Many women in this study shared household chores with their husbands. An elderly participant who was proud of her husband, who has a high position and still help her with the housework said:

“At my age, I don’t have a problem of balancing between family and work. I am sitting here with an empty nest. I have a husband, but I am lucky that he completely supports me in all the things I do. My husband does have a high position here in the same institution but still helps me with household chores.

He often does shopping with me on weekends and helps with cleaning and washing and then we do the gardening together (PJ: aged 60 years).

Another participant said that:

“He allows me to take part in trade union activities and we often attend the leadership workshops together. He does not complain when I arrive home late or if I have a meeting during the weekend. Whenever I have problems in my work, I share with him and ask for advice on how to deal with the problem which is a bonus to me. (PE: aged 58 years).

Three women said they were only supported in theory. Their husbands did not share housework, either they were too busy at their work or do not have time to help. In general, these women felt lucky for receiving such support. These women understood that looking after the family, including raising children and doing household chores is not their primary purpose in life. One participant had a feeling of shame for the little time she gave to her family due to work demands. Besides, her two female colleagues were aware that balancing work and family needs was restricting their work involvement and career development but have accepted it as their fate as women.

“Women have to look after their families, so they hardly have any time for work as much as men. A woman who holds a leadership position is somehow limited in fulfilling her roles. Sometimes she can’t go away on business or participate in long training workshops because she can’t be far away from her young and needy children for many days” (PM: aged 34 years).

Apart from household chores, the heavy workload was also mentioned as a factor in balancing work and family needs. It was remarkable to know that the head of a department could undertake so many tasks in her job and still try to maintain a balance between work and family.

“I am responsible for personnel management, examinations and observing lecturers. In addition have to supervise post graduates students with their research. I don’t have any time left for me to enjoy with my family because with research students I even have to work during the holidays” (PK: aged 45 years).

PM: aged 40 years is a female with a strong personality, but she acknowledged that she has difficulty managing her domestic duties. Her reason being:

“We are short-staffed in this department, hence, I have too many students to take care of since my work requires me to deal with the students on a one on one session. It has become hectic in such a way that I ended up attending to students even on Fridays the day that I initially allocated for report writing (PM: aged 34 years)

Another participant said that:

“Instead of writing reports on Fridays, I end up writing them on Saturdays to keep up with my workload. I am a motivational speaker and do that mostly on weekends; I virtually have no time for my family. I love my job though it’s difficult for me to manage my time sensibly, and it caused me some personal problems which I can’t tell you now” (PE: aged 55 years).

Women in this study revealed that they have huge workloads and balancing work and family proved to be a challenge even with a supportive family and work structures. However, their efforts are extraordinary and they revealed that balancing work and family is not all that they need to strive for. Individuals do not live for themselves; these women also need to contribute to their communities as well, however, it adds to the heavy load they are already carrying. Women put a lot of effort into balancing work and family responsibilities.

“I have a helper, but I do all the shopping, collect children from school and cook for my husband. I sacrifice for both work and family to get them balanced, Women always try harder than men” (PN: aged 36 years).

4.3.4 Discrimination

During the follow-up questions, discrimination came up as one of the challenges that the participants face within their institutions. One participant said:

“There is discrimination between men and women in this institution, to tell you the truth, women appear to be the ones who are more qualified in this department than men. Regardless of the responsibility that they carry both at home and work, you find that a woman is pregnant or is having a baby that is less than a year or six months, they don’t even drop their studies, they continue, and they sign up to their studies until the very end, even shortly before they retire.”(PP: aged 46 years)

Another participant said:

“In this department we have men, who have all the university benefits, but they have never attempted to do a diploma or degree to upgrade their Matric certificates. Right now as I am talking to you it is October and many women are busy with their studies but the very few studying. But many senior posts are filled by the men with their little education” (PT: aged 43 years).

However, in contrast to what participants above said about discrimination, one participant said:

“Even though there are people who discriminate against female leaders in the institution itself, I am used to that and have learned how to deal with them. I show them that I know what I am doing, and you are not going to give me instructions. You can only advise me on how to do things. I am thankful for my family support and I know they have full confidence in me and what I am doing” (PG: aged 49).

Another participant said that:

“Women are discriminated in this institution, during meetings when you raise a point as a female they just accept it and it ends there, from my personal experience even if you have a very good idea which is doable as a female they don’t implement it.” (PO: aged 39 years).

During the follow-up questions, participants raised the issue of leaders' age. The youngest participants talked about how their age affect their leadership roles. They revealed that their age had a substantial influence on their leadership irrespective of their gender. In African culture, the younger person must respect the older person. These young women have several elderly colleagues in their departments. They regarded age as a challenge that affect their leadership. These concerns are confirmed by three of the participants who pointed out that:

“Being as young as some of my colleague’s children, I have a problem giving them tasks with my particular requirements. They are old school and have their working style and if I want them to change their way of doing things for us to be more effective to achieve the goals of the organisation faster, they feel annoyed and think that I am arrogant” (PR: aged 32 years).

Another young participant acknowledged that she did not feel comfortable working with older colleagues, and it is a challenge that she needs to overcome.

“Although they are staff members under my leadership, I have to be very careful when communicating with them. They sometimes fail to do their work the way they are expected to, and it’s difficult for me to reprimand them, hence, our African culture that says older people are like leaders. I can’t openly or directly criticize them, but have to find ways to let them know what needs to be done. This stresses me out cause I end up looking like an incompetent leader. Honestly, I have to think twice before giving instructions and opinions” (PS: aged 35 years).

The other participant mentioned that:

“Working in higher education institution with old traditions and deeply entrenched influences makes it difficult for young leaders like me. The ideas that we come up with are hardly accepted and implemented because they say we are still young and inexperienced. The culture of respecting older person harms female leadership” (PQ: aged 33 years).

4.3.5 Gender equality

The participants revealed that gender equality remains a sensitive issue and is still topical in institutions of higher education in South Africa. South African cultures are still entrenched in patriarchal foundations and, thus, spilling over into government and professional institutions.

“In this institution, there is no gender equality at all. Look at the senior management positions they are all occupied by men. The top five positions in this institution are filled by men. There is still a lot that has to be done. Look at parliament, we still have more men than women.

As a female leader, you just have to survive until you can stand firm, there is nobody who will come and hold your hand to show you how things are done as a leader. You have to build yourself here. I have never come across any legislative framework that assists when you are already there. I know of the legislative framework that fights for females to be leaders. This creates a problem of self-actualization as a female leader” (PR: aged 35 years).

Participants in this study revealed that the legislative frameworks are not helping at all, they are just good on paper, not in practice; they are not beneficial to women. One participant said:

“Documents are written, they are there in black and white. Some are even pasted on walls, but definitely, I don’t think the government has got the modal, or have figured out the modalities in terms of what we want to be done or this is the kind of accommodation that we require for female leaders. But I can tell you that there is no system whatsoever, female leaders continue to suffer.

I know you know, some of my colleagues at some universities even went mental because of lack of support in a work environment and some ended up resigning. So the government has got good things written on paper but does not even have a follow-up system to say “what are you doing” (PT: aged 43 years).

Another participant said this:

“The legislative framework in South Africa has assisted in empowering females by giving them opportunities or room to engage in leadership. The freedom in the paper has made it easy for females to be better leaders in their leadership positions” (PO: aged 39 years).

4.3.6 Gender stereotype

The study participants revealed that gender stereotype is still deeply rooted in the South African culture where men are very patriarchal in certain areas. There are cultural differences that apply in the work environments where men do not accept female leaders. One participant attests that:

“Females should not be prejudiced because of their age and gender. It should be considered that women has got multiple roles. Females forge against such odds, we bear children, we cook, and we wash clothes and still make it with our careers that is how strong we are” (PR: aged 35 years).

4.3.7 Mentorship and training

Participants reported that they were not provided with personal mentors though they need them.

“In this institution, an attempt was made although the challenge was that the program was for just a certain period. There was nobody who was going to follow through with you. It was training that was offered and one of the things that they did was to ensure that each candidate had a mentor. So you see that was part of the fulfillment of the training, but there hasn’t been any follow-up.

We have employed you in this position and so certain somebody will be mentoring you. That’s not there, it is difficult when you don’t have a mentor because there is nobody who knows everything. It was just packaged for that training only and when the training was over and done with, that was it. The relationship was not sustained over time. Here in this institution, you are on your own. Sink or swim if you drown, we bury you” (PG: aged 49 years).

Another participant said:

“Although I have never been provided with a mentor myself, I take mentorship very seriously with the people that I work with in the institution. I take the responsibility to be a role model and to use my knowledge and experience to up-skill, guide and grow other female leaders and to inspire confidence in them” (PP: aged 42 years).

Another participant mentioned that:

“In this institution, they do not provide mentorship, here you have to come out and swim and make sure you come out. Training is also a problem, here they don’t train people according to the demand in the office they just train according to their friendship since they don’t take training as important, but they see it as a simple way of spending the institution money and training is done outside as vacations” (PN: aged 36 years).

4.3.8 Safety and security

All the participants revealed that they do not feel safe as women in their institutions:

“I don’t feel safe at all because there are no CCTV cameras in some corridors and the parking areas. You can hardly find security personnel within the institutions’ buildings but only at the gates and student residents. Management needs to take our safety seriously for both staff and students because women could be raped and men could be mugged.

The safety and security department needs to be developed in such a way that it becomes conducive to work and study at any given time of the day” (EP: aged 55 years).

Another participant said:

“No I don’t feel safe at all, three or four years back we had cases of students and staff attacked in and around the institution. Some of those attacks resulted in death, which is not a good thing, because there is no parent who expects a call from the university to be told that their daughter has passed away due to the injuries sustained in a rape attack. Security personnel is stationed mainly at the gates and

the administration building areas and the CCTV cameras are not placed everywhere but in the same areas where there are security personnel” (PK: aged 45 years).

Another participant had this to say:

“Here in my department we sometimes work until very late due to the service we provide, there are no surveillance cameras, we have been applying for it to be installed but it’s not being attended to. One of our staff members was hold hostage during working hours by the students and it has become frightening for us since that incident occurred. I think the women who feel safe around here are those who don’t attend a late meetings or even attempt to work late otherwise we are all at risk as women” (PO: aged 39 years).

All the female participants reported that they do not feel safe and they need to feel safe, for them to be able to do the work at any time they choose to, especially because they are leaders and sometimes it is important that they put in extra hours.

4.4 Similarities in challenges faced by female leaders in other countries and those in South African higher education settings

Table 4.6

Themes and sub-themes generated from the interviews

Themes	Sub-themes
To establish whether challenges faced by female leaders in other countries are the same as those in the South African higher education settings.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● A culture that promotes male dominance and patriarchal tendencies. ● Lack of support and mentorship programs. ● Gender segregation and inequality. ● Harassment and abuse.

4.4.1 Culture that promotes male dominance and patriarchal tendencies

South African cultures are founded on patriarchal blocks and stereotypical ideologies which assert that men are leaders while women are the weaker sex and are there to support men. One participant reported that:

“As a woman in a leadership position, I would like to commend the government for the steps it has taken up to now ensure that we as women can also participate in shaping the strategies of our organisations. It was not always like this no, no, no, women were not regarded as capable of leading. It has been a struggle for us to make our voices heard. I am not saying that is enough but at least we have managed to make a little progress.”(PT: aged 43 years)

Another participant said that:

“In our African culture, men are leaders and women follow as they are considered weak vessels meant to be protected from harm. This leads to women being undermined and not properly valued regardless of their educational qualifications. When women are recognized they are put at a disadvantage of meeting two expectations at the same time: Good at public and private work. It is so hard to be perfect in everything you do” (PN: aged 36 years).

This was also perpetuated by apartheid. Apartheid restricted the participation of women in leadership and relegated them to second class citizenship status. Female leaders face societal and family challenges, such as poor support for female leadership (South African History Online, 2019). Similarly, in Kenya the ideology of looking down upon African women and their leadership skills is evident. It was further perpetuated by the colonial government, which segregated people by race and culture. Females received double oppression as they were oppressed by political regimes and by their communities. Common cultural challenges across the globe include role conflict, patriarchy, attitudes, and efficiency (Choge, 2015).

These challenges seem to be a universal phenomenon; women experience it all over the world. There are similarities in challenges faced by female leaders in China and in South Africa.

There are patriarchal family model which has been the custom in Chinese society, based on Confucianism. (Peus, 2015) Women are limited to supportive roles in the family and are often treated as almost invisible. Women are regarded through their relationships with other people, especially their families (Saunders & Oganessian, 2014). Chinese women have been identified through their relationships, which define them as someone's daughter, someone's wife, or even someone's mother not as individuals. In Saudi Arabia, there is a guardianship policy that demands that a female must obtain permission from a male guardian, usually, her husband or father to travel and work. Strict Islamic cultural values in the Middle East countries expect women to give priority to their family, not their careers (Sunkonen & Valjakka, 2016). These may seem extreme in the modern South African context, but were common practices before the abolishment of the Apartheid era (Msimang, 2011).

4.4.2 Lack of support and mentorship programs

Participants cited lack of support and mentorship programs as a crucial hindrance for women in leadership positions in South African institutes of higher learning. One participant said:

“If only our male colleagues and fellow workmates understand that women are also as capable like them (males), in the execution of duties and in some instances we are even better than them. We deserve to be leaders and can steer organisations successfully. However, for women, the road has always been difficult because as we struggled to occupy our positions, there was no support from the community and families, I had to deal with both oppressive organisational policies and stigmas that limit women's capabilities as well as prove to my family that I could lead both in my family role and also at work.”(PF: aged 39 years).

Another participant said:

“As leaders, we also need to attend mentorship programs to help sharpen our mental abilities. We need mentors to assist us with advice and knowledge on some areas we may be doubtful about and require clarification in our professional careers.”(PC: aged 45 years).

Participants regard mentoring and training as critical success factors essential to support female leaders, however, such services are not provided to them. The study noted that men socially network with their mentors, but it is difficult for women to allocate private time for the sake of networking with mentors and it is important that the institutions provide mentorship for them. Participants in this study reported that they struggle to balance work and family life. Workload, gender stereotypes were harsh realities that they are face and try to overcome. Furthermore, some reported that their husbands support them in theory, and does not help them with household chores in any way.

In Saudi Arabia, lack of support and mentorship programs hinders women from participating in strategic meetings, limits access to important information and resources, and restricts them from networking with other leaders. Saudi women are also affected by technical lack of empowerment and self-challenge (Alomair, 2015). This policy creates challenges for women in leadership positions who do not have family support related to their work as they might not be allowed to travel for work purposes. In the workplace, Saudi women in leadership positions deal with complex laws, rules, and social practices which impact their day to day practice and freedom of movement. (Alomair, 2015).

Similarly, the female leaders in America are faced with challenges such as balancing the family and work responsibilities, ethnicity, gender, low self-respect by their colleagues, lack of support from work and in the communities. These problems are also common among female leaders in South African higher learning institutions (Thompson, 2017).

4.4.3 Gender segregation and inequality

In South African cultures, women are expected to be involved in several social responsibilities regardless of the positions they occupy at work. Participation in activities such as attending weddings and funerals is regarded as a priority in South African communities. One participant said:

“I have recently heard about a young female who went through an interview and did very well and when a decision had to be made they said: she is still of

childbearing age and she was not given the position because they looked at it and said she will get pregnant”(PK: aged 45 years).

Another participant said

“In my office I am not given a mentor, the reason being that they carry the so-called status being. Let’s say you are working in this office, they tell you that you don’t need many people to help you, even if you apply, they don’t approve. It is difficult because even though I can do the job alone I need to be mentored and improve in certain areas of my leadership. I try to network with other female leaders so that I can learn from them on my own time” (PM: aged 34 years).

Similarly, in India females face discrimination and intimidation challenges, especially in the workplace (Singh & Prasad, 2014). Ethiopian women are expected to be involved in several social responsibilities regardless of the positions they occupy at work. Participation in activities such as attending weddings and funerals is regarded as one of the biggest challenges for female leaders in Ethiopia (Girma, 2012). Women are forced to spend more time and energy on household chores, family, and other social responsibilities which makes it quite tough for female leaders. Women are facing social and environmental challenges that have an impact on their leadership (Girma, 2014).

4.4.4 Harassment and abuse

Women in leadership positions in South African institutions of higher learning experience abuse and harassment in the workplace. One participant shared that:

“Male colleagues usually misconstrue kindness and comradeship in the workplace to mean availability for sexual pursuit. When you decline them, they start to take the workspace as personal, refusing to take instructions and in some cases label me and bad mouth me amongst other workmates” (PK: aged 45 years).

This is like the USA where female leaders are faced with the harassment challenges. Many American female leaders stay single or are divorced or widowed because they could not effectively achieve a balance between their leadership roles at work and their families (brown, 2017). In India, sexual harassment has been identified as one of the most persistent and serious problems female employees experience in the workplace.

Female leaders are mostly affected by work related issues such as offensive comments, sexual assault threats, and other sexual advances. Sexual harassment causes women to lose confidence in themselves and resign. Thus ultimately negatively affecting career progression (Singh & Prasad, 2014).

4.5 Strategies to overcome challenges faced by female leaders in higher education institutions

4.5.1 Training and mentoring employees

Participants were of the view that the institutions of higher learning must invest in their labour force; they should facilitate employees, especially women to do leadership courses and attend workshops on leadership enhancement. One participant said that:

Table 4.7

Themes and sub-themes generated from the interviews

Theme	Sub-themes
Strategies to address challenges faced by female leaders to help them overcome and succeed as leaders in higher education institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Training and mentoring employees. ● Female representation ● Reviewing the legislative

Another participant said:

“I think human resources investment is key. As an institution, I don’t think they invest in their human resources. Ummhh, there are courses out there or workshops out there that deal with leadership for women, it doesn’t seem to be open, or maybe because I’m still new, maybe I’m not aware. Nonetheless, I believe if they can open a platform where they can say, there is a course and we are inviting all female leaders to attend, a leadership course for women, I think it will help us.”(PG: aged 49 years).

Another participant said:

“I think, workshops should be conducted in our institutions and most of the subordinates should attend. Sorry, I think a lot of subordinates should be trained as well to know exactly what the leaders are expected to do and how their leaders expect to be treated”(PN: aged 36 years).

4.5.2 Female representation

Participants stressed the need to establish a balance in gender representation in the workplace at all levels within institutions of higher learning. One participant said:

“To balance men and the women according to qualification, the appointments must be balanced. You must not find only men in top positions.”(PK: aged 45 years).

4.5.3 Reviewing the legislative

Participants highlighted the need for the government to review its legislative framework to ensure fairness in its policy-making mandate. This was reflected in one participant’s response:

“I think the starting point should be to review the legislative framework of our country because if there is an appropriate framework in the country, the institutions are supposed to implement it. That is the only way to address the whole problem and challenges (PR: aged 35 years).

4.6 Summary

The study established that even though South Africa has made commendable progress in the progression of women to leadership positions and female empowerment, female leaders still face challenges in South African higher education institutions. Similar challenges faced by women in South African institutions of higher learning in leadership positions and the rest of the world were noted. These include: Culture that promotes male dominance and patriarchal tendencies, Lack of support and mentorship programs; Gender segregation and inequality and harassment and abuse. Education, female representation, and reviewing the legislative were the strategies suggested to address challenges faced by female leaders to help them overcome and succeed as leaders in higher education institutions. The discussion will include themes that emerged from the interviews, reviewed literature will be infused and recommendations made.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide a summary of the key findings, recommendations of the study, limitations of the study, and suggestions for further studies. It will also include a discussion of the findings and a summary

5.2 Discussion of results

This section of the discussion focuses on the organisational and personal challenges that women in leadership positions face, strategies to address them and how to overcome them. Themes and sub-themes were generated to fully explain the challenges.

5.2.1 Organisational challenges

5.2.1.1 *Gender stereotyping and gender equity*

Literature has confirmed gender stereotyping as part of the collective encoding found in cultures, where men are taught that they are leaders, while women are taught to follow and they belong in the kitchen, barefoot and pregnant, where they are meant to be submissive to men (Mwando, Mamimine, Kanokanga & Chamutingiza, 2014). The extent to which South African society accepts inequality between men and women in power within the institutions is an illustration of how gender stereotypes are deeply rooted in organizational culture. The participants confirmed that they had to deal with traditional values and gender stereotypes in their marriages, which make it difficult for them to execute their leadership responsibilities.

Many officials and leaders neglect actions designed to promote gender equity and eliminate discrimination. The dissemination of the law on gender equality would be an important step on raising awareness of gender issues. The roles of women and their contributions should be published in all fields. This could lead to changes in the attitudes of men and women towards gender stereotypes. Household chores are not the sole responsibility of women and the conformist model of femininity that limits and directs women's lives must be questioned.

The re-socialization of gender stereotypes is vital. The public and education institutions will help in raising awareness. The most important places where gender equity should be taught are families and schools. The leadership training and mentoring course content should include gender issues. Women have duties (“heavenly mandates”) such as procreation and family care, which must be given due consideration by government administrative bodies at all levels in all sectors and society as a whole, for female leaders to be valued.

5.2.1.2 Discrimination

The participants reported that discrimination directly affects them in their leadership positions. They highlighted that men are very patriarchal in higher education institutions. White (2012), also noted that there is a clear indication of discrimination between men and women in favor of men, thus, an indication of women being undermined in their leadership roles. Participants also reported that their contributions to the organisational development are taken for granted because they are women and this has also caused unhealthy competition between them and their male colleagues. Some participants reported that they have been to some meetings where they were shunned through the comments that were made as they were speaking because they are women. The context in which women operate has changed. Despite the Labor relations Act (1995), The Employment Equity Act (1998), and the Affirmative Action policies aimed at protecting women from gender discrimination, the participants reported that discrimination is deeply rooted in South African culture.

5.2.1.3 Mentoring and training

Participants reported that guidance and support in the form of mentoring and training is important to ensure success in their leadership roles, although they were not provided with mentors by their respective institutions. This was in tandem with Ragins and Kram, (2007) who posited that mentoring is crucial for career development in leadership. However, the participants voiced their willingness to accept the responsibility of mentoring others to share their knowledge. Individuals who have mentors are often more satisfied with their work. This assertion was cemented by Vamos, (2014), who stated that mentorship is a strategic tool, it can attract and retain high potential talent and accelerate leadership and readiness.

Male mentors used their power to open doors and propel mentees to the top, while women in leadership positions will be facing difficulties in finding sponsors, with limited access to social networks that can deliver information about leadership expertise (Ho and Hall, 2016).

5.2.1.4 Safety and security

Participants reported that they do not feel safe around the institution. All of them were concerned about their safety as staff and students. They revealed that there are no CCTV cameras around the institution, they are only installed in the main administration building. Some argued that they have been trying to apply for the installation of the CCTV cameras in their buildings because they have to work late since they provide services for the whole institution and they are short-staffed, which forces them to work overtime. Half of the participants were mainly concerned because of the rape and murder cases that had happened in their institution. Some students and staff members were raped and killed. The issue of safety and security has a direct impact on the results of students and the performance of staff members, not only leaders. Participants suggested that the institution should consider the safety of everyone and make it conducive to study and work at any given time.

5.2.1.5 Legislative frameworks in South Africa

This theme includes discrimination, age of leadership, and gender equality. The establishment of a legislative framework in South Africa to improve women's conditions has had a significant impact on solving structural problems and has prompted corporate institutions to be more gender and equality sensitive (Burmeister, 2011). However, participants reported that higher education institutions do not retain and develop people from designated groups as required by the Employment Equity Act (1998). Specifically, they pointed out that female leaders who are in enhanced careers are not sufficiently supported and trained in leadership.

The Employment Equity Act, in particular, has failed women, because they still face increasing levels of unemployment, exacerbated by the challenge of competing with other women, who are also classified in designated groups (Gobind, 2013). A study by Chiloane and Tsoka (2010) reveals that discriminatory practices, structural inequalities, cultural factors, prejudices and traditional patriarchal societies are still alive and well in the South African business environment. While women dominate the teaching profession in South Africa, a few are in leadership positions. Those in managerial positions face many challenges in higher education institutions.

5.2.1.6 Balancing work and family responsibilities

The participants in this study reported that balancing work and family responsibilities is a serious challenge they are trying to overcome. Four women among the participants noted that they are overwhelmed with a huge workload and domestic responsibilities, resulting in a lot of pressure. These female leaders had a double burden of tasks from the workplace and home. The participants were forced to meet their cultural norms which required them to place family and community interests first. Household chores are associated with women in many cultures, whereas men are considered the head of the family (Schuler, 2006). It is not surprising that the participants from this study prioritized their families over their work.

5.2.1.7 Leaders age

Evidence from this study show that the leaders' age also affected the way they exercise their leadership. Age was regarded as an obstacle by young leaders, although but older leaders find it beneficial. The African culture of respecting the elderly is causing a predicament for young leaders. Participants reported that it is difficult to make important and direct comments or give warnings to the elderly. This puts these young leaders at odds with their colleagues and as result, they experience distress and challenges fulfilling their duties. The participants had to navigate their ways of dealing with older colleagues' issues. It is important for these young female leaders to get the work done whilst not violating cultural norms.

The culture of respecting the elderly has negative implications on leadership, regardless of gender. The study established that it is difficult to be an effective young leader because of this cultural norm, which resulted in compromised self-confidence because it compels them to keep quite. This is because they are often considered inexperienced and their voice does not easily get accepted by the elderly. Young female leaders are highly skilled and have proven themselves to be good leaders (Bandiho, 2009). Maintaining good relationships and respecting the elderly are important cultural values that have a huge impact on leaders. Participants made it clear that changing this deep-seated cultural norm is not easy, so young leaders need to be prepared for the elderly colleague related challenges at work. Joining a network of leaders to share and learn from each other's experiences and how they deal with the same problem could help.

5.2.2 To establish whether challenges faced by female leaders in other countries are the same as those in the South African higher education settings

5.2.2.1 Culture that promotes male dominance and patriarchal tendencies

South African cultures are founded on patriarchal blocks and stereotypical ideologies that men are leaders while women are the weaker sex and are there to support men. This assertion was supported by Msimang (2011), who noted that in South Africa apartheid was used to restrain the participation of women in leadership and it effectively relegated them to second-class citizenship status. Similarly, in Kenya the ideology of looking down upon African women's leadership skills is apparent. These challenges seem to be a universal phenomenon because they are experienced all over the world.

There are similarities on challenges faced in China and South Africa where there are patriarchal family models which has long been the custom in the Chinese society (Sunkonen & Valjakka, 2016). Women are limited to supportive roles in the family and are often treated as almost invisible. Women are considered through their relationships with other people, especially their family members. Chinese females have been identified through their relationships as someone's daughter, someone's wife, or even someone's mother, not as individuals. Peus, (2015), argued that in China the idea of leadership as a paternalistic act has long been a norm from the Confucian philosophy.

In Saudi Arabia, there is a guardianship policy that demands that a woman must get permission from a male guardian, usually her husband or father to travel and work. Strict Islamic cultural values in this Middle East country expect women to give priority to their family, not their careers. This aligned with AbalKhail (2017), who established that the workplace is characterized by complex laws, rules, and social practices that inhibit their day-to-day practice and freedom of movement for Saudi women in leadership positions. These may seem extreme to the modern South African context but were common practices before the abolishment of the Apartheid era (Msimang, 2011)

5.2.2.2 Lack of support and mentorship programs

Participants cited lack of support and mentorship programs as a crucial hindrance for women in leadership positions in South African institutes of higher learning.

Sebola and Khalo (2010), assert that simple advice from mentors is the most important support in leadership that a person requires than financial incentives. Mentorship provides a full support system to female leaders. In Saudi Arabia, lack of support and mentorship programs hinders women from participating in strategic meetings, limits access to important information and resources, and restricts them from networking with other leaders. This was supported by Hodges (2017), who stated that female leaders in Saudi Arabia face many challenges in the workplace such as social, religious, cultural and organizational challenges.

Saudi women are also affected by technical lack of empowerment and self-challenge. This creates challenges for women in leadership positions who do not have family support related to their work as they might not be allowed to travel for work purposes. In the workplace, Saudi women in leadership positions deal with complex laws, rules, and practices impacting their daily social practices and the right to move (AbalKhail 2017). Similarly, the female leaders in America are faced with challenges such as balancing the family and work responsibilities, ethnicity, gender, low self-respect by their colleagues, and lack of support from work and in the communities. Thuyle (2011), assert that this causes many American female leaders to stay single or divorced or widowed, because they could not effectively achieve a balance between their leadership roles at work and their families. These problems are also common among female leaders in South African higher learning institutions.

5.2.2.3 Gender segregation and inequality

In South African cultures, women are expected to be involved in several social responsibilities regardless of the positions they occupy at work. Hazifazlioglu (2010), perceived that challenges such as achieving a balance between family and leading role in the institutions, and low levels of achieving good relations with others are experienced by female leaders in higher education institutions. In India, women face discrimination and intimidation challenges, especially in the workplace. This was supported by Brown (2017), who noted that Indian female leaders are mostly affected by work related issues such as offensive comments, sexual assault threats and other sexual advantages. In Ethiopia, women are expected to be involved in several social responsibilities regardless of the positions they occupy at work.

Women are forced to spend more time and energy on household chores, family, and other social responsibilities which makes it quite tough for female leaders (Mengistu & Lituchy, 2017).

5.2.2.4 Harassment and abuse

Female leaders in South African institutions of higher learning experience abuse and harassment in the workplace. Thus women become reserved, fearing to be called names, should they be confident and aggressive (Msimang, 2011). Similarly, female leaders in the USA are faced with harassment challenges. Many American female leaders stay single or are divorced or widowed because they could not effectively achieve a balance between their leadership roles at work and their families (Thuyle, 2011). In India, sexual harassment was identified as one of the most persistent and serious problems female employees experience in the workplace. Female leaders are mostly affected by work related issues such as offensive comments, sexual assault threats, and other sexual advances (Brown, 2017). Sexual harassment causes women to lose confidence in themselves and resign, which negatively affect career progression.

5.2.3 Strategies to address challenges faced by female leaders to help them overcome and succeed as leaders in higher education institutions

5.2.3.1 Training and mentoring employees

Participants were of the view that institutions of higher learning must invest in their labour force. They should facilitate employees, especially for women to do leadership courses and attend workshops on leadership enhancement. This facilitation can be in the form of mentorship, as a strategic tool to attract and retain high potential talent, accelerate leadership, readiness, and open doors as well as help them overcome their challenges as leaders (Vamos, 2014).

5.2.3.2 Women representation

Participants stressed the need to establish a balance in gender representation in the workplace at all levels within institutions of higher learning. This is so because even though females in South Africa have moved to leadership positions in higher education institutions, a shift from the male-dominated culture in leadership and gender-mediated challenges, attitudes in South Africa still reflect the idea that men are better leaders than women (Saunders & Gamesman, 2014).

5.2.3.3 Reviewing the legislative

Participants highlighted the need for government to review its legislative framework to ensure fairness in its policy-making mandate. For example, the Bill on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment came into effect in 2003 (Department of Labor, 2015). The aim was to establish a legislative framework for the empowerment of women. This Bill needs to be reviewed to establish its effectiveness. Since the end of apartheid in South Africa, some pieces of the legislature achieved their mandate.

5.3 Recommendations of the study

5.3.1 Recommendations for future researchers

The most direct leadership experiences tackled racial and other forms of inequality. The South African government is committed to promote gender equality (Maseko, 2013). However, there is need for constant monitoring and evaluation to ensure that women's legislation in higher education institutions is documented. The limitations of this research and the lack of information about women leaders in higher education institutions in South Africa require more research. It is recommended to conduct larger studies on the same topic to get a clearer and more detailed picture of female leaders in higher education institutions.

5.3.2 Recommendations for policymakers

An all-inclusive perceptive would assist authorities and policymakers in adjusting the laws on gender to ease the challenges that are negatively impacting female leadership in higher educational institutions. Additionally, more appropriate strategies to empower women can be developed based on such knowledge. The study also recommends the revision of the current women empowerment policies to create advocacy for women in leadership development; they need platforms to share their success stories and how they overcome challenges.

5.3.3 Recommendations for females in leadership positions

It is essential to inspire women in leadership positions to work through the challenges they are faced with and through the moment of self-doubt when there is a misunderstanding and when they are undermined as leaders.

Female leaders should stop acting like men because acting like men does not guarantee their success. Females should not allow their femininity to stop them from getting things done the way they want. They need to have mentors to remain focused on being good leaders. There should be leadership orientation to the scientific research methods to enable conducting studies on work related challenges and come up with solutions thereof. Female leaders should be allowed to participate in decision-making process and setting foundations that boost the leading roles of women in higher education institutions.

5.4 Limitations of the study

This was a small-scale study and the research setting only represented two of the higher education institutions in the Limpopo province. This study provided an understanding of the challenges faced by female leaders and coping devices. One of the findings of this study was that participants' coping mechanisms of balancing work and family responsibilities are different. It would be beneficial to continue this study involving a bigger population to understand the exact needs for personal leadership development. This would involve a mixed methodology where quantitative and qualitative methods will be used to collect data from the participants through questionnaires, followed by in-depth interviews and empirical tests on participants. The researcher also faced the challenge of limited information restricted by participant confidentiality. Some of the participants felt some of the questions were too personal and they could not respond in all honesty because they would breach institutional confidentiality. However, the findings are indicative of the experiences of women in other higher education institutions.

Some of the conclusions on challenges faced by female leaders in institutions of higher education may be accurate and unique to the study area, Limpopo province, where the race and cultural backgrounds may not be representative of the whole South African population. Lastly, after conducting interviews, the researcher transcribed the audios and group the same themes together. Therefore, it is possible that some of the participants' ideas were not fully conveyed or were misinterpreted, however, I possibly did all that could humanly minimize the possibility of those mistakes.

5.5 Conclusions

In conclusion, the researcher established many challenges faced by female leaders in higher education institutions. One of the objectives of this study was to investigate whether the challenges faced by female leaders in other countries are applicable to the South African higher education settings. The findings show that female leaders in South African higher education institutions face organisational, personal, and social challenges. Therefore, this calls for higher education institutions to take suitable developmental procedures to address the challenges faced by these women in their various leadership levels, whether in academic or administration. This could be achieved through the review of the legislative framework in South Africa.

The government should come up with a follow-up strategy to check up on implementation. Indeed there are people who resist change, but eventually they get used to it. Institutions should invest in human resources; some courses and workshops deal with female leadership, which could open platforms for women to talk about their challenges and how to overcome them. During those training workshops women can also network with other female leaders. Leadership workshops could also be conducted within institutions and the subordinates should also be allowed to attend for them to understand what is expected of their leaders and how they should work towards the attainment of organisational goals.

Female leader should overcome some of the personal and social challenges that they face. This should be done by conducting face-to-face interviews to encourage their leadership roles, ignore their social outlook and negative beliefs which assume that they have weak personal capabilities. This can be applied as an experiment that was proven successful in Bloom (2003) research.

To overcome certain challenges, such as lack of self-confidence and job satisfaction, which are stumbling blocks to effective female leadership; face-to-face interviews with several leaders must be conducted. The researcher hopes that the results of this study will be presented to the decision-makers of higher education institutions in Limpopo Province to help them provide programs that strengthen leadership roles and consider tutoring to overcome the challenges faced by female leaders.

5.6 Summary

The chapter sought to give a summary of challenges faced by women in leadership positions. These include gender stereotyping, gender equity, safety and security, discrimination, mentoring and training, legislative framework in South Africa, balancing family and work responsibilities, and leaders' age. . These challenges are not peculiar to South Africa; female leaders in institutions of higher education faced similar challenges. These challenges include cultures which promote male dominance and patriarchal tendencies, lack of support and mentorship programs, gender segregation, and inequality, and harassment and abuse. Strategies to address challenges faced by female leaders to help them overcome and succeed as leaders in higher education institutions include training and mentoring employees, advocating for more women representation, and reviewing the legislative framework. Conclusions, limitations to the study and recommendations for future researchers were made.

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ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND LABOUR RELATIONS

INFORMED CONSENT DECLARATION

In terms of ethical requirements of the University of Venda, I invite you to complete this form as an indication of your permission for this institution's females in leadership positions to voluntarily participate in this study.

I _____ hereby confirm that I have been fully informed about the procedures, activities and purpose of this study. I was given full opportunity to ask any questions and I understand that participants can withdraw from the study at any stage and time.

I therefore hereby **Give/Do not give** my consent for the staff and any relevant member to voluntarily take part in the study as outlined. (**Cancel out the inapplicable**).

Participant

Date

Researcher

Date

ANNEXURE B: INTERVIEW COVER LETTER

Dear participant

I am, Rosinah Arlucia Tshipani, A master's student in the Department of Human Resources Management and Labour Relations, School of Management Sciences, University of Venda. I wish to engage in a research project entitled: An investigation into challenges faced by females in leadership positions in the higher education institutions, a case of Limpopo province, South Africa. This will require me to collect data on the above-mentioned topic that will meet the following objectives:

- (i) To examine the challenges faced by women in leaders in higher education institutions
- (ii) To explore how the challenges, affect women leaders in executing their leadership roles in the higher education institutions.
- (iii) To determine the strategies which could be used to alleviate challenges faced by female leaders to help them overcome and succeed as leaders in higher education institutions.

To this end you will be required to answer the questions, please note that:

- It will require about 20 minutes of your time
- Your participation in this study is voluntary
- You may withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice
- The information you provide will be treated as confidential
- The findings of the study will be used to make recommendations for the higher education institutions to address the challenges faced by females in leadership positions in higher education institutions

For any queries about this project my contacts are as follows:

Miss. Tshipani R.A (Master's Student No:15018015)

Department of Human Resource Management and Labour Relations

School of Management Sciences

Cell: 081 852 2010/073 511 4137. E-mail: rtshipani@gmail.com

ANNEXURE C: QUESTIONS

Characteristics of participants

Please answer the following questions by ticking in the appropriate boxes

Age

25-30 years (1)	31-40 years (2)	41-49 years (3)	49-50 years (4)	50 years and above
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Marital status

Single (1)	Married (2)	Divorced (3)	Widowed (4)
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Employment experience in leadership position

1-5 years (1)	5-10 years (2)	5-15 years (3)	Above 15 years (4)
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Qualification

First degree (1)	Honours (2)	Masters (3)	PhD (4)
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Section B: Interview Questions

An investigation into challenges faced by females in leadership positions in higher education institutions. A case of Limpopo, South Africa.

The researcher is conducting a scientific study about the above-mentioned topic, for this purpose, questions had been constructed over the following domains: Organisational, Personal, Cultural, Technical & Physical, and Social challenges.

The researcher appreciates your kindness to carefully listen to the questions and respond to them by expressing your point of view about the prevalence degree of the challenge. Assuring you that your responses will be used for scientific research purposes exclusively.

Best Regards and Gratitude.

The following questions would be asked during the interview session:

1. To what extent are you satisfied with your role as a leader at work?

2. What are the main challenges that emanate from an organisation itself?
3. How do you deal with male colleagues that still believes that women are not good leaders and don't want to take instructions from a female leader?
4. Do the community and the family support you as a woman leader?
5. To what extent would you say the legislative framework in South Africa are helping women in leadership positions?
6. Are there physical incentives for women leaders in this institution?
7. Are there challenges that you face as a woman leader that are unique to this organisation?
8. What are the personal challenges that affect you as a woman leader in higher education institution?
9. How do you maintain balance between your professional responsibilities and familial needs?
10. As a leader, sometimes you will be required to attend late meeting, do you feel safe around the institution's building?
11. What are the strategies that can be used to address the challenges that women leaders are faced with in higher education institutions?
12. Mentorship is of importance lately, does the University provide you with any mentors?

ANNEXURE D: TURNIT IN REPORT

CHALLENGES FACED BY FEMALES OCCUPYING LEADERSHIP POSITION AT SELECTED SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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ANNEXURE E: RESEARCH ETHICS LETTER

**RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR**

NAME OF RESEARCHER/INVESTIGATOR:

Ms RA Tshipani

Student No:

15018015

PROJECT TITLE: An investigation into leadership challenges faced by female leaders in higher education institutions: A case of Limpopo, South Africa.

PROJECT NO: SMS/18/HRM/02/1409

SUPERVISORS/ CO-RESEARCHERS/ CO-INVESTIGATORS

NAME	INSTITUTION & DEPARTMENT	ROLE
Dr TS Setati	University of Venda	Supervisor
Mr H Ngirande	University of Venda	Co- Supervisor
Ms RA Tshipani	University of Venda	Investigator – Student

ISSUED BY:

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

Date Considered: September 2018

Decision by Ethical Clearance Committee Granted

Signature of Chairperson of the Committee: 

Name of the Chairperson of the Committee: Senior Prof. G.E. Ekosse



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ANNEXURE F: EDITING LETTER

14/03/2021

Editing and Proofreading Report for Tshipani Rosina Arlucia (15018015)

This letter serves to confirm that I, Dr. Nyete Liberty, Takudzwa, proofread and edited a Dissertation by Tshipani Rosina Arlucia (15018015) from the University of Venda titled *Challenges Faced by Females Occupying Leadership Position at Selected South African Higher Education Institutions, South Africa*

I carefully read through the dissertation, focusing on proofreading and editorial issues.

The recommended suggestions were highlighted.

Yours Sincerely

Nyete.

Liberty Takudzwa Nyete (PhD)

Boston Media House –Pretoria Acadia

Tel.: 0766815547

E-mail: lnyete@gmail.com