International Journal for Research Trends in Social Science & Humanities
Volume 4, Issue 2
Mar-Apr- 2026, PP 1-79

The Influence of Gender Stereotypes and Church Teachings on Women's Ascension to Educational Leadership in Selected Secondary Schools in Lusaka, Zambia

Hellen Chisanga
Master Of Education in Educational Administration and Management

Abstract- This study will examine the influence of cultural and religious perspectives on women's ascension to educational leadership in randomly selected schools in Lusaka. Gender stereotypes and biblical teachings can perpetuate patriarchal attitudes, limiting women's opportunities for decision-making positions. This study will investigate how these perspectives shape women's experiences and opportunities for leadership. It will use a mixed-method approach, combining surveys and interviews to gather data from female educators, school administrators, and church leaders. The research will explore how gender stereotypes and biblical teachings influence perceptions of women's leadership abilities and opportunities through a qualitative approach. The study aims to identify the ways in which cultural and religious perceptions intersect with educational leadership. Its findings will promote greater inclusivity and diversity in educational leadership, contributing to a more equitable and just educational system. By exploring women's experiences in leadership, this study seeks to challenge and weaken patriarchal attitudes, thereby fostering a more supportive environment for women.

Keywords: Gender stereotypes, Church teachings, Women in educational leadership, Female leadership barriers, Secondary school leadership, Women empowerment in education

I. Introduction

1. Background of the Study

The underrepresentation of women in educational leadership positions constitutes a persistent global phenomenon that has attracted considerable scholarly attention over the past five decades. Despite comprising a significant majority of the teaching workforce in many countries, women remain substantially underrepresented in senior leadership positions such as principalships, deputy principalships, and heads of department across educational institutions worldwide (Fuller, 2022; Moorosi, 2010). This gender disparity in educational leadership is not merely a statistical anomaly but reflects deeply embedded structural, cultural, and ideological barriers that systematically disadvantage women's ascension to positions of authority and influence. Globally, research has demonstrated that women encounter what scholars have termed a "labyrinth" of challenges on their path to leadership positions a complex journey involving multifaceted obstacles rather than a single, transparent barrier (Carli & Eagly, 2016; Eagly & Carli, 2007). These challenges include entrenched societal stereotypes that associate leadership with masculine traits such as assertiveness, decisiveness, and authority, while feminine qualities such as empathy, collaboration, and nurturance are often devalued in leadership contexts (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The persistence of such stereotypes creates what role congruity theory describes as a prejudice against female leaders, arising from the perceived incongruity between feminine gender roles and the stereotypical requirements of leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

The global landscape of educational leadership reveals striking patterns of gender inequality. According to international studies, women's representation in educational leadership positions varies considerably across regions but rarely achieves parity with their representation in the teaching profession (Fuller, 2022; Moorosi, 2010). This phenomenon has been attributed to multiple factors operating at different levels of analysis: individual factors including women's career aspirations and self-efficacy beliefs; interpersonal factors such as gender bias in selection and promotion processes; institutional factors including organizational cultures and policies; and societal factors encompassing cultural norms, religious beliefs, and gender ideologies (Chibvembe, Daka, & Mulenga-Hagane, 2023; Moorosi, 2010).

The persistence of gender disparities in educational leadership has prompted the development of various theoretical frameworks to explain this phenomenon. Social role theory, pioneered by Alice Eagly, posits that gender differences in social behavior arise from the differential distribution of men and women into social roles, leading to the formation of gender role expectations that become self-perpetuating (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 2012). Feminist theories have further illuminated how patriarchal structures and ideologies operate to maintain male dominance in leadership positions, often through subtle mechanisms that appear natural or inevitable (Allen, 2018; Fuller, 2022). These theoretical perspectives provide essential analytical tools for understanding the specific barriers that women face in their quest for educational leadership positions.

Within the African continent, the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership positions reflects broader patterns of gender inequality while also manifesting region-specific characteristics shaped by particular cultural, historical, and religious contexts. Sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, presents a complex landscape where traditional patriarchal structures intersect with colonial legacies, contemporary religious influences, and modern educational reforms to shape women's opportunities for leadership advancement (Moorosi, 2010; Morojele & Chikoko, 2014).

Research conducted across various African countries has consistently identified socio-cultural factors as primary barriers to women's ascension to educational leadership positions. A South African study investigating stakeholder perceptions of women's underrepresentation in principalship positions revealed that "entrenched societal stereotypes and cultural beliefs perpetuate discrimination in leadership selection" (Dyantyi & Mbatha, 2025, p. 45). The study further found that "cultural and societal norms further complicate the landscape for aspiring female leaders" (Dyantyi & Mbatha, 2025, p. 47), creating systemic challenges that women must navigate in their professional advancement. These findings resonate with research from other African contexts, including Tanzania, where studies have shown that "women's underrepresentation in secondary school leadership positions is largely due to gender stereotypes, devaluation, and discrimination, perpetuating patriarchal systems" (Makere, 2025, p. 23).

The East African context provides particularly illuminating insights into the factors affecting women's participation in educational leadership. A Tanzanian study

investigating female teachers' underrepresentation in school leadership positions in the Sumbawanga district identified multiple interconnected barriers, including negative societal perceptions, gender bias, and what researchers termed "masculinity culture" (Mbalilaki & Onyango, 2022, p. 124). Similarly, research in Uganda has explored women teachers' aspirations to school leadership, revealing how cultural expectations regarding women's primary responsibilities for family and domestic duties constrain their career advancement opportunities (Sperandio & Kagoda, 2010).

The religious dimension of barriers to women's leadership in Africa deserves particular attention. Across the continent, both traditional beliefs and organized religion have played significant roles in shaping gender ideologies and prescribing appropriate roles for women. In many African societies, religious teachings derived from both Christian and Islamic traditions have been interpreted in ways that limit women's access to positions of authority and public leadership (Phiri, 2007; Phiri & Nadar, 2006). These religious influences often intersect with cultural norms to create powerful ideological barriers that legitimize and perpetuate gender inequality in leadership contexts.

Zambia presents a compelling case for examining the influence of gender stereotypes and church teachings on women's ascension to educational leadership. As a nation characterized by significant religious diversity and strong cultural traditions, Zambia's educational landscape reflects the complex interplay of multiple factors shaping women's leadership opportunities. The country's religious demographics, with approximately 95% of the population identifying as Christian alongside significant Muslim and traditional religious minorities, create a context where religious beliefs and institutions exert considerable influence on social norms and practices (Phiri, 2007; Taylor, 2006).

The Zambian education system has undergone significant transformations since independence in 1964, with various policy initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality in education. Despite these efforts, substantial gender disparities persist in educational leadership positions. Research has characterized the situation of women in positions of power in Zambia as "a sensitive and controversial issue," noting that "women are mostly subjected to preconceptions that place them in challenging situations" (Chibvembe et al., 2023, p. 177). This characterization underscores the deeply contested nature of women's leadership in the Zambian context and the powerful ideological forces that shape attitudes toward female authority.

Recent scholarship has begun to document the specific challenges faced by women in Zambian educational leadership positions. A study examining the experiences of women in managerial positions within the education system in Lusaka District found that "women administrators have hidden talents and competencies, as they perform in an ethical manner using different leadership styles" (Chibvembe et al., 2023, p. 184). However, the same study revealed that these women "experience a number of challenges and hurdles that stand in their pathways or occur when performing their leadership roles" (Chibvembe et al., 2023, p. 185). These findings suggest that while women demonstrate capacity and effectiveness in leadership positions, they must navigate significant obstacles that their male counterparts may not encounter.

The Zambian policy context relevant to women's educational leadership includes various international commitments and national frameworks. Zambia is signatory to international instruments promoting gender equality, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 5 regarding gender equality and Goal 4 regarding inclusive and equitable quality education (Ministry of Education, 1996). Nationally, the Education Policy of 1996 and subsequent policy documents have articulated commitments to gender equity in educational access and participation. However, the translation of these policy commitments into practice, particularly regarding women's representation in leadership positions, remains incomplete (Mwanza, 2020).

Lusaka District, as Zambia's capital and largest urban center, provides a particularly significant context for examining women's ascension to educational leadership. The district contains the highest concentration of secondary schools in the country and serves as a site where modern educational institutions intersect with traditional cultural values and contemporary religious influences. Research conducted specifically in Lusaka has begun to illuminate the particular challenges and experiences of women in educational leadership positions within this context.

A study focusing on the experiences of women in managerial positions in selected secondary schools in Lusaka District provided crucial insights into the local dynamics affecting female educational leaders. The research, which sampled thirty-five women in school management positions from seven secondary schools, found that while these women demonstrated significant competencies and ethical leadership approaches, they encountered numerous challenges in performing their leadership roles (Chibvembe et al., 2023). The study advocated for "getting rid of unnecessary and harmful prejudices that prevent women from arising in order to allow them to express their inner potential" (Chibvembe et al., 2023, p. 186), highlighting the presence of gender- based prejudices within the Lusaka educational context.

Further local research has examined the specific administrative challenges faced by female heads of department in Lusaka's secondary schools. A study investigating female social sciences heads of department revealed that these leaders encountered "both structural and material" challenges in their work, including heavy subject loads, constrained resources, managing large staff numbers, and addressing teacher absenteeism (Moomba, Mulubale, Mundando, Munkoyo, & Kaumba, 2023, p. 34). While these challenges may not be uniquely gendered, the study's focus on female department heads provides insight into the conditions under which women exercise educational leadership in Lusaka's schools.

The religious landscape of Lusaka is particularly significant for understanding the influence of church teachings on gender roles and leadership attitudes. As Zambia's most cosmopolitan city, Lusaka hosts diverse religious institutions representing various Christian denominations, Muslim communities, and other religious traditions. Among Christian denominations, the Evangelical Church in Zambia (ECZ) has been the subject of specific research attention regarding its stance on women's leadership. A theological study examining the ECZ's position on women's preaching and governing roles in

Lusaka found that while women can serve as deaconesses and teach in women's fellowships and youth services, they "cannot serve as elders or pastors of a congregation and are not allowed to preach in a service where men are present" (Muyutu, 2024, p. 56). This official position, based on interpretations of Genesis creation narratives and Pauline teachings regarding women's authority over men, exemplifies how church teachings can directly limit women's leadership opportunities even within religious institutions themselves.

The foregoing review of literature across global, regional, national, and local levels reveals a significant gap in existing research. While studies have examined gender stereotypes as barriers to women's educational leadership in various contexts, and separate studies have investigated church teachings regarding women's roles in religious institutions, there is a notable absence of research that explicitly examines the intersection of these two factors in shaping women's ascension to educational leadership positions in Zambian secondary schools. Existing research in Zambia has documented the challenges faced by women in educational leadership positions (Chibvembe et al., 2023; Moomba et al., 2023) and has separately examined church teachings regarding women's leadership within religious institutions (Muyutu, 2024). However, no study has systematically investigated how gender stereotypes prevalent in Zambian society and teachings emanating from churches may jointly or interactively influence women's opportunities for advancement to educational leadership positions in secondary schools. This gap is particularly significant given the central role of religious institutions in Zambian society and the potential for church teachings to reinforce or challenge gender stereotypes that affect women's professional advancement.

Furthermore, existing research has tended to focus either on the experiences of women who have already attained leadership positions or on theological analyses of religious doctrines regarding women's roles. What remains unexplored is how gender stereotypes and church teachings shape the aspirations, opportunities, and career trajectories of women seeking to ascend to educational leadership positions, as well as how these factors influence the selection and appointment processes through which leaders are chosen. This research intuition that the intersection of gender stereotypes and church teachings constitutes a significant but understudied barrier to women's educational leadership in Zambia provides the foundation for the present study.

1. Statement of the Problem

Despite international and national initiatives aimed at fostering gender equality in educational leadership, women continue to be significantly underrepresented in leadership roles within secondary schools in Zambia. Although women represent a substantial segment of the teaching workforce, their numbers in decision-making positions such as head teachers, deputy head teachers, and department heads are disproportionately low (MOE, 2020; Kamizhi, 2019). This inequality raises important questions about the factors that persist in obstructing women’s advancement into leadership roles in the education sector. Research indicates that cultural norms and gender stereotypes still influence views on leadership suitability, often favoring men over women (Mwansa, 2018). In numerous Zambian communities, leadership is linked with masculine attributes such as authority, assertiveness, and decision-making

capability, while women are viewed as more appropriate for nurturing and supportive roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002). These stereotypes not only affect recruitment and promotion processes but also deter qualified women from pursuing leadership positions due to anticipated societal opposition. Religion, especially Christianity, which is the predominant faith in Zambia, significantly influences gender roles and expectations. Certain interpretations of biblical teachings advocate for male leadership and impede women from taking on leadership roles, not just within religious contexts but also in broader social institutions, including education (Chanda & Mwansa, 2019). These interpretations frequently reinforce patriarchal ideals and create a setting in which women's leadership is doubted or undervalued. Although there are policies in place to promote gender equity in educational leadership, their execution has not produced the intended results in narrowing the gender gap in leadership roles (Chisanga & Chanda, 2020). The ongoing existence of these disparities indicates that mere formal policies are insufficient to dismantle the deeply entrenched socio-cultural and religious beliefs that continue to limit women's opportunities for leadership. Therefore, the issue lies in comprehending how gender stereotypes and church doctrines influence women's rise to leadership roles in secondary schools in Lusaka. Without tackling these fundamental issues, initiatives aimed at achieving gender equality in educational leadership may remain unsuccessful. This study explored the influence of gender stereotypes and church teachings on women's ascension to educational leadership in selected secondary schools in Lusaka, Zambia.

3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of gender stereotypes and church teachings on women's ascension to educational leadership positions in selected secondary schools in Lusaka, Zambia.

4. Research Objectives

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- To examine the extent to which gender stereotypes influence women's ascension to leadership positions in selected secondary schools in Lusaka.
- To explore how church teachings impact perceptions of women in educational leadership roles.
- To identify challenges women face in attaining leadership positions as a result of gender stereotypes and religious beliefs.
- To suggest strategies for addressing the influence of gender stereotypes and church teachings on women's progression into educational leadership positions.

5. Research Questions

The study answered the following questions:

- To what extent do gender stereotypes influence women's ascension to leadership positions in selected secondary schools in Lusaka?
- How do church teachings shape perceptions about women in educational leadership roles?
- What challenges do women encounter in attaining leadership positions as a result of gender stereotypes and religious beliefs?
- What strategies can be implemented to mitigate the impact of gender stereotypes and church teachings on women's progression into educational leadership?

6. Significance of the Study

This study may be significant because it contributes to the body of knowledge on gender and educational leadership, particularly within the Zambian context, where gender disparities in school leadership remained evident despite gender equity policies. The findings provided a deeper understanding of how cultural gender stereotypes and church teachings influenced women's opportunities for leadership roles in secondary schools. Understanding these socio-cultural and religious influences was essential because they represented systemic barriers that policies alone had not addressed effectively (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study may hold practical significance for policymakers, educational administrators, and gender advocacy organizations. By highlighting the challenges faced by women aspiring to leadership roles, the research provided evidence-based recommendations for promoting inclusive leadership practices in schools. This may be critical for the Ministry of Education and other stakeholders responsible for implementing gender-sensitive leadership strategies in line with national development goals and global frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015).

Furthermore, the research may add theoretical value by applying gender role theory and feminist perspectives to the educational leadership context in Zambia. This theoretical integration was important for understanding the intersection of gender, culture, and religion in shaping leadership opportunities (Neuman, 2014). Lastly, the study may contribute to social transformation by raising awareness of the need to dismantle structural barriers that limit women's participation in leadership. This may be in line with global efforts to achieve gender equality and promote women's empowerment in leadership positions across all sectors.

7. Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the influence of gender stereotypes and church teachings on women's ascension to educational leadership positions in selected secondary schools in Lusaka, Zambia. The geographical scope is limited to Lusaka District, which serves as the study's location due to its significance as Zambia's capital and largest urban center, its concentration of secondary schools, and its religious diversity.

The content scope of the study encompasses: (a) gender stereotypes regarding women's leadership as they manifest in educational contexts; (b) teachings of Christian churches regarding women's roles and leadership, with particular attention to denominations represented in Lusaka; and (c) the ascension process for women to educational leadership positions, including aspiration development, qualification acquisition, selection and appointment, and leadership experiences.

The participant scope includes: (a) women in educational leadership positions (principals, deputy principals, heads of department) in selected secondary schools; (b) women teachers aspiring to leadership positions; (c) male and female teachers who may hold views regarding women's leadership; (d) school administrators and members of selection panels involved in leadership appointments; and (e) religious leaders from selected Christian denominations who can provide insight into church teachings regarding women's roles.

The study is limited to secondary schools within Lusaka District and does not include primary schools, colleges, or universities. The focus on Christian church teachings reflects the predominance of Christianity in Zambia's religious landscape but does not include systematic examination of other religious traditions, though these may be acknowledged where relevant.

8. Limitations of the Study

The study, like any other research, was not without limitations. One major limitation was its geographical restriction to selected secondary schools in Lusaka District. This limited the generalizability of the findings to other districts and provinces in Zambia where cultural and religious beliefs might differ. Although the study employed purposive and random sampling techniques to enhance representativeness, the findings were context-specific and might not reflect the experiences of women in rural or predominantly traditional communities (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Another limitation was related to the self-reported nature of data collected through questionnaires and interviews. Responses were subject to social desirability bias, as some participants might have provided answers they perceived as socially acceptable rather than their true beliefs and practices. While triangulation of methods was applied to minimize bias, the possibility of subjectivity in responses could not be entirely eliminated (Neuman, 2014).

Additionally, the study focused primarily on gender stereotypes and church teachings, thereby excluding other potential determinants of women's leadership progression, such as institutional policies, political interference, and economic factors. While this delimitation allowed for in-depth analysis of the chosen variables, it also restricted the scope of interpretations regarding other systemic influences.

Time constraints also presented a limitation. Data collection was conducted within a specific academic calendar, which meant that the availability of some participants, especially school administrators, was affected by their workload and examination schedules. Despite these limitations, measures such as scheduling flexibility and methodological rigor were employed to ensure that the validity and reliability of the findings were upheld (Cohen et al., 2018).

Here's the detailed Theoretical Framework with in-text citations (APA style) written in prose format:

9. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two complementary theoretical perspectives that provide analytical tools for understanding the influence of gender stereotypes and church teachings on women's ascension to educational leadership: social role theory and feminist theory. These theoretical frameworks, while distinct in their origins and emphases, offer integrated insights into the phenomena under investigation.

Social Role Theory

Social role theory, originally developed by Alice Eagly in the 1980s and subsequently refined through extensive empirical research, provides a foundational framework for

understanding how gender stereotypes emerge, persist, and influence behavior in social contexts (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 2012). The theory posits that gender differences in social behavior arise primarily from the differential distribution of men and women into social roles, particularly domestic roles and occupational roles, within a given society.

Social role theory emerged from Eagly's efforts to integrate insights from social psychology, sociology, and feminist scholarship into a coherent explanation of gender differences in social behavior. The theory's core proposition is that the division of labor between men and women both in the domestic sphere (with women primarily responsible for childcare and household tasks) and in the occupational sphere (with men and women concentrated in different occupations) creates gender role expectations that become self-perpetuating (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 2012).

According to the theory, observers witness men and women performing different social roles and infer that the characteristics required to perform these roles reflect the inherent dispositions of men and women. Thus, because women are observed in nurturing roles such as childcare and teaching, they are presumed to be naturally nurturing, caring, and interpersonally sensitive. Because men are observed in roles requiring assertiveness, decisiveness, and authority, they are presumed to be naturally agentic, competitive, and achievement-oriented (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Karau, 2002).

These inferences become consolidated into gender stereotypes shared cultural beliefs about the attributes of men and women that then shape expectations for behavior and influence how individuals are evaluated in various social contexts. Gender stereotypes encompass both descriptive norms (beliefs about what men and women typically are like) and prescriptive norms (beliefs about what men and women should be like) (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The prescriptive element of gender stereotypes means that individuals who deviate from expected gender roles may face social sanctions, including disapproval, devaluation, and discrimination.

Social role theory has been extensively applied to understand gender dynamics in leadership contexts, particularly through the development of role congruity theory by Eagly and Karau (2002). Role congruity theory extends social role theory by specifically examining the perceived congruity or incongruity between gender roles and leadership roles.

The theory argues that there is often a perceived incongruity between the feminine gender role (characterized by communal attributes such as kindness, concern for others, and emotional expressiveness) and the leadership role (often stereotypically associated with agentic attributes such as assertiveness, dominance, and competitiveness) (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This perceived incongruity creates two forms of prejudice against female leaders:

First, women may be evaluated less favorably than men as potential leaders because leadership ability is culturally associated with masculinity. When people think of leaders, they tend to think of men, and when they think of women, they tend not to think of leaders. This cognitive association between masculinity and leadership means that

women are often perceived as lacking the requisite qualities for leadership positions (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Second, when women do assume leadership roles and behave in ways consistent with leadership stereotypes (i.e., agentically), they may be evaluated negatively for violating prescriptive gender norms regarding feminine behavior. Women leaders face a double bind: if they behave in stereotypically feminine ways, they may be perceived as insufficiently leader-like; if they behave in stereotypically masculine ways, they may be perceived as violating gender expectations and face social sanctions (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Research applying social role theory to educational leadership contexts has provided empirical support for these propositions. Studies have found that female educational leaders often navigate complex expectations, needing to demonstrate leadership competence while also conforming to gender-appropriate behaviors (Moorosi, 2010; Stafford, 2024). A study examining student perspectives on leadership at San Diego State University found that female and male student leaders differed in their communication approaches, with feminine-identifying participants using communication to build relationships and work collaboratively, while masculine-identifying individuals used communication to efficiently complete tasks patterns consistent with social role theory predictions (Stafford, 2024).

Social role theory has also been applied to understand gender dynamics in faith-based educational contexts. A study examining women leading American Islamic schools used social role theory as a lens to analyze the gendered experiences of these leaders, finding that "there was a gendered division of leadership tasks; the women assumed expectations associated with nurturing and motherly roles; and women faced professional and personal consequences for transgressing social roles" (DeCuir, 2014, p. 156). The study further found that "social roles are stored within community structures embedded within American Islamic schools and are transmitted through

social contexts" (DeCuir, 2014, p. 158), illustrating how religious communities can reinforce and perpetuate gender role expectations.

This application of social role theory to faith-based educational contexts is particularly relevant to the present study, as it demonstrates how religious beliefs and community structures can interact with gender role expectations to shape women's leadership experiences. The theory suggests that church teachings regarding women's appropriate roles may function as a form of prescriptive gender norms, specifying not only what women typically do but what they should do according to religious authority.

Social role theory provides a valuable framework for understanding the influence of gender stereotypes on women's ascension to educational leadership in Zambia. The theory directs attention to the division of labor between men and women in Zambian society, both in domestic contexts (where women bear primary responsibility for childcare and household tasks) and in occupational contexts (where teaching is feminized but leadership is masculinized). This division of labor likely contributes to

the formation and persistence of gender stereotypes that associate women with nurturing roles and men with authority roles (Chibvembe et al., 2023; Mwansa, 2018). The theory also illuminates how these stereotypes may shape expectations for women's behavior in educational leadership contexts and influence how women leaders are evaluated. Women aspiring to or occupying leadership positions in Zambian secondary schools may face the double bind identified by role congruity theory: they must demonstrate leadership competence while also conforming to gender-appropriate behaviors, navigating conflicting expectations that their male counterparts do not face. Furthermore, social role theory provides tools for understanding how church teachings may interact with gender stereotypes. If church teachings specify appropriate roles for women (e.g., as nurturers within the domestic sphere or as supporters rather than leaders within the church), these teachings may reinforce and legitimize the broader gender stereotypes that emerge from the social division of labor. The authority of religious institutions may give these prescriptions particular weight, making gender stereotypes more resistant to change and more difficult to challenge (Muyutu, 2024; Phiri, 2007).

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory provides a second complementary framework for understanding the influence of gender stereotypes and church teachings on women's ascension to educational leadership. While social role theory offers insights into the psychological and social-psychological mechanisms through which gender stereotypes operate, feminist theory provides critical analysis of the structural, political, and ideological dimensions of gender inequality, including the role of patriarchal institutions and belief systems in maintaining male dominance (Allen, 2018; hooks, 2000).

Feminist theory encompasses diverse strands of thought that have evolved through multiple "waves" of feminist activism and scholarship. Contemporary feminist theory, sometimes characterized as fourth-wave feminism, is distinguished by its intersectional approach that recognizes how gender inequality intersects with other forms of oppression and marginalization based on race, class, sexuality, religion, and other social categories (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2019).

Liberal feminism, one of the earliest strands of feminist theory, focuses on achieving gender equality through legal and policy reforms that remove formal barriers to women's participation in public life, including education, employment, and political representation (Friedan, 1963; hooks, 2000). Liberal feminists advocate for equal opportunities, non-discrimination policies, and affirmative action measures to increase women's representation in positions of power and influence.

Radical feminism identifies patriarchy a system of male dominance and female subordination as the fundamental structure of oppression that underlies all other forms of inequality. Radical feminists analyze how male control over women's bodies, sexuality, and reproductive capacity, as well as male dominance in cultural institutions, perpetuates gender inequality across all spheres of life (MacKinnon, 1989; Millet, 1970).

Socialist and materialist feminism integrates feminist analysis with Marxist insights regarding the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy. These approaches

examine how women's unpaid domestic labor and paid labor in feminized occupations contribute to capitalist accumulation while simultaneously reinforcing gender inequality (Hartmann, 1976; Young, 1980).

Poststructuralist and postmodern feminism challenges essentialist notions of "woman" as a unified category and examines how gender identities and power relations are constructed through discourse, language, and cultural practices. These approaches emphasize the instability of gender categories and the multiple, contradictory ways in which gender is performed and experienced (Butler, 1990; Weedon, 1997).

Postcolonial and transnational feminism critiques the Western-centric assumptions of much feminist theory and examines how colonialism, imperialism, and globalization have shaped gender relations in non-Western contexts. These approaches emphasize the need to understand gender inequality in relation to local cultural contexts, histories, and power structures, rather than imposing Western feminist frameworks (Mohanty, 2003; Oyěwùmí, 1997).

Black feminism and intersectionality theory, developed primarily by Black women scholars in the United States and United Kingdom, have made crucial contributions by demonstrating how gender inequality cannot be understood in isolation from race, class, and other forms of oppression. Intersectionality theory, articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) and developed by numerous scholars, analyzes how multiple systems of oppression intersect to create unique experiences of marginalization that cannot be captured by examining any single dimension of identity alone (Collins, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989).

Feminist scholarship on educational leadership has critically examined how the field of educational leadership, management and administration (ELMA) has historically been "gender blind," assuming male experience as normative and failing to adequately theorize gender as a significant dimension of leadership practice (Fuller, 2022; Blackmore, 2013). Feminist scholars have documented how traditional conceptions of leadership have been shaped by masculine norms and experiences, often marginalizing or rendering invisible alternative leadership approaches associated with women.

Kay Fuller's (2022) recent work on "Feminist Perspectives on Contemporary Educational Leadership" provides a comprehensive framework for applying feminist theory to understand women's experiences in educational leadership contexts. Fuller argues for an "intersectional and inclusive" approach that recognizes the diversity of women's experiences and the multiple factors that shape their leadership trajectories (Fuller, 2022, p. 15). This approach moves beyond essentialist notions of women's leadership to examine how gender intersects with race, class, religion, and other social categories in specific contexts.

Feminist scholarship has also examined how women educational leaders navigate patriarchal structures and ideologies in their professional contexts. Research has documented how women leaders often face skepticism regarding their competence, heightened scrutiny of their performance, and resistance to their authority challenges

that stem from the perceived incongruity between femininity and leadership that feminist theory helps to explain (Fuller, 2022; Moorosi, 2010).

Feminist theory provides essential tools for analyzing the role of religion in perpetuating or challenging gender inequality. Feminist scholars of religion have examined how religious institutions, texts, and teachings have historically been used to justify and maintain male dominance while also documenting women's agency and resistance within religious contexts (Phiri, 2007; Ruether, 1983).

Feminist analyses of religion typically examine how patriarchal interpretations of sacred texts have been used to limit women's roles and authority. In the Christian tradition, feminist theologians have critically examined interpretations of Genesis creation narratives, Pauline teachings regarding women's silence in churches, and other passages used to justify women's subordination (Phiri, 2007; Ruether, 1983; Trible, 1984). These scholars argue that alternative interpretations are possible and that the essential message of scripture supports gender equality rather than hierarchy.

Feminist theory also examines how religious institutions function as sites of gender politics, where struggles over women's roles and authority are played out. The debate between complementarian and egalitarian positions within Christianity reflects deeper disagreements about gender, authority, and the proper interpretation of religious texts (Pierce et al., 2005; Piper & Grudem, 1991). These debates have implications beyond the ecclesiastical sphere, as religious teachings shape broader cultural attitudes regarding women's suitability for leadership positions in other contexts, including education.

Feminist theory provides crucial analytical tools for understanding the influence of gender stereotypes and church teachings on women's ascension to educational leadership in Zambia. Several aspects of feminist theory are particularly relevant:

First, feminist theory's attention to patriarchy as a system of male dominance helps to explain the persistence of gender inequality in educational leadership despite policy commitments to gender equality. From a feminist perspective, women's underrepresentation in leadership positions is not merely an accidental outcome of individual choices or isolated prejudices but reflects deeply embedded structural and ideological systems that maintain male dominance (Allen, 2018; hooks, 2000).

Second, feminist theory's intersectional approach directs attention to how gender inequality in educational leadership may intersect with other forms of inequality in the Zambian context. Women's experiences of barriers to leadership may vary depending on their social class, educational background, ethnic identity, denominational affiliation, and other factors. An intersectional analysis can reveal how multiple systems of privilege and oppression shape women's leadership trajectories (Collins, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989).

Third, feminist analyses of religion provide frameworks for understanding how church teachings may function as ideological supports for patriarchy, legitimizing gender inequality by presenting it as divinely ordained. The complementarian teachings

documented in Zambian churches (Muyutu, 2024) can be understood through a feminist lens as religious ideologies that reinforce male dominance and limit women's access to positions of authority.

Fourth, feminist theory's attention to women's agency and resistance provides a counterbalance to analyses that emphasize only victimization and oppression. Feminist scholarship on educational leadership has documented how women navigate, resist, and sometimes transform patriarchal structures in their professional contexts (Fuller, 2022; Moorosi, 2010). This study will attend not only to barriers but also to women's strategies for overcoming these barriers and creating spaces for women's leadership.

This study integrates social role theory and feminist theory as complementary frameworks for investigating the influence of gender stereotypes and church teachings on women's ascension to educational leadership. These frameworks, while distinct in their origins and emphases, offer integrated insights that together provide a comprehensive analytical lens.

Social role theory provides insights into the micro-level mechanisms through which gender stereotypes operate: how observations of the social division of labor lead to inferences about gender differences, how these inferences become consolidated into stereotypes, how stereotypes shape expectations and evaluations, and how individuals navigate the double binds created by role incongruity (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Karau, 2002). This framework is particularly useful for understanding how gender stereotypes affect women's aspirations, selection, and experiences in educational leadership contexts.

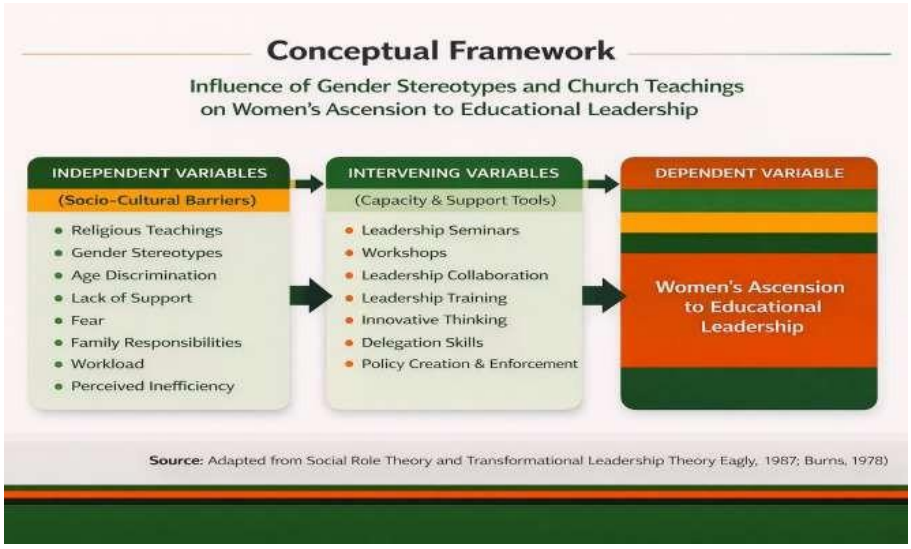
Feminist theory provides insights into the macro-level structures and ideologies within which these micro-level processes occur: how patriarchy as a system of male dominance shapes institutional arrangements and cultural beliefs, how religious teachings function as ideological supports for gender inequality, and how multiple systems of oppression intersect to create unique experiences of marginalization (Allen, 2018; Collins, 2019; Fuller, 2022). This framework is particularly useful for understanding the broader context within which gender stereotypes operate and the institutional and ideological forces that maintain them.

Together, these frameworks enable a multi-level analysis that examines: (a) the content and operation of gender stereotypes in educational contexts; (b) the content and influence of church teachings regarding women's roles; (c) how gender stereotypes and church teachings interact to shape the environment for women's leadership ascension; (d) how women navigate, resist, or internalize these influences; and (e) what strategies might effectively address these barriers to promote gender equity in educational leadership.

This integrated theoretical framework guides the study's research design, data collection, and analysis, ensuring that the investigation is theoretically grounded and that findings can contribute to theoretical development regarding gender and educational leadership in contexts characterized by strong religious influences.

International Journal for Research Trends in Social Science & Humanities
Volume 4, Issue 2
Mar-Apr- 2026, PP 1-79

Conceptual Framework



The model is composed three cycles and one rectangle. The cycles reflect the independent variables which affect and influence the dependent valuable and intervening variables which may act as solutions to the experiences. This explains that, female head teacher's experiences directly influence the Women's Ascension to Educational Leadership with the mixing up of intervening variables. The arrows indicated reflect that the direction towards which an arrow goals is the direct connection of one variable to another. The conceptual relationship between variables has prompted the researcher to investigating the influence of cultural and religious perspectives on women's ascension to educational leadership in randomly selected schools in Lusaka.

Definition of Key Terms / Operational Terms

Gender Stereotypes: Gender stereotypes are socially constructed beliefs and expectations about the roles, behaviors, and characteristics considered appropriate for men and women. In this study, gender stereotypes refer to perceptions that associate leadership qualities, such as assertiveness and decision-making, with men, while portraying women as better suited for nurturing or supportive roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Church Teachings: Church teachings refer to religious doctrines, interpretations, or practices that prescribe gender roles and responsibilities. For this study, church teachings are considered influential in shaping societal perceptions of women's suitability for leadership positions in educational settings (Chanda & Mwansa, 2019).
Women's Ascension to Educational Leadership: Women's ascension to educational leadership refers to the ability of female teachers to access, attain, and retain leadership positions within secondary schools. Leadership positions include head teacher, deputy head teacher, heads of departments, and other formal administrative roles within the school system. This operational definition emphasizes both attainment and effectiveness in leadership roles.

Educational Leadership: Educational leadership is the process of guiding, managing, and influencing the teaching and learning environment within schools. It involves strategic decision- making, administration of staff and resources, and promoting the academic and social development of learners (Bush, 2011).

Secondary Schools: Secondary schools are formal educational institutions that provide post- primary education, typically for students aged 13 to 18 years, following the Zambian curriculum. In this study, secondary schools include government and grant-aided schools within Lusaka District.

Institutional Policies|: Institutional policies are formal guidelines, rules, or measures developed by the Ministry of Education or individual schools to regulate leadership recruitment, appointment, and gender equity. Policies include affirmative action initiatives, leadership selection criteria, and gender mainstreaming strategies (MOE, 2020).

Personal Agency: Personal agency refers to an individual's capacity to make independent choices, exert influence over their career trajectory, and take actions to overcome barriers to leadership. In this study, it captures female teachers' self-efficacy, confidence, and determination to pursue leadership positions despite societal or institutional constraints.

Mentorship and Support Systems: Mentorship and support systems involve guidance, advice, and support provided by senior or experienced individuals within the educational environment.

Patriarchy: Patriarchy refers to a social system in which men hold primary power in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control of property. In this study, patriarchy is understood as a cultural and religious construct that privileges men in leadership roles, including in educational institutions.

II. Literature Review

This chapter presents the review of literature related to the study. An essential aspect of any research is the review of related literature because it gives an insight into the problem and helps the study in deciding the techniques and methodology followed by earlier investigators to find an answer to the current problem under investigation. Thus, this review facilitated a multidimensional, relational and processional understanding of women's higher education and their appointment to decision making positions in Educational Leadership in Zambia. The chapter reviewed literature in a systematic way, starting from global (looking at countries around the world) to local (looking at Africa and Zambia also). Reviewing literature on Educational Leadership, as well as decision-making, was beneficial for the study to understand how higher education affects women's participation in Educational Leadership. Based on the objectives set in this study, various literature was reviewed to guide and answer the research problem.

1. Sociological Theories of Gender Roles

The analysis of gender and leadership is profoundly shaped by foundational sociological theories that explain how gender roles are constructed and maintained within society. The functionalist perspective views gender inequalities as an efficient way to create a division of labor that maximizes resources and societal efficiency. This theory posits that men and women fulfill distinct, complementary roles such as men being the traditional breadwinners and women taking on caregiving responsibilities to ensure that societal needs are met and social cohesion is maintained. From this viewpoint, gender roles are not seen as oppressive but as essential for the smooth functioning and stability of a society. However, this perspective has been criticized for reinforcing, rather than simply reflecting, predefined gender roles, thereby perpetuating the very inequalities it purports to explain.

In contrast, conflict theory presents a fundamentally different view, emphasizing the role of power struggles in shaping gender roles. This perspective argues that gender roles are not neutral but are a product of the competition for resources and power between different groups. It contends that men, as the dominant gender, subordinate women to maintain their power and privilege. This is evidenced by the traditional overrepresentation of men in higher-paying jobs and leadership positions, while women are often confined to lower-status, lower-paying roles. From this standpoint, gender inequality is not an accident but a direct result of social, political, and economic forces designed to perpetuate male dominance.

Moving to a more granular level, social constructionism and symbolic interactionism offer a lens through which to understand how these macro-level power dynamics are internalized and enacted. Social constructionist theory stipulates that gender roles are not biologically determined but are an "achieved 'status'" shaped by culture and society. It emphasizes that our understanding of what it means to be male or female is learned through socialization and reinforced by cultural norms, media, and institutions from the moment we are born. Symbolic interactionism further focuses on the day-to-day interactions where gender is not something an individual is, but rather something they "do" or "perform" based on societal expectations. For example, a child may be given a specific toy to play with that reinforces traditional gender norms, which over time shapes their behavior and reinforces gender identity.

These theoretical frameworks together illustrate a comprehensive model of gender inequality. Functionalism describes the societal rationale for a division of labor, while conflict theory explains the unequal power dynamics embedded within it. Social constructionism and symbolic interactionism then provide the crucial link, detailing the specific mechanisms by which these macro-level systems are absorbed by individuals, shaping their identities and reinforcing the very systems of oppression that limit their opportunities. This intellectual progression reveals that the underrepresentation of women in leadership is not merely a consequence of individual choices or preferences, but the inevitable outcome of a deeply ingrained system where the ideal of leadership is culturally intertwined with masculinity. The challenge, therefore, is not to simply encourage more women to lead, but to fundamentally deconstruct and redefine the social and cultural understanding of what a leader is.

2. Social Psychological Theories of Leadership

Building upon the sociological foundations, social psychological theories examine how gender influences the perception and practice of leadership itself. A key distinction in this field is between transformational and transactional leadership styles. Transactional leadership is characterized by "contingent reward," where leaders reward followers for expected performance, and "management by exception," where leaders only intervene when a follower fails to meet expectations. In contrast, transformational leadership is a more active and motivating approach that inspires engagement and effort through four key behaviors: idealized leadership (charisma), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.

Empirical research has shown a consistent gender difference in the application of these styles. Women tend to use transformational leadership more than men, with the most significant difference being in "individualized consideration". They are also more democratic and participative in their approach, inviting followers to take responsibility and participate in decision- making. This is consistent with the notion that women are more communal, collaborative, and people-oriented in their approach to group roles. Importantly, studies have revealed a positive relationship between effectiveness and transformational leadership. This evidence suggests a "female advantage" in leadership, as women are more likely to employ the very styles that are most effective in contemporary organizations.

Despite this empirical advantage, women continue to face significant biases in leadership roles. The "Lack of Fit" model and Role Congruity Theory are critical frameworks for explaining this paradox. These theories argue that deeply ingrained, stereotype-based perceptions the notion that "women take care and men take charge" create a fundamental conflict between the female gender role and the ideal leader role, which is implicitly masculine. This "lack of fit" results in less favorable attitudes toward female leaders and makes it more difficult for women to attain and be perceived as effective in top leadership positions. The bias against women is not based on their abilities but on the cultural incompatibility between their gender identity and the rigid, culturally defined image of a leader.

This theoretical disconnect highlights a profound challenge: while women may possess leadership styles that are empirically proven to be more effective, their advancement is stymied by a pervasive, culturally-driven perception that they do not "look" like a leader. It is this deeply entrenched, biased perception, rather than a lack of competence, that truly impedes their career progression. To advance women into leadership, it is not enough to simply demonstrate their effectiveness; society must be encouraged to reframe its understanding of what leadership is, decoupling the concept from its historically masculine associations.

3. The Global and Regional Context: An Analysis of the Educational Leadership Gender Gap

The Persistent Global Disparity

The underrepresentation of women in educational leadership is a well-documented global phenomenon (Bergmann et al., 2022; Lara & Baird, 2025). While women make up a significant majority of teachers, particularly at the primary level, their presence in

leadership roles diminishes sharply as the organizational hierarchy ascends (Boulay, 2022; UNESCO, 2024/2025). This is not unique to education; a LinkedIn report from 2024 revealed that women hold only 30.6% of leadership positions globally, a gain of only 0.2 percentage points since 2022, indicating a troubling stall in progress (World Economic Forum, 2024).

While the education industry demonstrates a comparatively more equitable leadership pipeline than many other sectors with a median share of women in leadership at 43.7% it still falls far short of parity (UNESCO, 2025). There is a pronounced 22% drop in female representation between the overall workforce and leadership positions in the education sector, a statistic that highlights a systemic barrier to advancement (Boulay, 2022). This is particularly concerning given the extensive evidence suggesting that female leadership in education yields positive outcomes (Sharif et al., 2024a). Studies have found that female school leaders are more likely to report higher levels of instructional leadership, such as motivating teachers and fostering collaboration (Ngcobo, 2016; Singh, 2017). Furthermore, research in low- and middle-income countries has shown a link between female-led schools and improved student learning outcomes in both mathematics and reading (UNESCO, 2025). For example, in Togo, where only one in ten primary school leaders are women, students in schools led by women achieved higher exam results and promotion rates (PASEC, 2020).

The persistent disparity, despite clear evidence of female leaders' effectiveness, indicates that ascension to these roles is not based solely on merit or competence. The presence of a glass ceiling, an invisible barrier hindering women's progression to top management, suggests that deeply embedded, non-meritocratic factors, such as ingrained gender stereotypes and implicit biases, are overriding performance data in hiring and promotion decisions (Boulay, 2022; Suleman, 2015). The underrepresentation is thus not a sign of a lack of female talent but a symptom of a fundamentally flawed system (Bhattacharya et al., 2018; Musa, 2025).

The Sub-Saharan African Landscape: A Contradiction of Progress and Stagnation

The educational landscape in Sub-Saharan Africa presents a complex and contradictory picture of progress and stagnation (Bird, 2017; Kaasolu et al., 2019). While there has been significant improvement in access to education for girls, particularly at the secondary level, the translation of this access into leadership parity is not happening (UNICEF, 2020; UNESCO, 2025). Data from Ethiopia reveals a significant drop-off, with female representation in school leadership falling from 12% at the primary level to a mere 7% at the secondary level (PASEC, 2020). Similarly, in Francophone Africa, women make up only 16% of primary school principals (PASEC, 2020).

A closer look at a McKinsey report on gender parity in African tech reveals a crucial insight that applies broadly to other sectors, including education (Boulay, 2022; Lara & Baird, 2025). The report highlights that Sub-Saharan Africa leads globally with 47% of all STEM graduates from African universities being women, a higher percentage than in Europe, Asia, and North America. However, this impressive educational attainment does not translate into proportionate representation in top-tier roles (World Economic Forum, 2024; Kuyoro, 2025). The research notes a "steep drop-off" in women's representation from higher education to leadership roles, with their

participation dropping to 23%–30% in tech roles and less than 12% in tech leadership positions (WEF, 2025).

The conclusion to be drawn is that the problem in Sub-Saharan Africa is not a lack of access to education or a deficit of qualifications (Ng'ambi, 2024; Musa, 2025). Women are demonstrably capable and are successfully navigating the educational system. The challenge is not in the pipeline for talent but in the advancement to leadership (Blackmore, 2005; Deckard, 1975). The disconnect between women's educational achievements and their professional progression implies that the barrier is institutional and attitudinal, rather than educational or capability-based (Bhattacharya et al., 2018; Kaasolu et al., 2019).

4. The Sociocultural and Historical Foundations of Gender Roles in Zambia
A Historical Perspective: The Shift from Matriliny to Patriarchy
A profound understanding of contemporary gender dynamics in Zambia requires a historical perspective (Saidi, 2025; Deckard, 1975). The gender stereotypes that influence women's ascension to leadership are not an inherent or immutable part of Zambian culture (Kalumba et al.,2023; Blackmore, 2005). In the pre-colonial period, many Zambian ethnic groups practiced matrilineal descent, and women held a range of influential positions. Their roles in agriculture, pottery, and ritual were highly valued and complemented those of men (Deckard, 1975; Yáñez & Moreno, 2008). Men's and women's activities were distinct, but they were generally complementary, creating a system where women had significant power over land, labor, and lineage (Deckard, 1975).

This historical context was profoundly altered by the arrival of the colonial state and Christian missionaries in the 20th century (Saidi, 2025; Boulay, 2022). These forces introduced and imposed a powerful ideology of patriarchy and the nuclear family, in which the male was designated as the primary "breadwinner" and the female as the "housewife" (Kalumba et al., 2023; Deckard, 1975). This model, which was reinforced by colonial policies favoring men in education and wage- earning employment, marginalized women's traditional roles and created a new social and economic hierarchy (Blackmore, 2005; Deckard, 1975). The ideology of the male breadwinner and female housewife, actively promoted by churches, government social welfare, and the media, became a standard of prestige that families increasingly adopted (Saidi, 2025; Boulay, 2022).

The consequence of this historical shift is that the contemporary gender stereotypes in Zambia are not indigenous but are a direct historical legacy of colonial and Christian imposition (Kalumba et al., 2023; Saidi, 2025). This understanding is critical because it refutes the notion that these biases are an unchangeable cultural trait (Blackmore, 2005; Deckard, 1975). Instead, it positions them as a remediable, externally introduced phenomenon that can be challenged and dismantled (Boulay, 2022; Ng'ambi, 2024). By tracing the origins of these stereotypes, it becomes clear that the problem is not a matter of "traditional values," but a complex product of history and politics that requires targeted, historically-informed solutions (Saidi, 2025; Kaasolu et al., 2019).

Contemporary Manifestations of Gender Stereotypes and Societal Norms in Zambia

The historical impositions of the colonial era have left an enduring legacy on contemporary Zambian society (Saidi, 2025; Kalumba et al., 2023). Men are still widely perceived as more competent in socially valued domains and thus more suited for positions of influence (Bird, 2017; Kele & Pietersen, 2015). This prevailing gender belief curbs both the supply and demand for women leaders (Ng'ambi, 2024; Musa, 2025). Women may internalize these stereotypes, doubting their own capacity for leadership and complying with cultural expectations to avoid social sanction (Priola, 2007; Bhattacharya et al., 2018). The notion that women cannot succeed on their own merit is so deeply ingrained that publicly assertive women are sometimes chastised by their own kin or labeled with derogatory terms (Deckard, 1975; Saidi, 2025). This creates a powerful social pressure that discourages women from seeking or succeeding in leadership roles (Blackmore, 2005; Kele & Pietersen, 2015).

The influence of these stereotypes extends beyond individual attitudes and permeates the broader political and economic landscape (Ngcobo, 2016; Bird, 2017). The Zambian political space is often characterized as having a "male face" and is marred by violence and character assassination, which poses significant challenges for women to navigate (Saidi, 2025; Kalumba et al., 2023). This male- dominated environment in politics and other sectors directly influences perceptions within the education system (Musa, 2025; Ng'ambi, 2024). A woman perceived as a "housewife" in her community may face similar biases and lack of respect when she aspires to become a school principal (Saidi, 2025; Kele & Pietersen, 2015). The problem of female leadership in education is therefore not an isolated issue but a microcosm of broader Zambian society, underscoring the interconnectedness of different spheres of public life (Bird, 2017; Blackmore, 2005).

5. The Influence of Religious Teachings on Female Leadership Perceptions

The Role of Religious Institutions in Shaping Gender Norms

Religious institutions, particularly the church, have played a significant role in shaping and reinforcing gender norms in Zambia (Saidi, 2025; Kalumba et al., 2023). Building on the historical context of the colonial era, the church has cemented a patriarchal system that actively limits women's roles (Boulay, 2022; Deckard, 1975). A study conducted in Kabwe District concluded that the church remains "predominantly patriarchal" in its distribution of roles, a finding consistent with Hartman's Patriarchy theory, which emphasizes male dominance in communal activities (Saidi, 2025; Kalumba et al., 2023).

Within certain denominations, these patriarchal structures are particularly rigid (Ng'ambi, 2024; Bird, 2017). For example, in the Roman Catholic Church, women are explicitly ineligible for ordination to the priesthood (Saidi, 2025). The views of some adherents in a Kabwe-based study were against the idea of women in leadership roles, citing specific scriptural interpretations to argue that it is "better to please God than men" (Saidi, 2025). A female respondent in the same study noted that Jesus did not appoint women as apostles and that the church had "compromised" by allowing women into leadership (Saidi, 2025).

The church's patriarchal structure is not an isolated phenomenon but a powerful reinforcing agent of the societal stereotypes that are rooted in colonial history (Kalumba et al., 2023; Deckard, 1975). As a trusted moral and social institution, the church gives these gender norms a divine legitimacy that makes them particularly difficult for individuals to challenge (Bird, 2017; Blackmore, 2005). By limiting women to specific, often subordinate, roles within the church hierarchy, religious institutions create a powerful model of female subordination that has a cascading effect on other sectors, including education (Saidi, 2025; Kaasolu et al., 2019).

Divergent Theological Interpretations: The Internal Contradiction

While many churches in Zambia uphold a patriarchal view, it is crucial to recognize the existence of a counter-narrative and a "second school of thought" that supports female leadership (Saidi, 2025; Boulay, 2022). This internal debate presents a critical opportunity for intervention (Kalumba et al., 2023; Bhattacharya et al., 2018). The biblical verse Galatians 3:28, which states, "There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither bond nor free, there can be no male nor female, for ye all are one man in Christ Jesus," is a key theological argument for gender equality (Saidi, 2025; Boulay, 2022). This verse is interpreted by many as a powerful statement against all forms of social distinction and a call for a fellowship of equals (Bhattacharya et al., 2018; Deckard, 1975).

The presence of Pentecostal denominations, such as the Bread of Life, which accept women as pastors, serves as a practical counter-example to the patriarchal dominance of other churches (Saidi, 2025; Boulay, 2022). This demonstrates that the issue is not a monolithic religious belief but rather a matter of interpretation and application (Kalumba et al., 2023; Ng'ambi, 2024). The internal contradiction within the church suggests that engaging with religious institutions as a partner for change is possible, but it requires a careful, targeted approach (Bhattacharya et al., 2018; Saidi, 2025). Strategies can be developed that leverage the pro-equality theological frameworks to challenge the dominant patriarchal interpretations (Boulay, 2022; Kalumba et al., 2023). The problem is not the religion itself, but its specific interpretation and application by certain institutions, which provides a pathway for a more nuanced and effective engagement (Deckard, 1975; Bird, 2017).

6. Barriers to Women's Ascension to Educational Leadership in Lusaka Secondary Schools

Sociocultural and Interpersonal Hurdles

The analysis of gender stereotypes and religious teachings culminates in a clear understanding of the specific barriers women face in Lusaka's secondary schools. Local studies confirm that women administrators face a "sensitive and controversial" situation, subjected to discriminatory practices and deep-seated preconceptions (Kalumba et al., 2023; Saidi, 2025). The challenges are not merely structural but are deeply personal and psychological (Ng'ambi, 2024; Kele & Pietersen, 2015). Women in leadership roles, particularly as departmental heads, may find their skills "tested" by teachers and may face gender discrimination and bias that undermines their perceived competence (Kalumba et al., 2023; Bird, 2017). This dynamic creates a hostile environment where a woman's authority is not a given but must be constantly defended (Blackmore, 2005; Saidi, 2025).

This external discrimination can lead to a significant internal struggle. Studies have found that women themselves may lack confidence in their ability to lead, which can be attributed to the constant reinforcement of societal norms and cultural beliefs that favor men in leadership (Ng'ambi, 2024; Kele & Pietersen, 2015; Saidi, 2025). This creates a self-fulfilling prophecy, where the external prejudices lead to an internalization of these stereotypes, manifesting as a self- perceived lack of confidence that makes women less likely to seek leadership roles in the first place (Priola, 2007; Bhattacharya et al., 2018). The problem is a vicious cycle: the external environment, shaped by historical and religious factors, creates systemic biases that manifest as direct, interpersonal challenges in the workplace, which, in turn, can erode a woman's self-esteem and ambition, perpetuating the cycle of underrepresentation (Kalumba et al., 2023; Saidi, 2025).

Organizational and Institutional Hurdles

Beyond the interpersonal challenges, a range of organizational and institutional barriers prevent women from progressing to educational leadership roles (Kele & Pietersen, 2015; Kaasolu et al., 2019). A primary hurdle is the lack of mentorship and sponsorship opportunities from senior leaders, which are crucial for career advancement (Madsen, 2015; Lara & Baird, 2025). Without powerful allies to advocate for them, women may be overlooked for high-profile projects or stretch assignments that are essential for developing the skills and experiences necessary for leadership (Madsen, 2015; Musa, 2025).

The prevalence of implicit and unconscious biases in hiring, promotion, and performance evaluations further exacerbates the problem (Suleman, 2015; Boulay, 2022). The existence of the "glass ceiling" an invisible barrier that hinders women from advancing beyond certain levels—is a symptom of a system that is not designed to support female progression (Deckard, 1975; Davis & Maldonado, 2017). The problem is thus a systemic failure, not a personal one (Bird, 2017; Kalumba et al., 2023). The data counters the narrative that women are not "ready" for leadership by highlighting that the systems they must navigate are not "ready" for them (Ngcobo, 2016; Saidi, 2025). The absence of supportive policies and a lack of powerful allies to advocate for their promotion shifts the blame from the individual to the institution (Moomba et al., 2023; Kalumba et al., 2023).

7. The Intersectional Challenge of Work-Life Balance and the "Double Workload"

A significant and often unacknowledged barrier for women in Lusaka is the "double workload" (Saidi, 2025; Kalumba et al., 2023). Societal norms and cultural expectations, which are a direct legacy of the male breadwinner/female housewife model (Deckard, 1975; Blackmore, 2005), place the primary responsibility for domestic duties and childcare on women, even if they are employed. This creates a stressful work-life conflict that can negatively impact a woman's performance and leadership aspirations (Kuyoro, 2025; Ng'ambi, 2024).

The "double workload" is not a "women's problem"; it is a societal problem rooted in the patriarchal division of labor (Bhattacharya et al., 2018; Boulay, 2022). Data from studies in other contexts, such as Jordan, shows that when women receive support from

their families, they are more able to advance their careers and maintain a work-life balance (Musa, 2025; Madsen, 2015). This demonstrates that the issue is not inherent to being a woman, but to a lack of shared domestic responsibility (Ngcobo, 2016; Lara & Baird, 2025). Therefore, the solution is not just about institutional policies like flexible work arrangements but also about a fundamental societal shift in the perception and division of domestic labor (Kuyoro, 2025; Kalumba et al., 2023).

8. Women's participation in decision making in Educational Leadership

The UNDP considers Educational Leadership to be the bedrock of government and the central instrument through which national policies and programs are implemented. A fundamental argument for increased representation of women in Educational Leadership is that when the composition of the public sector reflects the composition of the society it serves, government will be more responsive and effective (UNDP, 2021). The under-representation of women also reflects the paucity in female careers to leadership and senior decision making positions.

In other words, the exclusion of women from decision making bodies not only limits the possibilities for entrenching the principles of democracy in a society but hinders economic development and discourages the attainment of gender equality. Women's education on a global perspective has been an issue of debate for long, within which it is now necessary to shift the focus from women's intellectual development to women's autonomy to participate in decision making. Women have always aspired to leadership and decision making positions as opportunities are increasingly presenting themselves but they continue to face discrimination and are in the minority when it comes to assuming leadership positions and performing their roles in the public and private domain (Evans et al., 2014).

Women around the world are far removed from decision making positions and the factors that hamper or facilitate their participation vary with the level of socio-economic development, geography, culture, and the type of political systems that are in place. Thus, in the public and private sectors, women continue to address multiple hurdles despite diversity and equity initiatives. Several studies around the world have examined how women impact legislation differently from men (Carroll, 1994; Stivers, 1993; Tamerius, 1995; Saidel & Loscocco, 2005; Volden, et al., 2013); others have investigated women's representation in government positions and the impact women make at the top levels of state (Bowling & Wright, 1998; Fox & Schuhmann, 1999; Miller, et al., 1999).

Several studies have examined the difference women and even specific women make to the field of Educational Leadership (Schacter, 2008; Shields, 2008). The imbalance in the distribution of power and decision making positions between women and men is a consequence of complex processes and of the interplay between multiple factors that are deeply embedded in social structures. Gender roles and stereotypes, gendered perceptions of leadership and the phenomena of the 'glass ceiling' and the 'glass cliff' are some of the underlying factors. In addition, institutional factors such as the design of electoral systems, internal policies and practices of political parties may either hinder or facilitate women's representation in decision making positions (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2015).

However, there appears to be a stronger focus on women's access to elected positions as an indicator of access to decision making and very little attention is given to gender equality in Educational Leadership. Gender equality in Educational Leadership is crucial since Educational Leadership is bound to convert policies into outcomes differently (Nasser, 2018). In Educational Leadership the prevalence of gender as a topic is limited. Schachter (2017) quotes Stivers's argument that 'Educational Leadership is structurally male despite its gender neutrality'. Educational Leadership has slowly evolved in the past few decades to focus on gender differences and disparities found in social roles (Bishu & Alkadry, 2017).

The think-manager think-male framework is a concept originally put forward by Schein (1975). However, it is discussed in literature by Sabharwal (2015), who states that the traits associated with men are the same traits associated with leaders. Therefore, men seem to possess the qualities that make an effective leader, and this male bias does not allow others to see women's leadership potential. Traditionally, women in many societies found themselves below males and dominant sets of male values in the hierarchy. These dominant male values create gender-biased practices that limit women's progression in structures and positions perceived to be patriarchal (Rusaw, 2011). Consequently, there is an unequal transference of power relations and gender transformation between men and women encouraged by gender-biased values and naturalized in daily practices.

According to Women Watch (2007) and Maseko (2013), there is still an underrepresentation of women in both developing and developed countries in several areas of leadership and decision- making structures. According to Schreiber (2013), despite women forming 50% of the world's population, only a paltry 2-3% have managed to break the glass ceiling in top leadership. This disparity has continued despite the fact that women are equally, if not, more qualified than some men, they possess the required technical know-how and are more than willing to serve in the top corporate leadership. This gender imbalance has continued to exist despite the passing of several legislations by governments to provide for gender balancing (Qian, 2016).
Several international declarations have also been made to address this disparity over the years but very little change if any has been achieved to this end (Crosby-Hillier, 2012). A look around the world shows that only four countries track women's access to decision making positions in Educational Leadership. Women only represent approximately 14.55% women in national

Educational Leadership in Iraq, 11.8% in Kuwait, 11.15% in Palestine and 30% in UAE (Nasser, 2017). Various factors affect women's participation in decision making in Educational Leadership.

King (1995) has identified four ways in which masculine power manifests in Educational Leadership s: (1) organizations are the domain of men because men are more likely to be leaders;
(2) organizations are the masculine domain, since expectations about gender is embedded in culture which leads to a preference for the masculine over the feminine;
(3) the state is a masculine domain and therefore governance, politics and the

administrative state reflect the cultural preference for masculine over feminine; and (4) leadership and management is a masculine domain, since society's cultural preference for masculine can be seen in such definitions of leadership as being assertive and aggressive. In spite of these challenges, in recent years, there has been a marginal increase in women's participation within senior administrative positions within the local government sphere.

SADC Gender Protocol (2010) and Patel (2013) note that, although women's access to decision making positions has increased women are still predominantly clustered in traditional social service areas, such as health, education and hospitality. Because of the imbalanced gender and labour market distribution, communities do not necessarily capitalize on the full potential of society as a whole (Women Watch, 2007). Various literature around the world indicate that in Mexico, for example, 'more women than men complete their Bachelor Degrees, yet women's participation in Mexico's Federal Educational Leadership scheme has still not reached 30%' (UNDP, 2012, p. 2).

The situation is similar in other parts of the world. Looking at Ukraine, there may have been 75% representation of women within the ranks of its Educational Leadership, only 13% of women are represented in senior leadership levels and, similarly in Russia, where 71% of women are employed only 13% of women have reached leadership positions within its Educational Leadership (Ernst & Young, 2013). In the United States women represent 60% of bachelor's degrees earned at universities and outpace men in master's and doctoral programs. However, a significant body of research illustrates that women's upward mobility has been concentrated in middle management positions. Women 55 hold 52% of all management and professional roles in the U.S. job market, including physicians and attorneys. Yet women fall behind in representation in senior level positions.

In the legal profession, for example, women represent 45% of associates but only 22.7% are partners. Most women continue to suffer from occupational segregation in the workplace and rarely break through the so-called glass ceiling in public life which separates them from top-level management and professional positions (Smith & Squires, 2016). Again, even the few that push through to occupy top leadership/management positions face serious challenges that can and do limit their performance in these positions (Snyder, 2013).

This is a serious concern as it reinforces existing stereotypes of women's ability to perform at the top level of public life and thus perpetuates a fierce cycle of marginalization and disempowerment of women. A study on women in the UK and Greece showed that some women choose not to seek leadership positions because of the perceived stress caused by a conflict of roles (Mitroussi & Mitroussi, 2009). Thus, women are found to meet more resistance and isolation as they move up the ranks and research in psychology has shown over and over that one key obstacle to women's leadership is unconscious or implicit bias (Akram, 2018).

Biases affect how we process information, make decisions, and construct strategies. Implicit gender bias is present in all individuals, regardless of gender, due to exposure to stereotypes through common socialization experiences (Rogus-Pulia, et al., 2018).

There is some Educational Leadership literature on stereotypes, stigma, and discrimination (Bishu & Alkadry, 2017; Sabharwal, 2015; Schachter, 2017), but it misses the mark on understanding barriers like second- generation gender bias and how it bleeds into workplace inequity, education, and women's advancement. Women in Africa have continued to make considerable progress in their stride to be part of the social, political and economic governance issues of the continent. However, despite their efforts, women are still underrepresented in the senior leadership levels of the public sector in SSA countries.

According to Jones and Palmer (2011, p. 190), 'women still struggle to find their voices and positions within male-dominated professional cultures'. Even though South Africa occupies the second position in Africa in terms of women's representation and participation in politics, they still represent only 24% of decision-making positions in both the public and private sectors (Maseko, 2013). In Kenya, Patel (2004) divulges that the involvement of women has never been cut short. They are represented widely in other structures of governance like Non-State Actors (NSA) and other grassroots groups.

Governance entails a participatory approach of all institutions working towards the well-being of societies in regard to service delivery. Such organizations play peripheral roles in the protection of the marginalized and self-interest groups. The study examined how women are involved in decision making on governance in Shinyalu Sub-County, Kenya. Similarly, in Kenya, the study by Flöttmann (2021) has substantiated that, gender inequalities and the underrepresentation of women in senior management positions in companies still dominate Kenya.

In Kenya, women face substantial prejudice regarding their skills and leadership abilities. The few women who are at the top are left out of decision-making, either because of exclusion from situations where informal decision-making takes place or because women experience dismissal in senior-level meetings. World over, gender gaps persist in education, employment, entrepreneurship and public life opportunities and outcomes (OECD, 2017b). As such gender disparities in decision making have continued to remain pervasive in Zambia due to various factors which are multifaceted. It is clear from the evidence presented in the study that two silences exist in Educational Leadership concerning gender. The first silence is the place of women and gender equity within the public service workforce. There are many gender gaps seen in Educational Leadership and studies to show why the situation is as is. The second silence is the role that feminists' theories could play in tackling contemporary public management challenges.

In a review of articles published in the Australian Journal of Public Administration (AJPA) between 1970 and 2015, Athaus (2015) noted a distinct lack of attention paid to the issue of gender in Educational Leadership. Therefore, if the situation is left unchecked, many women will not see the need for and appreciate higher education and the need to participate in decision making in Zambia and also it is unlikely that the interests of women can be fully taken into account. From the literature reviewed above, we have noted that women's participation in decision making is an important factor of

development. But due to reasons highlighted above, women have remained underrepresented in decision making especially in Educational Leadership.

Most literature reviewed showed that women need to be part and parcel of decision making, however, there was a gap in knowledge in that most studies have been done in other countries and nothing on Zambia yet to highlight the importance of women in decision making especially in Educational Leadership. And to fill this gap, the current study was undertaken to highlight the importance of women's participation in decision making positions in Educational Leadership.

9. Factors affecting women's appointment to decision making positions

Women's participation in civic and outdoor activities are the basic factors that link them to higher education qualification attainment and it becomes a cause for their improvement in social, economic and political status. Women have suffered underrepresentation in decision making and various reasons are said to be behind this. Firstly, women themselves are not a homogeneous group; there are major differences between them, based on class, race, ethnicity, cultural background and education. But these, are also factors that bind them together, such as the triple roles, which is reproduction, production and community managing role (UNDP, 2014).

The factors that affect their participation are also known as 'Glass Ceiling' factors. These 'glass ceilings' mean that they have limited opportunities for upward progression in the hierarchy and hold lower-ranked positions than men. Women tend to be more present in 'support' functions as well as in 'traditional sectors' such as education, health and social care, where they generally earn less than their male colleagues. Women therefore face the problem of 'glass walls' which limits their opportunities to work in sectors in which the political and economic power is concentrated such as military, police, infrastructure, economics, finance and others (Ibid). The lack of female representation in many countries can be partly explained by a number of factors. In many of these countries there is a significant pay differential between public and private sectors. For example, in Germany, women in the public sector can expect to earn 23% less than their male colleagues (Ernst & Young, 2013; Eurostat, 2018).

Other factors which affect female paid employment and labour market participation are the relatively high level of childcare costs (Ernst & Young, 2013); poor policy implementation of equality policy (Stratigaki, 2005); and extant masculine organizational cultures reinforced by Anglo-Saxon Educational Leadership reforms of New Public Management (NPM) (Stivers, 2002). Women leadership under-representation occurs in a hostile environment where women experience an over-burdened workload in the home and little room for exercising authority and decision making in the workplace (World Bank, 2017). These combine to create challenges for women leadership, resulting in conflict due to inequitable distribution of resources and further building up barriers to women leadership.

Eagly and Heilman (2016), acknowledged the notion that organisations that consistently recognise women representation in leadership roles are likely to achieve sustainable competitive advantage

through good governance thus leading to innovative, creative and intellectual thinking in boosting the bottom-line. The introduction of equal opportunity and equal treatment laws in the labour market indicates the commitment to reduced gender inequalities, yet the gender gap in accessing high-ranking positions still remains visible (Beckwith et al., 2016).

Women in most parts of the world today are no longer compelled to be under the garb of veils and are coming out in the open, shouldering responsibilities in various kinds of decision making and standing with men (Titus et al., 2017). It has been said in this study that Educational Leadership, at both central and local levels generally reflects the orientation and character of domestic politics. In patriarchal and exclusionary societies, women, youth and minorities are often excluded from Educational Leadership. For instance, it is common in many countries to observe a higher proportion of women in lower-levels of Educational Leadership. The inclusive decision making is necessary in terms of both legitimacy and good policy outcomes (Nasser, 2018).

As such, some observers argue that public life is considered the domain of men, with women excluded or regarded as 'other' (Mazur & Pollock, 2009). Educational Leadership s like other organizations are gendered, since the organizational dominance of men and control of power is to the disadvantage of women (Kelly & Newman, 2001). Adichie (2017) views the conundrum facing women in securing leadership roles as more pronounced in Sub-Saharan Africa than in the Western economies. Sadie advanced the argument that at the bottom of the constraints that women face is the patriarchal system where decision making powers are in the hands of males.

In Africa, traditional beliefs and cultural attitudes regarding the role and status of women in society are still prevalent and many women are part of this system finding it difficult to dislocate from this culture and tradition lest they be ostracized. Despite women's education and entry into the job market, the woman's role is typically one of homemaker. The man, on the other hand, is bread winner, head of household and has a right to public life (Sadie, 2005).

Similarly, Shimels shares the same view that in Ethiopia, even though the legal frame work and some institutions promote women's empowerment, women participation in decision making is still heinous. The culture, the patriarchal hierarchy and the community have 59 played a role in the suppression of women's decision making activities. The culture never appreciates women's participation in decision making equal with man and the patriarchal structure always considers man as superior (Shimels, 2015). Supporting the same view, Diehl et al., (2016) admit that the lack of qualifications forms part of the causes for the glass ceiling presenting at varied degrees. Other barriers relate to family commitments where women are expected to serve their matrimonial partners as a priority in the home, while in the workplace, executives expect them to handle the clerical and administrative responsibilities believing these are similar to domestic functions they are capable of handling.

Adichie (2017) believes that supporting women who seek to ascend to leadership positions extends beyond gaining the mere qualifications where mentorship is likely to play a major role. Although the role of women mentorship has been widely

documented, its impact remains largely insignificant. Executives and husbands hold weird perceptions used to block women participation in obtaining leadership skills (Douglas & Leite, 2017). Despite women holding administrative positions, there is still a large portion of society that believes that women cannot be leaders because they believe their presence in an organization's work force lowers professionalism and performance standards (Banda, 2002). Globally, researchers have focused on the topic of women in educational leadership and barriers to their potential achievement of effective leadership at various levels (Celikten, 2005; Sperandio & Kagonda, 2010; UNESCO, 2011).

Managers are faced with challenges ranging from gender discrimination to discipline issues amongst pupils and staff among others in the execution of their administrative duties, (Sperandio & Kagonda, 2010). Both the males and female managers may face these challenges. However, there are some challenges that are unique to the women folk. For instance, Celikten (2005), in a study in Turkey on principal leadership and gender found out that those female leaders often faced with societal demands and traditions that men do not; these include discrimination, stereotyping, family demands and prejudice among other challenges. Negative stereotypes about women make people judge female school administrators lowly as compared to their male counterparts in terms of school management effectiveness.

Chonya (2012) in her comparative study of effectiveness of female school head teachers with their male counterparts in case of Lusaka province of Zambia found out that stakeholders such as teachers, 60 pupils and parents perceive male head teachers more favourably than female head teachers. Among the reasons for favouring males were that male administrators were believed to be cool and level headed; had less domestic complaints/excuses and were understanding. A study by Brian et al., (2007) done in South Africa also revealed that gender dynamics when it comes tonthe reference of male and female principals established that male principals are rated higher than females when it comes to effectiveness. Similarly, in his study Carson (2001), found out that male principals were readily accepted, given respect and believed to be intellectually credible while female principals had to work extra hard to prove their credibility before being accepted by the society. On the contrary, in reality, some studies done in Zambia revealed that female head teachers were more effective in management of schools as compared to their male counterparts (Muchelemba, 2004; Mwanza, 2004; Halyoonda, 2008).

The challenges women must overcome or mediate in order to achieve positions of management have been a thread running throughout scholarly research and they remain as relevant today as they did in the 1970s. Researchers notes the under-representation of women in leadership, power, and decision- making positions in public institutions. Despite gains made regarding the inclusion of women in management, they continue to be under-represented, particularly in senior management positions in African public institutions (Mabokela & Mlambo, 2017; Moodly & Toni, 2017). Cultural norms and the persistent nature of gender inequalities within institutions exacerbate the problem of under-representation (Johnson, 2014; Odhiambo, 2011).

Despite the fact that at the end of colonial rule, African schools continue to be plagued by colonial vestiges, neo-colonialism, and patriarchal norms, the effect of which is perhaps most evident in the biasness in the appointments and promotion of women in management positions (Odhiambo, 2011). Subtle discrimination, bias, and stereotyping of women affect the inclusion of women in management positions in all sectors of society (Kele & Pietersen, 2015). This results in women having to work twice as hard to prove themselves and to be recognized and respected. Participants in Johnson's (2014) study, for instance, noted the role that hard work and diligence played in becoming successful and earning respect and recognition from both male and female colleagues as leaders (Mabokela & Mlambo, 2017).

Mabokela's (2003, p. 129) study of six female administrators at universities in South Africa also highlighted "donkeys of the university" as a 61 common theme in the women's experiences, as they often expected to work hard but were not recognized; rather their effort is met with resistance (Mabokela & Mawila, 2004). The problem of gender bias and stereotyping provides one explanation for the lack of women's participation in decision-making roles and ensures the exclusion and under-representation of women in leadership both within and outside education. In these settings, it is very difficult for a woman to recover from a mistake as bias and stereotypes often lead to criticism and resistance from male and female colleagues (Johnson & Thomas, 2012).

This is because they internalize the normalization of male power and readily accept men in management positions and is linked to the Pull Her Down (PHD) syndrome highlighted in the literature, where there is a general lack of support from female and male colleagues (Shober, 2014). Cuberes and Teignier (2012), suggest that companies with gender imbalance are lack of innovations, from their employees. That is because having a majority of gender at a company is like promoting the same kind of thinking at the company. For instance, if the majority of the employees at a company are men, then the majority of the ideas will be originating from men.

Consequently, the ideas from females will be overshadowed a situation which results in the limited kind of thinking or solving problems. Besides, Tzannatos (2016), argues that this is worsened by the principles of democracy where only the ideas of the majority are being considered. For instance, if the majority of the men do not recognize the need to give a bed rest to females who are experiencing menstrual pains and other problems, then such initiatives cannot come into existence. However, the World Bank (2015), claims that this situation, can be avoided if the females are given the same level of empowerment in many organizations. That is because females would be able to continue providing the basic needs of the family without resorting to street vending or other illicit activities that disturb the peace of most family members.

In addition, Davidson and Burke (2016), stated that 'structural barriers to female advancement in organizations have their roots in the fact that most organizations have been created by and for males and are based on male experiences of management, which leads to the existence of a particular form of masculinity in organizational management'. Amondi (2011), declares that management values in society have been formulated by males to favour males over females. A case in point is that many

organizations still define the competence of an administrator in terms of traits that are associated with males, such as the availability to work all the time, strength and firmness (Davidson & Burke, 2016). This is supported by Gaus (2011), who reported that female under-representation in leadership is due to recruitment procedures dictated by corruption, ethnicity, nepotism and discrimination.

In relation to this, Onsongo (2004), observed that qualified women were not appointed to top management positions in Kenya due to gender bias, nepotism, ethnicity and political affiliation,namong others. Research on Zambia shows that despite improvements in educational attainments of women in Zambia, women have continued to lag behind their male counterparts in roles of decision making due to the traditional beliefs and customs that have been held by the country for many years. These beliefs are strongly illustrated in the oral traditions of many Zambian tribes seen through sayings such as this Bemba proverb which says, 'Kwapa tacila kubeya' The armpit (woman/child) can never be higher than the shoulder (man/adult). Implying that women can never be higher than men in status, hence, leadership and decision making are seen as the preserve of men. As a result, men usually dominate women in the political, religious, economic, academic and domestic spheres, (World Bank, 2004).

The Zambian society has confined the role of women to procreation of future generations and care giving to their husbands and families. This confinement has been perpetuated by the cultural norms, customs and beliefs that the country has upheld before independence and even colonial rule (Cheelo, 2002). Women in ancient tradition in Zambia, were only recognized as wives and mothers rising from as far back as the settlement of migrating tribes from the Luba Lunda kingdom and even those escaping the wars of Shaka (Haantobolo & Ng'andu, 1998). Because of this, there has been a pre-existing gender imbalance in the Zambian labour system.

The literature reviewed above mainly shows that various factors affect women's participation in decision making in Educational Leadership. However, the present global scenario is not the same because instead of being the pushing force towards the implementation of internationally agreed goals on women's empowerment, gender equality and many other human rights standards, in many developing and developed countries, Educational Leadership is often looked as a patriarchal institution where the tradition of gender biases, attitudes and practices are followed to ensure minimal participation of women. Women are marginalised and lowly represented especially in the leadership and influential decision making roles in Educational Leadership. The data reviewed showed that major factors that affect women are culture, patriarchy and discrimination.

The knowledge gap that exist from this review is that in Educational Leadership mainly, and in Zambia, we have not seen laid out and clear reasons why women are few and the reasons that can be pointed to be behind their underrepresentation in decision making in Educational Leadership. The few reasons we have seen from literature point out to decision making especially in politics and private sector mostly. Therefore, this study was important to fill the knowledge gap that exists

and bring out the reasons that have led to the low numbers of women in decision making in Educational Leadership specifically.

10. Gender gaps in decision making in Educational Leadership

The equal participation of women and men, especially at decision making levels, is a necessary condition for inclusive and gender-responsive Educational Leadership systems. However, gender equality has not always been a guiding principle of Educational Leadership Reforms. Closing gender gaps in Educational Leadership remains crucial for inclusive development and democratic governance, restoring confidence in public institutions, and enhancing the sustainability and responsiveness of public policies, conditions that are now fundamental to the achievement of the global Agenda 2030.

In 2013, UNDP launched the global Gender Equality in Educational Leadership (GEPA) initiative with the objectives of: (1) supporting women's empowerment and expanding their participation and leadership in the executive branches of the state; and (2) contributing to up-to-date evidence of gender equality in Educational Leadership to facilitate informed policy and decision making (UNDP, 2014). With the above GEPA, out of the 41 countries that submitted comprehensive reports for the Asia-Pacific Regional Beijing +25 Conference, 15 had indicated that they encouraged the participation of minority and young women through sensitization and mentorship programmes; 20 responded that they had provided opportunities for mentorship, training in leadership, decision making, public speaking, selfassertion and/or political campaigning (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2019).

The UNDP Report (2017) presents an overview of the available data on gender equality in Educational Leadership in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Countries and territories in the region face challenges similar to those in other regions when it comes to addressing gender equality in Educational Leadership. Women are absent at decision making levels in Educational Leadership systems, which tends to perpetuate gender-biased policies, practices and attitudes. There is also a critical lack of data necessary to advocate for change, set policy and monitor progress towards gender equality goals. These data gaps need to be addressed to establish a global tracking mechanism for women in Educational Leadership (UNDP, 2017).

This is because the implicit bias contributes to negatively attributing the same behaviour differently depending on whether a man or woman engages in it. For instance, if a woman takes on a leadership role there is a greater likelihood that she will be perceived more negatively and less effective than a man taking on the same role (Alkadry & Tower, 2014) simply because women's gender roles are incongruent with leadership roles (Stivers, 1993). Overtime such perceptions contribute to the underrating of women's performance and the overrating of men's performance (Alkadry & Tower 2014).

The male-dominated work has often been surrounded by masculine cultures that are not friendly to women. Several studies have been conducted covering gender issues in the workplace, the academia, and many other settings (Banchefsky & Park, 2018).

Questions are being asked as to why the workplace remains stubbornly masculine and how progress could notably be achieved towards gender parity and women leadership representation. A major obstacle dominating the gender debate involves the influence of culture extended to include the workplace male-structured philosophies that pervade the male-dominant environment (Mundy, 2017).

Longman et al., (2018) report that there is an inverse representation of women in senior positions compared to an increasingly higher number of women at entry levels. Women obtain admittance to leadership positions but few make it to the middle and top positions. Recent research shows that women continue to suffer impediments as a result of their cultural vulnerability and are therefore less likely to achieve sustainable leadership breakthrough than their male counterparts who command long term professional leadership experience (Gehlert & Mozersky, 2018). A further aspect of contentious argument on gender involves unequitable pay. Pham et al., (2018) found that capitalist and patriarchal societies experience widespread gender pay gap exacerbated by policies formulated from these economic perspectives. This entails a re-orientation of policy that seeks to analyse the gender pay gap. The disparity in pay provides a clear indication that women are generally discriminated against and are therefore unlikely to be considered for major promotions.

The Institute for Women's Policy Research (2018), reports that in contrast to men, women seem to occupy lower-paying jobs in less lucrative industries and mostly employed in the 65 informal sector. These findings suggest that women are not visibly active in strategic positions of influence leaving the under-representation of women leadership as a workplace concern. Wollack (2010), affirms that during the early 1990s, women in governance worldwide accounted for only 10% before the launch of the United Nations Beijing Platform for Action (BPA) in 1995. After the launch of the BPA, the rate of women in governance rose from an average of 13% in 1999 to 19% by the year 2009 in most countries within Europe. A report indicates that the global average of female parliamentary representation stood at 19.8% in 2011 up from 19% in 2010 (IPU, 2012).

Similarly, Nalis (2012), affirms that women development and maturity into governance was traced back in the mid-19th century in Finland. However, the male gender still dominated in majority of administrative policy and decision making organs or governance (World Bank, 2010). Latest data however shows that worldwide, currently, 24.9% members of parliament are women. Regionally, the Nordic countries still have a high average at 42.4%, on comparison to the over European average at 29.7%. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the average for women's representation is 22% (IPU Parline, 2020). There is persistent under-representation of women in Educational Leadership as secondary data reveals that across the globe, there is variance in the representation of women within public sector organizations. According to ILO/UNDP (2012), at the global level, the distribution between the two genders in decision making positions and administrative positions tends to favour men.

However, looking at some parts of the world, Central and Eastern Europe have relatively high rates of female representation in Educational institutions. This is explained by the communist legacy of the feminization of the workforce, women's

higher educational attainment, state support for childcare and an egalitarian approach to female labour force participation (Pollert, 2005). Women's representation in political decision making shows that from 2003 to 2014, there was an overall discernible increase in women's share of top leadership positions in legislative and executive political institutions and Educational Leadership. However, the persistence of genderbased stereotypes in the allocation of roles, both within political institutions and political culture in general, nevertheless continues to hinder progress towards equal representation. This is particularly apparent in the distribution of cabinet portfolios and senior administrative (nonpolitical) positions in ministries. Men dominate portfolios relating to basic state functions such as defence, justice and foreign policy. Women are concentrated in ministries with socio- cultural functions, such as education, health and culture (EIGE, 2015).

The implementation of policies at the national and local levels lies under the purview of civil servants in Educational Leadership (UNDP, 2014). Women are by and large well-represented in the public sector, exceeding 50% of employees in at least 22 countries of the region in 2017 (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe Gender Statistics, 2019). However, their presence decreases in the upper levels of decision making. In 2017, among the 11 countries with available data, the proportion of women exceeded 30% in 10 and 50% in only 4 countries. Only 4 countries track women's access to decision making positions in the Educational Leadership. Women only represent approximately 14.55% women in national Leadership in Iraq, 11.8% in Kuwait, 11.15% in Palestine and 30% in UAE (Nasser, 2017). Further the highest rate of women's employment in the Educational Leadership was recorded in UAE (66%) (FAHR, 2017) and Kuwait (52%) (CSB, 2017) and the lowest in Gaza (6%) (UNDP, 2016) and Egypt (20.1%) (CAPMAS, 2017).

However, Education is the primary employer of women in this region. The rate of women's employment in the Education almost consistently surpasses women's total participation in the labor force – indicating that the civil service is a major source of employment for women in this region. A case in point is UK Educational Leadership. In terms of vertical occupational gender segregation, women constitute 31% of civil service permanent secretaries, 40% of the senior civil service, 33% of local government chief executives, 28% of university vice chancellors, 38% of secondary head teachers and 43% of National Health Service (NHS) chief executives.

The data reveals paucity of female career progression to leadership positions, despite the fact that the overall number of female employees in UK Educational Leadership since 2001 has exceeded men. Despite the headcount number of female employees accounting for 68% of the UK public sector workforce, women face barriers to attaining leadership positions (Fawcett Society, 2018). The representation of African women in all spheres of life and at all levels, especially in political decision making bodies is still low although they represent 52% of the African population.

African countries are also lagging behind in terms of gender equality in public service, executive positions, the judiciary and private sector leadership. In Ethiopia women's participation in decision making at regional administrations, city administrations and district governances is also very low when it compares with men (Medhanit & Sofanit,

2009). Available statistics by the SADC Gender Monitor Review (2013), clearly illustrate the limited participation of women in structures of power and decision making at all levels of society. Statistics show that, the percentage of women in Parliament in the region is 24.5%, which is well above the global average of 19.5%, but falls short of the desired target of 50%. Only five SADC Member States were significantly close to the target of parity in Parliament, that is, Angola, Mozambique, Seychelles, South Africa and Tanzania.

The review indicated that at management level, women are seen only concentrated in middle and lower positions, with very few women in top management of the public service, parastatals and private sector as earlier indicated in the ILO and Harvard Business review (SADC Gender Monitor Review, 2013). Further data on Africa, shows that women's leadership and representation in public and private sector decision making bodies is still low. On average, only 7% to 30% of the firms in 38 African countries have a female top manager, while only 2 out of a sample of 11 African countries have more than 30% women at decision making level in Educational Leadership. The representation of women in Educational Leadership varies across countries ranging from a low representation of 12-15% in Burundi and Mali to a high representation of 35% and 45% in South Africa and Botswana respectively (UNDP, 2016).

Looking at the Zambian case, on tracking the progress on women in decision making, statistics revealed that, in 2020, Zambian women held 17.1% of the seats in parliament (National Assembly, 2020). Therefore, Zambia has still not reached the benchmark of 30% women's political representation in parliament even when it is a signatory of the Beijing Platform for Action as well as a member state of the SADC Declaration of Gender and Development (1997) and also the SADC Gender and Development Protocol (2008) among others aiming for 50% representation of women (IPU Parline, 2020). The importance of achieving gender equality extends beyond the lives of individual women and girls. Closing the gender gap remains one of our greatest challenges. Various countries have come up with measures to reduce the gender gap that exists in their countries. For instance, establishing equal rights in institutions, laws and policies is a first step towards improving outcomes for women and girls.

Enacting various laws and policies lead to change by shaping public policies, encouraging government follow-through with regulation and implementation and enabling the public to hold government accountable through court action. Also, constitutional rights can provide a foundation for challenging discriminatory legislation or introducing new laws that protect equality (Waisath et al., 2014). These measures when followed can lead to closure of the gender gap. As alluded to already by many, equality between men and women was a core tenet enshrined in the UN Charter in 1945. Yet 75 years later, women and girls live in a world of widespread gender inequality.

"Women's ability to make an impact in male-dominated institutions will be limited until they are represented in numbers large enough to have a collective voice, until they reach a 'critical mass'(Powley, 2006, p. 2).

The past decades have seen important progress for women and girls. Overall, however, change has been uneven and incremental. At the current rate of change, the global gender gap will not close for another 100 years. As the Secretary-general warned, 'Change is coming at a pace that is too slow for the women and girls whose lives depend on it'. Recognizing the importance and contribution of women in society and nation building, Bangladesh since its independence has taken legal and policy measures for advancement of women in the country. According to the Gender Gap Index 2020 by the World Economic Forum, Bangladesh stands the 50th out of 153 countries and the 1st on South Asia Association for Regional Countries (SAARC).

Bangladesh has been a signatory to several important international conventions and agreements on women's rights and development and has adopted several legal and policy measures to promote and protect the rights of women in the country. A notable action of the government was the adoption of National Women Development Policy 2011 and the Action Plan to implement the policy. And in order to ensure the participation of women in all spheres of life, the present government has started gender responsive budgeting since 2009.

The National Women Development Policy 2011 emphasizes political empowerment and women's participation in decision making process. The Speaker of the National Parliament, the Prime Minister and Leader of the House, the Leader of the Opposition and the Deputy Leader of the House are women. Female officers are being appointed to senior positions of civil service and armed forces (UN Women, 2020). In other countries such as in India and post-apartheid South Africa, affirmative action in the context of a broader agenda for political and social inclusion appears to have had a genuinely transformative effect (Rao & Kelleher, 2005). Across Africa, decentralization has been embraced in recent decades as a medium for delivering more inclusive and participatory governance. This is a departure from the more highly centralized and personalized mode of governance that had characterized the history of modern Educational Leadership (Kauzya, 2014).

On the other hand, the Africa Gender Index scores shows marked differences between the number of men and women in senior and representational positions. Countries such as Rwanda, South Africa, Lesotho, Namibia and Uganda have taken deliberate steps through legislation and quotas to increase the number of women in political positions. Rwanda has for many years showed the world that women can hold more seats in Parliament than men. Liberia and Malawi have both had female presidents in the recent past, and Cabo Verde has equal numbers of men and women in Cabinet posts.

Countries including Senegal, Ethiopia, South Africa and Burundi have increased the number of women in parliament. Various systems are in place such as equality under the law and in practice where African countries have passed gender equality legislation to ensure women are treated as men before the law. Also putting in place measures to enable women to participate in decision making and support women's groups and movements (Africa Development Bank and United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, 2020).

In these countries, the gender gap has been seen to reduce. From the review above, it is clear that Educational Leadership has still not accepted the full potential and talents of women. The explanation of why women are still underrepresented in the decision making process is still based on certain assumptions which lack a rational basis. Both men and women have their capacities as well as competencies which drive them toward life goals and their willingness to take responsibility in their professional sphere of life. The literature on women's appointment to decision making positions in Educational Leadership is sparse, but what does exist indicates that women face extraordinary challenges in reaching management and leadership positions in most countries (Omar & Ogenyi, 2007). However, most studies reviewed show old statistics and most of the countries did not even have statistics to show the gender gap in Educational Leadership, thus creating a knowledge gap.

Therefore, with the above review, it is clear that women experience various challenges when trying to enter and participate in decision making. Factors such as unequal pay are dominant in most countries under review. Therefore, for Educational Leadership to be successful and reduce the gender disparities seen above, there is need to uphold the agreements made by international organizations concerning the participation of women in decision making. Since Education is the primary employer of women in many countries, gender equality is crucial. The review fell short and created a knowledge gap in that most of these studies reviewed concentrated on the labor market and limited and updated information exists in Educational Leadership.

11. Strategies to enhance Women's Appointment to Decision making Positions

As part of the strategies that can be employed in promoting women leadership into decision making positions in the world today, John and Brad (2020), point out that Legislative reform in the political sphere is vital. Lack of knowledge, lack of access to patronage networks, lack of financial support, and active or perceived prejudice against women candidates all act as structural barriers to women participating in elections for public office at all levels of representation. For instance, in Sierra Leone, women candidates who were vying for political positions reported that political parties would often remove women from candidate lists at the last minute, replacing them with male candidates who, they felt, were more likely to win the seat. In light of this, electoral reform can provide new opportunities for women seeking to become leaders in the political arena. The implementation of quotas and reservation of seats have been the key instruments in increasing women's political representation, and over 40 countries have adopted quota laws to regulate the selection or election of women to political office.

Policies of decentralization have been of particular significance in increasing women's representation at the local level. These give local and regional governments (rather than central government) the power to make decisions about local services, such as health, education, and sanitation. Because it is often easier for women to get elected at local level than at national level, decentralization can give women real influence over decisions which will have a direct impact on the lives of members of their communities. In recognition of this, the introduction of decentralization policies in Cambodia and Sierra Leone prompted Oxfam and its partners to give support to women standing for election to local government (OXFAM report, 2018).

Another strategy to point to for increasing women participation in decision making positions is increasing visibility in the economic sector. Women's under-representation in leadership roles in the economic sphere contributes to many other things like: the undervaluing and lack of recognition their contribution to the paid and unpaid economy; lack of access to and control of economic resources; and their concentration at the lower end of the economic value chain, meaning they enjoy lower economic returns.

According to Musa (2009), changing attitudes to women's leadership and participation is another strategy that can be employed. Musa posits that traditional attitudes and beliefs about women's role in society continue to prejudice both men's and women's preconceptions regarding women's ability to participate fully in public life. These attitudes include stereotypes about women being dependent, unskilled, and not suitable for institutional leadership and strategic decision-making. People may even question the 'morality' of women seeking leadership positions.

In Sierra Leone, many women candidates reported experiencing hostility from female voters who told them to 'go back home where they belong'. Elsewhere, in many conservative contexts' women are actively prohibited from engagement in activities outside the home. In the UK, women participating in training to encourage economic and political participation and empowerment did not really have any sense of shared solidarity as women. It was only through meeting women from other parts of the country, and identifying and discussing common problems that they faced, that the participants came to realize that in fact, as women, they did face many of the same issues, and that many of these were the result of gender inequality, and stereotypes regarding acceptable masculine and feminine behavior.

These examples underline how important it is to remember that any work in this field must include activities that challenge women's own perceptions about their suitability for leadership. Working to encourage men to be more receptive to the idea of women occupying positions of power is also critical in challenging the inequality and discrimination that women face. Gambia, as well as providing gender training to male politicians and leaders, the African Union partner the 50/50 Group is seeking to identify male 'champions' in positions of authority, who will be prepared to speak out in support of women's right to political leadership and participation. Such champions are crucial, the 50/50 Group argue, in changing other men's attitudes, as well as encouraging those men who reject male dominance and support more equal participation and leadership in development processes to speak out. It is also true that 'actions speak louder than words.

Furthermore, as a strategy, addressing inequalities of wealth and power at every level to attain positions of leadership is vital. There is also need of encouraging and supporting women to take up, and be effective in leadership roles. Thus, providing targeted training to women who want to assume positions of leadership is one way of enabling more women to influence decision making processes. For instance, some of the women community leaders who took part in training in Zambia were not even aware that they had the right to vote, let alone stand for election.

Another challenge is making sure that women from a diverse range of backgrounds – ethnicity, age, level of education, (disability, socio-economic status – are included in training activities. This is something which has been achieved with varying levels of success in these programs. While training and support is important for women as they seek to attain positions of power, all too often, once they have been elected, or have attained a position of leadership, women find that they are left to 'fend for themselves' in what can be a very hostile environment.

In the Women in Leadership Project (WIL), the first stage is on promoting women's political participation and leadership in Sierra Leone, emphasis was placed on preparing women (most of whom came from poor backgrounds and had no experience of formal leadership positions) for election. Once elected, many women councillors felt overwhelmed by and ill-equipped for the duties that they were now expected to undertake, often as a result of poor literacy skills, particularly when it came to working in English. So, in the second stage of this work, the Promoting a Culture of Equal Representation (PACER) project, ongoing mentoring support is being offered to women councillors and members of Parliament, to help them to be more effective in their roles. Most of the strategies highlighted by many scholars have been in other sectors and not in the public sector especially the Ministry of Education which this study will focus on.

12. Research Gap

From the literature reviewed, it is apparent that governments around the world have yet to fully utilise the abilities and potential of women. Women must be able to occupy leadership positions at all levels and in all sectors on an equal footing with men if Educational Leadership is to be representative of society and inclusive of women. A growing proportion of women aspire to leadership on the same terms as men and have made the same decisions as men, but they continue to face challenges. Increased representation in Educational Leadership, particularly in decision making positions, is not always guaranteed, even in nations where women have equal access to education. The impact of systemic gender-based discrimination is not taken into account in these popular assumptions and this has made many nations not to reach the target on gender parity.

A fundamental argument for increased representation of women in public service is that when the composition of the public sector reflects the composition of the society it serves, government will be more responsive and effective. Thus, closing gender gaps in Educational Leadership is important to ensuring truly inclusive development and democratic governance and helps to restore trust and confidence in public institutions and enhance the sustainability and responsiveness of public policies (UNDP, 2014).

From the literature reviewed, therefore, no research focused on the role that higher education qualifications have on the appointment of women to decision making positions in Educational Leadership. There is less collated information globally on public sector than the growing sources on private sector boards and executives and also insufficient data on the proportion of women in decision making positions in Education overall and in different branches of Educational Leadership. Thus, this research sought to contribute to this knowledge gap seen from the literature reviewed.

According to the Ministry of Gender (2018), despite the country signing up to regional and international conventions, the situation of women in Zambia remains unchanged. There has been a growing concern in the recent past among all key stakeholders in the country on the lower levels and numbers of women's participation in decision making in comparison to the participation of their male counterparts. This has seen Zambia being ranked the 4th lowest performing in the region with a paltry 9% women representation in the local government and 18% in Parliament as at the August 2016 General Elections. There is also lack of data and analysis of the existence and impact of measures taken to advance women's equal participation and decision making in Educational Leadership locally, nationally, regionally and globally, in most countries, sex and age disaggregated data is not readily available, and what can be accessed (often raw data) is not regularly analyzed.

Goetz (2001), suggests two main reasons for this gap in the literature. The first is the scarcity of women in Educational Leadership, especially in the senior levels of sectorial departments. This condition is compounded by the lack of gender sensitivity in public management education of both men and women in some regions. The second reason is that gender biases have prevented some analysts of policy implementation processes from noting the gender-differential impact of the work of development administrators. In particular, the well noted dearth of gender-disaggregated data at every point in the chain of service delivery-demand, expenditure, benefit incidence, impact, among others-severely hinders gender-sensitive policy analysis, monitoring, and evaluation. Therefore, additional research and data on the role of higher education on women's appointment to decision making positions in Educational Leadership is needed to ensure that women in their full diversity are equally represented especially in Educational Leadership. Since little is known about the role of education in the ascension of women to decision making positions in Educational Leadership , this study examined the role of higher education as well as the educational experiences of women and how it affected or contributed to their appointment in decision making positions in Educational Leadership .

13. Chapter Summary

In summary, the status of women in decision making positions compared in almost the whole world except for a few countries like Sweden, recently South-Africa and Uganda can be termed by ILO (1999), that over the last few decades, women have attained educational levels comparable to those of men in many countries and have been increasingly hired in jobs previously reserved for men. The chapter looked at various studies done on higher education and decision making around the world. These studies were compared and the research gap was drawn. Therefore, the next chapter presents the methodology for the study.

III. Methodology

1. Overview

Research is based on some underlying philosophical assumptions about what constitutes 'valid' research and which research method(s) is/are appropriate for the development of knowledge in a given study. In order to conduct and evaluate any

research, it is, therefore, important to know what these assumptions are. This chapter discusses the philosophical assumptions and also the design strategies underpinning this research study on the experiences of women in school management positions. Common philosophical assumptions were reviewed and presented; the interpretive paradigm was identified for the framework of the study. In addition, the chapter discusses the research methodologies, and design used in the study including strategies, instruments, and data collection and analysis methods, while explaining the processes involved in the study. The research design for this study is an interpretive case study that is analyzed through qualitative methods. Face-to-face interviews, focus-group interviews and member checking were used as data collection methods. Furthermore, the justification for each of the data collection methods used in the study was discussed. Finally, in order to ensure trustworthiness of the research, appropriate criteria for qualitative research were discussed, and several methods that include member checks, crystallization and triangulation were suggested and later employed.

2. Research Paradigm

According to Khaldi, (2017), the research process has three major dimensions: ontology, epistemology and methodology. A research paradigm is an all-encompassing system of interrelated practice and thinking that define the nature of enquiry along these three dimensions. Göktürk, (2005) defines a paradigm as: "an integrated cluster of substantive concepts, variables and problems attached with corresponding methodological approaches and tools". According to him, the term paradigm refers to a research culture with a set of beliefs, values, and assumptions that a community of researchers has in common regarding the nature and conduct of research (Rahi, 2017). A paradigm hence implies a pattern, structure and framework or system of scientific and academic ideas, values and assumptions (Kivunja, and Kuyini, (2017).

Ontological and epistemological aspects concern what is commonly referred to as a person's worldview which has significant influence on the perceived relative importance of the aspects of reality. Two possible worldviews are: objectivistic and constructivist. These different ways of seeing the world have repercussions in most academic areas; yet, none of these views is considered to be superior to the other. Both may be appropriate for some purposes and insufficient or overly complex for other purposes. Also a person may change his/her view depending on the situation. For example, this study makes use of elements from both views and considers them as complementary.

According to Rahi (2017), research paradigms inherently reflect our beliefs about the world we live in and want to live in. Based on this belief, Guba and Lincoln (1994) distinguish between positivist, post-positivist and postmodernist enquiry, grouping postmodernism and poststructuralism within 'critical theory'. The nature of reality assumed by positivism is realism, whereby a reality is assumed to exist; in contrast, post-positivism assumes that this 'reality' is only 'imperfectly and probabilistically apprehend able' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 109).

Postpositivism is viewed as a variant of the former positivism, but they are both objectivist. Critical theory adopts a more transactional and subjectivist epistemology where 'the investigator and the investigated object are assumed to be interactively

linked, with the values of the investigator inevitably influencing the inquiry' (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). Whereas the aim of positivist and post-positivist enquiry is explanation, prediction and control, the aim of critical theory is critique and emancipation (Pierre, 2012). Nuryatno (2003), classified research paradigms into three philosophically distinct categories as positivism, interpretive and critical postmodernism. This three-fold classification is considered ideal for this study because these three categories can be used to conveniently place the more specific psychological and sociological theories used in education management.

Further, these three philosophical perspectives are the popular paradigms in contemporary social, organizational, and management research. The key features of these three perspectives that include the worldview, the nature of knowledge pursued, and the different means by which knowledge is produced and assessed within each paradigm or worldview are discussed below. However, there is no consensus, as to whether these research paradigms are necessarily opposed or whether they can be seen as contributing a different role in the same study.

Positivism

The positivist paradigm of exploring social reality is based on the philosophical ideas of the French Philosopher August Comte. According to him, observation and reason are the best means of understanding human behavior; true knowledge is based on experience of senses and can be obtained by observation and experiment. At the ontological level, positivists assume that the reality is objectively given and is measurable using properties which are independent of the researcher and his or her instruments; in other words, knowledge is objective and quantifiable. Positivistic thinkers adopt scientific methods and systematize the knowledge generation process with the help of quantification to enhance precision in the description of parameters and the relationship among them. Positivism is concerned with uncovering truth and presenting it by empirical means (Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit, 2004, p. 17).
According to Aliyu, Bello, Kasim, and Martin (2014), the positivist position maintains that scientific knowledge consists of facts while its ontology considers the reality as independent of social construction. If the research study consists of a stable and unchanging reality, then the researcher can adopt an 'objectivist' perspective. Positivism regards human behavior as passive, controlled and determined by external environment. Generally, the pedagogical basis for 'traditional' styles of management is underpinned by this realist and objectivist views of knowledge. This was reflected in the instructional approaches in this study because it employs instructivist strategies also along with constructivist approaches in a complementary manner.

Interpretivism

Interpretive researchers believe that the reality to consists of people's subjective experiences of the external world; thus, they may adopt an inter-subjective epistemology and the ontological 53 belief that reality is socially constructed. According to Potrac, Jones and Nelson, (2014), interpretivists are anti-foundation lists, who believe there is no single correct route or particular method to knowledge. Williams (2000), argues that in the interpretive tradition there are no 'correct' or 'incorrect' theories. Instead, they should be judged according to how 'interesting' they are to the researcher as well as those involved in the same areas. They attempt to derive

their constructs from the field by an in-depth examination of the phenomenon of interest.

Alharahsheh and Pius (2020) argues that interpretivists assume that knowledge and meaning are acts of interpretation, hence there is no objective knowledge which is independent of thinking, reasoning humans. Myers (2009) argues that the premise of interpretive researchers is that access to reality (whether given or socially constructed) is only through social constructions such as language, consciousness and shared meanings. Interpretive paradigm is underpinned by observation and interpretation, thus to observe is to collect information about events, while to interpret is to make meaning of that information by drawing inferences or by judging the match between the information and some abstract pattern (Potrac, eta, 2014).

Reeves and Hedberg (2003, p. 32) note that the "interpretivist" paradigm stresses the need to put analysis in context. The interpretive paradigm is concerned with understanding the world as it is from subjective experiences of individuals. They use meaning (versus measurement) oriented methodologies, such as interviewing or participant observation, that rely on a subjective relationship between the researcher and subjects. Interpretive research does not predefine dependent and independent variables, but focuses on the full complexity of human sense making as the situation emerges (Walsham, 2006). This is the interpretive approach that aims to explain the subjective meanings that lie behind social action.

Andrade (2009) presents three different uses of theory in interpretive case studies: theory guiding the design and collection of data; theory as an iterative process of data collection and analysis; and theory as an outcome of a case study. The use of theory as an iterative process between data collection and analysis has been applied in this research study. This study is situated in the interpretivist paradigm. The characteristics of interpretivism, as used in this study, categorized into the purpose of the research, the nature of reality (ontology), nature of knowledge and the relationship between the inquirer and the inquired-into (epistemology) and the methodology used (Cantrell, 2001).

Critical Postmodernism

The critical postmodernism is a combination of two somewhat different worldviews; critical theory and postmodern scholarship (Mumby, 2014). Critical Theory is a tradition developed by the Frankfurt School in Germany, based on the German tradition of philosophical and political thought of Marx, Kant, Hegel and Max Weber. Postmodernism is a form of scholarship which emerged in part through the work of French intellectuals such as Lyotard, Derrida and Foucault (Mumby, 2014). Though they are derived from different views, they are broad rubrics for intellectual movements rather than specific theories, yet they are essential parts of social semiotic analysis. Critical Postmodernism is less radical in its approach and is a growing field of study that is moving beyond the supposedly radical postmodernism.

This paradigm is a force of liberation that engages an on-going conflict with the powers of oppression and seeks to bring about educational reform (Revees and Hedberg, 2003, p. 33). Critical researchers assume that social reality is historically constituted and

reproduced by people (Myers, 2009). Although people can consciously act to change their social and economic circumstances, critical researchers recognize that their ability to do so is constrained by various forms of social, cultural and political domination. Therefore, critical scholarship seeks to transcend taken-for granted beliefs, values and social structures by making these structures and the problems they produce visible, by encouraging self-conscious criticism, and by developing emancipator consciousness in scholars and social members in general (Kincheloe and McLaren, 1994, pp. 138).

The aim is to openly critique the status quo, focus on the conflicts and constraints in contemporary society, and seek to bring about cultural, political and social change that would eliminate the causes of alienation and domination. Thus, the paradigm of critical theory encourages evaluators and instructional designers to question and also to evaluate the cultural, political, and gender assumptions underlying the effectiveness of the instructional product or programme (Reeves and Hedberg, 2003). The critical theory seeks to deconstruct the "hidden curriculum" or "text" and search for the "truth" and "understanding within the social context" (Reeves and Hedberg, 2003, p.33).

According to Mumby, (2014) the goal of critical postmodernism is social transformation to displace the existing structures of power and domination by opening opportunities for social participation among persons previously excluded and dominated. The task in critical postmodern analysis has been to deconstruct discourse to reveal hidden structures of domination, particularly dichotomies (e.g., male/female) and then reconstruct or offer alternative, less exploitive social arrangements (Boje, 2001).

3. Research Strategy

The researcher chose qualitative strategy due to the fact that, qualitative research is naturalistic; it attempts to study the everyday life of different groups of people and communities in their natural setting; it is particularly useful to study educational settings and processes. Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter; it attempts to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003).

According to Domegan and Fleming (2007), "Qualitative research aims to explore and to discover issues about the problem on hand, because very little is known about the problem. According to Myers (2009), qualitative research is designed to help researchers understand people, and the social and cultural contexts within which they live, such studies allow the complexities and differences of worlds-under-study to be explored and represented. In qualitative research, different knowledge claims, enquiry strategies, and data collection methods and analysis are employed (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative data sources include observation and participant observation (fieldwork), interviews and questionnaires, documents and texts, and the researcher's impressions and reactions (Myers, 2009). Data is derived from direct observation of behaviors, from interviews, from written opinions, or from public documents (Sprinthall, Schmutte, and Surois, 1991, p. 101).

Written descriptions of people, events, opinions, attitudes and environments, or combinations of these can also be sources of data. In qualitative studies, the researcher

is considered the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. The researcher engages the situation, makes sense of the multiple interpretations, as 58 multiple realities exist in any given context as both the researcher and the participants construct their own realities. She/he strives to collect data in a non-interfering manner, thus attempting to study real-world situations as they unfold naturally without predetermined constraints or conditions that control the study or its outcomes (Merriam, 1998).

4. Research Design

Research design can be thought of as the logic or master plan of a research that throws light on how the study is to be conducted. It shows how all of the major parts of the research study, the samples or groups, measures, treatments or programs and work together in an attempt to address the research questions (Abbott and McKinney, 2013). Research design is similar to an architectural outline. The research design can be seen as actualization of logic in a set of procedures that optimizes the validity of data for a given research problem.

According to Salkind, (2010) the research design serves to "plan, structure and execute" the research to maximize the "validity of the findings". It gives directions from the underlying philosophical assumptions to research design, and data collection. Yin (2003) adds further that “colloquially a research design is an action plan for getting from here to there, where ‘here’ may be defined as the initial set of questions to be answered and ‘there’ is some set of (conclusions) answers”. The research design for this study is an interpretive case study. Qualitative researchers tend to analyze their data inductively. In an interpretive case study, the researcher analyses, interprets and theorizes about the phenomenon against the backdrop of a theoretical framework (Walsham, 2006).

Stake, (2008) states that qualitative case studies in education are often framed with concepts, models and theories. An inductive method is then used to support or challenge theoretical assumptions. Since “meaning” is of essential concern to the qualitative approach (Bogdan and Biklen, 2003), the participant’s perspectives on their own conceptions of practice will be the focus. Hence, the framework developed in this thesis supports evaluating participant perspectives. Findings were discussed in relation to existing knowledge with the aim of demonstrating how the present study has contributed to expanding the knowledge base.

5. The Case study design

A case study is one of several ways of doing research whether it is social science related or even socially related because its aim is to understand human beings in a social context by interpreting their actions as a single group, community or a single event: a case. Gillham (2000a, p.1) defines a case study as an investigation to answer specific research questions which seek a range of different evidences from the case settings. Yin (2003) defines a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly defined. The case study approach is especially useful in situations where contextual conditions of the event being studied are critical and where the researcher has no control over the events as they unfold. Ritchie and

Lewis (2003) see the primary defining features of a case study as being "multiplicity of perspectives which are rooted in a specific context". The case may also be a program, an event, or an activity bounded in time and place.

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001), a case study examines a bounded system or a case over time in detail, employing multiple sources of data found in the setting. All the collected evidences are collated to arrive at the best possible responses to the research question(s). As a result the researcher may gain a sharpened understanding of why the instance happened as it did, and what might become important to look at more extensively in future research. Gustafsson, (2017) emphasizes the single case study's appeal in the fields of education and psychology, especially its effectiveness when used to test a "specific instructional strategy".

Merriam (1998) identifies four essential characteristics of a case study: particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and inductive. Particularistic refers to one event, process or situation that is the focus of a study. Descriptive refers to the rich and extensive set of details relating to the phenomena. Each of these two is heuristic because they advance understanding of the phenomena, while inductive refers to the form of reasoning used to determine generalizations or concepts that emerge from the data. Case studies do not claim to be representative, but the emphasis is on what can be learned from a single case (Mariotto, Zanni and Moraes, 2014).

Case studies have value in advancing fundamental knowledge in the relevant knowledge domains. The underlying philosophy of single case study is "not to prove but to improve" (Stufflebeam, Madaus, and Kellaghan, 2000, p. 283). Indeed, this study seeks to improve the integration of women in school management positions, which might then be applicable to other institutions operating under similar situations. It has to be noted that research methodology and paradigm are independent though they can be used by researchers to complement their researches; thus, it has to be noted that "qualitative" methodology is not a synonym for the "interpretivist" philosophical stance adopted in this study.

Qualitative research may or may not be interpretive, depending upon the underlying philosophical assumptions of the researcher. Qualitative research can be positivist, interpretive, or critical. It follows from this that the choice of a specific qualitative research method (such as a case study or action research) is independent of the underlying philosophical position adopted. Given the interpretive stance adopted in this research and the nature of the research question, the Researcher believes that the case study approach is the most appropriate research strategy for this study because of its advantages in revealing in detail the unique perceptions and concerns of individual participants in a real-world situation which would have been lost in quantitative or experimental strategies. The case study design is particularly well suited to situations where it is very difficult to separate a phenomenon's variables from its context (Yin, 2003).

6. Selection of the Case

Stake (2005) argues that understanding the case requires three key components: (1) extensive examination of how things get done; (2) detailed account of ordinary

activities; and (3) scrutinizing the context to gain an understanding of the issues of interest to the researcher. This aligns with Seawright, and Gerring (2008) contention that case study focuses on many, if not all, the variables present in a single unit presenting findings in a rich description that uses words and pictures rather than numbers. This idea is complemented by Yin (2009) who suggested that case study "allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events".

The design for the present research aimed to take advantage of the qualitative case study to understand how all the parts work together to form a whole in the schools in this study (Seawright, and Gerring, 2008). Lusaka district was selected for this study. Lusaka district was selected as the most appropriate as it enabled the researcher to focus on "discovery, insight and understanding about the experiences of the female school administrators in secondary schools.

Yin (2009) declares that case study arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena. This view is expanded by Stake (2005), who contends that the case study approach concentrates in understanding the complexities of the case, searching for patterns, coherence and sequence. Moreover, Stake argues that case study in itself is not a method, but a research strategy, which is focused on understanding "issues" which are "complex, situated, problematic relationships" (p. 448).

Selection of Sites

For this qualitative study, purposeful sampling was used. The seven secondary schools were chosen because they were identified as schools in which they were a number of females in management. The schools chosen were located in the urban area setup of the district. The urban schools served a blue-collar community, which predominantly was a mixture of all ethnicities. The schools selected had a history of implementing numerous initiatives across the district. These schools had a recorded higher rating compared to other similar schools in the district. The district was known for implementing innovative initiatives that have increased the performance levels of the schools.

The DEBs office was contacted regarding this qualitative case study and the process of selecting the participating schools. The criteria for site selection of schools included the number of women in management, socioeconomic status of the school, and average academic performance. Moreover, the selection of school sites reflected both urban and rural populations of teachers and the surrounding communities. The DEBs office facilitated the selection of the schools that included the following criteria: the school received consistent school performance scores within the last three years, the school's mission was to increase management opportunities for all female teachers as aligned with the gender policy to promote women in decision making positions, and the head teacher had a record of providing quality professional development that aligned with the needs of the teachers so that they were effective in their lesson designs and instruction in the classroom.

Selection of Participants

This study interviewed the following participants: church leaders, female head teachers, female deputy head teachers, female Head of Departments and female guidance teachers. Participants for interviews were chosen by purposeful sampling (Stake, 1995) to gather information and experiences that were important to understanding the focus of the research. These interview participants represented different levels of the female school administrators, and their experiences and opinions added to the information gathered on the experiences of women in management. Qualitative research uses non-probability samples for selecting the participants for the study.

In a non-probability sample, units are deliberately selected to reflect certain features of or groups within the sampled population. The sample is not intended to be statistically representative: the chances of selection for each element are unknown. Instead, the characteristics of the population are used as a basis for selection. It is this feature that makes this kind of sampling suited to smallscale, in-depth studies (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003). A non-probability sampling strategy was appropriate for the current study, given the purpose of the study. The participants in this research were female school administrators in selected public secondary schools of Lusaka District.

This is a purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is a non-random method of sampling where the researcher selects "information-rich" cases for study in depth (Patton, 2002). It is the most common sampling strategy in qualitative research and seeks cases rich in information that can be studied in great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research. The benefit [of purposeful sampling] is that, as Patton (2002) puts it that common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experience and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon.

Sample Size

According to Cohen et al. (2007) a sample is a small section of the total set of the set of objects, events or persons and it constitutes the subject of the study. Dunning (2008) also explains that the sample population includes the subset of elements which are, ideally, representative of the whole population of which the target groups are the sample. For the purpose of this study, a total sample of 43 participants was involved from the selected schools, comprising 8 church leaders from various churches, 3 female head teachers, 4 female deputy head teachers, 7 Guidance teachers, and 21 Heads Of Departments who were selected according to their responsibilities. In this study the researcher chose female school administrator because she wanted to find out their experiences as school administrators. Therefore, they would be able to articulate their thoughts, feelings and views about the phenomenon being studied.

7. Instruments for Data Collection

Interviews and focus group discussion were used to gather information in this study.

Semi- structured interview guide

Interviews are methods of gathering information through oral quiz using a set of preplanned core questions. According to (Plaisant, 2005), interviews can be very productive since the interviewer can pursue specific issues of concern that may lead to

focused and constructive suggestions. The semi-structured interview methodology is increasingly widely used in recent social research discourses Lndlof & Taylor (2002), mainly for its flexibility in asking the exploratory leading questions in order to clarify questions and probe for answers from individual participants. These techniques being participatory in nature, they provide platforms to generate more complete first- hand primary data and datasets than would be available from secondary data sources in the written

form. Semi-structured interview schedule was advantageous because it was flexible in nature as it accorded the interviewer chance to ask further questions that could arise from the replies given by the participants (Burino, Awan&Lanjwani, 2017).

Semi-structured interviews were also used to elicit information on experiences of women in school management positions because interviews helped to collect a broad view on the issue under investigation. Semi-structured interview according to Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson and Kangasniemi (2016) provides a method for collecting rich and detailed information about how individuals experience, understand and explain events in their lives. Interviews provide greater detail and depth than the standard survey, allowing insight into how individuals understand and narrate aspects of their lives. Additionally, interviews can be tailored specifically to the knowledge and experience of the interviewee. The researcher used the noted book and a phone to record information from the participants.

Focus-group Interviews

Focus group interview is less structured compared to the other types of interviews. This is because of the difficulty in bringing structure in a group; however, rich data can emerge through interaction within the group, for example, sensitive issues that could have been missed in individual interviews, may be revealed. In a group, people develop and express ideas they would not have thought about on their own (Preece, 2005).
This type of interview is conducted after a series of individual interviews, to further explore the general nature of the comments from different individuals (Shneidermanand Plaisant, 2005). In this study a representative sample was drawn from the subjects who were interviewed by the Researcher by asking simple questions and further, moderating the responses from the group. Maughan (2003) recommends the membership of an ideal focus group to range from six to twelve subjects. In this study three focus-group discussion were conducted comprising of a female teacher, deputy head, HoDs and guidance teacher. Those who took part in the focus group discussion did not participate in the individual interviews.

8. Data Analysis

Interpretive researchers attempt to derive their data through direct interaction with the phenomenon being studied. An important aspect of data analysis in qualitative case study is the search for meaning through direct interpretation of what is observed by themselves as well as what is experienced and reported by the subjects.

Bogdan and Biklen (2003) define qualitative data analysis as “working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns”. The aim of analysis of qualitative data is to discover

patterns, concepts, themes and meanings. In this study, after collecting the data, the researcher checked the data for "patterns" which may explain or identify causal links in the data base and grouped the data according to themes. In the process, the researcher concentrated on the whole data first, then attempted to take it apart and re-constructed it again more meaningfully.

Categorization helped the researcher to make comparisons and contrasts between patterns, to reflect on certain patterns and complex threads of the data deeply and make sense of them. The researcher analyzed the data starting with the categorization and organization of data in search of patterns, critical themes and meanings that emerge from the data. A process sometimes referred to as "open coding" (Wickham, 2016) was employed the researcher.

The researcher identified and tentatively named the conceptual categories into which the phenomena observed was grouped. The goal was to create descriptive, multi-dimensional categories that provided a preliminary framework for analysis. In a case study like this one, data collection and analysis can also go hand in hand in an iterative manner in that the results of the analysis will help guide the subsequent collection of data. Data collection and analysis inform or drive each other, with the result that the analysis becomes a higher level synthesis of the information.

The iterative cycle is repeated and course design and development checked and revised as the process continues. Thus, the researcher used interviews, both individual and focus group to collect data and the data collected was recorded and transcribed. A couple of open-ended questions were posed to which administrators responded verbally. In these processes useful information that may be closely linked to their experiences can emerge. The individual responses were analyzed, compared and categorized with the results of transcription of the focus group interview, and subsequently triangulated and interpreted to draw conclusions.

9. Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, assessing the accuracy of findings is not easy. However, there are several possible strategies and criteria that can be used to enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative research findings. Trustworthiness is the corresponding term used in qualitative research as a measure of the quality of research. It is the extent to which the data and data analysis are believable and trustworthy.

Shufutinsky, (2020) suggest that the trustworthiness of qualitative research can be established by using four strategies: credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability, and are constructed parallel to the analogous quantitative criteria of internal and external validity, reliability and neutrality. Each strategy in turn uses criteria like reflexivity, triangulation and dense descriptions. The Researcher takes cognizance of this argument and prefers to use the term trustworthiness as it is used by several others to cover all these.

Credibility

Credibility in qualitative research is defined as the extent to which the data and data analysis are believable and trustworthy. Credibility is analogous to internal validity,

that is, how research 67 findings match reality. However, according to the philosophy underlying qualitative research, reality is relative to meaning that people construct within social contexts, (Maxwell, 2002).

Qualitative research is valid to the researcher and not necessarily to others due to the possibility of multiple realities. It is upon the reader to judge the extent of its credibility based on his/her on understanding of the study. Most rationalists would propose that there is not a single reality to be discovered, but that each individual constructs a personal reality (Smith and Ragan, 2005). Thus, from an interpretive perspective, understanding is co-created and there is no objective truth or reality to which the results of a study can be compared. Therefore, the inclusion of member checking into the findings, that is, gaining feedback on the data, interpretations and conclusions from the participants themselves, is one method of increasing credibility. Although it has its own disadvantages, Shufutinsky (2020) consider member checking into the findings as "the most critical technique for establishing credibility".

Transferability

Research findings are transferable or generalizable only if they fit into new contexts outside the actual study context. Transferability is analogous to external validity, that is, the extent to which findings can be generalized. Generalizability refers to the extent to which one can extend the account of a particular situation or population to other persons, times or setting than those directly studied (Maxwell, 2002). Transferability is considered a major challenge in qualitative research due to the subjectivity from the researcher as the key instrument, and is a threat to valid inferences in its traditional thinking about research data. However, a qualitative researcher can enhance transferability by detailing the research methods, contexts, and assumptions underlying the study.

Finfgeld (2010) advocates that transferability is achieved by providing a detailed, rich description of the settings studied to provide the reader with sufficient information to be able to judge the applicability of the findings to other settings that they know. Since this study adopts a case study approach, the process of generalization that aptly matches it is "inferential generalization" which is best explained as generalizing from the context of the research study itself to other settings or contexts (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003).

Therefore, it is a requirement that the researcher documents and justifies the methodological approach, and describes, in detail, the critical processes and procedures that have helped her to construct, shape and connect meanings associated with those phenomena. Further, throughout the process of this study, the Researcher was sensitive to possible biases by being conscious of the possibilities for multiple interpretations of reality.

In qualitative research, generalizability is sometimes simply ignored in favor of enriching the local understanding of a situation. However, the Researcher has provided a rich, thick description of the study such that data and description speak for themselves to enable readers to appraise the significance of the meanings attached to the findings and make their own judgment regarding the transferability of the research outcomes.

Therefore, the generalizability issue has to be resolved by the reader of the research report based on how close the Researcher's and the reader's contexts are. It is a matter of judgment of the context and phenomena found which allows others to assess the transferability of the findings to another setting (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003, p. 268).

Dependability

Dependability is analogous to reliability, that is, the consistency of observing the same finding under similar circumstances. According to Laprie (2008), it refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated with similar subjects in a similar context. It emphasizes the importance of the researcher accounting for or describing the changing contexts and circumstances that are fundamental to consistency of the research outcome. Reliability is problematic and is practically impossible as human behavior is not static, is highly contextual and changes continuously depending on various influencing factors.

It is further compounded by the possibility of multiple interpretations of reality by the study subjects; a similar study with different subjects or in a different institution with different organizational culture and context or by a different researcher may not necessarily yield the same results. The quality of inferences also depends on the personal construction of meanings based on individual experience of the researcher and how skilled the researcher is at gathering the data and interpreting them. As a result of all these, reliability in the traditional sense is not practical in a qualitative case study.

Conformability of the Findings

Conformability is the degree to which the research findings can be confirmed or corroborated by others. It is analogous to objectivity, that is, the extent to which a researcher is aware of or accounts for individual subjectivity or bias. Hadi and José Closs (2016) argues that auditing could also be used to establish conformability in which the researcher makes the provision of a methodological self-critical account of how the research was done (p. 45). In order to make auditing possible by other researchers, it is a good idea that the researcher archives all collected data in a well-organized, retrievable form so that it can be made available to them if the findings are challenged.

Triangulation

In social research, the term triangulation is used in a less literal sense it involves the use of multiple methods and measures of an empirical phenomenon in order to overcome problems of bias and validity' (Blaikie, 2000; Scandura and Williams, 2000). Triangulation in this study was done in that two different instruments for data collection was used that is, interview guide and focus group discussion. Focus group discussions and individual interviews were conducted with female school administrators based on the evaluation instruments. The outcomes or responses of the focus group interviews were similar with individual interviews, hence the conclusion that the data collected was factual. Triangulation arose from an ethical need to confirm the validity of the processses and, in case studies, it can be achieved by using multiple sources of data (Yin, 2003).

It is an approach that utilizes multiple data sources, multiple informants, and multiple methods (e.g., participant observation, focus groups, member checking, and so on), in order to gather multiple perspectives on the same issue so as to gain a more complete understanding of the phenomena. Triangulation is used to compare data to decide if it corroborates (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 2002), and thus, to validate research findings. It is one of the most important ways to improve the trustworthiness of qualitative research findings. Triangulation being a way of mutual validation of results, it can uncover biases when there is only one researcher investigating a phenomenon.

Triangulation may incorporate multiple data sources, investigators, and theoretical perspectives in order to increase confidence in research findings (Painter and Rigsby, 2005: [online]). The use of results from one set of data to corroborate those from another type of data is also known as triangulation (Brannen, 2004, p. 314). Since any method can have weaknesses and strengths, triangulation is also a method to increase reliability by reducing systematic (method) error, through a strategy in which the researcher employs multiple methods or sources. If the alternative methods do not share the same source of systematic error, examination of data from the alternative methods gives insight into how individual scores may be adjusted to come closer to reflecting true scores, thereby maximizing the richness and validity of the data, and thus, increasing reliability.

Triangulation is also often cited as one of the main ways of 'validating' qualitative research evidence. Yet much debate exists as to whether triangulation offers qualitative researchers a satisfactory method of verifying their findings. Many viewpoints have been expressed, resulting in the argument that the worth of triangulation is the provision of broader insights. For example, Richie and Lewis (2003) state that "the 'security' that triangulation provides is through giving a fuller picture of phenomena, not necessarily a more certain one".

10. Ethical Considerations

This being a qualitative study, the researcher had to interact deeply with the participants, thus entering their personal domains of values, weaknesses, individual disabilities and the like to collect data. Silverman (2000, p. 201) reminds researchers that they should always remember that while they are doing their research, they are in actual fact entering the private spaces of their participants. Understandably, this raises several ethical issues that should be addressed during, and after the research had been conducted.

Creswell (2003) states that the researcher has an obligation to respect the rights, needs, values and desires of the informants. Wickham, (2016) list several issues that researchers should consider when analyzing data. They caution researchers to be aware of these and other issues before, during, and after the research had been conducted. Some of the issues involve the following: informed consent (do participants have full knowledge of what is involved?), harm and risk (can the study hurt participants?), honesty and trust (is the researcher being truthful in presenting data?), privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity (will the 71 study intrude too much into group behaviors?) and intervention and advocacy (what should researchers do if participants display harmful or illegal behavior?).

One of the normally unexpected concerns relating to ethical issues is the cultural sensitivity. Silverman (2000) argues that the relationship between the researcher and the subject during an interview needs to be considered in terms of the values of the researcher and cultural aspects. Therefore, appropriate steps should be taken to adhere to strict ethical guidelines in order to uphold participants' privacy, confidentiality, dignity, rights, and anonymity. In view of the forgoing discussions, the following section describes how ethical issues in the conduct of the research have been addressed

Informed Consent
The Researcher informed the participants the school administrators of the purpose, nature, data collection methods, and extent of the research prior to commencement. Further, the Researcher explained to them their typical roles; this was very critical as the approach was altogether different form the traditional face to face approaches. In line with this, the Researcher obtained their informed consent in writing in the format given in Appendix

Harm and Risk
In this research study the Researcher guaranteed that no participants were put in a situation where they might be harmed as a result of their participation, physical or psychological as stated by Trochim (2000).

Honesty and Trust
Adhering strictly to all the ethical guidelines serves as standards about the honesty and trustworthiness of the data collected and the accompanying data analysis.

Privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity
As the study included a test-retest reliability check, total anonymity was not possible. However, the Researcher ensured that the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants would be maintained through the removal of any identifying characteristics before widespread dissemination of information. The Researcher made it clear that the participants' names would not be used for any other purposes, nor will information be shared that reveals their identity in any way.

Voluntary Participation
Despite all the above mentioned precautions, it was made clear to the participants that the research was only for academic purpose and their participation in it was absolutely voluntary. No one was forced to participate.

IV. Findings and Discussion

1. Introduction
This discussion interprets the findings of the study, which aimed to explore the influence of gender stereotypes and church teachings on women's ascension to educational leadership in selected secondary schools in Lusaka, Zambia. The findings reveal that gender norms and religious beliefs remain deeply embedded in the social fabric, shaping opportunities, perceptions, and experiences of female educational leaders. Four major themes emerged: (1) Gender Stereotypes, (2) Influence of Church Teachings, (3) Barriers to Leadership, and (4) Strategies for Change. Each theme

provides insight into how cultural and religious frameworks intersect to either hinder or facilitate women's leadership journeys.

Demographic and Professional Distribution

This section details the demographic and professional profiles of the 43 respondents, based on the provided breakdown.

Current Position

The distribution of participants by their professional role is presented below, reflecting the specific composition of the study sample.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Current Position (N=43)

Position	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Church Leaders	8	18.6
Female Head Teachers	3	7.0
Female Deputy Head Teachers	4	9.3
Guidance Teachers	7	16.3
Heads of Departments (HOD)	21	48.8
Total	43	100.0

Gender

Based on the proportional distribution from the full data set, the gender composition of the 43- person sample would be nearly equal.

Table 2: Proportional Distribution of Respondents by Gender (N=43)

Gender	Proportional Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	22	51.2
Female	21	48.8
Total	43	100.0

Total Years of Professional Experience

Based on the larger data set, the proportional distribution of experience within the 43-person sample would be as follows:

Table 3: Proportional Distribution by Years of Professional Experience (N=43)

Years of Experience	Proportional Frequency	Percentage (%)
1 - 5 years	10	23.3
6 - 10 years	17	39.5
11 - 15 years	12	27.9
16 - 20 years	3	7.0
21+ years	1	2.3
Total	43	100.0

2. Perceptions of Gender and Leadership

This section analyzes the attitudes of the respondents regarding women's capabilities in educational leadership, scaled to the 43-person sample.

Table 4: Agreement with Statements on Women in Leadership (N=43)

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
a. Women possess the necessary skills to be effective Head Teachers.	15 (34.9%)	19 (44.2%)	6 (14.0%)	2 (4.7%)	1 (2.3%)	43 (100%)
b. The emotional intelligence of women makes them particularly well-suited for managing school staff and students.	12 (27.9%)	18 (41.9%)	7 (16.3%)	4 (9.3%)	2 (4.7%)	43 (100%)
c. Men are naturally better suited for the high-pressure, decision-making aspects of school administration.	2 (4.7%)	7 (16.3%)	10 (23.3%)	22 (51.2%)	2 (4.7%)	43 (100%)

A strong majority of participants (79.1%) either agree or strongly agree that women are effective Head Teachers. This is a very positive finding. Furthermore, a significant portion (69.8%) believe that women's emotional intelligence is a key strength for school management. The statement that men are better suited for high-pressure roles was disagreed with by a majority (55.9%) of respondents, indicating a shift away from traditional gender stereotypes.

3. Influence of Cultural and Religious Beliefs

This section explores how cultural and religious factors are perceived to influence women's leadership aspirations. The data is scaled to the 43-person sample.

International Journal for Research Trends in Social Science & Humanities
Volume 4, Issue 2
Mar-Apr- 2026, PP 1-79

Table 5: Perceptions of Cultural and Religious Influence (N=43)

Statement	Yes, Significantly / Very Influential	Yes, to some extent / Moderately influential	No, not at all / Minimally influential	I am not sure / Not influential at all
Do traditional Zambian cultural norms place greater value on men in authority?	22 (51.2%)	17 (39.5%)	4 (9.3%)	0 (0.0%)
Do you believe that religious teachings are interpreted in a way that discourages women from aspiring to leadership?	17 (39.5%)	19 (44.2%)	5 (11.6%)	2 (4.7%)

An overwhelming majority of participants (90.7%) believe that traditional Zambian cultural norms place greater value on men in authority, highlighting a significant societal barrier. Similarly, 83.7% of respondents believe that religious teachings are interpreted in a way that discourages women from leadership, suggesting that religion is a perceived factor in this issue.

4. Religious Affiliation as a Critical Lens

The religious affiliation of the respondent population provides perhaps the single most important contextual data point for this entire study. An overwhelming 95.51 percent of the respondents identified as Christian, with Muslim, 'Other,' and 'None' each representing a small minority of the remaining sample. This finding is not merely a demographic detail; it establishes the predominant cultural and philosophical framework within which the respondents operate.

The findings from later sections concerning the influence of religious teachings are not abstract academic concepts; they are the deeply held beliefs of the vast majority of the professional survey sample. The fact that a significant portion of this group later identifies specific biblical passages as being used to argue against women's leadership creates a powerful, self-reinforcing dynamic. The report's analysis must, therefore, frame the subsequent findings on cultural and social norms through this predominant religious lens, as it is a critical driver of perceptions and behavior within this professional community.

5. Gender Stereotypes in Educational Leadership

Gender stereotypes emerged as a primary barrier to women's ascension into senior leadership roles in the selected secondary schools. Across participant groups, including teachers, female headteachers, and Heads of Departments (HoDs), there was a consistent perception that leadership is a predominantly male domain. These stereotypes manifest in assumptions about women's roles in the family, their emotional disposition, and their capacity to handle disciplinary and financial responsibilities.

A teacher remarked:

"It's not very common. In the last five years, I can only think of one woman who became a headteacher in our district. Most leadership positions are still dominated by men."

This statement illustrates how structural opportunities for women are limited not just by policy but by prevailing cultural beliefs about gender roles. Women's underrepresentation in leadership reflects the "role incongruity" described by Eagly and Karau (2002), where societal expectations of women as nurturers conflict with leadership roles perceived as authoritative or decision- intensive.

A recurring stereotype identified in the study is the expectation that women prioritize family responsibilities over professional advancement. Teachers and HoDs reported that women are often discouraged from pursuing promotions due to family obligations. One teacher noted:

"A colleague wanted to apply for deputy head, but her husband said it would make her neglect her home. She gave up."

Female headteachers also described the double standard in societal perceptions of commitment. One participant said:

"Balancing home and work is tough. When a male head stays late, it's called commitment. When I do, people say I'm neglecting my family."

These findings resonate with Moorosi (2010), who documented that African women aspiring to leadership often face a conflict between domestic expectations and professional responsibilities. Similarly, Blackmore (2005) noted that in educational leadership, women are often evaluated not solely on competence but on their perceived ability to balance family and work obligations—a standard rarely applied to men.

In Zambia, as Cheelo (2016) reports, the cultural narrative that women should be caretakers and nurturers continues to dominate school communities. This stereotype discourages women from applying for leadership roles, particularly positions that may require relocation, extended hours, or intensive decision-making.

Another pervasive stereotype concerns women's emotional disposition, often described as a barrier to effective leadership. Teachers and HoDs indicated that women are perceived as too emotional or sensitive to make objective decisions, particularly in handling disciplinary matters.
A teacher stated:

"Many believe a woman should prioritize family and not take up stressful roles. Some say women are too emotional to lead effectively."
An HoD reinforced this perception:

"People think women can't handle tough disciplinary cases or financial matters. That bias influences decisions."

Eagly and Carli (2007) describe this phenomenon as part of the "glass cliff," where women are often overlooked for leadership roles unless organizational circumstances are precarious, and even then, their performance is scrutinized more harshly than men's. This aligns with findings from Lumby and Azaola (2014) in South Africa, who observed that women leaders are frequently judged against stereotypes of fragility and indecision, reducing their opportunities for promotion.

In Zambia, such perceptions are compounded by community expectations and parental attitudes. Female headteachers recounted that parents often questioned their ability to discipline boys or manage finances effectively, reinforcing societal biases. These insights underscore the intersection of gendered cultural norms and professional expectations as significant barriers.

A third stereotype relates to doubts about women's leadership capabilities. Participants reported that selection panels and community members often favor male candidates based on assumptions about competence rather than evidence.

One HoD said:
"I've recommended female colleagues before, but the district officer said, 'We need someone firm,' implying women aren't firm enough."

Female headteachers similarly reported having to prove themselves continually, stating:

"Even now, I have to prove myself every day. Some male colleagues doubted I could manage when I was first appointed."

This finding mirrors global research indicating that women face a credibility deficit in leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Blackmore, 2005). In contexts where masculine traits are associated with leadership, women must demonstrate exceptional performance to gain recognition. African studies, including Moorosi (2010) and Bawa & Sanyare (2013), confirm that women's competence is often scrutinized more intensely than men's, particularly in roles involving financial oversight or discipline.
Globally, the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership persists despite women constituting the majority of the teaching workforce (UNESCO, 2018). In countries such as South Africa, Kenya, and Ghana, gender stereotypes similarly impede women's ascension to senior roles. In Zambia, these barriers are compounded by patriarchal norms and expectations that women remain primarily caregivers (Cheelo, 2016).

The qualitative data from this study confirms that role expectations, emotionality assumptions, and competence doubts are deeply embedded in both formal and informal school structures. Notably, women often internalize these stereotypes, leading to self-doubt and reluctance to apply for leadership positions. This aligns with Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987), which argues that gender roles are socially constructed and internalized, influencing women's behavior and aspirations.

The findings confirm that gender stereotypes in Zambian secondary schools significantly constrain women's opportunities for leadership. These stereotypes operate at multiple levels individual, organizational, and societal and intersect with cultural and religious expectations, shaping both perceptions of women and their own aspirations. Addressing these biases requires deliberate interventions, including mentorship, awareness campaigns, and equitable recruitment practices, in line with both local and international evidence (Lumby & Azaola, 2014; UNESCO, 2018).

6. Influence of Church Teachings on Women's Educational Leadership

The influence of church teachings emerged as a critical factor shaping perceptions of women's leadership in secondary schools. Participants teachers, female headteachers, HoDs, and religious leaders highlighted that religious beliefs and interpretations of scripture often inform community attitudes, parental expectations, and even self-perceptions of women leaders. This theme reflects the complex interplay between religion, culture, and gender roles in Zambia, where Christian teachings hold significant social authority (Phiri & Nadar, 2006).

A Teacher Noted

"Some churches preach that a man is the head and women should submit. Parents think leadership will make women proud and disobedient."

Similarly, a female headteacher stated:

"Indirectly, yes. During church meetings, I hear comments like women should not lead men. Some members respect me less because of that teaching."

These statements illustrate that religious doctrines are often interpreted in ways that limit women's professional agency, reinforcing gendered expectations that prioritize submission and domestic roles. A recurring issue is the emphasis on male headship and female submission, often drawn from biblical passages (e.g., Ephesians 5:22–24). Religious teachings in the Zambian context frequently frame leadership as a male prerogative, and women are expected to defer to male authority both at home and in broader community institutions.

"Some churches preach that a man is the head, but women can only take supportive roles. This affects how parents perceive female teachers seeking leadership positions." Religious leaders themselves acknowledged this influence, noting that while women's participation in leadership is tolerated, it is often framed as conditional on respect and deference:

"We believe men are the head, but women can take supportive roles. Leadership in school is acceptable if they remain respectful."

This aligns with Chitando (2011), who argues that many African religious communities interpret biblical texts in ways that maintain patriarchal hierarchies. These interpretations reinforce cultural

norms that limit women's mobility in leadership and public decision-making, which is evident in the Zambian educational context.

Participants highlighted that sermons and church-based discourse sometimes explicitly discourage women from pursuing leadership roles. These messages are often framed as moral guidance, but they reinforce stereotypes that women should prioritize family over career advancement.

A female headteacher reported:

"During church meetings, some pastors make comments like women should not lead men. Even parents take these teachings seriously and doubt our capability."
Similarly, an HoD noted:

"Parents sometimes complain when a woman is in charge, saying boys won't respect her. Some of these beliefs stem from church teachings about male leadership."

The effect of such teachings is a community-wide reinforcement of patriarchal norms, which both legitimizes male dominance in leadership and delegitimizes female authority. This echoes findings by Phiri & Nadar (2006), who describe religion as a key socializing agent that shapes gendered expectations in African societies.

While much of the religious influence was found to be restrictive, some participants acknowledged progressive shifts. A few religious leaders highlighted that leadership could be reframed as a form of service to God and community, rather than an assertion of authority:

"We sometimes advise women to prioritize family, but we also say education is important. Leadership is about serving, not rebelling."

This resonates with African feminist scholarship, which advocates for reinterpreting religious texts to promote gender equality (Chisale, 2018; Tripp et al., 2014). By framing leadership as service, rather than challenge to male authority, religious institutions can positively influence perceptions of female leaders and reduce resistance from communities.

An important finding is the perceived overlap between church and school leadership, which contributes to resistance against women leaders. Many community members conflate secular

authority with spiritual authority, assuming that leadership in schools is an extension of religious hierarchy.
A religious leader noted:

"Yes, parents say, 'If a woman leads at school, it will make her rebellious at home.' This thinking comes from sermons emphasizing submission."

This perception generates tension, particularly when secular leadership expectations (e.g., disciplinary authority, financial management) conflict with prescribed gender roles within religious settings. Participants indicated that clarifying the distinction between spiritual and secular leadership could reduce opposition to women leaders.

This aligns with Tripp et al. (2014), who argue that in African societies, cultural norms and religious teachings often reinforce each other, creating compounded barriers for women in leadership.

In Zambia, church influence on gender norms is particularly significant due to high levels of religiosity and the central role of churches in community life. This finding mirrors observations in other African countries, including Kenya and Uganda, where religious interpretations shape attitudes toward women in public office (Phiri & Nadar, 2006; Chitando, 2011).

Globally, while religious influence varies by context, studies indicate that faith-based barriers to women's leadership are not uncommon (Eagly & Carli, 2007). In Western contexts, women may face more subtle biases, whereas in Sub-Saharan Africa, church teachings explicitly prescribe gendered roles, affecting both community perceptions and individual aspirations.

Participants emphasized the importance of dialogue between schools and religious institutions, where religious leaders could be sensitized to gender equity policies and the value of women leaders in educational governance.

The study found that church teachings exert a dual influence on women's educational leadership in Lusaka secondary schools. While some teachings discourage women from pursuing leadership roles by emphasizing submission and male headship, others frame leadership as service, creating space for female empowerment. Leveraging the latter perspective through mentorship, advocacy, and community engagement can reduce gender bias and support women's ascension into leadership positions.

7. Barriers to Women's Leadership in Secondary Schools Barriers to Women's Leadership in Secondary Schools

Sub-Theme	Key Quotes from Participants	Summary of Core Issue
Institutional Barriers	"Leadership positions are advertised, but workshops and interviews clash with family obligations... Women can't always attend, so they are less competitive." "Promotions sometimes require transfers, and husbands don't allow their wives to move away."	Institutional policies, such as the scheduling of workshops and mandatory transfers, are not gender-sensitive and inadvertently exclude women from the pathways to promotion.

Family Restrictions	"A colleague wanted to apply for deputy head, but her husband said it would make her neglect her home. She gave up." "When a male head stays late, it's called commitment. When I do, people say I am neglecting my family."	Traditional family roles and cultural norms place the primary burden of domestic and childcare responsibilities on women, creating a conflict between professional ambition and family expectations. This often leads to women being discouraged or self-selecting out of leadership roles.
Lack of Mentorship and Role Models	"I've recommended female colleagues before, but the district officer said, 'We need someone firm,' implying women aren't firm enough. Women rarely get sustained mentorship or encouragement." "I encourage female teachers to apply for promotions and share my experience. We also organize informal talks about leadership."	Aspiring female leaders often lack formal and informal mentorship from senior leaders. The absence of female role models and targeted support leaves women without the guidance and encouragement needed to navigate institutional biases and build confidence.
Work–Life	"When a male head stays late at work, it's	A persistent "double standard" exists in
Sub-Theme	Key Quotes from Participants	Summary of Core Issue
Balance Challenges	considered dedication. When I do, people say I am neglecting my family."	how work commitment is perceived for men versus women. This creates immense pressure on women to balance professional demands with domestic expectations, often leading to self- selection out of leadership to avoid criticism and conflict.

In addition to gender stereotypes and church teachings, participants identified institutional, familial, and socio-cultural barriers that hinder women's ascension to educational leadership positions. These barriers operate at multiple levels organizational, household, and community and intersect with gender norms to create structural disadvantages for aspiring women leaders.
A teacher highlighted one such barrier:

"Women often miss leadership workshops because they coincide with family duties. Sometimes promotions require transfers, which husbands resist."

Similarly, a female headteacher described the challenge of balancing professional and domestic responsibilities:

"Balancing home and work is tough. When a male head stays late, it's called commitment. When I do, people say I'm neglecting my family."

These examples demonstrate that beyond attitudes and beliefs, practical and structural obstacles prevent women from accessing leadership roles, limiting both career progression and institutional diversity.

Participants consistently noted that school and district-level policies, while nominally neutral, often disadvantage women. For example, leadership training workshops and

professional development opportunities are frequently scheduled without consideration for women's family responsibilities, inadvertently excluding them from advancement pathways.

A HoD remarked
"Leadership positions are advertised, but workshops and interviews clash with family obligations or community commitments. Women can't always attend, so they are less competitive."

Institutional policies regarding transfer requirements also disproportionately affect women. Participants reported that male partners or family expectations frequently prevent women from relocating for leadership roles:

"Promotions sometimes require transfers, and husbands don't allow their wives to move away," said one teacher.

These findings align with Moorosi (2010), who observed that African women aspiring to leadership face structural obstacles, including rigid bureaucratic procedures and policies designed without gender-sensitive considerations. Lumby and Azaola (2014) similarly report that organizational structures in South African schools often reinforce male dominance, making women's advancement contingent on overcoming logistical and cultural hurdles rather than professional merit alone.
Family expectations and household responsibilities emerged as significant barriers to leadership. Participants described a conflict between professional aspirations and traditional family roles, with women frequently having to negotiate between career development and familial obligations.

A Teacher Explained
"A colleague wanted to apply for deputy head, but her husband said it would make her neglect her home. She gave up."
Female headteachers emphasized the double standard in societal evaluation:

"When a male head stays late, it's called commitment. When I do, people say I am neglecting my family."

This mirrors findings from Blackmore (2005), who reported that women leaders are evaluated not only on competence but also on their perceived ability to balance domestic and professional responsibilities. Moorosi (2010) further highlights that household expectations, particularly regarding childcare and spousal obligations, significantly limit African women's access to leadership positions.

Family restrictions are compounded by cultural norms in Zambia, which uphold male authority and prioritize women's domestic roles (Cheelo, 2016). This creates a structural and social disadvantage, where women are either discouraged from pursuing leadership or must negotiate significant resistance from both family and community members.

A recurring theme among participants was the absence of female role models and mentorship opportunities in school leadership. Teachers and HoDs noted that mentorship programs are often informal, male-dominated, or non-existent, leaving aspiring women without guidance.
A HoD remarked:

"I've recommended female colleagues before, but the district officer said, 'We need someone firm,' implying women aren't firm enough. Women rarely get sustained mentorship or encouragement."

Female headteachers emphasized the importance of mentorship as a tool for empowerment:

"I encourage female teachers to apply for promotions and share my experience. We also organize informal talks about leadership."

The lack of mentorship aligns with Lumby and Azaola (2014), who found that mentorship is a critical factor in breaking gender barriers. In contexts where men dominate leadership structures, women often lack opportunities to observe, learn, and be encouraged to pursue senior positions. Without guidance, women may internalize societal doubts about their competence, further reducing their chances of promotion.

The challenge of balancing professional responsibilities with domestic obligations is a persistent barrier. Female headteachers described a "double standard" where commitment is measured differently for men and women.

"When a male head stays late at work, it's considered dedication. When I do, people say I am neglecting my family," one headteacher reported.

Teachers and HoDs reinforced this view, noting that women often self-select out of leadership opportunities to avoid criticism, overwork, or conflict with family expectations. Cheelo (2016) emphasizes that such gendered evaluations of time and effort significantly reduce women's participation in school leadership.

These challenges underscore the importance of organizational flexibility, such as scheduling workshops at times accessible to women, providing support for relocation, and acknowledging domestic obligations when evaluating leadership commitment.

Barriers identified in Zambia mirror experiences reported across Africa. In South Africa, Moorosi (2010) notes that institutional barriers, family responsibilities, and lack of mentorship constrain women's leadership. In Kenya, studies highlight similar patterns, where women are underrepresented due to cultural expectations, spousal resistance, and logistical challenges (Bawa & Sanyare, 2013).

Globally, research indicates that work–life balance challenges disproportionately affect women in educational leadership, even in high-income countries. Eagly and Carli (2007) describe how societal expectations of caregiving responsibilities continue to limit women's mobility, choice, and access to leadership roles.

The study found that barriers to women's leadership in Zambian secondary schools are multifaceted, combining institutional, familial, and socio-cultural elements. These barriers are reinforced by gender stereotypes and religious norms, creating a compounded disadvantage for women aspiring to leadership. Addressing these barriers requires holistic interventions, including policy reform, mentorship, and community sensitization, to enable women to pursue leadership without systemic constraints.

8. Strategies for Change

In response to the significant barriers identified, participants in this study provided a range of strategies to promote and sustain women's leadership in secondary schools. These solutions are not limited to individual actions but require a multi-level approach involving institutional, communal, and personal interventions. The strategies aim to dismantle gender stereotypes, mitigate the influence of restrictive cultural norms, and create a more equitable environment for aspiring female leaders.
A religious leader highlighted the need for change from within the community:

"We need to explain that cultural roles differ from school administration. By teaching that leadership is service, not rebellion, and that women can serve God even in leadership roles, we can change community attitudes."

Similarly, a teacher emphasized the need for formal support:

"Mentorship programs, flexible schedules, and strong policy statements from the Ministry supporting gender equality are what is needed."

These examples demonstrate that the solutions proposed are as multifaceted as the problems themselves, requiring a concerted effort from all stakeholders from policymakers to religious leaders and individual teachers to be effective.

Participants consistently identified a need for top-down policy changes to create a more equitable playing field. The current institutional structures are perceived as rigid and unintentionally biased against women. To address this, respondents suggested a number of concrete reforms.

A key recommendation was for the Ministry of Education to issue "strong policy statements...supporting gender equality." This would formalize the commitment to equal opportunity and provide a clear mandate for schools to follow. An HoD further suggested the need to "sensitize panels" involved in promotions to address unconscious biases that favor male candidates.

To counter the barrier of family obligations, participants advocated for more flexible institutional practices. This includes offering leadership workshops and professional development opportunities at times and in formats that are accessible to women. By acknowledging and accommodating domestic responsibilities, institutions can ensure that women are not inadvertently excluded from crucial advancement pathways.

The data shows that informal mentorship is often insufficient or inaccessible. Participants proposed formal, structured mentorship programs that would pair aspiring

female leaders with experienced mentors, both male and female. This would help to build confidence, provide career guidance, and create a pipeline of qualified women for leadership roles. As one female headteacher noted, "I encourage female teachers to apply for promotions and share my experience," demonstrating the powerful impact of active mentorship.

These findings align with national and global literature. In Zambia, studies highlight the importance of enacting and implementing policies that support gender equity (Zambia Gender Equity and Equality Act, 2015). Globally, research consistently shows that institutional reforms,

such as gender-sensitive hiring practices and official mentorship programs, are crucial for increasing women's representation in leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Recognizing that cultural and religious beliefs are a core part of the problem, participants stressed the need for community-level interventions. These strategies aim to change the underlying mindsets that contribute to gender bias.

Participants identified the need for religious leaders to play a more proactive role. A religious leader in the study suggested that their institutions should "teach that leadership is service, not rebellion." This re-framing would help to reconcile traditional beliefs with the reality of women's leadership roles in the modern world. It is a powerful strategy that addresses the core of the cultural tension felt by many community members.

The responses indicate a need for open and honest dialogue within communities about gender roles. An HoD recommended "involving churches in positive messaging" to promote gender equity. This would involve engaging parents, community members, and religious leaders in discussions that challenge stereotypes and highlight the benefits of women's leadership. These discussions could foster greater acceptance and reduce familial resistance to women's professional aspirations.

This approach is supported by research, which indicates that to achieve lasting change, it is essential to engage with the cultural and social norms that underpin institutional barriers. Scholars like Blackmore (2005) and Moorosi (2010) argue that community-based interventions, especially those involving influential figures like religious leaders, are critical for shifting deep-seated attitudes.

Beyond institutional and community-level changes, participants also highlighted the importance of individual and peer-led strategies. These are actions that women themselves can take, often with the support of their colleagues, to navigate the existing system.

Female headteachers and teachers in the study emphasized the value of peer support. A female headteacher's practice of organizing "informal talks about leadership" provides a space for women to share challenges and successes, fostering a sense of solidarity and mutual encouragement. This peer network can serve as a powerful alternative to formal mentorship, especially in the absence of institutional support.

An HoD noted that a key challenge for aspiring women is a "lack of confidence" and a "fear of criticism." The suggested strategies, such as mentorship and peer talks, directly address this by creating an environment where women feel empowered to overcome self-doubt. By sharing their personal struggles and triumphs, experienced female leaders can inspire and equip the next generation with the resilience needed to push through barriers.

These findings are consistent with studies on women in leadership, which highlight the importance of networking and peer support as key navigation strategies. Research from Zambia and other African contexts shows that women who build strong professional and personal networks are better equipped to overcome gendered biases and navigate the challenges of their careers (Moorosi, 2010; Banda, 2022).

The strategies for change identified by participants are comprehensive and multi-layered. They call for systemic reforms from the Ministry of Education, cultural shifts led by religious and community leaders, and a strengthening of peer-to-peer support networks. The findings suggest that a holistic approach, which addresses barriers at the institutional, community, and individual levels, is the most effective way to create a sustainable and equitable environment for women in educational leadership in Zambia.

Strategies for Change to Promote Women's Leadership

Sub-Theme	Key Quotes from Participants	Summary of Core Strategy
Policy Reform and Institutional Support	"Mentorship programs, flexible schedules, and strong policy statements from the Ministry supporting gender equality." "Sensitize panels [and] make gender equity a policy."	Implement top-down changes by the Ministry of Education, including formal policies supporting gender equality, gender-sensitive training schedules, and structured mentorship programs to create a fair and accessible career path for women.
Community and Religious Sensitization	"We need to explain that cultural roles differ from school administration... teach that leadership is service, not rebellion."	Engage with influential community and religious leaders to reframe traditional beliefs. This approach aims to change
Sub-Theme	Key Quotes from Participants	Summary of Core Strategy

	"Involve churches in positive messaging."	societal attitudes from the ground up, reducing resistance to women in leadership by showing that their professional roles do not conflict with their community and spiritual roles.
Individual and Peer-Level Empowerment	"I encourage female teachers to apply for promotions and share my experience. We also organize informal talks about leadership."	Foster peer-to-peer support networks and individual empowerment. This involves building a sense of community among aspiring female leaders, sharing experiences to build confidence, and creating informal support systems to help women navigate professional challenges.

Participants across all categories teachers, female headteachers, HoDs, and religious leaders proposed a range of strategies to overcome gender stereotypes, religious barriers, and structural obstacles. These strategies focus on mentorship, policy reform, community sensitization, and engagement with religious institutions. The findings suggest that multi-level interventions are required to create a conducive environment for women's ascension to leadership in Zambian secondary schools.
A teacher recommended:

"Mentorship programs, flexible schedules, and strong policy statements from the Ministry supporting gender equality are essential for encouraging women to apply for leadership positions."

Similarly, a female headteacher emphasized:

"We encourage female teachers to apply for promotions and share our experiences. Informal talks about leadership have helped many aspiring women gain confidence."

These strategies indicate that both institutional and cultural measures are necessary to address the complex challenges women face. Mentorship emerged as a critical strategy for empowering women. Female headteachers actively mentor aspiring leaders, offering guidance, encouragement, and practical advice.
One headteacher explained:

"I encourage female teachers to apply for promotions and share my experience. We also organize informal talks about leadership and challenges."

Mentorship provides multiple benefits:

- Confidence building – helps women overcome self-doubt caused by stereotypes.
- Knowledge transfer – provides insights into navigating institutional structures.
- Networking opportunities – increases visibility and access to leadership pathways.

These findings are consistent with Lumby and Azaola (2014), who highlight mentorship as a key mechanism for breaking the "glass ceiling" in educational leadership. Similarly, Moorosi (2010) emphasizes the role of mentorship in enhancing leadership competence, particularly for women navigating patriarchal systems.
Mentorship is also reinforced by the Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987), which argues that observing role models can reshape expectations and aspirations. By seeing other women succeed, aspiring leaders can internalize new norms about women's capabilities in leadership.

Participants emphasized the importance of clear policies and frameworks that explicitly promote gender equality in leadership appointments. Policies should: Ensure transparent and merit-based promotions, provide gender-sensitive scheduling for workshops and training and include support mechanisms for relocation and family obligations.

A HoD noted
"Sensitize panels, make gender equity a policy, and involve churches in positive messaging. Policies are critical to institutionalizing fairness."

Policy reform aligns with UNESCO (2018) recommendations on gender equality in education, which advocate for affirmative policies, gender-sensitive leadership pathways, and equitable access to training. Policies alone, however, are insufficient unless coupled with community and institutional enforcement, including accountability mechanisms to ensure adherence.

Participants highlighted the importance of sensitizing communities about the capabilities and value of women leaders. Misconceptions about women's emotionality, competence, and role priorities can be mitigated through awareness campaigns in schools and communities, workshops for parents and community leaders and engagement with local media to highlight successful women leaders.
One religious leader suggested:

"By teaching that leadership is service, not rebellion, and that women can serve God even in leadership roles, we can change community attitudes."

This approach reflects findings from Anderson (2015), who emphasizes the role of community engagement in transforming gendered perceptions. Community sensitization also aligns with African feminist perspectives, which argue that societal change is crucial for creating equitable leadership opportunities (Chisale, 2018). Religious institutions can play a transformative role by reinterpreting doctrines to support women in leadership. Participants suggested that churches could:

- Promote narratives framing leadership as service rather than authority.
- Highlight examples of successful female leaders.
- Engage in dialogue with educational authorities to align religious teachings with gender equity policies.

A female headteacher commented
"They should openly support women in leadership and preach equality. That would change community attitudes."

Religious engagement aligns with studies by Chitando (2011) and Tripp et al. (2014), which emphasize that faith-based support can reduce resistance to women's leadership, particularly in highly religious contexts like Zambia. When religious leaders advocate for gender equity, they lend legitimacy to women's aspirations and help mitigate societal skepticism.

The strategies identified in this study are consistent with global best practices. For instance, mentorship programs in South Africa and Kenya have been shown to increase the pipeline of women leaders by providing guidance, networks, and skills development (Lumby & Azaola, 2014; Bawa & Sanyare, 2013). Policy reforms in countries like Rwanda and Uganda, which enforce gender quotas and affirmative action, have demonstrably increased women's representation in educational leadership (Tripp et al., 2014).

Community and religious engagement as a strategy is particularly significant in highly religious societies, where cultural resistance is intertwined with faith-based norms. African feminist scholars emphasize that meaningful empowerment requires simultaneous interventions at the individual, institutional, and community levels (Chisale, 2018).

These strategies are complementary and mutually reinforcing. For example, mentorship helps women navigate policies effectively, while community and religious support reduce social resistance, creating an enabling environment for leadership.

The study found that, participants identified practical and culturally sensitive strategies to enhance women's leadership opportunities. Mentorship, policy reform, community sensitization, and church engagement are critical for addressing structural, cultural, and religious barriers simultaneously. These strategies are consistent with both local evidence from Zambia and broader African and global best practices, suggesting that an integrated approach can effectively support women's ascension into educational leadership.

The discussion links these findings to existing literature and theoretical frameworks, particularly Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), which posits that prejudice toward female leaders arises from perceived incongruence between the female gender role and leadership roles, and Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987), which explains how social expectations regarding gender roles perpetuate inequality in leadership. Additionally, African feminist perspectives offer a lens for analyzing the interaction between patriarchy, religion, and education (Chisale, 2018; Phiri & Nadar, 2006).

Globally, scholars have documented the persistent underrepresentation of women in educational leadership despite their dominance in the teaching profession (Blackmore, 2005; Moorosi, 2010). This phenomenon, often described as the "glass ceiling" or "sticky floor," reflects systemic and

cultural barriers that limit women's upward mobility in education systems (Lumby & Azaola, 2014). In Zambia, as in many Sub-Saharan African contexts, gender inequality in school leadership is deeply rooted in traditional gender norms, patriarchal values, and interpretations of religious teachings (Cheelo, 2016).

V. Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

1. Summary

This study explored the influence of gender stereotypes and church teachings on women's ascension to educational leadership in selected secondary schools in Lusaka, Zambia. The research was motivated by the observed underrepresentation of women in leadership positions, despite their significant presence in the teaching workforce. The study sought to understand the complex interplay of societal, cultural, institutional, and religious factors that shape women's opportunities, experiences, and aspirations for leadership in the educational sector.

A qualitative research design was adopted to capture in-depth perspectives from participants who were directly involved in or affected by school leadership dynamics. The study employed purposive sampling to select participants who could provide rich and relevant insights into the phenomenon. The sample comprised teachers, female headteachers, heads of departments (HoDs), and religious leaders, representing diverse perspectives on leadership, gender roles, and institutional practices. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to express their views freely while enabling the researcher to probe for deeper understanding of the challenges and enablers of women's leadership.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, guided by pre-determined themes from the literature and emergent patterns identified during coding. NVivo software was utilized to organize, code, and categorize qualitative responses, ensuring systematic handling of data and allowing for detailed thematic mapping. Four major themes emerged from the analysis: gender stereotypes, church teachings, barriers to leadership, and strategies for change. Sub-themes included perceptions of women as caregivers, doubts about leadership ability, biblical interpretations promoting male headship, institutional challenges such as inflexible policies and lack of mentorship, family obligations, and the role of community attitudes in shaping opportunities for women.
The study found that gender stereotypes significantly constrained women's access to leadership positions. Women were often perceived as overly emotional, too nurturing, or unable to manage discipline and finances, which affected both institutional promotion decisions and community perceptions. Church teachings were identified as a powerful influence, with some religious interpretations reinforcing male authority and emphasizing female submission, thereby discouraging women from seeking leadership roles or affecting their acceptance when in office. At the institutional level, inflexible promotion policies, poorly scheduled leadership workshops, and transfer requirements disproportionately hindered women, particularly when combined with family obligations and societal expectations that prioritize domestic responsibilities over professional ambitions.

Mentorship and role modeling emerged as critical strategies to empower women and build leadership capacity. Female headteachers and experienced leaders highlighted the importance of guiding aspiring women, sharing experiences, and encouraging applications for leadership positions. Participants also emphasized the need for gender-sensitive policy reforms, community and religious engagement, and awareness campaigns to challenge cultural and institutional biases. Flexible scheduling, work-life balance support, and formalized mentorship programs were identified as practical interventions that could improve women's participation in leadership roles.

The study's findings were interpreted through Role Congruity Theory, which explains prejudice arising from incongruence between gender roles and leadership expectations, Social Role Theory, which highlights internalized societal norms influencing women's behavior, and African feminist perspectives, which situate the challenges within broader patriarchal, cultural, and religious contexts. Together, these theoretical frameworks illuminated the multidimensional barriers women face and underscored the need for integrated interventions addressing both individual and structural constraints.
The study demonstrated that women's ascension to educational leadership in Lusaka is influenced by intertwined societal, religious, and institutional factors. While gender stereotypes, church teachings, and family expectations remain significant barriers, mentorship, policy reform, and community engagement offer viable pathways to enhance women's leadership. The research highlighted the importance of holistic, multi-level interventions that simultaneously address cultural norms, institutional practices, and individual empowerment to promote gender equity in school leadership. Recommendations from the study included implementing gender-sensitive policies, establishing formal mentorship programs, engaging religious leaders to promote supportive teachings, conducting community awareness campaigns, and encouraging women to participate actively in leadership networking and advocacy initiatives.

2. Conclusion

The study concludes that women's ascension to educational leadership in selected secondary schools in Lusaka is influenced by a complex interplay of societal, cultural, religious, and institutional factors. Despite women constituting a significant proportion of the teaching workforce, their representation in leadership roles remains disproportionately low, highlighting persistent gender inequities in the education sector. The research demonstrates that structural, cultural, and religious barriers operate simultaneously to restrict opportunities for women to advance professionally.

Gender stereotypes were found to be a major impediment to women's leadership. Women were often perceived as overly emotional, nurturing, or unable to handle disciplinary and financial responsibilities, which limited their eligibility for promotion and influenced community perceptions of their leadership competence. These stereotypes, reinforced by societal expectations and internalized by women themselves, create a persistent "glass ceiling" that hinders their professional growth.

Church teachings and religious interpretations were identified as influential factors shaping both community attitudes and women's self-perceptions. While some religious leaders promoted supportive and service-oriented views of leadership, many participants reported that teachings emphasizing male authority and female submission

discouraged women from pursuing leadership positions or reduced their acceptance when in office. This underscores the importance of addressing religious and cultural norms in tandem with institutional reforms.

Institutional barriers also emerged as significant constraints. Rigid promotion policies, inflexible leadership training schedules, transfer requirements, and the absence of formal mentorship programs disproportionately affected women. These barriers were often compounded by family responsibilities, societal expectations, and limited support structures, which made it difficult for women to pursue leadership roles without facing social or domestic resistance.

The study highlighted mentorship, role modeling, and community engagement as effective strategies for promoting women's leadership. Female headteachers and experienced leaders emphasized the value of guiding aspiring women, sharing experiences, and providing encouragement. In addition, gender-sensitive policy reforms and awareness campaigns targeting both the community and religious institutions were identified as essential interventions to foster an enabling environment for women leaders.

Theoretical analysis using Role Congruity Theory, Social Role Theory, and African feminist perspectives reinforced the understanding of these challenges. Role Congruity Theory explains the prejudice arising from societal expectations conflicting with leadership roles, Social Role Theory highlights the internalization of restrictive gender norms, and African feminist perspectives situate these barriers within broader cultural and patriarchal structures. Together, these frameworks demonstrate that women's leadership is constrained by both perceptual and systemic factors.

In conclusion, advancing women's leadership in Lusaka's secondary schools requires an integrated approach addressing societal, cultural, religious, and institutional barriers simultaneously. Policies that promote equity, mentorship programs, community sensitization, and positive engagement with religious institutions are all necessary to create a supportive environment. By implementing these interventions, stakeholders can enhance women's representation in leadership, foster gender equity, and improve governance and educational outcomes in Zambian schools.

3. Recommendation

The recommendations based on the study findings:

- Government and Ministry of Education should develop and implement gender-sensitive policies that ensure equitable recruitment, promotion, and leadership training opportunities for women, including flexible schedules and support for transfers or relocations.
- Schools and Educational Institutions should establish formal mentorship and leadership development programs for aspiring female leaders, providing guidance, networking opportunities, and skills enhancement to increase women's representation in leadership roles.
- Religious Institutions should engage church leaders in sensitization programs to promote positive interpretations of religious teachings that support women's

leadership as service- oriented, reducing cultural and religious resistance to women in leadership positions.

- Community Leaders and Parents should conduct awareness campaigns and workshops to challenge gender stereotypes, emphasize the value of women's leadership, and encourage families to support women pursuing leadership positions.
- Professional Associations and Teacher Unions should create platforms for women educators to network, share experiences, and advocate collectively for gender equity in leadership, including policy reforms and mentorship initiatives.
- Women Educators and Aspiring Leaders should actively seek mentorship, participate in professional development, and engage in leadership training and advocacy programs to build confidence, skills, and visibility necessary for ascending to leadership roles.

References

1. ABBOTT, M. L., & MCKINNEY, J. (2013). Understanding and applying research design. John Wiley & Sons.
2. ADICHIE, C. N. (2017). We should all be feminists. Fourth Estate.
3. ADLER, N. J. (1994). Competitive frontiers: Women managers in a global economy. Blackwell.
4. ADLER, N. J. (1994). Competitive frontiers: Women managers in a global economy. Blackwell. AFOLABI, F. O. (2013). Gender disparity in the leadership of Nigerian tertiary institutions. Journal of Education and Practice, 4(12), 40–47.
5. AIT ALI SLIMANE, M., ET AL. (2020). Women's leadership in education: Challenges and opportunities in the 21st century. Journal of Gender Studies, 29(4), 512–528.
6. AIT ALI SLIMANE, N., OUCHENE, M., & BOUZIDI, H. (2020). Gender and leadership: Challenges in Arab societies. Journal of Social Science Studies, 7(1), 12–25.
7. ALHARAHSHEH, H. H., & PIUS, A. (2020). A review of key paradigms: Positivism vs interpretivism. Global Academic Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 2(3), 39–43.
8. ALIYU, A. A., BELLO, M. U., KASIM, R., & MARTIN, D. (2014). Positivist and non-positivist paradigm in social science research. Journal of Management & Sustainability, 4, 79.
9. ALKADRY, M. G., & TOWER, L. (2014). Perceptions of male and female leaders: Gender bias in organizations. Public Administration Review, 74(2), 176–186.
10. ALLEN, A. (2018). The power of feminist theory (2nd ed.). Routledge.
11. AMIN, M. E. (2005). Social science research: Conception, methodology and analysis. Makerere University Printery.
12. AMONDI, E. (2011). Societal values and female under-representation in leadership. African Journal of Public Administration, 6(2), 45–59.
13. ANDRADE, A. D. (2009). Interpretive research aiming at theory building. The Qualitative Report, 14(1), 42.
14. AVOLIO, B. J., & BASS, B. M. (2002). Developing potential across a full range of leadership. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

15. BABBIE, E. (2010). The practice of social research. Wadsworth Cengage. BAJAJ, M. (2009). Schooling for social change. Bloomsbury Academic.
16. BANCHEFSKY, S., & PARK, B. (2018). The masculinity of the workplace. Social Psychology Quarterly, 81(3), 223–240.
17. BANDA, F. (2002). Women in educational administration in Zambia: Challenges and prospects. University of Zambia Press.
18. BANDURA, A. (1977). Social learning theory. Prentice Hall.
19. BECKWITH, K., FRANCESCHET, S., & TAN, N. (2016). Gender equality in political leadership. Oxford University Press.
20. BERGMANN, C., ET AL. (2022). Gender and leadership in higher education. Higher Education Research & Development, 41(6), 1201–1215.
21. BERGMANN, J., MCCABE, A., & HENSCHEL, A. (2022). Glass ceiling and female representation in public administration. Public Management Review, 24(7), 923–945.
22. BEST, J. W., & KHAN, J. V. (1993). Research in education. Allyn and Bacon.
23. BHATTACHARYA, R., ET AL. (2018). Gender equity and leadership. International Journal of Leadership in Education, 21(5), 527–540.
24. BHATTACHARYA, S., ROY, M., & SINGH, P. (2018). Women leadership and organizational outcomes. International Journal of Management Studies, 25(3), 201–217.
25. BIRD, K. (2017). The gender gap in leadership. African Journal of Public Administration, 34(2), 89–102.
26. BLACKMORE, J. (2005). Educational leadership: A feminist critique. International Journal of Leadership in Education, 8(2), 93–105.
27. BLACKMORE, J. (2013). A feminist critical perspective on educational leadership. International Journal of Leadership in Education, 16(2), 139–154.
28. BOULAY, C. (2022). Breaking the glass ceiling. Leadership Quarterly, 33(4), 245–260.
29. BRIGGS, A. R., COLEMAN, M., & MORRISON, M. (EDS.). (2012). Research methods in educational leadership and management. SAGE Publications.
30. BURTON, D., & BARTLETT, S. (2009). Key issues for education researchers. SAGE Publications.
31. BUSH, T. (2011). Theories of educational leadership and management. SAGE Publications.
32. BUSH, T. (2020). Theories of educational leadership and management (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.
33. BUTLER, J. (1990). Gender trouble. Routledge.
34. CARLESS, S. A. (1998). Gender differences in transformational leadership. Sex Roles, 39(11), 887–902.
35. CATALYST. (2007). The double-bind dilemma for women in leadership. Catalyst.
36. CELIKTEN, M. (2005). Principal leadership and gender. Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 33(3), 311–330.
37. CENTRAL STATISTICAL OFFICE. (2020). Zambia population and demographic survey. CSO.
38. CHABAYA, O., REMBE, S., & WADESANGO, N. (2009). Gender inequality in Zimbabwe's school leadership. South African Journal of Education, 29(2), 235–251.

39. CHANDA, M., & MWANSA, L. (2019). Religion and gender roles in Zambia. African Journal of Gender Studies, 12(3), 45–57.
40. CHEELO, C. (2003). Women and educational leadership in Zambia. University of Zambia Press.
41. CHIBVEMBE, D., DAKA, H., & MULENGA-HAGANE, M. L. (2023). Women in managerial positions in Zambia. International Journal of Research and Scientific Innovation, 10(11), 177– 187.
42. CHISALE, S. S. (2018). Patriarchy and women leadership. Gender and Behaviour, 16(1), 11015– 11026.
43. CHONYA, M. (2012). Comparative effectiveness of female and male school head teachers in Lusaka, Zambia. University of Zambia Press.
44. COHEN, L., MANION, L., & MORRISON, K. (2018). Research methods in education (8th ed.). Routledge.
45. COLEMAN, M. (2002). Women as head teachers: Striking the balance. Trentham Books. CRESWELL, J. W., & CRESWELL, J. D. (2018). Research design. SAGE Publications.
46. CRESWELL, J. W., & POTH, C. N. (2018). Qualitative inquiry and research design (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
47. CRENSHAW, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex. University of Chicago Legal Forum, 1989(1), 139–167.
48. DAVIDSON, M. J., & BURKE, R. J. (2016). Women in management worldwide. Gower Publishing.
49. DE BEAUVOIR, S. (1949). The second sex. Gallimard.
50. DIEHL, A. B., DZUBINSKI, L., & JOHANSEN, L. (2016). Glass ceilings in the workplace. Journal of Business Ethics, 135(2), 249–265.
51. EAGLY, A. H. (1987). Sex differences in social behavior. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. EAGLY, A. H., & CARLI, L. L. (2007). Through the labyrinth. Harvard Business School Press.
52. EAGLY, A. H., & KARAU, S. J. (2002). Role congruity theory. Psychological Review, 109(3), 573–598.
53. EAGLY, A. H., & WOOD, W. (2012). Social role theory. In P. A. M. VAN LANGE et al. (Eds.),
54. Handbook of theories of social psychology (pp. 458–476). SAGE Publications. FULLAN, M. (2014). The principal. Jossey-Bass.
55. GUBA, E. G., & LINCOLN, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In Handbook of qualitative research. SAGE.
56. HEIFETZ, R. A. (1994). Leadership without easy answers. Harvard University Press. HOOKS, B. (2000). Feminism is for everybody. South End Press.
57. HOY, W. K., & MISKEL, C. G. (2013). Educational administration. McGraw-Hill.
58. KABEER, N. (2005). Gender equality and women's empowerment. Gender & Development, 13(1), 13–24.
59. KOMBO, D. K., & TROMP, D. L. A. (2006). Proposal and thesis writing. Paulines Publications Africa.
60. KOTHARI, C. R. (2004). Research methodology. New Age International. LUMBY, J., & COLEMAN, M. (2007). Leadership and diversity. SAGE.
61. MINISTRY OF EDUCATION. (1996). Educating our future. Government of the Republic of Zambia.

62. MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (MOE). (2020). Education statistical bulletin. Ministry of Education.
63. NORTHOUSE, P. G. (2019). Leadership: Theory and practice. SAGE Publications.
64. OPLATKA, I. (2006). Women in educational administration. Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 34(4), 605–624.
65. ORODHO, A. J. (2009). Elements of education and social science research methods. Kanezja Publisher.
66. POLICY MONITORING AND RESEARCH CENTRE (PMRC). (2025). Gender and education in Zambia. PMRC Zambia.
67. SAUNDERS, M., LEWIS, P., & THORNHILL, A. (2012). Research methods for business students. Pearson Education.
68. SHAKESHAFT, C. (1989). Women in educational administration. SAGE Publications.
69. SPERANDIO, J., & KAGODA, A. M. (2010). Women teachers' aspirations to leadership. International Journal of Educational Management, 24(1), 22–33.
70. STRAUSS, A., & CORBIN, J. (1998). Basics of qualitative research. SAGE Publications. TAYLOR, S. D. (2006). Culture and customs of Zambia. Greenwood Press.
71. UNESCO. (2025). Gender equality in education. UNESCO Publishing.
72. UNITED NATIONS. (2015). Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development. UN.
73. WORLD BANK. (2017). Challenges for women in leadership. World Bank.
74. YOUNG, I. M. (1980). Socialist feminism and the limits of dual systems theory. Socialist Review, 10(2–3), 169–188.
75. YUKL, G. (2013). Leadership in organizations. Pearson.
76. ZAMBIA STATISTICS AGENCY. (2020). Zambia population and demographic projections 2011–2035. ZamStats.