

**Experiences of female principals regarding leadership and
management support received from school stakeholders in
Ekurhuleni Education District**

by

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Tirhani D Ngomane, Student number 36487754, declare that this research dissertation, titled: ***Experiences of female principals regarding leadership and management support received from school stakeholders in Ekurhuleni Education District***, is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated or acknowledged using complete references. I further declare that I submitted the dissertation to the originality checking software.

I, Tirhani Doreen Ngomane, confirm that the dissertation has been submitted to originality checking software.

The dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the MEd (Education Management) degree in the College of Education at the University of South Africa. I further declare that I obtained the required authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

Student Signature

DATE



15/11/2025



15/11/2025

Supervisor Signature

DATE

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Primarily, our Heavenly Father, who had given me hope when it was all gone, the courage and the strength not to give up. The Lord has indeed been my shepherd in this journey.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this study first to my heavenly father, whose grace, strength, and guidance have sustained me throughout this academic journey. To my beloved family, thank you for your endless love, patience, and encouragement. Your faith in me made this achievement possible. I also dedicate this study to all female school principals, who lead with courage, resilience and compassion. May this work serve as a testimony to your strength and as an inspiration for continued empowerment and support for women in educational leadership.

ABSTRACT

This study explored the experiences of female principals regarding the support they receive or do not receive from various stakeholders within the Ekurhuleni Education District, South Africa. The study focused on how stakeholder support influences leadership and management performance, how female principals' strategies they use, and support structure are required to strengthen their leadership roles. The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of female principals in educational leadership, with particular attention to the nature and effects of stakeholders' support in their professional roles. A qualitative research approach was used, and a multiple-site case study design was adopted, with data collected through semi-structured interviews and observations during the interviews. The study indicate that leadership and management experiences of female principals are strongly associated with effective stakeholder support, including collaboration with teachers, engagement with parents, and support from School Governing Bodies (SGB). It means that such support from the different stakeholders promotes accountability, shared responsibility, and improved school performance. Conversely, negative experience is linked to inefficient stakeholder support and gendered expectations that undermine authority. Female principals address these challenges by fostering shared visions, promoting collaboration, delegating responsibilities and building professional networks to enhance their leadership and management responsibilities. The study concludes that effective stakeholder support is essential for enabling female principals to lead successfully. It recommends strengthening collaborative practices, enhancing stakeholder accountability, and promoting gender-sensitive leadership approaches.

Keywords: Stakeholder support; Female Principalship; School leadership; School performance, gender and education; Collaboration; School Governing Body.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACESLM	Advanced Certificate: Education (School Management and Leadership)
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DBSA	Development Bank of South Africa
DoE	Department of Education
GDE	Gauteng Department of Education
HOD	Head of Department
HR	Human Resources
IDSO	Institutional Development and Support Official
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
ISASSA	Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa
SA	South Africa
SAP	South African Police
SAPA	South African Principals' Association
SASA	South African School Act
SGB	School Governing Body
SLM	School Leadership and Management
SMT	School Management Team
SSI	Semi-Structured Interviews
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Stakeholders' support is a critical factor in shaping the effectiveness of school leadership, particularly for female principals who often operate within complex organisational and social contexts. In schools, stakeholders such as the department of education (DoE), or district officials, School Management Teams (SMT), School Governing Bodies (SGBs), and parents and teachers play significant roles in enabling or constraining leadership practices through their levels of collaboration, trust, and accountability. While existing literature acknowledges the persistent gendered challenges in educational leadership (Shakeshaft et al., 2007), less attention has been given to how stakeholder support specifically influences the leadership experiences of female principals. Understanding these dynamics is essential, as leadership effectiveness is not exercised in isolation but is co-constructed through relationships within the school community (Acker, 1990; Robinson, 2011).

The topic of gender-related challenges and leadership in education has been researched around the world for many years. Most of the debates in many countries are on cultural and traditional norms such as gender bias and stereotyping, family responsibilities commonly associated with women, less assertive approaches to career advancement, restricted access to establish networks, and underdeveloped female leadership networks (Cundiff & Vescio, 2016; Chaluvadi, 2015; Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016). Globally, research continually affirms female under-representation at all levels of leadership and decision-making. Davids (2018) provides examples of women who have demonstrated their capability to perform leadership roles effectively by investing in their own development and resilience. Notable examples include Malala Yousafzai, an advocate for girls' education in Pakistan, and Angela Merkel, who led Germany through significant national and global crises. These examples illustrate how women continue to assert their leadership potential through education, empowerment and perseverance. However, while such global examples highlight women's leadership capabilities, they also underscore the

importance of contextual support systems. Shakeshaft (2014) emphasised the critical role of support in enabling female principals to succeed in leadership positions, identifying the absence of support, encouragement, and counselling as key barriers to women in educational leadership.

In this study, the experiences of female principals are not only shaped by their individual efforts, but also by the level of support they receive from stakeholders, which is critical to enabling effective leadership in schools.

This study focused on exploring and addressing the question of female principals' experiences with the support they receive from stakeholders such as the DoE, SMT, SGB, the private and public sectors, parents, and learners in the Ekurhuleni Education Districts. The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of female principals in educational leadership, with particular attention to the nature and effects of stakeholders' support in their professional roles.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Between 1994 and 1999, South Africa made significant progress in empowering female education graduates to assume leadership positions, through new discourses of social justice and gender equity, which facilitated the entry of many women into previously male-dominated areas of the educational bureaucracy (Chisholm, 2001). Similarly, Naidoo and Perumal (2014) agree with Chisholm (2001) that South Africa's democratic transition accelerated numerous changes and brought long standing issues, such as workplace equity, to the forefront, extending into education, sector historically dominated by man, Their study indicates that women were able to overcome gender barriers and attain leadership position only after the enactment and implementation of multiple redress policies designed to promote equity and inclusivity within educational leadership structures. However, the formulation of support structures, especially from stakeholders that could contribute to the redress of challenges experienced by female leaders, seems to be lacking in this literature.

Literature continually points out how female teachers and leaders would do so well if they received respect and support. In a study conducted in South Africa, Tanzania, Ivory Coast, and Kenya amongst female teachers, the findings revealed that for women

educators perform to effectively and excel, they must feel respected by learners, operate within a supportive environment and experience gender equality (Unterhalter et al, 2016). Just like female teachers, those in positions to lead, whether as principals or HODs, need to be heard and supported to start to excel in their leadership roles. Mampane, (2021) and Knights & Omanović (2016) reiterated that female educationists fail to advance since they create personal barriers by doubting their ability to play three roles: wife, mother, and professional. Often, female principals struggle to develop their leadership identity due to a lack of understanding of the different managerial career stages they undergo during their careers. Performing such multiple tasks expected of female leaders can be overwhelming and requires a support system, which in schools may be the stakeholders. Stakeholder support is a critical factor in determining the effectiveness of school leaders, particularly for female principals who often operate within complex and gendered organisational contexts. Female principals require consistent support from key stakeholders, including teachers, parents, SGBs, and education authorities, to successfully fulfil their leadership roles (Shakeshaft, 2014). The absence of such support can undermine leadership effectiveness by limiting collaboration, weakening authority, and constraining decision-making processes. This study, therefore, focused on exploring the experiences of female principals in relation to stakeholder support, examining how such support influences their leadership and management responsibilities. This study also investigated how the lack of support from the stakeholders affects the leadership and management role of female principals.

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Despite sustained efforts to promote gender equity in school leadership in South Africa, female principals continue to experience significant challenges in executing their leadership and management roles effectively. Policy initiatives and leadership development programmes, such as the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE), have sought to strengthen school leadership capacity (Bush, Kiggundu & Moorosi, 2011; Naidoo, 2014). In addition, support mechanisms such as mentoring and professional learning communities have been identified as critical in empowering women in leadership (Moroasui, 2022).

However, the existing literature suggests that these interventions have not fully translated into consistent and meaningful support at the school level. Research by Moorosi (2021), Mestry and Schmidt (2012) and Moyo & Perumal (2020) indicates that female principals often operate within environments characterised by systemic gender bias, limited institutional support, and weak collaborative structures. These conditions constrain their leadership effectiveness and limit their ability to manage schools efficiently.

A central problem identified in the literature is the lack of adequate and consistent stakeholder support for female principals. However, stakeholders such as teachers, parents, school governing bodies, district officials, and community members are essential for effective school governance and management. Female principals frequently encounter resistance, a lack of cooperation, and insufficient professional support. This results in professional isolation, increased workload, and restricted decision-making authority, all of which negatively impact leadership practice.

While stakeholder support is theoretically available to all principals, studies suggest that female principals experience disparities in accessing such support due to gendered expectations and organisational dynamics (Moorosi, 2021; Moyo & Perumal, 2020). Male principals are often perceived as more authoritative and may benefit from stronger informal networks, enhancing their access to support. Consequently, female principals face additional barriers to their leadership performance.

Although prior studies have explored gender inequality and leadership challenges, there is a limited understanding of stakeholder support from the perspective of female principals themselves. Insufficient attention has been given to the nature, extent, and impact of stakeholder support on their leadership and management practices, as well as the strategies they can employ to cope with inadequate or inconsistent support.

Therefore, this study sought to address this gap by exploring how female principals experience stakeholder support and how this influences their leadership effectiveness and management practices in schools.

1.4 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Gender inequality in leadership remains a persistent concern in the education sector, despite policy efforts aimed at promoting equity. In the South African context, although

more women have entered school leadership positions, disparities in representation and experience continue to exist. Female principals often operate within environments shaped by historical and structural inequalities, which influence how leadership is perceived and supported. This study is further informed by professional observations made during my time as an educator in a public school and as a coordinator in a religious education organisation between 2007-2009 and 2018-2024. During this period, a noticeable gap in leadership roles between men and women was observed, particularly in senior leadership positions. While there have been gradual improvements in gender representations in recent years, literature suggests that inequalities in leadership experience and support persist, indicating that the issues remain relevant today (Moorosi, 2021; Moyo & Perumal, 2020).

Existing research indicates that female principals face a range of challenges, including gender bias, limited access to mentoring, and resistance from stakeholders within the school community. Mestry and Schmidt (2012) suggest that female principals, when adequately supported, can lead effectively and contribute to balanced gender representation in educational leadership. However, in practice, many female principals continue to experience insufficient cooperation and support from key stakeholders such as teachers, parents, school governing bodies, and district officials. These challenges can negatively affect their leadership effectiveness and overall school performance.

Despite growing scholarship on gender and educational leadership, there is limited research that specifically explores stakeholder support from the perspective of female principals themselves. Much of the existing literature focuses broadly on gender inequality, with less attention given to how support systems, or the lack thereof, shape the lived experiences and leadership practices of female school leaders. This study is therefore important as it seeks to address this gap by exploring how stakeholder support influences the leadership experiences and performance of female principals. The findings are expected to contribute to leadership development, inform policy, and promote more supportive and gender responsive school environments. Ultimately, the study seeks to

enhance leadership practices, foster effective stakeholder collaboration, and promote better gender equity within South African educational leadership.

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Mounton (1998) defines a theoretical framework as the conceptual process through which research is integrated into the existing body of knowledge relevant to the topic under investigation. It seeks to bridge conceptual understanding with practical application. In this study, the theoretical framework is grounded in multiple perspectives that collectively illuminate how gender, leadership style, and social relationships intersect to shape female principals' experiences in their professional environments. Specifically, the integration of feminist theory, transformational leadership theory and social support theory provides a multidimensional understanding of how female principals navigate structural barriers, assert leadership, secure support, and engage with stakeholder support in the education sector.

Feminist theory offers a critical perspective for examining how cultural norms, social structures, and institutional practices influence women's experiences and opportunities. It challenges patriarchal systems that perpetuate gender inequities and advocates for the recognition of women's voices, agency and contributions within organisational contexts (Hooks, 2020; Hooks, 2023). Within educational leadership, feminist theory highlights how gendered expectations influence the recruitment, support and evaluation of female principals. It further underscores that women's leadership styles, often characterised by collaboration, empathy and inclusivity, are frequently undervalued despite being essential for meaningful school transformation (Moorosi & Fuller, 2020; Ali & Nagvi 2021). In this study, feminist theory helps examine the structural and cultural barriers that shape female principals' access to and experiences with stakeholder support.

Transformational leadership theory complements this perspective by focusing on a leadership paradigm and rational strategies. Transformational leadership emphasises leaders' ability to articulate a shared vision, inspire and motivate followers, and foster professional growth (Bass & Riggio, 2019; Northouse, 2022). The theory identifies the four fundamental dimensions: inspirational motivation, idealised influence, intellectual stimulation and individualised consideration. Female principals often demonstrate these

qualities through collaborative and participatory approaches to leadership, enabling them to build trust, empower staff and improve school culture and performance (Tikly, 2020). In this study, transformational leadership theory provides insight into how female principals actively mobilise and sustain stakeholder support through inclusive and relationship-oriented leadership practices, even within constrained environments.

Mnisi & Chang'ach (2018) observes that debates surrounding gender and leadership persist, noting that when employees are asked to envision an effective leader, the prevailing image is typically that of a man. Wallin (2023) argues that such perception illustrates gender stereotypes. Female leaders across Africa and globally encounter similar challenges and experiences in attaining and exercising leadership positions (Ärlestig et al., 2016). Female leaders in most parts of Africa who hold similar positions frequently point to the earlier disadvantages of culture and patriarchal order being the main reasons for an unpleasant experience in their positions. Mestry and Schmidt's (2012) theory points the readers to the importance of acknowledging and reconciling the damage caused by patriarchal oppression and dominion. Men typically adhere to a transactional leadership approach, emphasising structured exchange and performance-based rewards rather than rational or transformational strategies (Naidoo & Perumal, 2021). Like their male counterparts, female school principals strive to achieve institutional objectives; however, in this study, transformational leadership theory emphasises the process through which these goals are attained, particularly through collaborative, inclusive, and relationship-oriented practices. Female leaders prioritise team development and productivity by employing strategies that enhance motivation and foster individual growth (Moorosi & Torrance, 2023).

Burns (1978) characterised transformational leadership as a reciprocal process in which leaders and followers elevate one another to a higher level of morality and motivation, unified by a shared vision that directs collective purpose. Subsequent scholarship emphasises that leadership inherently involves articulating vision, providing strategic direction, influencing processes and energising followers. Within this paradigm, transformational leadership requires leaders to communicate objectives clearly so that followers internalise and embrace them as their own (Wasserman & Ben-Eliyahu, 2022).

Social support theory provides a third, complementary lens by focusing on the role of interpersonal relationships in facilitating effective functioning and resilience. The theory posits that individuals rely on emotional, informational, and instrumental resources that enable them to manage stress and enhance performance (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Lakey & Orehek, 2019). In school contexts, such support may be derived from teachers, school governing bodies, parents, district officials, and the broader community. For female principals, the availability and quality of stakeholder support significantly influence their confidence, decision-making, and leadership effectiveness (Kim & Bryan, 2021; Van Deventer, 2016). This perspective is central to the study, as it directly addresses the nature and impact of stakeholder support on female principals' professional experiences. Together, these three theoretical perspectives form a coherent, integrated analytical framework. Feminist theory explains the structural and gendered context within which female principals operate. While transformational leadership theory illuminates the leadership practices and agency they employ; social support theory clarifies the role and impact of stakeholder relationships on their effectiveness. Their integration enables a holistic analysis of how systemic factors, leadership behaviour, and support networks interact to shape the experiences, and performance of female principals in South Africa's educational landscape.

1.6. PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of female principals in educational leadership, with particular attention to the nature and effects of stakeholders' support in their professional roles.

The objectives of this study were as follows:

- To explore the experiences of female principals regarding stakeholder support they receive or do not receive from different stakeholders in the Ekurhuleni Education District.
- To establish how the support received from stakeholders, or the lack of it, influences the performance of the female school principals.

- To explore how female principals currently cope with the challenges arising from the support they receive or do not receive from stakeholders.
- To identify the additional support, structures and policy interventions required to strengthen female principals' capacity to address these challenges effectively.

1.7 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question was:

What are the experiences of female school principals regarding the support that they receive from stakeholders?

Sub-questions

- How do female principals experience the support they receive from different stakeholders?
- What challenges do female principals encounter regarding stakeholder support?
- How does the support received from the stakeholders, or the lack thereof, influence their performance as educational leaders?
- How do female principals cope with the challenges related to inadequate or inconsistent stakeholder support?
- What strategies, structures, policies, and forms of support do female principals require to effectively perform their leadership roles?

1.8 RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This section provides an overview of the research methodology adopted for the study. Research methodology refers to the systematic framework and underlying philosophical assumptions that guide the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation to address the research problem. It forms the foundation for ensuring the validity and reliability of the study. As Creswell and Creswell (2018) note, methodology represents the overarching strategy that connects research philosophy with the methods employed for data collection and analysis. In contrast, Leedy and Ormrod (2021) describe it as a logical inquiry that explains what methods are chosen and why they are suitable for the research

problem. Similarly, McMillan et Al., (2019) emphasise that methodology provides the roadmap that ensures coherence between the study's purpose, design and implementation.

Given the study's objective of exploring female principals' experiences regarding the support they receive from various stakeholders, an interpretive paradigm grounded in a qualitative approach was deemed most suitable. This approach facilitated an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, emphasising meaning, interpretation, and context rather than numerical measurement. The research adopted a descriptive and exploratory qualitative design to capture and interpret experiences within their leadership roles. Guided by a phenomenological perspective, the design sought to uncover the essence of participants' experiences, enabling the researcher to reflect on their realities and perceptions within a natural school setting. A detailed justification of this and its procedures is provided, and the design is elaborated in Chapter Three.

The study utilised purposive sampling to recruit participants with rich and relevant experiences related to the research problem. Ten female school principals from both primary and secondary public schools in the Ekurhuleni Education District were chosen to ensure diversity while maintaining focus. Data were gathered through semi-structured, enabling participants to express their experiences openly and allowing the researcher to probe for clarification and deeper insights. Interview questions were informed by the research objectives and existing literature on educational leadership and stakeholder support. Data analysis adhered to Braun and Clarke's (2019) Five-step thematic analysis framework: familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing themes and compiling the report. Measures to ensure trustworthiness and ethical considerations are described in detail in Chapter Three of this study.

1.9 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to a deeper understanding of the experiences of female principals in the school system. The study focuses on the types of support they receive from stakeholders and how this support affects their leadership performance. Despite ongoing initiatives to advance gender equity in educational leadership, this study shows that many female principals still encounter unique challenges

that make it harder for them to be effective in their role. This research provides evidence-based findings that help fill these gaps. Firstly, this study underscores the essential role of the stakeholder support, such as teachers, parents, school Governing Bodies (SGBs), district councils or officials, businesses and the wider community in influencing the leadership realities of female principals. Therefore, by identifying both supportive and unsupportive stakeholder behaviours, the study offers practical recommendations for creating a more enabling leadership environment. Secondly, the study informs policy and school management practices. Its findings may assist the Department of Education, district offices, and SGBs in developing gender-responsive policies, structures, and accountability mechanisms that minimise obstacles faced by female principals and enhance overall school performance.

Thirdly, through the application of feminist theory and transformational leadership theory, the study also contributes to the theoretical comprehension of the interplay between gender norms, social expectations, and leadership styles intersecting within school contexts. These perspectives enrich existing scholarship and intensify awareness of the complexities surrounding female leadership in South Africa. Additionally, this study's findings can also assist in creating professional development programmes, mentoring opportunities, and coping mechanisms specifically designed to help female principals deal with gender bias, heavy workloads and stakeholder resistance. This contributes to a larger effort to give women more authority in leadership positions.

Lastly, the study sets the stage for ongoing research by pointing out areas that need greater research, such as the long-term effects of stakeholders' relationships on school outcomes and how to create more inclusive leadership cultures. Overall, the significance of this study is that it can enhance leadership practices, improve stakeholder engagement, promote gender equity, and support female school leaders in the South African education system to continue to grow and develop.

1.10 DEFINITION OF TERMS

This section aims to clarify the key concepts underpinning the study to ensure conceptual clarity and consistency. Understanding these concepts is crucial for interpreting the research findings within the context of female school leadership and support systems

provided by education stakeholders. The concepts are divided into basic concepts and related concepts as follows:

- ***Female Principals***

A female principal refers to a woman who occupies the position of school principal and assumes comprehensive responsibility for managing and leading the school, including instructional supervision, administrative duties and community relations (Moorosi, 2021; Mestry, 2017). The critical role played by female principals is that of shaping school culture and ensuring the effective functioning of teaching and learning activities.

- ***Stakeholders***

Stakeholders refer to individuals or groups with a vested interest in a school's functioning and outcomes. These include teachers, learners, parents, governing bodies, community members and officials from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) (Bush & Glover 2019; Van der Westhuizen, 2018). Effective engagement between principals and stakeholders fosters shared decision-making and promotes accountability in school management (Naidoo & Adinyenka, 2024).

- ***Support***

Support refers to the assistance, whether emotional, professional or material, provided to principals to enable them to perform their duties effectively (Botha, 2021; Van der Vyver & Mestry, 2023). Support from stakeholders may include mentoring, resource allocation, collaboration and moral encouragement that enhance principals' confidence and leadership capacity.

- ***Experiences***

Experiences refer to the subjective, lived realities and interpretations of events as encountered by individuals in specific contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2026). In this study, experiences refer to encompass perceptions, emotions and reflections of female principals as they navigate their leadership responsibilities and interact with various stakeholders.

- ***Educational Leadership***

Educational leadership involves guiding and influencing teachers, learners, and the broader school community towards achieving shared educational goals (Bush, 2020; Hallinger, 2018). In this study, educational leadership is understood through the lived roles of female principals, as they navigate and mobilise support from key stakeholders, including teachers, parents and district officials. These principals enact leadership through strategic decision-making, communication, and collaborative engagement, often within complex social and organisational contexts. Their leadership practices are not only aimed at improving teaching and learning but are also shaped by the nature and extent of support they receive. Thus, educational leadership in this study is conceptualised as a relational and context-dependent process, where the effectiveness of female principals is closely linked to shareholder support.

- ***Challenges***

Challenges refer to barriers, constraints, or obstacles that hinder principals from performing their leadership duties effectively. These may arise from institutional structures, cultural biases, or resource limitations (Akinola & Naidoo, 2024; Chisholm & September, 2005). Identifying the challenges female principals face is essential for understanding the leadership context in which they operate and the coping strategies they employ. It also informs the development of recommendations for more effective support systems.

- ***Coping strategies***

Coping strategies refer to the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural efforts used by individuals to manage or adapt to stressful or challenging situations in their professional situations (Lazarus & Folkman, 2020; Moorosi, 2010). These may be problem-focused, addressing the source of stress, or emotion-focused, regulating responses to it. In the educational context, school principals employ strategies such as networking, delegation, time management, seeking support, and building emotional resilience. In this study of female school principals in the Ekurhuleni educational district, coping strategies are understood as the means through which female principals navigate systemic, stakeholder, and gender-related challenges. They also enable sustainable leadership

effectiveness, well-being, and school improvement, positioning coping not only as a response to stress but as a key mechanism for resilience and professional agency.

1.11 OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

Chapter one introduces the study by outlining the background and rationale. It explains that the research aims to explore the experiences of female school principals regarding the support they receive from different stakeholders. The principals shared insights into their roles as female leaders and the support they receive. Additionally, the chapter presents the problem statement, research purpose, theoretical framework, methodology, significance of the study, clarification of key concepts, and an overview of the chapter structure.

Chapter two investigates existing literature, with the intent to provide the reader with a general overview of the concept of leadership and the management role of principals, paying attention to female principals, their role, the support they receive and the strategies they use to overcome leadership challenges. The literature review is presented in four sections: first, the concept of leadership and the management role of principals is discussed; the second one explores challenges encountered by female school principals; the third one discusses the support principals receive from educational stakeholders; and lastly, the key role of female school principals in educational leadership and the summary thereof. The literature review in this chapter investigates both internal and national practices.

Chapter three focuses on the research methodology, in which the interaction between the researcher and the participant is analysed to explain what the participant connects to the researcher's interview question. A discussion on research techniques and methods used for the study, providing an overview of a research paradigm, approach, and designs, along with details on the population, sample and sampling techniques. It further explains the data collection process, including the procedures followed and methods of data analysis conducted within the interpretive paradigm. Additionally, it outlines the strategies employed to ensure trustworthiness and presents the ethical considerations guiding the study.

Chapter four looks at the analysis of the data collected and its interpretation. It presents the research's findings within the context of the theoretical framework and includes comparisons of these results with existing literature.

Chapter five summarises findings, conclusions, and recommendations derived from relevant published literature and interviews conducted for this research on female principals' experiences of support from stakeholders in their roles. This chapter consolidates the main outcomes of the research, highlights its significance, and provides actionable recommendations to strengthen support systems for female school principals. It also addresses the study's delimitation and limitations, suggests recommendations for future research and concludes with a reflective summary of the study's contributions.

1.12 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter has presented the introduction, background, and justification for the study. It outlined the problem statement, research purpose and questions, theoretical framework, methodology, significance of the study, and key concepts, and was conducted with an overview of the chapter structure. The next chapter provides a comprehensive review of relevant literature, focusing on leadership and management roles in education, the challenges encountered by female principals in educational leadership, the nature of support provided by educational stakeholders, and the critical contribution of female principals to effective school leadership.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter outlined the study's background, problem statement and rationale for the study. It also presented the research purpose, aim, objectives, theoretical framework, significance and a brief overview of the methodology. Key concepts were verified, and the chapter structure explained. This section critically explores existing research to determine what is known about female leadership, stakeholders' support, and the challenges women face in educational management. The literature review further identifies gaps in knowledge that justify this study and guide the formulation of research questions and objectives introduced earlier in Chapter One.

2.2 THE CONCEPT OF LEADERSHIP

Leadership can be defined as the ability to guide, influence, and inspire individuals towards the achievement of shared goals through effective communication, trust, collaboration, and strategic direction. Leadership involves creating a clear vision (Harris, 2020), motivating others and coordinating collective efforts to achieve desired outcomes. Within educational settings, literature (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015; AL-Husseini, 2025; Ho & Yong Tray, 2020) shows that leadership focuses on improving teaching and learning, fostering a positive school climate, supporting staff development, and ensuring that the school community works together to enhance learner achievement. Leadership enables cooperation to achieve goals beyond individual capacity and fosters social structures such as families and communities to meet affiliative needs (Naidoo & Perumal, 2021).

The core aim of leadership is to drive academic success through systemic process (Lakomski et al., 2017), material, and training improvements. To identify every characteristic of outstanding leaders, a variety of approaches have been taken in myriad studies of leadership (Arar et Al., 2024). A single definition of leadership is elusive, though many schools of thought share commonalities. It is simple to spot effective leadership,

but how it is executed varies depending on the characteristics, environment, and other external elements that contribute to the development of a particular leader (Naidoo & Perumal, 2020). Based on the different definitions of leadership in the literature, leadership in this study is defined as the ability of female school leaders to work collaboratively and support different stakeholders.

2.3 EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Educational leadership, particularly in schools, brings together the abilities and efforts of teachers, learners, and parents in achieving educational outcomes. The primary aim of educational leadership is to enhance both the quality of education and the overall education system (Harris, 2020). Educational leadership involves creating a shared vision for success, maintaining a safe and welcoming learning environment, delegating responsibilities effectively, continuously improving teaching methods and curriculum, and adopting modern management tools and techniques to strengthen school operations (Bush, 2009). The reviewed literature indicates that educational leadership serves as a collaborative and goal-oriented process; therefore, the following section explores how female principals enact the above leadership responsibilities within their school.

2.4 LEADERSHIP OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Generally, in leading a school, principals must reconcile two essential responsibilities: managerial duties and moral leadership, both of which are critical for fostering a learning community (Lakomski et al., 2017). School principals are expected to play both managerial and moral leadership roles necessary to develop a learning community (Bush, 2020). Arar et Al., (2024) asserts that for schools to survive, the principals must run effectively the role of leadership and management. The success in performing the dual role depends on a learning community which has the responsibility of overseeing the functions of a school (Lakomski et al., 2017). The Department of Basic Education (DBE) identifies these individuals as school principals or managers of the school (UNICEF Innocenti & Ministry of Education, Lao People's Democratic Republic, 2020). Within the education system, they are regarded as key partners in driving improvement. Learner achievement and teachers' performance are strongly linked to the principal's skills,

qualities and commitment to managing the school effectively and efficiently (Arar et Al., 2024).

Fullan & Gallagher (2020) emphasises that principals establish the overall tone of the school, shaping how teachers interact with learners, parents and one another. A school's success is closely linked to the principal's leadership style. Amongst various styles such as democratic, transactional, transformational, laissez-faire, autocratic, collegial, and so forth, female principals tend to use the transformational leadership style more often. Leadership style preference determines the principal's influence over goal achievement, academic success, throughput, teacher determination, commitment, and job satisfaction (Coleman, 2023).

Arar et Al., (2024) reports that one of the persistent explanations for the poor performance of South African Schools is the inadequate training and lack of proper management and leadership skills among principals. The study also discovered that training and preparation for the role continue to be the main challenge for some of the interviewed individuals (Bush, 2020). The management responsibilities of principals or educational leaders are grounded in fundamental societal, educational and professional values, which are evident in how they handle responsibilities related to curriculum and human resources (Naidoo & Perumal, 2020). The Department of Basic Education asserts that the values possessed by principals combined with their knowledge and skills determine the overall approach and direction of leadership and management within a school.

The literature presented in this section generally describes what is expected of the school principal. The next section provides a more detailed evaluation of the roles and responsibilities expected of school principals.

2.5 GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE ON FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATION

Female leaders remain underrepresented in the education sector worldwide. In numerous nations across the world, women remain disproportionately represented in school leadership roles, particularly in secondary schools (Department of Basic Education (GDBE) 2023). For example, the OECD notes that while women constitute most teachers, they remain largely underrepresented in leadership roles, particularly in secondary schools (Maphalala et Al., 2025). This raises questions about whether and how women

are considered for leadership roles, how those roles may be filled, and how they may be valued, mentored, or assessed.

In Sweden, men have traditionally held leadership positions in schools such that in the 1980s, female managers made up 60% of the workforce, yet there were only 7% of female principals (Ärlestig et al., 2016; Naidoo & Perumal, 2020; Maphalala et Al., 2025; Arar et Al., 2024). In Ethiopia, the education statistics for (2020–2021) show that the percentage of female school directors in primary and intermediate schools was 12%, while at the secondary level, that number dropped to just 7% (Arar et Al., 2024). In some places, the representation is considerably lower. For instance, in the whole Somali region in 2019, there were just two female principals (Naidoo & Perumal, 2020). These studies give a picture of the under-representation of female teachers in leadership positions that could speak to some of the challenges being experienced by female principals that could require the support of stakeholders.

In South Africa, the debate on how principal leadership influences school achievement remains ongoing. Gender-related challenges females encounter in the workplace are viewed as obstacle to female leaders' success. Ndebele (2018) highlights that female principals often face poor reception from school staff, largely because many employees doubt their ability to lead effectively. The perceived mismatch between traditional female gender roles and leadership roles often results in biased evaluations of women leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The unfairness creates a double bind for female leaders, forcing them to navigate conflicting expectations tied to both gender and leadership roles. Such negative situations are extended by unfair remuneration of female leaders linked to unfair performance appraisals, indicating that women tend to receive more negative evaluations compared to men (Eagly & Carli, 2007). These findings from the literature call for ways in which the female principals can be supported in doing their work, one of which is supported by the stakeholders, which is the focus of this study.

Therefore, the global literature makes it evident that the under-representation of women in educational leadership is neither incidental nor context-bound but rooted in long-standing structural, persistent cultural and organisational factors that continue to limit women's access to leadership positions. Despite gradual progress, women still navigate

complex barriers that influence both their leadership trajectories and experiences once appointed. The insights underscore the importance of examining not only global trends but also how such patterns unfold within local school environments. With this broader context in place, the next section discusses the phenomenon of female principalship, focusing on the unique challenges, opportunities and experiences of female principals in schools.

2.6 FEMALE PRINCIPALSHIP

Female principalship refers to the leadership role undertaken by women who serve as heads of educational institutions, responsible for managing school operations, leading staff and ensuring the academic and social success of learners. Within educational leadership literature, female principals are often described as embodying leadership attributes that differ in emphasis from traditional, masculine-oriented models of authority (Moorosi, 2010; Coleman, 2012). Their leadership style tends to prioritise collaboration, emotional intelligence and the creation of inclusive school cultures (Lumby & Azaola, 2014).

Research indicates that female principals often adopt transformational and participatory leadership approaches, emphasising shared decision making, staff empowerment and collective goal setting (Chisholm, 2001; Ngunjiri, 2010). These characteristics align with values such as empathy, communication and nurturing relationships, attributes which not only reflect their socialisation but also contribute positively to staff and school performance (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Female leaders are commonly described as relational leaders who inspire trust, encourage collaboration, and cultivate a sense of belonging within their school communities. However, the practice of female principalship is shaped by both opportunities and constraints. Although many female leaders demonstrate high levels of competence and resilience, they frequently encounter gendered expectations, role conflict and restricted access to mentorship and professional networks (Moorosi, 2010; Mestry & Schmidt, 2012). These challenges make performing the leadership and management responsibilities of the female school principal difficult, and there is a need for stakeholder support systems that validate their authority and provide the resources necessary for effective school management.

2.7 LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Different literature on gender and school leadership highlights the challenges female principals encounter throughout their careers, which often arise during educator preparation programmes, within the workplace, and beyond. Whether these experiences are positive or negative largely depends on multiple factors associated with the school's operations, including supporting school leadership. David (2018) states that the schools tend to integrate into communities where they are situated, often mirroring the prevailing norms and practices of those areas. Hence, the female principals' experiences and support structure may vary from principal to principal and from one school to another. The next section explores both the positive and negative experiences of female school principals, as documented in existing literature.

2.7.1 Positive experiences of female school principals

The school principal's role is both complex and multifaceted, requiring strong leadership, decision-making, interpersonal skills and support from stakeholders. Female principals face distinct challenges related to gender biases, social expectations, and organisational barriers. Despite these challenges, many female principals share positive and empowering experiences that enhance their growth and job satisfaction. These experiences often stem from supportive networks, effective leadership initiatives, the ability to positively influence learners and communities, and personal resilience. Positive experiences of female school principals can be measured using their success stories, according to a study conducted by Nhlumayo & Nkosi (2017). Female principals' experiences of success can be explained using the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) by Albert Bandura, the Cognitive Adjustments and Leadership Effectiveness. Leadership effectiveness may include various characteristics and attributes demonstrated by female principals, such as leadership skills, leadership styles, intelligence needed for leadership, personality, as well as collaborative relationships with stakeholders.

2.7.2 Negative experiences of female school principals

Female principals encounter a distinct set of challenges, often influenced by gender biases, societal expectations, and systemic inequalities within educational systems.

Female leaders are criticised for their lack of physical strength, maternal tendencies, and soft personalities. The challenges that female principals must confront and overcome to advance and prosper include gender discrimination, balancing work and home obligations, social pressures and traditions, and the position of women's status (Komiti & Moorosi, 2020). Davids & Waghid (2018) states that female principals' experiences include a sense of non-belonging, tensions, feelings of displacement and hesitation in their role, and in their relationship with both male and female colleagues. As female principals take off the hat of a principal, they get home to put on the other hats, to become a mother to the kids and or a wife to their husband (Lipscombe et al., 2020). Female principals, according to Davids (2018), often experience tension, feelings of exclusion and uncertainty regarding their roles and relationships with both male and female colleagues.

Although the challenges that female principals experience are well documented in the literature, the silence around the support that female principals need, especially from school stakeholders, to cope with these challenges is notable. In this study, the researcher intended to investigate the possibilities of how support from the stakeholders could be one of the disadvantages female leaders in the Ekurhuleni Education Districts are facing in their role as principals. Moorosi (2014) found that women in leadership are often expected to embody traits of both genders simultaneously, adopting traditionally male leadership behaviours while also maintaining those associated with femininity.

The above literature indicates that gender stereotypes, discriminatory practices, and societal expectations continue to challenge female school principals, affecting their leadership experiences and sense of belonging. These barriers highlight the importance of examining the support structures available to female leaders. The next section explores the forms of support available to female school principals and how they influence their effectiveness in leadership roles.

2.8 SUPPORT FOR FEMALE SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

Research indicates that having access to mentorship, professional networks, and financial support can strengthen their leadership abilities, enabling female principals to tackle gender-related challenges and enhance their overall job performance (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Female school principals are expected to be fully committed and seek

opportunities to collaborate with outside sources to meet the needs of their learners. The principals can do this through responsive networking, by responding to those who offer support, by reaching out to the school, and by being initiative-taking to gain external support through networking (Maryla Bialobrzaska, 2012). Support for female principals in continued professional development, when managed effectively, could help develop principals and equip them with relevant skills for their demanding role (Bush, 2020). The presented literature implies that female school principals need to be proactive in seeking support to enable them to enhance the performance of certain leadership and management roles in which there is a need for improvement.

- *Support from teachers as stakeholders*

School teachers are stakeholders in education. Earlier research by Leithwood and Riehl (2003) found that principals who receive support from their teachers and non-teaching staff are more inclined to engage in instructional leadership and can assist and establish effective school policies. Just like other support provided by other stakeholders, teacher support can assist in overcoming the gender-specific challenges and is also associated with the mental and emotional health of female principals. Studies (Kowalski et al., 2011; Ingersoll & May, 2012) have shown that female principals in a supportive school environment experience less burnout and greater job dissatisfaction. This finding implies the importance of supporting female school principals in performing their expected leadership and management roles.

Although teacher support proves to be essential for the success of female principals and overall school performance, the absence of organised support systems, cultural expectations and gender bias, as well as stereotyping, could prove to be obstacles for teachers supporting female principals effectively (Reinius et al., 2024). According to Johnson and Cheng (2013), the support that teachers give to female principals can be improved through promoting gender equity, creating formal mentorship programs, and fostering collaborative school cultures. Furthermore, teacher support is vital to the success of female principals by addressing the unique challenges they encounter based on gender, while promoting a positive and efficient school atmosphere.

The extent of support that female principals receive from teachers differs based on factors such as gender dynamics, cultural contexts, and the presence of structured support systems. The challenges that principals experience make their leadership responsibilities more difficult, necessitating more assistance from their peers, especially teachers. According to Johnson and Cheng (2013), female principals frequently adopt more inclusive leadership styles, which involve the participation of teachers. The collaborative work and support that principals receive from teachers promote a more cooperative and supportive school environment. Such support highlights the significance of teacher support, which depends on the capacity of the teachers to collaborate with the principal (Robinson, 2011). The support that teachers give to the principal is both professional and emotional.

The professional support that the principal receives from teachers as school stakeholders encompasses collaborative efforts, instructional guidance and feedback. Teachers assist the principal with decision-making, curriculum development, and instructional practices. This support is particularly important for female principals, who often experience increased scrutiny in their decision-making (Dimmock & Walker, 2000). Bush and Glover (2014) emphasised that teacher collaboration and the active participation of teachers in school leadership were key factors in successfully managing educational reforms, particularly in schools led by female principals.

Emotional support that the female principals receive from teachers focuses on empathy, trust, and encouragement. Teachers offering this support help female principals cope with the stress that comes with leadership roles (Bush & Glover, 2014). Female leaders are frequently expected to juggle administrative responsibilities alongside emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills, which can lead to increased stress and burnout if adequate support is not provided (Bush & Glover, 2014). Gender dynamics have a considerable impact on how teacher support is provided to and received by female principals. Likewise, Theoharis (2007) reported that female principals may find emotional support from female staff members, but they often receive less support from male teachers due to gender-based power dynamics within the school system. Female principals can also gain from strong networks of female educators who recognise their specific challenges and can offer mentorship and solidarity. These networks have been

shown to enhance resilience and job satisfaction among female principals, helping them overcome the obstacles created by gender related discrimination (Pogodzinski, 2012).

- *Support from learners and parents as stakeholders*

Learners are part of the school community; they are also stakeholders. Jansen & Blank (2014) found that female principals who receive support from learners experience lower stress levels compared with principals who are not supported by their learners. This implies that learner support helps the individual principal, creating a more inclusive and sustainable learning environment. The effectiveness of female principals, both in terms of their capacity to lead and enhance school results, can be strongly impacted by parental support. Kowalski (2013) found that female principals are more likely to successfully implement school reforms, promote a positive school climate, and win support for their choices when they have strong parental support. Female principals may encounter resistance from a male-dominated leadership structure in the school district or larger educational community, but the presence of supportive parents can help them overcome gender bias-related obstacles.

Female Principals can receive parental support in a variety of ways, from active involvement in school-making to emotional support (Berkovich, 2014). The leadership style of female principals frequently cultivates a positive school climate, which can be a source of strength, particularly when backed by important stakeholders like parents (Eagly & Johannessen-Schmidt, 2001). Parental support may be even more important for female principals in overcoming the extra obstacles they encounter. Warmth and empathy are frequently expected of female leaders, and when these standards coincide with parents' values, trust and support can be fostered. Theoharis (2007) points out, though, that gendered expectations can also lead to opposition to female leadership, especially when parents or other stakeholders find the notion of a woman in a position of power unsettling.

Povey et al., (2016) points out that parental support frequently depends on the principal's capacity to interact with parents effectively and exhibit a sincere interest in the welfare of the learners. The literature discussion on the support parents give to the female school principals depends on the way the school community understand traditional and gender

roles of females in leadership positions. It implies that the degree of parental support may vary depending on the socioeconomic status of the school community, cultural factors, and the individual preferences of parents. In certain areas, parents may have lower levels of engagement with school leadership, which can make it more difficult for female principals to build the necessary rapport and support networks. Additionally, female principals may encounter overt or covert resistance to their authority or struggle to gain the trust of their parents.

With all said and done, indeed, one can conclude that the success of female principals as leaders is greatly influenced by parental support. It offers advocacy, practical help, and emotional support, all crucial for overcoming the gender-specific obstacles faced by school principals. Positive parental relationships are beneficial to female principals, but cultural, socioeconomic, and gender-related factors also affect the dynamics of parental support. Fostering an inclusive school climate where parents are encouraged to support leadership, regardless of gender, is crucial to maximising the effectiveness of female principals.

- *Support from the community*

Grey (2009) reports that when a principal is backed by a cooperative community, their ability to lead effectively is improved because they can rely on a network of stakeholders to assist them in meeting their vision. The local community within the school surroundings has a stake in education, due to the benefits of having an educated population, which can be easily employed, earn higher sustainable living income, and therefore be less dependent on government grants and other types of assistance (Moorosi

et al., 2020). This study explores ways in which the community can support female principals, drawing attention to the significance of social networks, mentorship, community involvement and organisational structures in fostering leadership development and job satisfaction.

Community support for female principals is vital because it encompasses a broad range of interactions, including formal and informal networks, mentorship, professional development, and the active involvement of parents, staff, and local organisations (Maruyama et al., 2023). For female principals, having a supportive community can

significantly impact and enhance their confidence, resilience, and job satisfaction. Social capital, referring to the networks, relationships, and resources individuals can access through their social connections, has been regarded as essential to the success of female principals. Community involvement can bring relief to female principals by distributing leadership responsibilities. According to Datnow (2020), when female principals make effective use of community networks, they are better prepared to manage the demands of their positions and create a supportive school environment.

- *Support from the Department of Basic Education*

Department of Basic Education as an employer of public educators, has taken a significant step by creating the Female Principal Support Network Programme. This initiative is designed to help fulfil the constitutional goal of workplace equality. The department hopes that this will be one of the first long-term, ongoing interventions in basic education. According to Wagner and Kegan (2006), the purpose of these networks is to support female principals by fostering meaningful dialogue, collaborative problem-solving, and collective learning, which are more effective communities of practice, rather than working in isolation. Support networks for female principals involve several key stakeholders, including the Educational Management and Government Development (EMDG), the Provincial Education Department (PED), and district offices, all of which play crucial roles in the Female Principal support Programme. According to DBE (2013), district offices are essential in coordinating support activities across various circuits. Circuits, being the closest management units to female principals, are where the circuit managers possess the deepest understanding of the distinct challenges encountered by female principals in their respective contexts. The circuit managers are expected to play the following crucial roles in the Female Principal Support Programme:

- Identifying professional development needs to shape the focus of the programme each year.
- Assisting in the identification of both current and retired female principals to serve as mentors and coaches.

- Identifying newly appointed principals and encouraging them to join the support network.
- Identifying female principals facing challenges in their roles and encouraging them to participate in the programme
- If the number of female principals is insufficient to form a strong network at the circuit level, collaborating with the district office and neighbouring circuits to establish a more robust support system.
- Monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the programme at the circuit level, including gathering and analysing feedback from mentees about the effectiveness of various interventions.
- Tracking the progress of female principals in the programme by coordinating with district officials, who will assess performance through surveys or questionnaires.
- Providing logistical support for activities within the female support network at the circuit level.
- Monitoring the activities of coaches and mentors at the circuit level through evaluations, including feedback from female principals as mentees, and time sheets completed by coaches and mentors.
- Ensuring that female principals have access to relevant materials to help them navigate specific challenges in their role.

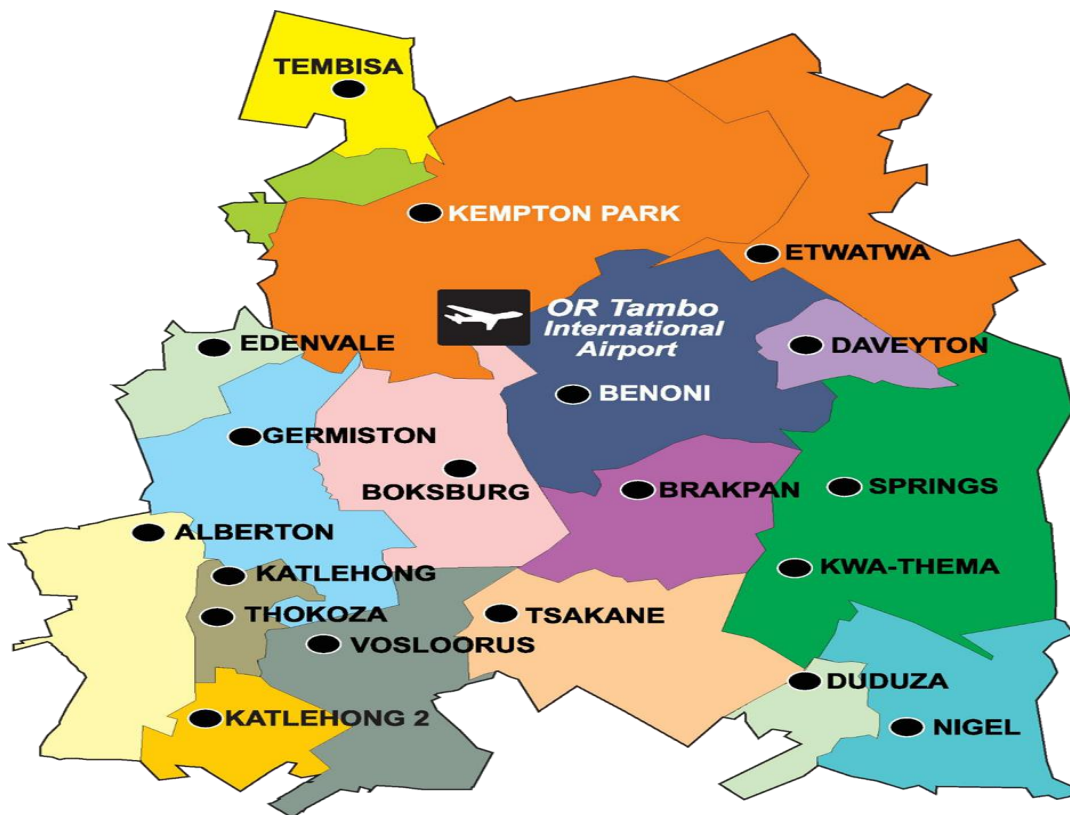
The discussed literature indicates that although the Department of Basic Education initiated the Female Principal Support Network Programme to promote equality and structured support at work, its implementation remains inconsistent. District and circuit officials should help with mentoring, coordination, and development assistance, yet research (Bantwini & Moorosi, 2018) indicates that female principals often continue to experience insufficient and ineffective support. This gap shows that there are still problems with the system and the environment, especially in communities that are already struggling.

This study discusses the different stakeholders' support available for female school principals in their school leadership role and investigates the types of support they can receive. The subsequent section discusses the context of the study.

2.9 THE CONTEXT OF THE STUDY (EKURHULENI)

According to the report by Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality (2023:36), the Eastern Gauteng Service Council, the Khayalami Metropolitan Council, and the former municipalities of Alberton, Benoni, Boksburg, Brakpan, Edenvale/Lethabong, Germiston, Kempton Park/Tembisa, Nigel and Spring, were merged to become the Municipality of Ekurhuleni in 2000. The report further stipulates that, currently, the municipality of comprises Alberton (Thokoza), Benoni (Daveyton, Actonville, Wattville, Etwatwa), Boksburg (Vosloorus, Reiger Park), Kempton Park (Tembisa), Germiston (Katlhlong, Palm Ridge, Zonkesizwe), Springs (Kwa Thema, Bakerton), Nigel (Duduza), Brakpan (Geluksdal, Tsakane), Edenvale/Lethabong, the Khayalami Metropolitan Council and the Eastern Gauteng Services Council. Therefore, below is the 2023 map of Ekurhuleni Metropolitan, as stipulated in the report.

Figure 2.1 Ekurhuleni District Map



Source: (Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality 2022-2023)

Ekurhuleni has two school districts: Ekurhuleni North and Ekurhuleni South. There are 671 schools in Ekurhuleni, of which 137 are independent. Ekurhuleni has two colleges of further education and training (FET), as well as two centres of adult education and training (AET). The municipal government under Executive Mayor Mzwandile Masina conducted a feasibility study and lobbied the national government to establish a university in Ekurhuleni, which was officially announced by President Cyril Ramaphosa in the 2020 State of the Nation Address.

The context of the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality highlights the complexity and diversity of the district, encompassing multiple regions, townships, and socio-economic dynamics. Understanding this context is essential for situating the experiences of female school principals, as the municipality's demographic composition, administrative structures, and educational landscape shape both opportunities and challenges in leadership. This background provides a foundation for interpreting the study's findings and leads naturally into a summary of this chapter, which consolidates the key insights from the literature and contextual overview.

2.10 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter has provided a comprehensive exploration of the contextual, theoretical and conceptual foundations that guide the study. Female school principals' leadership was discussed under the subjects of women's leadership, looking at their positive and negative experiences. A discussion of the different support that principals need and receive from stakeholders is presented. Support for female school principals, looking into the internal and external support they receive, is presented. The involvement of different stakeholders in supporting the principal is discussed. In the following chapter, the research methodology used for this research study is discussed.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Two discussed literature on female leadership and the support they receive from different stakeholders. International as well as local studies that have been done on the focus of this study are discussed in the literature review. Chapter Three discusses the research methodology used to address the questions outlined in Chapter One. In this chapter, the research paradigm, approach and design are presented. The choice of the research site, sample and data collection methods are included. This section is followed by an explanation of the data analysis process, measures taken to ensure trustworthiness of the study, as well as ethical principles adhered to in this study.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

A research paradigm comprises the philosophical assumptions that shape how reality is perceived (ontology), how knowledge is acquired (epistemology) and how it should be studied (methodology) (Mertens, 2020). The research paradigm for this study was the interpretive, since it sought to understand the participants' subjective experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). According to Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), this approach aimed to explore the perspective of those studied, in this case, the school female principals. The interpretive paradigm assumes that reality is socially constructed, and meaning is best understood through individuals' experiences and interactions. The effort of this chosen study was to understand the viewpoint of the principal on the support they receive from stakeholders, rather than the researcher's perspective. The paradigm is characterised by a subjectivist ontology, epistemology, naturalist methodology, and balanced axiology, aligning with the research questions.

Interpretive paradigm enables the researcher to explore the experiences of female principals, their social interactions and their lived realities regarding the support that they receive from the different stakeholders. The study sought to understand how principals perceive, interpret and react to stakeholders' support within their unique school contexts. The interpretive paradigm provided the necessary philosophical foundation. This

alignment ensured that the study focused not merely on observable behaviour but on the deeper meaning and contextual factors shaping participants' leadership experiences and professional realities.

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

This study adopted a qualitative research approach grounded within an interpretivist paradigm. Qualitative research emphasises understanding how individuals interpret and make sense of their experiences to explain social realities (Mohajan, 2018). Qualitative research approach involves observing and interpreting perceptions in a natural setting, offering a snapshot of lived experiences (Gentles et. al., 2015; Mohajan, 2018). Creswell and Poth (2018) supports this view, noting that qualitative research seeks to uncover meaning derived from everyday life. The applied nature of the study lay in its focus on addressing real-life challenges encountered by female principals within the education sector, particularly regarding the support they receive from various stakeholders. The goal was to generate practical insights to inform policy, improve leadership practices and promote gender equity in school management. A qualitative approach was deemed most appropriate, as it enabled an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions and interpretations of stakeholder support.

Rahman (2017) notes that qualitative research offers several advantages, as it provides rich and detailed insights into participants' feelings, opinions, and experiences, while also interpreting the meanings behind their actions, and capturing human experiences within specific contexts. The approach is often considered ideographic, as it focuses on individual cases and enables researchers to understand diverse voices, meanings, and events while also uncovering participants' inner experiences and the ways in which meanings evolve.

Rahman (2017) adds that, beyond the advantages, there are limitations too, because qualitative methods often involve a smaller purposive sample size, raising questions about how generalisable the findings are to a wider population, so they cannot be generalised to a larger population. However, the details provided regarding the context of the study may enable the reader to transfer the findings of the study to similar contexts. The process of collecting qualitative data, such as the interview question (used in this

study), can be time-consuming. Likewise, the process of data analysis is equally demanding due to the depth and complexity of the information. Interpreting participants' views can introduce researcher subjectivity, increase the risk of bias and affect the credibility of the findings. This calls for the application of trustworthiness measures like member checking. Qualitative research may also overlook broader contextual factors while focusing closely on individual experiences. The following section discusses the research design that underpins the methodological direction of this research.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design serves as a structured plan for how the study will be conducted. Research design involves organising the steps of the inquiry to ensure that the research questions are answered effectively and that the evidence gathered is credible (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study is phenomenological in nature. Phenomenological research design was particularly suitable for this study because it enables the researcher to explore the lived experiences of the participants regarding the phenomenon being studied and make sense of it (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In this study, the phenomenon under investigation was the support female school principals receive from stakeholders in their leadership and management roles. Phenomenological design enabled the researcher to engage with the participants in data gathering and interpret the data to make meaning of the lived experiences of the support that the female principals receive from the stakeholders in performing their leadership and management responsibilities. This design was appropriate because it prioritised participants' perspectives, emotions and interpretations, which were central to the study's purpose. The adoption of an interpretivist paradigm aligned closely with the phenomenology design employed in this research. The design was selected to explore how individuals' perspectives, viewpoints, and worldviews evolve, as they integrate new information and experiences within the dynamic process of decision-making and adoption (Conroy, 2003).

3.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methods refer to the specific techniques and procedures used to collect and analyse data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2021). They translate the research design into practice,

specifying participant selection, data collection and analysis processes. The following subsections briefly describe the methods used in this study.

3.5.1 Research site and population

The research sites in this study were schools in the Ekurhuleni Education District. The target was all public schools in the education district with female school principals. The population was all female principals in public schools within the Ekurhuleni Education District. The sample was selected from the ten schools identified in the Gauteng Department of Education database. The study was conducted in ten schools, comprising five public schools and five independent schools. The study was conducted in ten schools, comprising five public schools and five independent schools. The sample consisted of ten female principals, with five from primary schools and five from secondary schools, ensuring balanced representation across schooling phases and governance types. This allowed for comparison of leadership experiences across different institutional and administrative contexts within the education system.

The selected schools represented a diverse range of contexts, including suburbs, townships, and informal settlements, providing a broad basis for examining female principals' leadership experiences and practices across varied socio-economic and geographic settings. The schools serve culturally and linguistically diverse communities, reflecting the multicultural composition of the district. Learners come from varied ethnic backgrounds and speak multiple languages, which shapes communication, stakeholder engagement, and daily school operations. As a result, principals operate within complex environments influenced by both cultural diversity and socio-economic inequalities.

Within these settings, the SGB in public schools and the equivalent governance structure in independent schools play a central role in supporting school leadership. In public schools, SGBs contribute through policy implementation, school maintenance, and fundraising activities, while independent schools operate within governance frameworks defined by their institutional structures. Across both contexts, collaboration between governing bodies, School Management Teams (SMTs), and parents supports the

planning and execution of school goals, although effectiveness varies depending on governance capacity and stakeholder engagement.

External stakeholders, including the Department of Social Development and Health, further contribute to school support through services such as counselling, social work interventions, healthcare access, learner uniforms and feeding schemes. These services are particularly important in addressing socio-economic and psychological challenges affecting learners in both public and independent school contexts.

3.5.2 Selection of the participants

The study employed purposive sampling, where female principals were deliberately chosen as participants. Schools and principals were selected based on gender, as the study focused exclusively on female principals. The selected participants were those who potentially possessed relevant experiences regarding support received from different stakeholders to enhance school leadership and management. The specified municipality criteria were based on the gender of the principals since the study only focused on female principals in the chosen municipality. The researcher collaborated with the Gauteng Department of Education to obtain an official list of female principals. This study's sample encompassed both primary and secondary schools within the Ekurhuleni Education District. Ten principals participated in the interviews. The accessible population was female principals from five primary schools and five secondary schools in the Ekurhuleni Education District. The criteria for choosing the schools and the principals were based on schools led by women, with five principals from primary schools and five from secondary schools.

3.5.3 Data collection methods

Data was gathered through semi-structured interviews, providing rich, detailed insights that quantitative methods could not achieve. The primary tool for data collection was in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face or via audio and video calls. This method aligns with phenomenological research, as noted by Creswell (2009). Semi-structured interviews offer flexibility in adjusting questions and create a conversational atmosphere, helping participants feel at ease. This approach allows for deeper

exploration of topics and typically results in longer interviews, as highlighted by Creswell & Poth (2018).

Interviews were conducted at locations convenient for participants and recorded with consent to ensure accuracy. Each interview lasted approximately 30-60 minutes. A pilot interview was conducted with a principal from another district to refine the interview guide and ensure clarity of questions. Due to COVID-19 protocols, the researcher was unable to conduct direct observations and therefore did not collect observational field notes. As a result, the study relied solely on interview data, with brief reflective notes taken immediately after each interview to capture initial impressions and contextual basis. Semi-structured interviews are intended to capture individuals' subjective responses to specific situations or phenomena they have encountered. This technique uses a detailed interview guide and is particularly useful when there is adequate objective knowledge about a topic, but limited understanding of an individual's subjective perspectives. It allows the researcher to probe responses, seek clarification and explore participants' experiences in depth. However, semi-structured interviews may also present limitations, such as the possibility of interviewer bias, differences in the way questions are posed, and the time required for conducting and analysing interviews.

The interview process for this study was structured into five main sections, outlined as follows:

- The first section discusses the introduction part.
- The second section discusses the experience of female principals and the support they receive from various stakeholders.
- The third section discusses the challenges that female principal leaders face regarding the support they receive.
- The fourth section explores how female principal leaders cope with the challenges they face regarding the support they receive from stakeholders.

The last section discussed strategies, structures, policies, and support that female principals require to address the perceived challenges that they experience in the performance of their roles. The interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes over a Zoom

meeting; other principals insisted on a face-to-face meeting because of the instability of their internet. COVID-19 pandemic protocols were strictly followed

3.5.4 Data analysis strategies

Wong (2008) explains that qualitative data analysis involves systematically organising and examining interview transcripts, observation notes, or other collected materials to deepen understanding of the studied phenomenon. Qualitative research data yield unstructured text-based data, which can be derived from in-depth interviews with individual participants. In this study, thematic data analysis process was followed. Data recording for this study was conducted via audio recording on a phone, via phone call, and via Zoom, where interviews took place over Zoom. These in-depth interviews were conducted to probe the participants' experiences with the support female principals receive from stakeholders. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim. Six thematic steps of inductive data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) were followed:

Step 1: I started the data analysis process by familiarising myself with the data by reading and re-reading the transcribed data.

Step 2: I then coded the data by highlighting sections of the texts (usually phrases or sentences) and coming up with labels to describe the content.

Step 3: I grouped the coded data to form categories. The categories were further merged to form themes. The codes that were vague were discarded.

Step 4: I then reviewed the themes and sub-themes to identify patterns and made the necessary changes.

Step 5: I defined and named the final list of themes. Defining themes involved formulating exactly what each theme meant.

Step 6: Finally, I wrote the findings by beginning with writing the findings of each theme, what they meant, and citing examples from the data (quotations) as evidence.

The researcher used pseudonyms for coding to identify the study participants, for example, Principal A to Principal J, representing ten female principals who participated in the study. Initial codes were developed through repeated reading of the interview transcripts to identify meaningful statements, recurring ideas, and significant experiences shared by participants. Similar codes were then compared, refined and grouped into

broader categories, which were subsequently organised into overarching themes that reflected common patterns across the data.

Emerging themes were compared across participants to identify similarities and differences in experiences. The themes generated through this process were aligned with the research questions, as they reflected participants' experiences of stakeholder support, the challenges encountered, and ways in which support influenced their leadership roles and performance. The analysis process was iterative, allowing the researcher to move between data and interpretation to ensure credibility and trustworthiness.

3.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is vital for ensuring that findings are accurate, authentic, and credible. Unlike quantitative studies that rely on validity and reliability, qualitative research employs criteria such as credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability to establish confidence in the findings of the study (De Vos et al., 2018). These measures help confirm that the findings genuinely reflect participants 'lived experiences' and that the research process is clear and replicable.

3.6.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the degree of confidence in the truthfulness of the findings (Stahl & King, 2020). In this study, credibility was strengthened by aligning interview questions with the research objectives and grounding them in relevant literature on female leadership and stakeholder support. A pilot interview was also conducted with a principal from another school to refine the interview guide and ensure clarity and appropriateness. Member checking was done after the interview with the participants (female school principals) by taking the transcripts to the participants to confirm the content of the interview. Follow-up interviews were also conducted. Triangulation was done in the presentation and discussion of the findings.

3.6.2 Transferability

Transferability concerns whether the findings can be applied to similar contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To support this, the researcher provided detailed descriptions of the

research setting, participants' background and data collection environment. There is a section in Chapter Two that provides details about the site where the data were collected. These rich contextual details enable readers to judge whether the findings are relevant to other educational settings with similar leadership structures and stakeholder dynamics.

3.6.3 Dependability

Dependability relates to the consistency and stability of the findings over time and under similar conditions (De Vos et al., 2018). To ensure dependability, the researcher maintained an audit trail on every step of the process, including data collection procedures, interview transcripts, and analysis notes. Peer debriefing sessions were also conducted with the supervisor to ensure that data interpretation remained logical and grounded in participants' narratives.

3.6.4 Confirmability

Confirmability addresses the extent to which findings are shaped by participants' responses rather than researcher bias (Shenton, 2004). Confirmability in this study was achieved through reflexivity, where the researcher continuously reflected on personal assumptions and potential influence during data collection and analysis. In addition, an audit trail was maintained through documented coding procedures, theme development and analytic decisions, which enabled the findings to be traced back to the original data. The use of verbatim quotations further ensured that interpretations were grounded in participants' authentic perspectives, allowing readers to trace the link between raw data and the conclusions drawn.

3.7. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics concentrates on principles, values, and morality. Since this study involved female principals in basic education, the following steps were taken: First, ethical clearance was obtained from the University of South Africa (UNISA); secondly, permission to conduct the study was secured from the Department of Education because the study focused on schools in Ekurhuleni Municipality. Informed consent letters were sent to the participating principals. The participants were informed in the letters about the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without

consequences. The researcher ensured that participants were not exposed to any professional or psychological harm during data collection. Participants were further assured that all information collected would remain confidential and anonymous, with pseudonyms used instead of real names (for example, coding was used to identify participants instead of names) to protect the identities of the participants in the interview transcripts and the final report. The researcher was committed to safeguarding all the instruments used in data collection, like interview schedules, audio recordings and transcripts.

As the researcher, I took all appropriate precautions to ensure the confidentiality, security, and integrity of the data by storing hard copies of data in a locked cabinet in my home for ten years after the submission of my dissertation. Potential harm of data loss, data manipulation, or unauthorised access by outside parties in the form of research was prevented. I will store hard copies of research letters and memos with codes for each participant. Electronic data transmission will be secured by the use of encryption and secure socket layer (SSL) protocols. I will use identifying labels that are meaningless to separating transmission of identifying information. Electronic information will be stored on the computer and on password-protected memory sticks. Data files contained only study numbers, not any data that could identify subjects. I ensured that data was protected with a secure password. Future use of the stored data will be subjected to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable.

3.8 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter outlined the interpretivist paradigm, qualitative approach, phenomenological design, data collection methods and data analysis methods. Trustworthiness measures applied in this study, as well as the ethical considerations guiding the study, were presented. The next chapter focuses on the research findings and analysis. The chapter also includes a discussion of the research findings in relation to the literature.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided a comprehensive discussion of the research paradigm, approach, design, and methodology, including the rationale for selecting a qualitative rather than a quantitative method. Chapter Three also presented a detailed discussion of the study site and sampling procedures, the data collection tools and procedures, and strategies used for data analysis. The findings of this study align with the research questions and are presented in themes that answer them. The sub-themes are the answers to the interview questions asked under every research question.

The research questions guiding the interview questions are presented below:

Main question

What are the experiences of female school principals regarding the support that they receive from stakeholders?

Sub-questions

- How do female principals experience the support they receive from different stakeholders?
- What challenges do female principals encounter regarding stakeholder support?
- How does the support received from the stakeholders, or the lack thereof, influence their performance as educational leaders?
- How do female principals cope with the challenges related to inadequate or inconsistent stakeholder support?
- What strategies, structures, policies, and forms of support do female principals require to effectively perform their leadership roles?

This chapter presents and discusses the research findings. The data used in this chapter were generated from the semi-structured interviews and observations during the interviews.

The ten female principals interviewed were given pseudonyms (Principal A, Principal B...to Principal J) to protect their identity. The biographical data of the participants are presented in the following table:

4.2. BIOGRAPHICAL DATA OF PARTICIPANTS

The table below lists the interviewed participants with code names assigned to them:

Table 4.1 Biographical data of the participants (Female school principals)

Participant	School level	Age	Qualification	Total teaching staff	Years of experience as school principal
Principal A	Secondary	62	B-Ed	18	24
Principal B	Secondary	64	Honours	25	3
Principal C	Primary	67	BA	20	19
Principal D	Primary	58	Diploma	46	10
Principal E	Secondary	44	PHD	30	6
Principal F	Primary	57	Honours	22	8
Principal G	Primary	63	B-Ed	55	10
Principal H	Primary	48	Honours	23	9
Principal I	Secondary	59	Honours	54	7
Principal J	Secondary	57	BA	40	3

The biographical data presented in the above table shows that all those who participated in the study are female principals, ranging between the ages of 44 and 67. The age bracket is important for comparing the principal's age and the experiences of the support

they receive from stakeholders. The qualification of the principal would show the educational background and knowledge of leadership, as well as management. Then, the years of experience in the principal school leadership may contribute to in-depth sharing of experiences of support that is expected and received from the stakeholders

4.3. FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH

The first theme addresses the research question: How do female principals experience the support they receive from different stakeholders? The findings are presented in sub-themes linked to the interview questions, drawn from the research questions. The sub-themes identified in the data include how the principals describe their negative and positive experiences of support, as well as the support they receive from the different stakeholders. The theme also includes the findings expressed by the participants, which contribute to their satisfaction or lack of it with the support they receive from the different stakeholders.

4.3.1. THEME 1: Female principals’ experiences with support received from the stakeholders

Table 4.2 Research question 1, interview questions, theme, and sub-themes

Research question 1	Theme and sub-themes
<p>RQ1: How do female principals experience the support they receive from different stakeholders?</p> <p><i>Interview Question 1.</i></p> <p><i>How would you describe your experience as a female educational leader?</i></p>	<p>Theme 1</p> <p>Female principals’ experiences of support received from stakeholders</p> <p><i>Sub-theme 1: Description of the experiences of female principals with the support they receive from stakeholders</i></p> <p><i>Category 1: Description of positive experiences of female principals</i></p>

<p><i>Interview Question 2.</i></p> <p><i>What support do you receive from the different stakeholders, such as the Department of Education (DoE), School Management Teams (SMT), School Governing Bodies (SGB), and parents?</i></p>	<p><i>Category 2: Description of negative experiences of female principals</i></p> <p><i>Sub-theme 2: Description of support received from different stakeholders</i></p> <p><i>Category 1: Support from the GDE</i></p> <p><i>Category 2: Support from Business companies, agencies, and organisations</i></p> <p><i>Category 3: Support from the community</i></p> <p><i>Category 4: Support from parents, SMT and SGB</i></p> <p><i>Category 5: Support from other departments</i></p>
<p><i>Interview Question 3.</i></p> <p><i>Overall, how satisfied are you with the support you receive?</i></p>	<p><i>Sub-theme 3: The satisfaction with the support that principals received from the stakeholders</i></p> <p><i>Category 1: Satisfied female principals.</i></p> <p><i>Category 2: Non-satisfied female principals</i></p>

This theme presents the findings from the interview questions that relate to the first research question. The interview question explored female principals' experiences as

educational leaders, the support female principals received from the different stakeholders, including the Department of Education, School Management Teams, School Governing Bodies, and their satisfaction with the support they received. Their responses are discussed under the following three sub-themes:

4.3.1.1 Sub-theme 1.1: Description of the experiences of female principals with the support they receive from stakeholders

This sub-theme revealed the description of female principals' experiences with the support they receive from stakeholders. The participants in this study described their experiences as both positive and negative. Answers to this question are divided and presented using the following two categories:

Category 1: Description of positive experiences of female principals

This first category presents the participants' positive experiences of support, and the second category focuses on their negative experiences. The participants said:

I had a wonderful time and success with two of the directors at the first school where I served for many years as a principal; however, things changed when the new female owner took over, and challenges arose that led me to leave the school. Where I am now, I feel valued even if we are private without benefits (Principal A).

I am satisfied with where I am. I believe female leaders should lead primary schools because of their mothering nature. I can spot a sick or hungry child. I had an experience of a child who fainted after giving him food; he woke up and was okay (Principal D).

My experience is that it all depends on the kind of leader/teacher you are. I am a diligent worker; I come in too early and leave late. It has been my habit. I have joy in running Saturday schools, and intervention programmes, a passion for interacting with learners and quality results (Principal G).

The responses in the above quotations suggest that female principals often associate positive leadership experiences with relational and nurturing leadership practices. The nurturing ability associated with the female gender seems to be well-received as a women's empowerment attribute. The leadership style that includes being diligent and

hardworking gave the principals the power to oversee their leadership position, and this was also presented as a positive experience. Other attributes of the principals shared as positive experiences were a feeling valued, being passionate about their work, as well as producing good academic results. The experience of success seems reflected in the input of female leadership and in the results achieved.

Category 2: Description of negative experiences of female principals

In this category, participants revealed that they had encountered negative experiences as female principals. They expressed the following:

Being a principal is challenging, and you must put twice the work. As a female leader, I put more detail into everything. There have been the highs and lows (Principal E).

Being a female principal is not easy or small. You just need to be confident, determined and trust in yourself as a person. It is not easy because when I applied for this post, with other teachers who applied for the same post and were not successful, and when I got to this school, I had to deal with the same teachers, and our school is so small and does not have a deputy principal, but the head of departments do support our teachers (Principal F).

The community I serve in have the mindset that female principals are not the ideal as compared to male principals. They think that because you are a female, you cannot do the job as compared to male principals (Principal H).

This category revealed that some of the female principals who responded to these interview questions described some of their experiences as a female educational leader as being negative. The negative experiences also presented challenges that the principals faced, requiring support from stakeholders. The participants stated that, as female principals, their role requires them to put twice the effort into their work compared to their male counterparts. They mentioned that despite being female, the participants tended to put more detail into everything they do. They had to be more assertive than their male counterparts. This finding suggests that female principals had to put in more time and effort in their leadership and management roles to match what is perceived as

good leadership from the perspective of male leaders. This kind of leadership approach suggests that female principals are expected to give more time to their leadership responsibilities. In addition to doing more work, to succeed in the male-dominated role, the female principals had to build confidence and self-trust to demonstrate their ability to lead. Other traits of the principals shared as negative experiences were a feeling of being viewed by the community as not an ideal good fit for the leadership position, as compared to their male counterparts. The challenges faced by these principals might discourage female principals from excelling in their roles.

4.3.1.2 Sub-theme 1.2: Description of support received from different stakeholders

In this sub-theme, the participants revealed that each one of them received different kinds of support from different stakeholders. The support received by the principals is grouped in the following categories:

Category 1: Support from Gauteng Department of Education (GDE)

In this category, participants discussed the support they received from the Gauteng Department of Education. This category revealed the different strategic supports designed by the Department of Basic Education to help female principals fulfil their leadership roles. Although some principals acknowledged the difficulties they faced, stakeholders like the GDE, the district and circuit offices, and the IDSO (Institutional Development and Support Officer) were usually mentioned as giving the principals most of the support they needed to fulfil their leadership roles under the strategic support.

The participant interviewed said the following regarding the support received from the GDE:

The support we receive from GDE is guided by policies and procedures set by the department, and problems are solved via those policies. The GDE provides us with all the necessary learning materials, mostly focusing on the curriculum (Principal F).

Our cluster leaders are supportive and available to serve us. The Circuit managers always rally around the principal. There are policies for each section, such as

analysis, financial, procurement, etc. GDE also support us financially and provides the curriculum (Principal I).

For the brief time I have been an acting principal, I have been supported to an extent that the department is always here to provide any clarity, guidance and training needed. The support we receive from GDE depends on policies, and problems are solved via policies. The support we receive is adequate and goes beyond expectations. GDE also provide us with the curriculum (Principal J).

GDE, our Cluster leader, provides support as he comes, calls, and is open to taking on challenges. The district office always listens and sends facilitators to provide training. The state has been supportive and hopes our school could be brick and mortar; they keep our broken items repaired, provide electricity, maintain our infrastructure of PPE, and provide us with sanitisers (Principal G).

This sub-section revealed the support principals received from the Gauteng Department of Education. The principals seem to perceive support in terms of policy use and reinforcement as a guide for school operations. It appears that principals are required to follow policy guidelines in managing some of the challenges they experience at their schools. The support in learning materials implies accountability for the use of the required teaching and learning resources. The principals also acknowledge the support from the GDE as professional development opportunities. From this category, one can say the GDE seem to be fully invested in the school of most of the interviewed participants and is available to provide the help needed.

According to DBE (2023:17), districts are expected to oversee the implementation of curriculum policy and assist schools that are having difficulty managing the curriculum, acting as a bridge between the National and Provincial Departments and the schools.

This sub-section revealed the support female principals received from IDSO, because the question was directed to the support received from government stakeholders, only three of the participants who responded included the IDSO in their answer, and this is what they had to say:

IDSO from the district is incredibly supportive and always available to help guide (Principal E).

Department of Education and my IDSO are supportive and come on board whenever needed; it feels like everyone is supportive (Principal I).

The IDSO has not been supportive. I have noticed that it is not easy to get support from women. I feel like she was pushing for my downfall, always finding fault; she demoralises me. For example, with the previous one, we would be allowed to go for a team building at a private venue, but now we are told to use schools. I sense a pull-down syndrome (Principal J).

This category revealed that two participants who chose to speak about the support they received from the IDSO agreed that they are receiving adequate support from the IDSO, and there is a mutual feeling that the IDSO is available to guide and assist whenever they are called on. This category further revealed that the GDE has a support structure in place to empower and support female principals in their roles as educational leaders. The Gauteng Department of Education work through cluster leaders, IDSO and circuit managers to ensure female principals are trained and receive ongoing support in their work. All in all, one can conclude that female principals have the support they need from the government as one of the key stakeholders.

Category 2: Support from Business Companies, Agencies and Organisations

In this category, participants reveal the support they received from companies, some agencies, and organisations. The following is what they said:

A private company provides the school with financial support to help it pay teachers' stipends, as the school struggles to pay decent salaries (Principal C).

I have a lot of support from the stakeholders, which enables me to perform my duties. Transnet is sponsoring us with food parcels, and Pick and Pay is providing sanitary pads for the girls. And we have a Non-Government Organisation that gives us uniform (Principal I).

Sasol, Apollo Brick, and Clover have been there to support us, to the extent that our school has washing machines, showers, computers, food parcels and feeding

schemes. Our sports team is the performer, and they are sponsored with sports gear, including school uniforms (Principal D).

CONSOL, the glass company, took me for management training workshops. NUMSA (National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa)- come and give learners pads and soccer kits. SAPS (South African Police Service) - they are always available when called upon. AFRISAM- helped us with crashes for the parking lot (Principal G).

ISASSA (Independent Schools Association of Southern Africa), Johnson and Matthey, SAP (South African Police) help us with uniforms, school shoes and food parcels for homes. The child is encouraged to come to school and participates with confidence (Principal J).

I was fortunate to get a business partner from the Development Bank of South Africa (DBSA). Fortunately, the program was to develop a principal to develop the school. The National Security Agency gave us Personal Protective Equipment. The Transportation Security Administration gave us laptops; Teacher assistants have helped us a lot with revisions and markings (Principal F).

This category revealed that most schools do receive additional support from various sources. Business companies, agencies and organisations prove to be the key stakeholders and a blessing for many principals working to establish an environment where learners will feel safe, needed and belonging. The support provided by these stakeholders ensures that learners are at schools daily, are fed and provided with personal resources that can boost their confidence. Besides, they are also provided with learning resources that allow all learners to have access to learning material such as computers, books, and uniforms, to mention a few, and activity resources such as sports kits.

Category 3: Support from the community

Some of the key stakeholders in schools, who are very important to their successes and failures, are community members. These are individuals who include organisations within the community that can support schools by ensuring the safety of individuals and school

premises. In this category, participants revealed the support they received from their communities. They shared the following insights:

The schools also receive psychosocial support from churches in the area, which provide food parcels to the school and the community. The school also, before COVID-19, received prominent people to come and contribute and encourage the pupils through motivational speaking during assembly (Principal C).

The community own the school, they patrol after school, and I am satisfied with the support I get (Principal D).

We have the Community Police Forum and a police officer assigned to the school. So, when the schools close, I normally call him to let him know if we don't have patrollers, and he will come and make the field check-up or take the rounds around the school. We also have the Community Police Forum in the community around the school (Principal E).

This category revealed a need for involvement by the community members and the community policing forums as a means of bringing greater security to the schools. The community near the school receives psychosocial support in the form of food parcels from churches in the area. The learners at the school are motivated through motivational speakers who visit the school. This kind of support empowers the learners to believe in themselves and their ability to succeed.

Category 4: Support from parents, SMT and SGB

This category focuses on the three key stakeholders that are the main contributors towards the success or challenges faced by schools. Parents play a crucial role both at home and within their communities. They live in and can greatly influence their kids and each other in forming a strong bond to offer support to the school principal. In this category, the participants revealed the support from the following three stakeholders, and this is what they said about each stakeholder:

This subsection revealed the support the female principal received from parents, and this is what they said:

Parents, when it comes to the parents, one had to prove herself that she can do the work, as the school has a lot of gangsterism. The parents did not believe in females being a principal, staff within the schools there were those stereotypes who felt that they cannot be led by a female. However, after proving myself, one of the teachers came back to apologise about how he treated me and gave his full support. The parents who participate in the SGB also fulfil their roles, put more effort, and are more cooperative (Principal G).

The parents in this community are incredibly supportive and attend meetings whenever they are called upon. The community is poor, and we are in the bottom quartile (Principal I).

The parents in this community are supportive and attend meetings whenever they are called upon. The community is very mixed; we have pupils come from both poor and middle-class families (Principal J).

According to these responses, female principals who prove themselves to be an asset to the school by creating greater relationship with the parents, in turn award themselves with full support. Supportive parents will act as an anchor to the principal through their participation in the SGB, regularly attend parents meetings, and in this case, even help in reducing gangsterism in the community.

While the support from the SMT is a key stakeholder and expected to be a beneficial supporter to the female principal, as one who works hand in hand with the principal, the interviewed participant had the following to say:

The SMT's cooperation is great, except for the deputy principal, who was more stereotypical in thinking that I cannot lead because I am a Black female; he was resistant, non-submissive, and there was not enough communication (Principal I).

SMTs, I have functional SMTs, a bunch of great young men promoted from within, and I know how to delegate (Principal E).

This subsection indicated that poor communication created a challenge between the principal and the deputy principal at one school. Another participant believed that having a supportive SMT depends on the relationship the principal has with his team. Besides,

their ability to delegate plays a major role. The success or failure of support from SMTs depends on the quality of the relationship between female principals and the SMTs, the principal's leadership style, and the principal's ability to delegate to bring everyone to a common goal. The literature also shows that female leadership tends to focus on collaboration and the use of emotional intelligence to create an inclusive school environment (Lumby & Azaola, 2014). Furthermore, earlier research (Chisholm, 2001; Ngunjiri, 2010) found that female principals favour practising transformational and participatory leadership strategies in leading and managing their schools.

The following subsection discusses the support the female principal received from the school governing body and the key role they play as stakeholders in the school. When the female principals were asked about this stakeholder, this is what they said:

Our SGB is familiar with policies, gives their all, is cooperative, and also fundraises. Parents in communities are incredible supporters. Parents and SGB attend meetings whenever they are called upon to do so. They also do fundraisers and provide incredible support (Principal I). The SGB – the school governing body is incredibly supportive. Every term, there's a parents' meeting where Grades 8-12 results are discussed and expectations are outlined. During the third term of our meeting, we discuss progress reports; in the fourth term meeting, parents are handed their children's reports and the pre-liminary examination (Principal G).

SGB: some members are active but do not fulfil their roles. We have a program where people can adopt a learner to help bring about change in that learner's life. As a school, working with the SGB, we fundraise and ask for donations to raise more cash for other things where necessary. Parents, some are lagging in support, while others are fully supportive and involved (Principal F).

This sub-section revealed the significant role each SGB member plays in contributing to their school's success, and how it gives the principal an opportunity to engage with both parents and SGB members to plan and execute the school's goals and objectives. Active participation of the SGB in a school is manifested in their knowledge of the governing policy, greater involvement in the operations and maintenance of the school, and the responsibility of raising funds through organising donation activities for the school. As

members of the SGB, parents' involvement is a vital support for the female principal and contributes significantly to the school's overall success.

This category revealed the important role played by parents, STM's and SGBs. The participant confirmed the involvement of these three stakeholders as the anchor to the female principals' success as leaders, the educators' success, and the learners' academic success. The participants' responses revealed that they are receiving the necessary support from these stakeholders, and only one participant expressed a lack of support from parents in the area they serve, attributing it to stereotypes in the community about having a male principal.

Category 5: Support from other departments

Category 5 focuses on the support provided by other state departments, such as health and social development, which are important stakeholders in supporting schools. Many learners experience social, emotional, and economic challenges arising from the communities in which they live and therefore require additional assistance to cope and perform successfully in their schoolwork. Access to these external support services shapes female principals' leadership roles by requiring them to coordinate with multiple agencies, advocate for learners' welfare, and ensure that vulnerable learners receive the necessary interventions. This expands their responsibilities beyond academic management to include learner well-being, community engagement, and interdepartmental collaboration. Consequently, the principals often assume a holistic leadership role that integrates educational leadership with social support systems. When sharing about the support they receive from other departments, this is what the participants had to say concerning the two other departments mentioned:

Social Development provides us with social support by providing uniforms for our learners. As a school, we have access to social services, policing and Health providers, and our families have access to counselling. I do not currently have a social worker assigned to the school, but I do have a nurse assigned by the Department of Health (Principal F).

Social Development helps a lot. We have social workers at least once a week. Whenever parents have an emergency, they are also assisted. Abused kids and child-headed homes are assisted as well (Principal I).

Social Development helps a lot. We have a social worker on our premises on those days of the week when they are assigned to come. The presence of social workers in the school helps learners offload their challenges to professionals. We also have a feeding scheme in the school which encourages our pupils to come to school and participate with confidence (Principal J).

The support from other departments like social work, policing and health reduces the heavy workload of the principals, especially regarding non-educational matters that negatively affect the academic performance of learners. Socio-psychological behaviour of learners, if not properly managed, may have a negative impact on the leadership and management roles of the principal. The professional expertise of the social workers seems to be perceived by the principals as a relief, while the feeding scheme encourages learner school attendance, reducing the problem of managing it. Most participants confirmed having a social worker assigned to them and having a feeding scheme, though there has been limited support from the Department of Health. Though there has been a shortfall in providing a sufficient framework for long-term psychosocial interventions that can facilitate the nation's ability to recover from disasters, participants still express gratitude for the minimal support they currently receive, which supports their leadership and management responsibilities.

This theme revealed a need to provide a sufficient framework for long-term psychosocial interventions that can facilitate the principals, teachers and learners' mental health issues, making social services, policing and health, a standard need for all government schools.

4.3.1.3 Sub-theme 1:3: The satisfaction with the support that principals receive from the stakeholders.

This sub-theme revealed the views and the feelings of the participants about the satisfaction they receive from the support that the principals receive from the stakeholders, and their views are presented using the following two categories:

Category 1: Satisfied female principals.

The interview question that yielded data in this category was to determine if the principals were satisfied with the support they received from the different stakeholders. In this category, the participants revealed how they were satisfied with the support they received from the stakeholders, and this is what they said:

I am happy with the support I am currently getting from the department and the school directors. The school is an independent school, and the teachers who take positions here do so out of a love for education and service (Principal A).

I am happy. I have observed the same support given to the outgoing principal, even though I thought it was because she used to work for the department. Now, I can testify that the support is there for me as well (Principal B).

I am satisfied with the support I receive; I do not focus on the challenges, but I build rapport, prove myself, and move on. As a leader, you must have a vision and know where you are going. As a school, we have access to the whole social services. I am very happy. I am satisfied with the support I am getting (Principal F).

I am very, very happy as a female principal because people are so used to having male principals, but I have been receiving support from the SMT, from the HOD, and the SGB. So overall, I am very happy (Principal I).

This category revealed that most participants were satisfied with the support they were receiving from the stakeholders. This category reveals that there are various aspects of support that made the principals satisfied with the help they received. The support associated with commitment and passion for teaching, as well as interpersonal relationships, seems to be perceived by the principals as satisfactory support.

Category 2: Female principals who were not satisfied with the support they received.

This category revealed that only a few participants expressed dissatisfaction with the support they received from the stakeholders. The participants said:

I am not very satisfied with the community; we are dealing with parents who are youngsters and illiterate grandparents, which makes it more difficult. Our SGB represent the community only. It is like they do not understand their role (Principal H).

Not happy, but it is getting better with time, you know, outside the school, I don't want to lie. I did receive good support, especially from my business partner, because there were so many developmental opportunities, you know, that happened in the workshops. Even with some of my staff members, because I had them by my side and the kind of ideas I had. I have learned that as a female leader, it's not easy to get the support (Principal J).

This category revealed that very few participants provided satisfaction feedback regarding the support received from the stakeholders. The dissatisfaction with the support received from stakeholders was attributed to a lack of backing from many of the parent figures or grannies, who were mostly less interested in the school or the principal's expectations. Some of the parents may not be in a position to provide the support expected by the principal due to their educational background. Some cases that led to the principal's dissatisfaction were linked to having an SGB that was one-sided, understanding its role as representing parents and the community as a whole and neglecting duties that could benefit the school.

4.3.1.4 Discussions of the findings of theme 1

The findings of this study revealed that female principals experience both positive and negative aspects in their leadership roles, reflecting a dual reality that aligns with existing literature on women in educational leadership. The positive experiences reported were appreciation of their nurturing qualities, participatory leadership styles, passion for their work, and recognition for producing strong academic outcomes. These findings are consistent with previous studies (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Coleman, 2011), which highlighted the unique leadership characteristics of female school principals. These authors argue that female leaders tend to emphasise collaboration, empathy, and the personal development of staff, which fosters positive school climates and improved learner performance.

The notion that female leaders derive satisfaction from being recognised and valued resonates with Shakeshaft's (2019) findings, which indicate that women leaders find motivation and fulfilment when their contributions are acknowledged by both superiors and communities. Similarly, Grogan and Arar et Al., (2024) assert that women's leadership is often grounded in moral purpose and a commitment to community wellbeing, aligning with the participants' reported passion and dedication to their schools.

Conversely, the negative experiences shared by some participants, particularly the perception that women must exert greater effort than men to gain equal recognition, mirror the persistent gender disparities documented in more recent literature (Dyantyi & Mbatha, 2025; Akinola & Naidoo, 2024). Research conducted in South Africa shows that female principals often encounter societal and institutional biases that demand a lot of effort from them to be assertive in their leadership (Mahlangu & Mncube, 2025; Nhlumayo, 2025). These expectations not only reinforce gender stereotypes but may also contribute to increased workload stress and emotional exhaustion among women leaders.

Regarding sources of support, the study found that most female principals were generally satisfied with the assistance they received from the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE), business organisations, parents, and community structures align with more recent literature (e.g. Using social capital to develop South African principals and schools, 2022; *Experiences of Female School Principals on Resilient Leadership Practices in Leading and Managing Rural Schools*, 2025). These studies similarly emphasise that systemic and community support through networks, partnership, and stakeholders is instrumental in enabling female leaders to thrive. However, variation in satisfaction still depends on community culture, school context, and socio-economic factors, as shown in Nhlumayo (2025) and *The Experiences of Female Principals in the Gauteng Province* (SCIEPUB), confirming that the effectiveness of support varies depending on the context.

A few instances of dissatisfaction, particularly concerning uncooperative parents or SGB members lacking governance knowledge, align with findings by Mestry (2017), who notes that ineffective school governing bodies can hinder principals' ability to implement policies effectively. Additionally, lack of collegial support within schools has been cited as a barrier to effective leadership among female principals, restricting collaboration, mentorship, and

peer learning (Nhlumayo, 2023; Akinola & Naidoo 2024; Dyantyi & Mbatha, 2025; Nhlumayo, 2025).

Overall, the results of this study affirm that while female principals receive considerable institutional and community support, the quality and consistency of such support may vary across contexts. Moreover, the persistence of gendered expectations underscores the need for continued advocacy and systemic reform to ensure equity in school leadership experiences.

4.3.2 THEME 2: The influence of stakeholder support on the performance of female school principals

Table 4.3 Research question 2, interview questions, theme and sub-themes

Research Question 2	Theme and Sub-theme
<p>RQ 2:</p> <p>How does the support received from stakeholders influence the performance of the female principals as educational leaders?</p> <p><i>Interview Question 4.</i></p> <p><i>How does the support you receive from the stakeholders influence your performance as an educational leader?</i></p> <p><i>Interview Question 5.</i></p> <p><i>How does the support you receive from the stakeholders influence the work done by the teachers?</i></p>	<p>Theme 2</p> <p>The influence of stakeholder support on the performance of female school principals</p> <p><i>Sub-theme 1: Describing how the support received from the stakeholders influences the performance of female principals as educational leaders</i></p> <p><i>Sub-theme 2: Describing how the support that the principal receives from stakeholders influences the work done by teachers</i></p>

This theme presents the findings from the two interview questions that relate to the second research question. The first interview question explored how stakeholder support influences the performance of female principals as educational leaders, and the second question explored how the principal's support influences teachers' work. The following sub-themes present the findings.

4.3.2.1 Sub-theme 2.1. Describing how support received from the stakeholders influences the performance of female principals as educational leaders

This sub-theme revealed how the support female principals receive from stakeholders influences their performance as educational leaders. This fourth interview question explored the reasons and factors that drive performance improvement. In some schools, additional blocks were added, and others mentioned that the additional support they needed was provided by the community. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the government introduced the hiring of assistant teachers; other principals saw this as a calming aid for full-time teachers and would be happy if GDE could get that going. When these participants were asked to describe how support from stakeholders influences their performance, this is what they had to say:

When subordinates realise you are supported by stakeholders, they, in turn, support you, making my job easy (Principal B).

My teachers are tagging along; I have placed most of them in place, which makes it easier for me to manage and collaborate with them. I have seen some old teachers resign from their posts. They did not want to collaborate with me as a principal, having known my character. Though we have a higher percentage who do not understand that teaching is more of a calling than just a job, I am working extremely hard to get them to understand this and adopt a positive attitude. I plan to help the older teachers overcome their technology phobia and teach them to love technology (Principal D).

With the fact that we receive support such as money, library, computer rooms, and a digital phonetics programme in place... With all the support, you can enhance

learning, which in turn improves our academic results, and once teachers realise they have resources at their disposal, it makes teaching and learning easier for them (Principal E).

I must say that knowing you have all the support gives you the desire to do more, with many resources at hand (Principal G).

In my case, the lack of support from the community does not affect me or my performance; instead, it motivates me to do even better to prove that I can. The support from teachers and others motivates me (Principal H).

Female principals need support from all stakeholders and the district office, especially the community in which they work and the school staff, so the school can perform. With this support, I can achieve all my goals with ease (Principal I).

This theme shows the connection between the support in providing teaching and learning resources, teacher commitment to teaching and learning, as well as learner performance. The ripple effect on the provision of teaching and learning materials seems to directly have a positive influence on the leadership and management responsibilities of the principal. The support of the stakeholders seems to increase leadership motivation and commitment. The material support provided by the stakeholders seems to be a tool that enhances teaching and learning and improves academic performance, as well as makes the principal's leadership and management responsibilities easier to perform.

4.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2.2. Influence of stakeholders' support on teachers' performance

This sub-theme revealed the many descriptions of how the support female principals receive from the stakeholders influences the support they receive from the teachers they lead. When the participants were asked to describe their view by answering the fifth interview question, this is what they had to say:

Whenever there is support from the top, subordinates follow through, and the learners do likewise (Principal B).

Once teachers realise they have resources at their disposal, teaching and learning become easier for them. Once able to receive normal psychosocial support, they

receive educational packs and any support they need. Their zeal and will to participate will automatically change and will enhance their results (Principal E).

My teachers are incredibly supportive. I had one male teacher who was not very supportive at first, but later realised he needed to change, and he came out to ask for forgiveness (Parental G).

Our teachers respond with enthusiasm and multiply their efforts to ensure we succeed as a team. They have been incredibly supportive because of the great support we receive from the stakeholders; the teachers do not wait to be told what's next, but they do their work with love, and they are much happier and seem to enjoy their work (Principal I).

The sub-theme revealed that teachers and the other subordinates who report to the principal are eager to offer the principal support when they notice the following: the principal is supported from the top, they have resources to carry on their duties with ease and they can innovate, elevate their learner teaching and learning experience. Once the teachers are happy, they do not wait to be told what they need to do; the principals can easily influence them, and teaching and learning improve.

4.3.2.3 Discussion of the findings of theme 2

This theme highlights the essential importance of stakeholder support in influencing the performance and motivation of educational leaders. The participants in this study emphasised that effective collaboration and open communication among stakeholders, including the Department of Education, teachers, parents, and community members, foster a conducive environment for school improvement. This finding aligns with the recent literature that underscores the importance of distributed leadership and shared responsibility in educational settings (Naicker & Mestry, 2013; Ziduli & Buka, 2023). When female principals receive adequate support, they are better positioned to lead effectively, motivate staff, and drive academic success.

The participants' reflections on how stakeholders' support enhances their motivation and, in turn, influences teachers' attitudes, are in line with recent empirical research. For example, Shula (2023) found that servant leadership practices such as recognising and

responding to teachers' needs, supporting collaboration, and showing appreciation boost teacher motivation in rural South Africa. Similarly, Shava and Heystek (2021) report that principals who integrate transformational leadership and inclusive visioning support from the school community tend to strengthen teacher confidence, resilience, and a proactive stance towards school improvement. These more recent findings corroborate earlier theory, but with added nuance about contextual factors shaping how leadership support plays out in practice.

Furthermore, the findings of this study, which show that teachers are more willing to support the principal when they witness institutional backing from higher authorities, are consistent with the work of Bush and Glover (2016), who argue that visible support from district and provincial levels legitimises the principal's authority and fosters staff commitment. The availability of adequate resources, which participants identified as a key enabler of motivation, is documented in the literature as a determinant of school effectiveness (Mestry, 2017; Hallinger, 2018). Resource availability not only facilitates instructional innovation but also empowers teachers to take initiative in improving learner outcomes.

According to recent research, cultures based on collaboration and shared vision often surpass hierarchical, top-down control in fostering sustainable school improvement. Reinius et. al. (2024) found that when teachers feel their voices are included in setting the school's vision and mission, they develop greater ownership and engagement. Such ownership may lead to teacher commitment to their work and reduce management stress experienced by the principal. Similarly, Nhlumayo (2024) demonstrates that leadership practices that emphasise openness, collaboration, and shared responsibility enhance teaching efficacy and foster higher learning outcomes in rural primary schools. These findings echo theories of transformational and distributed leadership, underlining the value of shared commitment over rigid hierarchy, which could work well for leadership and management practices of female principals.

In summary, this study's findings resonate with existing literature on collaborative leadership and stakeholder involvement. Supportive relationships within and beyond the

school may not only enhance the principal’s leadership capacity but also cultivate a motivated and committed teaching staff, contributing to improved learner achievement.

4.3.3 THEME 3. Coping strategies used by female principals to address challenges related to stakeholders’ support

Table 4.4 Research question 3, interview questions, theme and sub-themes

Research Questions 3	<i>Theme and Sub-theme</i>
<p>RQ3:</p> <p>How do female principal leaders cope with the challenges they experience in relation to the support they receive from stakeholders?</p> <p><i>Interview Question 6.</i></p> <p><i>What strategies do you have in place to cope with the perceived challenges you face in relation to the support you receive from the stakeholders (i.e., the Department of Education (DoE), School Management Teams (SMT), School Governing Bodies (SGB), and parents?</i></p> <p><i>Interview Question 7.</i></p> <p><i>How do the strategies mentioned above help you in accomplishing your duties as the principal?</i></p> <p><i>Interview Question 8.</i></p>	<p>Theme 3</p> <p>Coping strategies used by female principals to address challenges related to stakeholders’ support</p> <p><i>Sub-theme 1:</i></p> <p><i>Applicable strategies used by female principals to challenges they experience with the support they receive from the stakeholders</i></p> <p><i>Sub-theme 2:</i></p> <p><i>Applicable strategies used by female principals in accomplishing their duties</i></p> <p><i>Sub-theme 3:</i></p>

<i>How do these strategies help teachers and learners with their own performances?</i>	<i>Application of strategies for enhancing the performance of learners and teachers</i>
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This theme presents the findings from the interview questions that relate to the third research question. The sixth interview question explored how female principal leaders cope with the challenges they experience in relation to the support they receive from stakeholders. Their responses are discussed under the following three sub-themes:

4.3.3.1 Sub-Theme 3.1. Applicable strategies used by female principals regarding the challenges they experience related to the support they receive from the stakeholders

This theme revealed the strategies, structures, policies, and support used by female principals. When asked “what strategies do you have in place to cope with the perceived challenges you face in relation to the support you receive from the stakeholders, such as the Department of Education (DoE), School Management Teams (SMT), School Governing Bodies (SGB) and parents? this is what they had to say:

Whenever there are challenges, the principal will first sit down with the SMT, HODs, and discuss the matter. If that fails, they will bring in Directors, and then the department of education (Principal A).

Ensure that teachers are doing the following: plan their week, deliver the lesson, and give an assessment, avoid random teaching because it is suicidal, use material, teaching aids and activities that reach out to learners (Principal B).

We have the SMTs to look and collaborate with each teacher in isolation, instead of using a blanket approach. I believe in always sending the teachers out to represent the school, which will help in developing my staff and, where necessary, call on the district to give guidance (Principal D).

Delegating and training SMTs, I also know that partnership works. For example, in our school, we worry a lot about burglary, but we have insurance that is covered by one of our stakeholders (Principal E).

Getting parents to be more involved in their kids' education, holding regular and even quarterly parents' meetings to explain the expectations for each quarter and share the timetable and other aspects that will help the learners to be effective. I often get the teachers more involved by delegating more functions to them (Principal G).

Consistency in adhering to and aligning with the policy, and treat all those that I work with, including our learners, with respect and assure them that they are important, and their contribution is valued. It is important for me as a principal to recognise that I am not without them and their efforts (Principal I).

This theme revealed that having a united vision with the teachers and all the stakeholders, especially the community and parents, requires the principal to be an initiative-taking person, and it also requires a lot of effort to share the vision she has for the school and how everyone fits into the vision. The above quotation suggests that principals rely on structured decision-making and collaboration with leadership structures. The principals also perceive support in the form of delegation, which leads to strengthening leadership capacity and coping mechanisms of the female principal. Providing training, delegating some of the duties and holding teachers accountable seem to be perceived by the principals as support strategies that create unity towards achieving the school vision. Such strategies reflect distributive leadership and collaborative management practices. Policies are in place to ensure that schools are a haven for all who use them.

4.3.3.2 Sub-Theme 3.2. Strategies employed by female principals in accomplishing their duties.

This sub-theme revealed how the strategies mentioned above help female principals in accomplishing their duties as the principal; in answering the seventh question of the ninth interview question, participants responded to the question by saying the following:

Collaborating with parents, teachers, and learners has helped bring us together and accomplish our goals; the school has even managed to reduce gangsterism (Principal G).

We normally invite guest speakers to our morning assembly to address us. We believe that sometimes learners and teachers need to hear from people other than me. When that happens, the learners and teachers get motivated and do what is requested of them (Principal C).

We have had our highs in the form of winning a trophy in sports, and our enrolment increased from 600 to 1000, and infrastructural transformation (Principal E).

Taking time to read, understand and align with the policy helped me achieve my goals. By respecting my teachers and learners, they, in turn, respect me, and this helps me in getting them to do their part, contributing towards a common goal of helping learners receive the education they have come to acquire (Principal I).

For those underperforming teachers I will normally sit on them until they improve, and when they improve, they want to do more on their own, which helps me accomplish my duties. When teachers know and understand the expectations, they tend to be cooperative and, in that way, the whole team tends to work together effectively for the benefit of the learners and the school (Principal J).

This sub-theme revealed that the female principal's success depends on their understanding of their mandate as an educational leader and their ability to work with others to accomplish a common goal—mastering the skill of collaborating with all stakeholders, including teachers, learners and parents. It has come out in different ways. Most participants believe that setting expectations and helping teachers understand their mandate is important to make them cooperate. Being cooperative comes with the desire to work as a team, and effectively for the benefit of the learners and the success of the school. It was also outlined that excellence in other activities, such as sports or other extracurricular activities, can put the school in the spotlight.

4.3.3.3 Sub-theme 3.3. Application of the strategies for enhancing the performance of learners and teachers.

This sub-theme revealed how the strategies mentioned to answer the eight interview questions help the teachers and students in their own performances. The participants' responses are presented below as follows:

Teachers who are prepared will find joy in the work they do, continue to improve, and see learners' performance improve (Principal B).

When learners and teachers hear from different people or from outside, they gain strength and are motivated (Principal C).

The infrastructure enhancement that we got helps reduce overcrowding in classes, which makes teaching and learning easier. Once teaching and learning are easy, results improve (Principal E).

When we have parents who are involved in the policies that are followed by teachers, as well. We have motivated teachers who help learners improve (Principal F).

Because the teachers are more involved, they are encouraged to drive change for learners, and our school has achieved superior results, just like Model C schools (Principal G).

Because when they feel supported, they are happy and put more effort into their work, most teachers have been supportive, and their performance and that of the learners have been great (Principal J).

This sub-theme revealed that a committed teacher who is prepared to drive change in learners' lives builds their confidence, and when learners realise they are supported, they increase their efforts. Both learners' and teachers' performance increase, and the school's performance is enhanced. Some participants attributed successful performance to the teacher's happiness with their job and their desire to improve, encouraging and motivating the learner to succeed.

4.3.3.4 Discussion of the findings of theme 3

This theme revealed how female principals cope with the challenges they encounter, particularly in relation to the level of support they receive from various stakeholders. The findings suggest that the principals adopted proactive strategies such as developing a shared vision with teachers, parents, and community members; ensuring that policies are communicated and implemented; delegating responsibilities; promoting accountability; and fostering unity towards achieving the school goals. These findings are echoed in

research; for example, Mampane (2021) reports that in Limpopo primary schools, female principals use stakeholder involvement and delegation to overcome gendered pressure. Studies (Nhlumayo, 2025; Romanowski, 2022) show that rural female principals build resilient leadership through vision-sharing, collaboration with stakeholders, and delegating tasks confidently.

In another study, the participants' responses emphasise having a united vision and ensuring stakeholders' inclusion reflects the principles of distributed and transformational leadership, which encourage shared ownership and collective responsibility in schools (Shava, 2021; Ziduli & Buka, 2023). According to Bush, Bell and Middlewood (2019), effective school leaders achieve sustainable results when they build a culture of collaboration and align all stakeholders with the school's mission. This is consistent with the participant's belief that unity and shared goals enhance teaching, learning and the school's overall performance. The above comparison reveals a strong alignment between this study's findings and existing literature, suggesting that the coping strategies adopted by female principals are part of a broader leadership pattern across South African schools.

Consistent with Mampane (2021) and Nhlumayo (2025), the participants demonstrated that collaboration, delegation and shared vision are key strategies for addressing gendered and contextual challenges. Ramanowski (2022) supports this view, showing that principals who develop strong collaborative networks and professional learning communities through social capital initiatives are better positioned to strengthen their leadership and school outcomes. The findings also reflect the principles of distributed and transformational leadership highlighted by Manzini (2023) and Ziduli and Buka (2023), underscoring that effective leadership is built on collective responsibility rather than individual authority.

Furthermore, the findings that female principals adopted proactive strategies to cope with the challenges they encounter in relation to the support they receive from stakeholders echo more recent research in South Africa, which shows that female principals often rely on collaboration, mentorship, and delegation as coping strategies to balance leadership demands (Dyantyi & Mbatha, 2025). Nhlumayo (2025) highlights the importance of

mentorship and supportive networks, and reports how rural female principals engage stakeholders and delegate tasks to mitigate overload. Mampane (2021) found that communicating with teachers, parents, and distributing responsibilities help these leaders cultivate a sense of belonging and accountability within their school communities. This also aligns with Lumby and Azaola's (2014) assertion that participative management empowers both leaders and subordinates, fostering resilience and professional growth. These findings imply that female principals' leadership approach is adaptive and relational, grounded in collaboration rather than individual authority.

In contexts where stakeholders' support is inconsistent, this female may actively cultivate networks of trust, shared responsibility and participatory decision-making to sustain effective school functioning. By engaging in mentorship, delegation and inclusive management, female principals are not only coping with challenges but also redefining leadership as a collective and empowering process. This reflects Nhlumayo's (2025) and Karichi's (2022) observations that stakeholder engagement and delegation enhance accountability and belonging within school communities and support Lumby and Azaola's (2014) view that participative management strengthens resilience and professional growth. Overall, the findings suggest that collaboration and distributed leadership serve as both coping strategies and mechanisms for achieving sustainable school improvement.

In this study, participants' strategies for providing training and delegating duties also align with the findings of Shava (2021), who argue that professional development and empowerment are key to improving school performance. When teachers are well-trained and entrusted with responsibility, they tend to be more motivated and innovative in their instructional practices. Similarly, recent research shows that women leaders often prioritise empowerment and capacity building as part of their leadership style, resulting in positive organisational outcomes. For example, a study by Coetzee and Moosa (2025) finds that providing growth opportunities, recognising achievements, and involving women in decision-making significantly improves their retention and performance. Also, a study of senior South African women leaders (FrontiersThelma & Ngue, 2025) shows that mentoring, strategic networking, and continuous skills development contribute to a stronger organisational culture and effectiveness.

The participant's strategies of providing training and delegating duties reflect a transformational and capacity-building approach to leadership. Consistent with Shava and Ndebele's (2014) assertion that professional development and empowerment enhance school performance, the findings suggest that when teachers are well-trained and entrusted with responsibility, they become more motivated and innovative in their practice. This echoes recent studies showing that female leaders often prioritise empowerment, mentorship, and inclusion as key aspects of their leadership approach (Murphy et al., 2024; Thelma & Ngulube, 2024). Coetzee and Moosa (2025) found that providing growth opportunities, recognising achievements and involving women decision making improve retention and performance, while the Thelma & Ngulube (2025) study of senior South African women leaders highlights mentoring, strategic networking and continuous development as key drivers of strong organisational culture and effectiveness. Collectively, these insights indicate that the female principals in this study not only address daily challenges but also cultivate sustainable leadership ecosystems grounded in empowerment, trust and professional growth.

The finding that teachers' and learners' performance improves when teachers feel supported and accountable aligns with Fullan's (2014) view that effective school leadership creates a ripple effect, enhancing motivation and performance across all levels of the school. When teachers perceive a supportive environment and are encouraged to take responsibility, they are more motivated, innovative, and committed to their work. This may, in turn, create a learning atmosphere where learners feel valued and engaged, enhancing their confidence and participation, which ultimately contributes to improved academic outcomes.

4.3.4. Theme 4. Implementation of strategies, structures, policy, and support required by female principals to address challenges that they experience

Table 4.5 Research question 4, interview questions, theme and sub-themes

Research Question	Theme and Sub-theme
RQ4:	Theme 4

<p>What strategies, structures, policies, and support do female principals require to address the perceived challenges that they experience in performing their role?</p> <p><i>Interview Question 9.</i></p> <p><i>In the presence of challenges, what other strategies, structures, policies, and support do you require from the stakeholders?</i></p> <p><i>Interview Question 10.</i></p> <p><i>In the absence of challenges in your role, what advice would you give to your fellow principals regarding support received from the stakeholders?</i></p> <p><i>Interview Question 11</i></p> <p><i>As a conclusion, how would you describe the relationship between your leadership and its impact on school performance?</i></p>	<p>Implementation of strategies, structures, policy, and support required by female principals to address challenges that they experience</p> <p><i>Sub-theme 1:</i></p> <p><i>Strategies, structures, policies, and support provided by stakeholders for addressing challenges</i></p> <p><i>Sub-theme 2:</i></p> <p><i>Required advice regarding support received from the stakeholders</i></p> <p><i>Sub-theme 3:</i></p> <p><i>Conceptualising the relationship between leadership and its impact on school performance</i></p>
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This theme presents findings from the fourth research question, which explores the strategies, structures, policies, and support female principals require to address challenges in their role. Their responses are analysed across three sub-themes.

4.3.4.1 Sub-theme 4.1: Strategies, structures, policies, and additional support needed by female principals.

This sub-theme revealed the additional strategies, structures, policies, and support required by female principals. When asked what additional strategies, structures, policies, and support female principals require to address the perceived challenges experienced in their leadership role? This is what they had to say:

We are blessed to have so much support in the school from across the board; all that we need now is to develop our staff and help them represent their profession.”
(Principal D).

If we can get more classes, more reliable security or the community could come together to protect the school. If we could have more parental support, psychosocial support, churches, etc. Most kids are coming from child-headed homes *(Principal E).*

We need a sponsor or partner who can take the school to team building, CONSOL. They usually train teachers on their responsibilities, but they need training that will help them to be consistent *(Principal G).*

If the department can zoom into principals in schools and not keep them too long in the position, because they get bored. They start to take advantage of using those with expertise or use them to empower other principals. Staying too long takes the energy away *(Principal H).*

If the government can provide at least one social worker and one psychologist per grade, our learners will have fewer challenges. Some of our grade 12 learners fell pregnant and just came back to write exams. We could be happy if they were to keep the assistant teachers as well, they are effective *(Principal I).*

GDE must bring back assistance teachers because they calm the full-time teachers *(Principal J).*

This sub-theme revealed that female principals appreciate the DBE’s initiative to provide schools with assistant teachers and would be grateful if this could continue, as it would help calm the permanent teachers who are struggling to balance their day-to-day teaching

responsibilities with their administrative roles. Having a representative from the Department of Health and Social Development in the schools in the form of a nurse, social worker or psychologist was voiced out by many of the participants. Their presence could help young people who are pregnant and still expected to remain in school and cope with their school workload. Another strategy they would like to see implemented is having staff development programmes to help them represent their profession. Lastly, they can get more community members more involved in the school activities, be in the position of giving back to the school they live close to, participating in the SGB, protecting the school and offering other parental support.

4.3.4.2 Subtheme 4.2: Advice from female principals regarding stakeholder support

This sub-theme revealed the advice from different female principals on what they believe would bring success to their counterparts. When allowed to advise their counterparts, this is what they had to say:

Treat each teacher differently; do not use a blanket approach since they are all unique. For example, some are like wheelbarrows and will not move until pushed. They need to be constantly supervised and given deadlines. They constantly need a plan to follow daily, while others can easily do and succeed without anyone behind them. As the principal, management by wandering around (MBWA) translates to mean that as you walk around unannounced and visit classes, you are most likely to pick up if things are happening; in other words, your presence may encourage/promote accountability (Principal B).

I liaise with other school principals (peers). I liaise most with male principals; they take things easy, always keep in touch with the business partner, also arrange psychological consultation, involve the IDSO and circuit manager (Principal I).

This sub-theme highlights a need for differential support for female school principals. The findings imply that a needs assessment should be conducted to determine the support needed by individual female principals to effectively perform their leadership and management roles. Communication with potential stakeholders seems to be important in seeking the needed support from the stakeholders.

4.3.4.3 Sub-theme 4.3: Conceptualising the relationship between leadership and its influence on school performance

This sub-theme highlighted the connection between the principal's leadership style and school performance. Participants felt they played a significant role in the school's success and in strengthening the link between the principal, learners, and teachers. The participants' answers are presented below:

The success of the school depends on the teachers we have in place, and I am happy to say I headhunted most of the teachers we have in the school, so it makes it easier to work for a common goal (Principal A).

Help your pupil to know your authority; that you believe in them, your understanding, your love, and always teach them to be clean. Our education speaks for itself (Principal D).

As I put more effort into the running of the school and seeking resources that help in enhancing teaching and learning, we see positive results in return. The department has noticed my dedication and gave me an opportunity to enrol in a leadership development programme at Hiroshima University (Principal E).

I have seen so much difference in the parents' involvement and the performance of the school; the teachers even go to the extent of collecting the kids from their homes to bring them to Saturday school. All I can say is, I can see the change I have brought to the school as I approach my retirement (Principal G).

Doing my best, just the fact that the school is up and running. I have sourced the resources from scratch, and all systems are now in place. We are due for evaluation next week (Principal H).

This sub-theme revealed that there is a relationship between the principal's leadership style and the impact on school performance. Participants believe that they have a bigger role to play in school success, and the ability to foster the link between the principal, the learner and the teacher's success. It was also revealed that success in the school can be attributed to the principal's and teachers' love for the work, their ability to help learners understand authority, their letting learners know they love and believe in them, and their

teaching them to be clean. Such positive leadership practices can foster a sense of mutual respect and motivation among learners, encouraging them to engage more actively in their studies and strive for higher academic performance as a way of contributing to the success of the school and validating the principal's efforts. Therefore, the principal's confidence translates into the teachers' and the learner's confidence, and then all win as a team. The principal with a will to succeed ignores the negativity of all that is going wrong and focuses on what works for the benefit of the school.

4.3.4.4 Discussion of the findings of theme 4

This theme revealed that effective strategies, supportive organisational structures, sound policies, and strong stakeholder support are essential to helping female principals address the challenges they encounter in their leadership roles. Participants acknowledge that departmental initiatives, such as the provision of assistant teachers by the Department of Basic Education (DBE), help alleviate workload pressures faced by permanent staff who must balance teaching and administrative duties. Recent research supports the idea that female principals' capacity to overcome leadership challenges depends heavily on well-designed strategies, robust organisational structures, supportive policies and strong stakeholder involvement.

For example, Nhlumayo (2025) reports that rural female principals rely on community engagement, emotional intelligence, and resilience, but these succeed only when policy frameworks and support networks are in place. Thelma & Ngulube (2025) asserts that aligned policy implementation and cohesive leadership structures, such as circuit managers and subject advisors, help principals manage teaching and learning pressures. Similar themes emerge in De Bruyn and Mestry (2017), where clear vision setting, collaborative decision making and trust with staff and community are seen as key coping mechanisms and routes to sustainable school performance.

This theme demonstrates that a female principal's capacity to address leadership challenges depends on a combination of effective strategies, supportive organisational structures, sound policies and active stakeholder engagement. Participants highlighted that departmental initiatives, such as the provision of assistant teachers by the DBE, help reduce workload pressures, enabling principals to rely on emotional intelligence,

resilience and community engagement, but these strategies may be effective only when strong policy frameworks and support networks exist. Similarly, Thelma & Ngulube (2025) emphasises that aligned policy implementation and cohesive leadership structures, including circuit managers and subject advisors, assist principals in managing teaching and learning pressures. Overall, these findings indicate that female principals' leadership effectiveness is shaped not only by their personal strategies but also by systemic support, which fosters resilience, accountability and long-term school improvement.

The study found that female principals actively lead continuous professional development for teachers and identify pedagogical needs, which enhances teacher confidence, instructional quality, and learner outcomes. The findings of the current study are consistent with Adams et al. (2025), who found that when principals actively lead continuous professional teacher development (CPTD) and identify pedagogical needs, teacher confidence, performance, and learner outcomes improve. Such findings may motivate female principals to perform their leadership and management responsibilities. Brion (2020) also reveals that female principals' engagement with professional learning communities enhances their leadership and management skills, boosts motivation, and ultimately contributes to better school performance. Similarly, Nhlumayo (2025) demonstrates that capacity building programmes, stakeholder engagement including parents and community members, and mentoring form essential pillars that empower female principals and strengthen institutional culture. These findings indicate that effective female leadership is both proactive and relational, relying on professional development, collaborative networks, and stakeholder engagement to cultivate a culture of accountability, resilience and shared responsibility, ultimately enhancing learning and overall school performance.

The participants' belief in the power of networking and mutual support among female principals in this study aligns with several new studies that underscore the importance of mentoring, collaboration, and peer learning for women leaders facing gendered barriers. Dyantyi & Mbatha (2025) reported that strong supportive networks are essential for female principals advancing in secondary school leadership roles. De Bruyn and Mestry (2017) show that female principals in Mpumalanga draw on mentoring and leadership learning to build resilience. In comparison, Sinyosi and Potokri (2021) found that rural

female principals foster relational, collaborative practices that strengthen leadership. In addition, a case study in the Western Cape (Combrinck & Daniels, 2023) highlights the need for formal and informal mentoring to enhance principal leadership capacities. This finding also supports Shakeshaft's (2019) argument that women in leadership thrive when they get support to develop strong professional communities that challenge stereotypes and reinforce collective empowerment.

Moreover, this study found a clear link between leadership style and school performance. Participants emphasised that a principal's confidence, passion, and relational approach directly influence teacher motivation and learner outcomes. The finding aligns with other studies, such as Shula (2023), who found that principals practising servant leadership, showing passion, listening, and relational care, motivate teachers in rural settings, which is crucial for sustaining performance. Nhlumayo (2025) adds that female principals' confidence, emotional intelligence and relational leadership help them overcome gendered challenges and maintain high standards.

Lastly, the participants' reflections on leading with love, respect, and compassion align with feminist leadership perspectives, which value empathy, inclusivity, and emotional intelligence as central components of effective leadership. For example, Makirmani and Naicker (2024) found that servant leadership attributes such as caring, respect, and empowerment strongly uplift teacher morale. Also, Setlhodi and Ramatsui (2024) show that women leaders in challenging school settings draw on compassion, respect for wellbeing, and relational trust to foster inclusive and supportive school climates. Similarly, Sinyosi and Potokri (2021) report that female rural principals act as role models who nurture and inspire through respect, empathy, and selfless relational leadership.

The participants' emphasis on leading with love reflects key principles of feminist and servant leadership, which prioritise empathy, inclusivity, and emotional intelligence. This aligns with Makirmani and Naicker (2024), who found that respect significantly enhances teacher morale, and with Setlhodi and Ramatsui (2024), who show that women leaders in challenging school contexts rely on compassion and relational trust to foster inclusive and supportive school environments. Similarly, Sinyosi and Potokri (2021) highlight that female rural principals act as role models, nurturing and inspiring teachers and learners

through selfless relational leadership. Collectively, these findings suggest that empathic and relational leadership, along with the support of different stakeholders, are key to the female principal's leadership and management practices in creating an inclusive school climate.

4.4. SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter presented and discussed four key themes that emerged from the study of the experiences of the support that female principals receive from different stakeholders in their leadership and management practices. The findings of this study also show how the support received from stakeholders influences the performance of female principals as educational leaders. Furthermore, the strategies that female principals use to cope with challenges they experience with support from stakeholders are also presented in this chapter. The next chapter presents the summary of the findings, limitations and delimitations as well as the conclusion and recommendations from the research findings.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 presents and discusses four key themes that emerged from the study on the experience of female principals in educational leadership and their interaction with various stakeholders. The findings explore female principals' experiences regarding the support they received from stakeholders, the influence of such support on their performance as educational leaders, the strategies they employed to cope with challenges related to stakeholder support, and the additional structures, policies, and forms of assistance required to address the challenges encountered in their leadership roles. This chapter provides a summary of findings, draws conclusions, and offers recommendations based on the study of female principals' experiences of support from stakeholders in their roles. Its purpose is to consolidate the main outcomes of the research, highlight its significance, and provide actionable recommendations to strengthen support systems for female educational leaders. Additionally, the chapter discusses the delimitation and limitations, suggests areas for future study and concludes with a reflective discussion on the contributions of this study.

5.2 REFLECTIONS OF THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

The experience of conducting this study was both enlightening and transformative. Conducting qualitative research, using semi-structured interviews with ten female principals, provided the researcher with the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of female school principals. The process highlighted the importance of fostering a safe and trusting environment, enabling participants to openly share their challenges, achievements and personal reflections without fear of judgement or exposure.

Engaging directly with the participants provided a deeper appreciation of the realities faced by female principals as they navigate their professional responsibilities in complex and often gendered environments. Each interview with each principal revealed a unique

perspective that added richness to the study, emphasising that while their experiences differed, common themes such as resilience, commitment and the desire to make a meaningful impact on education were evident throughout.

This research process required patience, flexibility and ethical sensitivity. Scheduling interviews around the participants' demanding professional commitments proved challenging, yet their willingness to contribute reflected their passion for educational leadership and their belief in the value of the study. Data transcription and analysis were equally demanding but deeply rewarding, as they required one to be engaged intimately with the narratives, discovering recurring patterns and profound insights.

This research journey also offered an opportunity for personal and professional growth. Mastered the skill of listening deeply, interpreting meaning beyond words and respecting the subjectivity inherent in qualitative inquiry. The iterative process of coding, categorising, and interpreting data reaffirmed that research is not a linear process but a reflective and evolving one. The experience demonstrated that qualitative research, when approached with openness and empathy, has the power to give voice to those whose experiences were rarely represented previously in academic discourse.

Ultimately, this research journey reinforced the belief that educational leadership, particularly among women, is not only a matter of position but of purpose and influence. The reflections and insights gathered through this study have shaped the researcher's understanding of leadership as a relational, collaborative and transformative practice, one that thrives on compassion, equity and commitment to lifelong learning.

5.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The summary of the findings presented in this section is based on interviews with female principals. The findings of the study are structured in alignment with the specific research objectives. The summary of the findings is as follows: the nature of support female principals receive from stakeholders; how such support influences their performance; the coping strategies they employ to manage related challenges; and the strategies, structures and policies required to address these challenges effectively.

5.3.1 Female principals' experiences of support received from stakeholders

This section reflects on the findings of theme one, which explained both positive and negative experiences of support from the different stakeholders. The theme revealed that the female principals in this study expressed both positive and negative experiences regarding their school leadership. The principals attributed their positive experience to their female nurturing attributes, their leadership style, the reciprocation of being recognised and valued, being passionate about their work, as well as their ability to produce good academic results. The female principals explained their leadership and management practices to include the support needed for them from the stakeholders that would enable them to play the nurturing role. At the same time, those with negative experiences blamed it on the fact that, as female principals, they were expected to give more time and put in double the effort compared to their male counterparts. This finding reveals the different sources of support that the participants shared with the researcher. Female principals received support from Gauteng Department of Education (GDE), Business Companies, Agencies and Organisations, and the community, parents, SMT and SGB, as well as other departments. Most of the participants interviewed expressed satisfaction with the support they received from GDE, while satisfaction with support from other stakeholders seemed to depend on the environment and the culture of the community where the school was situated. The participants seemed to lean more on the stakeholders with whom they interacted the most and from whom they received the most support. As a result, it was challenging to compare levels of support for individual stakeholder groups; instead, the analysis focused on patterns emerging from most participant responses.

Only two of the ten participants expressed dissatisfaction with the support they received, and this was attributed to a lack of support from parents or guardians, who were unable to provide the expected support due to their own lack of accountability and illiteracy. The lack of support from SGB members who did not understand their mandate to serve the community and the school, but rather thought their job was to represent the community alone. Secondly, the other participant attributed her dissatisfaction to a lack of support

within the school, including unsupportive colleagues. Generally, most participants reported being satisfied with the support they received from the different stakeholders.

5.3.2 The influence of stakeholder support on the performance of female school principals

This theme highlighted the importance of stakeholders' support and its influence on the performance of educational leaders. The participants articulated the need for a collaborative environment, one in which they can freely communicate and receive the support they need to perform their roles. Stakeholders' support towards the principal and the school motivates them to enhance teaching and learning and increase academic results. With a motivated principal, teachers are influenced to support the principal too, because subordinates are always eager to offer their support when they see the following happen: first, they see support coming from the top; second, they have resources to carry on their duties; and third, they can innovate and elevate their teaching and learning experiences. Once teachers are satisfied, they do not need to be told what to do; they act on their own, and teaching and learning improve.

5.3.3 Coping strategies used by female principals to address challenges related to stakeholders' support

This theme highlighted how female principals manage the challenges associated with the support they receive from stakeholders. The participants responded with the following strategies as their coping mechanism: first, having a united vision with the teachers and all the stakeholders, especially the community and parents, requires the principal to be an initiative-taking person. Second, leaders should clearly communicate the vision and ensure that all stakeholders understand it and align their efforts toward achieving it. Common understanding and owning the vision strengthened the collaboration among the stakeholders, which encouraged the support given to the principal. Last, the findings revealed that policies provided guidelines in the activities performed by the principal, especially when the policies were shared and adhered to. The findings of this study show that the principals perceived delegation of responsibilities to teachers and holding the

teachers accountable as a coping strategy that enabled them to manage the challenges they experienced.

5.3.4. Implementation of strategies, structures, policy, and support required by female principals to address the challenges that they experience

This study theme revealed factors such as strategies, structures, policies, and support required from stakeholders to resolve the challenges they face in their leadership and management roles as female principals. Participants believe that the DBE's initiative of support through providing schools with assistant teachers helped permanent teachers who are struggling to balance their day-to-day teaching responsibilities and their administrative roles. They added that the continuous presence of the Department of Health and Social Development in the schools in the form of a nurse, social worker or a psychologist is of great assistance. The non-teaching support structures assisted in providing socio-emotional support and counselling to learners, especially those with special needs. The theme also revealed the importance of support in staff development programmes to assist and encourage the principals, as well as teachers in their profession. The participants expressed the need for female principals to network and offer one another advice as they both strive for success. Among the advice given by the participants was that the principals need to understand the important role they play for the school to succeed; they need to conduct themselves as leaders and know how they should treat those they work with.

5.4 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study focused on ten female principals from selected primary and secondary schools within the Ekurhuleni Municipality, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of their lived experiences with stakeholder support in educational leadership. A qualitative research design was employed, with semi-structured interviews used to collect detailed and descriptive data. Therefore, the study focused on exploring participants' perceptions and experiences rather than qualifying relationships or measuring variables statistically. Only female principals were included in the study, as the purpose was to understand leadership experiences from a gendered perspective. While teachers, parents, learners, district

officials, and community members were not direct participants, their impact was explored through the participants' narratives.

The support structures, strategies, and challenges experienced by female principals in their leadership roles limited the scope of the study. Other factors that may affect leadership effectiveness, such as school resources, teacher performance, learner outcomes, or policy implementation, were not explored in depth. Additionally, the research is also confined to a specific timeframe, limiting the opportunity to capture evolving trends or long-term changes in stakeholder support.

5.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While this study generated meaningful insights into the experiences of female principals in educational leadership, several limitations need to be recognised. To begin with, the study involved only ten female principals from selected primary and secondary schools within the Ekurhuleni Education District, which limited the sample size and geographic scope. As a result, the findings may not be representative of all female principals in South Africa or in other educational contexts.

Additionally, the study utilised a qualitative research approach, drawing primarily on semi-structured interviews for data collection. Although this method provided detailed accounts of participants' experiences, it also meant that findings were based on subjective perceptions rather than measurable data. The interpretations, therefore, reflect the participants' viewpoints and may not capture the full complexity of stakeholder relationships across different school environments.

Also, only female principals were interviewed. Other key stakeholders, such as teachers, parents, SGB members, learners, district officials and community representatives, were excluded as participants. Their direct input might have provided a more balanced or contrasting perspective on stakeholders' support. Additionally, the study focused specifically on stakeholders' support as a factor influencing leadership performance. Other variables that could also affect school leadership, such as institutional resources, policy implementation challenges, or socio-economic conditions, were not explored in depth. Lastly, as with most qualitative studies, researcher bias cannot be entirely ruled out. Although every effort has been made to ensure objectivity through rigorous data

analysis and participant validation, the interpretation of responses may still have been influenced by the researcher's perspective and understanding of the subject matter. Despite the limitations, the study contributes meaningfully to understanding the experiences of female principals in educational leadership, offering valuable insights into the nature and impact of stakeholder support within the school context.

5.6 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the experiences of female principals in educational leadership, with particular attention to the nature and effects of stakeholders' support in their professional roles. Guided by the research objective, the study explored the types of support female principals receive from various stakeholders, how such support influences their leadership performance, the coping strategies they employ in response to challenges, and the strategies, structures and policies needed to address those challenges effectively. The findings revealed that female principals experience both positive and negative forms of stakeholder support. On the positive side, many participants acknowledged receiving meaningful support from the GDE, business partners, parents, the SGB, and the broader community. These forms of support enhanced collaboration, improved school performance, and motivated principals to lead with greater confidence and commitment. However, some participants reported inconsistent or inadequate support, particularly from parents and SGB members who lacked understanding of their roles or demonstrated limited accountability.

The study further established that stakeholder support directly influences the effectiveness of female principals. When support is consistent and constructive, principals feel empowered, motivated and capable of fostering a positive school culture. Such support has a cascading effect, whereby motivated principals inspire teachers who, in turn, motivate learners, improving overall teaching and learning outcomes. In addressing challenges related to stakeholder support, the study found that female principals rely on coping mechanisms, including fostering shared visions, promoting collaboration, delegating responsibilities, providing training and ensuring adherence to school policies. These strategies not only help maintain stability and unity within the school but also strengthen principals' leadership capacity.

Furthermore, the research underscores the significance of institutional frameworks and policies that promote sustainable support for female principals. Initiatives such as the Department of Basic Education's (DBE) assistant teacher programme, the involvement of health and social development professionals in schools and opportunities for professional development and peer networking were recognised as crucial interventions. Overall, the study concludes that stakeholder support is crucial in influencing the leadership experiences and effectiveness of female principals. When schools operate within a supportive ecosystem characterised by collaboration, clear policies and shared accountability, female principals are better positioned to lead effectively, improve school outcomes and contribute to the broader goal of educational transformation in South Africa.

5.7 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FINDINGS

Drawing on the study's findings and conclusions, several recommendations are suggested to improve the effectiveness of female principals in educational leadership, strengthen stakeholder collaboration and inform future research in this area.

5.7.1 Recommendation for practitioners

Strengthen Stakeholder Collaboration

Schools should foster stronger partnerships between principals, teachers, parents, SGB members and the broader community. The principals initiate support from the stakeholders through regular meetings, open communication channels and joint planning activities. On such platforms, the roles of different stakeholders can be clarified, mutual understanding enhanced and trust among all stakeholders built.

Provide Continuous Professional Development

The Department of Education should support female principals by consistently giving them opportunities for professional growth through leadership development workshops, mentorship programmes, and peer networking platforms. These initiatives can help build confidence, improve decision-making and enhance management skills.

Promote Shared Vision and Accountability

To gain support from the different stakeholders, the principals should ensure that all staff and stakeholders understand and commit to the vision of the school and goals, as well as being accountable for the role they play in the school. Shared accountability encourages collaboration and motivates both teachers and learners to work towards common objectives.

Implement Effective Coping Strategies

The findings of this study revealed the coping strategies used by female principals to include delegation of responsibilities, teamwork and adherence to policy. This implies that the different stakeholders should support the principals when delegating responsibilities, asking them for teamwork and support during policy implementation.

5.7.2 Recommendations for policy

Enhance Departmental Support

The Department of Education should ensure that current support programmes, such as the deployment of assistant teachers and the involvement of health and social development professionals, are expanded and consistently implemented across schools.

Gender Sensitive Leadership Policies

Education policymakers should support female principals by reviewing and strengthening existing policies to advance gender equity in school leadership. The amended policies should include providing mentorship opportunities for aspiring female leaders and addressing systemic barriers that limit women's progression within the education sector. These recommendations arise from the experiences of female participants regarding gender-related challenges that needed support from the different stakeholders.

Capacity Building for School Governing Bodies

The Department of Education and local education districts should offer support to school principals in the form of regular training for SGB members to help them understand their governance roles, responsibilities and the importance of supporting the principal in achieving the school's educational goals. Such training would include school governance partnership and mutual support among the different components of the SGB.

Community Engagement Frameworks

Schools should adopt structured frameworks for engaging with community members and local organisations. This can enhance the availability of external resources, improve accountability and create a shared sense of ownership of the school's success.

5.7.3 Recommendations for future research

- Future studies should include a larger and more diverse sample of schools across multiple provinces to allow for broader transferability of findings.
- Future researchers could explore the viewpoints of additional stakeholders such as male principals, teachers, parents, learners and district officials to gain a more comprehensive understanding of stakeholder support in educational leadership.
- Comparative studies between male and female principals could help highlight gender-based differences in leadership and support systems.
- Longitudinal studies could be conducted to explore how stakeholder support evolved and its long-term effects on school performance and leadership effectiveness.

In summary, implementing these recommendations can help strengthen the support system available to female principals, enhance collaboration between schools and stakeholders and promote a more equitable and efficient educational leadership environment in South Africa.

5.8 A FINAL WORD

This study demonstrates the types of support female school principals need to perform their leadership and management roles effectively. The study highlights the critical involvement of the various stakeholders in creating a school environment that enables effective leadership, particularly, female school principals. Such leadership is fostered through collaboration, shared responsibility, and mutual accountability among stakeholders. Consequently, cooperative school leadership should ensure that all the stakeholders are collectively accountable for both the successes and challenges associated with the leadership of the school, especially in relation to female school principals.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: ETHICAL CLEARANCE



UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2021/08/11

Ref: 2021/08/11/36487554/51/AM

Name: Ms TD Ngomane

Student No.:36487554

Dear Ms TD Ngomane

Decision: Ethics Approval from
2021/08/11 to 2024/08/11

Researcher(s): Name: Ms TD Ngomane
E-mail address: 36487554@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Telephone: 0834146570

Supervisor(s): Name: Dr Nevensha Sing
E-mail address: Nevensha.Sing@gmail.com
Telephone: 0828772564

Title of research:

Experiences of female school principals regarding support received from stakeholders in the Ekurhuleni Municipal district

Qualification: MEd Education management

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2021/08/11 to 2024/08/11.

*The **medium risk** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2021/08/11 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.*

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to the relevant guidelines set out in the Unisa Covid-19 position statement on research ethics attached.
2. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.



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3. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.
4. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
5. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing.
6. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
7. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
8. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date **2024/08/11**. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

*The reference number **2021/08/11/36487554/51/AM** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Kind regards,



Prof AT Motlhabane
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APPENDIX B: RESEARCH PERMISSION FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



GAUTENG PROVINCE

Department: Education
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

8/4/4/1/2

GDE RESEARCH APPROVAL LETTER

Date:	24 August 2021
Validity of Research Approval:	08 February 2021– 30 September 2021 2021/206
Name of Researcher:	Ngomane TD
Address of Researcher:	54 Totius Road Crystal Park
Telephone Number:	0119680293 / 0834146570
Email address:	36487554.mylife.unisa.ac.za
Research Topic:	Experiences of female school principals regarding support received from stakeholders in the Ekurhuleni Municipal district
Type of qualification	MED-EDMA
Number and type of schools:	8 Primary Schools 8 Secondary Schools
District/s/HO	Ekurhuleni North and Ekurhuleni South

Re: Approval in Respect of Request to Conduct Research

This letter serves to indicate that approval is hereby granted to the above-mentioned researcher to proceed with research in respect of the study indicated above. The onus rests with the researcher to negotiate appropriate and relevant time schedules with the school/s and/or offices involved to conduct the research. A separate copy of this letter must be presented to both the School (both Principal and SGB) and the District/Head Office Senior Manager confirming that permission has been granted for the research to be conducted.

The following conditions apply to GDE research. The researcher may proceed with the above study subject to the conditions listed below being met. Approval may be withdrawn should any of the conditions listed below be flouted:

1. Letter that would indicate that the said researcher/s has/have been granted permission from the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research study.

Making education a societal priority

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APPENDIX C: INFORMED PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

PRINCIPAL PERMISSION FOR RESEARCH

I, _____, hereby give my consent to Tirhani Doreen Ngomane to be included as a participant in her research on Experiences of female school principals regarding support received from stakeholders in Ekurhuleni Education District.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D: CONSENT LETTER TO THE PRINCIPAL



LETTER OF CONSENT TO THE PRINCIPAL

27/07/2021

Research Title: Experiences of Female school principals regarding support received from stakeholders in the Ekurhuleni Education District

Dear Principal,

I am Tirhani Ngomane, an MEd student at the University of South Africa. The title of my study towards my MEd degree is Experiences of female school principals regarding support received from stakeholders in the Ekurhuleni Education Districts. The study aims to collect important information that could assist in the Gauteng Department of Education's efforts to promote and support principals through understanding their experience with the support they receive from stakeholders such as the Department of Education (DoE), School Management Teams (SMT), School Governing Bodies (SGB) and Parents in their educational leadership in the municipality. I am working under Dr Nevensha Sing, from the Department of Education Leadership Management, an external supervisor from the University of South Africa. As one of the principals, I kindly invite you to participate in this study. There is one part to this research, an interview (using a semi-structured interview questionnaire). The interview will be scheduled as per your availability and will take place at a venue convenient to you. The interview should take between 45 to 60 minutes.

However, due to COVID-19 regulations, an alternative option of meeting through a platform most suitable for and preferred by you, such as WhatsApp video call/Zoom/Google Meet/ FaceTime/Facebook Messenger/ or any valid suggestion, will be considered by me. I am flexible to accommodate whatever option will be suitable for you.

Your Participation in this study is voluntary and confidential. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the research study without any consequences or explanations.

Confidentiality and anonymity of the information you provide us with such as names and personal information, will always be protected by using Pseudonyms for each participant during the transcription phase.

In participating in this research study, your permission to make audio recordings of the interview is requested. The purpose thereof is to make the transcription of data valid and authentic. The recording will be safely kept in password-protected computer devices, which only my supervisor and I will have access to.

We would also like to request your permission to use your data, confidentiality and anonymity for further research purposes, as data sets are the intellectual property of the University of South Africa. Further research may include secondary Data analysis and using the data for teaching purposes. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will be binding on future research studies.

If you have any concerns regarding the data collection procedures, please do not hesitate to contact my supervisor or me. As a participant, you will have the opportunity to access and verify the recorded views and the transcriptions of interviews, if needed. Please indicate your consent to participate by signing the form below.

Kind Regards

Tirhani Doreen Ngomane

E-mail address: 36487554@mylife.unisa.ac.za.

Contact Number: 083 414 6570

Supervisor: Dr T. Ogina

Contact Number: 00254719288098

E-mail address: Oginateresa8@gmail.com

APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM



PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORM

I understand that:

- Participation in this study is voluntary and confidential. I have the right not to answer any questions I would prefer not to.
- I have the right to withdraw at any point during the research study without any consequences or explanations.
- Confidentiality and anonymity will be guaranteed. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the participant during the transcription phase.
- No names or personal information that may identify me will be included in the research report, and my responses will remain confidential.
- The semi-structured interviews will be audio-recorded for transcription
- Permission to make audio recordings of the interview is requested. The purpose thereof is to make the transcription of data valid and authentic. The recording will be safely kept in password-protected computer devices, which only the researcher and the supervisor will have access to.
- My permission to use your data, confidentiality and anonymity for further research purposes, as data sets are the intellectual property of the University of South Africa.
- Further research may include secondary Data analysis and using the data for teaching purposes. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will be binding on future research studies.

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS



INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PRINCIPALS

TITLE	
Experiences of female school principals regarding support received from stakeholders in the Ekurhuleni Education District.	
Main Research Question	
What are the experiences of female school principals in relation to the support that they receive, and how does it affect their performance as educational leaders?	
Research Question	Interview Questions
Biographical Information	Can you tell me a little bit about yourself? For how long have you been a principal? And how many teachers do you currently lead?
a) How do principals experience the support they receive from different stakeholders?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How would you describe your experience as a female educational leader? 2. What support do you receive from the different stakeholders, such as the Department of Education (DoE), School

	<p>Management Teams (SMT), School Governing Bodies (SGB) and parents?</p> <p>3. Overall, how satisfied are you with the support you receive?</p>
<p>b) How does the support received from stakeholders influence their performance as educational leaders?</p>	<p>4. How does the support you receive influence your performance as an educational leader?</p> <p>5. How does the support you receive from the stakeholders influence the support you receive from the teachers you lead?</p> <p>6. What impact does such support have on students and their academic performance?</p>
<p>c) How do principal leaders cope with the challenges they experience in relation to the support they receive from stakeholders?</p>	<p>7. What strategies do you have in place to cope with the perceived challenges you face in relation to the support you receive from the stakeholders (i.e., the Department of Education (DoE), School Management Teams (SMT), School Governing</p>

	<p>Bodies (SGB) and parents?</p> <p>8. How do the strategies mentioned above help you in accomplishing your duties as the principal?</p> <p>9. How do these strategies help the teachers and students in their own performances?</p>
<p>d) What strategies, structures, policies, and support principals require addressing the perceived challenges that they experience in performing their role?</p>	<p>10. In the presence of challenges, what other strategies, structures, policies, and support do you require from the stakeholders?</p> <p>11. In the absence of challenges in your role, what advice would you give to your fellow principals regarding support received from the stakeholders?</p> <p>12. As a conclusion, how would you describe the relationship between your leadership and its impact on school performance?</p>
<p>Tell me what else you would like to add or share with me, something that we missed addressing?</p>	

APPENDIX G: SAMPLE OF INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

PRINCIPAL A

Interview One

School: A

Time:09h00

Researcher =R

Principal A=P

R: This interview will be conducted with the principal of Benoni Christian School, Thank you, Ms A, for making time in your busy schedule to have me conduct this interview with you.

I would like to reintroduce the objective of my research; this study focuses on exploring and answering the question surrounding the experiences of female principals regarding the support that they receive from stakeholders in the Ekurhuleni Education Districts.

I would like to begin our interview by inviting you to tell me a little about yourself:

P: I have been an educator for 27 years, of which 24 years have been a principal in two schools, one primary and the latter being a college that caters to grades RR to grade 12 and supervises eighteen educators.

R: Thank you. Going straight to our questions, would you mind sharing with me your experience as a female principal when it comes to the support you receive from the stakeholders? Describe your experience, and share the diverse types of support you receive from different stakeholders

P: I have had a wonderful time and success with two of the directors I had in the first school, where I served for many years as a principal; however, things changed when the new female owner of the school took over, and challenges arose that led me to leave the school. Where I am now, I am now I feel valued, even if we are private without benefits, I

am happy with the support I get. I had challenges with the department, which has not actioned my request, for example, I asked for speed humps and to date, we have never received the help we needed. Other than that, we have been receiving significant help from the department.

SMTs are exceptionally good, and teachers are extremely supportive. I brought most of the teachers from the previous school; therefore, the support I receive is great because we all have the same goal.

R: Overall, how happy are you with the support you receive?

P: I am happy with the support I am currently getting from the department and the school directors. The school is an independent school, and the teachers who take positions here do so for their love of education and service. I am happy with the support I am currently getting from the department and the directors.

R: How have you seen that the support influencing your performance, and that of the students, depends on the type of teachers you have in place?

P: Our teachers are motivated, and our learners are achieving the best marks.

R: How does the support you receive influence your performance as an educational leader?

P: The support we are getting helps us to reach our goals

R: How does the support you receive from the stakeholders influence the support you receive from the teachers you lead?

P: The teachers will always achieve when they are led by a leader who always demonstrates the do as I do leadership style. Our teachers are reaching their goals through seeing the support the school receive from stakeholders.

R: What impact does such support have on students and their academic performance?

P: The performance of the teachers is good because we have the right teachers.

R: What strategies do you have in place to cope with the perceived challenges you face in relation to the support you receive from the stakeholders, i.e., DoE, SMT, SGB and Parents?

P: Whenever there are challenges, the principal will first sit down with the SMT with HODs and discuss the matter, then discuss with the staff, if that fails, then they will bring in directors and then the department of education.

The parents are involved, and they continually receive communication from school via WhatsApp.

There is a school support base team that helps support students in need, the school have a feeding scheme to ensure that all kids study on a full stomach.

R: How do the strategies mentioned above help you in accomplishing your duties as the principal?

P: The more people involved in making sure learning goes well, it is to accomplish school goals. When we are together, we achieve together.

R: How do these strategies help the teachers and students in their own performances?

P: Teachers and students are doing very well.

R: In the presence of challenges, what other strategies, structures, policies, and support do you require from the Stakeholders?

P: Have the department act a little faster on requests such as humps, etc.

R: In the absence of challenges in your role, what advice would you give to your fellow principals regarding support received from the Stakeholders?

P: Be there for the right reason

Be a positive person and have feelings for the people, be thankful for what they do, and see the positive in both the teacher and the students.

Be visible/Present by visiting classes and greeting both students and teachers.

Be Part, be happy, be respectful, be humble.

R: As a conclusion, how would you describe the relationship between your leadership and its impact on school performance?

P: The success of the school depends on the teachers we have in place, and I am happy to say I headhunted most of the teachers we have in the school, so it makes it easier to work for a common goal.

APPENDIX H: SAMPLE OF DATA ANALYSIS TABLE

Figure 4.2: Summary of themes and sub-themes

Themes and Sub-Themes	Responses	Segments	Comments/Codes	Themes/ Sub themes
<p>RQ1. How do female principals' experience the support they receive from different stake holders?</p> <p>IQ 1. <i>How would you describe your experience as female educational leader?</i></p>	<p>PA "I have had a wonderful time and success with two of the directors I had in the first school, I served for many years as a principal. However, things changed when the new female owner of the school took over, challenges arose that led me to leave the school. Where I am now, I feel valued even if we are private without benefits".</p> <p>PD "I am satisfied with where I am, I believe female leaders should lead primary schools because of their mother nature in them, I can spot a sick or hungry child. I had an experience of a child who fainted after giving him food, he woke up and was okay".</p> <p>PE "Being a principal is challenging, and you must put twice the work. As a female leader, we put more detail into everything. There have been the highs and lows".</p>	<p>I have had a wonderful time and success with two of the directors I had in the first school.</p> <p>Satisfied with where I am, I believe female leaders should lead primary schools because of their mother nature in them.</p> <p>Being a principal is challenging, and you must put twice the work.</p>	<p>Wonderful time and success</p> <p>Satisfied</p> <p>Challenging</p>	<p>Theme1: The Conceptualisation of female principals experience as educational leaders. Sub-theme 1: Description of female educational leaders' experience.</p> <p>Positive experiences</p> <p>Sub-theme 1: Positive experiences</p> <p>Sub-theme 2: Negative experiences</p>

	<p>PF “Being a female principal is not easy or small. You just need to be confident, determined and trust in yourself as a person. It is not easy because when I applied for this post with other teachers who applied for the same post and were not successful, and when I got to this school, I had to deal with the same teachers and our school is so small and does not have a deputy principal, but head of departments do support our teachers”. (PF)</p>	<p>Being a female principal is not easy or small. You just need to be confident, determined and trust in yourself as a person. (PF)</p>	<p>Not easy.</p>	<p>Sub-theme 2: Negative experiences</p>
	<p>PG “My experience is that it all depends on the kind of leader/teachers you are. I am a diligent worker; I come too early to work and leave late. It has been my habit. I have joy in running Saturday schools, intervention programs, passion for interacting with learners and quality results”.</p>	<p>“It all depends on the kind of leader/teachers you are.” (PG)</p>	<p>Depends on leadership style.</p>	<p>Sub-theme 2: Positive experiences</p>
	<p>PH “The community I serve in have their minds set on the facts that female principals are not ideal leaders as compared to male principals. They think that because you’re a female you cannot do the job of a principal as compared to male principals”.</p>	<p>“Female principals viewed as being not the ideal as compared to male principals” (PH)</p>	<p>Females not so ideal as compared to male.</p>	<p>Sub-theme 2: Negative experiences</p>
	<p>PI “There’s transformation taking place in the system, we see that females are being recognised and focus is given to capacitating them”.</p>	<p>“Transformation taking place in the system, we see that females are being recognised” (PL)</p>	<p>Transformation & Female recognition.</p>	<p>Sub-theme 1: Positive experiences</p>
	<p>PJ “Females are being recognised, and focus is given to those who desire and are qualified for leadership, to be developed in their career”.</p>	<p>“Females are being recognised, and focus is given to those who desire and are qualified for leadership.” (PN)</p>	<p>Female Recognition.</p>	<p>Sub-theme 2: Negative experiences</p>

APPENDIX I: TURNITIN REPORT

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APPENDIX J: EDITOR'S REPORT

Dr Kufakunesu Zano, PhD in English.
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CERTIFICATE OF EDITING

This confirms that I edited substantively the document below, including the Reference list. The document was returned to the author with various track changes to correct errors and clarify meaning.

TITLE: Experiences of female principals regarding leadership and management support received from school stakeholders in Ekurhuleni Education District

AUTHOR: Tirhani Doreen Ngomane

Note: The edited work described here may not be identical to that submitted. The authors, at their sole discretion, have the prerogative to accept, delete, or change amendments made by the editor before submission.

DATE: 29 April 2026

EDITOR'S COMMENT

The author was advised to effect suggested corrections regarding subject-verb agreement, punctuation and overall academic writing style, to name a few.

Signature