

Exploring Sustainability in Mitigating Managerial Challenges Faced by Women Principals in Primary Schools: A Case of Rural Areas

Saltiel Khololo Collen Mataboge
University of South Africa, Muckleneuk, South Africa

Abstract

The purpose of this conceptual paper is to explore sustainability in mitigating managerial challenges faced by women principals in rural primary schools. The main research question guiding this study is: "What strategies can be employed to enhance sustainability in mitigating the managerial challenges experienced by women principals in primary schools, particularly in rural areas?" This qualitative study draws upon a comprehensive review of scholarly books and articles, serving as the foundational framework for the research. Data collection is conducted through qualitative methods aligned with the interpretive paradigm allowing for a deep exploration of the experiences and perspectives of women principals. Findings from this study highlight a multitude of challenges faced by women principals in rural primary schools including limited resources, societal expectations, and gender biases. Despite these challenges, many women principals demonstrate resilience and innovative approaches in their leadership roles. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the understanding of gender dynamics in educational leadership within rural settings, shedding light on unique challenges faced by women in these roles. Policymakers, school leaders, and aspirant deputy principals can benefit from the insights gleaned from this study. These recommendations include the need for tailored support mechanisms for women principals in rural areas, professional development opportunities focusing on leadership skills and gender equity, and policy interventions aimed at addressing systemic barriers to women's advancement in educational leadership roles. Attempts in implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can foster more inclusive and supportive environments for women principals in rural primary schools, ultimately enhancing the quality of education and leadership within these communities.

Keywords: women principals, management, leadership, challenges, rural areas, sustainability

Introduction

The authors (Young, 2023; Thelma & Chitondo, 2024) believe that in the realm of educational leadership, women principals face a myriad of ubiquitous challenges particularly in the context of primary schools which are located in deep rural areas. It is reported that progress has been achieved in promoting gender equality in educational

leadership, inconsistencies continue to exist particularly among women facing various difficulties in their managerial roles (Hilal et al., 2024). Therefore, the understanding about these obstacles is critical for the establishment of inclusive and efficacious leadership practices in rural primary schools. This research study intends to investigate the particular managerial challenges faced by female administrators in rural primary schools highlighting the intricacies of their responsibilities and the consequences for educational leadership.

Women's representation in educational leadership has steadily increased over the years, nonetheless, disparities are persistent especially in rural settlements where gender norms and traditional roles may influence perceptions of leadership (Carrasco-Santos et al., 2024). Research conducted by Al Daraai & Al Rahbi (2024) indicated that despite the increasing presence of women in leadership positions, they continue to encounter challenges such as limited access to resources, gender biases, and societal norms and expectations. However, these numerous challenges are exacerbated in rural areas where infrastructural limitations and cultural factors continuously overlap in shaping the experiences of women principals which are found to be occurring in unique ways.

Notably, Kakade et al., (2024) affirm that the role of a woman principal in rural primary schools extends beyond traditional managerial duties to encompass community engagement, resource mobilization, and advocating for the needs of both students and staff. Women in these roles navigate intricate social dynamics and often find themselves balancing multiple responsibilities amidst resource constraints (Dhakal et al., 2024). As a result, understanding the managerial challenges faced by women principals in rural areas is of pivotal importance for informing policy makers and practices that promote gender equity and achieving effective leadership in primary school education as located in rural settlements.

In the context of women principals facing managerial challenges in rural primary schools, sustainability and resilience are of paramount significance. The authors Biancardi et al., (2023) believe that sustainable practices ensure the long-term viability of interventions aimed at mitigating these challenges which will be fostering enduring improvements in educational leadership. Likewise, resilience is enabling women principals to navigate a multitude of obstacles effectively where they adapt to changing circumstances and persevere in their roles despite adversities as posed by ubiquitous pressures in the educational systems (Daouk et al., (2023). The adoption of a perspective that emphasises sustainability makes the task simpler to create customised interventions towards solving structural issues and provide an equal opportunity for women to assume positions of leadership in education. In a nutshell, Ahmad et al., (2023) emphasize that resilience empowers women principals to confront challenges with determination and innovation, ultimately contributing to the creation of inclusive and effective leadership practices in rural primary schools.

Background

The underrepresentation of women in educational leadership positions has been a longstanding matter of great concern with a reflection of the broader societal inequalities. Kuzmanic et al., (2024) found that in recent decades, there has been immense progress; however, women still constitute a minority of principals, especially in rural primary schools. On the other hand, these disparities are further pronounced in rural areas where traditional gender roles and limited access to opportunities

intersect and places constraints on women's advancement in leadership roles (Heilman et al., 2024).

Studies conducted by these scholars (Al Daraai & Al Rahbi, 2024; Watterston & Ehrich, 2024) have identified various challenges faced by women principals, including gender biases, limited access to professional development opportunities, and systemic barriers within educational systems. These challenges are compounded in rural settings, where factors such as geographic isolation, limited infrastructure, and cultural norms contribute to the marginalization of women in leadership positions. Subsequently, women principals in rural primary schools often grapple with unique impediments that require suitable support and effective relevant intervention strategies to remedy this situation (Carlock et al., 2023).

Ruan (2024) affirms that these challenges emerge from the patriarchal nature of schools as learning organizations in which the gendered nature of rural communities' influences perceptions of female leadership including their managerial effectiveness. Many rural communities do not expect women to hold high leadership positions especially in school organizations where men with similar qualifications and experiences are present. Therefore, Le Fevre et al. (2024) advice that there is a need for policy makers in education to prioritize gender sensitivity initiatives that support women leaders in rural school communities and other social institutions to enable them to excel in their roles and responsibilities as successful school leaders and managers.

These scholars (Aijaz et al., 2024; Lazaridou & Polymeropoulou, 2024) emphasise that women principals' efficiency of administrative tasks is largely hampered by limited access to technology and infrastructure in rural schools. This is because many deep rural and remote areas lack reliable mobile and internet connectivity which poses serious difficulties that require to be resolved. It is understandable that the inadequate technological resources will impede tasks like data management, communication, and resource allocation which may lead to inefficiencies and errors in school's routine activities and operations (Zamir & Wang, 2023). Thus, Bucăta & Tileagă (2024) maintain that these deficiencies continue to undermine educational initiatives' effectiveness by highlighting the critical need to improve technology access and infrastructure in rural areas so that they enhance administrative efficiency and advance educational outcomes.

Aijaz et al. (2024) found that budgetary constraints have a profound impact on resource allocation for educational initiatives especially for women principals in rural primary schools. Similarly, Ni et al.(2024) affirm that the scarcity of funding restricts the acquisition of essential resources such as teaching materials, technological devices, and professional development opportunities for teachers. Undeniably, these constraints not only affect the quality of education provided but also exacerbates existing disparities between rural and urban schools. As a result, Wilmot (2024) emphasise that students in rural areas may lack access to the necessary tools of trade, materials and the support needed to thrive academically within a conducive environment that promotes a culture of effective teaching and learning. Therefore, Massouti et al. (2024) believe that women principals should be able to resolve these budgetary challenges to ensure provision of equitable educational opportunities for all students regardless of their geographic location.

The **purpose** of this conceptual paper is to delve into the “**sustainability in mitigating managerial challenges faced by women principals in primary schools: A case of rural areas**”.

The **main research question** guiding this qualitative inquiry is: “What strategies can be employed to enhance sustainability in mitigating the managerial challenges experienced by women principals in primary schools, particularly in rural areas?”

The research objectives pertinent to this study are:

- To identify the specific managerial challenges encountered by women principals in rural primary schools.
- To explore sustainable strategies and interventions that effectively mitigate these challenges and promote equitable leadership opportunities for women in rural primary education.

Theoretical Framework

Both Gender Role Theory (GRT) and Sustainability Theory (ST) offer valuable perspectives on the challenges encountered by women primary school principals particularly those employed in rural contexts. It is of great significance that the interventions aimed at reducing gender disparities in educational leadership can be evaluated through the lens of sustainability theory which prioritizes long-lasting solutions to focus on the environmental, social, and economic factors in an equitable manner (Tavanti, 2023). By integrating sustainability principles into managerial practices, organizations can facilitate ongoing improvements in the implementation of effective leadership which promotes inclusive participation and enhance women principals to be adaptive of the changing circumstances. Sustainability Theory encourages the assessment of interventions for women principals in rural primary schools not only in terms of their immediate impact on gender equity but also in terms of their long-term viability. This involves considering how these interventions can be effectively implemented within the specific educational landscape of rural settings.

Literature Review

The Concepts of “Management” and “Leadership” and “Sustainability in Education Context

This research study sought to utilise rigorous systematic review of literature to draw insight from books and articles published in recent years to distinguish between "management" and "leadership" and "sustainability" in the context of education. This scholar (Sihombing, 2024) found that management is about the administrative duties required to maintain a school's operational activities such as budgeting, scheduling, and staff coordination. These intricate tasks and competencies are the underpinning cornerstones for the school to function efficiently and effectively to achieve the core goals of quality education (Sihawong & Phusee-orn, 2024). In contrast, leadership is attributable by the capability to inspire and motivate people and guiding them towards shared educational objectives. Effective educational leaders are those who can foster innovation and encourage collaboration that drives positive culture of change within the school community. However, Waghid (2023) reiterates that both management and leadership are indispensable for educational institutions' success; while management ensures operational smoothness, leadership drives growth and vision realization.

In rural settings, achieving a balance between management and leadership is crucial due to socioeconomic disparities and resource constraints. This balance will

ensure the establishment of effective governance while fostering inspiration and direction that are essential for navigating the challenges faced by women principals. Deep (2023) believes that sustainable practices in education management comprise of long-term solutions that not only address immediate difficulties but also foster resilience and flexibility to future situations. Hossain et al., (2024) found that supporting women in leadership positions through mentorship programs, professional development efforts, and community participation is critical importance to for foster sustainability and improving organizational efficiency. Thus, Börü (2024) suggests that women principals should be encouraged to incorporate sustainability principles into their managing and leadership roles to enhance their organisational effectiveness.

Types of Management and Leadership

Stone-Johnson et al., (2023) found that in the realm of education, management and leadership occur in various forms where each is tailored to meet the unique demands of educational institutions. One prevalent type of management is bureaucratic management which is characterized by hierarchical structures, standardized procedures, and clear delineation of roles and responsibilities (Schuster & Kanbach, 2024). In educational settings, bureaucratic management ensures efficient operations through established protocols for tasks such as curriculum development, budget allocation, and personnel management. It is worth noting that bureaucratic management can provide stability and consistency, however, this management approach may also pose deeper challenges in adapting to rapidly changing educational landscapes and fostering innovation (Lukman & Hakim, 2024).

Li et al., (2024) found that top-down management, also known as autocratic or hierarchical management, is a leadership approach where decisions and directives flow from higher levels of authority downwards to lower levels. In educational settings, this style often involves administrators or senior leadership making decisions without significant consultation or inputs from teachers or staff. Therefore, decision making processes are non-inclusive of other stakeholders. Notably, Kjellström et al., (2024) this style of management can provide clear direction and efficiency in its implementation however, top-down management may restrain creativity, innovation, and collaboration among stakeholders. It can also lead to disengagement and demotivation among staff members who feel marginalized or undervalued (Lombard & Cheryan, 2024). On the contrary, it may seem to be suitable for certain situations that require quick decision-making or in times of crisis, top-down management may not fully leverage the diverse expertise and perspectives within an educational institution.

Zelege & Ephrem (2024) support the notion that *Laissez-Faire* management entails minimal guidance from leaders, granting teachers and staff significant autonomy in decision-making processes and task oriented management. This approach encourages independence, self-direction, and creativity among educators. However, it necessitates a strong sense of self-motivation and accountability among staff members to effectively navigate their responsibilities without constant oversight (Kuhn & Frick, 2023). Similarly, Hundie & Habtewold (2024) postulate that this management approach can foster innovation and empowerment however, it may also pose challenges in maintaining consistency and alignment with organizational goals if it is executed without clear direction from leadership. Consequently, Pan (2024) asserts that this approach may seem to be suitable for environments where individuals thrive with autonomy and also requires a supportive organizational culture with robust

mechanisms for monitoring progress that ensures accountability to achieve optimal outcomes.

On the contrary, Kartika (2024) found that transformational leadership is a style that motivates individuals towards excellence which is underpinned through the cultivation of a collective vision, encouragement of innovation, and empowerment of individuals to realize their optimal potentials. This leadership approach accentuates the importance of inspiring others to embrace change, strive for excellence, and contribute significantly to shared organisational objectives. According to (Hud et al., 2024) transformational leaders achieve exceedingly by encouraging and building confidence and trust in their team members through their compelling vision. Similarly, Zhang (2024) affirm that these leaders are prepared to foster a culture of innovation and empowerment which serves to stimulate creativity and promote ownership of roles and responsibilities among individuals. In a nutshell, this approach facilitates high levels of performance and organizational success irrespective of prevalent environment factors.

Groenewald et al., (2024) found that this is an ideal leadership approach wherein leadership responsibilities and decision-making processes are distributed across different levels and roles within an educational institution. It prioritizes collaboration, teamwork, and harnessing the diverse expertise of stakeholders to enhance school performance. In the same vein, Traver-Martí et al., (2023) maintain that distributed leadership recognizes that effective leadership is not confined to a single individual or position but rather distributed throughout the organization. When stakeholders are involved at all levels, it promotes a sense of belonging, ownership and commitment to the institution's goals. This approach encourages participation and inputs from various perspectives resulting in more comprehensive and informed decision-making processes (Phillips et al., 2024). In addition, Omapas et al., (2024) believe that distributed leadership facilitates a dynamic and creates an inclusive environment that is conducive to driving continuous improvement and achieving educational excellence.

On the other hand, Shiundu (2024) affirms that ethical leadership emphasizes the importance of ethical decision-making, integrity, and moral values in guiding actions within the educational community. (Sweeting, 2023; Scheepers et al., 2023) accentuate that leaders who subscribe to this approach prioritize fairness, transparency including accountability and concurrently adhere to ethical standards that are underpinned by principles such as respect for autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence and justice. They serve as role models for ethical behavior in which they foster a culture of trust and respect among all stakeholders. Sumlin et al., (2024) argue that consistent demonstration of integrity and adherence to moral values by authority figures fosters confidence and cultivates a conducive organizational climate. Notably, their commitment to ethical conduct ensures that decisions are made in the best interest of students, staff, and the community in mind, ultimately their actions contribute to the establishment of an ethical and responsible educational environment.

Holst (2023) emphasises that both leadership and management approaches should be grounded in sustainability with the view of ensuring that decision-making considers long-term social, environmental, and financial implications. In a nutshell, Waqar et al., (2024) regard the incorporation of sustainability principles into management and leadership practices as an essential component to resolve current challenges and establishing organizational resilience.

Managerial Challenges in Rural ContextTop of Form

Gawo & Tafesse (2024) found that women principals in rural primary schools encounter formidable challenges stemming from both limited access to resources and deeply entrenched sociocultural constraints. In these settings, inadequate funding, technology, and infrastructure hamper their ability to manage schools effectively, impacting overall educational quality. Moreover, societal norms dictating gender roles often lead to resistance or discrimination against women in leadership roles. This pervasive bias can undermine their authority and effectiveness as leaders, impeding their capacity to implement meaningful change and foster inclusive learning environments (Chikwe et al., 2024). Thus, Singh (2024) maintains that women principals in rural areas must navigate a complex landscape characterized by resource scarcity and sociocultural barriers, requiring resilience, advocacy, and innovative approaches to overcome these challenges and drive positive outcomes in education.

Tran & Kelley (2024) affirm that geographic isolation in rural areas exacerbates challenges for women principals by limiting their networking opportunities critical for professional development and mentorship. This isolation hampers their ability to build support networks necessary for effective leadership. Similarly, Lingam & Lingam (2023) believe that staff recruitment and retention pose significant hurdles as rural areas often struggle to attract and retain qualified teaching staff due to various factors such as limited amenities, lower salaries, and geographic isolation. Montano (2023) holds a view that women principals find themselves grappling with these challenges which directly impact on the quality of education and overall school management. Overcoming these obstacles requires innovative strategies to foster connections, attract talent, and create supportive environments conducive to effective leadership in rural primary schools.

In rural primary schools with limited enrolment there is prevalence of multi-grade classrooms which presents a distinctive challenge for women principals including the entire teaching personnel (Fagernäs & Pelkonen, 2023; Tejeiro, 2024). These classrooms accommodate students of varying ages and abilities that necessitates tailored teaching approaches to meet their diverse learning needs. In the same vein, King (2024) found that the management of such diversity while ensuring equitable education poses a significant managerial burden for women principals. Women principals are expected to devise effective strategies to address individual student requirements for the provision of adequate support and thereby maintain a conducive learning environment for all learners. This complexity adds layers to their already demanding role which require adept organizational skills, instructional leadership empowerment and excellent collaborative efforts with teachers (Chaker & Damak, 2024). Therefore, Jatiningsih et al., (2024) suggest that in an attempt to overcome these multiple challenges, it requires women principals to embrace innovative pedagogical methods which leverage on available resources and fostering a culture of inclusivity to optimize student outcomes in rural primary schools. Concurrently, the empowerment of women principals remains pivotal to enhance their leadership roles and foster conducive educational environments for effective teaching and learning (Esoy et al., 2024).

Managerial challenges related to rural areas are exacerbated by factors such as limited resources, deep rural areas, and various needs of the community (Ohta et al., 2024). Recently conducted studies emphasizes the importance of resolving these challenges through sustainable practices that encourage rural organizations' long-term

existence and resilience (Nair et al., 2024). Similarly, these challenges frequently manifest as difficulties in attracting and retaining competent staff members, insufficient infrastructure, and managing complex relationships with the community (Blackmore et al., 2024). However, sustainable solutions such as establishing local partnerships and using technology for efficient resource management are of the utmost importance (Ammirato et al., 2023). Thus, it is imperative to integrate sustainability principles into rural management practices to overcome current challenges, but also it improves the general well-being and sustainability of rural communities.

Strategies in the Mitigation of the Challenges

The empowerment of women principals in rural areas requires specialised capacity-building activities that focus on skills in leadership, management skills, and creative approaches to education. Shaked (2024) believes that women principals are able to cultivate the necessary expertise in instructional leadership, curriculum development, and school improvement strategies through focused workshops and training sessions with the facilitation of personal advancement and foster beneficial transformations within educational institutions and surrounding communities. Lv et al., (2024) found that improving the quality of education in rural primary schools can be accomplished by providing additional resources towards professional development to rural women principals. According to Hodedatov et al, (2024) these efforts will be able to help them to overcome multiple challenges which may impede their strides in the improvement within their professions and ultimately bring the envisaged support to their students.

In their concerted effort to the alleviation pertaining to the resource constraints faced by women principals in rural primary schools, it is crucial to develop robust resource mobilization strategies aimed at addressing infrastructure deficits and securing funding for essential components like technology, classroom materials, and staff development programs (Hampton et al., 2024). Concurrently, women principals are expected to foster partnerships and collaboration with government agencies, NGOs, businesses, and educational institutions that can be instrumental in leveraging additional resources, the needed scarce expertise, and other significant support services. Mansour et al., (2024) maintain that these partnerships can facilitate access to vital resources such as mental health counselling, special education resources, and community outreach programs that are tailored to the specific needs of rural schools. In a nutshell, Sun & Xu, (2024) hold a view that the implementation and the expansion of access to customized support services enables female principals to adeptly address the diverse needs of students and staff, thereby enhancing their capacity to administer schools and advocate for positive educational outcomes in rural areas.

Concerted efforts in the mitigation of rural community challenges require initiatives that must adhere to sustainable principles. Recent literature highlights beneficial techniques and practices that promotes community participation and capacity-building in organisations including drives towards effectiveness (Choi, 2023). In the same vein, sustainable management which includes amongst others rural developmental programmes and support based training sessions to women in leadership could yield resilience and ensure quality outcomes (Hossain et al., 2024). Therefore, there is a need to implement the sustainable principles which will enable women principals in rural communities to effectively resolve work related difficulties while fostering resilience and prosperity.

Method

This is a qualitative study which comprised of literature review as a research method. A systematic literature review was conducted drawing evidence based on books and articles published in recent year sources. To explore our knowledge and understanding about the managerial challenges faced by women principals in primary schools: a case of rural areas Minerbo & Briton (2022) elucidate that integrative literature review is a form of research that reviews, critiques, and synthesises representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new perspectives on the topic are generated. An integrative literature review is a special kind of systematic literature review that permits the combination and synthesis of findings. In the analysis of the reviewed books and articles in understanding the topic, the interpretivist paradigm was used within a local context with its limitations that have deep social and cultural foundations (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2023). The reflections are based on the researcher's subjective perspectives about the topic.

Data Collection

A systematic literature review was conducted drawing evidence which is based on books and articles published in recent year (2023 -2024) sources.

Data Analysis

In the analysis of the reviewed books and articles in understanding the topic, "Managerial Challenges Faced by Women Principals in Primary Schools: A Case of Rural Areas" the interpretivist paradigm was used within a local context with its limitations that have deep social and cultural foundations (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2023). The reflections are based on the researcher's subjective perspectives about the topic under discussion.

Curriculum Transformation

Curriculum transformation for empowering women principals in rural primary schools should prioritize inclusive education, gender-sensitive pedagogy, and leadership development. This entails integrating modules on gender equality, women's leadership, and community engagement into existing curricula. Emphasizing practical strategies for fostering inclusive environments and addressing gender disparities in educational outcomes is essential. Additionally, incorporating case studies and role-playing exercises can facilitate understanding and application of gender-responsive leadership practices. Such curriculum transformation aims to equip women principals with the tools to overcome managerial challenges and promote equitable education in rural settings.

The Millenium Development Goal

The Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 3 aims to promote gender equality and empower women with a focus on eliminating gender disparity in education and increasing women's representation in leadership roles including as principals in primary education. Hossain et al., (2024) found that this goal recognizes the importance

of education in empowering women and the need to address the challenges they face in leadership positions.

Undoubtedly, concerted efforts to eliminate gender disparity in primary education must yield significant progress in this regard. However, despite strides in educational access women remain noticeably underrepresented in senior official or managerial roles within the education sector. The issue of disparity extends beyond education to political realms where there has been a global increase in women's political representation though gender parity remains an elusive process (Carter, 2024). Progress in addressing gender disparities in education and leadership notwithstanding a systemic obstacle persists in achieving equitable representation and empowerment for women across diverse sectors thereby impeding the realization of genuine gender equality and inclusive governance.

There is a need for policymakers and stakeholders to collaborate and overcome these impediments by ensuring that justice and support prevail for women in educational leadership roles in order to resolve challenges faced by women principals including unhealthy gender disparities (Tamadoni et al., 2024).

Sustainability in Education

In conclusion, sustainability in education plays a pivotal role in fostering enduring success and resilience within educational frameworks. (Hossain et al., 2024; Peras, 2024) highlight the importance of integrating sustainability principles into educational methodologies to mitigate contemporary challenges and equip forthcoming leadership and management generations with the requisite global environmental and social responsibilities. By embedding sustainability across curriculum development, school administration, and community engagement, educational institutions can cultivate environmentally aware citizens who are equipped with the knowledge and skills to navigate complex issues with resilience and on sustainable basis (Ryan & Ferreira, 2024). Ultimately, a steadfast dedication to sustainability in education not only safeguards the welfare of current and future generations but also fosters a more equitable and caring diversified conscious communities in rural settings.

Conclusion

This study points to the intricate challenges encountered by women principals in rural primary schools with an emphasis on the need for a multifaceted approach to support their leadership roles. The research also points out that women principals continue to encounter significant impediments which includes societal norms, structural limitations, and inadequate resources and professional development opportunities, notwithstanding strides in achieving gender equality (Dako-Gyeke et al., 2024). Notably, Eyana et al., (2024) suggest that the challenges faced by women principals in rural primary schools comprises of a lack of trust, insufficient resources, and resistance from stakeholders which also are compounded by entrenched cultural biases and personal responsibilities that significantly hamper their capacity to accomplish their obligatory duties effectively and efficiently.

Recommendations

Garrison (2024) suggests that resolving the managerial challenges encountered by female principals in rural primary schools ought to include the implementation of relevant mentorship programmes to offer guidance and support in resource allocation, avoiding disparities, and incorporating diversity training to tackle deeply embedded biases. The measures seek to empower women principals to establish inclusive environments and optimise the effectiveness of educational leadership in deep rural areas with inadequate resources and underdeveloped infrastructure. In the same vein, Tamadoni et al., (2024) emphasize the need for policymakers and stakeholders to collaborate and overcome these impediments by ensuring that justice, guidance and support prevail for women in educational leadership roles in order to resolve challenges faced by women principals including unhealthy gender disparities within rural settings.

There is a need to empower women principals in rural areas through sustainable leadership practices that are underpinned by sustainable principles such as collaboration and partnerships, equity and social justice including systems thinking which are crucial for fostering inclusive educational environments. Ryan & Ferreira (2024) emphasise that the support and empowerment of women leaders to enhance organizational effectiveness and community engagement is of paramount importance.

References

- Aijaz, U., Lodhi, K. S., Shamim, M. A., & Mughal, S. (2024). Economics of education and digital learning for human capital development in Pakistan: A critical review, *Qulantic Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(1), 217–234 <https://doi.org/10.55737/qjss.349367331>.
- Al Daraai, S. B., & Al Rahbi, N. (2024). Enhancing women's participation in environmental leadership: Challenges, solutions, and opportunities. In K. Kankaew, S. Chaudhary, S. Widtayakornbundit (Ed.), *Contemporary Management and Global leadership for sustainability* (pp. 39-55). IGI Global.
- Ammirato, S., Felicetti, A. M., Linzalone, R., Corvello, V., & Kumar, S. (2023). Still our most important asset: A systematic review on human resource management in the midst of the fourth industrial revolution. *Journal of Innovation & Knowledge*, 8(3), 100403. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jik.2023.100403>
- Asmorowati, S., & Schubert, V. (2024). Leveraging international education to advance women's leadership: reflections of Indonesian alumnae of their Australian education experiences. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2024.2307875>.
- Ayyildiz, P., & Banoglu, K. (2024). The leaky pipeline: where 'exactly' are these leakages for women leaders in higher education? *School Leadership & Management*, 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2024.2323731>.
- Blackmore, J., Hobbs, L., & Rowlands, J. (2024). Aspiring teachers, financial incentives, and principals' recruitment practices in hard-to-staff schools. *Journal of Education Policy*, 39(2), 233-252. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2023.2193170>.
- Bucăța, G., & Tileagă, C. (2024). *Land Forces Academy Review*, 29(1), 20-37. <https://doi.org/10.2478/raft-2024-0003>.
- Carlock, K., Nygaard, M. A., & Ormiston, H. E. (2023). School principals' perceived barriers and facilitators to the normalization of school-based mental health

- services: A multimethod investigation. *School Mental Health*, 15(3), 940-954. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-023-09597-8>.
- Carrasco-Santos, M. J., Seyfi, S., Hosseini, S., Hall, C. M., Mohajer, B., Almeida-García, F., & Macías, R. C. (2024). Breaking boundaries: Exploring gendered challenges and advancing equality for Iranian women careers in tourism. *Tourism Management*, 103, 104913. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2024.104913>.
- Carter, P. L. (2024). Unrealized integration in education, sociology, and society. *American Sociological Review*, 89(1), 6-30. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00031224231217711>.
- Chaker, B., & Damak, C. (2024). Navigating tomorrow: Strategies for effective workforce reskilling. In: Oytun Meçik: *Reskilling the Workforce for Technological Advancement* (pp. 62-81). IGI Global.
- Chikwe, C. F., Eneh, N. E., & Akpuokwe, C. U. (2024). Navigating the double bind: Strategies for women leaders in overcoming stereotypes and leadership biases. *GSC Advanced Research and Reviews*, 18(03), 159-172. <https://doi.org/10.30574/gscarr.2024.18.3.0103>.
- Choi, S. (2023). Distributed leadership promotes teacher self-efficacy in multicultural classrooms through school capacity building: A multilevel SEM approach using US teaching and learning international survey. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 59(4), 811-844. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X231189196>.
- Dako-Gyeke, M., Hervie, V. M., Abbey, E., Mort, K. S. T., & Kodom, R. B. (2024). Sustainable Development Goals, In Androff, D., & Damani, J. (Ed.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Social Development, Social Work, and the Sustainable Development Goals* (pp. 199-213). Routledge.
- Dhakai, S., Lummis, G. W., & Jones, A. (2024). Continuous professional development strategies of Nepali secondary principals: navigating challenges in changing times. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220620.2023.2298322>.
- Esoy, J. L. E., Kilaton, L. J., Tan, J. M. B., Batonghinog, N. A., & Alonsabe, O. A. (2024). Relationship of leadership style and teachers' commitment in higher education institutions (HEIs). *European Journal of Science, Innovation and Technology*, 4(1), 375-392. <https://www.ejsit-journal.com/index.php/ejsit/article/view/389>.
- Eyana, J. A., Muring, C. E., & Bauyot, M. M. (2024). Supervisory roles of school heads in public stand-alone senior high school: A phenomenological case study. *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies*, 50(2), 95-120. <https://doi.org/10.9734/ajess/2024/v50i21263>.
- Garrison, S. M., Webster, E. E., & Good, R. (2024). Advancing diversity in behavior genetics: Strategies for incorporating undergraduates into student-driven research. *Behavior Genetics*, 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10519-023-10172-9>.
- Gawo, G., & Tafesse, M. (2024). The involvement of marginalized Menja society children in primary education: A case study of the Bench Sheko Zone, Ethiopia. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 9, 100782. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2023.100782>.
- Groenewald, E., Groenewald, C. A., Dela Cruz, R. A., Uy, F., Kilag, O. K., & Villaver, Jr, M. (2024). Navigating educational leadership: Challenges, styles, and impacts – A systematic review. *International Multidisciplinary Journal of Research for Innovation, Sustainability, and Excellence (IMJRIS)*, 1(2), 262-267. <https://risejournals.org/index.php/imjrise/article/view/142>.

- Hampton, M., O'Hara, S., & Gearin, E. (2024). Assessing restorative community development frameworks-A meso-level and micro-level integrated approach. *Sustainability*, 16(5), 2061; <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16052061>
- Heilman, M. E., Caleo, S., & Manzi, F. (2024). Women at work: pathways from gender stereotypes to gender bias and discrimination. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 11, 165-192.<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-110721-034105>.
- Hilal, Y. Y., Mifsud, D., & Hammad, W. (2024). Female educational leadership in the Arab world: a systematic review of published research literature. *International Journal of Leadership Education*, 1- 29 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2024.2316655>.
- Horan, B. Y. (2024). *An Exploratory Study on Leadership Organizational Behaviors: Unifying Corporate Social Responsibility, Decision-Making Perceptions, and Employee and Stakeholder Engagement Levels in the Utility Industry to Make Meaning* (Doctoral dissertation, The Chicago School of Professional Psychology).
- Hodedatov, S., Avidov-Ungar, O., & Hayak, M. (2024). The integration of digital games in elementary schools: The principals' point of view. *Education and Information Technologies*, 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-024-12568-4>.
- Hossain, Md. S., Hosen, M., Pek, C.-K., & Loh, Y. F. (2024). Exploring contemporary challenges and prospective solutions for women's empowerment: Does women's empowerment impact achieving sustainable development goal five? *Business Strategy & Development*, 7(1), e355. <https://doi.org/10.1002/bsd2.355>.
- Hud, N. H., Arham, A. F., & Muhamad Hanapiyah, Z. (2024). Successful leadership styles from the lense of qualitative perspective: A conceptual visit. *Information Management and Business Review*, 16(1), 116-123. [https://doi.org/10.22610/imbr.v16i1\(I\).3667](https://doi.org/10.22610/imbr.v16i1(I).3667).
- Hundie, Z. A., & Habtewold, E. M. (2024). The effect of transformational, transactional, and Laissez-Faire leadership styles on employees' level of performance: The case of hospital in Oromia Region, Ethiopia. *Journal of Healthcare Leadership*, 67-82. <https://doi.org/10.2147/JHL.S450077>.
- Jatiningsih, O., Kotten, N. B., & Martasandy, B. (2024). The strategic role of education services to realize gender equality in Indonesia. *International Journal of Society Reviews*, 3, 620-629.
- Kakade, K. S., Kulkarni, A. M., & Naik, K. R. (2024). The role of women leadership in environmental management. In , R.C., & Malar Justin, M.S.(Eds.), *Opportunities and Challenges for Women Leaders in Environmental Management* (pp. 31-49). doi: 10.4018/978-1-6684-5986-7.ch003
- Kartika, N. D. (2024). The influence of transformational leadership on nurses' performances in Indonesia. *American Journal of Physical Education and Health Science*, 2(1), 11-16. <https://doi.org/10.54536/ajpehs.v2i1.2502>.
- King, B., Simpson, C. E., Rose, S. M., Farhangi, S., & Wood, K. E. (2024). Sharing the work: Using diversity advocates to develop inclusive excellence. *Innovative Higher Education*, 1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10755-024-09702-y>.
- Kjellström, S., Sarre, S., & Masterson, D. (2024). The complexity of leadership in coproduction practices: a guiding framework based on a systematic literature review. *BMC Health Services Research*, 24(1), 2-16. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-024-10549-4>.
- Kuhn, T., & Frick, N. (2023). *The E Suite: Empathetic Leadership for the Next Generation of Executives*. Greenleaf Book Group.

- Kuzmanic, D., Valenzuela, J. P., Montecinos, C., Allende, C., & Vanni, X. (2024). What happens next? Unravelling career trajectories after becoming a principal in Chile's primary schools. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2024>.
- Lazaridou, A., Polymeropoulou, V. (2024). School principals as agents on the path to the digitization of Greek schools: Lessons learned from the pandemic. In Kafa, A., Eteokleous, N. (Eds.), *The power of technology in school leadership during COVID-19. Studies in educational leadership*, 26, Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51575-0_6
- Le Fevre, D. M., Meng, C., & Foreman-Brown, G. (2024). Navigating senior leadership in higher education: a case study of women in Cambodia. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2023>.
- Li, J., Xiong, C., & Huang, Y. (2024). How the river chief system achieved river pollution control: Analysis based on AGIL Paradigm. *Sustainability*, 16(5), 1775. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16051775>.
- Lombard, E. J., & Cheryan, S. (2024). Does my work matter? Reduced sense of mattering as a source of gender disparities. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 18(1), e12907. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spc3.12907>.
- Lukman, S., & Hakim, A. (2024). Agile governance, digital transformation, and citizen satisfaction moderated by political stability in Indonesia's socio-political landscape. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, 11(1), 210-228. <https://doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/2001>.
- Lv, B., Zhou, D., Rong, Z., Tian, X., & Wang, J. (2024). Effects of professional development program on primary science teachers' ICT use in China: mediation effects of science teachers' knowledge, beliefs and instructional practice. *Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Science Education Research*, 6(1), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s43031-024-00099-4>.
- Mansour R, Abdel-Razeq H, Al-Hussaini M, Shamieh O, Al-Ibraheem A, Al-Omari A, Mansour AH. (2024). Systemic barriers to optimal cancer care in resource-limited countries: Jordanian healthcare as an Example. *International Journal of Cancers*, 16(6), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.3390/cancers16061117>
- Massouti A, Al-Rashaida, M, Alhosani, M. A (2024). Qualitative study on Dubai's inclusive education policy from school leaders' perspectives, *Sustainability*, 16(3), 12-52. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su16031252>.
- Montano, M. D. L. N. V. (2023). A comprehensive approach to the impact of job stress on women in the teaching profession. *Rehabilitacion Interdisciplinaria [Journal of Interdisciplinary Rehabilitation]*, 3(56), 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.56294/ri202356>.
- J Nair, A., Manohar, S., & Mittal, A. (2024). Reconfiguration and transformation for resilience: building service organizations towards sustainability. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 1-25. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSM-04-2023-0144>.
- Ni, Y., Li, B., Su, Y., & Xia, J. (2024). Unveiling leadership priorities: a comparative study of principal time use across high school types, *Journal of Educational Administration*, 62 (2), 255-273. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-05-2023-0118>.
- Ohta, R., Yakabe, T., & Sano, C. (2024). Addressing health challenges in rural Japan: a thematic analysis of social isolation and community solutions. *BMC Primary Care*, 25(1), 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12875-024-02266-y>.
- Omapas, M. L., Parinasan, M. A., Ben, L., Peñero, R., & Quiñanola, K. J. (2024). The Impact and challenges of school-based decision-making on educational outcomes. *International Multidisciplinary Journal of Research for Innovation*,

- Sustainability, and Excellence (IMJRISSE)*, 1(3),39-44. <https://risejournals.org/index.php/imjrise/article/view/173>.
- Pan, F. (2024). Enhancing student's language learning autonomy: Student-centered approaches in the classroom. *Transactions on Social Science, Education and Humanities Research* 4,74-80. <https://doi.org/10.62051/v3988j29>.
- Peras, C. (2024). Navigating linguistic challenges: Strategies for minimizing barriers in English Language communication. *International Multidisciplinary Journal of Research for Innovation, Sustainability, and Excellence (IMJRISSE)*, 1(2),71-76. <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5103-2884>.
- Phillips, D., Bhojedat, J., Phillips, S., Henry, C., & Stewart-Fox, T. (2024) Exploring the readiness of schools for distributed leadership: Perspectives of private school teachers in Guyana. *Creative Education*, 15,249-277 <https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2024.152015>.
- Rhinesmith, E., Anglum, J. C., Park, A., & Burrola, A. (2023). Recruiting and retaining teachers in rural schools: A systematic review of the literature. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 98(4), 347-363. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2023.2238491>
- Scheepers, J., Christopher, L., & Harrison, S. (2023). Ethical imperatives in community engagement. *African Journal of Higher Education Community Engagement*, 1(1),1-19. <https://journal.ru.ac.za/index.php/AJHECE/article/view/2479>.
- Schuster, A. S., & Kanbach, D. K. (2024). Power and organizations: how organization types link to power relationships - a state of the field. *International Studies of Management & Organization*,1-23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00208825.2024.2307202>.
- Shaked, H. (2024). Enabling factors of instructional leadership in subject coordinators, *Journal of Educational Administration*, 62(2),239-254. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-09-2023-0223>.
- Shiundu, T., W. (2024). Ethical leadership and its implication on decision-making in organizations: A literature review. *Journal of Human Resource & Leadership*, 8(1), 59-67. <https://doi.org/10.53819/81018102t30131>.
- Sihawong, U., & Phusee-orn, S. (2024). Developing a model to enhance junior high school teacher 21st century learning management competencies. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 13(1), 101-110. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v13n1p101>.
- Sihombing, D. J. C. (2024). Optimizing administrative efficiency in education departments: a knowledge management approach. *Journal Info Sains: Informatika Dan Sains*, 14(01), 864 - 874. <https://ejournal.seaninstitute.or.id/index.php/InfoSains/article/view/4118>.
- Singh, R. B. (2024). *Challenges and coping strategies of teaching English in an under-resourced context: A narrative inquiry* (Doctoral dissertation, Kathmandu University School of Education). <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14301/351>.
- Stone-Johnson, C., Hubbard, L., Resultan, B., & Steilen, K. (2023). Responsible school leadership: Exploring role expansion in crisis and beyond. *Journal of School Leadership*, 33(5), 472-490. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10526846231174149>.
- Sumlin, C., De Oliveira, M.J.J., Conde, R., & Green, K.W. (2024). Do the management process and organizational behavior modification enhance an ethical environment and organizational trust in the U.S. and Brazil?", *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOA-11-2023-4072>.
- Sun, Y., & Xu, X. (Eds.). (2024). The development of personal learning environments in higher education: Promoting culturally responsive teaching and learner autonomy. Taylor & Francis.

- Sweeting, K. D. (2023). Executive orders: Mandating inclusion in the federal workplace: Insights from Federal executive departments' strategic plans. *Public Personnel Management*, 52(4), 590-623. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00910260231187542>.
- Tamadoni, A., Hosseingholizadeh, R., & Bellibaş, M. Ş. (2024). A systematic review of key contextual challenges facing school principals: Research-informed coping solutions. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 52(1), 116-150. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17411432211061439>
- Tejeiro, F. (2024). Distributed leadership and inclusive schools. *International Journal of Educational Leadership and Management*, 12(1), 36-56. <https://doi.org/10.17583/ijelm.10997>.
- Tran, H., & Kelley, C. (2024). Planning for talent needs: Recruitment and retention. In Rose M. Ylimaki and Michelle D. Young. (Ed.), *Strategic Human Resources Management in Schools* (pp. 77-110). Routledge.
- Thelma, C. C., & Chitondo, (2024). Leadership for sustainable development in Africa: A comprehensive perspective. *International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews*, 5(2), 2395-2410.
- Traver-Martí, J. A., Ballesteros-Velázquez, B., Beldarrain, N. O., & Maiquez, M. del C. C. (2023). Leading the curriculum towards social change: Distributed leadership and the inclusive school. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 51(3), 554-574. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143221991849>.
- Waghid, F. (2023). Crisis, changed leadership, change management and educational technology. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 37(4), 1-19. <https://doi/full/10.20853/37-4-6011>.
- Watterston, B., & Ehrich, L. C. (2024). Women's leadership development is everybody's business: if not now, when? *School Leadership & Management*, 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2023.2299942>
- Wilmot, AM. (2024). Rural school leadership and digital technologies: Understandings, applications, challenges, and solutions. In Kafa, A., Eteokleous, N. (Eds.), *The power of technology in school leadership during COVID-19*. 77-104. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-51575-0_5.
- Young, A. D. (2023). Courageous school leadership: Rural principals' perception and self-efficacy in implementing culturally responsive leadership (CRL). (Doctoral dissertation, Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, GA. Educational Leadership for Learning). https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/educleaddoc_etd/44.
- Zamir, S., & Wang, Z. (2023). Uncovering Covid-19, distance learning, and educational inequality in rural areas of Pakistan and China: a situational analysis method. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 10(1), 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-02025-x>.
- Zhang, Y. (2024). Cultivating a culture of innovation: The impact of leadership style on employee well-being and organizational creativity. *International Journal of Global Economics and Management*, 2(1), 202-210. <https://doi.org/10.62051/ijgem.v2n1.26>.

All correspondence related to this paper should be addressed to DR Saltiel Khololo Collen Mataboge ORCID:0000-0001-7805-9123, University of South Africa, Muckleneuk, South Africa E-mail: Ematabsk@unisa.ac.za