

**THE LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT
GEOGRAPHIES IN THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF
WOMEN EDUCATIONAL LEADERS IN THE PUBLIC
SECONDARY EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF
MAURITIUS – A NARRATIVE INQUIRY**

by

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A thesis submitted in the fulfilment of the Academic Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in the

Faculty of Education

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Durban, South Africa

OCTOBER 2021

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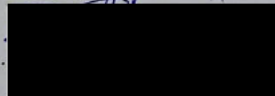
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
DECLARATION

I, **Bye Salim ALIRAJA**, declare that:

- i) The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work.
- ii) This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
- iii) This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information unless expressly acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
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Signed:



 October 2021

SUPERVISORS' APPROVAL FOR SUBMISSION

This dissertation is submitted with/without our approval.

PROFESSOR PHOLOHO MOROJELE

DR. FAWZIA BIBI NAROD

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the Name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate. All praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds; and peace be upon Muhammad (S.A.W.), His servant and last Messenger. I am sure that this work would have never become possible without His will and divine guidance.

I owe a deep debt of gratitude to the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal and the Mauritius Institute of Education for allowing me to complete this PhD work and to Professor Michael Samuel and Dr Hylene Mariyae for their constant support, motivation, constantly pushing the limit...

I wish to express my thanks to my project supervisors, Professor Pholoho Morojele and Dr Fawzia Narod, for their encouragement, positive criticisms, constructive guidance throughout the research seminars and duration of the PhD journey and the writing of this thesis. I would also like to thank Dr Fawzia, who has always guided and advised me concerning my studies from the secondary to the doctoral level.

I am grateful to the women research participants for giving me their precious time to conduct the interviews, without whom the research would not have been possible.

I want to express my deepest thanks to my parents-in-law for their kind support and help, especially for looking after and taking care of my daughter while I concentrated on my research work. Thank you, my adorable darling Lubna Maria, for displaying maturity beyond your age in accepting that your dad had to study and could not always share his time with you.

My thanks also go to dearest my friends: Adjani, Dev, Husna, Irshaad and Nursiah, who, in one way or the other, have helped and supported me during the research work and writing up of this thesis.

Last but not least, I would like to express my indebtedness to my elder brothers and sisters who have contributed to the path I have followed, and especially to my late father Mamode Assim Aliraja and my late mother Bibi Sabeyrah Busropun-Aliraja, who always inspired me to pursue my higher studies. May Allah give them Jannah.

PREAMBLE

My autobiographical narrative

I am a Muslim Mauritian man born at Sebastopol in the district of Flacq in Mauritius. My schooling began in the early eighties, and I schooled in educational institutions modelled on the British Colonial System.

I grew up in a nuclear family with my parents, eight elder brothers and two elder sisters and our upbringing was suffused in traditional Indian Muslim values and culture. I came from a very secure home environment and shared a loving relationship with my parents and siblings. My emotional and affiliate experiences were developed from a young age because the conditions within my family promoted my development.

My father was educated only to the level of Primary Education and received a pass certificate from the Church of England, United Kingdom, and he attended the Madrassah, the Islamic school, after school hours in the afternoons. My mother unfortunately did not attend school or the Madrassah, since education was reserved only for the males of the family in those days, some 80 years back. My parents were involved in backyard gardening, land cultivation, the rearing of cows and goats, and hawker-type jobs, selling whatever surplus was being grown, as well as household and kitchen utensils. Nevertheless, both my parents placed great emphasis on educating all their children. Therefore, the capabilities and motivation for education was developed in me from a young age and continued to grow till later in life. However, the external conditions within the schools I attended lacked the resources that a well-equipped school should provide for its learners. The lack of resources did not constrain my love for knowledge because I persevered with my studies and planned a career to be a medical doctor. Unfortunately, due to limited financial resources, I was constrained to follow a bachelor of honours degree in Chemistry at the only local university. I received a scholarship in 2002 to read for an MPhil/PhD degree in Environmental Science in China. I got a divine intuition that I might lose my father while studying in China and would not get the opportunity to attend the burial ceremony. Therefore, I declined the scholarship offer and opted to study for my Master's degree in Mauritius through governmental financial aid. In the middle of the first semester of my first year of study, on an early Monday morning, while the "rhou" – my father's soul was about to leave the body, my father advised me to study well and to continue studying as the sky is the limit. After completing my Master's degree, I obtained another

scholarship from the French government to read for a Professional Master-degree in Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Management, which I completed successfully.

My parents' passion for learning inspired me, I mean artisanal learning and applied it to earn their livings. So, it was a natural journey for me to follow in my parents' footsteps and go the extra mile in academic education. I looked upon them as my role models and aspired to be like them: industrious, not to say "bricoleurs" – an all-rounder handyman and hard-working individual who loved to impart and create knowledge. Like some of the women educational leaders in my study, my parents were my mentors, especially my mother. They mentored and guided me to lead a productive life. They gave me the freedom to develop into the type of person I am today; an independent man capable of standing on his own feet having an entrepreneurial spirit in doing things. After gaining some lived-life and professional experiences, I started questioning how my mother with eleven children, who had never been to school, had been able to overcome so many obstacles and managed to set up a family business - what had been her pathways and what strategies she had employed to become a woman leader and manager in the broader sense. This is part of what motivated me to study women educational leaders since I am a secondary school educator. Hence, I opted to study women educational leaders' lived experiences for convenience purposes.

Like the woman educational leaders in my study, I was also seduced into school leadership and management as I thought that leadership and management would offer me so much more than the routine I had as an educator. I willingly accepted the Head of Department (HoD) post when the opportunity was presented to me. What was so seductive about this leadership and management position? It willingly embraced me and promised me the opportunity to express myself creatively in a formal leadership and management position. It offered me the freedom to introduce new ideas and guide teachers in the department to accept the changes in the Mauritian educational system. Therefore, I offered no resistance as I was being seduced into a middle management and leadership position at school.

Through my practice, I learnt that the role of the head of the department was multidimensional because it involved managing the curriculum, managing people and managing the classroom as a teacher. The role entailed managing the knowledge, skills and abilities of the teachers in my team. I also had to manage the knowledge, skills and abilities of the learners. As a middle manager, I was being managed and lead by my woman rector. In addition, I was also entrusted with other

informal leadership and management roles such as the Chairperson for School Events and the Eco-School Committees. I was not trained for this role, but I slipped into it with ease. I was able to be the manager and leader because of the aptitudes I had developed over the years. The capability to form relationships, feel compassion and a sense of responsibility for my colleagues and learners, to be ethical in my practices and to anticipate likely outcomes of collective actions were some of the capabilities I learned and developed through my life experiences. Therefore, my leadership and management aptitudes were closely related to my competencies, which I understood as my management capabilities.

My experiences within this middle management tier of school leadership, under the leadership of a woman rector, led me to become curious about the development of women educational leaders. I wanted to understand how women educational leaders practised their roles within the changing educational climate, what capabilities enabled their management functioning, and how women educational leaders developed their leadership and management capabilities. These questions pushed me in the direction of my study to understand the development of capabilities in women in their roles as educational leaders within a transforming secondary educational context, especially when hit by global challenges like COVID-19 pandemic and Ukraine-Russia War 2022.

DEDICATIONS

*...Dedicated to my late dad, Mamode Assim Aliraja and
late mum, Bibi Sabeyrah Busropun-Aliraja...*

My parents, whose blessed presence in the initial stages of my tertiary education journey led me to where I have reached today ...

We parted ways all too soon, and you left us broken-hearted.

You will always live on in my heart and thoughts.

To you, I dedicate this work to which you are inextricably linked.

*My Duas for you will always be... "Rabbir Hamhuma kama Rabbayani Saghira" -
"My Lord! Bestow on them Your mercy, as they did bring me up when I was small".
(Quran 17:24).*

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AD – Assistant Director

BEC – Bureau d’Education Catholique

COVID-19 - novel COrona Virus Infectious Disease, first identified in December 2019

CTO – Chief Technical Officer

DR – Deputy Rector

IVTB – Industrial and Vocational Training Board

MES – Mauritius Educational Statistics

MIE – Mauritius Institute of Education

MITD – Mauritius Institute of Training and Development

MLP – Mauritius Labour Party, also known as PTr – Partie Travailleiste

MMM – Movement Militant Mauricien

MOE – Ministry of Education

MSM – Movement Socialist Mauricien

PSC – Public Service Commission

SC – State College, also known as the National College

SFG – Socio-constructionism, Feminist and Gender

SM – Statistics Mauritius

SSS – State Secondary School, also known as a regional secondary school

UNDP – United Nations Development Programme

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

UoM – University of Mauritius

UTM – University Technology (Mauritius)

ZADM – Zone Administrator

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ABSTRACT

The leadership and management geographies in the lived experiences of women educational leaders in the public secondary educational system of Mauritius – A narrative inquiry.

The study aims to explore and understand how three women educational leaders made their way to attain and sustain in leadership and management positions, in the male-dominated leadership spaces of the public secondary educational system, using narratives of their life experiences. On the one hand, the challenges lie in feminist emancipation and navigating the gendered socio-economic and cultural challenges. On the other hand, policymakers have not been taking enough action to facilitate and promote the professional access of women into leadership spaces, *although legislations are present.*

Locating this study in the qualitative interpretive paradigm, three purposively sampled women participants, each having different cultural and ethnic backgrounds and living in urban and rural regions (eastern, central and western) of Mauritius, were interviewed. Through the narrative inquiry method, they storied their life-history biographical experiences revealing their sadnesses and traumas, achievements and joys, tensions and emotions, dilemmas, challenges and coping strategies.

Since this study had women educational leaders as participants, I created and used a Socio-Feminist and Gender (SFG) conceptual framework derived from leadership, feminism, *gender and socio-constructionism theoretical constructs.* The SFG framework allowed for the exploration of the participants ascending into educational leadership *and management* positions in male-dominated leadership *and management* spaces. It also provided the analytical framing to understand any specificity about women's leadership and their leadership practices and any changing relationships in home and family settings and organisations due to their positions as women educational leaders. The SFG conceptual framework also attempts to uncover the challenges and strategies adopted by women educational leaders to be sustained in leadership spaces.

In the descriptive analysis phase, the generation of data, guided by the research questions and the SFG conceptual framework, produced three main themes that became the categories for the narrative analysis method used in this study.

Through the analysis of the narrative method, the ultimate core findings of the research showed that the women participants had used a multitude of resources such as **Family** and patriarchy; **Religion** and spirituality; social **Adversities**; ethnic and political **Contexts**; and **Gender** and power dynamics (**FRACEG**) to emerge as leaders.

In addition, the findings also revealed that these resources were instrumental in shaping the women participants' career-path into leadership **and management** spaces. They also sculptured the leadership **and management** characteristics needed for them to navigate through the male-dominated **leadership and management** spaces of the secondary educational system.

The results demonstrate that the experiences acquired by the women-participants tend to enhance their leadership **and management** capabilities significantly. These women developed their leadership **and management** skills by practising disciplines, taking on more projects, learning to follow, developing situational awareness, inspiring others, staying attuned with learning, resolving conflicts, and by being discerning listeners. In addition, they undertook to use their abilities to deal resourcefully with unusual problems, together with the persistent efforts and perseverance that has shaped their personalities.

Hence, the overall findings showed that the participants as women educational leaders rely on multi-combinations and permutations of leadership **and management** styles for different challenges at different times and places, including the use of improvisation, within all the complexities of leadership **and management**. This I have termed as “Feminine Quantum Leadership”, a theoretical construct using the construct and metaphor of Quantum Chemistry. Simultaneously, the women participants embraced the art of self-creative diplomacy (a feminine characteristic) by struggling with the challenges faced (feminist emancipation), leading to a new feminist leadership approach which I have called “Diplo-Poiesis Feminist Leadership”. These findings add valuable insights into the discourses of socio-constructionism, feminism, genderism and leadership in education and society.

Last but not least, the benefits of leadership and management are extensively reported as being highly effective and productive. There is consensus that leadership and management can be regarded as a mechanism that facilitates women's transition from a lower to a higher hierarchy within the gendered social context. The contribution of this research intends to emancipate women more to attain leadership and management positions in society. The women participants, as role models, contribute to the emancipation of the feminine gender and social justice in different spaces and landscapes. Therefore, this study shows the geographies of leadership and management of women educational leaders in the public secondary educational system.

Keywords: geographies, leaders, women, educational, society, cultural, ethnic, hierarchy, gender, experiences, narrative inquiry, feminist geography, resources, complexity, quantum, leadership, diplomacy, feminism.

CHAPTER 1: THE LANDSCAPE, DRIVE AND OPPORTUNITY OF THE RESEARCH

1.1 Introduction

Globally, the general view is that the teaching profession is being debated as feminised, be it in the primary, secondary or tertiary sector, because of the outnumbering of the women's population compared to their male counterparts in the teaching workforce (Kelleher et al., 2011; Schmude & Jackisch, 2019). However, the number of women educators or lecturers entering different leadership and management positions (departmental head, faculty head, school head or principalship) within the organisations where they work or at the broader level of the educational sector (Zone Administrator, Zone Director, Curriculum Director, Managing Director, Chief Executive Officer, College Dean, Vice-Chancellor) remains meagre (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2019).

When women are acceding the educational leadership and management professions, I am of the opinion that they are affected by the spatial positions and climate encompassing social, cultural, political and other factors fostering or struggling with their leadership practices. For years, several studies have been conducted on women in leadership roles. Some examples are of this are found in the following papers: Female secondary school principals - equity in the development of professional identities (Murakami & Tornsen, 2017); Characteristics of public and private elementary and secondary school principals in the United States (Bitterman, Goldring & Gray, 2013); Women and Educational Leadership (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011); Gender and educational leadership in England: A comparison of secondary head teachers' views over time (Coleman, 2007); Women into educational leadership and management: International differences (Cubillo & Brown, 2003); The female secondary head teacher in England and Wales: Leadership and management styles (Coleman, 2000); Troubling women, Feminism, Leadership and Educational Change (Blackmore, 1989). However, the different spaces or strata of leadership hierarchies involving women educational leaders have not been researched sufficiently on how women educational leaders [aspiring to next level of leadership](#), deal with and sustain their roles in the different leadership [and management](#) spaces.

This study explores the resources, [pushing factors](#) and strategies deployed by women entering different leadership positions, which remain male-dominated spaces, in the secondary education sector. Therefore, this research creates an opening to undertake a study which illuminates women's lived experiences in choosing their career path and how they grapple with the challenges in the socio-economical and culturally-gendered spaces. These factors and other potential factors are viewed within the framing of the socio-feminist and gender conceptual framework, derived from socio-constructionism as a significant theoretical framework, coupled with feminism and genderism, [which are explained in further details in Chapter 3](#).

This chapter conveys information to guide readers to grasp the essence of [the study](#) and what the research entails. First, women leaders in the international context and the local setting of Mauritius are presented. This is followed by the background to the research, its rationale and the research purpose of [the study](#). The research questions in line with the research objectives are formulated. The theoretical and methodological frameworks of the study are presented, where an effort has been made to identify the beneficiaries of the research study. Finally, the chapter concludes with a presentation of the structure of the whole dissertation.

1.2 Women in the world of work

The entering of women into the world of work dates back to the Industrial Revolution in Britain in the eighteenth century (Burnette, 2008). Their roles and responsibilities became increasingly important during the periods of civil and world wars. Consequently, they have become a resource of planned economies which are used when the need arises (Alabani, 2011).

The role of women at work fluctuated then depending on the political, social and economic tensions with plans of modernisation (Taylor, 2017). Since then, discrimination between men and women concerning wages and treatment, for example, started appearing (Al-Gabsi & Al-Malhof, 1998). With time, other forms of discrimination and challenges appeared in accessing different opportunities for women. Religious beliefs, patriarchal socialisation and cultural practices, and economic development have caused women to be demotivated and hampered by family traditions, societal norms, and organisational standards when attempting to access leadership positions in most countries. The levels of the challenges vary from country to country (Fagenson, 1990a).

As observed by Hofstädter-Thalmann et al. (2018), the global phenomenon of women in leadership roles, which are male-dominated spaces, cuts across all segments of society. It is evident that a significant share of the women's working population does not secure the top leadership seats (Thornton, 2019). Although the statistics show that women consist of up to 43% of the world's working population (Catalyst, 2019), it has been appraised that women occupy just 29% of the senior management positions worldwide (Thornton, 2016, 2019). A figure which calls for reflection in this so-called egalitarian and democratic era.

Generally, on the spectrum, the status of women has experienced many phases, beginning with liberty, then equality (Al-Bozide, 2006) and today, autonomy. However, women's emancipation is still continuing, and if so, in which direction? This study attempts to unpack any new knowledge in this struggle of feminism and genderism to reach leadership positions in the secondary educational system.

1.3 The background of the research study

The paucity of women in leadership positions is predisposed by factors that are found within societies, institutions and individuals (Kossek & Buzzanell, 2018). Regardless of the almost gender parity of the population globally, as reported by Ritchie and Roser (2019), the number of women in leadership and senior leadership positions remains sparse worldwide (Kossek & Buzzanell, 2018). According to The World Bank (2020) and Catalyst's (2021) reported figures, the world labour force in 2019 consisted of about 39% women, and only 29% of them assumed leadership positions.

Despite women being qualified for leadership roles, women are still fronting challenges and judgement to get into different leadership and management opportunities (Groeneveld, Bakker & Schmidt, 2020; Lips, 2020). Religious beliefs, patriarchal socialization, economic status, cultural practices and political adherence are sources of marginalization for women, together with oppression by individuals, organisations and society in many parts of the world and the echelons of these differ from country to country (Mbepera, 2015; Oden, 2020; Elias, 2020; Deel, 2020). Due to the erroneous use of these social factors to the detriment of women internationally, different measures are in place to address the challenges, barriers, and glass ceilings in order to provide opportunities for the personal and professional development of women, and ultimately, enhance

the count of women in leadership. For example, the United Nations Charter on Human Rights emphasises gender equality and equality in accessing services and law (United Nations, 1948); the Beijing Declaration demands gender equality and the empowerment of women (United Nations Women, 1995); Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development endorses the principle of “Leaving No-one Behind” and calls for the empowerment and advancement of women in decision-making processes, as well as access to power (International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2017). Despite adherence to these international protocols, country-wise statistics show that women still face challenges in accessing decision-making and leadership podiums which remain male-dominated positions in all sectors (Ritchie & Roser, 2019; Catalyst, 2020; Groeneveld, Bakker & Schmidt, 2020; Lips, 2020).

This research study centres on the secondary educational system in which women are under-represented in senior leadership positions globally, even though women form the majority in the system (Del Baldo, Tiron-Tudor & Faragalla, 2019; O’Connor, 2019; Sanchez & Thornton, 2010).

Table 1 below illustrates the trend of women’s under-representation in leadership roles in secondary [educational](#) systems, both in emerging and advanced countries. Although there are high percentages of women teachers in the secondary educational system, the percentage of women in secondary education leadership positions remains low.

Table 1: The trend in women’s under-representation in leadership roles in secondary educational systems in emerging and advanced countries

Country	Percentage of Female teachers in the secondary educational system	Percentage of Female in leadership positions in the secondary educational system	Sources
Afghanistan	36	21	Barekazi (2014)
Bangladesh	26	11	Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics [BANBEIS], (2016).
India	43	35	Mythili (2017); Trading Economics (2020)
South Africa	68	36	Dauids (2018)
United Arab Emirates	68	51	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2019)
UK	61	26	Jerrim & Sims (2019)
France	59	32	Jerrim & Sims (2019)
USA	63	26	Robinson, Shakeshaft, Grogan & Newcomb (2017)
Cyprus	75	50	OECD (2019)

In Mauritius, the secondary educational system faces a similar situation where female teachers are more than male teachers by 26.84%, but only an average of 30.03% of the female teachers occupy leadership and management positions as school heads, administrators and directors at Zone levels and the headquarter of the public secondary educational system (Ministry of Education, 2017). Further details are provided in sub-section 1.4.3.3. Consequently, having women in leadership roles have significant implications for the secondary educational system and in the Small Island Developing States.

The challenges of glass ceilings and socio-cultural and political barriers facing women appear to be ongoing in various parts of the world (Smith, Caputi & Crittenden, 2012; Zaiya, 2016). The search for knowledge regarding women in the leadership arena seems to have been neglected, or has been conducted more often than not according to a male perspective (Fine, 2009). Therefore, these studies which tend to neglect women and their experiences remain a partial study.

Accordingly, this is likely to cause the social structure to suffer from not being able to use all its resources, which involves both genders (Wardle & Gay y Blasco, 2011). Therefore, pushing the educational leadership and management spaces through the socio-constructionist theory blended with feminist and gender perspectives, this study proposes an alternative to the high proportion of literature in educational leadership and management that are male-centred and offers new insights from a small island state's perspective.

1.4 Putting the research in the local context

1.4.1 The geographic context of the study

Mauritius is located in the south-west Indian Ocean, at longitude 57° east and latitude 20° south. It is approximately 2,000km off the east coast of Africa and some 855km east of Madagascar. Mauritius has a land area of about 1,864 km², surrounded by fringing coral reefs (GMIS, 2018a). Figure 1 below shows the geographical location of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean.

Mauritius became a sovereign nation within the Commonwealth and Francophonie on 12th March 1968 and a Republic on 12th March 1992 (Hazareesing, 1984; Hazareesing & Addison, 1999). The independence was gained not because of a civil war or political war, but rather because the British colonial power no longer saw any potential exploitation of the island since the island had no natural or mineral resources (Le Comte, 2004). Mauritius was left on its own with a sugar cane cultivation that was not sure of its fate in the international market prevailing at that time and a highly uneducated population (Alladin, 1993).



Figure 1: The geographical location of Mauritius in the Indian Ocean
(Source: GMIS, 2018b)

Mauritius' capital city is Port Louis, situated in the northwest of the island. Other towns are Rose-Hill and Beau-Bassin, Curepipe, Vacoas, Phoenix, Quatre Bornes. Mauritius is divided into nine districts namely: Port Louis, Pamplemousses, Riviere du Rampart, Flacq, Moka, Plain Wilhems, Grand Port, Savanne and Black River as located in Figure 2 below. Port Louis and Plain Wilhems are urban districts that house major economic and technological developments, while the rest are rural districts.

contributes substantially to the limited literature within the contest of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS)¹ as well.

Economic growth has led to fundamental social changes within the island state. There is now much greater mobility in Mauritian society than there was 20 years ago. Parents entertain higher ambitions for their children, and economic progress has increased in the range of jobs and occupations on offer. New enterprises and businesses seem less concerned with ethnic origin in their hiring policies and much keener on academic and technical qualifications. As a result, young people generally feel justified in entertaining higher aspirations than their parents did in the previous generation. Yet, the accession of women to higher leadership positions remains inadequate (Gender Links, 2018).

Mauritius is a Small Island Developing State, where a diversity of religions and cultures exist in harmony with permeating influences between the Asian migrants and ex-slave descendants who were leftover by the ex-colonial powers of Europe (Portuguese, Dutch, French and British) (Hazareesing, 1984; Hazareesing & Addison, 1999). Today, Mauritius, a rainbow nation, consists of Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Chinese, Creole, White and European descendants, all living in harmony and peace without any system of legalised residential segregation or ethnic zone partitioning. However, an attempt to change this was made by the British colonial power before independence (Alladin, 1993). However, the people's mobility has reached all regions of the island. Today, all communities live side by side with each other without any cultural or ethnic conflicts (Hazareesing & Addison, 1999). Mauritius entered the 21st century as an unbeaten Small Island Developing State, relying on its diversity of human capital. However, in the employment sectors, the various socio-cultural factors and ethnicities still influence the recruitment and promotion of individuals in leadership positions in the public and private sectors (Transparency Mauritius, 2017).

Moreover, Murtadha and Watts (2005) declare that, historically, [women teachers](#) have overcome barriers such as social constructions, lack of resources, and being qualified teachers, to create schools or to join schools as teachers that are of service to the community. At present, only a few

¹ "SIDS are low-lying coastal countries that tend to share similar sustainable development challenges, including small but rising populations, inadequate resources, remoteness, vulnerability to natural disasters, vulnerability to external shocks, excessive dependence on international trade, and fragile environments" (Karamanidou, 2017).

women have taken the lead to be in educational leadership [and management](#) positions in the public and private sectors or have been able to create their own private primary and secondary schools and be their own boss, [although there is a growing population of female teachers as compared to male teachers](#) (PSEA Report, 2017).

Leadership [and management](#) research studies deriving from large country blocks such as Europe, the United States, Africa, the Middle East and Asia are substantial, but studies on women and their working lives in other cultural-mix contexts, like in SIDS, have been given little attention (Omair, 2008, 2010; Karamanidou, 2017). As such, Javidan and Carl (2005) and Lin (2018) cross-examine the universality of leadership concepts across cultures, political regimes and geographical locations, especially leadership and gendered practices. Hence, the research is, to some degree, inclined by the analyses raised by Javidan and Carl (2005), Oplatka (2006), Kyriacou-Savva (2013) and Karamanidou (2017) on the necessity of exploring further study in emerging countries which are SIDS, like Mauritius, regarding women and leadership to address the prevailing gap.

1.4.3 The leadership context of women in Mauritius

1.4.3.1 Women in decision-making positions

Women continue to be under-represented in the decision-making positions in the Government Cabinet and Local Government Councils since independence in 1968. The share of women among cabinet ministers was 8.7% in 2018 (three out of 24 Ministers) (Government Information Service, 2018). In 2018, out of the five municipalities, only one had a [woman as a mayor](#) (Ministry of Local Government, 2018).

There has been a tendency to campaign through publicity “the first woman president, the first woman speaker, the first woman vice-chancellor” as a piece of political music only good for the public ears (Gender Links, 2018). Astonishingly, the Government of Mauritius has not yet signed the Protocol on Gender and Development (SADC Gender and Development Monitor, 2018, p. 61). The Government of Mauritius in 2009, through the Secretary to Foreign Affairs, stated “the Protocol provides for positive discrimination which is not in line with the Constitution of Mauritius. The Mauritian government is still examining how to address this legal constraint and how special provisions can be added for Mauritius” (Kampilipili, 2018). Nonetheless, the Equal Opportunity Act 2008 of Mauritius condemns all forms of discrimination, with the Equal

Opportunities Commission and the Equal Opportunity Tribunal established in 2012. However, behind the official documents promoting women empowerment and advancement in leadership, on the ground, certain governmental and organisational actions are contrary to what has been publicised.

1.4.3.2 The proportion of women holding higher cadre positions in the public sector

There has been an increase in the proportion of women holding senior positions in government services from 19.8% in 1997 to 36.6% in 2017. A proportion, which is still quite low for women representation in leadership positions compared to the women intake at the bottom-line level in different public sectors.

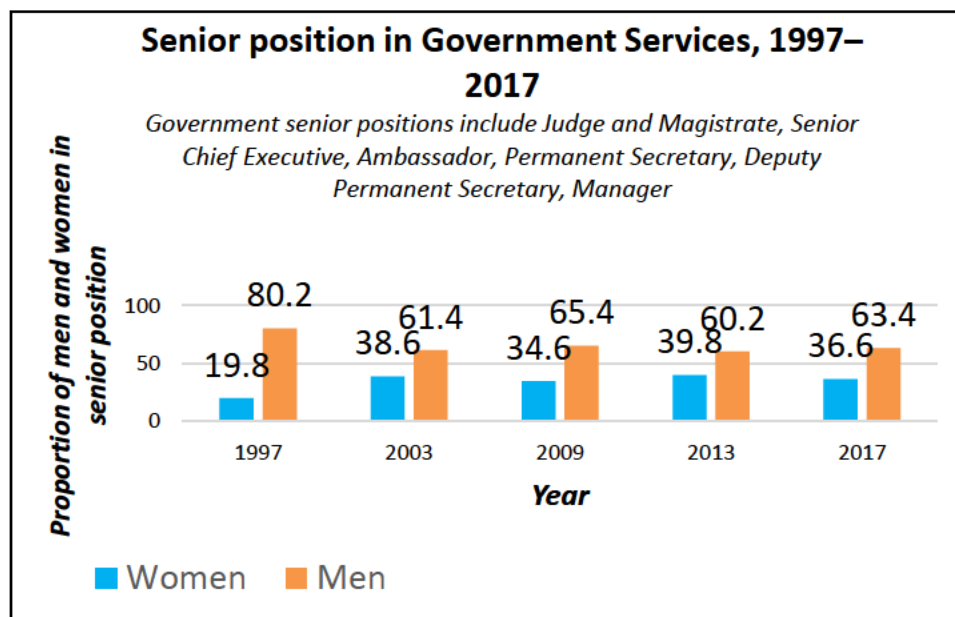


Figure 3: Percentage of women and men occupying senior positions in the different public sectors
(Source: Ministry of Labour and Employment - Gender Employment Statistics of 2017)

1.4.3.3 Population of women in the public secondary educational sector

Table 2: The number and percentage of women occupying different positions in the career-path of the public educational sector compared to men for the period 1985 to 2017

Leadership from “outside” school	Positions	1984		2007		2010		2017	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Leadership from “outside” school	Administrator/ Ass. Director/Director/ Chief Technical Officer	5	0	28	2	30	5	23	12
		100%	0.00%	93.3%	6.67%	85.71%	14.29%	65.71%	34.29%
Leadership from “inside” school	Deputy Rector/Rector	20	2	54	8	76	19	91	35
			9.09%		12.90%		20.00%		27.78%
	Educator *(also refers to teacher – teacher appellation has changed since PRB report 2012).	685	261	800	700	1287	1988	1114	2413
		72.21%	27.59%	53.33%	46.67%	39.30%	60.70%	31.58%	68.42%

(Source: Ministry of Education, 2017 - data compiled from Educational Statistics Division)

The above table shows that the educational leadership positions in the public sector have always been dominated by the male presence even though [women educators](#)² outnumbered males between the years 2007 and 2010. It is evident that public secondary schools are being “feminised” year after year, according to the baseline recruitment trends. However, the “inside” school leadership

² Educator is also referred to teacher. The Pay Research Bureau of Mauritius changed the appellation of the post of teacher into educator, which apart from teaching has the role of educational counsellor.

positions and leadership positions “outside” the school structure of the public secondary educational system remain male-dominated spaces.

Worldwide, similar patterns of women under-representation in leadership positions have been noted in the primary, secondary and tertiary education sectors, as well as other non-educational sectors (Alabani, 2011; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; [Hernandez Jr, 2017](#); [Avgeri, 2015](#); [Mejiuni, 2019](#); [Holmes & Mayhew, 2016](#)).

1.4.4 The organisational structure of the secondary educational system

In Mauritius, around 29% of the public secondary educational system has women leaders which include deputy rectors/rectors, administrators, assistant directors and directors (Statistics Mauritius, 2017). These leadership positions have been male-dominated in throughout the educational sector. Figure 4 below offers an overview of the organisational structure of the public secondary educational system in the Ministry of Education, and Figure 5 gives a similar structure of a private grant-aided secondary educational system of the [Service Diocésain de l’Education Catholique \(SeDEC\)](#) previously known as Bureau d’Education Catholique of Mauritius.

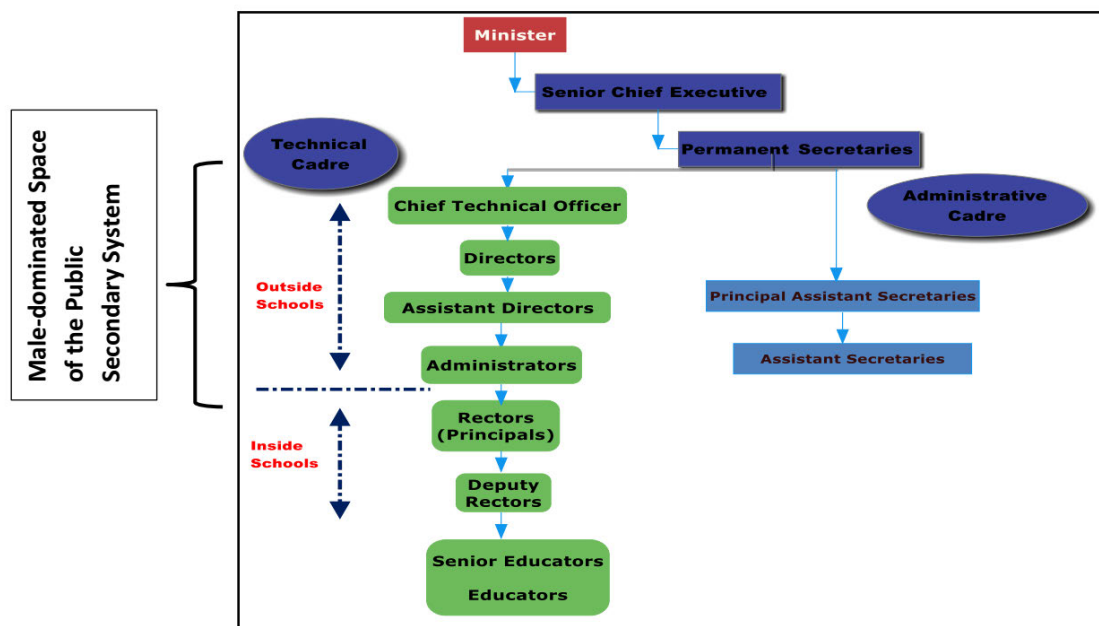


Figure 4: The organisational structure of the public secondary educational system (Technical Cadre) in the Ministry of Education

Since educational reform took place in Mauritius in 2000, there has been an increase in the number of secondary schools from 22 to 62, with massive recruitments of educators, of which 68.42% are

women (Ministry of Education Statistical Report, 2017). Nevertheless, very few women educators have been able to enter leadership and management positions. From the level of Deputy Rectors/Rectors to Chief Technical Officers, this has always been a male-dominated space (Statistics Mauritius, 2017). It has only been during the last eight years that a few women have been able to step into the gender-biased leadership positions of the public secondary educational system in Mauritius. Worldwide, this trend of women being under-represented in leadership and management positions has also been noted. This is supported by studies on leaderships that have included women only in the past decade (Brown & Irby, 1993; Bruegman, 1995; Papalewis, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1995; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Avgeri, 2015; Holmes & Mayhew, 2016; Hernandez Jr, 2017; Mejiuni, 2019).

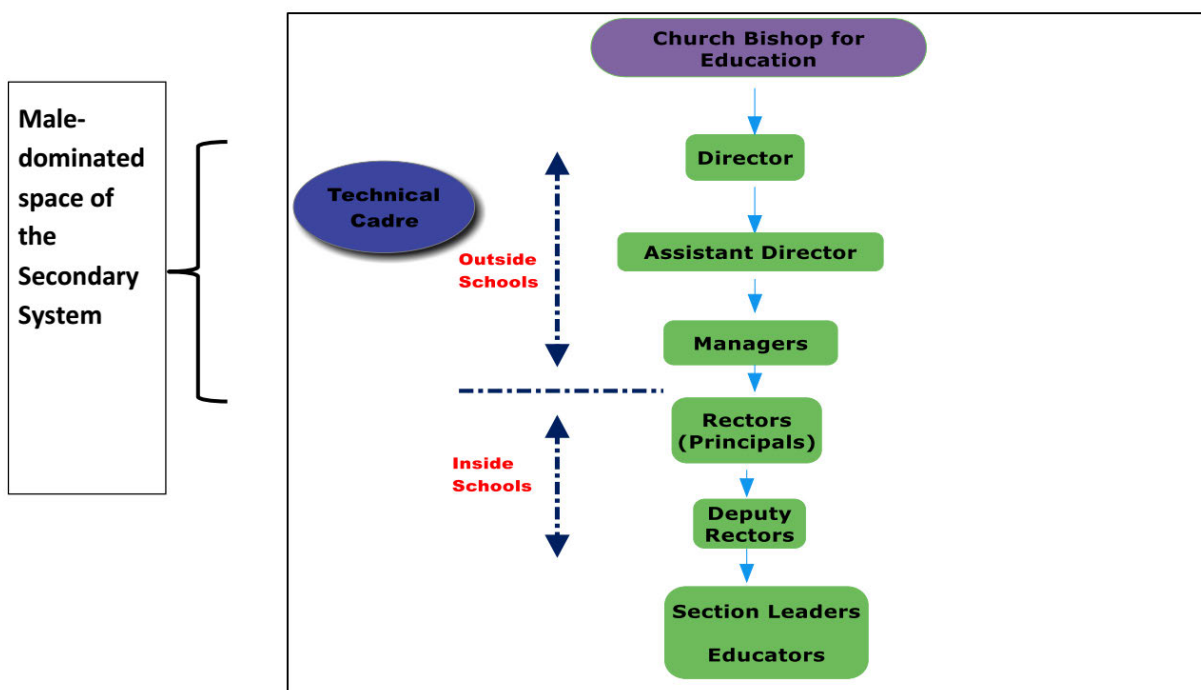


Figure 5: The organisational structure of a private grant-aided secondary educational system (Technical Cadre) of the Service Diocésain de l'Éducation Catholique (SeDEC).

The Service Diocésain de l'Éducation Catholique (SeDEC) previously known as Bureau d'Éducation Catholique (BEC) is a foremost private partner of the Ministry of Education, catering for around 35000 children and youth in the free education system. The SeDEC is responsible for the education services of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Port Louis. The SeDEC system coordinates the administration of the catholic secondary schools.

Similar to the public secondary educational system of the Ministry of Education, in the SeDEC system, the leadership and management positions have been male-dominated for the 160 years of its existence since the French and the British colonisations of Mauritius. It is only during the last ten years that some women have been able to step into the patriarchal leadership spaces (Bureau d'Education Catholique Annual Report, 2016)). However, in the private and grant-aided secondary educational system under the prevue of Islamic and Hindu cultures, the senior leadership positions continue to be male-centred. It would have been academically, socio-economically and politically interesting to do comparative study of women in leadership and management between the different secondary educational system. However, owing to limited research time, limited number of women in the “inside” and the “outside” of the secondary educational system and other research limitation factors, the focus of this study is only on women in the educational leadership and management positions in the public secondary educational system.

1.5 Research Problem

In the public secondary education system of Mauritius, women are over-represented in the classroom (68.42% in the year 2017) and under-represented in leadership and management positions (27.78% “inside” school system and 34.29% “outside” school system in the year 2017) as evidenced from Table 2 of the Educational Statistics of Mauritius. “When men are oppressed, it’s a tragedy. When women are oppressed, it’s a tradition,” as provocatively said by Bernadette Mosala (cited in Little, 2021). Although significant numbers of women in previously male-dominated professions such as police forces, law, government administration-cadres, engineering and medicine, women secondary educators have yet to gain parity in educational leadership and management. Kim and Brunner (2009) found that although women have similar career ambitions as men, they do not partake the equal opportunities in the job promotion processes (p. 76).

Most educational leadership and management scholars mention gender theories as the source for the significant number of men in secondary educational leadership (Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan, & Ballenger, 2014; Kowalski, McCord, Peterson, Young, & Ellerson, 2011). Nevertheless, gender theories may not be the complete answer. Women hold the same credentials, are similarly proficient, and hold more advanced degrees than their male colleagues (Feistritz, et al., 2011; Kowalski, 2006; Shakeshaft et al., 2007). Therefore, it is time for researchers in the field to ask women educational leaders about their objectives, explanations, practices, choices,

experiences, and insights into why there is an under-representation of women in public secondary educational leadership and management spaces.

The leadership and management field has been researched extensively, but women in secondary educational leadership, from the stepping-stone to the top secondary educational leadership, have not been equally considered. Researchers have evaluated the leadership styles or approaches, but not the feminist, institutional or social perspectives for the underrepresentation of women educational leaders in the public secondary educational leadership system. Moreover, leadership researchers have not considered the geographic, socio-economic and cultural context of Mauritius, a small island developing state with multi-ethnicities, cultures and languages. There is a gap in the literature concerning public secondary educational leaders' perceptions and understanding of the challenges, opportunities, lived experiences, and ambitions of being in secondary educational leadership spaces, which are male-dominated.

1.5.1 The purpose of the research

The purpose of this research study is to explore the **experiences** that Mauritian women educational leaders face on their journey to educational leadership in the **secondary educational system**. The study further intends to understand the ways through which these women have succeeded in the traditionally different male-dominated leadership spaces. **In Mauritius, many** quantitative studies have been done on leadership styles, including leadership approaches, the practice of leadership concepts and their impact on educators. Other quantitative researches have focused on the perceptions of rectors or principals in state-owned and privately-owned secondary schools and critical analysis of the role of the educational leaders (Byrd, 2008). **However, not much research has been done using qualitative approaches in the field of educational leadership and management in the Mauritian context. Henceforth, little** is known about the dynamics that contribute to women's resilience amid the pressures they face through the process of obtaining educational leadership positions in male-dominated spaces bounded by socio-cultural and political factors.

1.5.2 Theoretical context of the research

According to Voelkle, Brose, Schmiedek and Lindenberg (2014), a theoretical context is a grouping of interrelated theories that are thematically structured and guided by a set of research questions addressing the research purpose. While I was engaged with the research process, I worked on specific themes in order to keep on track within my area of research. This prevented me from becoming obsessive about the large amounts of information and diverging from the boundaries of the research topic.

Given the research [purpose](#), this study seeks to understand how some women succeed in acceding to secondary educational leadership positions, their roles as educational leaders, despite the multiple experiences. [The leadership and management geographies are explored using a narrative inquiry approach in the qualitative paradigm.](#) Through an examination based on [socio-constructionism, feminism and genderism theoretical frameworks](#), this study seeks to explore the women's career-path experiences and their navigation in the different educational leadership spaces of the public secondary educational system and what feminist interpretations can be derived thereof. [I collected stories from three women educational leader-participants regarding their biographical life experiences on their journeys to the different leadership and management positions in the public secondary educational system.](#) As the women participants were telling their narratives, the challenges and strategies were epitomised. Through their gestures and voices, the women expressed and demonstrated the subtleties and complexities that impacted their lives on the road to educational leadership.

The insight of this research's theoretical context is founded on social constructionism, through which the principal emphasis is to capture the understandings that human beings' behaviours of sighting things are caused by relationships (Harré, 2002). By working with women educational leaders as participants, the study was informed by the sociology of feminism, feminist geography and a feminine leadership approach, which believes that women leaders' voices also deserve to be heard, whether working with male or female colleagues, and even if their husbands occupy leadership positions at work.

1.5.3 Methodological context of the research

In its expedition to explore and understand the leadership and [management geographies](#) of women educational leaders in the secondary schooling sector, this study used a life-history approach

within the narrative inquiry method. This study makes a methodological contribution to the investigation of gender socialisation, gender performativity and feminist interpretation in the qualitative and the interpretive paradigms.

While doing three semi-structured interviews on different days, I was able to collect rich data by listening attentively to the participants belonging to different ethnic and socio-cultural milieu, living in urban and rural areas, and by cross-examining them in their narratives. I chose this inquiry method for data gathering as it allowed me to understand the geographies of leadership in the different leadership spaces and places in the secondary education sector of Mauritius.

Therefore, this research investigates the lives of women leaders in the secondary educational system using narratives from their minor ages to adulthood, including their professional years, so that the secret of their achievement could be depicted. In conjunction with probing the challenges women secondary educational leaders face on their route to leadership, and during their occupancy of leadership, this research goes further and examines the bases of these women's accomplishments in achieving leadership and conquering challenges that emanate from such leadership practices.

1.6 Aim and Objectives of the study

The study aims to explore and understand how women educational leaders made their way to attain and sustain in leadership and management positions, in the male-dominated leadership spaces in the public secondary educational system.

Internationally, some researchers (Bronars, 2015; Mbpera, 2015; Fuller 2017; Düzgün, Metresh, Pozdnyakova, Grafkova & Kalita, 2021) have observed that women educational leaders are underrepresented in secondary education. Extending this observation to the Mauritian landscape, the first objective of this study was to map the lived experiences of women educational leaders in the public secondary educational system of Mauritius. The second objective sought to explore the career-paths of the women educational leaders to the different leadership and management positions in the public secondary educational system. The third objective sought to explore the leadership patterns adopted in male-dominated leadership spaces by women educational leaders participating in this study.

1.6.1 Research questions

The main objective of the research is to develop a feminist leadership model that depicts the leadership sustainability of women educational leaders from the leadership and management geographies of the public secondary educational system of Mauritius.

The following research questions and sub-research questions were used in this study.

Research questions	Sub- research questions
RQ 1: What are the lived experiences of women educational leaders in the public secondary educational system of Mauritius?	1.1 What factors have shaped the lived experiences of women educational leaders? 1.2 How have these factors influenced the leadership experiences of the women educational leaders?
RQ2: How the career-path of women educational leaders evolved in the different leadership and management spaces in the public secondary educational system?	2.1 How have women entered into the leadership space which is male dominated? 2.2 Is the path to educational leadership structured, a conscious career move or ad hoc/improvisational? 2.3 What are the challenges/barriers women educational leaders face on their way to leadership positions? 2.4 What are the motivations/opportunities women educational leaders receive on their way to leadership positions? 2.5 What strategies/tactics do women educational leaders adopt during their journey to leadership positions?
RQ3: What leadership patterns do women educational leaders adopt in this study?	3.1 What leadership theory predominates among women leaders? 3.2 How do the life experiences of female educational leaders determine their leadership style? 3.4 How may a re-theorising of women leadership practices contribute to the existing literature on leadership?

1.7 The significance of the study

Until the present, there has been no research on the path to and leadership experiences of women educational leaders in Mauritius. Only a few researchers such as Ramesh and Subrun (2020),

Chukowry (2018), Kausmaully (2005), Ramful (2017), Gungapersad (2018) and Ah-Teck (2011) have conducted studies on secondary education in Mauritius. However, they tend to focus on issues such as teachers' leadership styles and learners' achievements (Chukowry, 2018; Gungapersad, 2018), rectors' leadership styles and school performance (Ramful, 2017; Kausmaully, 2005; Ramesh & Subrun, 2020), and principals' quality management in secondary schools (Ah-Teck, 2011).

The current research study aims to fill the gap in the academic work on secondary education in Mauritius in the quest to contribute to the knowledge about women leaders' narratives in the secondary education system. [The goal is to link the gap in the existing frame of academic knowledge by exploring the life-history experiences, competences, strategies, influences of gender and politico-socio-cultural context in the leadership and management geographies of Mauritian women leaders in the secondary educational system to lead with empathy and success.](#)

Regoniel (2015, p. 2) advises that:

“Write the significance of the study by looking into the general contribution of your study, such as its importance to society as a whole, then proceed downwards... towards its contribution to individuals, and that may include yourself as a researcher.”

In my opinion, the outcome of this research is likely to benefit and influence leadership practitioners and academics, policymakers, women leaders in general and Mauritian women leaders particularly, as well as aspiring women leaders and myself, the researcher.

1.7.1 For leadership practitioners and academics

This study has a direct bearing for leadership practitioners and contributes to academia, especially to those who pursue the study of women leaders. The women participants' narratives are a significant learning paradigm as the participants' voices reveal a great deal about the challenges, motivations, achievements, obstacles, enabling factors, communications and emotions that women leaders face in their path to leadership roles and in sustaining those leadership positions. Hearing unswervingly from these women leaders challenges the notion that leadership can only be learnt and practiced from male leaders' perspectives (Radu, Deaconu & Frasinianu, 2017). Therefore, the findings from this research can be used as a way to explore further the leadership spaces for women in other fields or sectors.

1.7.2 For policymakers

This [study](#) also has implications on the policy and practice of gender equality, not only in educational leadership, but also in all entities of the public and private sectors. The narratives of the women shed light on the power dynamic and tension that can exist in gender-power relations in leadership roles, be it at home or the workplace, and as such, new guidelines need to be set to sustain a healthy role between genders, irrespective of who is leading, for the betterment of our social and professional institutions.

1.7.3 For women educational leaders

The constructive influence of this narrative inquiry can be felt by other women educational leaders or aspiring women in leadership roles. The thesis serves as an orientation for prevailing women leaders in the secondary education sector in Mauritius to empower themselves to reflect on the performativity and efficiency of their leadership in times of complexities in the changing socio-cultural and political contexts.

Moreover, this study may generate constructive professional and personal developments as it highlights means and ways to assist in women's development and leadership activities by designing and conducting leadership training courses which would be useful to upcoming women leaders.

Last but not least, this thesis is of importance to those who might have a desire to learn through the narratives of leading practitioners and who may have been aiming to attain senior leadership roles in education or other sectors, but may not know how to get there.

1.7.4 For me as a researcher

As a researcher coming from the field of Chemistry, the journey of this research work has allowed me to extend my thinking and perspectives about researching social science. I developed the ability to capture critical lived experiences encountered by the women leader participants through their narratives which created the confidence in me to research elitist members of our society. Furthermore, through this research, I have become more agile in shifting my positivist mindset to the interpretivist approach, thus gaining a versatile research skill.

Besides engaging in studying the concept of leadership, I came to understand that leadership should not only be viewed from the male perspective, but also that female perspectives can contribute to the practices of leadership. Since I am in a middle management and leadership position and an aspiring educational leader, this study has given me opportunities to explore and understand in depth the leadership roles, practices and strategies needed to cope with multifaceted challenges in the different leadership spaces of the secondary schooling system in the future. These require critical thinking in mapping out the different leadership practices of educational leaders to inform the planning of resources, new social policymaking and the progress of future initiatives to bring enhancement to educational leadership practices.

1.8 Delimitation

This study was limited to three women participants in the public secondary schooling system. Among other available qualitative methods, this study primarily used semi-structured interviews with cross-examining techniques as the only data collection method. Only women educational leaders, in public secondary educational system, who have had at least three years' continuous experience in different leadership and senior leadership roles were accepted as participants for this study. The perceptions and understandings of other stakeholders like their past students, past members of the parents' association, past teaching and non-teaching, as well as current office staff were not included in this study.

1.9 Definition of terms

In this section, the terms used in the context of this research are defined. By carefully defining these selected terms, the reader will better understand this research as these selected terms are referenced and defined similarly throughout the literature review. The following essential vocabulary is referenced in this study: geographies, career trajectory, career pattern, career path, women educational leaders, secondary context.

Leadership and management geographies

In this research study, geographies are used as the location of women in the socio-spatial dynamics and social hierarchies of work sites and society (at home before and after marriage). The mobility of women educators to school headship and then to the different senior leadership positions in the structural hierarchies of educational administration and management, as shown in Figure 4, constitute the geographies of women educational leaders. These strata or layering of the leadership positions is referred to as space and place (Morojele & Muthukrishna, 2012, 2013; Muthukrishna, 2013). The leadership space and place are the position of school rector, Zone Administrator, Zone and Headquarters Director, where promotion to these positions is very limited for women as revealed by the secondary educational statistics in Table 2 (Ministry of Education Report, 2017).

Moreover, leadership and management geographies refer to the different types of leadership experiences encountered by women educational leaders from different physical, moral, socio-cultural, professional, and political spheres at different stages and spaces in their lives. The access and mobility of women in leadership and management spaces of secondary educational system result from what I termed women leadership and management geographies. They consist of the spatial experiential patterns in leading and managing people's interactions, leadership practices and close and/or distant relationships vis-a-vis gender in different institutions that help create, configure, and paint the leadership experiences women educational leaders can map and share about.

Women educational leaders

The women educational leaders in this study refer to those women who started their career as secondary school teachers or educators in the public sector. These women have been promoted to different leadership positions in the structural hierarchies of the leadership and management of the secondary educational system.

Career trajectory

In this study, the term career trajectory is “an individual’s total pattern of organised, professional movement activity which includes all pre-established stages of preparation, promotions, and advancements in an occupation” (Shakeshaft, 1989, p. 64). It is the “*work history*” of an individual (Shakeshaft, 1989, p. 65). The course followed can be direct, interrupted, or similar to the course followed by others who have successfully reached the same career goal (Sameroff, 2010; Deil-Amen, 2011). Career trajectory is used synonymously with the terms career journey, career paths

and career patterns throughout this research (Biemann, Zacher & Feldman, 2012; Lent & Brown, 2013).

Career pattern

A career pattern is the entire sequence of jobs related to an occupation held by an individual (Hülshager, Alberts, Feinholdt & Lang, 2013). In the educational leadership and management destination track, one would most likely begin the job sequence with entrance into the teaching profession and include several years as a teacher (Barnett, Shoho & Oleszewski, 2012). Some individuals follow a planned and sequentially organised course to reach their career goal to the top leadership position in their organisation (Fernando, Amaratunga & Haigh, 2014).

Career path

A career path might be described as the course followed through a planned and logical sequence of work experiences over a progression of time chosen to reach the desired career goal (London, 2014). The career path includes all jobs or occupations that an individual is qualified for after completing specific basic requirements. These requirements could include course work and acquired skills (Crompton & Lyonette, 2011). The key terminology in the definition of career path is “course followed” (Crompton & Lyonette, 2011; London, 2014).

Secondary educational system

The public educational system is divided into several categories, namely: Early Childhood Education System, Primary Educational System, Secondary Educational System, Vocational Education System, and Tertiary Education System. Each system has a career path. In the secondary educational system, an officer starts at the level of Educator and climb up to the level of Chief Technical Officer, as shown in Figure 4 above. However, in the secondary educational system, leadership positions exist at the school level and outside the school level, that is at Zones level and the Headquarter. The latter level oversees the whole secondary educational system.

1.10 Structure of the research thesis

This research thesis is divided into seven chapters: a summary of the content of the seven chapters is provided as follows:

Chapter 1: The landscape, drive and opportunity of the research

Chapter 1 provides an orientation of the present research. It outlines the research context internationally and locally, the local backgrounds, research purpose and research questions together with the objectives of the study. Attention is also focused on the definition of terms used in this research.

Chapter 2: A literature review on leadership approaches and challenges to leadership

Chapter 2 provides an examination of the scholarly research publications covering the central issues of leadership and management, women leadership, career pathways, barriers and challenges to leadership positions and the different leadership styles. These feed into the theoretical framework against which the research questions are eventually explored.

Chapter 3: Theoretical frameworks - the zooming devices encompassing women in educational leadership

Chapter 3 focuses on the literature on the socio-constructionist theory and theoretical lenses against which this study is being examined. It provides the filtering lenses through which interpretations of the research findings from the data collected need to be constructed. The theoretical foundation assisted my understanding of the factors influencing women educational leaders entering the different male-dominated leadership spaces in line with the leadership practices they adopt, and subsequently, the conceptual framework for the study was developed.

Chapter 4: Research methodology – charting the route to conduct the study

Chapter 4 is devoted to the research design, choice and justification of the selected methodology, that is, the narrative inquiry, the criteria used in the selection process of the participants, data gathering tools and instruments employed. It further discusses the approach adopted from “data analysis”, using the technique of data coding to the “analysis of data” processing by using the thematic approach, chartered by an analytical framework for the different levels of analysis. The route to construction of the thesis is mapped. Validity and reliability issues, as well as ontological concerns, are also highlighted.

Chapter 5: Research findings – the biographical narratives of three women educational leaders

Chapter 5 presents the biographical narrative analysis of the interview data of three women participants occupying leadership positions in the secondary schooling system. The lived experiences of the participants are storied to display the range of factors influencing their becoming educational leaders entering the male-dominated space and shaping their leadership practices. The chapter concludes by presenting the initial inferences that sprung from my first level of analysis – the women became educational leaders not by succession to the leadership throne but through hard work.

Chapter 6: Cross-narrative analysis - the seen and the unseen

Chapter 6 offers the analysis of narratives where the “seen” and “unseen” factors visible from the surface are thematised under the generic term of a resource. The latter term sheds light in understanding and uncovering how challenges in the leadership pathway and in sites of leadership at different times and places are transmuted in catapulting the women participants to become educational leaders. The chapter discusses themes that cut across the three lived stories and establishes a dialogue with the literature and concepts concerning the theoretical and conceptual framework of this study. The findings are interpreted within the background from which they emerged, to provide an interface between the use of particular theoretical views and the data gathered to provide an abstract outlook. The researcher presents the patterns that have transpired through the analysis stage with existing literature on the career path, barriers to leadership, strategies and other interrelated themes.

An initial theoretical construct based on the metaphor of “transitional metal chemistry where electron transition from one energy level to another energy level to display a certain colour depends on the characteristic of energy absorbed”. Similarly, the women educational leaders display a confident leadership characteristic depending on the adoption of specific leadership and gendered attributes.

Chapter 7: Summary, implications and conclusions of the research study

Chapter 7 is the final chapter. The chapter is separated into four sections. Section 1 summarises information aimed at guiding readers to grasp the essence of the present study on women educational leaders in the secondary school system of Mauritius. Based on the main research findings which address the research questions, different themes revolving around resources emerged. The thesis is then formulated based on the propelling metaphorical concept of quantum resources borrowed from Quantum Physical Chemistry. Becoming educational leaders and the type of leadership practices are theorised using the Quantum Resource superposition of electron spin where multiple combinations of energy from different directions is required to generate the optimum output. An add-on of Diplo-feminist in the feminist theory is also conceptualised. Section 2 discusses the implications of the research on educational leaders, while Section 3 deals with the limitations of the research and its process. Section 4 inclines on the findings to propose new research expeditions in the future. Finally, the chapter closes with an overall conclusion.

1.11 Chapter summary

This chapter takes cognisance of the global and local backgrounds where women are under-represented in the leadership spaces, especially in the secondary educational system. The study's context, rationale and research purpose are described. The research questions have been formulated in line with the research aims and objectives. The significance of the study has been presented, and the potential beneficiaries have been identified. The chapter concludes with a presentation of the structure of the whole dissertation.

The next chapter deals with the literature review of leadership approaches, women in leadership, career pathways and challenges to leadership positions.

CHAPTER 2: A LITERATURE REVIEW ON LEADERSHIP APPROACHES AND CHALLENGES TO LEADERSHIP

2.1 Introduction

The principal objective of the current research is to **explore and understand** the lived experiences of the women educational leaders to reach leadership positions in the male-dominated space. A literature review on the concept of geographies is discussed to explain the research space that this study is dealing with. Moreover, this chapter explains the concepts of management and leadership and provides an overview of the different leadership styles. Last but not the least, the barriers and constraints that women have to deal with to attain leadership positions and some of the facilitators employed to overcome these barriers are discussed.

2.2 The concept of geographies in educational leadership and management

Morojele and Muthukrishna (2012, 2013) and Muthukrishna (2013) explain the concept of “geographies” as spaces and places in the social environment. Goodfellow (2012) and Creswell (2004) argue that “space” and “place” must be examined, and that space is an area which is meaningless, unless a meaning is attributed to it. They also state that places could be sites of power. From the feminist perspective, power can be explored in connection to the distribution of power, resources and leadership (Boundless, 2014).

The upward mobility of women educational leaders in the different structural hierarchies of **secondary educational leadership and management**, as shown in Figure 4, constitute the geographies of women educational leaders. In this research study, geographies are used as the locatedness of women in the socio-spatial dynamics and social hierarchies of work sites and power – the spaces and places of leadership. Since social places are fluid and are created through social relationships, the leadership spaces and places are also created through social relationships that are correspondingly fluid (Staeheli & Martin, 2000). The spaces and places are not static. The boundaries between men and women as social subjects are shifting, contradicting and constructing through gendered power relationships by the layering of activities, experiences and conflicts over time (McDowell & Sharp, 2016; Dery, 2020). With time, the changes involved in the gendering of the places and spaces echo the disputed and dynamic ideas about sexuality, family norms and gender roles.

With an extrapolation of Goodfellow's research work, it can be put forward that women's lives vary in different times, places, spaces and circumstances, including within family, peer groups, and sites of work (Goodfellow, 2012), and are impacted by economic, cultural, social, technological and political structures. It must be understood that research in this area is examined from multiple perspectives and by acknowledging the range of female geographies. Various studies conducted internationally have shown that **women** leaders negotiate the journey to educational leadership spatially with intrinsic rigidities and contradictions through social relationships (Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Rarieya, 2007; Murray, 2009; Heslinga, 2010, 2013).

Therefore, leadership and management geographies refer to the different leadership experiences encountered by **women** educational leaders from various physical, moral, socio-cultural, professional, and political spheres at different life stages and spaces (Liu, 2016).

- **Physical geography** refers to the closeness or distance created by time and space. Educational leadership and management is an eventful job and requires a lot of energy to collaborate with the different academic partners and stakeholders (students, parents, teaching and non-teaching staff, local community, parent ministry and other organisations, and the various educational committees). A leadership and management community provides time and space for the collaborations to happen and generates an opportunity for leadership understanding of each other's work practices. Lack of this opportunity will likely cause misunderstanding of different aspects of the public secondary educational system. For public secondary educational leaders, collegiality is predominantly essential, as it provides them with a space to mediate the variances in understanding teaching, learning, managing and leading in different workplaces.
- **Moral geography** refers to the closeness or distance created by different purposes and senses of accomplishment in professional practice. Coming from a diverse social, cultural, religious and location (urban or rural) and educational background, women educational leaders in the public secondary educational system usually have different moral standards. Changing from teachers to secondary educational leaders in the same or other work sites within the same parent organisation implies that they need to deconstruct their existing epistemological beliefs to understand the new moral legitimacy of leadership and

management practices. During this process, emotions such as honour, responsibility, satisfaction, self-doubt, and over-zeal could emerge, which require constant emotional work on moral management and leadership (Zembylas, 2007).

- **Socio-cultural geography** refers to the closeness or distance created by the differences in gender, race, ethnicity, language and culture. Women educational leaders may have very distinct characteristics from many of their counterparts in the cohort of public secondary educational leaders. They come from different social and family backgrounds, have different cultural values, and might even look very different because of their different location backgrounds (urban and rural areas). The distinctiveness can easily be magnified in their interaction with students, teachers, parents, husbands and family members, administrators and senior education leaders and can produce different leadership connections or disconnections.
- **Professional geography** refers to the closeness or distance created by different understandings of professionalism and professional practice norms. Professional standards, procedures, and practices are understood differently in different socio-cultural and religious milieus. Although in the same educational system, good leadership and management practices in one educational setting might be considered unnecessary, inappropriate, and sometimes culturally, ethnically and politically dangerous in another. For women educational leaders in the public secondary educational system, this professional closeness or distance impinges on their feelings, appropriate leadership practices, and professional legitimacy. Consequently, various leadership emotions, such as warmth, devotion, anxiety, stress, and frustration, are cropped up.
- **Political geography** refers to the closeness or distance created by different understandings of power. The public secondary educational system is premised on a power structure that determines the order and types of leadership interactions and practices. The multiple challenges of being a woman educational leader and a new member of the leadership spaces entail a need to identify one's and others' roles and statuses and develop a nuanced understanding of the "leadership and management rules" in the different leadership spaces. Having the appropriate discernment or misunderstanding or breaking these 'rules' could

lead to various reactions (positive and negative) such as eagerness, ambitions, reluctance and embarrassment from self and others.

The access and mobility of women in leadership and management spaces of the secondary educational system result from what is termed ‘women leadership and management geographies’. They consist of the spatial, experiential patterns in leading and managing people’s interactions, leadership practices and close or distant relationships vis-a-vis gender in different institutions that help create, configure, and fashion the leadership experiences women educational leaders can map and share about.

2.3 The concepts of leadership and management in educational settings

Educational leadership and management sit within the extensive field of leadership studies, which draws from numerous disciplinary areas including organisational studies, sociology, business studies, psychology, anthropology, and social sciences (The Open University, 2018). This section provides an explanation of the terms “leadership” and “management”. It highlights that leadership and management may be used interchangeably or as different concepts. Diverse opinions and efforts are discussed with the view to find clarification of these concepts.

According to Foster (1989, p. 57) leadership and management are not transposable concepts. However, Kotter (1990) argued that they are harmonising and correspondingly necessary for organisational achievement. On the one hand, management deals with operational procedures with the view of getting any task done within the framework of organisational policies (Bollington, 1999, p. 155). On the other hand, leadership is concerned with doing the right things, using strategic vision and orientation to reach the targeted goals (West-Burnham, 1997). Hence, Bollington’s (1999) views seem to substantiate the idea that management ensures those tasks are performed correctly within the organisational structures while leadership ensures the right tasks are carried out.

In a study carried out on secondary school leadership in North America, Wright (2001) comes up with the opinion that management involves hands-on organisational activities while leadership is about “the philosophy and moral underpinnings of what is to be done”. Such convictions as they

impact on those categorised as “manager” or “leader” are observed and how others deal or react to them. Conversely, Evans (2010) and Gill (2011) express that the differences reside in associating the inside of the organisation and how goals are reached. Gill (2011) states that leadership essentially influences the ability of a group to achieve a set of goals while management uses its integral authority, in their nominated official positions, to attain compliance.

As noted by Daft (2012), management seems to be the secured hands-on wheel for an institution where steadiness and directives are promoted within the current organisational structure. While, leaders are there to sail the boat, in the sense of questioning obsolete, ineffective, or socially unacceptable norms which need to be replaced, in order to meet new challenges.

The above roles are interchangeable, and it can be inferred that from their findings and their way of thinking that Hay and Hodgkinson (2006) find that leadership and management are interrelated activities. Leadership is regarded as an aspect of management which is concerned with long-term planning, [managing](#), and thinking about the future of the institution and promoting sustenance for certain ideas. These views are further supported by Bush and Joubert (2004) and Fris and Lazaridou (2006), who mark dissimilarities between leadership and management, but also identify that the two concepts overlay each other and that the two are mutually indispensable for organisational achievement. Hence, both concepts are compulsory for effective institutions, which is in agreement with Bush and Glover (2014), who claim that in the present-day policy climate, educational organisations call for both visionary leadership and effective management.

According to Dubrin (2015), managers have to exercise leadership positions so that they can impressively carry out crucial features of their role. For example, this can be done by applying, influencing, urging and inducing their staff and others outside the organisation to work to their best of abilities. Nonetheless, all managers are not leaders. Although this view is held high by research academics, it is not a widely understood or agreed logic (Daft, 2012). Hence, there is still a confusing government persuasive about the nature and benefits of leadership and management (Ciulla, 2020).

In this present study, the term and the activity of leadership are used as an aspect of management. Daft (2012) clearly states that leadership’s power emanates from being assembled on the footing

of a well-managed organisation. This idea is in line with the views of Hannagan (2008, p. 38) and Azad et al. (2017), where leadership and management are considered to be a mutually dependent and interconnected activity, where managers must know what leadership encompasses so that the goals of the organisations are met. Therefore, the success or failure of management has a strong connection with leadership and as an outcome of changes in the social, economic, cultural, political and technological environment.

Leadership remains a contentious area of scholarship, and in the literature, we find competing and contrasting references to multiple leadership approaches and styles. Hence, after reviewing the different approaches of leadership, it can be concluded that there is no single leadership solution that fits all the purposes, that is suitable for everyone and in every situation. Simply put, this is because circumstances are not static. They keep on changing and ostensibly a well-tailored leadership capability prototype does not categorise steadily effective behaviours. Hence, a leader cannot rely on a single style of leadership but rather on multiple approaches and how effective he or she is able to shift “within and from” the leadership gear remains challenging. Do our educational leaders of today find themselves in this scenario? This study will try to uncover the present leadership situation within the secondary schooling system.

2.4 Leadership approaches

In the long run, according to the literature, multiple leadership approaches have been established, each one retaining significances from the field in which it initiated. Making sense of the multiple theoretical approaches to leadership is, therefore, challenging. Nevertheless, researchers have tried to classify the different leadership characteristics into five major approaches – instructional, transactional, transformational, distributed and authentic, which are commonly found in educational settings in order for educational leadership practitioners to at least visualise the continuum of leadership (Kellis & Ran, 2013; Bush, Hamid, Ng & Kaparou, 2018). The leadership competencies associated with each of these approaches have significant bearing on determining the degree of success of each specific strategy of leadership.

The following sub-section focuses on the five leadership approaches and at the same time uncovers the leadership attributes and styles within each of the leadership approaches. The different

leadership approaches, derived from personal theories, contingency theories and leadership-style theories, help in understanding women leadership experiences and perspectives (Polat, 2008; Alabani, 2011). In this study to what extent these leadership approaches are super-imposed or entangled on the women educational leaders in the public secondary educational system of a SIDS are discussed.

2.4.1 Instructional leadership

Generally, instructional leadership infers dealing effectively with administrative issues and matters of school ethos that encompass activities concentrating on teaching practices in order to improve students' attainment (Petrovic & Vracar, 2019). Therefore, in the educational system, the rector of the school or the director of the schooling system acts as the instructional leader and the followers are the teachers, students and other stakeholders (Firmaningsih-Kolu, 2015). Be it in the schools or in the educational Zones or Headquarters, the rector and the director have important roles to play in the respective educational spaces and places. Both have to direct the teaching staff and other stakeholders so as to reach their respective goals. However, the modes of action and the power relations of the same instructional leader shifting from the school setting in the role of rector and to the outside of the school setting in the role of director in his or her career path can differ greatly due to socio-economic, political, cultural and religious influences. How such an instructional leader overcome barriers, negotiates the leadership practices and deploys strategies provides food for thought, especially when the leadership spaces are male-dominated and the ground space is feminised.

Among the models of instructional leadership developed (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hallinger, Wang, Chen & Liare, 2015), instructional management theorises the actions and strategies of educational leaders towards schools and schooling administrations and the progress of educational culture and outcomes (Amanchukwu, Stanley & Ololube, 2015; Simkins, Sisum & Memon, 2003). According to Tobin (2014), instructional leadership tends to reduce the role of educational leaders to managerial tasks, inclining more towards the coordination and control of educational activities rather than equilibrated towards the educational mission and vision, instructional plans and institutional learning settings. Such educational leaders are directed by the duties as defined by the government's educational act and they tend to stay within the educational management framework performing all the duties without any extra allowance (Petrovic & Vracar, 2019).

Therefore, educational regulation impacts on the educational practices, and as such, there is less room for creativity in adhering to instructional leadership practices (Bush, 2003; Firmaningsih-Kolu, 2015).

2.4.2 Transactional leadership

The transactional approach of leadership, developed by Max Webber in 1947 and then supported by Bernard M. Bass in the 1980s, focuses on supervision, organisation and group performance (Smith, 2012). The basic assumptions of transactional leadership are that staff members are driven by rewards and reprimands as bases of motivation and following the directives of the leader is a prime goal line of the followers (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1999; Smith, 2015). Bass and Avolio (1993) view the relationship between the boss and the subordinates as contractual where the boss compensates or limits the subordinates based on the capability of the subordinates' performance. In addition, procedures, instructions and ethics are important in transactional leadership, which tends to be most operative in circumstances of challenges (Thakur, 2014).

Moreover, transactional leadership is viewed as synonymous to management by Bollington (1999). Similarly, Obeidat and Zyod (2015) and Nazim (2017) notice that transactional leadership is generally connected with supervisory, practical or action-based leadership, with emphasis on the know-how of leadership practices and its influence upon others.

Sundi (2013) and Thakur (2014) point out the importance of transactional leadership in the field of education. They reinforce the view of Burns (1978) and Bass (1990) by mentioning that “a transactional leader's manipulation of followers' valued outcomes (e.g., wages, promotion) in exchange for followers' compliance with leadership wishes” and expecting the dependent workers to work per one's expectations is considered an ineffective style of leadership.

Indeed, the above studies helped the researcher to discover the different leadership typologies which the group sample of women educational leaders in the secondary sector may have adopted. Also, these findings could be used as the theoretical base for the research question on leadership styles and competencies of effective educational leadership.

According to the above discussion, managerial characteristics, skills and abilities such as entrepreneurship, assertiveness, efficiency, aggressiveness, decisiveness, competitiveness and cost-effectiveness are related to transactional leadership (Proctor, 2018). Transactional leaders usually set up and fulfil only short terms goals, working towards the present mission and without plans to bring about changes and improvements (Mansaray, 2019).

2.4.3 Transformational leadership

The Government of Mauritius has embarked on secondary educational reform since 2003 in order to phase out the previous educational system established during colonial occupations at the primary level examination which allows for successful students to be able to get a seat, especially, in the government secondary schools. As such government constructed around twenty-six new secondary schools in various localities (urban and rural) (Government of Mauritius, Budget Speech, 2005). To help in the successful transformational change of the secondary schooling system, transformational leadership became a must. Consequently, the recruitment of schools' heads took place and a few more women got the chance to fulfil the positions of rector or officer-in-charge in the male-dominated leadership space at secondary school level (Educational Statistics, 2005). Hence, transformational leadership is about championing changes to the organisational strategies so that a better fit with the surrounding educational landscape is achieved (Taylor, 2015).

Transformational leadership, developed by Burns (1978), is an ethical practice whereby both adherents and leaders are raised to greater levels of benefits and inspiration (Tafvelin, 2013). Bollington (1999) advocated that transformational leadership is attuned to leadership rather than management, and states that transformational leadership:

“... is pre-occupied with purposes, values, morals and ethics; ... is oriented towards long-term goals without compromising human values; ... emphasises more on strategies and missions for accomplishing them; makes full use of human resources; designs and re-designs professions to make them significant and inspiring; realises human potential, and lines up in-house organisational structures to strengthen over-arching aims and objectives” (p. 170).

Ershadi and Dehdazzi (2019), Kotter (1990) and Kaufman (2016) recognise that leadership and management work in unity and are equally important for the success of an establishment. Bass (1985) perceives that transactional tactics, such as benefits for exceptional work, are somewhat complementary to transformational components, for example, inspiration, emotive encouragement, individual reflection for employees, and intellectual reassurance.

From the work of Bass (1985), it is revealed that the concept of transformational leadership is a symbol of leadership style. He affirms that for an organisation to perform leadership outstandingly, the organisation's leader has to shift from traditional (transactional dimensions) to transformational construct. Research carried out by several authors in the field, for example, Smith (2015), Neumann and Neumann (1999) and Focht and Ponton (2015) found that transformational leaders adopt three distinct leadership skills which include: visioning (leaders' ability to think about the future of their organisation); focusing (leaders' ability to communicate his ideas to the staff) and implementing (leaders' ability to facilitate and motivate the employees towards the goal and organisational changes).

Following the concept put forward by Burns (1978) and Southworth (1998), Lingam and Lingam (2020) confirm the importance of vision in leadership, particularly transformational leadership. They argue that this leadership dimension encourages followers to develop a shared vision for an organisation, such that the followers work hard to achieve long-term goals which are indeed beneficial for the organisation's future. Moreover, Neumann and Neumann (1999) highlight that communicating and sharing the vision of the organisation to others form part of the crucial strategic skills in the transformational leadership approach.

Inspirational motivation is believed to be another critical dimension of transformational leadership (Vinkenbunrg, Van Engen, Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2011; Jiang, Zhao & Ni, 2017). As noted by Li (2010) and Fry, Hannah, Noel and Walumbwa (2011), transformational leadership is about constructing a united communal interest where motivation is reinforced by raising members' personal and altruistic attitudes, beliefs and values. Similarly, Barbutto Jr. (2005) notes that transformational leaders having charismatic behaviours intensify the motivation of followers. Moreover, Bottery (2001) and Vinkenbunrg, Van Engen, Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2011) observe that managers having transformational leadership characteristics have the ability to

transmute the functioning of an establishment so that personnel and learners can operate even in complex situations.

Bass (1985) theorises transformational leadership using four axes that depicts broad characteristics: “charisma, inspiration, individual consideration and intellectual stimulation”. Lievens, Van Geit and Coetsier (1997) detail features of the four axes as follows: charismatic style (role model, shared vision, instilling confidence in subordinates); inspiration style (empowering, inspiring, trailing a mission, persuing challenging goals); individual consideration (providing specific attention, individual treatment, recognition of the uniqueness of each member); and intellectual stimulation (using creative thinking to solve problems). Additionally, Pounder (2003) further elaborates on the definition of transformational leadership by using the study of Kouzes and Posner (1995) and reveals two other axes: “challenging the process” and “encouraging the heart”. I have schematically represented the four axes of Bass (1985) and that of Kouzes and Posner (1995) for ease of comparison.

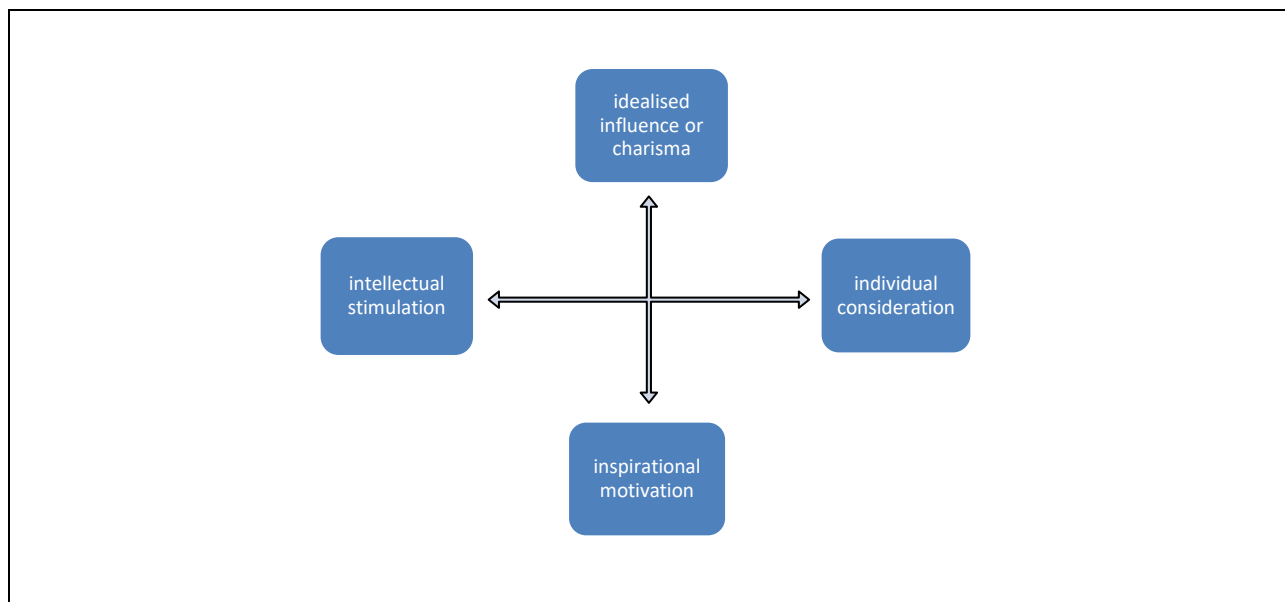


Figure 6: Four Axes of Transformational Leadership according to Bass (1985)
(Source: Researcher’s own construct)

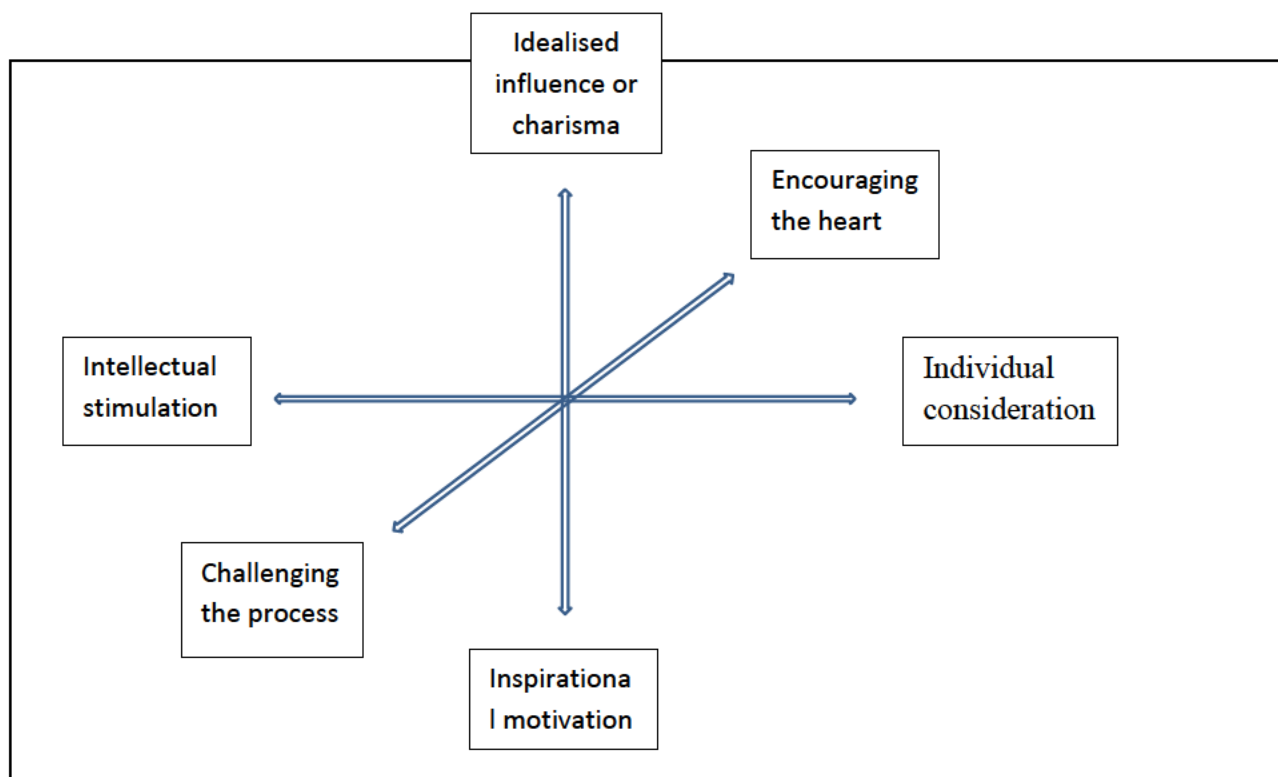


Figure 7: Six axes of Transformational Leadership according to Kouzes and Posner (1995)
(Source: Researcher's own construct)

“Challenging the process” involves experimentation, risk-taking, accepting mistakes and encouraging ideas from others to develop learning opportunities while “encouraging the heart” includes rejoicing supporters’ accomplishments and authentic actions of care and love focussed at the supporters (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). A number of researchers (e.g. Bollington, 1999; Ryan, 2002; Coleman, 2003; Li, Sajjad, Wang, Ali, Khaqan & Amina, 2019) have expanded the concept of transformational leadership by taking into account empowerment, development and change.

Southworth (1999) and later Berkovich (2016) suggest that transformational leadership is mainly concerned with the future of the schooling system and is both supplementary and complementary to transactional leadership. Southworth (1999) and Bollington (1999) claim that transformational leadership is linked to acknowledgement, team spirit, progress, training and vision. Southworth (1998) added further that this leadership strategy has the capability to revolutionise a schooling system’s culture and create an ecosystem for enhancement. This consolidates the importance of individualised attention on the axis of development as a feature of transformational leadership where the chief strengthens the progress of each individual and serves as a mentor (Coleman,

2003). Moreover, the fundamental goals which transformational leaders have adopted are development-related work culture (supporting workers to develop and adopt professional teamwork culture), encouraging staff development and being an excellent problem-solver (Li, Sajjad, Wang, Ali, Khaqan & Amina, 2019; Macasa, Acosta & Malagapo, 2019).

Southworth (1998, 1999) and Bollington (1999 cited in Li, 2010) view leadership as “a collaborative and corporate act”. Having made this observation, this implies that each staff member has a crucial role to play in leading the schooling system towards its goals and objectives. Transformational leadership, therefore, involves the development of an inter-dependent leader. On the other hand, Ryan (2002) and Peeke (2003) point out the drawbacks of this kind of leadership approach. Ryan (2002) and Gronn (1999) criticise transformational leaders by saying they are “stand-alone, solo-performer leaders” since they do not allow for cooperative leadership practices. Peeke (2003) criticises this approach by referring to the teaching and learning processes in terms of the inadequate continuous professional development of staff. Additionally, the research work of Herbst, Rios-Collazo and Denison (2019) reveal the following related drawbacks: a potential lack of follow-through and efficiency of the team due to the on-going turn-around on certain issues and the danger of immature team members of usurping of a member over the team members due to power imbalances or inclinations.

Some authors (e.g. Siddique & Nawaz, 2019; Jovanovica & Ciricb, 2016; Pounder, 2001) investigate the link between transactional and transformational leadership and its effectiveness in the educational context. They conclude that elements like innovation, accountability, creativity and integrity are essential dimensions and support the idea that educational leaders need to be self-reflective and apply various competencies to leadership. They also suggest that current educational leadership have to draw on the scopes of both transactional, as well as transformational leadership or other approaches of leadership to create a synergy. This can be clarified by the circumstances that there are many challenges in the educational sector. Leaders within the secondary educational system, therefore, have to force themselves to adapt according to new leadership characteristics in order to deal with the challenges and complexities. Research has identified various skills which include the ability to visualise the future of the organisation, communicate and share ideas (Mittal & Dhar, 2015; Neumann & Neumann, 1999), encouraging teamwork to fulfil the vision of the organisation (Zeb, Saeed, Ullah & Rabi, 2015; Bollington, 1999); the ability to motivate staff

to work smartly (Leithwood, Mascal, Strauss, Sacks, Memon & Yashkina, 2007), enhancing interpersonal and communication skills, focusing on teamwork, self-development and adapting to changes (Volet & Jones, 2012; Ariratana, Sirisookslip & Ngang, 2015). In Table 3 below, I have demonstrated the distinction between transformational and transactional leadership indicating how both approaches of leadership operate at different levels.

Table 3: Summary of the distinctions between Transformational and Transactional Leadership

Transformational	Transactional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Builds on the need for meaning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Builds on the need to get the job done and make a living.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pre-occupied with purposes, values, morals and ethics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Pre-occupied with power and position, politics and perks.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Transcends daily affairs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Swamped in daily affairs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Oriented towards long-term goals without compromising human values and principles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Orientated to short-term goals and hard data.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Separates causes and symptoms and work prevention. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Confuses causes and symptoms and is concerned with treatment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Focuses more on missions and strategies for achieving them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Focuses on tactical issues.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Makes full use of available resources (human). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Relies on human relations to oil human interactions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Designs and re-designs jobs to make them meaningful and challenging; realises human potential. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Follows and fulfils the role of expectations by striving to work effectively within the current system.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Aligns internal structures and systems to reinforce over-arching values and goals. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Supports structures and systems that reinforce the bottom line.

2.4.4 Distributed leadership

In the educational context, distributed leadership involves the sharing of tasks among colleagues rather than focusing all responsibilities on only one person (Diamond & Spillane, 2016; Gronn,

2002, 2016). Distributed leadership includes intuitive working relations, spontaneous collaboration and institutionalised practices (Jones, Harvey, Lefoe & Ryland, 2014). In brief, this approach mirrors the notions of shared roles, the division of labour, the delegation of responsibilities and leaders acting as mediators. Gronn (2002, 2016) interprets distributed leadership as the notion of teamwork that involves working with colleagues, promoting interpersonal synergies wherein the team, where one of the members would likely influence, persuade or lead others.

Dimmock (2003, p. 7) explains distributed leadership as “a permeable process that is widely distributed throughout the school organisation ... an empowering process enabling others in the school to exercise leadership”. This is perceived as contemporary leadership. It is also argued that success in an organisation can only be attained through distributed leadership (El-Bakkali, 2020). In other words, distributed leadership can inspire, motivate and pressure the entire organisation towards its goals (MacBeath, 2005).

In school institutions, researchers Peeke (2003) and Harris and DeFlaminis (2016) in the field witnessed that distributed leadership may not have a substantial impact on the teaching and learning process, curriculum development, or the course team leaders and teachers. In order for this type of leadership to function correctly, leadership needs to be distributed and shared so that every staff member has the opportunity to act as the change agent and for colleagues collaborate to make tasks achievable (DeMatthews, 2014).

Jones and Harvey (2017) examine the concept of distributed leadership by referring to tertiary education. They also found that effective leadership at various levels is essential when educational institutions have to respond and adapt to external changes and challenges (increasing requests from stakeholders, global competition and a decrease in resources). This view has also been supported by Khan (2017). He reveals that leaders in the education sectors need to be equipped with some competencies and skills. These include: promoting mentoring and peer influence, interpersonal skills, self-discipline and empowering the juniors (Bush & Glover, 2014).

2.4.5 Authentic leadership

Authenticity is not a new concept in education. Theorists have stated authenticity as living a meaningful life (Levy, 2011; Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing & Peterson, 2008). Indeed, leaders need to be authentic to manage institutions with integrity. According to Northouse (2010), the term authentic leadership was coined during the 21st century when an armada of research was being conducted on ethics and positive psychology due to an attrition of trust in American leaders (George, 2003; Cooper, Scandura & Schriesheim, 2005; MacNeil, 2006; Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing & Peterson, 2008).

Although the concepts of authenticity have not been fully developed, researchers are trying to differentiate authentic leadership from other forms of leadership. For instance, Avolio, Walumbwa, and Weber (2009) explained authentic leadership as “a pattern of transparent and ethical leader behaviour that encourages openness in sharing information needed to make decisions while accepting followers’ inputs” (p. 423). In line with this statement, the leader adds to the willpower of authentic leadership if the follower alleges the leader to be performing in a real and consistent manner (Behera, 2016; Goode, 2015; Gardner, Avolio, Luthans & Walumbwa, 2005; Shamir & Eilam, 2005).

Several researchers (Gardner et al., 2005; Endrissat, Muller & Kaudela-Baum, 2007; Abrash Walton, 2016) have been trying to formulate an understanding to the construct of authentic leadership as being true to oneself or the successful alignment of one’s inner ideals, principles and convictions with one’s behaviour. In so doing, one must know oneself and be true to oneself so that self-awareness becomes a fundamental component of authenticity (Kinsler, 2014).

Self-awareness is a lifetime expedition of personal exploration that supports leaders in understanding their weaknesses and strengths, values, priorities and identity (Rickards, 2015; Subbarao, 2013; Broome & Marshall, 2016; Ilies, Morgeson & Nahrgang, 2005). Developing and maintaining this understanding of self, allows authentic leaders to act following their beliefs, even under stressful situations (Gardner et al., 2005; Nyberg & Sveningsson, 2014). Possessing this insight allows leaders to behave consistently in a variety of situations and to self-develop resilience.

According to Simons (2002) and Bauman (2013), performing according to one's words is called behavioural integrity which is a continuous process in which the leader acts in the same manner as he or she says he or she will act. Hence, a person who possesses this skill is regarded as authentic. However, authenticity is beyond behavioural integrity since it involves the values and beliefs of the person.

Authentic leaders have several benefits while working in an organisation. For instance, there is better collaboration between workers; objectives are set and met, and they support the professional development of new members until they become leaders (Gardner et al., 2005). The new leaders in turn support the new entrant juniors in the organisation. There is the creation of an evolutionary lifecycle in the leadership practices (Kutsyuruba & Walker, 2015).

Above and beyond, followers rely on the leaders who act consistently (Gabriel, 2015). In these tumultuous times of perpetual change, global instability, budget cuts and worldwide uncertainty and complexity, this dependability provides a closeness to the subordinates with whom the leader works and stimulates trust. Nevertheless, being authentic does not mean that the individual performs the same way in all situations, but instead acts consistently using a multiplicity of resources across various situations.

Indeed, not every behaviour or action is appropriate in every situation. There is a need to understand what it means by acting the same and acting consistently. For instance, authentic leaders vary their communication skills according to the audience (Lolli, 2013; Gabriel, 2015). Certainly, it is inappropriate to speak to the board of directors using the same language as one would with subordinates. There are moments when leaders have to communicate informally to general workers where such behaviour in an official meeting is viewed as a negative point. Therefore, it is vital to adopt the appropriate behaviour while staying true to oneself.

It is a known fact that authenticity requires hard work (Genz, 2015). Authenticity is intentional and goes beyond self-awareness (Walumbwa & Wernsing, 2013). One of the main elements of authenticity is self-regulation (Gardner et al., 2005) which includes the sensible handling of information, interpersonal transparency and inner or emotional regulation. Sensible handling of information involves careful thinking about events and applying critical reflection on decisions

and not criticising personal skills (Cottrell, 2017). Interpersonal transparency allows creativity and discussion among members, promotes information and knowledge sharing in a team, and enhances an atmosphere of team trust (Meng, Cheng & Guo, 2016). Inner regulation is concerned with the capacity of self-control and coping with external pressures and anxiety to maintain performance (Lian, Brown, Ferris, Liang, Keeping & Morrison, 2014; Landman, Nieuwenhuys & Oudejans, 2016).

Espousing an authentic leadership approach allows leaders to stay grounded by integrating life so as not to be led astray from one's core self during difficult times. Integrating one's life does not mean compartmentalising the different aspects of life (i.e., job, school, home) in order for leaders to perform effectively and to become more productive, rather they need to bring their skills and identities into their professions and task accomplishments (Amanchukwu, Stanley & Ololube, 2015). Indeed, it has been observed that women do bring their whole-self to their leadership and this promotes their authenticity. However, institutional culture has played a role in their competences, as well as in the foundation of social and organisational structures intended at realising targeted goals (Ololube, 2012).

2.5 Types of barriers women face in accessing and advancing in educational leadership and management

Educational management and leadership processes involve influencing the feelings, behaviours and thoughts of members working in the educational system by the leaders in view of implementing action plans and policies as a set of combined practices to achieve educational goals (Amanchukwu, Stanley & Ololube, 2015). However, no matter how effective leaders can be, they are confronted with a number of obstacles in their leadership pathway and the practices that they must encompass and manage in order to succeed. Some of the barriers to leadership advancement of women are discussed below.

2.5.1 Glass ceiling

Evidence in management and leadership literature (Eagly, 2007; Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; Jabbar & Imran, 2013; Kakker & Bhandhari, 2015; Yousaf & Schmiede, 2016) shows that a small number of women are unable to take up leadership positions (Chugh & Sahgal, 2007) due to glass ceilings, which is one of the barriers they face (Israeli, Adler & Israeli, 1994; Rosener, 1995).

Yongho (2012) states that the “glass ceiling is a socio-political representation” used to tag the unremarkable and resistant barrier that grips minorities and women from ascending to the higher levels of administrative leadership spaces, irrespective of qualifications, experiences or achievements (Federal Glass-Ceiling Commission Report, 1995). Kellerman and Rhode (2007) accentuate that the glass ceiling is the unseen and indiscernible operational patterns of gender discrimination. The latter thwarts women from climbing into the most esteemed, well-paid higher leadership positions. Glass ceiling is mainly caused by cultural beliefs and practices (Kellerman & Rhode, 2007; Davies & Maldonado, 2015); sex-role orientation (Shabharwal, 2015; Chakravarti, 1995); gender-stereotyping (Shakeshaf, 1995; Bruckmüller, Ryan, Rink & Haslam, 2014; Soleymanpour-Omran, Alizadeh & Esmaeeli, 2015); higher level management which has a tendency to believe that women who are married would not be willing to advance in their careers (Jauhar & Lau, 2018; Van Der Boon, 2003) and on the assumptions that working mothers have other commitments (Osibanjo, Iyiola & Adeniji, 2013). Mauritius, being an ex-colony of France and Britain, inheriting multi-cultural and multi-ethnic people from Africa, India, China and Europe, a mix of cultural and socio-political glass-ceiling may likely to occur depending on the organisational context.

Research carried out by Cotter (2001) and his co-workers on glass ceiling effects reveal that they have a strong correlation with gender. Apart from minority women, even white women face a glass ceiling in their career path. However, for African-American men, no evidence of a glass ceiling was found by the researchers (Cotter, 2001).

In another study carried out in Sri Lanka by Bombuwela and Chamaru (2013), they found that a substantial impact of the glass ceiling effect is caused by family on the career progression of women, while individual factors, organisational factors and cultural factors have a substantial effect on the career development of female employees in the private sector.

Cotter et al. (2001) cited in Wikipedia found that four topographies govern the existence of the glass ceiling:

- *“A gender or racial difference that is not explained by other job-relevant characteristics of the employee.”*

- *“A gender or racial difference that is greater at higher levels of an outcome than at lower levels of an outcome.”*
- *“A gender or racial inequality in the chances of advancement into higher levels, not merely the proportions of each gender or race currently at those higher levels.”*
- *“A gender or racial inequality that increases throughout a career.”*

Glass ceiling gaps will always exist, but they can be reduced to a minimum by adopting policies that provide equity, fairness, flexibility, training, support, and awareness, which will change the attitudes of **men and women** for the overall benefit of society.

2.5.2 Psychological glass ceiling

Kellerman and Rhode (2007) suggested that a “psychological glass ceiling” refers to the assumption made by women who believe that in a “male-control gender system”, it is evident that their chances of acquiring a leadership position are reduced to a minimum. Eagly and Carli (2007) state that women are less willing to be involved in assertive behaviours, self-promotion or risk-taking to occupy leadership roles because they believe they will fail. Although self-promotion helps to express competence and status, in the absolute it is not mutual. While men try to get noticed by blustering, unpretentiousness is anticipated from highly talented women (Weissman, 2013). Moreover, due to the lesser agencies for women in terms of ambitions, competence and competition to men, they tend to be ignored for leadership and administrative posts unless they present themselves confidently as exceptional women. Nevertheless, encompassing these undertakings challenges the rigid nature of gender stereotypes resulting in detrimental ripostes to women authority and agency (Rudman & Phelan, 2008).

Worldwide the “glass ceiling effect” is found to be at its most potent in highly traditional, male-dominated work areas such as corporate leadership (Matsa & Miller, 2011), the management of political elections (Palmer & Simon, 2006), human resource management (Pichler et al., 2008), and high-tech industries (Fernandez & Campero, 2017). Such findings have prompted authors such as Rutherford (2011) to argue that this effect is essentially like a shrill layer of cling film draped around the bearing of power, wherever it is located.

However, since the time the phrase “glass ceiling” was first coined by Marilyn Loden in 1978 (Pelican Bay Post, 2011) and later pondered on in 1984 by Gay Bryant and other feminists, women have made pronounced progress in terms of leadership equality in the workplace (Costa Barreto, Barreto, Ryan & Schmidt, 2009; Department for Education and Employment, 2002). Nevertheless, it is still noted that women continue to be less potent in leadership positions in paralleled to men (Eagly & Carli, 2001; Crosby-Hillier, 2012). It has been revealed that in the educational field of both developed and developing countries, males are more likely to be educational leaders (Davies, 1998; Coleman, 2002). According to Lumby et al. (2010), even in African countries, the glass ceiling has not changed much and that despite equality and equity policies being in place, there are still significant obstacles for the few successful women leaders.

Despite equal opportunities legislation and awareness of the concept of the glass ceiling, women are still insecure about leadership positions as compared to men (Coleman, 2003; Ansari, 2016; Ganiyu, Oluwafemi, Ademola & Olatunji, 2018). Additionally, as noted in the research work of Sobczak (2018), women might be willing to aid each other to overcome the glass ceiling. However, there is another sub-invisible obstacle known as the “Queen Bee Syndrome” which concerns circumstances where women who have succeeded in male-dominated work spaces or leadership spaces aim to prevent other women from progressing and being promoted in their career development (Faniko, Ellemers & Derks, 2016; Netshitangani, 2019). Moreover, the research work of Derks, Van Laar and Ellemers (2016) shows that the queen bee’s circumstances are important consequences of workplace gender discrimination that women experience during their career in male-dominated work settings and that their behaviours are responses to the social identity threats.

Hence, this adage helps us to understand why women who have attained leadership positions in a male-dominated ecosystem have to develop “muscles” (Rindfleish, 2000) to counteract negative attitudes in the workplace (Berson & Stieglitz, 2013). In line with this, competitive performance may outreach professional conflict among women in terms of dress code, physical appearance and age (Mavin, 2006).

Overall, the several root causes for the glass ceiling and the related issues remains complex since they involve lots of layers of analysis for their interpretation. However, the concept mostly deals

with the stereotypical representation and unequal division of social roles and more specifically with women's limited access to power marked by male domination and their correlation with family and household work. The phenomenon particularly reflects upon labour market discrimination and unequal distribution of opportunities in the chances of promotion into higher level between the two genders (Laufer, 2009).

2.6 Challenges faced by women in educational leadership and management spaces

There are many challenges faced by women as they try to find their way towards leadership positions. Some of these challenges are discussed below.

2.6.1 Struggling between family and work accountabilities

The marginalised number of women in leadership positions may be explained by the clash between family and work responsibilities (Sanchez & Thornton, 2010). In her work "Feminine Mystique", Betty Friedan's (2010) (book first published in 1963) clearly explained how working women have difficulties in managing both responsibilities efficiently and congruently (cited in Crosby-Hillier, 2012). Hence, the women have no choice but to choose only one position. Indeed, Kellerman and Rhode (2007), cited in Crosby-Hillier (2012), point out that women prefer to choose their family life instead of advancing in their professional career. Conflicts may arise in the form of time-based (time allocated for both roles), strained-based (overflow of the tasks) and behaviour-based (mismatch of the two roles) (Galinsky & Swanberg, 2000 cited in Crosby-Hillier, 2012).

In spite of the conflict between work and family life experiences of women (Smulyan, 2000a, 2000b; Moorosi, 2010; Lumby et al., 2010; Uwamahoro, 2011; Naidoo & Perumal, 2014), they still show their "commitment and agency" to overcome the barriers of the patriarchal societies (Smith et al., 2012; Porritt, 2016). However, some women are reluctant to embark on taking organisational responsibilities that are attached with leadership positions in the quest for stability between their personal lives, work and family responsibilities (Shakeshaft, 2002). On the other hand, nowadays, working women still believe that family and work are crucial life roles (Friedman & Greehaus, 2000). Moreover, due to a lack of understanding of both roles, women find it challenging to balance and negotiate their time between work and family (Moorosi, 2010).

In the study carried by Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2011), it is found that women shifted in their careers by taking employment as part-timers, or becoming self-employed or changing to organisations that offered a more flexible work schedule. Moreover, the research-participants revealed that they had adjusted their jobs at several intervals in their careers. Usually, the decision to choose a career path in the secondary education field already occurs when they are doing their university studies, before having a family or what they would decide to do after having their first child. Apart from placing a high value on career-path, Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2011) point out that women place great value on family and children welfare.

In addition to juggling between work and responsibilities, women have difficulties in accessing resources following their training as supervisors when they are in leadership positions (discussed in sections 2.5.4 and 2.5.5). Women leaders, when instructed differently, eventually become anxious about their achievements as a leader, unlike their male counterparts when it comes to working purpose (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2011).

2.6.2 Lack of access to networking resources

According to Coleman (2010), the networking links and the set of mutual opportunities inside a community are referred to as an individual's social capital. The latter, according to Davies and Davies (2004), stimulates the goal-seeking actions of its followers. Within that social capital are the resources of career advice, mentoring, socialisation and socialisation patterns of women educational leaders (Paludi, 2008). Hence, the lack of access to these resources impedes the development of the full potential of women leaders (Pichler et al., 2008), thereby they experience a drawback in their workplace social capital, unlike the males who have their networking arena of the "old boys' club" (Searby & Tripses, 2006). The debarring of women to the attached welfares of workplace social capital may drastically affect their career progressions. This includes the inability to share knowledge, extreme turnover rates, lack of resources, reduced contacts that can help to climb up the ladder, lack of trust and teamwork among colleagues (Timberlake, 2005; Crosby-Hillier, 2012).

A plethora of data has revealed that women are put aside from social networking, which is believed to be the most critical feature of leadership influence (Lin, Featherman & Sarker, 2017). Therefore,

access to networking resources (knowledge, relationships, mentoring, proximities, skills, training and advices) plays an important role in the development of implanting new capabilities for socio-professional development in order to accede to leadership spaces (Macpherson, Herbane & Jones, 2015).

2.6.3 Scarcity of reliable mentorship

According to Baker, Pifer and Griffin (2014), mentoring comprises a mentor and a protégée. Generally, in the mentoring process a more experienced leader and a newly appointed leader are involved (DiRenzo, Weer & Linnehan, 2013). Coaching, which is another model of mentoring, is a proficient “reciprocal relationship” between two heads of an organisation that support each other to improve their professional leadership skills (Passmore, Peterson & Freire, 2016; Robertson, 2016). Mentors offer support and professional development skills necessary for leadership which supports both mentees and mentors to obtain necessary feedback on their skills (abilities and attitudes) (Dziczkowski, 2013; Maphalala, 2013).

However, some studies (Maphalala, 2013; Fitzgerald, 2013; Dunn, Gerlach & Hyle, 2014) have reported that some of the women educational leaders have a feeling of loneliness when they work in higher positions since they have to work in a patriarchal environment. Moreover, in the study by Howard, Msengi, and Harris (2017), the women participants revealed a craving for mentorship backing and inspiration from a mentor. The women participants also conveyed the wish of obtaining job-related counselling from an advisor in order to enhance their professional qualities.

Likewise, Rathmell, Brown, and Kilburg (2019) also support the idea of mentorship as a precious asset for the hiring and preparing of women in leadership positions. Martinez and Welton (2017) researched the mentoring relationships among 12 pre-tenured faculties of colour (FOC) women educational leaders at selected universities within predominantly White departments and concluded that most of the educational leaders did get mentoring and that mentorship was crucial for educational leaders to advance in their career. In fact, Brown (2005), in a study that involved aspiring educational leaders taking part in a mentoring programme, found that around 72% of these women recognise the importance of mentorship at managerial and leadership level for advancement. These findings were replicated by Crosby-Hillier (2012).

Another model of mentorship is the presence of role models. In research done by Durbin and Tomlinson (2014), women part-time managers in UK spoke out about the lack of role models as an adverse characteristic in their career pathway. In the research work of Hill and Wheat (2017), the women leaders in high positions found it difficult to advance further in their career although they had long time experiences because there was no aspiration from other educational leaders in similar positions. Further research carried out in Cypriot revealed that women participants demonstrated a reduced level of self-assurance (Papadakis, Amanaki, Drakaki & Saridaki, 2020). Therefore, on navigating to leadership spaces, the presence of role models is required for women to accomplish the role effectively (Theodosiou, 2015).

Finally, prospective mentors or trainer mentors very often comprise the school heads and other educational administrators (Hobson & Malderez, 2013), such as assistant directors and directors. According to Grole and Montgomery (2000), finding mentors may be a difficult task because conventionally, mentorship has taken place by the choice and attention of the mentor and not by the protégée (Baker, Pifer & Griffin, 2014). Although women may be willing to take up leadership positions, they seem shy about approaching mentors (Uwamahoro, 2011; Thomas, Lunsford & Rodrigues, 2015). The next barrier that hampers the climb of women in educational leadership is peer oppression among women themselves.

2.6.4 Peer oppression at work

In any working environment, relationship dynamics among women has portrayed both positive and negative impacts on the organisational goals (Ellwood & Garcia-Lacalle, 2015; Tahmincioglu, 2010; Meece, 2009). For instance, in some studies on women's interactions at work it was found that in an oppressive system, teamwork is jammed (Yonemura & Wilson, 2016; Litwin, 2008). Additionally, obstacles arise from gender and inter-personal clashes, enmity and jealousy between women themselves. For example, when women wish to apply for a higher position (rector, assistant director and director), there is a tendency to feel that they do not belong to certain cliques in the organisation. This makes them feel that others dislike them and feels harmful to their occupational well-being since they have been negatively pre-labelled by colleagues (Sojo, Wood & Genat, 2016; Litwin, 2006).

Freire (2000), in her research work entitled “Pedagogy of the Oppressed”, emphasises the above phenomenon as “horizontal violence” used to label the dismemberment of one’s oppressed group of co-workers. Moreover, Freire (2000) defines horizontal violence as “indirect aggression or as intentional and harmful behaviour” employed on the oppressed person by the leading group in order to regain ruling power. In Jones and Palmer’s (2011) study, female participants described their experiences of horizontal violence as follows: enmity among female staff, the inability to view colleagues as partners, being suspicious about how women-colleagues have attained top positions (implying covert relationships with political powers), a reluctance to talk about unfair practices and clashes with young women leaders due a generation gap (Jones & Palmer, 2011).

Similarly, Litwin (2006) states that other negative characteristics of female behaviours in her study include “the double bind” when utilising both the masculine and feminine styles of leading in the gendered workplaces. Therefore, the tags that befall women as a consequence of implementing a masculine style generate the impression of powerlessness as a result of internalising undesirable gender stereotypes (Litwin, 2006 cited in Crosby-Hillier, 2012). These unconscious and unspoken expectations function as a filter to explain the behaviours of other women who are working in the organisation. This is often demonstrated by the various expectations that women have concerning the behaviour of their superiors. Women subordinates look for more cordial interactions between women superiors and co-workers than similar expectations between male superiors and co-workers. When women leaders do not embrace a feminine leadership style, they are usually categorised as persons “difficult to work with” (Litman, 2006, p. 3). On the other hand, aspiring women leaders were discouraged from supporting their peers because acting in a friendly manner with a female co-worker is often viewed as interfering in an attempt to obtain the leadership position (Litwin, 2006).

In light of the above discussion, peer oppression is one of the most challenging obstacles that women have to overcome at work.

2.6.5 Gender stereotypes

Gender is the sexual characteristics by which men and women are socially constructed to adopt male and female identities (Wolpe, Quinlan & Martinez, 1997, p. 269). In leadership research, Pounder and Coleman (2002, p. 124) assert that gender is identified through sex (male or female)

that are socially constructed and result from biological characteristics. In so doing, certain jobs have been characterised as masculine (engineering, military officers, secondary and tertiary education, senior management positions) while others as feminine (nursing, early childhood and primary school education) and there has been disparity in the gender-work treatment leading to socio-economic disproportionation (McDowell, 2015). According to Uwamahoro (2011), gender equity looks at jobs as having equal opportunities, promoting impartial treatment for men and women in the socio-cultural, economic, political and personal showgrounds. In Mauritius, although there is legislation that promotes gender equity, however, at home and within organisations, gender equity is interpreted differently mainly due to the different religious influences that co-exist in the country (Boateng, 2017; Gnanzi & Öberg, 2017; Desmond, 2019).

Although there has been a feminist revolution since the 1960s regarding women's civil rights and professional desires with the enactment of equal opportunities legislation in many countries, gender stereotypes endorsed by men and women continue to exist across many nations (Rudman & Phelan, 2010). Paludi (2008) advances that gender stereotype consciousness becomes activated as early as the age of infancy and is firmly established for most children by the early stage of primary schooling. Differentiating gender type since childhood sets the founding base for basic gender categories which automatically link women and men with different characters, for example, women being viewed as cherishing and men as agentic (Rudman & Phelan, 2010).

According to Davies, Spencer and Steele (2005), hidden self-concepts become more apparent when women are continuously exposed to stereotypic advertisements and beliefs. In the study carried out by Davies et al. (2005), it was discovered that when priming women were allowed to watch stereotypic television advertisements concentrating on the female stereotype, these decreased their desire to take up leadership role and their ability to see themselves as successful as opposed to males in these roles (Rudman & Phelan, 2010). Similarly, these affected children's career paths due to the lowering of ambitions and ideologies (Weenink, 2008).

Since an early age, children often start to adopt gender stereotypes in terms of the occupations they would like to do in the future. For instance, girls tend to choose mostly air hostessing, secretarial, teaching or nursing jobs to name a few. On the contrary, boys prefer jobs such as truck driving,

engineering, mechanics or becoming an army officer. Broadley (2015) also shows that girls are less motivated to embrace a career in science and mathematics.

Additionally, the President of Catalyst, Ilene Lang highlights that gender stereotypes in various companies might have drastic consequences when organisations are unable to identify gender stereotype bias, they may lose top talented female leaders. Consequently, in order for an organisation to capitalise on the “full deck” of talent, innate responses need to be adopted to address the effects of gender stereotypes (Catalyst, 2007, p. 24).

2.6.6 Double bind impasse

In the literature, the “double bind” issue is regarded as the idea that women have no bright future if they manage to occupy top positions, as well as being unable to reach leadership positions due to their male counterparts (Rhode, 2017). This is also referred to as the concept of “think leader – think male” (Hoyt, 2005). Oplatka and Hertz-Lararowitz (2006), Sczesny (2003) and Hoyt (2005) suggest that leaders often have skills which are mostly dominated by male attributes (assertiveness, being able to take charge, confidence, and being dynamic). If women act in the same way, they are regarded as too rigid, having grown muscles, and being aggressive, self-promoting and uncaring which is commonly termed as “unfeminine” (Morojele, Chikoko & Ngcobo, 2013). As a result, women leaders are always perceived as being less effective compared to male leaders.

The “masculine nature” of leadership positions in education makes women feel more reluctant to climb the ladder to leadership positions. This is because women have the inclination to be caring. Therefore, individual relational ideals could be professed to be at odds with the “masculine values” such as “rationality” and “objectivity” in senior-most leadership positions (Oplatka & Hertz-Lararowitz, 2006; Shakeshaft, 1989). In addition, there is the assumption that men’s behaviours are important for effective leadership (Schuh, Bark, Van Quaquebeke, Hossiep, Friege & Van Dick, 2014)). When a working milieu presumes men’s ideals and practices as the model for leadership, it is difficult for women to reach senior leadership positions and to navigate in these sites (Linková, 2017; Pick, 2017).

Other researchers have shown that gender inequality prevails at the workplace in leadership positions (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2013; Wajcman, 2013; Cleveland, Vescio & Barnes-Farrell,

2013). Catalyst (2013) carried out a survey on gender stereotypes at work. The results indicate that male respondents viewed male leaders as more effective than women in delegating tasks, problem-solving and influencing upward networking, team-building, reward building and mentoring. Surprisingly, female respondents also believe that males were more competent as leaders (Berdahl & Moon, 2013).

All the above-mentioned barriers can be wrapped into two categories: external and internal barriers. The former is extremely reliant on peripheral forces and necessitate institutional, organisational, and societal change globally, whereas the latter is related with the inner feelings of current women educational leaders and those aspiring and can be surpassed through their individual change. However, it is to be noted that internal barriers can seem to be the product or the repercussion of the external ones since it is the male-dominated settings of each culture, religious beliefs and society that shapes women leaders' low self-confidence, self-esteem and lack of enthusiasm. As a result, women leaders keep themselves away from the advancement in the leadership and management ladder (Shakeshaft, 1987).

2.7 Strategies women educational leaders adopt to overcome challenges in the leadership geographies

The above sections have identified some of the aspects which are accountable for hampering the career development of women educational leaders and aspiring women leaders and their ascension into leadership spaces. However, despite all these barriers which impede women in attaining leadership and management positions, there are women who employ certain strategies to overcome the challenges on this pathway. Accordingly, some of the strategies are discussed below.

A strategy used by women to advance in their lives and work includes opting for the right organisational fit (Darcy, McCarthy & Grady, 2012). In other words, working women are choosing to join companies which have policies based on having a good family and work balance so that they can spend quality time with their children and family as opposed to quantity time. At the same time, these women look for life partners who are accepting that there are no stereotype roles among family members so that social and professional relationships are created with the view of supporting each other as life partners, be it at home or the work places (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2011).

Research carried by Uwamahoro (2011) investigated the barriers faced by women heads of schools in accessing leadership positions in Rwanda. She found that mentoring is an essential tool for women's leadership development. The researcher suggests the following strategies to address the challenges they face: women's networking, mentoring and modelling, sourcing funding for further studies and continuous professional development training programmes (Uwamahoro, 2011).

A meaningful way for aspiring and existing women educational leaders to overcome societal barriers is to be self-confident and apply for existing and higher leadership positions when they have the desired qualifications and experiences (Pirouznia, 2013, 2006). Additionally, it is crucial to determine whether the women's points of view on the barriers change when they are in top positions. Understanding their perceptions as educational leaders is also likely to affect other women who are planning to take up positions as school leaders (Pirouznia, 2013; 2006).

Mcdonald, Jackson, Vickers and Wilkes (2016) stated that interpersonal relationships play an essential role in enhancing a pleasant and relaxed working environment. Mcdonald et al. (2016) find that women participants as educational leaders can create a caring atmosphere, enhance teamwork through collaborative leadership and networking and the ability to systematise work with individual resilience. Moreover, Samier, Bates and Stanley (2006) and Eagly (2005) find that women principals create a socially more compassionate form of organisational objectives, promote social policies and everyday interactions, share decision-making and work delegation. Moreover, women school principals prefer regular contact and information sharing with stakeholders which is also known as the "web of inclusion" (Hegelson, 1995; Ishimaru, 2013; Barr & Saltmarsh, 2014). Using this strategy, all members of the educational system are able to voice their concerns and feelings and dialogue is on-going. This enhances decision making.

Another strategy to break barriers is the engagement of aspiring educational leaders in continuous professional development (CPD) (Zepeda, Parylo & Bengtson, 2014; Whitworth & Chiu, 2015). This approach helps to prepare aspiring leaders to further advance in their careers (Chisholm-Burns, Spivey, Hagemann & Josephson, 2017; Tekleselassie, 2002; Bush & Jackson, 2002; Mestry & Singh, 2007). Moorosi (2010) argues that women educational heads, who are engaged in CPD, influence their job satisfaction which has a positive impact on their leadership practices. The more

training the women are offered by the different stakeholders, the better they perform in principalship positions. The Mauritius Institute of Directors (2017a, 2017b) places emphasis on the importance of developing adequate policies and organisational infrastructures to promote women's access to leadership spaces and the reconciliation of private and professional lives.

Family, friends and their own bosses' support also influence women in leadership positions (Coleman, 2009; Roebuck, Smith & El Haddaoui, 2013). Similarly, Rarieya (2007) and Naz, Fazal and Khan (2017) reveal that depending on the tribal norms and intellectual levels prevalent, husbands, fathers, male colleagues and male relatives supported women leaders in traditional Pakistan. Moreover, women feel more secured and have less conflict when their employers support their family and professional lives (Wattis, Standing & Yerkes, 2013). On the other hand, Shakeshaft et al. (2007) argue that women leaders sometimes find themselves over-loaded due to work commitments, and child-care and family responsibilities. Thus, women are now advocating having a balanced home and professional work life, with services and opportunities in all their roles (Liss & Schiffrin, 2014). In Nordic countries, researchers (Ólafsson, 2016; Pinheiro Geschwind & Aarrevaara, 2014; Tappura, Syvänen & Saarela, 2014) have found that consistent excessive workloads and responsibilities negatively affected heads of schools' lives and career development which resulted in stress and health problems. For instance, in Mauritius it has been found that women leaders in the private sector have faced more difficulties with acceding to leadership positions compared to those in the government sector (Mauritius Institute of Directors Report, 2017). These women, who have been able to climb the leadership ladder, complain about having coping problems with excessive workloads, power relationships and leadership responsibilities that impact on their family life and their own health (Women in Networking Annual Report, 2017). As such, having "talks with colleagues" - with whom complex situations are confidentially discussed, views and experiences exchanged, as well as discovering solution options from colleagues - are hopeful and inspiring ways to cope with stressful work conditions (Tappura et al., 2014). In so doing, a dialogic leadership approach is adopted where complexity is managed using communication, procedures, advice sharing, collaborative supports and an appreciation of efforts among stakeholders (Law, Dollard, Tuckey & Dormann, 2011; Syvanen, 2014).

2.8 Chapter summary

Although women have consequentially upgraded their academic qualifications that make them eligible for supervisory positions (Statistics Mauritius, 2017), they are still under-represented in the top-level educational leadership roles such as rectors, assistant directors and directors. The Mauritius Educational Statistics of 2016 (MES, 2016) reports that women had been outstanding compared to men in qualifications since 2001. Inclining to this tendency, one would infer that the number of women occupying leadership positions in the secondary education sector would be contemplative of the number of qualified women for supervisory roles. However, only about 37.8% of women were in the position of head of primary and secondary schools and around 24.7 % of women occupied the assistant director and director positions in the schooling context in 2016 (MES, 2016).

Meanwhile the arena of leadership and management comprises many theories, this chapter has involved just some of them which have an association with women in educational leadership and management in the secondary educational system. The significant matter to be retained from the analysis of literature is that even though there are a range of leadership theories, the behavioural leadership styles in transactional, transformational, instructional, distributed and authentic leadership theories are the most commonly found in educational settings and they are more inclined towards conceptualising feminine leadership.

It should be noted that in Mauritius hardly any research on the leadership practices among women secondary educational leaders (values, goals, and strategies), the lived experiences, and the spatial and leadership patterns of the women secondary educational leaders has been carried out. Much of the studies on educational leadership are geared towards leadership styles, leadership approaches, the impact of leadership styles on teacher motivations, the barriers in the practice of educational leadership, and critical analyses of the role of the rector in motivating the teaching staff using quantitative methodologies. This study serves to explore and understand the lived experiences of women educational leaders from their childhood to their present leadership positions in the secondary educational system.

Moreover, the literature review also enumerates different contributing factors such as family and work conflict, restricted access to resources, the absence of mentoring support, glass-ceilings,

gender labelling, male-dominated organisational power structures and the poor perception of women leadership's effectiveness, including the unbalanced representation of women educational leaders within the [secondary educational context](#). Utilising the narrative inquiry research method, this study furthers these experiences.

This study provides an opportunity for women educational leaders to narrate their lived experiences, to uncover challenges the Mauritian women educational leaders have encountered and how they have navigated the male-dominated leadership spaces during their leadership pathways.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS -THE ZOOMING DEVICES ENCOMPASSING WOMEN EDUCATIONAL LEADERS IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIPS

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the literature on different leadership approaches and challenges to leadership served as the opening theoretical basis for exploring the study. Since this study is about women educational leaders, initially I believed only a feminist lens would be sufficient for this research work that intended to reveal and search into women's emancipation when entering the male-dominated secondary educational management and leadership spaces which are bounded by socio-cultural norms. However, after taking cognisance of the diversity, intricacy and complexity of feminism, the latter cannot be a stand-alone theoretical construct for analysis due to the tensions and contradictions within the theory (Hooks, 2000; Beasley, 1999; Blackmore, 2013; Acker, 2013), and the ways in which women's positions are improving in the society, even though not at the expected pace (Pritlove, 2016). Therefore, the theoretical analysis has been drawn from multiple perspectives such as social constructionism, feminism and gender to frame the biographical narratives of the women educational leader participants in this study from an underprivileged point of view.

For the purpose of this research study, I developed a specific framework called the "Socio-Feminist and Gender" (SFG) conceptual framework. I developed the structural framing of the SFG concept using a collage of social constructionism as the dominant theory, encompassing feminism and genderism's theoretical perspectives in the leadership spaces of the participants. When these paradigms of theorisation were applied individually to educational feminist leadership, they insufficiently inquired and explained women's educational leadership in the broader context of apprising the socio-economic and cultural changes. Typically, this happened simply because one construct would often not recognise the existence or influence of the other constructs (Martinez-Kellar, 2012; Kellar & Slayton, 2016). However, when the three theoretical paradigms were intertwined with one another, the SFG concept emerged and provided the potential to clarify and recognise the multi-directional interactions with multiple realities of women educational leaders in male-dominated leadership spaces.

By examining the lived experiences of the women participants, the SFG conceptual framework offers insights which explain their career choices and trajectories. It further uncovers the barriers to leadership achievements and approaches to navigate these challenges. It also unveils the way women leaders carved their career path in male-dominated leadership spaces bounded by socio-cultural traditions. Therefore, in this chapter, I am providing arguments within a socio-feminist and gender conceptual framework.

3.2 Women educational leaders through the lens of social constructionism

Social constructionism posits as the theoretical stand acknowledging that people develop knowledge in a social space and not individually (Schaffner & Tabb, 2014). The social spaces in this study are the different leadership spaces where women exert agencies, be it in their childhood, adolescence, professional or married life. Social constructionists (for example, Levy Vygotsky;³ Peter Berger & Thomas Luckman;⁴ Andrews Tom⁵) conceptualise that knowledge and reality are formed through social interaction and not discovered out of the blue in the mind (Gergen, 2011). From this point of view, it can be understood that social constructionism as a practice of scholarship is connected with the credence that a considerable collection of people's lives and experiences occurs due to relational and social influences (Taylor, 2017). Hence, this theory is pertinent to this research since it pursues an understanding of the appurtenances of leadership spaces, as a social concept, from the lived experiences of women being in different educational leadership spaces. As such, social constructionism has become a dominant theory to this study since it considers women in leadership positions as a social phenomenon.

While social constructionism is deployed in this research study to understand how women educational leaders socially construct their leadership experiences, it is also used to explore how barriers such as prejudice, discrimination, and institutional racism influence women educational leaders' experiences and their career pathways. Therefore, within the social constructionist

³ Vygotsky, L. S. (1980). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard university press.

⁴ Berger, P. L. & Luckman, T. (1966). *The Social Construction of Reality*. Doubleday/Anchor.

⁵ Tom, A. (2012). "What is Social Constructionism?" *Grounded Theory Review: An International Journal*, 11(1). <http://groundedtheoryreview.com/2012/06/01/what-is-social-constructionism/>

paradigm, individuals are asked to be aware of the multiple realities that exist and the need to be constantly mindful about our assumptions about how the world appears to be (Burr, 2015).

Moreover, a socio-constructionist approach is philosophically aligned to the purpose of this thesis because the researcher seeks to understand the meanings ascribed to the navigating path of women to reach the different leadership positions using social-relationship scaffold building. It is argued that such sense-making requires exploration because interpretive researchers are likely to attach a variety of meanings to the phrase “Women in Leadership”. This suggests that the researcher would hear different stories about leadership practice(s) as these would be derived from the participants’ understandings, combined with constructions about childhood, adulthood, professional and leadership positions that emerge from the socio-cultural-historical moments-in-time when the stories are formed and told (Crotty, 1998; Patton, 2002). Hence, in the epistemology of socio-constructionism, it is argued that understandings and responses to the lived experiences of women educational leaders are socially and historically shaped (Boske, 2014).

Additionally, the word “truth” for social constructionism is problematic. Some researchers believe that there is nothing we can say as an objective fact (Tuck & Yang, 2014). Hence, the ways social constructionism understands the world is not from an objective reality but from people living in today’s world or who have experienced the past (Burr, 2015). Therefore, this research study uses social constructionism to present the stories of three women who are educational leaders, illuminating their different experiences and perspectives of childhood and adolescence (as a student), as a professional (teacher and rector) and as a director together with the social constructions of their professional and personal identities that enable them to negotiate the challenges that exist within the secondary educational system.

In the drive of social constructionism as a qualitative and narrative inquiry approach, knowledge, instead of being individually created, incorporates much emphasis on the intercommunications between people (Burr, 2015). As such, languages are of prime importance during social interactions through which concepts and knowledge are created. The use of human languages to facilitate, negotiate and filter interpretations and co-construct reality fits appropriately with the narrative landscape of this thesis, given the different social interactions that women have to deal with in their leadership pathways, both in positions as sub-ordinates and power-holders (Pather,

2017; Cohen, 2004; Burr, 2015). Hence, through social constructionism, this research study has unfolded how the male-dominated leadership spaces when filled by women come to be enriched with the dynamics of power-shifts, interpretations, mediations and reconstructions through communal practices.

Using the elementary logical beliefs of social constructionism, this research thesis comprehended that male-dominated leadership spaces are sites for social constructions because they cannot prevail without local communities and larger societies. Being placed in such socially constructed male-dominated leadership spaces means that women leaders or aspiring women leaders are surrounded by the reality of such social concepts or the construction of them (Zhao & Jones, 2017; Lock & Strong, 2010). This thesis strives to provide and obtain the truth from women educational leaders by directly listening to their voices. Hence, social constructionism is an appropriate theoretical lens in this case because it is used for discovering personal truth, undertaking problem-solving tasks, reducing apprehension, acquiring relationship know-how, finding causes and gaining insights into the “significant others” inside a given social setting (Jolemore, 2018).

Using the theoretical construct of social constructionism, I interpreted what the women educational leaders said in their own “languages and voices” and was enlightened by why they said what they had said. In so doing, the social constructionism theory assisted me to piece together their narrations and explanations to make plausible conclusions. For instance, when I asked the women participants “how they felt” about being able to reach leadership positions and being in male-dominated leadership spaces, it invoked their emotions. Whatever the participants chose to say in reply to questions during the interviews, emotions were present. As such, “language”, whether spoken or through gesticulation, assisted the women participants to construct multiple realities by unfolding “what has been going on or happening” to them in the different leadership spaces. Social constructionism is concerned with how individuals seem sensible about their world, and in what way they are able to voice their feelings originating from their lived experiences (Van Manen, 2016). It searches for understanding the emotional state while experiencing certain circumstances of life. Through the social constructionism theory, I explored what this meant and how the women participants felt as women educational leaders in a male-dominated leadership milieu. By openly voicing their states of mind, I was able to gain knowledge and enlightenment directly from them.

Social constructionism is logically lined up with this qualitative study as it strives to reveal the ways in which people contribute to the creation of their apparent social reality (Karpf, Kreiss, Nielsen & Powers, 2015). This qualitative social study endeavours to explore and comprehend the meanings of individuals in their natural territory, such as the home and families, schools, workplaces and other spaces (Buonomo, Benevene & Fiorilli, 2020). This theory had assisted me in understanding how women educational leaders negotiated and managed the tribulations of life with regard to patriarchal and matriarchal interactions in the home and family settings, during schooling and at work sites.

3.3 Women educational leaders through the lens of feminism

The basic notion of feminism is that women and men should be equal in the social, environmental, political and economic spheres of society (Burkett & Brunell, 2020). However, due to the different historically oppressive experiences of women, different feminist paradigms have emerged to investigate the different forms of women's struggles, unfair treatment and segregation grounded on sexual difference (Zemba, 2017). As such, different feminist theoretical constructs have arisen juxtaposing with feminist advocacies and academic research and practices. They strive to highlight the barriers, dominations and restraints that encompass women's lives, as well as to explain the dynamics and determination in identifying mechanisms for transformation, especially in the unbalanced power relationship between women and men (Disch & Hawkesworth, 2018). Since the architectural doctrine of the feminist theory is viewed as multi-layered, multi-dimensional and multi-sited rather than field constrained (Yip & Page, 2016; Ferguson, 2017), the commitment to develop strategies of transformation to create full rights and opportunities for women and conducive relations between women and men for the better is of prime focus. It is within these mediation tactics that feminists and pro-feminists hold dissimilar stands; consequently, within the feminist theory, there is an array of perspectives.

The different perspectives of feminism, classified according to the "hyphenation model" (Hawkesworth, 2012), for example, cultural feminism, psychoanalytic feminism, sociological feminism, eco-feminism, first, second, third and fourth-wave feminists (Brabeck & Brown, 1997; Hawkesworth, 2012) have cropped up to deal with specific types of women's challenges. In this study, I have used a "blended-mix" of feminist theories (liberal, radical and post-structural) as a sub-framework which elucidated the findings that made sense as an investigator. The constructs

borrowed from these perspectives were used together with the socio-constructionist and gender theory sub-frameworks to explain some of the women participants' emancipation experiences in their career path to leadership positions in the male-dominated leadership spaces of the Mauritian secondary schooling system.

This sub-section attempts to explain which aspects of the three-feminist theoretical and conceptual perspectives were found relevant for this research. Despite alternative theories of feminism overture logical critiques, they do not contribute to an appropriate debate for the educational sector, nor do they provide an adequate analytical framing to focus on the vagaries and challenges of women in educational leadership which is the crux of the research. Given the complexities of the lived experiences of the women educational leaders, I realised that applying only one feminist perspective would not be sufficient to support the study. Therefore, it was important to draw from the radical, liberal and post-structural feminism to create a "blended-mix" feminism.

A "blended-mix" feminist sub-framework was found pertinent for the research as it conveys an awareness of the prejudice women endure due to their sex. At the same time, it seeks to advise on actions to enhance women's lives. Consequently, feminism takes into consideration the subservience of women to men, by inscribing how it emanated, how and why it got bolstered, and how it could be reformed (Acker, 1994, p. 43). Therefore, in a similar vein, this study dwells on how women come to occupy management and leadership positions despite socio-cultural barriers; how women continue to face sometimes covert and sometimes unconcealed constraints related to their participation in management and leadership positions despite legislation prescribing equal job opportunities. It discloses some of the gendered traditions women have to face in their quest and endeavours to land and remain in leadership positions despite gender equality legislation. Women's social conditions and positions cannot be explored in seclusion, but have to be examined in relation to that of men and the institutions, and the cultures and systems in which they operate. Thus, liberal, radical and post-structural feminist constructs were used to analyse some of the women's challenges and strategies in male-dominated leadership spaces.

As previously stated, there are numerous feminist paradigms, but instead of debating each paradigm, I focused my discussion on the three most evocative constructs, namely, radical, liberal and post-structural feminisms, in order to decipher and enlighten the gender disparities in

educational leadership and management spaces. This sub-section, therefore, mounts the sub-framework of feminism by charting the fundamental assumptions supporting feminist theory in general. The sub-section further justifies the relevance of some approaches within feminism and displaying their limits in explaining the present research, thereby engaging towards the creation of the overall socio-feminist and gender (SFG) theoretical framework.

3.3.1 The context for feminism

Before entering into the discussion of liberal, radical and post-structural feminisms, I would like to highlight a brief historical background of the study, which adds meaning to the choice of the three chosen feminist theoretical constructs. Other studies within the context of colonisation have used liberal feminism (e.g., Almeder, 1994; Chaudhuri, 2012; Stewart, Lal & McGuire, 2011), radical feminism (e.g., Wallace, 2018; Wallin & Wallace, 2018; McLeod, 2019) and post-structural feminism (e.g., Strachan, 1999; Meyer, 2014; Niesche & Gowlett, 2015) independently as the theoretical lens in the educational sector but not collectively in one study.

Mauritius was under the occupation as a colony of the Dutch, French and British at different periods (Piat, 2004). After the abolition of slavery in 1835 and before the Second World War, the population was made up of settlers (European Whites), workers (who were freed slaves from Africa) and immigrants from India (Muslim, Hindus and Tamils) and China (Le Comte, 2004). During this period, economic and social mobility was intangible for the workers because education was not accessible to the labour class and even landownership was something to be dreamt of (Gurib-Fakim, 2019). Hence, well before independence, access to formal education for girls and office work opportunities for learned girls and women in the public and private sectors were quasi existent. Most of the work opportunities were meant for men and women were offered jobs that are less attractive in terms of high labour effort and low salaries (Gurib-Fakim, 2019).

The establishment of the Constitution and other laws passed since the independence of Mauritius in 1968 were meant to grant girls and women equal access and opportunities for socio-cultural and economic development (Sookhoo, 2015). Great progress has been made in terms of free access to education for both boys and girls from pre-primary to tertiary education (Oolun, Ramgoolam & Dorasami, 2012; Mariaye, 2006). However, the change concerning women in leadership and management has not been significant, more specifically in secondary educational management and

leadership spaces. The majority of women are stepping into the secondary education sector as teachers, while their numbers in educational leadership and management are very low and, as such, the educational management spaces remain male-dominated. The low number of women in leadership spaces dominated by men has been discussed and illustrated by statistical data in Section 1.4.3.

The following sub-sections briefly analyse liberal, radical and post-structural feminists' advocacy in an attempt to interpret and explain the impact of policies and practices addressing gender inequalities in educational leadership and management.

3.3.2 Liberal feminism

Liberal feminism is grounded in the dogmatic ideology of liberalism, which originates from the conviction that all human beings have rights to liberty, self-determination and independence. The debate on liberal feminism is grounded in the persuasion that women have as much capability as men. Therefore, equal rights need to be given to women so that they can exercise their capability and thereby redress the prejudices perpetrated against them. Human educational development has always been imperative for liberals as oblivion and injustices are overtaken by information and knowledge. Hence, the concept of equal opportunities and rights in human educational development has always been backed by liberal feminism, advocating fighting injustices against women.

The prime objective of liberal feminism is the fair distribution of the genders throughout the different labour segments and over prevailing societal hierarchies (Middleton, 1993). Additionally, liberal feminism targets transforming the positions and opportunities of women within the current social, political, environmental, economic, religious and cultural backgrounds. It focuses on eliminating obstacles that inhibit women from achieving their full capability, whether such obstacles are situated in the secondary educational system, or other sectors that tend to adopt discriminatory labour practices, covert economic disempowerment or act as hurdles to political aspiration because of sex discrimination.

Therefore, in this study, I explored the life experiences of the women educational leader participants who were born, grew up and did their schooling in the era of pre-independence and

joined the job market in the post-independence period. I explored their experiences and perceptions about their struggles and emancipation to be educated as equally as boys and to have access to resources for their personal and professional development as female figures in the male-dominated system. Liberal feminism was used as a sub-analytical lens to analyse equality and equity of opportunities, rights and power to have access to the same or similar resources as boys and men.

Nevertheless, liberal feminism is viewed as being grounded on a paradox that is unresolved since it advocates that in essence women and men are distinct. It categorises rationalism as a manly feature and advocates that the dearth of it by women forms part of their nature. As such, liberal feminism intends to attain complete fairness, opportunity and equity in all domains of life without drastically changing the existing social hierarchy. As a result, this research uncovers the covert tactics of societal processes that continue to oppress women, even though liberal feminism appears to have offered more accessible opportunities to education and through education for the individual and professional development of women.

3.3.3 Radical feminism and patriarchy

Radical feminism's theoretical position, compared to alternative feminist perspectives, views patriarchy as the pivotal system of dominance (Saulnier, 2014; Lister & Campling, 2017). Patriarchy is a historical form of male oppression on women, permeating all aspects of their socio-economic and cultural lives (Gaffney & Beverley, 2001; Bapuji & Chrispal, 2020). However, the extent and the type of power oppression vary significantly as there is no global tendency. The operational relationships in the patriarchal system are structural (Medaglia, 2019), that is, they exist within organisations and institutions such as places of work and home and family settings, respectively. Patriarchal supremacy is primarily confronted by radical and post-structural feminists.

According to radical feminists, patriarchy is the central form of domination towards women (Vukoicic, 2013). The women gender is viewed as the target for oppression and gender discrimination which occurs in the patriarchal system with both apparent and hidden structures despite the legal elimination of various modes of discrimination (Bartky, 2015). Hence, it is very problematic to eradicate discrimination completely. Radical feminism attributes the remaining inequalities to patriarchal forces and relationships in the male power-dominated system that are

unveiled at each stratum of the society, ranging from the private spaces of life through spouses and sexuality, the institutional spaces of the family and home to the organisational spaces of work (Hadi, 2017; Makama, 2013). Therefore, through this research, I can admit that there may be contemporary systems of patriarchy where although women are reaching public arenas and leadership spaces, they are still subservient to men both outside and inside the home.

Under the sub-sectional lens of radical feminism which is a theoretical construct “intended for and appertaining to” women and based on women’s involvement, knowledge and opinion, in this study, I explored the life experiences of three women educational leaders having different social, cultural, religious and political milieu. From their lived experiences, how patriarchal practices in those milieus have impacted the participants’ lives and what strategies they deployed to counteract the patriarchal challenges within their private, home and family settings, within the school environment and the higher education leadership work sites.

However, under radical feminism, statutory structures are viewed as too conciliatory in order to reduce or exclude power from men, knowing that they will not hand this over freely (Van der Gaag, 2014; Gangoli, 2016). Since liberal feminism necessitates a constitutional framework to eliminate sex discrimination, radical feminism is doubtful of the government and views it as intrinsically and naturally patriarchal. Hence, I surmise that liberal and radical feminists’ constructs lack certain distinctions which can be used for further and deeper analysis of power dynamics between men and women in leadership spaces in today’s society. If women are accessing leadership positions, I assume there is the likelihood of a disruption in the power system in the male-dominated leadership spaces. Therefore, post-structural feminism was used as an additional dimension of analysis to provide further enlightenment on the challenges women leaders face when they are in male-dominated leadership spaces.

3.3.4 Post-structural feminism

The research also suggested that post-structural feminism has significance in the insightful construction of new knowledge (Jefford & Sundin, 2013; Fullagar, Pavlidis & Francombe-Webb, 2018). Post-structuralist feminism is a theoretical construct that recognises the potential for social change by questioning the sources and demonstrations of individual, institutional, organisational

and societal “knowledge and beliefs” (Grogan, 1996, p. 34). It investigates further the details of the operations of the patriarchal phenomena with all its likely appearances: subjective, institutional, organisational and ideological (Moorosi, 2006). Post-structural feminism emphasises disrupting the multiple operations of (gendered) power by demolishing the inequitable social structures so that equality and equity between men and women become permeable and sustainable. Therefore, this ties us to continuously re-evaluate the world and how it is formulated (Adams-St. Pierre, 2000).

Hence, from the above discussion, I was able to understand that post-structural feminism pictures social relationships with regard to plurality, complexity and diversity rather than unity and compliance as considered by conventional feminists. In this way, I was able to see that post-structural feminism operates in synergy with social constructionism where multiple realities of oppressions are socially created, sometimes sophisticatedly crafted and practised by people and society. As such, these oppressional treatments become “normal” or the “new normal”. Therefore, a post-structural feminist analytical lens discloses the “normalised” tendentious processes and practices in private, in the home and in work organisations as male-dominated spaces, which are well structured and where knowledge, position and power are sophisticatedly connected to sustain male dominance.

In line with the above discussion, post-structural feminism considers women as a representative body. However, liberal feminism perceives women as secluded and independent persons having the capability to transform their conditions but does not see the single woman as representative of a “sex” group being exploited because she is a woman. Whilst radical feminism observes that women are adherents of one gender group where they are all viewed as casualties of patriarchy, men are viewed as dictators within patriarchy (Moorosi, 2006).

The feminist post-structural framework displays the classical and modern domination of women in societal, organisational, institutional and private spheres through everyday interactions (John et al., 2017). It also gears towards the construction of different identities grounded in culture, gender, ethnicity, religion, social and political affiliations (Ray, 2015; Chebli, 2016). Moreover, the analytical framing permits women to master the social and operational milieu involving the dynamics of power and have the agility in disrupting and resisting social-power relationships. In

so doing, women are likely to empower other followers with the necessary resources to challenge existing and new forms of social structures (Arslanian-Engoren, 2002; Watkins, 2005).

Hence, through post-structural feminism, women are seen as subjects owning the power to make choices, to be active participants in the creation of social truths and are able to make informed decisions and not be just submissive sufferers of social replication (Klugman et al., 2014; Gardiner et al, 2000). Therefore, post-structural feminism does not treat women as a homogenous group but rather highlights the multiplicity of variances among women resulting in different and complex types of power forging the life experiences of women (Colfer et al., 2015; Beasley, 1999).

3.3.5 Blended-mix of feminist theories

Deconstructing and analysing the socially created multiple identities and realities provide support to comprehend the drudgery and the place of women in society. This, in turn, empowers women to rename and relocate their individual and universal contributions to society, and to recognize their interconnection (Gardiner et al., 2000; Moorosi, 2006). Therefore, taking into consideration of the historically social, cultural and political shaping of Mauritius, a single feminist framework for the analysis of women's oppression and emancipation was insufficient for this study.

Hence, I considered that a “blended-mix” of the “liberal, radical and post-structural feminist” sub-framework would help to enlighten this research on women attaining educational leadership positions and sustaining the challenges in the male-dominated leadership spaces. This is because feminism intends to comprehend the human condition, with a committed focus on the progression of women and this opinion is partaken by all the diverse feminist constructs (Grogan, 1996; Gray, Agllias, Schubert & Boddy, 2015; Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Stroking post-structuralism in conjunction with liberal and radical feminism permits the analysis of social structures that are unfair, burdensome and discriminatory to women's welfare, not only on surface but beneath the surface also, and to undertake social responsibility for progressive change (Ana, 2020). Hence, in this study, both the individualistic and pluralistic experiences of the women educational leader

participants were analysed using the “blended-mix” of feminist theories, in view of narratively inquiring about any new dynamics of feminism⁶.

The “blended-mix” feminist sub-framework adopted for this study provided the conceptual mechanism that permits us to be much more mindful of the history, context, continuity, change, power and complexity that revolves in society. Blended-mix thoughts, therefore, can be mobilized for the advancement of women in educational leadership studies without forfeiting the pledge to enhance the lives of people by generating new knowledge (Fahy, 2002; Jefford & Sundin, 2013).

3.4 Women educational leaders through the lens of genderism

Genderism is a multidimensional theoretical paradigm assigned to the range of socially created roles and rapports, behavioural characters, mindsets, actions, conducts, comparative power, authority and leadership that the world contrastingly applies to males and females. In essence, gender is historically distinct, ethnically and culturally grounded, and continuously shifting (Johnson & Repta, 2012).

Gendering goes beyond the individual identities and is levied on instead of developed from individuals separating them into two complementary but unequal sets, i.e. “women” and “men”. It gives them identity and status, shaping their everyday behaviour and interaction and favouring some while disadvantaging others. Through this division, norms and roles are constructed into significant social institutions of society or in other words into the “gendered social order”. Its power makes men and women to be entrapped in their gender structure that is built by the society and act in a passively shaped way without being able to deviate because of danger of stigmatization (Lorber, 2010).

The scopes of gender include institutionalised genders, gender identity, gender roles and gender relationships (Johnson, Greaves & Repta, 2007). Therefore, in this study, I explored how each

⁶ Feminism is a very challengeable term. Therefore, it is impractical to produce a very comfortable synthesis (blended-mix) from those vertiginous theoretical constructs to situate feminism. As a result, blended-mix feminism tries strategically to reconfigure, but unable to shield, within the multiple systems of meaning and in reply to the circumstantial calls for separation and adherence (Chaudhry, 1998, p. 2)

scope or multiple scopes of gender could affect leadership and leadership practices, especially in the field of the secondary educational system, in diverse ways.

Even though the word “gender” is frequently used reciprocally with “sex”, these expressions are categorical (Schellenberg, 2019). Sex is a biological construct that encloses the anatomical, hormonal, physical and hereditary diversity that prevails in the species. Although theoretically categorical, “gender and sex” are decidedly interconnected, and it is habitually hard to disentangle these two words (Johnson & Repta, 2012). Thus, gender remains a contested concept because of the blurring agreement between sex as a biological construct and gender as a social construct (De la Rey, 2005).

Needless to say, the dimensions of gender do affect leadership and management practices through numerous different mechanisms (Johnson, Greaves & Repta, 2007). These embrace social, cultural, political and religious circumstances, family and work duties, lifestyle opportunities, sociable cooperation with members of family and synergies with the crew at places of work (Lorber, 1997). These mechanisms materialise from the interpretation that gender is formulated and developed in social interactions known as social constructionism (Budgeon, 2014; Bourdieu, 2001; Butler, 1990, 1999). Using the discussion on gender theoretical construct in this section, I explored how the participants’ gender impacted their career path to and in educational leadership and management positions that are male-dominated spaces.

For scholars working in the field of educational leadership and management, gender-centred leadership develops as a category where masculine and feminine capabilities, attitudes, skills, discernment, language and dialogue, actions, power and authority are understood as behavioural mouldings (Hansatit, 2014; Kornau, 2014). As such, efficient educational leadership has been considered as gender-related, resulting from the stereotyping of men as embracing leadership and higher leadership positions in contrast to women who are supposed to occupy teaching level and mid-management positions (Paustian-Underdahl, Walker & Woehr, 2014; Hentschel, Heilman & Peus, 2019). Hence, most of the studies over the years (for example, Schein, 1973; Hoyle & McMahon, 1986; Fagenson, 1990a; Coleman, 2003a, 2003b, 2003c; Rowley & Yukongdi, 2009; Brooks, 2013; Aziz, Kalsoom, Quraishi & Hasan, 2017) have established that capabilities, skills and aptitudes branded as “effective competencies” and characteristics of leaders, such as

decisiveness, independence, aggressiveness, assertiveness and dominance, are those retained by men. On the other hand, women (leaders) have been depicted to have characteristics such as caring about people, collegial, team-oriented, sympathetic, and consultative, with more interest in their private lives rather than higher professional aspirations and creating and maintaining social relationships (Hoyle & McMahon, 1986; Rowley & Yukongdi, 2009; Aziz, Kalsoom, Quraishi & Hasan, 2017). Therefore, through this research study, I have tried to find out whether universally women have a different way of leading or one that is differentiated from that of men, with the view to revealing if any new characteristics of women leadership style exist.

Consequently, the gender-centred leadership perception tends to adopt that “women’s traits and behaviour are ‘inappropriate’” (Akpinar-Sposito, 2013, p. 1) for the higher level of leadership spaces. It reflects that apart from organisational and societal influences, institutional (home) and personal (self) factors are originally accountable for women’s marginal representation in leadership chairs. According to this viewpoint, women are insufficiently embodied in leadership spaces because of home and personal factors ensuing from socialisation (De la Rey, 2005). Values and ideals transmitted to girls during their childhood and adolescent socialisation processes inspire few women whilst debar many others from taking senior and higher leadership chairs (Borthwick, 2015). This can be explained that in certain way women are grooved to put more effort into their personal lives and to appraise peers and colleagues more than their jobs, to have more obligation to their home and family than the work in the organisation and to renounce educational leadership positions (Akpinar-Sposito, 2013). It embraces that female are inculcated with private motivations, few initiatives to authority and power (Nemoto, 2016), more sympathetically oriented behaviours, compliance, subservience and more evocativeness towards womanhood and feminineness grooming (Hentschel, Heilman & Peus, 2019; Abdallah & Jibai, 2020). Regrettably, such traits are inconsistent with the values and requirements of leadership roles (Paarlberg & Lavigna, 2010). Therefore, in this study, I explored whether women, to be able to assume leadership roles in male-dominated spaces, need to perform and function like males to persuade the public that they are suitable for leadership tenures (Heilman, 2012; Clarke, 2011).

Moreover, the leadership roles of women and men are socially characterised by the institutions to which they belong. As a result, women and men perform oppositely (Shelley, Morabito & Tobin-Gurley, 2011). This happens due to the shaping of women’s inner characteristics and behaviours

resulting from socialisation in the workplaces and also because of institutional structures having a bearing on their leadership practices (Batliwala, 2011; Wood & Eagly, 2012). Additionally, it is alleged that the institutional culture and ethos, policies, stereotypes and philosophy hamper women from reaching higher leadership positions (Ilie, 2018; Mangisa, 2019). Institutional culture profiles the performance of women while promotion opportunities are created and given to men (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011; Bellou, 2010). Hence, the operational culture of institutions contributes to the low numbers of female candidates in leadership spaces because of, amid other reasons, biased preferences for male candidates.

Furthermore, through the research work of Dipboye and Colella (2013), it can be extracted that at the work organisational level women are treated differently owing to jobs being branded into two categories: favourable and unfavourable occupations. On the one hand, favourable work posts offer privileged opportunities, authority and power. Consequently, men are favoured to dwell in such positions because they have developed personality traits and boldness that empower them to reach the high-ranking leadership spaces (Lenski, 2013). Adding to this situation, since the uppermost leadership positions are occupied by men, they sustain other menfolk to ascend the leadership hierarchy (Hill, Miller, Benson & Handley, 2016).

On the other hand, unfavourable work postings have few opportunities for professional development, and have limited managerial power and authority. As a result, such postings are mainly offered to a greater number of women because these posts have fewer benefits or represent a “cul-de-sac” in the career path to higher leadership ascension (Lenski, 2013; Hill et al., 2016). The contradictory personality traits, skills and professional attitudes of women and men are a consequence of inequitable contingents, prospects and power structures in organisations due to stereotyping and favoured choice in gender (Zentner & Eagly, 2015). The gender stereotypes have been noted to be in high propensity in the ecosystem in which the organisations are located, and in return, such organisations function based on such stereotypes (Wohlers & Hertel, 2017). Therefore, gender socialisation and stereotypes have a considerable impact on women’s representation in male-dominated leadership spaces.

In brief, gender theory is connected with the construction and advancement of the person within culturally, socially and environmentally distinct patterns of roles, conducts, behaviour and traits

that change over time (Carter & Greer, 2013; Carter, 2011; Disch, 2008). This leads to the exploration of what constitutes masculine and/or feminine gender in society and sites of work. At the same time, gender theory is allied to discontinuing sexist, bigoted and stereotype systems and researching novel approaches to be “real” humans with respect to any gendered actions and achievements of the self (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick & Xu, 2002; Foucault, 1978). Therefore, in this study, I explored to what extent the gender of the women participants in becoming educational leaders have been influenced by societal and cultural norms and to what extent the female gender has impacted their leadership practices when acceding to the different male-dominated leadership spaces in their worksites and home and family settings.

It is noteworthy that the gender perspective alone cannot sufficiently explain women leaders’ under-representation and influences of their leadership practices in male-dominated leadership spaces. Therefore, in the next section, socio-constructionist, feminist and gender theories are pulled together, forming the socio-feminist and gender (SFG) conceptual framework for this study, in order to explain the synergies that exist in shaping women educational leaders.

3.5 The socio-feminist and gender conceptual framework

The constructs of socio-constructionism and feminism are used together with gender theory to form the holistic socio-feminist and gender (SFG) conceptual framework (Figure 8) to explore women’s ascension to educational leadership positions in male-dominated leadership spaces. It also provides a framing to understand any specificity about women leadership and their leadership practices, and any changing relationships in the home and family settings and organisations due to their positions as women educational leaders. The SFG framework, as an analytical lens, also tries to uncover the challenges and strategies adopted by women educational leaders needed to sustain their positions in the leadership spaces.

“Gender is understood as socially constructed” (Jule, 2014, p. 2464) – that is, something learned through social acculturation. Therefore, through the socio-constructionist theory, it is argued that we understand and gain attitudes and qualities as a consequence of those in our surrounding environment. With time, we progressively turn into feminine and/or masculine conformations, and

we perform in gendered styles in several settings for a range of reasons. Besides, although the feminist theory is thoughtfully linked to, but not similar to gender theory (Ahl & Marlow, 2012), both feminist and gender theories move towards a critical investigation of the connection between discrimination and the differences that exists between the theory of gender role socialisation and the theory of gender (Lindsey, 2015; Trauth, 2013; Kimmel & Aronson, 2010; Gilligan, 1982).

Feminist and socio-constructionist theories view a woman's skill and experience as an initial mark and reflect that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," (De Beauvoir, 1949/1989 cited in Jule, 2014) while in gender theory masculinity and femininity are conceptualised as a process of operational and dynamic identity instead of natural demonstrations by itself (Fausto-Sterling, 2019; Jule, 2014) Hence, under SFG, in my opinion, someone is not feminine or masculine, but in one way or the other one accomplishes a combination of various attributes that might be interpreted as either or both feminine or masculine taking into consideration the wider context, specific background, relationships and objectives in the life of the Mauritian (SIDS) women educational leader participants (Morash & Haarr, 2012; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003).

Female leadership theory assists in distinguishing how women educational leaders manage and lead their work organisations and home institutions and the types of communication they have with their juniors and family members respectively, in their challenge to accomplish the corresponding objectives. Female leadership theory also enlightens how women educational leaders interact, encourage, perform as role models, and help organisations and home partners to grow in their professional development and advance in their careers. Such attitudes of women educational leaders are likely to inspire other women to engage in informal and formal leadership. Herein, (female) leadership theory propels women in the arena of leadership without questioning gender inequality.

Feminist theories try to understand gender inequality in senior leadership spaces by elucidating why there is gender inequality in society, organisations and institutions and clarifies that gender inequality is founded on biological characteristics rather than capability. The theories assert that all individuals are equal in front of the law. Nevertheless, no single feminist construct describes sufficiently informal features such as community customs and values that isolate and show

prejudice against women in their personal and professional advancement (Lorber, 2010). Even though the feminist theories have been struggling for civil rights and prospects for women, they do not inquire deeply enough about the organisational and institutional inequalities prevalent in the world (Mannathoko, 1992, p. 73; 1999).

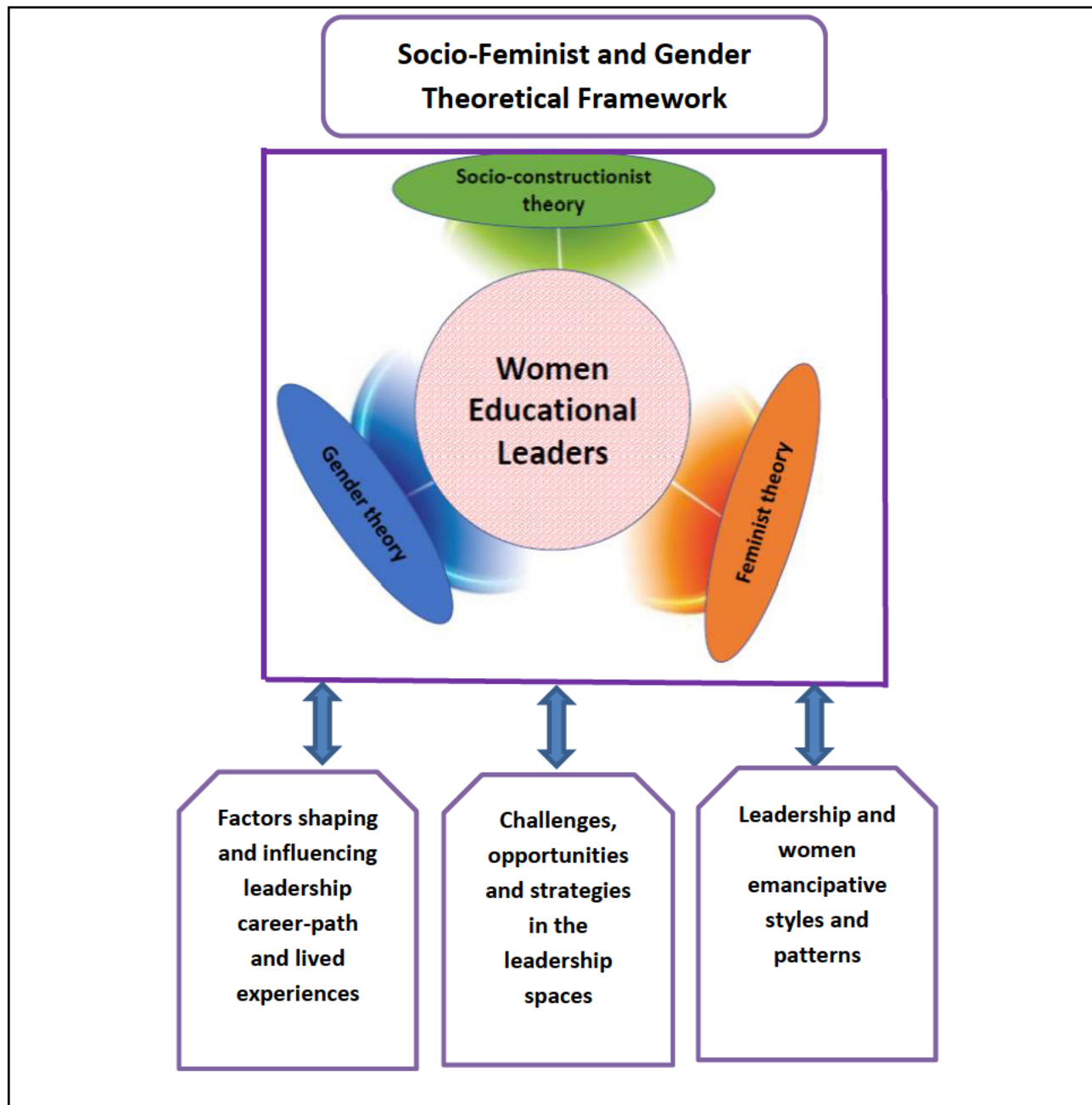


Figure 8: The Socio-Feminist and Gender Conceptual Framework
(Source: Author's design)

In this research study, SFG incorporated the theoretical constructs of feminism (liberal, radical and post-structural), gender, leadership and socio-constructionism to yield a holistic recipe to explain the disparities in the number of women and men in secondary educational leadership positions. The SFG method also provided an understanding of the challenges and strategies that women educational leaders deployed to face the effect of spouses and family members, individual colleagues, work environments and community that obstructed women from attaining leadership positions in the secondary educational system. Therefore, in my opinion, the SFG conceptual approach was significant to this inquiry research, as it operated in an all-inclusive way in a world where the women educational leaders' attitudes are shaped and where its traditions and principles are imparted.

The SFG conceptual framework theorised that the synergy between self, gender, feminism, organisation, institution and societal systems is a dynamic, interactive, continuous and holistic modus operandi (Martin & Barnard, 2013; Martin, 2011). Regarding the application of the SFG conceptual framework to the current research, it informed on how personal, organisational, institutional and community features in different times and spaces hindered women educational leaders from reaching leadership positions in the secondary educational system of Mauritius. In this manner, SFG supported the research work to explore, amid other conditions, how the social interactions of women since their childhood impacted their career pathways and leadership goals. The framework assisted in unfolding and recognising aspiring and existing women educational leaders' management and leadership at work, their altitude of self-assurance and engagement at work, and their exigencies around family and work. SFG aided in determining how the opportunities and acuties of the world, communities, organisations, institutions and individuals influenced existing and aspiring women educational leaders' presence in secondary educational leadership spaces that are male dominated.

The SFG conceptual framework integrated the assumptions and arguments of the socio-constructionist, blended-mix feminist and gender perspectives. This is because human beings and their work organisations and home institutions cannot be understood as being disconnected from the society (social, religious and cultural, economic and political implications) in which human beings operate. When human beings, the organisations, the institutions or the systems in which

they are nested alter, the associated components also change (Hazy & Uhl-Bien, 2013; Parker & Fagenson, 1994).

Therefore, under SFG, human beings' behaviours were sculpted while institutional values and societal norms were inculcated. The way individuals manage, lead, perform and function in private, institutional and organisational spheres is the ultimate creation of societal patterns and principles. Hence, gender roles, discrimination, expectations and inequalities between spouses, in the family settings and workplaces are grounded in society. In reality, societal patterns and principles regulate the leadership styles adopted that cause gender inequalities. According to this study, although there are gender inequalities, some women leaders have emerged through distinguished social, cultural and environmental values and norms. Therefore, the conceptual framework shown in Figure 8 was informed mainly by the SFG approach, which spoused the socio-constructionism, blended-mix feminism and genderism that provided the dynamical theoretical support to explain the presence and under-representation of women educational leaders in the male-dominated leadership spaces of the secondary educational system of Mauritius. Methodologically, the analytical construction and discussion of data were based on multiple realities that originated from the women educational leader participants creating and interpreting the meaning of women leadership in male-dominated spaces.

Furthermore, in the quest to understand gender disparity in home institutions and workplace organisations, it is vital to explore how women and men diverge in their experience, how women are disfavoured and prejudiced against in family institutions and work organisations, and how the societal systems value and/or victimize women (Fagenson, 1990a). Explicitly, women's leadership and practices are outcomes of gender, institutional, organisational, patriarchal, economic, cultural and societal structures, all influencing in various ways and different degrees. Therefore, leadership, socio-constructionism, blended-mix feminism and gender that encompassed the SFG approach was a useful theoretical and analytical framework for the research of women in male-dominated leadership spaces. The results were expected to offer the explanations of the women participants in the senior-most leadership positions of the secondary educational system, even though these women had unusual educational backgrounds and progress was bounded by patriarchy and socio-cultural and economic norms.

Finally, despite some weaknesses inherent in blended-mix feminist theory, gender theory and socio-constructionist theory, the strengths acknowledged in each of the theoretical paradigms were relevant for acquiring an understanding of women educational leaders in male-dominated leadership spaces. This study, therefore, combined the strengths of socio-constructionist, blended-mix feminist and gender theories to gain a full understanding of the career path, underrepresentation, the challenges and strategies of women in leadership positions, thereby overtaking these weaknesses.

The SFG guided the present study in identifying the factors that shaped and influenced the leadership experiences of women educational leaders. The theoretical constructive approach detailed how the women participants stepped into the male-dominated leadership spaces, the challenges they faced and the strategies they deployed to sustain their leadership positions. It was difficult to look at analysis using only one theory, while multiple theories were shooting at the study. All three theories were influencing each other. There was need to bring operational peace between the theories through diplomatic dialogues. Therefore, it was necessary to blend the theories because the gender, struggles and social construction characteristics of participants could not stand alone in the study. That was one of the most painful task to do and after several readings and re-readings to understand the confluences and nuances in “the similarities and the differences” of the three theories that the SFG was emerged like “Eureka”. In doing so, any existing or new leadership and emancipative styles and patterns were revealed.

3.6 Chapter summary

This chapter illuminates the theories of social constructionism, feminism and gender on women educational leaders in male-dominated leadership spaces of the secondary educational system. Nevertheless, social constructionism was the leading approach in this research. This chapter recognises that the women educational leaders were social performers through their ability to narrate their experiences about leadership in the different leadership spaces. This chapter shows that women can dynamically contribute to society and the secondary education system as distinguished human beings and not just as simple objects of the research work. Social constructionism pursued to explore and comprehend the meanings of women as educational

leaders in their natural and different environments, such as home and family, schools, workplaces and other spaces in the creation of their social realities.

Different feminist theories have been successful in fighting the formal processes of discrimination and exclusion that many women face in their career choice and advancement. However, each individual feminist theory did not fully address the invisible discrimination, patriarchal or other structural challenges of society emanating from societal values, norms, beliefs, attitudes and stereotypes, and those that were within the women leader participants themselves that were discriminatory in terms of their participation in different scenarios. Hence, a blended-mix of feminist theories created the synergy to understand the types of challenges women educational leaders in the secondary educational system faced in their career advancement and how the blended-mix feminist construct brought new dynamisms against the subtle challenges the women leader participants faced in their career paths and leadership practices.

Through gender theory, the intent was to understand the identity of women educational leader participants in regard to their gender and how their roles, practices and relationships with self, institutions, organisations and society are shifting to unmask the male-gendered conversations and methods wherein women are overwhelmed. These conversations and methods have become “normal” in the social practices of educational establishments and society altogether (Mooroosi, 2006a, 2006b). The way of doing things and discourses are viewed as “normal” as they have been drafted in the profession of educational leadership by and for men as already pointed out in Section 3.4. The irony is that even when equitable access is formally acknowledged, women continue to encounter impediments in their accomplishment in educational leadership and management. A gender lens required an analysis that is rooted in the intention of seeing how gender and gender practices are affected by cultural, religious, social, economic and political bearings on the lives of the women participants.

Hence, the dynamic, holistic and interactive influences of the three theories led to the conception of the socio-feminist and gender theoretical framework, as well as an analytical framework to make sense of the experiences of women educational leaders from early childhood to their positions in leadership.

CHAPTER 4: CONDUCTING RESEARCH WITH WOMEN EDUCATIONAL LEADERS IN THE PUBLIC SECONDARY EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, the literature set the theoretical framework for this study to be explored. This study is about women educational leaders in the public secondary educational system of Mauritius. The study aims [to explore the leadership and management geographies in the](#) lived experiences of women educational leaders in navigating male-dominated leadership spaces during their career paths to different leadership and higher leadership positions.

This chapter provides for the male researcher to conduct studies with women participants as research elites. In addition, this chapter places emphasis on the use of the study design and methodology used to gather data from women educational leader participants in leadership and higher leadership positions. Moreover, it gives an account of the location of the study, the participants in the study, the techniques of data collection, the method of data analysis, as well as the issues of validity and reliability and ethical consideration of the study. This chapter locates the study within the interpretive paradigm.

4.2 Male researcher doing feminist research

Women researchers, who recognise themselves as feminists, [conduct research on women](#) for a specific purpose (the why) (Sprague, 2016). In their pursuit, they use particular kinds of interrogations with regard to the subject matter and disputes to be explored (the what), together with a distinctive technique of knowing (the how). These probing and explorative questions conspicuously apply to women's participation in a world in which they are outranked by men (Wadsworth & Hargreaves, 2001).

A feminist is a woman, who usually fights for the cause of womanhood but not necessarily according to gender, and therefore, a man cannot be a feminist (Flood, 2020; Alimi & Leitz, 2019; Burrell & Flood, 2019). On the other hand, men can be pro-feminist and participate in pro-feminist

researches (Crowe, 2011). In this study, I stand as a pro-feminist researcher willing to take up the challenge of positively swaying the attitude and behaviour of men towards women in order to help reduce gender biases in our society. Moreover, I wanted to use this research opportunity to understand the leadership practices of women in male-dominated leadership spaces and the implications thereof for organisational and societal benefits.

Doing research from the socio-constructionist, feminist and genderist perspectives under the SFD conceptual framework implicates exploring matters of feminist importance, with an emphasis on leadership practices, scientific oppression, social power and differences while concurrently encouraging societal engagement (Hesse et al., 2004). In a nutshell, feminist research is centred on undertaking research study “for women” rather than “on women”, with a strong emphasis on social change (Miner et al., 2007). Feminists study contrasts from other backgrounds due to the feminist philosophies and apprehensions that can repetitively disrupt the framework of the development of the current study (Brayton, 1997). Brayton (1997) states that feminist and traditional research methodologies differ in three ways, namely, an effort to eliminate power imbalances between the participants and the researcher, the ways to work towards social equality and continuously to gyrate around women’s lived experiences. [This study concentrates on the geographies of educational leadership and management in the lived experiences of women educational leaders.](#)

Researching the lived experiences of women by interacting personally with them was challenging for me due to their professional status. I found this study challenging as most of the women educational leaders had busy and hectic lives, and some did not want to narrate their personal lives to a male researcher [because of their religious beliefs which prevented them in telling their personal lives to a male stranger](#), except a few, even though ethical and anonymity issues were assured. Therefore, this research included the issue of “researching up” the field or as it academically known as “elite research” which is dealt with in more detail in sub-section 4.13.

According to Wadsworth and Hargreaves (1991), the methodology of feminists could still be pertinent to men perusing research on women’s lives in order to revolutionise the underrepresentation practice in the educational leadership space for the purpose of change and improvement of society. In this study, the exchange of experiences with women educational

leaders is not non-judgemental since it is not merely inquiring “about” women but rather it is exploring “for” women but “by” a man. Pro-feminist research takes it a stage further than just “listening” to each other. Listening is for an advanced purpose so that a better understanding can be derived and new techniques can be identified. This allows for altering and bringing changes to the underrepresentation of women in the educational leadership space. By exploring the lived experiences of [women educational leader participants](#) in a male-dominated space, [the lessons learned from these experiences can be shared with existing and aspiring male and female educational leaders](#). Thus, while this “feminist” or “pro-feminist” study embarks with an initial vital stage, these are footsteps to the questions: [How women educational leaders made their way to attain and sustain in leadership and management positions, in the male-dominated leadership spaces in the public secondary educational system? What are the lived experiences of women educational leaders in the public secondary educational system of Mauritius? How the career-path of women educational leaders evolved in the different leadership and management spaces in the public secondary educational system? What leadership patterns do women educational leaders adopt in this study?](#)

4.3 Research design and methodology

According to Babbie and Mouton (2009), a research design is a plan of how the researcher anticipates conducting [the study](#). Creswell (2007, p. 5) defines the research design as “the entire process of exploration from conceptualising a problem to writing the conclusion” of the research. Figure 9 below illustrates the research design that I adopted, where a qualitative research study utilises a narrative inquiry research method which provides direction for the data generating process and how the data is going to be analysed. A research design describes the strategy for moving from essentially philosophical assumptions to stipulations on the selection of participants, the data collection techniques and types of data analysis to be adopted (Maree, 2015).

Moreover, in the qualitative research design, the researcher is a crucial instrument during the data gathering process. The use of the researcher’s semi-structured questions as an instrument is vital because it permits the “participants’ voices to communicate and carry the story” (Creswell, 2007, p. 43). [During the research interview processes, the researcher felt the opportunities as well as a](#)

challenge to create an interpersonal environment of respect, shared information, openness, and clarity of communication.

The qualitative design is evolving and malleable rather than being rigid with a prefigured scheme (Hill, 2013). Hence, adopting a qualitative research design for this study allowed the researcher to create interpretations about what was heard, seen, and understood. Moreover, the research-value and ingredients of the data generated at the instances of each interaction between researcher and participants was reliant on the interpersonal quality of that interaction, as well as the participant's professed value of the reality and its retelling. These facts are impossible to be disconnected from the researcher's historical background and understandings (Creswell, 2007).

Therefore, in this study, the methodological objective was to listen to the stories of the past and present lived experiences of women educational leaders in the secondary school system and to record these as historical accounts. This research is grounded on the "narrative inquiry" that focuses on the experiences of the participants.

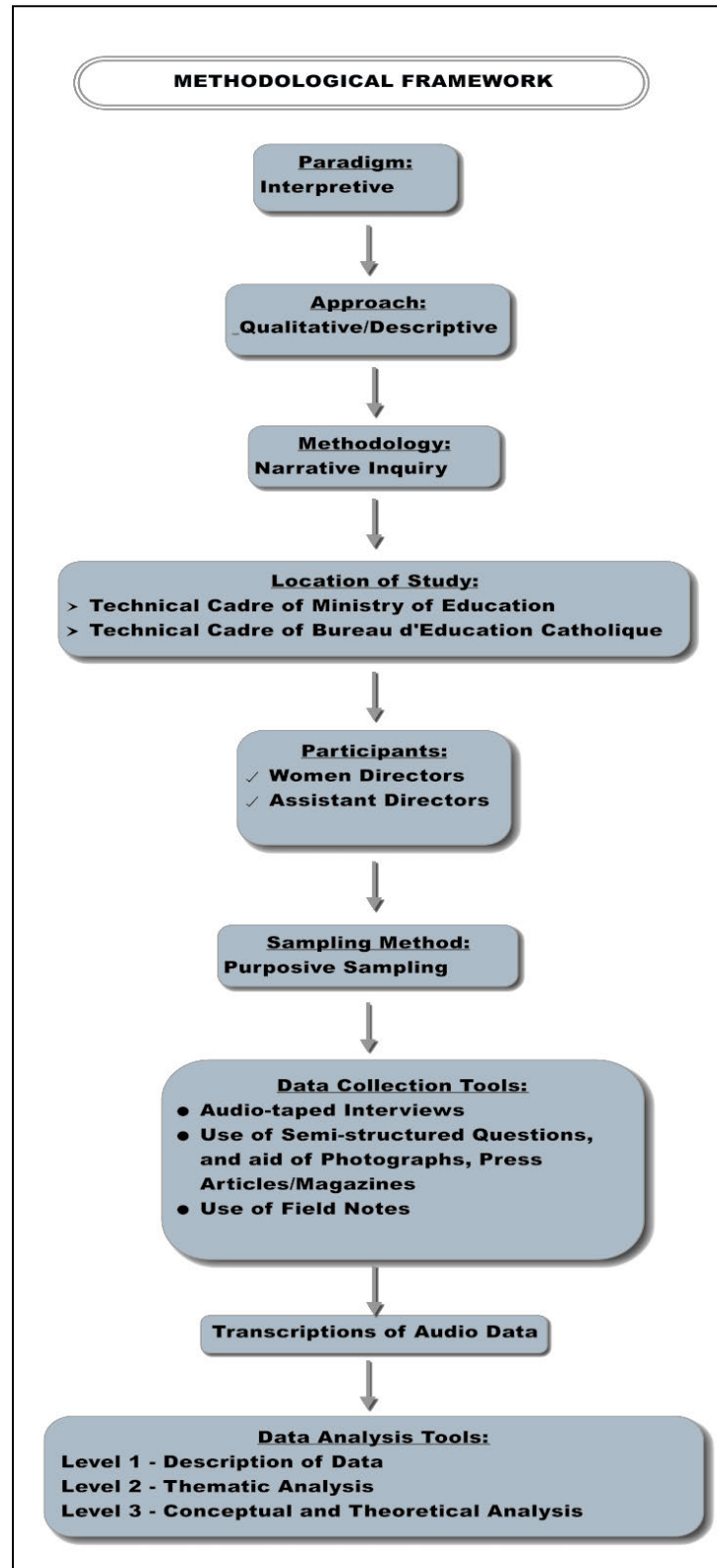


Figure 9: The Research Design
(Source: Author's own design)

4.4 Paradigmatic choice

An educational field research paradigm is a debatable investigation directed at enlightening educational judgments and choices so that there is an excellent and appropriate educational achievement (Bassey, 1999). This is based on a basic worldview system that guides researchers' decisions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). [Scholars](#) stick to a class of philosophical postures having a particular paradigm about what is the nature of the knowledge and how the [research](#) ought to be carried out in order to gain the in-depth understanding of the knowledge.

Grogan and Simmons (2012, p. 38) postulate that paradigmatic research study incorporates three essential components: “an ontological perspective, an epistemological perspective and methodological approaches that are most often associated with the paradigm”. The philosophical standpoints supporting the different paradigms are impacted by contrasting epistemological and ontological circumstances (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Epistemology is the association between “what we see and how we may comprehend it” while ontology is the study of existence (McKenzie, 1997). The two concepts are theorised differently between two paradigms commonly known as positivism and interpretivism.

From the interpretivists' epistemological point of view, truth is relational and continuously shifting since the observer constructs realities (Grogan & Simmons, 2007, p. 38). Ontology is personal and continuously composed by the individuals who form and symbolise reality. For the interpretivist “no knowledge is value-neutral” (Grogan & Simmons, 2007, p. 38). Based on the research work of Miles and Huberman (1994), people are dynamic subjects of the ecosystem conveying their principles and opinions constructed on understanding and interpreting different phenomena.

Equally, it is expected that interpretivists adopt qualitative research using approaches and methodologies of a interpretivist nature, such as narrative inquiry, grounded theory, ethnography and phenomenology. Moreover, case studies and research tools, such as participants or direct observation, open-ended, structured or semi-structured interviews and thematic or discourse analysis can be used (Cohen et al., 2019).

Hence, this study located itself in the jurisdictions of the interpretive paradigm and narrative inquiry in regard to the qualitative approach (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Two critical factors

supported this particular choice. Firstly, the nature of the research purpose and questions called for the acceptance of the particular paradigm and approach. In other words, the “why” and the “how” questions to be answered for which the interpretive and qualitative framework was used. Secondly, the choice was affected by my philosophical position vis-à-vis the problem under exploration signifying that the interpretive paradigm was well-matched to the study because it presented opportunities to view circumstances through the eyes of the participants and secured their explanations and meanings of complex situations and unfolded the dynamics of their relationships (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 384).

The researcher believed that the explanations and understandings of women’s underrepresentation, their career paths and their locatedness in the male-dominated space of the secondary school system, could only be explored in depth by taking into consideration the women’s own lived experiences that have been directly involved and affected by their situations (Elliot, 2005; Creswell, 2009). In so doing, the multifaceted causes accounting for the diachronic phenomenon could be acknowledged.

The employment of this paradigm and approach enabled the multi-layered phenomenon in this research study to be studied in depth (Lieblich et al., 1998; Bassey, 1999), captivating the essence of the absence of any relevant research in Mauritius. Moreover, this paradigmatic approach offered a more vibrant and comprehensive picture of the subject matter in a specific socio-cultural background and inside the chronological timeframe of Mauritius since independence in 1968. Additionally, undefined generalisations about women educational leaders were possible (Bassey, 1999).

4.5 Narrative inquiry methodology

Narrative inquiry methodology forms part of a subcategory of the qualitative research strategy in which stories are used to trace people’s life experiences (Josephsson & Alsaker, 2014; Polkinghorne, 1995). The women educational leader participants narrated their life stories that involved past experiences and present happenings in relation to unique contexts and situations. In the methodology of narrative inquiry, the women participants were encouraged to recall, reflect and re-live life experiences (Dhunpath & Samuel, 2009). As such, the women participants’ lived

experiences became a reflexive story offering human meaning-making. Multiple insights of realities were unfolded and were at times in conflict with one and the other. However, the contradictory layers of meaning brought the multiple realities into useful dialogue with each other to understand the social construction of the women leader participants and their social environment.

The interlinking of the educational, professional, social and cultural experiences of the female directors in becoming educational leaders cannot be isolated from their personal experiences. Hence, their personal lives with their own particular traits and skills outline who they are as educational leaders. Therefore, in this study, the researcher generated the biographical and historical narratives of the women participants, covering their childhoods to when they stepped into their role as rector, assistant director and director, in order to discover how their past experiences influenced them as educational leaders in the secondary educational sector.

4.5.1 The reasons for choosing narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry in the field of education offers scholars a comprehensive framework for exploring how people experience life and unconnected events that have occurred through narrated stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000; Dyson & Genishi, 1994; Sedberry, 2016). While conducting the research investigation, the researcher came to be aware of how diversities among the women educational leader participants, (for examples: age, health status, social position, race, sexual orientation, economic status, ethnicity, reproductive status, religious beliefs and political influence) were important factors that could impact on the choices and decisions of the women participants to be in educational leadership spaces while many of the mainstream studies often blind themselves to such diversities among the women leaders and concentrate more on the women's doings in relation to her gender and social relationships. The interpretation of the stories provides insights into the emotional, physical, social, cultural, political, ethical, and historical aspects of life and provides a view that humans lead storied lives (Bell, 2002; Golombek & Johnson, 2004; Webster & Mertova, 2007; Clandinin, Pushor & Murray Orr, 2007). Moreover, the telling and retelling the stories of one's life assisted the researcher in assembling different meanings from logical inquiry and allowed the participants as well to picturised their own life stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Unlike other research approaches used by social scientists, narrative inquiry examined and sought the subterranean understanding of specific features of life experiences of the women educational leader participants. This is because the narrative inquiry provided the “narrative ways of knowing” and understanding of the lived experiences of the women participants. These narrated circumstances aligned in the theoretical rationales of constructivist and constructionist theories, hermeneutic theory, feminist theory, humanist theory and gender theory (Yang, 2011). The narrative inquiry was well suited for this research since it enabled the examination of the lived and life experiences of the participants through the socio-constructionist, feminist and genderist theories under a single conceptual framework of SFG when crossing into leadership positions and carrying out educational leadership roles as rectors, assistant directors and directors. This method also enabled the researcher to learn about the obstacles the women participants came across and what strategies they employed to overcome the challenges they faced in life to navigate to and into the different leadership positions in the male-dominated leadership spaces in the secondary education context.

4.5.2 Narrative inquiry in feminist research

According to literature (e.g., Franz & Stewart, 1994; Mannah, 2008; Marchbank & Letherby, 2014), feminists have asserted that male-centred or patriarchal perspectives have traditionally ruled social science research. This is because the male perspective was considered more important than the female experiences. On the other hand, feminists equally debate that the use of feminist approaches in research can correspondingly produce truthful and valid social experiences (Letherby, 2003; Franz & Stewart, 1994).

Feminist research often uses qualitative methods involving participatory techniques with research participants (Hesse-Biber, 2013; Gray et al., 2007, p. 214). In this study research participants, who were actively involved in the inquiry process, allowed for the diversity of women’s experiences thus giving multiple voices to women. Moreover, using feminist approaches when studying women participants allowed for what has been unnoticed, overlooked, and un-conceptualised in the lived experiences of women. Yet even though no specific procedures exist in feminist research methodology, there are typical feminist approaches to understanding research practices where all knowledge is socially located (Smith et al., 2017). Therefore, no distinct technique could be used

to grasp all that could be known. In line with this, gender, social class, race, researcher's or participant's position, all influenced the conduct and findings of the research, which are in line with what Stewart (1994) and Gray et al. (2007) have noticed. Hence, according to Neumann (2000), one of the research-approaches that feminist researchers use is to give voice to women in order to rectify the male-dominated research perspective. Therefore, narrative inquiry, which is a subcategory of qualitative research, and is just one process amongst the accepted methods used by feminist researchers.

Hence, in this narrative inquiry research, a relationship was created between the participants and the researcher to establish a collaborative rapport and data was generated in the form of original narrative stories which moved away from the general to the more personal form of experiences in order to overview the more significant societal scenery. It was these latter types of experiences that the researcher as a pro-feminist interested in because the women expressed their points of view from their own perspectives. Consequently, in the research process of this study, the women participants, instead of representing a homogenous group of women educational leaders (Administrator, Assistant Director, and Director), were each regarded as a unique individual with their own distinctive personal and professional experiences in their climb up the leadership ladder.

Therefore, narrative inquiry as a method of pro-feminist research appeared spontaneously convenient for comprehending a participant's life and lived experiences through stories, their meaning-making of what, how and why it happened, as well as why it was significant in their lives. In so doing, multiple truths and representations of the women participants' social, cultural, political and contextual influences gave access to the unfolded, multi-folded and situated characters of humans (Sedberry, 2016; Webster & Mertova, 2007).

4.6 Population, sample and sampling technique(s)

4.6.1 Population size

Population refers to the theoretically entire aggregation of elements under study, having common features about which the researcher intends to derive conclusions (Yilmaz, 2013; Babbie, 2016). Hence, using the population under investigation, the researcher were anticipating that the outcomes of the research could be generalisable since for this study, the initial population consisted of 13

women holding educational leadership and higher leadership positions in the administrative-technical cadre space of the secondary educational system of the Ministry of Education of Mauritius (refer to Figure 4 and Table 2). However, when the real research process was active, only 3 women participants were agreeable to form part of the study and therefore, the observations, interpretations and conclusions derived was limited to this study.

This is a space which has been male-dominated since pre-independence and post-independence in 1968, until 2006. From 2003, the then government of the day decided to invest massively in infrastructural development with the construction of 62 secondary schools, and it then became possible for women to accede to the first leadership positions in the public secondary educational system. Consequently, the secondary schooling infrastructural development allowed women to access the “broken rung” space – i.e., from educator to school leader (Madsen, 2020). Therefore, how the women, who embarked on the journey to higher leadership positions in the secondary educational system, have travelled and shaped their leadership career in male-dominated leadership spaces is being explored.

Since few women occupy senior leadership positions in the secondary educational system of Mauritius, the leadership positions were broadened to include the positions of Administrator, Assistant Director and Director, which provided an additional dimension of anonymity to the participants. The population of women educational leaders consisted of Administrators (5), Assistant Directors (3) and Directors (4) (personal field inquiry and also refer to Table 2). From this population, a sample of women educational leaders was drawn.

4.6.2 Population sample

A sample consists of selected participants from a population from whom data is produced (Creswell, 2013). Based on the recommendations of Merriam (1998, 2009), finding a sufficient number of research participants to obtain “reasonable coverage” (1998, p. 64) relies on the research drive. Different qualitative studies acquiring in-depth knowledge on women’s leadership or adult learning have made use of a different number of participants ranging from three to fifteen (Helgesen, 1990; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Kroth & Boverie, 2000; Fine, 2009). In Fine’s (2009) [research](#), fifteen narratives on women’s leadership were studied, but ultimately only seven women were interviewed since saturation point was reached when the interviews yielded similar information. Moreover, in research works within the narrative inquiry genre of Phillion (2002),

Parker (2006), and Pithouse-Morgan, Morojele, Pillay, Naicker, Chikoko, Ramkelawan and Rajpal (2012), the studies focused on only one participant's lived story. I could conclude that the decisive influence is not on the number of participants, but how each participant generates information-rich data in a real life context through their biographical narratives. In so doing, they also contribute to the understanding of the concerned phenomenon using the structure, deepness and complexity of the lived experiences (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2012).

As soon as [the researcher](#) received the ethical clearance from the UKZN Research Committee, I sent out a letter of participation (Appendix D), which contained an explanation of the research aims and objectives and an invitation to participate as a participant, to all of the women Administrators (5), Assistant Directors (3) and Directors (4). However, only five women from the secondary sector agreed to participate in the study. Consequently, out of the five participants, two were considered for the pilot study (one administrator and one director) and three (one administrator, one assistant director and one director) were considered for the leading the main research study. The selection procedure used to select the three main participants is discussed in the next sub-section.

4.6.3 Sampling procedure

The sampling procedure is the criteria and steps adopted in selecting participants for the research study. There are two proposals for developing criteria used to select participants by Ritchie et al. (2013). Firstly, it is to ensure that all relevant factors of the study are included in the selection exercise. Secondly, it is to strive for diversity among the participants in order to explore multiple perspectives, which will provide more relevant data and allow for a more accurate picture of the phenomenon being researched to be seen.

The criteria used in the present study of exploring the geography of women's leadership in the secondary educational sector were: firstly, female gender, and secondly, women in leadership positions in the public secondary educational system. The word "leader" has various definitions according to the point of view of different individuals. Consequently, in this study, the term "leader" is centred on the official position held in the secondary educational system. Thirdly, all the participants possessed at least three years of experience in their respective positions of

Administrator, Assistant Director and Director. They had the work experience and exposure to the institutional climate and culture of the secondary educational system and were equipped to address questions and issues pertaining to their ability to lead effectively in their leadership role.

In this study, the number of women participants currently holding senior-level positions are within the recommended sample size of 1 to 15 (Pithouse et al., 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Kroth & Boverie, 2000; Phillion, 2002; Parker, 2006; Fine, 2009; Helgesen, 1990). Based on the above selection criteria, three women secondary educational leaders, who were the most information-rich participants, were purposively selected after analysing their biographical data. Their personal profiles are detailed in Table 4.

Table 4: Biographical data of Women Educational Leader participants

Participants	P1 - Ananda	P2 – Hafiza	P3 – Lea
Religious Classification	Hindu	Muslim	Catholic
Age Group	55–60	55–60	50–55
Marital Status	Married	Married	Married
Children	2 daughters + 1 son	2 sons	2 sons
Tertiary education	Bachelor in Chemistry Master in Chemistry, PGCE Master in Educational Administration	Bachelor in Mathematics PGCE International Diploma in Administration	Diploma in Education - French Bachelor in Education – French Master in Educational Leadership and Administration
The first year of teaching and number of years	1984, 17	1982, 15 years	1979, 26
Year of promotion to Rector position and number of years	2001 DR 2002 Rector	1998 DR 2002 Rector	2005 DR 2008–2010 Acting Rector 2010 Rector
Year of promotion to Assistant Director	2006 Acting Director till 2011	Acting Director 2012 2014 Appointed	Zone Administrator from 2013

		2014–2016 Acting Director	
Year of promotion to Director	2011 till to date	March 2016 and Retired in Oct 2016	

- The participants chose their own names that reflected more or less their character in order to remain anonymous. However, [the researcher](#) reminded them, due to their small population number in the top positions of the secondary education context, there was no guarantee that people would not recognise them.
- The religious classification of the women participants became an essential element because of the politico-socio-cultural context that identified people by religious classification. The participants had varied family, social, educational, cultural and personal experiences due to their religious upbringing. Three religious categories, namely Hindu, Muslim and Christian were recorded, with one participant from each category.
- The age group of the women participants indicates the maturity level of the women educational leaders. They were aged between 50 to 57 years. The women had held the positions of Rector, and then Assistant Director and Director for at least three years.
- The family status of the women participants served as an indicator of how their married life and responsibilities of children influenced their professional lives as educational leaders. All of them are married and have two or three children.
- The different academic qualifications and short courses or professional development courses attended by the participants display the proficiency and ability of the women to assume the role of educational leaders.
- The different periods spent in the educational sector by the participants shows the number of years they have spent in their roles as educator, deputy rector, rector, and assistant director before being promoted to the position of director.

The researcher did not consider himself as having “power-over” any of the women participants because the researcher did not find himself within the male preoccupation of the gender construction of man nor with the intention of undermining or cornering the women participants with embarrassing questions. Rather, the researcher believed that they were more knowledgeable about their field of work and their lives than himself. Hence, the researcher espoused “power-with” the women educational leader participants so that communication and interaction with them became fluid and translucent, as if the researcher could read the deeper feelings of the participants. Moreover, such “power-with” relationship between the interviewer and the interviewees is regarded as a feminine characteristic concentrating on problems solving, in view of benefiting others and empowering them through their different role of daughter, wife, mother and secondary educational leaders. Therefore, in the power dynamics between the women educational leaders and the male-researcher, both coming from the same research context, is immanent. Hence, throughout the research process, the researcher negotiated the relationship and understanding with the participants so that communication and interaction remained fluid and translucent.

4.7 Data generation methods

According to Creswell (2013), research using theories and methods to create data from a sampled data source is referred as data degeneration. The data generation process started from the time [the researcher](#) sent the invitation letter of participation to the women participants and the telephone conversations that took place discussing additional details between [the researcher](#) and the participants before their acceptance to participate in the research study. These conversations created the initial rapport between the participants and the researcher. The data generation methods adopted were interviews, documents and field notes. These multiple methods of data generation constituted the triangulation process (Daly, Willis, Small, Green, Welch, Kealy & Hughes, 2007).

4.7.1 Interview

The interview is a method which has been extensively used to gain in-depth insights into the research respondents. It is used in different fields of social science “ranging from anthropology where the researcher conducts fieldwork within a given culture to sociology where the feminist researcher wants to gain new perspectives on the lives of participants living in a particular community” (Hesse-Biber, 2013, p. 120). One of the significant roles of interviews is to enhance

understanding of the social conditions of participants. According to Polkinghorne (1995), interviews seem to be the best frequently used method to capture data in order to generate rich narratives of human lived experiences. A semi-structured interview (Appendix F) was designed to be used during the interview sessions.

During this study, although semi-structured interviews were used, at times the researcher had to shift to unstructured or highly structured interview questions because they enabled the researcher to investigate deeply into the subjective experiences of the women participants and obtain information regarding the present phenomenon being studied (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Hesse-Biber, 2013). The participants were able to express their feelings fully and spontaneously (Cohen et al., 2011; Long et al., 2017) without being interrupted in the process of narration (Reinharz & Chase, 2001). As such, the interview process became a “conversation with a purpose” (Babbie, 2016). The researcher found a combination of interview formats offering opportunities to maintain the research drive focused on the objectives while at the same time providing the respondents with sufficient freedom to reply to the questions and for the researcher to ask further questions systematically (Bryman, 2004; Bell, 2008).

4.7.2 Taking notes during field work

The observational notes taken during the research provided me with additional information and clarification of meanings concerning impressions, emotions, moods and other remarkable incidences, including follow-up conversations that arose during the interview sessions (Kelly, Barr, Church & Lynch, 1999). All the observational notes were written in a field notebook with the date and observed phenomenon. The non-verbal reactions also known as emotives (Bull, 2001; Davidson & Milligan, 2004) such as facial expression, hands gestures, body postures and distinctions in quality, pitch and volume of voice and length of silences during the discussion (Gorden, 1980) used by participants were noted and included. The researcher, therefore, recoded descriptions of the participants, the locations of the interviews, the settings, as well as emotional gestures in his field notes during the interview process (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2010). The non-verbal communication allowed the researcher to notice trends in emerging themes and extract meanings between respondents as the interviews progressed.

4.7.3 Documents and artefacts

Artefacts and documents are data generation tools complementary to interviews and field notes. They are regarded as natural fragments of the research investigation (Lee, 2000; Snelson, 2015; Webb, Campbell, Schwartz & Sechrest, 2000). They are also termed as visual methods by some researchers (Grady, 2008; Pink, 2013). As a result of their availability, accessibility and usability in inquiry, they are widely used as visual materials in research across many disciplines (Margolis & Pauwels, 2011; Pink, 2013).

Documents are frequently described under the term “canopy” which denotes a wide variety of “written, visual, digital and physical materials relevant to the study” (Marchall & Rossman, 2016). On the other hand, artefacts are typically physical items that symbolise some form of message that is evocative to participants and the setting. Examples included art pieces, organisational or school symbols, trophies, awards or personal gifts, to name a few.

Documents and artefacts are the symbols of a culture or social setting and can help researchers understand the beliefs, values and behaviours of the social settings (Bowen, 2009). The interpretation of the meaning of the documents and artefacts used were corroborated from observations and through interviews. In this study, the researcher requested the participants to make use of any press articles, school magazine articles, photographs of school trophies and awards in relation to their leadership practices to help them recall any critical events that happened in their lives (Tinkler, 2013; Bogdan & Biklen, 2011). In so doing, probing questions were put to the women participants to obtain further details about their lived experiences from their early childhood to the present in their roles as educational leaders in the secondary education sector. Photo-elicitation helped the participants to generate data while conversing with them and encouraging them to share their leadership practices and social relations with their staff, students and their superiors. However, none of the participants wanted to publish any pictures of themselves or their artefacts in the report writing of the thesis. This request was strictly adhered to. In this qualitative study, the different artefacts and documents acted as data mines when they were smartly dug into to extract information related to the phenomenon of women educational leaders in different leadership spaces under investigation.

All forms of data were collected at the women participants' homes during the time 13hr to 16hr, after doing all their household and personal works. This time is regarded as “dead-time”, when usually no one is at home or there are little disturbances in terms of phone calls as stated by the participants. Also, the spouses and children are away to work, or schools and they would return home after 16hr. Therefore, the women participants expressed themselves freely and the interpersonal interactions that took place with mutual respect between researcher and participants, allowed for clarity of communication in terms of voicing in openness, sharing of confidential information about their personal life and work that should not be reported but provided clues about the directions in the analytical processing route, discussing the different decisions in life and work related to leadership and management.

4.8 Data collection procedures

4.8.1 Administrative procedures to gain access to the field

Authorisation to conduct the research study was obtained from the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the data gathering instruments' protocol on human subjects was submitted and approved (Appendix A – Approval of Research by Research Ethics Committee of UKZN).

Initially, gatekeeper permission (Appendix B - Seeking Gatekeeper Permission) was sought in Mauritius from the Chief Technical Officer, Ministry of Education and Human Resources to carry out this research on women officers who were in leadership positions in the secondary educational context. Gatekeeper approval was obtained (Appendix C – Gatekeeper Approval Letter).

After the participants were identified, a letter requesting participation (Appendix D - Letter to Prospective Participants) was sent to the prospective participants. Once their approval was obtained, a letter of Informed Consent, detailing the purpose of the study, was sent to the agreed participants (Appendix E – Informed Consent Letter), and this letter (signed Informed Consent) was collected from the agreeable participants before the interview started.

4.8.2 Pilot interview

Social science researchers recommend the use of a pilot study before going ahead with the main study to determine the achievability of the interview questions and operability of the interview settings (Haralambos & Holborn, 1996). Hence, I piloted a small-scale study with two “pilot-participants” to evaluate the suitability of the interview questions and to amend appropriately any misleading or double-meaning questions so that I could obtain full responses from the participants in order to attain the research objectives (Kim, 2011). Moreover, I had the opportunity to assess my skills at conducting interviews and how to deal with such things as planning, juggling different types of probing questions (basic, explanatory, focused), managing sensitive information (Easterby-Smith et al., 2012) and using a laddering technique. Being an engaged listener, I was able to reflect on these different issues as conversing with someone for research purposes involves multiple skills (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007).

Before implementing the main interviews, I piloted the initial interview schedules with a non-participant woman educational administrator and a non-participant woman educational director because of their long career experience. At first, I kept my interpositions to a minimum during the interview sessions, believing that by first setting the interview background and purpose, the women participants would convey a well-ordered story of their lives. However, I realised that I needed to engage more closely with the women participants in the main study in order to spark the dormant and remote memories which were essential to this study. At this point, I realised also that the documents and artefacts would help in activating these memories. Thus, I abstained from excessive questioning and adopted gentler probing and prompting conversational attitude that achieved instantaneous and encouraging outcomes. Also, I reviewed some of the questions’ styles and the language used and adjusted to a softer approach.

Therefore, the pilot study that was carried out helped me to pre-test and fine tune the research instruments, as well as to unscramble the interview process for a smooth running in the main study (Creswell, 2013). In addition, the pilot study validated the research instruments to be used in the main inquiry (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delport, 2014). Finally, the pilot study helped me to decide where to position the voice-recorder to avoid background noises for efficient data collection.

4.8.3 Main study

4.8.3.1 Interview protocols, recordings, data storage

Data were collected from the selected women educational leaders over a period of eight months, starting from November 2016 to July 2017. The data were collected in three phases (for details see sub-section 4.8.3.4) using the semi-structured interview instrument (Appendix G). The participants were free to use any artefacts and documents they felt would help in the data generation. However, they preferred using documents that contained their pictures and articles already in the school or public domain, for example, school magazines, newspapers and social media. Therefore, I respected their wishes to do so. The data collection tools were a digital audio-recorder and written field notes. All recorded data were lock-stored under the guardianship of my first co-supervisor (now retired from service at the Mauritius Institute of Education) as per the mandate of the UKZN Research Ethics Policy.

Before each interview session, a fifteen-minute briefing was performed to explain to the respondents their rights to give information or not, as well as clarification of the interview settings. This was done in order to give the participants enough time to recall and reflect on their lived experiences within the secondary educational context while answering the interview questions.

The number of interviews per participant varied between three and four as the duration of each interview depended on the appointment time, the availability of the participants, the research objectives and resources (Adjei, 2013). The duration of the interviews lasted from 60 to 90 minutes. The number of interviews and interview duration, in qualitative research, cannot be fixed because interviews are carried on until the saturation of data appears (Berg, 2004). Therefore, I remained in the field until data saturation was reached when the same information was being heard repeatedly and no new learning was taking place (De Vos et al., 2014). I conducted my field work within the time-frame set by the UKZN Research and Ethics Committee.

4.8.3.2 Interview organisation and management

The data for this research were acquired from three women participants in the higher administrative cadre of the public secondary school system of Mauritius. All the interviews and dialogues through semi-structured interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the women participants on three or four different days according to the participants' availability. They were conducted face-

to-face the participants' homes. The researcher attempted to create a warm atmosphere by being friendly, interested and attentive so that the participants felt that they could engage in open dialogue about their experiences in obtaining a leadership position in the secondary educational system. During the interviews, the researcher undertook to construct a relationship through the cooperative effort of using common courtesousness and [respecting to the participants' decisions in connection to which personal information to be reported or not](#). The researcher guided the participants through the interview process by asking probing questions to obtain rich data for the study. In-depth interviewing guidelines provided by Seidman (2006) were used to conduct the interviews. The voice-recorded meetings were transcribed word-for-word.

4.8.3.3 Interview phases

Understanding the meaning of what the participants reveal during the interviews is the primary task in interviewing (Kvale, 1996). Additionally, interviews are useful to retrieve the story behind the participant's experiences (McNamara, 1999). The interviews were conducted in three phases, as suggested by Seidman (2006).

The first phase allowed the researcher to focus primarily on the context and background of each participant. Participants were asked to reconstruct their experiences since their childhood to their present positions. This phase allowed the researcher to better understand how their professional journey was interwoven within the context of their lives.

The second phase of the interviews focused on the details of the experiences presently lived by the participants. This phase allowed the participants to discuss their experiences as they related to their perceptions of the barriers and challenges faced in the secondary educational context. In this phase, the strategies deployed to overcome perceived barriers and challenges for the successful attainment and sustenance of leadership were also discussed.

In the third phase, the participants reflected on the significance of their lived experiences concerning their different leadership positions and practices. Follow up and cross-examining questions based on previous interviews were also addressed to gain deeper first-hand information. This allowed the researcher to clarify the meaning behind the themes and concepts in order to minimise any misrepresentation of information made by the researcher. Allowing the participants

to make meaning of their experiences allowed them to interconnect how their experiences had led them to their present status.

Therefore, the combination of detailed accounts of their past experiences that steered the participants into their current positions, as well as by giving comprehensive accounts of their present experiences, created conditions for them to reflect upon their present-day lives (Seidman, 2006).

4.8.3.4 Member-checking process between the researcher and the women educational leader participants

The women educational leaders participants received copies of the transcripts to check for the accuracy in their statements after the transcriptions had been completed by the researcher. This is also known as member-checking. This endorsed the participants' statements and provided them with an opportunity to review and express any concerns they might have had regarding the researcher's interpretations or any potential misrepresentation of the data provided by the participants (Birt, 2016). According to Bygstad and Munkvold (2007), member-checking helped to improve the rationality, trustworthiness, rigour and transferability of the research study.

From the narrative ways of knowing during the data generation process, the researcher (from the Chemistry field), discovered and appreciated that lived realities are multiple, fluid and multi-layered, all simultaneously "independent and interconnected"; such that, they are continuously shaped by observations, perceptions and contexts that embrace, but are not restricted to, age, gender, sexual orientation, social and economic status, cultural and religious practices and beliefs, and political influences. The initial processing and interpretation of data are based on the principles that relationships between the women participants and what are to be known by the researcher are subjective and interactive. The researcher noticed that the research principles and the researcher himself, as well as those of the women participants, inexorably influenced the inquiry. Hence, the consequential knowledge, that is, the 'findings' of the narrative study, is arbitrated by and indissolubly "entangled" and "super-imposed" with the inter-synergistic communications between the research and the women participants in the study. Fundamentally, the research ideology, the human thinking and the research limits are blended and bonded.

The transcripts were sent via an email attachment for the convenience of the participants. Once the participants received the transcript, the researcher requested that the participants confirm their responses within a week of receiving it. The researcher [adjusted](#) any misrepresentations noted by the participants before the next stage of the data analysis process took place.

4.9 Trustworthiness

According to Thakhathi (2001) and Patton (2002), trustworthiness is parallel to validity, reliability and rigour found in quantitative research. Creswell (2013) describes validation in qualitative research as the process which attempts to account for the accuracy of the findings. During any research process, all data that are collected need to respond to the critical questions of the study. Multiple validation strategies exist to document the trustworthiness of a qualitative study. In this research, validity was ensured by triangulation where multiple methods of data generation were used as described in **Section 4.7**. Moreover, the participants were cross-examined with further probing questions to corroborate the different data sources in order to shed light on the initial emerging themes, for example, from adversity to success, multitasking and entrepreneurship and leadership savvy.

Moreover, reliability is the degree of neutrality that research instruments employed by the investigator in collecting data would capture the same effect on prospective occasions to safeguard homogeneity (Cohen et al., 2011). This means that a particular method of data collection is replicable and would yield the same results each time the researcher makes use of different techniques for measuring the collected data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Cohen et al., 2011; Silverman, 1993). Hence, in this research, I adhered to the [research ethics](#) that researchers must abide by so that the data produced were credible and pertinent to any research context (Vithal, 2009).

To further increase credibility in the research, I had prolonged and persistent engagement in the field to gain the trust of participants, to learn their culture and to become accustomed to their way of thinking. I listened actively to the narratives of the participants by allowing them to express themselves and talk freely.

According to Babbie (2016), validity entails the investigator to interrogate whether what he truly hears and perceives is what he believes he is seeing. Thus, the concept of “authenticity” (Gangadeen, 2013) was embraced. That is, the narrations of the storytellers have authorial honesty (Sikes, 2012). Therefore, I regarded the participants’ words and their meaning-making of the critical events to be valid values to the interpretation of their stories leading to trustworthiness in the results of the data. After the audio data had been transcribed, the participants were allowed to read and bring clarity to unclear meanings in the transcripts to ensure the correctness, completeness, and accuracy of the data.

4.9.1 The qualitative concepts of verisimilitude, apparency and transferability in narrative research

The qualitative concepts of verisimilitude, apparency and transferability (Liu & Sammons, 2022; Loh, 2013; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007) afforded rigour in this narrative inquiry study by focusing on transferability instead of generalisability because since only three participants were involved.

Verisimilitude requires the sensible appearance of truth and reality in the personal narratives of the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) and apparency is accepting the credibility of the narratives (Patterson, 2017). When the study was conducted, the researcher sensed the narrations to be “alive” and “real” such that the researcher got transported into the lived experiences of the participants. The interpretation of some of the narrated experiences of the women educational leader participants “rang true” and believable that the researcher experienced resemblance with his own experiences of analogous situations. Therefore, the quality of verisimilitude is imperative as it allows researchers to have empathetic experiences of being in the comparable circumstances and thereby understanding the emotions felt and the choices made by the women educational leader participants in the study.

The individual transcripts and narratives were “member-checked” with each women educational leader participants to ensure they made sense and represented the reality of their lived experiences. Apparency was evident in the interpretative approach used with the women educational leader participants, which energised a reciprocated objective for seeking explanatory meaning from their

lived experiences. Apparency and verisimilitude for the study required trustworthiness in reporting findings and in understanding external factors, such as professional status, gender, religious beliefs, financial independency which presented tensions in recognising women leadership and management practices in the different leadership milieu.

The extent to which other women educational leaders or women leaders in other fields relate the findings of this research to their own lived experiences supports transferability. In so doing, the capability to identify findings within the research ground and their pertinence and applicability to forthcoming research undertakings reinforces transferability in the methodology of narrative inquiry research. The transferability concept for this research trusted on elicited views of the women educational leader participants as trustworthy account of their lived experiences for narration and interpretation. The trustworthiness of participants narratives was triangulated with crossed-examined interview questions at different interview sessions.

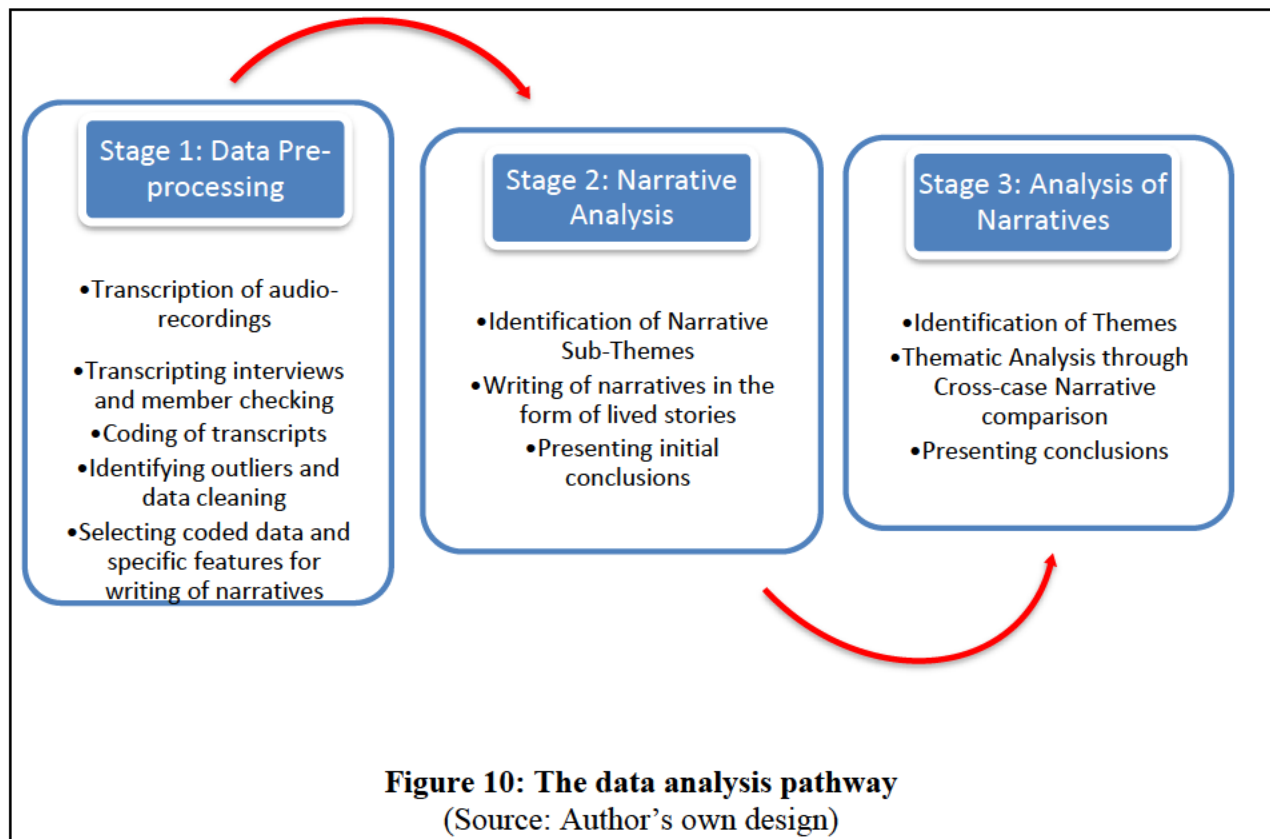
The narrative analysis addressed the consistency of the research findings (Riessman, 2008) to sustain the scope to which themes drawn from the women educational leader participants' narratives and interpretations would freely 'transpose' and 'super-impose' to the experiences of other women educational leaders or women leaders in other fields within the Mauritian context.

4.10 Data analysis

According to Bamberg (2012, p. 54 cited by Gangadeen, 2013), "analysis begins the moment we adopt the reflective posture of indwelling as we listen to the recordings of interviews to immerse ourselves in the data".

However, from Riessman's (1993, 2008) and Elliot's (2005) work, no specific or typical method or set of techniques for analysis of historical narrative information exist. Therefore, based on the work of Cohen et al. (2007), I opted for a data analysis procedure grounded on "fitness for the purpose". Various approaches to historical narrative analysis have appeared in recent years (Elliot, 2005; Webster & Mertova, 2007; Phoenix, 2008), concentrating on exploring the content of the narratives (Mishler, 1995; Riessman, 2008). For this research, a paradigmatic mode of analysis of the narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 5; Creswell, 2007), coupled with thematic analysis using

the inductive approach to code data for the emergence of themes (Labaree, 2006) best suited the aims of the study. The data analysis pathway that I adopted is presented in a schematic diagram below.



4.10.1 Stage One: Data pre-processing

Data pre-processing is an important step in the data analysis process. It consists of data coding, selection, outlier identification, cleaning, extraction of specific features and transformation to aid in writing the biographical narratives of the participants (Alasadi & Bhaya, 2017). However, prior to embarking on the initial data analysis process, the researcher followed the recommendations of

Atkinson (1998), that is, to suspend any theoretical assumptions and to consider whether any theory developed from the participants' narratives.

Data were selected and coded from the member-checked transcripts. These selective coded data were responses to the sub-research questions. The coded data were then extracted for creating the narratives. The data pre-processing captured the different episodes in the life stories of each participant. Using the inductive approach (Azungah, 2018), I analysed the coded data and looked for inventive dissimilarity to ascertain possible meanings. This approach is meant to try to obtain meaning by looking at different roles, functions, or positions, in addition to the underlying or precipitating factors which could account for reasons to what was being experienced by the participants. The researcher must also aid in deciding which data are meaningful and which are not, based on the professional judgment of the researcher (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

4.10.2 Stage Two: Narrative analysis

Stage Two of the analysis consisted of creating and writing the participants' narratives. This phase comprised of several steps: the re-listening of interview recordings; the re-reading of the coded transcripts; identifying the most meaningful data; the preliminary writing of the narratives and refining the narratives that captured the participants' emotions, views, and state of mind at specific moments and positions. The field notes and the coded transcripts were merged to create stories that narrate the life journey from childhood to the leadership positions of the participants.

Taking into consideration that narratives are an interpretation of what the participants have experienced resulting from their personalities and the macro and micro contexts, it was crucial to go beyond the words and to take cognisance of all the clues that would throw light on the understanding of the phenomenon. This is because amalgamating and fixing the meaningful extracts from the coded transcripts into "a fluid and coherent whole without distilling the voice of the participant and, at the same time, keeping the phenomenon under investigation into focus was a challenging enterprise" (Gangadeen, 2013, p. 66).

The participants themselves chose their pseudo-names because they wanted to express their personality, character, identity, religiosity, and spirituality through their pseudonyms.

Table 5: Participants' Religious and Personality Characteristics

Participant	Religious Belonging	Meaning of pseudonym	Personality
Ananda	Hindu	Lady warrior who brings victory and happiness.	Mature, self-determined and strict.
Hafiza	Muslim	Mindful and glittering, perfectionist.	Emotional, strict, friendly but firm.
Lea	Roman Catholic	Bringer of good news.	Appears quiet, shows a lack of confidence but will try in life.

Moreover, I structured the narratives of the participants into three major chronological life stages, firstly: Childhood and Adolescent, secondly: Professional and Married Life and thirdly: Leadership Positions. The narrative analysis of the three women research participants is presented in Chapter 5.

4.10.3 Stage Three: Cross-narrative analysis

In Stage Three of the analysis, the researcher reviewed the three narratives to identify patterns and separated the data into themes. This process involved the analysis of the narratives (Polkinghorne, 2005), where categories of like patterns of comments were grouped, allowing for the emergence of new themes. The cross-narrative analysis is a valuable technique for geographers since it emphasises how individuals converse about and appraise knowledge, involvements and conditions in different spaces. The dominant themes that had influenced the participants' leadership practices and developments were chosen in relation to the research questions. While reading and re-reading the narrative analysis of the women participants, and at that time I was explaining the concept of electron transitions between energy levels in transition metal complexes to my students of A-Level Chemistry that the term Quantum Resources came to my mind and I could see certain analogies between the lived experiences of the women educational leader participants and the factors that surround the concept of Quantum Resource Theory in Physics and Chemistry. From this point, I explored the metaphor of "Resources" and then I identified five main themes, namely: Resources of Context, Resources of Religion, Resources of Family, Resources of Entrepreneurial Knowledge and Resources of Gender Politics. Each of the main themes were further sub-divided into sub-themes, which are discussed in Chapter 6. While analysing the sub-themes in their depth, I

earmarked the reverberations and dissensions across the narrative extracts of the three participants. This process shed light on the phenomenon being studied by comparing the research findings with literature in order to make interpretation of the demonstrative data and how they contribute to the overall arguments of the study.

Therefore, the different stages of data analysis carried out steered to a higher level of abstraction and the origination of a thesis wherein the evolving theories on women educational leaders in male-dominated spaces was portrayed given the women participants' biographical experiences.

4.11 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations in any research address what actions are legitimate or not and also lays down the correct research procedures that should be adopted or not (Neuman, 2006). Moreover, an ethical researcher will guide, manage and protect the interests of both the participants and the him/herself as a researcher (Neuman, 2006; Cohen et al. 2011). Therefore, firstly, I asked for permission from the Mauritian Ministry of Education to access the sites and employees (Appendix B - Seeking Gatekeeper Permission and Appendix C - Gatekeeper Approval Letter). Secondly, I requested an Ethical Clearance Certificate from the University of Kwazulu-Natal Research Ethics Committee (Appendix A - Approval of Research by Research Committee) to access the field to conduct the research. Thirdly, a letter of request for participation (Appendix D - Letter to Prospective Participants) was sent to the prospective participants. Once their agreement was obtained, a letter of informed consent detailing the purpose of the study was sent to the agreeable participants (Appendix E – Informed Consent Letter), and once this letter was signed (signed Informed Consent), it was collected from the agreeable participants before the interviews started.

Moreover, a week before I conducted the semi-structured interviews, I had the first 15-minute face-to-face contact explaining and answering queries from the participants. These were in regard to the interview techniques, research instruments and artefacts that could be used during the interview processes for data generation. Also, they were reminded that they could decline to answer questions that they were not comfortable with and that they could pull out of the research process at any time. The participants' confidentiality was protected by attributing anonymous names chosen by the participants themselves that best described their character and also to avoid

the possibility of attributing a “wrong name” or “bullying name” to them by the researcher. All the transcribed data were member-checked by the participants and in this way, they were aware of what data would be used for analysis.

4.12 Issue of reflexivity

Based on Elliot’s (2005) advice, the acceptance of a critical and reflexive attitude throughout the inquiry research was crucial in creating an ethical and trustworthy narrative inquiry research. Reflexivity is the path towards trustworthiness where academics come to know how they are positioned in relation to the knowledge they are producing (Morrison, 2007; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Moreover, within the process of the research, it indicates consciousness of the researcher’s identity (Elliot, 2005). I recognised that as a male researcher researching women leaders that I could not sensibly rule out my own influences during the data collection and the analysis of the narratives. Hence, my gender, my age, my religion, upbringing, knowledge, beliefs, professional status and values about the research on women might have unwillingly influenced the research process at any stage and by any means. Therefore, I tried to be authentic, explicit, transparent, and accountable vis-à-vis my theoretical and logical decisions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) and methodological choices (Oancea & Furlong, 2007) in doing this research by temporarily suspending my gender, religious and cultural beliefs, professional status and political affiliations.

4.13 Issue of elite research

According to Harvey (2011), elites are those individuals who occupy the senior-most management positions within institutions. These persons have a significant influence on administrative and managerial decisions inside and outside the organisations. Consequently, they pose a unique challenge to the interview process. For example, during an interview the researcher may feel that he has not done his homework by not preparing his interview properly, which may make him/her appear unwise and unconfident in front of the high calibre participants. It may be that the interview questions look senseless, or that the body language and posture of the participants may intimidate the researcher. In order to avoid being apprehensive with this kind of situation, I built up trust from the first contact with the elite members until beyond the interview sessions (Ostrander, 1993).

Moreover, based on the advice of Rubin and Rubin (2005) and Oancea and Furlong (2007), as a novice researcher I was honest, transparent, and accountable to my participants by disclosing my research agenda. I provided them with information about myself, the place where I work, the purpose of my study, the likely duration of the interviews, the use of the data for academic purposes and how their identity and personal information would be anonymous and confidential.

Furthermore, I tried to adjust my style during the interview processes so that the participants felt comfortable while noticing and assessing the body language and verbal expressions of the participants during the first contact I had with them. Furthermore, I avoided asking my participants “closed-ended questions” (Harvey, 2011), since elite participants are usually unhappy with restricted types of questions and answers (Dexter, 2006).

Lastly, among the issues of doing research with elites were the concerns about asking participants challenging questions that they might not feel comfortable about answering. Therefore, as a junior researcher, I asked the challenging questions during the mid-interval of the interview sessions (Richards, 1996). Moreover, I cross-examined the evocative responses using a different style. For example, at the end of the interview process when I sensed that an excellent rapport had been established or when the participants appeared eager to give more information, I re-invoked the critically narrated events with jokes and further probed on the critical events to increase the richness of data.

4.14 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I explained why the narrative inquiry methodological approach was adopted for this research. The lived experiences of women educational leaders were studied using biographical narratives. Data were collected using three methods, namely: interviews, field notes and documents and artefacts which enhanced validity and trustworthiness.

The process of participants’ selection using purposive sampling was addressed. Following a pilot study that was conducted, the reflections and alterations that cropped up were adopted in the leading research process. Three women educational leaders in the secondary education context participated in the study. Extracts of the semi-structured interview transcripts are provided in Annex F. Ethical considerations overseeing the entire research procedure were debated.

In the next chapter (Chapter 5), the findings are reported in the form of life history narratives, which ultimately provided data for deeper analysis which is discussed in cross narratives analysis in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 5: DATA FINDINGS: THE LIFE HISTORY NARRATIVES OF THREE WOMEN EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter exposes the participants' narratives and the whole process of meaning-making from the narratives. The study presents a life history narrative of each of the three women educational leader participants that were interviewed, with particular attention given to the distinctive experiences in each woman's story. The narrative findings are presented as three theme-phases, namely: Childhood and Adolescent Life Experiences, Professional and School Leadership Experiences and Higher Educational Leadership Experiences. The chapter is structured into categories of description, interspersed into the theme-phases.

Using the women participants' own words from the member-checked transcripts, I co-constructed and represented the narratives that recognised and portrayed the women participants' stories of lived experiences through momentary accounts and expressive acts (Coulter & Smith, 2009; Caulley, 2008; Humphreys, 2005; Kirk 2005 cited in Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2012), [guided by the main research question of "How women educational leaders made their way to attain and sustain in leadership and management positions, in the \(male-dominated\) leadership geographies in the public secondary educational system? The three research questions that supported the main research question are listed below:](#)

[RQ⁷ 1: What are the lived experiences of women educational leaders in the public secondary educational system of Mauritius?](#)

[RQ2: How the career-path of women educational leaders evolved in the different leadership and management spaces in the public secondary educational system?](#)

[RQ3: What leadership patterns do women educational leaders adopt in this study?](#)

⁷ RQ stands for Research Question

The women participants chose their pseudonyms for their names while I chose all the other pseudonyms for places and institutions. In interpreting the stories, I did a narrative analysis by looking at each narrative as an individual case in this chapter (**Chapter 5**), while a comparative or cross-case analysis was carried out in the next chapter (**Chapter 6**). I preferred to use the first-person voice because, as Coulter and Smith (2009, p. 580) explain, “in general, a first-person construction lends closeness to the telling: the reader sees the story through the perspective of the character as narrator” (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2012).

I first identified and discussed the major themes in each narrative. Then, I related the emerging categories to the women participants’ socialisation process and performativity challenges encountered in the path to leadership. I also investigated the leadership practices at home, at school, on other platforms and in higher leadership positions in the public secondary education system of Mauritius.

5.2 Narrative One: Ananda-Agha’s narrative

5.2.1 Childhood and adolescent life experiences

5.2.1.1 Facing poverty

I was born in 1959 during the British Occupation... After three months I became an orphan and was brought up by my mother as a single parent...” these were the murmuring words that could be heard with Ananda’s head kneeling ...but after sometimes she voiced it out with tears “my mother separated from my father, and till today I have not known my father”. My mother and I came to live at my uncle’s place in an Eastern rural village of the Island. Being poor, my family could not afford to give me the proper books and equipment for the school, and I had to walk long distances to and from the primary school in the mid 1960s in order to save on transport. Fortunately, I got the company of my cousins and a few friends. We were made to understand that education would be our social way to get out of poverty and escalate the social ladder. I made up my mind to study and got the scholarship to attend an elite secondary school in the town of Plaine Wilhems.

Although the scholarship alleviated my family financially during my secondary schooling years, my family could pay private tuitions for me to compete for the laureate scholarship of Cambridge Higher School Certificate Examinations for admission in UK universities. I was even not in a position to be afforded with new shoes and uniforms each year unlike other girls who were mainly from wealthy families from different towns. Those girls were looking down upon me. I could not talk French fluently, I felt inferiority complex, and I had to bear with. Initially, this made me introvert and turned on to myself. When maturity started coming up, I accepted life fate as it was and I was also determined to live out of the odd. I took the patience and nurtured the virtue of perseverance that one day I shall be victorious and stand on my feet.

5.2.1.2 The shaping of my personality

Unlike the other neighbouring kids, I have never been to Baitka – the religious school, which was fee-paying. My religious instructions were just at home and going to the temple for praying. Divali – the light festival and Holi – the colour festival were the most enjoyable and of course without forgetting the New Year and Christmas celebrations though I was not that fortunate to get a crying doll – a very sophisticated toy of that time. Being the oldest cousin, I had the responsibility to look after the smaller ones, inculcating in them the discipline and ethical behaviours. Of course, my family was an extended one, with twenty people living together. I used to organise and play outdoor games with my cousins. We were engaged in crafting and creating our toys like food cooking toys with used cans and boxes. I also recalled making gun-type toys for my cousins using bamboo shoots and grains.

My mother could not attend school because it was fee-paying and my uncles were preferred because they would be the breadwinners of the family. However, my mother wanted me to study at all cost. She made hard efforts like working in the fields and rearing and selling of chickens and goats to earn some money. I was giving her a helping hand during my free time. My mother was a strong lady, very much determined in her endeavour that she instilled the spirit of sacrifice, self-responsibility, entrepreneurial skills, go-getter and encouragement towards education in order to succeed in life. In the shaping of what I am today, I am also very grateful and gratified towards the help, advice and affection of my maternal uncles and of course, Lakshmi – the Hindu goddess of good fortune, prosperity and beauty.

On the 20th May 1976, there was general students' strike and students walked from Rose-Hill to Port Louis to sit in front of the Legislative Assembly. The police were armed and prepared at all eventual riots. I had an appointment with the doctor on that day, and my mother was waiting for me in Port Louis next to the Legislative Assembly. Although I was looking odd, I felt the thrilling and daring experience of walking in front of the police in my school uniform to cross the roadside to meet my mother without the police making any move to arrest me. On that day, I felt courageous, ready to overcome obstacles and be a go-getter in life. Later my English literature classmates nick-named me as Agha –the Chief Warrior in the Ottoman literature.

5.2.1.3 Succeeding my secondary school examinations with flying colours

Nevertheless, I have been able to navigate through the harsh social disparities, stigmatisation and bourgeoisie class to demarcate myself by succeeding brilliantly at the secondary Higher School Certificate examination. When my name was heard just after the fourth laureate for girls' section, the happiness was ever joyful. "Ghar ki Ananda" – the Happiness of the House, nick-named by my uncle.

Paradoxically, the scholarship that I was offered was from the French Government to continue tertiary education which was a luxury. It was a blessing in disguise to empower my French language and to learn and get accustomed to European culture. Before embarking for my tertiary studies, coincidentally my first-hand job was science replacement teacher in 1979 for six months in a low ability rural secondary school. It was a psychological shock as a novice teacher that intelligence did not make me a good teacher as I have been a good student. Learning for self and teaching to others are two different things.

5.2.2 Professional and school leadership experiences

5.2.2.1 Early years of my professional career

When I returned home after completing my Bachelor and Master degrees in Chemistry in 1983, I remained unemployed for nearly one and a half years, although I was one among the highly qualified women at that time. I got frustrated when I could see unqualified or less qualified people were getting jobs. Meanwhile, I was giving a helping hand in the morning to my mother in doing

household work, and in the afternoon, I was much engaged in reading books in a way to keep away from frustration. Then, in mid-year of 1984, I got a job in a private secondary school in the region of Flacq, and at the same time, there was an advertisement for secondary school teachers in the public sector, which I applied by default. A career in teaching was not my first choice though I like teaching. However, with the prevailing unemployment situation and the family financial situation, my mother influenced me to go for the teaching profession.

In February 1985, I joined the public service as a Secondary School Teacher to teach Chemistry. I was newly married and was living at my in-laws' place until April 1985 when I moved to my newly constructed two-room house in the rural area of Lamba in the district of Flacq. Almost every day, I had a transport problem; there were not sufficient buses. In a few months afterwards, I was pregnant, and my gestation period was horrible until my first son was born in December 1985. Since I was not yet confirmed in my job, I had to leave my one-month-old baby under the care of a maid to attend work so that I got confirmed by the end of February 1986. I was so job-conscious and also the female rector at that time did not like newly joined staff taking vacation leave; the naivety in me dissuaded me from asking for maternity leave. Indeed, during that period, I became quite weak and sick. I continued to work, and in 1989 I got my second child. My second-time pregnancy and motherhood were less stressful than the first one since I got the help of my mother to look after the two kids.

At RSC, I started to get bored after working for nearly seven years. In those days, there were few extra-curricular activities (like debates, drama, sports), especially in rural girls' schools compared to urban girls' secondary schools. The rural girls focused mainly on at least completing their Cambridge O-Level examination and afterwards, if the parents have the means to finance for A-level studies, they will continue. Otherwise, the girls would stay at home and learn to cook and to sew clothes until they got married. Teaching at RSC thus became routine and boring for me.

On the other hand, I was giving extra teaching support to the students during lunch-time or replacement classes so that they succeed in their exams because many of the students were from needy families. The students appreciated the additional help I provided to them. At that time the rector in RSC was the second or the third lady rector nominated in the Ministry of Education based on seniority of with eight years of service. I was already helping a lot in the Chemistry Department and the school administration in time-table planning, Sports Activities organisation, the Flag Raising Ceremony and Prize Giving Day as well. Then in December 1992, I got my first transfer

to TSC, a boys' state school in Flacq. The rector of RSC was not happy and did not want me to get transferred but, when she learnt that I was going to be Head of Department, then she agreed to my transfer.

5.2.2.2 Confronting gender issues

When I joined TSC, there was no ladies toilet. We had to use the same male staff toilet, and this situation was awkward. When we ladies requested a separate female toilet, the Principal replied in a discriminating way whether at home there are separate toilets for male and female. Finally, after seven months there was a small block of female toilets. Apart from that, the rude boys were teasing the young lady teachers and making their lives quite miserable. These male students would come to school to shirk subject classes and go to play in the grounds, to make noise, causing disturbances to the smooth running of classes.

Because of the way I talked to them and the thoughtful motherly approach, these boys started calling me “mama” in the school corridors and at times, even out of the school premises. Moreover, a teacher is well known by his or her students. I felt proud and happy that the students loved me.

When I took employment as an educator in 1985, less than 10% of the teaching staff was female. Nowadays, there is nearly 80% female in the teaching profession - this is being referred to as the Feminisation of the Teaching Profession. It needs to be highlighted that less than 15% of the rectorors were female in 2015. Gender discrimination was not apparent. I am more inclined to say women still do not want to leave their comfort zone or home and family responsibilities to assume higher professional responsibilities in parallel. In some instances, there could have been covert discrimination primarily because of the government regime in place and the National Intelligence Unit (NIU) reporting to which political groups one belongs or one is supporting. However, saying that the male gender is favoured over female in occupying leadership positions, I do not think so.

5.2.2.3 Stepping into the first leadership role

Thus, after seven years of service in RSC, I moved to TSC where I was given the responsibility to be the Head of Chemistry Department; also TSC was nearer to my home as well. I found that working in a boys' school was a different kind of experience. First of all, at that time, there were

only three young female teachers in TSC. Since I was Head of Department, the three other ladies took me to be their senior and spokesperson in front of the school administration run by a male-centric Rector. At first, I felt shy and apprehensive about working in a boys' school and about having almost all its staff as males. However, with time I got used to it and in a way, I got a bit of the male character in talking and addressing the schoolboys and staff.

During my teaching days at TSC school, the rector was delegating some tasks to me. For example, I was responsible for the implementation and smooth running of Education for Family Life and Career Guidance sessions at school. I was chosen to follow the courses and then trained the other colleagues. As a means to improve myself academically in the field of education and educational administration, I then embarked on a two-year Post-Graduate Certificate in Education course offered by the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE). Later, I applied for a Master of Educational Administration scholarship offered by the Government of China, and I was nominated to join the course in January 2001. Moreover, the rector was allocating me also the responsibility to overlook all extra and co-curricular activities of the school. When I was appointed as Director in the Ministry of Education, my past experiences in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities have helped me to handle the portfolio of Curriculum Development better and to propose new activities like Soft Skills Development.

In 1990s, teachers possessing a Bachelor's degree were eligible to apply for the promotional post of Deputy-Rector after completing eight years of teaching service. However, seeing my colleagues getting promoted with lesser qualification and a lesser number of years of service than me, I started getting frustrated and stressed because I felt that I was not moving ahead. I asked my husband, Sanjeev, who was also eligible to apply, why he was not postulating for the promotional post. Sanjeev replied that he was not interested because he did not want to take on additional responsibilities of school and that he did not want to "lose" his school holidays and freedom. Nevertheless, he told me "if you are interested, you can try applying". Earlier, family commitment was preventing me from climbing the school leadership ladder, but now I wanted to move ahead. I worked at TSC school for nearly nine years until I got promoted to Deputy Rector at RSC in 2001 after 17 years of teaching.

5.2.2.4 From teacher to school leader in the role of school builder

In 2000, I applied for the post of Deputy-Rector for the fourth time. After passing successfully through the interview, in October 2001, I was promoted to Deputy Rector. I was posted to RSC girls' college, the same school where I started my teaching. However, a new building had been constructed, and the status of the school changed from a regional to a national college. This meant, only those girls who had been able to achieve an excellent academic standard at Certificate of Primary Education got admission. Shortly afterwards, that is in January 2002, I got transferred to MPSS, a boys' school. MPSS was a school located in the premises of another school, PNSS - meaning the MPSS was sharing part of the buildings and other infrastructures of PNSS. At MPSS, I assumed the duties of Officer-in-Charge since there was no Rector, and I had to supervise the parts of the school that was under construction also. It was a very confusing, challenging and stressful situation. Almost, every day I was doing more of building technician work than my school administrative work. I was tagged "Recteur Ingenieur" – Engineer Rector – connoting being a school rector who is supervising the construction of the school building. However, that was part of the exigencies of my duties as "Officer-in-Charge". I had to drive from one school site to another school site every day and submit a daily report of the work progress to the Ministry.

After being the Officer-in-Charge of MPSS, in October 2004 I got transferred to GMDA located temporarily in RTI premises at Ilot in the northern region. The building of GMDA was under construction in Port Louis, and I was involved in another school construction. It was very hectic managing a school in someone else school premises and also I had to drive long distances from Ilot to Port Louis to come and see the progress of the construction and then submit reports to the Ministry of Education. Then, during the second term school holidays of 2005, we moved to Port Louis, and at the beginning of the third term, we accommodated the students in the newly built building of GMDA in Port Louis.

In 2006 I was posted back to RSC. The Ministry wanted an influential rector regarding strong character at RSC. I was delighted in the sense that I was an educator, became deputy rector and rector at RSC as a first posting in the respective roles. After having worked for five years as Rector at RSC, I was appointed as Assistant Director in February 2007 and served Zone C till November 2009.

5.2.2.5 The impacts/challenges of family responsibilities

After helping my husband in the construction of our house, now it was time to maintain the house, the children, work-life and married life also. There was much stress, but I had to. Despite my mother giving a helping hand. However, I have been a very much self-disciplined person. I like organising my household and professional works, in fact, any task. The way I raised my kids, they are all very responsible, and my kids are well disciplined. If my children were still kids, I would not have done that job that I am doing now. As a working woman, I should also give time to them. They need the maternal love and care for their socio-emotional development; I recognise that.

My husband has been a very caring person and is always helping me out. So, I cannot complain that he has not been aiding me. My husband and I managed to construct a simple house. We constructed one part, and then other rooms were added as the children were growing up. There was a lot of work and much involvement by us in the construction of our house, money-wise and labour-wise. We had to make many sacrifices.

My motivation into educational leadership was driven more by wanting to take the challenge to lead my career path and become a school leader and move ahead. I wanted to leave that job of teaching and do something else because I felt I was moving round and round in doing the same tasks. I was not at ease with myself doing regular work year in and year out.

5.2.2.6 The corridor-talk during the movement in different leadership positions

When I became Rector after one year of assuming the duty of Deputy Rector cum Officer-In-Charge, people were talking about how that could be possible. The talk of the day was that those who got promoted had a political connection that's why the scheme of promotion to Rector had an apparent change catering for Deputy Rector cum Officer-In-Charge with at least one year experience. Seven female and sixty-seven male candidates were called for competitive interview by PSC. Twenty-six people got promoted to Rector Positions, out of which there were three ladies.

In 2006, four people got promoted to Assistant Director, and I was the only woman rector, and three others were male administrators. Rectors do administrative work inside the school while Administrators do administrative work outside school, that is, at Zone levels. Therefore, all that was done by the PSC based on the promotion criteria set at that time. Moreover, when I got into the top administrative position, people were still talking because they believed that because I came

from a specific constituency that I was promoted. I have been to the interview sessions at each stage of promotion and never have I been held up at the first application I made. It is after the second or third trial or after being on the waiting list for promotion for one year that I have been promoted.

5.2.2.7 Paradox situation

In my working environment, people were questioning how I could be my husband's boss, since the latter was still a teacher. Even the sister of my husband used to say things bad to make my husband felt obdurate. However, I did not care about that. I had never felt awkward; neither have I thought he was feeling complexed. We lived aside from all those evil comments, and we thought that the gossiping commentaries should not bother us. Respectively each of us has her or his role to play, be it in the house, or at work or in society. We are educated and cultivated; we have to work professionally. At the Ministry, I had declared my interest, and like that, I have never been given any Zone to be responsible for where my husband works to avoid conflict of interest.

5.2.2.8 School entrepreneur

I was a rector of two successive schools undergoing construction. Therefore, I have been mainly involved in the constructions of schools more than the supervision of teaching and learning at schools. It was as if I was the owner of the school. I felt terrible when, for the first time, I was dealing with the male workers on the construction sites because they looked at me unpleasantly. Moreover, it was quite difficult for me to go round the school construction premises in my sari – the Indian dress. At times, the workers were using vulgar language among themselves, and I had to act as if I did not hear anything.

I have many bad memories because working in such conditions was very hectic. The everyday challenge was that I had to look out for everything. There was a lack of manual staff and I had to ensure the school was clean. There was no attendant and I had to ensure that the boy students abided by the school discipline. At the same time, I had to cater for the welfare of the teachers. I had to set up everything.

When we moved into one of the building blocks which was ready for use, I told my staff and students that we had made the school stand from nothing on this land. It came from human skill, human

effort, and human sacrifice which made it possible for the school to rise up. Therefore, we had to make good use of the school for the betterment of our future citizens.

In my role as Rector, I meant business. So everyone knew that the work should continue after setting down the rules of the game. I befriended all the staff, and I inculcated the team spirit in them. However, I felt that the male staff appreciated my work more than the female staff. The females were most of the time complaining about all the ills that were in the school, and they even tagged me “Recteur demenagement” – Resettling Rector. “People never judge people by the work they do, they judge you by what you have not been able to do for them”. Since I could manage difficult situations while others could not, I was having a lot of problems like gossiping, harassments, and relational problems with other colleague-rectors. I felt I was a woman lady at home, and I was a woman-man in my place of work.

5.2.2.9 Magnetic repulsion between like poles

My superior, Mrs Delbar, assigned me to all kind of stressful situations to resolve instead of her assuming her responsibilities. In such kind of situations, we started developing “enemy-type relationship”, especially with the lady teachers. However, I do not think it is gender discrimination. I feel it is more of a personality conflict out of jealousy or whatever reason. Another tag name on my head was “Iron Lady”. I have never felt intimidated by these kinds of tag names. For me, they were all a compliment because I have been doing my work with dedication and commitment so that every staff member enjoy same privileges, but at times you have “Quelques brebies galeuses qui gate tout un troupeau” (few scabby sheep are enough to spoil the whole flock). They want to be “Calif at the place of Calif”; (wanting me to do things according to their agenda). There are tasks that I delegate only to people I trust and specific tasks that I cannot delegate but do myself. At times people will hassle you just like that for petty things, but you have to be attentive and patient in listening to them.

5.2.3 Higher educational leadership experiences

5.2.3.1 Confronting school caretakers as political agents

When I was an Assistant Director and Director of Zone G, I never had the support of the Ministry. Nevertheless, I used to provide help and support to the schools of Zone G so that the schools get settled as quickly as possible for effective teaching and learning to take place. However, moving caretakers from one school to another was more problematic than moving teachers for the effective running of the schools. Many of the caretakers at one point in time have been political agents and had the backing of politicians in government. I also provided support to the rectors. I was visiting the schools on Fridays. Some of them were appreciative, while some complained because they thought I was visiting them purposely to have watchful eyes on them, and they regarded my weekly visit as harassment. They had their comfort zone and did not want to change to fulfil the expectations of the students and parents.

In this Zone, there was much gossiping also. I have always taken things in a positive way, not in a negative mode. I always work in collaboration with the rectors of Zone G. But, when I am gone, they have not seen the face of the new director for more than half a year. They complained to the Headquarters that the new Zone Director was not taking care of them and not establishing any communication. When I made school dossiers move ahead, positive comments were coming from rectors. In 2015, when I was transferred to Headquarters, they complained that the new director was dawdling and hardly visible.

5.2.3.2 Having listening ears towards staff

When rectors and administrators or other staffs are bringing proposals, first, I am attentive and listen to them. If the proposals are reasonable, I accept their proposals. For the less attractive proposals, I help them out. I go from my office and negotiate with them so that they do not feel neglected. I have never scoffed at them. I have always addressed them by name in the meeting. They felt worthy and respectable, instead of Rector of School X. There has never been any mentor to guide me. I have learnt everything about effective leadership by myself – leadership on the landscape I would call it.

5.2.3.3 Developing muscles – becoming a superwoman

At the Headquarters, when others were lagging in their work, the Ministry would dump it on me, and they knew the work would be done. I am not someone who would refuse to take on additional work. However, what is worse is that when a less senior director than me is taking her vacation leave every year and at times twice a year, the Ministry gives me her full schedule of work to do in addition to my schedule without consulting me. Some officers are “more equal than others”. Finally, I am doing the work of two directors. I do all the work by Outlook mail, Skype meetings or WhatsApp, planning, thinking, researching and finding solutions at night. We are in the digital age, and we need to make optimum use of this tool. The job now is more interesting, very much more challenging since I moved from Zone to Headquarters. We are now in a “nine-year schooling” project. We have much to do. We are not monotonous.

Although the surreptitious and blatant pressures are coming from different directions, I have never felt like giving up, unlike others who have preferred to go on early retirement. I will fight the battle till the last moment. My husband supports me a lot and even my children, although they are abroad, by giving me a call very often.

In the context of Education Reform 2016 -2020, I have had the opportunity to chair many essential meetings where the whole nine-year schooling concept had to be started from scratch. I had to gather the resources, negotiate with international partners like UNESCO and World Bank, constitute the secondary curriculum panel, play the ambassadorial role between teachers, students, unions, parents and other stakeholders of the Ministry. It has been very dynamic.

In the implementation of the nine-year transition of schooling, I had already prepared myself and the panel to receive critics from everybody. I was open to this, otherwise, we would not succeed. I took the critics on board and then we worked out the final documents, books, and other issues.

5.2.3.4 My leadership decision leading to generativity

My decision to enter into the leadership position happened all naturally, as an educator having responsibility at school further than teaching periods. I was also used to assuming responsibilities in girls’ club at the school level, social club or ashram for older people in my locality and other facets and helping in the administration of the school and it was quite natural that I got promoted to a leadership position.

I have also already thought of what I shall be doing after my retirement. I intend to create a free-tuition centre for the orphaned children of the Ashram in my locality. I think me and my husband will work towards this endeavour to help the orphaned children stand on their feet through education.

5.2.3.5 The different forms of obstacles in my career path

As a woman candidate for leadership positions and based on my experience as a leader for nearly 15 years, I have never felt the gender discrimination when applying and being promoted to different leadership positions. However, there have been other forms of obstacles while holding office in different leadership positions, for examples, assigning me the responsibility of supervising building constructions in a very dusty environment, colleagues back-biting me because I did not agree to their agenda. At times, I felt the non-collaboration of colleagues due to jealousies, over-loading my work portfolio and doing the work of others and also the different kinds of insubordination that I had to face by clerical officers and other junior staffs by taking casual leaves in a way to avoid doing the work given to them.

Now there is also the issue of making me feel “gender complex” with my male colleagues in the tasks that male are supposed to do. I was doing as good as them or better if I can say. But, I was being tagged as “Zote Mari” – a term to denote masculine power in accomplishing tasks. Moreover, there is still the corridor talk at work and even in the family settings – “ki san la ki boss dans la caze” – who is the boss at home, since my husband is still a teacher. However, I have never felt any complex vis-à-vis him or vice versa, because I value and pay the respect due to being his wife and the mother of three children.

5.2.3.6 Competencies in becoming an educational leader

I had been to many interviews before being appointed Deputy Rector. Then my luck was in 2002 when many state secondary schools were constructed, and then I got the opportunity to be Officer-in-Charge, and shortly afterwards, I was promoted to Rector in 2003 and then Assistant Director in 2007. However, I was shouldering the responsibility of Acting Director till February 2011 and then promoted to Director till today. Usually, administrators become directors. There has been a few cases where a rector becomes assistant director and then director.

In order to become an educational leader, one must know all the policies in the education sector, one's contribution in the secondary education sector and other issues related to education, like discipline, the protocols for official ceremonies and functions, prove one's capability in assuming the leadership role.

5.2.3.7 The job experiences as an educational leader

When I became Head of School, I had a tough time in supervising the construction of the new schools. I was not only looking at the management of the school but the construction of buildings. I had lots of experience there regarding construction, project management, site management, human and financial resources management, the creation of the PTA and others. In fact, I was involved in the setting up of two schools, one national college and one regional secondary school. I did not only manage the day to day running but also in the construction. I had to manage the noise that was undergoing on the site, the discipline, the water supply per day, and the dust all these. I call it crisis management. It was not a big deal to settle things, but I was not feeling good being on a construction site. It was a painful period and managing the setting up of schools from scratch was excellent and uncomfortable at the same time, but I was able to achieve it together with the team spirit of the staff.

5.2.3.8 Pioneering the nine-year schooling project

Now I want to leave a legacy in what I have been doing. Just now, you see we are in the nine-year schooling education transition and implementation. I am among the first to start the nine-year schooling project, and we have many things to do. There are lots of responsibilities that I am shouldering to make the nine-year schooling succeed so that one day when one looks back, nobody can say that we have done something wrong; because it is a legacy for the whole Mauritian nation so we should do the work well. I have to get the collaboration of all: directors, administrators, rectors, teachers, support staff and all of them might not be working at the same speed, but I must ensure the work is progressing and is going in the right direction taking into consideration the different options or scenarios.

I have encountered problems because some people do not follow the steps and instructions or unexpected problems crop up. They cannot deal with new things, they cannot think out of the box, I have to ease and guide them to work together for the excellent progress of the project.

5.2.3.9 Relationship with students, parents and staff

I have had good relations, be it with boys or girls, with the students I have taught. When I see them, many of them are grateful because of the advice I gave them which may have inspired them in specific ways. I have never heard students backbiting me. Maybe it is because of the caring that I gave them.

I have an open-door policy for anyone, be it students, teachers or parents. When parents come to meet me with concerns, I try to clarify things for them, give good advice if need be and also take in advice from them that is in the best interest of the students. I have always had reciprocal communication with them.

We were in a hard place when I stepped into school leadership as Head of School. However, as I had the support of my staff, I managed with the existing terms and conditions and if they compare in other schools and they say we worked better in terms of values, more commitment, more problems and many heads of school could not cope with that, and that is why I said I was like a woman-man working in a school which was under construction.

At the time, I did shout at the staff when they had not done their work well. It is a typical human reaction, but this has never jeopardised my professional relationship with them. Sometimes I have a blow out when things do not work the way I want them to, and in a certain way we grow out of the situation also, and I just let them realise that we should not be doing things in the wrong way. Sometimes I do the maximum number of things that I can. I do not depend on others, and I move very fast.

5.2.3.10 Leadership experiences at international level

I have been the chairperson for the Commonwealth Education Secretariat and organised a major conference in Mauritius. This is just one among the events that I remember the most because it felt good when in such a large international forum they said that I am the one who has organised all this. This is one. Another one is setting everything in the nine-year schooling education. For the first time it is well implemented, and one day it should be remembered.

I have also organised many functions for the Embassies of France, USA, and Australia and they always have kind words for me. I recall organising “Journée de la Francophonie” – the French

Day and the Ambassador spoke kind words because I did a good program for the dissemination of French Language and Culture.

5.2.3.11 The organisational hurdles

I put in all my efforts to make a project succeed and then I realised that the job I was doing was very stressful. All the efforts I put in at my level were put down; unless I directed the project from A to Z to get progress. But, colleagues also purposely did not get committed to the projects. I did feel down, and this brought negativity. Former situations let one know how to manage similar situations that follow. I call it crisis management. Hence, I do many consultations, with much empathy, showing concern about staff problems, tackling problems diplomatically, negotiating, delegating responsibilities and then, after some time, we meet again and talk. So, this is how I cope with the crisis.

5.2.3.12 Position, authority and work culture

As a head of unit, I can tell you that the use of “authority and work position” works only “on paper” or “in theory”, not in practice. So, you must talk emotionally and diplomatically. If you use authority, things will turn bitter. Unless you put it on paper and you start a big battle with that person. By the time you speak to that person about how to do it, you are more tired, and eventually, you do it yourself. They may act like they do not understand or they just do it superficially, so you have to go back and do things again. It is not because you are a lady; rather, they are lazy.

The workplace culture is absent in Mauritian people, so you feel you are the odd one out. How these people have been disciplined, I have no idea. I am a disciplined person, even when I was a student and now as an educator. I have the culture of work, I value hard work, and I do not understand why people do not do this. I think in the public sector this is tolerated, but not in the private sector. People talk to the unions, politicians and you cannot touch them. In a way, this makes you bitter. People just sit around and get their salary. My son is a doctor in France, my daughter was a laureate, and she went to school by catching two buses, and she too is a doctor in the UK, and they have always been on time at school, lectures or work. It is not a problem for them to follow the discipline.

Tradition and cultural activities have its place in our society, but I am telling you, if there is any religious festival people disappear in the name of the festival without any planning. It impacts profoundly on the volume of work in the office. During the end of the year, it is the same: “you are the only one in the office, you and your office, you have to do it by yourself”. Three lady staff members work in this office, and they do not even communicate if they are not coming to work. This kind of attitude irritates me and make me waste my time.

5.2.3.13 Mauritian culture influencing women to occupy leadership position

The Mauritian culture and religious beliefs may influence the choice of gender for a leadership position, and it is crucial for some people, but it has never been a problem for me. I studied in Europe, and I came across many cultures. I have always been appreciated. For me, it is not a problem.

5.2.3.14 Some women are not at ease to talk

I am more at ease working with men rather than women who keep on gossiping every day. I have been working with foreign men; we deal with them. I never had this type of context. I am sure for some Mauritian ladies, it is a problem working with men, and they would prefer women.

5.2.3.15 Advice to the aspiring educational leaders

You will go through lots of challenges; when you sit in a leadership chair, You should deliver, otherwise do not go for it. You should not just be interested in promotion and high salaries. Be it a man or a woman, an aspiring educational leader should be committed to the work. He or she must not just do the work because he or she has to do it, but instead make the work become the centre, value, trust and love the work which is being done. Do not come to the office to scratch and give orders. Instead, put your hands to work to make things happen, show one’s commitment to the project. Be holistic in your approach to the people you are working with, showing the right attitude, be positive, disciplined and have a heart in what is being done, and bring the changes slowly but surely. For me, work is next to worship.

END OF ANANDA’S NARRATIVE

5.3 Narrative Two: Hafizah's narrative

5.3.1 Childhood and adolescent life experiences

5.3.1.1 My knitted family

I was born in Port Louis and came to live in Beau-Bassin during my primary school education in 1965, before Mauritius gained independence in 1968. My late father was a very disciplined and learned tailor, and my late mother was an unlearned housewife, but was very intelligent. I grew up together with my sisters and brothers in a very close-knitted family. My parents laid much emphasis on education for all their children and told us whatever work you do, do it with passion, not just for the sake of money.

5.3.1.2 The pain of primary school exam competition

For my primary schooling, I do not have good memories. It was just robot learning, just working to have the primary scholarship, “la classe boursiere” to be admitted to the best secondary school. I went to an elite secondary school producing laureates. After six years of secondary education scholarship holders’ get university admission full paid by the government - a British Colonial Education System that is still present. I remember carrying heavy bags, reading until late at night and waking up early in the morning to pray and study. I was beaten for the “classe boursiere”. I used to complain to my parents and would ask my mum to pray so that I didn’t get beaten the next day. However, my parents used to pacify me and would say “Your teachers know much; they were beating you for your own good”. However, as a parent I would never accept this treatment for my children today.

5.3.1.3 My religious schooling

During my schooling, my father and brothers fully supported me financially, emotionally and spiritually. My mother, who was not educated, could not help us but sat with us while we were doing our homework until I was in secondary school and my dad would make us recite our lessons. Moreover, I was attending the madrassa – Islamic and Coranic classes that take place usually early morning before going to school or after school hours. Madrassa is a vital institution, that I have excellent souvenirs, that has contributed in what I am today. I learned prayers and Coran

messages and interpretations from my Janab (madrassa teacher) on how religious education is critical in our lives. Until today, I am still inspired by the Spiritual lessons learned. Gratitude! This is what I feel today towards my parents, brothers and Janab for who I am today.

5.3.1.4 Secondary school memories

Unlike my primary schooling, my secondary education was more enjoyable since I was doing extra-curricular activities like yoga, majorettes, and swimming. Our sports' day was grand, much like a celebrity organisation. I took a leading role in all the events' organisation together with our teachers, especially for the prize-giving ceremony. The standard was very high, and nothing was comparable. This is why when I was a rector, I emphasised the grandeur of the events which would mark the lives of the students.

After passing my final secondary examinations, I opted to pursue my higher studies in the UK in the field of Mathematics. Being a Muslim girl, my father would not venture to send a girl to go and stay in a hostel abroad. Fortunately, my brother-in-law and elder sister, who lived in the UK, accepted to take charge of my well-being. They were like parent figures to me. In fact, the idea of studying abroad came from my second brother, who was an educator and later a rector. He has always taken the lead and advised me in the educational field. My eldest brother was a little bit taken up by political activities. Then, in 1982, upon the advice of my brothers, I came to Mauritius for a teaching job interview and shortly thereafter I was appointed as an educator in the Ministry of Education.

5.3.2 Professional and school leadership experiences

5.3.2.1 Embarking into the teaching career in secondary education

After my graduation in Mathematics in the UK, I thought of doing something worthy in a place where I would meet more interesting people. Then in the PSC, there was no other option apart from the education sector, which was recruiting a large number of graduates. I became an educator in 1982 and was posted to a girls' college in a town in the Plain Willems region. Most of the recruitment exercises, be it in the public or private sector, are carried out in terms of ethnic belongings, political adherences or family and relative connection apart from the academic merits

as criteria. I still remember the first classroom where I taught the topic of equations, and by the end of the lesson, a courageous girl stood up to say they had not understood the lesson. It was a failure with a hard blow. This made me reflect “Am I meant for teaching?” Then, I thought that I should start teaching myself reading a little bit on how to teach and finally by the grace of God I had a very successful career as an educator because my students appreciated me.

However, I had a hard time in terms of mischievous behaviours while teaching the boys during my first transfer to a secondary school in a rural region. Then they became normal as they came to understand that I mean businesses in my work and class. Any late students in my class, I sent them to the office and made them realise that they have lost an essential part of the lesson. Gradually, students understood the importance of self-discipline and punctuality.

5.3.2.2 Leadership experiences as an educator

As an educator, I was a leader in my class. In the early years of my teaching, I always felt I would be a leader. Even though I have worked with very rude boys in one of the boys’ schools reputed for bad behaviour in my mid-twenties, I have never capitulated to their behaviours. “I have gone through a few of your classes and it is amazing how a young lady like you made the boys some as old as 17 years sit quietly and follow the class,” said my rector at that time. In fact, it is the way I started everything, the way I imposed myself in class without being rude, without shouting and without humiliating anyone because this has been my first rule. We cannot humiliate a student. But we set the example; if there is no discipline, there is no teaching. This is the prerequisite for teaching to take place. Alhamdulillah, I never had any problem, and I was able to hold on to proper functioning in the class.

During another episode of my teaching career, again in another elite boys’ school (ERC), I was pregnant with my first child. Before arriving in class, I used to see all sorts of vulgar words written on my table and on the board. The students expected me to get angry, and they wanted to create a scene. However, before starting the class, I used to push the table into a corner, asked somebody to clean the board and just started my class. I never ever commented on the graffiti written by the students. I adopted an attitude of self-control in order to avoid conflict. They did it once, twice, and then abandoned their mischief as they saw it was not affecting me as I was ignoring them.

5.3.2.3 Middle management experiences

As an educator and Head of the Mathematics Department, I used to cooperate a lot with the administration in terms of school curriculum planning such as Timetable, events organisations like sports day, family day, prize giving and other ceremonials. My rector delegated the planning responsibilities to me. I was going the extra mile. I liked it when everything was going well, but at times, I could hear adverse remarks from colleagues, mostly women, out of jealousy, and this was hampering my zeal. Spontaneously, I was becoming impulsive, and that was my weakness. Then with the experience, I came to realise that this impulsiveness is my weakness, which needed hard toil to be transformed into strength. I did not attend any course, but I prayed a lot every day asking the Almighty to give me strength, guidance, protection, and wisdom for every step I took. Even my peers were questioning me as to how I was able to lead one of the most difficult boys' secondary schools for nine years before stepping into the role of Assistant Director and Acting Director. I was conscious, and I knew I could do it. I was passionate about it. I had the vision to transform the hooligan boys to smart boys.

However, during this part of the leadership journey, I received no support from my superiors from the Zone and Headquarters. I had to create my own inner circle consisting of administrative staff and senior teachers in whom I saw wisdom. Even the lower ones among the staff, I used to give them responsibilities and made them committed. The educators, who were the first to leave school, it was not because they wanted to go early, but something was blocking them. I tried to understand them, praised them more for everything they did well, even if it was a simple task the size of a mustard seed because they had done it with heart. I recognised the staffs' ownership of efforts and contributions in school projects, together with a commitment to the work and responsibilities, and I was able to have my staff behind me to lead the school.

5.3.2.4 Stepping into the school leader role – Two extremes of mentorship

During my first posting as Deputy Rector in a rural school, I experienced two extremities of mentorship from two different rectors. The first mentor-rector used to close his eyes on the shortcomings of teachers, and he would not take any actions. Shortly after, he retired. Then another rector came, and he started having meetings with students very often but rarely with

teachers. As an aspiring school leader, my ultimate aim was to get both the teachers and the students behind me, even though there would be a few outsiders, the core would be with me.

Moreover, problems in rural schools in terms of the mentalities of the students, personnel, and parents are different from urban. Seeing the cultural and social disparities between rural and urban living, I was having difficulties in adapting and was questioning why I should be bothered by the students and staff when the rector himself was not demurring. Nevertheless, with Divine guidance, my woman's intuition and empathy I could sense the lack of effective communication and the absence of proximity of the school leader with the school partners as if these people were a bit left-out of the system. I tried to re-establish the connection between the staff and the administration by being an active listener at least. As a Deputy Rector, I knew how to do things since one of my brothers had been a school rector. However, I did not show my excessive zeal. I preferred to be in the see, observe and understand modes of the leadership space so that I could become accustomed to the school socio-cultural environment.

5.3.2.5 Blended roles of mother, wife and school leader

In 1998 when I became a Deputy Rector, my third child was three years old. First of all, I took the responsibility to take them to school in Curepipe when I was working in the Upper Plain Wilhelm's region while my husband was working at Port Louis. My husband was doing the whole kit and caboodle in the house, which was just constructed when my first son was born. He used to show me samples of tiles and curtains, and wanting my advice for carpet colour, types of furniture – Teak or Sapele. However, I did not have time for that, my entire afternoon and weekend was for my child because during the weekdays it was like “quick-fit-quick-done” with school work preparation, household work, and childcare and getting everything ready for next day. I had the help of my mother-in-law whenever the need was felt. Then, after the second child was born, I had to employ a nanny for the children at home. She looked after them; she did the cooking and housework that at one point, the second boy used to say “my mom! She does not work”. That was emotionally hard for me as a mother since the nanny stayed and cared for them at home more than their mother. Furthermore, this was among other reasons, why I did not apply for leadership positions earlier, although I had already become eligible when my first child was born in 1990.

When I became a school leader, my evenings were to organise my house and plan my work; otherwise, it would have been chaos. I have a husband, who also had many responsibilities in the government sector, and he was leaving home earlier than me and coming later than me, but he was helping me to the best of his abilities.

Indiscriminately, during the period 1992 to 1995, my husband and my elder brothers with whom I seek advice told me to concentrate on my family rather than a promotional post. I was still young and a bit immature of the political context of the country. Then in 1998, my husband asked if I was not interested in applying for Deputy Rector post. Therefore, after going through the application procedures, without much conviction, because in those days there was some political turmoil, in 1999, I was nominated, Deputy Rector. My husband has been all through my career a source of inspiration and motivation whenever I have had to go abroad for training and official mission.

5.3.2.6 Gender issues

For the promotional processes all through my life, I have never encountered gender discrimination as such, but I knew it was an issue, but to be honest, I do not think it is a crucial problem. I had worked on gender issues at the Ministry of Education on the Global, National, and Community Gender. However, gender issues can occur in a house, maybe if parents do not have money; then, regarding education, only boys got educated. Otherwise, because of social, cultural, ethnic, religious backgrounds where women get penalised, I have never felt it throughout my life that gender had been in the way an obstacle to get a promotion although I being a woman. However, in private sectors, promotion for men is higher than women. In the public sector, it is more of a political and racial quota, favouritism or nepotism that prevails over and above qualifications when promotional posts are advertised.

5.3.2.7 Being overshadowed in my role as school leader

Three years later, when I was nominated Rector, I was posted to a girls' school (RDL). I got some difficulties in navigating as a school leader. There was a "Lady" Deputy Rector, (I have used the pseudonym Lady because she was acting much like a Bourgeoisie woman), who was nearly retiring, wanted to overshadow me as rector. When I reported to the school, I introduced myself,

and she just turned away and said: “Sorry, sorry, I do not have time for you now, am very busy”. It was a hard blow on my face. Then, Lady asked me to follow her to the hall for distribution of papers to parents regarding students’ admission and there was confusion and panic everywhere. She was behaving as if she was “Un Calif a la place du Calif” – a Chief in the place of the real Chief.

The next day after greeting the officers, I requested the school timetable. When I tried to talk to the lady, I was shocked by the way she behaved. Then I got the intuition that I needed to give her some importance. I praised her for her work; I delegated part of my role and responsibilities to her and eventually, with time, I was able to convert the negativity she had towards me into positivity. She started doing things more with heart. We are now best friends.

Moreover, I had some problems with social cohesion with some of the teaching staff, who were my ex-class teachers. They were viewing me in an odd way: how come they were still teachers, and I had already become their supervisor. With time, they became impersonal, and work was going on smoothly even with male colleagues.

5.3.2.8 Fibbed leadership role assignment

In 2003, I was nominated by the then Minister of Education to follow an International Diploma in Administration offered by the Government of India. After completing the course, I resumed my duties at the same girls' school (RDL). Two days later, I got a call from a lady Director at the Headquarters requesting me to take responsibilities of the International Affairs in Education at the Ministry. I thought it was a higher level of administrative and managerial position, and I accepted the position. However, to my astonishment, after one week, I could not see myself undertaking any international administrative tasks. The posting was just to take care of the international relations desk, and I was doing all tasks the clerical duties. The posting was like a trap. I felt I had been duped and suppressed professionally. In fact, the Director knew me for my organisational and operational skills which I have, and this is why she had been looking for me to do her tasks. After the conference, there was neither any recognition for my work nor a word of thanks. The Director told me "I am posting you back to the school level", but then in an elite boys' school (RRC), which I accepted. I had found it very pleasant to work as a teacher at RRC, and now I was returning as Head of School.

5.3.2.9 Back to square one – taking the bull by the horns

On joining RRC, during the 3rd term the situation was far from the teaching years I knew and the way I have been coaxed to accept the posting done by the Director. In the real situation, discipline was at its lowest level. There were loads of challenges than expected. Moreover, the school had a mix of school culture since the boys came from other schools over Mauritius after doing their O-level examination to complete their A-Level examination programme. Students formed small gangster groups with wounds and blows quite frequent in the school and outside of the school. On top of all these, the boys were vulgar, they lacked manners in the way they talk, and lateness was around 90% with the boys coming to school with an inappropriate uniform, ear and nose piercing and all kind of T-shirts. I was utterly discouraged and was regretting how I have been coaxed into this trap again. Then, I understood it was in a way to harass me in a disguised manner since I raised my voice to disapprove of the Director's way of doing things vis-à-vis the International Education Affairs. With the support of my husband, the advice of my brother and the guide of Allah, I ventured to take the leadership role in RRC as the first woman rector in the history of the school.

5.3.2.10 Delegation of work

During the school holidays, after the third term examinations, I set up a committee with the Heads of Departments. We talked about various school issues and discussed the strategies to adopt. I called another meeting this time with the whole school staff, and I told them I need their help, and they need my help to remedy the chaotic situation. We all have to work together if we want our lives to be calm at school, and they were all agreeable to do this.

5.3.2.11 Re-establishing discipline

I established each morning the Morning Assembly with the National Anthem, the School Universal Prayer, and a message. I assembled them in lines in the yard. This I had prepared in advance during the holidays. The hall was too small to cater for the large school population, and students found it an opportunity to loiter outside the hall during any assembly. I decided to conduct all the school assemblies in the yard. On the very first day, the boys rebelled. They did not want to sing the National Anthem and repeat the Morning Prayer. I stood firm with them and only for a week, there was the rotten culture of disruption of morning assembly, and afterwards, everything became smooth. The latecomers were not allowed to come to the assembly until the prayer was finished. At one point, I stood up and said to a student “I am not impressed at all with your outstanding academic results. I would have preferred if you had failed with good manners”. At that time, I was able to control my emotions and imposed the disciplines and ethical ethos of school culture in that student and others as well by taking the help of the representatives of the student body. After having control over the smooth running of the school, then we (myself and my inner circle of staff members) decided to give responsibilities to those very unruly students, giving them responsibilities which kept them busy doing good jobs. In a way, this was a creative way of managing the school.

I have been able to transform the bad reputation of the school into the honourable name it bears today. I really thank God for the leadership wisdom he gave me in leading and changing the school.

5.3.2.12 From hooliganism to heroes

During my first year at RRC, after the proclamation of A-Level results in February 2005, after school hours, the students went to two girls' schools and broke everything there in the schoolyard and made many things that would not make an elite boys' school proud of at all. They wrote all kinds of vulgar graffiti everywhere. It was the RRC boys' way of celebrating good results! I was left on my own to navigate the rough seas and deal with the hooliganism and bad behaviour of the RRC students. I wrote to the Ministry and looked for the support of the senior administration. There was "radio silence" from the Ministry – they just told me to keep quiet since the event took place after school hours and let those boys bear the responsibilities for their irresponsible acts with the police. My motherly intuition said no, I could not let them have police cases, for this would affect their careers in the future. So, I decided to hold a meeting with the representative of the student body, my inner circle staff, those irresponsible boys and their parents, PTA members, the management representative of the two damaged girls' schools and the police. After the rude boys apologised for their immature acts, it was decided that their parents would contribute financially up to ninety percent to repair the infrastructural damage and the PTA would contribute the rest. Moreover, after the work was done, I requested those boys to offer flowers to the girls in the respective girls' schools. I made them understand that it is the only way to get out of what they have done and regain a good reputation.

5.3.2.13 Historical facts on hooliganism behaviours at RRC

As a matter of fact, the hooliganism of the students and silence of the parents on results day dated back to British colonial times. I got that information from the archives of the school. On A-Level result day, all shops had to be closed in the nearby perimeter of the school because the boys would manifest their stress instead of joy on the street. They would throw all kinds of projectiles, breaking the window panes of shops, buses, and cars. This was the way the boys wanted to say they were the best. I said no to all these bad behaviours and as from now all events would be celebrated in the school campus under the supervision of teachers during school hours.

5.3.2.14 Hundred and eighty degrees transformation

Then during every morning assembly, I started talking to them about moral values and manners, adolescence crisis, family issues and other social concerns. After spending eight years in RRC, I felt a sense of happiness in myself and the staff for transforming the boys from having animal behaviour to human behaviour which other rectors have not been able to do since the time of the British rectors.

All the changes happened due to the careful selection of reliable members of staff and students that constituted my team of co-workers – my inner circle, on whom I could rely on for any issues. They were so supportive of all the initiatives that we took for the welfare and protection of students, teachers, and the community. I had established a relationship with the parents, the community, the police and the shops. I went to the shops in the vicinity to warn them in writing to stop selling alcoholic drinks to minors and college students as it was a serious offence according to the law. This would prevent all shops from shutting down their shutters on results day or any other school events, and the public also would not be terrified by the boys' behaviour. After three years, together with the help of the school community, I did eradicate the problem of RRC's school hooliganism. I believe I took the right decision in every step of the proceedings when the Ministry remained silent in the matter.

5.3.2.15 My mentors in the leadership position

Officially, there were no mentors. I learnt about the managerial and administrative tasks by doing. I took Allah as my mentor, the Supreme guide on how one should lead when someone is in a leadership position. Otherwise, unofficially, my husband and my brother have been my mentors on the school and Ministry administrative issues. The care, the love, patience, forgiveness, security, trustworthiness that everyone should feel and receive and, in turn, give to others. I also used to invite people from the community to talk on topical issues such as drugs, mobile phones, the use of time, family welfare, respect, parents, and talks on career guidance to sensitise the students, as well as the educators, since we all worked as a family.

5.3.2.16 My relationship with the teaching staff

I had to give the teachers responsibilities as one would give them to a child. This was not as easy as one thinks. Teachers are adults, and one cannot mould their characters but I used to see corrective measures undertaken by the teachers themselves. I gave them their chance of performing, taking the time to change and recognising their efforts and praising them when the effective changes had taken place. I took it that every individual was different, some were fast, some were slow, and some do things more intellectually than with heart. So, as a leader I knew every staff member, understood everyone, and we worked together. I knew where to channel the game. I was happy to see the school celebrating its true nobility, not to say superiority, after three years of hard work with each and everyone's effort.

5.3.2.17 Inspiring changes

When I was leaving RRC, a teacher came with a gift to thank me for having changed his personality and his way of working with integrity and passion. It was not all easy. Nonetheless, we can see what has been done with an excellent sense of responsibility and the human spirit of love. Even now, I meet my teachers. We go out for dinner in families, and we always talk about those good times we worked to make miracles happened. I invested myself totally to change the public views of an elite school with ill-mannered characters. I think I achieved my mission as a woman leader when my head boy made a speech and said: "You have converted RRC from an educational institution to an educational temple where we developed compassion, altruistic love and learnt to give happiness to others through our actions". I engaged the students in social construction through all sorts of extra-curricular activities. They were so intelligent and had so much energy but they did not know how to use their intelligence. Therefore, we had to guide them and make them do other fruitful things in life apart from just thinking of laureates and celebrating laureateship like hooligans. My teachers and students were like my body-guards and soldiers respectively, and in their eyes, I was like an Iron-lady. Once, one of my brothers gave an interview, and they asked him about me. He said « Oui, Elle est une Dame de Fer qui portent des Gants de Velour » - Yes, she is an Iron Lady who wears Velvet Gloves.

5.3.2.18 Challenges with students' parents

The parents of the students of RRC think highly of themselves because they think the achievement of their children is their achievement. It is true, but it does not give parents or entitle them to be too proud, but they are, and they think that the school owes them everything.

Whatever good happens to their children, they take the credit, and whatever wrong happens to their children, it is the school. I made it very clear to parents on day one of each school year and during PTA meetings that the school needed the teachers, the administrative staff, and the parents. All school work has to be done in collaboration, and everyone should be aware, otherwise, we defeat ourselves. I insisted on them complementing each other. We cannot work in isolation and that we needed to work together.

Very often, parents were telling me “you are the only one who can do this and that to my child, I am leaving him in your hands”. I said sorry, “you assume the responsibility of parents, my staff and I will assume our responsibilities. We will work together. I cannot come to your house and wake up your child, for example, you can do that”. I used to communicate, and communication was one of my priorities, be it with students, staff or parents. Moreover, I made sure whatever I communicated with parents, as far as I could, would be communicated to the staff. In this way, the teachers also knew what was happening at the level of parents so that those parents later did not blame anyone for not giving the due professional care to their children at school. What I concluded was that parents did not like to hear anything wrong about their children. However, I liked to make it a point before saying anything about a child. I used to tell them being a mother myself, I could understand the parent's feelings whenever their children have done something wrong.

Working at RRC for eight years was very challenging and rewarding as well since I got the big opportunity for developing as a leader who wanted to make a change. From there, I got promoted to Assistant Director/Acting Director at the Head Quarters.

5.3.2.19 Influence of married life on leadership experiences

My married life influenced me in a way in my leadership practices. My house, my children, my husband and my family, have given me the opportunity to show my leadership capabilities or performances in my small family world, immediate extended family and in my huge family. With

my in-laws, we usually organise lots of outings together, lots of picnics and family dinners. Well, for that matter, I am always taking the lead and adjusting here and there. I sit down with a paper and pen and plan all the tasks. I have my WhatsApp chat with the family members in finalising the events, like for the Eid festivity, for example.

5.3.2.20 Leadership tension between husband and wife

However, at times there has been frustration also vis-à-vis my husband. It is like having the responsibility to oversee all the operations and taking appropriate decisions for many years at my workplace. So, I have been a leader in schools. I had my team. I set the vision. I set the direction. I would take their advice also when they gave their point of view in what I was suggesting and in whatever I was doing. I had the appropriate support in taking a particular decision. However, in my house, it was not that everything I said would be accepted, it was not always my opinion. This is where sometimes problems cropped up. Unfortunately, I could not get along with those leadership practices in my house. My husband is a stronger leader than I am. I must admit much stronger, so I managed with things being this way. He would be happy to hear that [laughing for a moment]. His character is different from mine. I deal very differently in my school. I am a different leader in my school compared to my house.

5.3.2.21 Looking for divine guidance in leadership practices

I always ask for divine guidance, whether it is in school or my house. In every sphere of my life, I always pray, and I say ok I am having problems, I am getting upset and worked up for such and such an issue. When I ask for divine guidance, I feel at peace; the Almighty is accompanying me all the way. People will not understand that, but mind you, it worked, as much work had to be done to reach here. I have been in much turmoil. I even, at a point, came to think that he does not know my value, my children do not know me. In my school, they even said from the start that I do not know the school culture and its realities. Then, when I become more mature, I realised it is something needing much experience.

I wanted to mend things to whatever extent. Then, I prayed and worked on myself and my character to become more receptive and understanding in allowing things to evolve.

5.3.3 Higher educational leadership experiences

5.3.3.1 Resisting changes

The change from a leader in school to a leader outside school happened at a Y-junction. I was entitled to become Assistant Director since 2009, but I never decided to step in every time there was an acting position although I had become the most senior staff member. I said no because of my bad experience at the Ministry, which pulled me down. Nevertheless, my colleagues were telling me: “Your juniors are going over your head, and you should think about it”.

In December 2011, I got the information that there would be a massive transfer in April 2012 and I was thinking of where would I be going after RRC. It was not that I was looking down on other schools, but in fact, I already had lots of short-term experiences in many other schools and to re-start anew in another school demanded much energy. However, I wanted to end my career at RRC. I did not want to change to another school since I had spent most of my energies on transforming that school for eight years as Rector. In February 2012, I took the final decision to step into a leadership position outside the school when the opportunity presented itself.

5.3.3.2 Fighting another battle in higher seas

I accepted the post as Acting Assistant Director in Zone 2 and one month later in Zone 3. Ultimately, it was an excellent experience since I knew the work environment, although it was not my first choice because the work became monotonous. It was just operational management. I was not attaining any experience as technical, policy or curriculum development in the Zone. Then after six months, I was transferred to Headquarters, and this is where my nightmare started. I was required to share an office with clerical officers without any personal computers or a confidential secretary. As an Assistant Director, I was not getting my value recognised, and I felt diminished. However, I did not allow this to impede my work. I made loads of requests. I wrote many letters to the female Acting Senior Chief Executive (SCE) until after nearly 8 months, I was given an office like a bathroom. To me, it was not that practical... I went to complain to her. I said: “Come down and see the conditions I am working in. How can I work in such an office”. She was very rude to me. I am sorry to say that she was insulting to me and I put everything in an official letter and sent it to her and to the Head of Civil Service stating what the Acting SCE had said to me. Finally, I

was able to get an office with a secretary, and this office was quite far and in another building, that made the frequent coming and going to the SCE office or Chief Technical Office very tiresome. Mischievous action was being directed towards me.

Moreover, I was also discussing with my husband about my retirement from the service, and I said to him “I am very unhappy with my job, and on top of everything, I am having a lot of problems with insubordination”. I was a leader, and I was being suppressed again when I wanted to do something. It was like “you had to be where you are, you cannot do something, you cannot act, you just have to follow, you agree, or you do not agree, you cannot say anything in committee”.

When there was a meeting, all directors would say things that the Minister wanted to hear, and I said it higher and louder that I am not the type of lady to let favour ever influence me, never. I preferred to be victimised and not get my due than to get my due by being agreeable to something that I did not adhere to, something that I did not believe in. That is how I made up my mind to retire early. I wanted to retire on the spot. I had no interest in working in that type of work environment.

5.3.3.3 The obstacle in getting pre-retirement leaves

In 2016, my last day of work was to be 1st April to become eligible for a full pension. When I was sure I was going to retire, I wrote a letter and personally went to submit the letter to the new male SCE, and I asked for pre-retirement leave. He was angry, and he asked: “What will happen to the pending dossiers on international matters”. I said “Sorry Sir, I have my personal problems and I need the pre-retirement leave. He said: “You have to deal with the Public Service Commission”. I said “Ok, I will do so”. Even when I wanted to go into retirement, my superior was posing obstacles in the procedure.

My letter of retirement had not yet gone to the Public Service Commission, when I was called for an interview, and I was appointed as Assistant Director. I accepted it, but I still maintained my decision to go on early retirement.

5.3.3.4 Failure to accept that a woman has a mind and muscles too

I had already made up my mind that I wasn't really happy with that type of job, and I did not want to work under those conditions.

I said to my director that I was having a big problem with insubordination, and that I couldn't be a leader in such a situation. Without wanting to offend anybody, I am a born leader, I think. I wanted to lead projects. I wanted to do something for the benefit of the society, like creating an NGO for divorced and widowed women. I did not think I would be happy as a director either. I would not because a Director is not his own boss. The director has the SCE on top of him or her and in all the management meetings the SCE does not even listen to his Directors about sensible schooling issues. I would have loved to stand up and give them a piece of my mind. I tried to open my mouth, but I felt suppressed. I was suffocating, and my mind felt like it was going to explode. For me, I believe being happy in your place of work is very important.

In fact, to be an educational leader with a vision for the National Education System, one needs to have moved through the positions of deputy rector, rector, AD and Director. While the actual Directors have not travelled this way, they had been Principal Education Officers in respective schools and had been promoted directly to Director without any experience in the technical part of education or Ministry administrative issues. This was a flaw in the system in the past and has now been corrected by PRB 2008. So, the work was done by trial and error.

The Directors only sat there, sat back and didn't open their mouths. Usually, the Directors had a weekly meeting, a purely technical meeting, saying things like: "We must all know what is happening, what strategies we are using, what are we doing". To my dismay, the political agenda of the Minister was more often discussed than the real problems of National Education. They said at the Ministry that children are at the core, yet I never saw children's real welfare at the core. Whatever they did, they would just write "a very nice report" to be approved by the Minister, by the CEO, and then where does it go? Was it being implemented or what is happening at the school level? No one knew.

At the Ministry, the Directors and officers of the Administrative Cadre work in an office, and the schools are far away. Students! They do not even recall whether these are their customers. For them, it is like nothing, but for me ... all my career I have been close to the students. I have worked

with them and for them. How can I reward myself by going against my principles, my spiritual belief as an educator? There was never cooperation between the directorates because whatever they were doing was as if they have their “chasser garder” – their own territory. The Primary Curriculum Directorate has to liaise with the secondary school on how to manage it together. The curriculum has to be done with school management and other secondary sections as it is all interrelated, but it was not like this at all. Everybody worked in isolation. At the meeting, I was the only one who would ever dare make alternative propositions and challenge the Chairperson.

Since I have retired from the service, I appreciate my home. For me, it was like being a robot. My friend always says that I have changed. When we went out in the evening, I was the first to say: “Let us go home. In the morning I have to wake up early. I have important school affairs to handle”. My sisters and family members saw a new me. I can now go to my gym three times a week. I can go anywhere I want. My time is mine. I do not regret retiring. I have worked so hard for which I am very proud. I have had a fruitful career despite the critical episodes.

5.3.3.5 The selection process to be in a leadership position

As a Muslim woman, I must say it that there was some kind of oppression towards me, a strong feeling that somebody was pulling me further down and it has influenced my career and myself a lot. Consequently, I was not appointed Director from 2010 to 2012 but kept as Acting Director. For my first interview for Assistant Director when I was not appointed, I felt emotionally let down. It was the first time that I had failed an interview in my life. It was more the rejection than not being selected from the interview because I knew I hadn't done badly during the first interview. Then after two years when the post was re-advertised, I was already performing the functions of the Acting Director. During the second interview I was much more confident when I answered the questions. I was appointed in February 2015. Again I want to say, and I do not want to sound pompous, but I had no intention of putting anybody down. Therefore, I can say with conviction that I did not understand how those other people had been nominated and not me after the first interview. I was doing the job, and bearing in mind my achievements and knowing their achievements, that moment was very frustrating. I do not like putting people down, but they had been chosen, and there was a close relationship between the choice of candidates and their political connections, and everybody knew that I was not politically active. The political interference was so apparent that everybody talked about this, but nobody could do anything.

When they faced me, those who were nominated, they felt very embarrassed because they were nominated not through the proper channels. I held my head high although I was not nominated. They had their heads low because they were nominated for their political affiliations. It was a tough period in my life. Nobody recognised me in my dark moments. I did not have the same “joie de vivre” – the joy of living. It was reflected on my face as I was heartbroken. I felt like I had lost my identity; I did not recognise who I was. I was being forced to transform into a different person. If I had stayed at the Ministry, I would have had to transform.

When I went back in January 2016, it was just for goodbyes. I wanted to get away from there to get back to myself, to re-establish myself. “When you are affected, it reflects on your person”. Nobody could recognise me, not even my family. They thought that I had a severe illness because why was I sinking and why did I not have any interest in life. I was depressed and emotionally affected. When one is going into this situation, money has no value. Then, I talked to my brothers and sisters together with my husband and children. As my husband was retiring in December 2015, I took the decision to retire along with him and I retired after 35 years of service from the Ministry of Education in April 2016 as Acting Director, a post I had occupied for three years..

5.3.3.6 The use of authority in a leadership position

I use my sense of authority on myself before I impose it on others. Authority for me is a privilege; on the other hand, it is also a responsibility. It is a privilege to have the authority to decide on something. What I understand and the way I use it is first of all on myself. It was my duty and responsibility as a leader to use my authority on those whom I was leading, be it students, teachers, parents and my family.

I was really doing my duty in a humble way, bringing ideas forward, sustaining my points, and getting all the reasons behind wanting to do something. I have always kindly requested everybody to do the work without imposing with a firm hand. I believed that what I was doing was the correct option. Because, the right thing to do for me, is working for and with the community where I am placed.. So, this is how I perceived working with authority. To make things happen when it was not happening by using my feminine intuition. I worked a lot on my feminine intuition to take decisions which were the right decisions. Once a rector remarked to me that I ruled the school with my heart, and I should not, otherwise, I would end up being a heart patient. However, I really did the work with my heart.

5.3.3.7 The impact of culture on leadership practices

I think in all spheres, not only as a leader of a school, in any job, one's culture will reflect in the decisions that one is making. I think the culture has a lot to do with how someone does things, what one does and how one does it, one's culture will direct the person.

5.3.3.8 My personal development

I do not have any of sort degree other than my bachelor's degree in Mathematics and the course that I followed in educational planning. I attended short courses offered by the Ministry which helped me a lot to get started. I cannot deny the need to receive training to get started, but what you eventually do depends on your experience, mindset, the journey and determination. For me, what matters more are not qualifications or degrees, it is the willingness to make a change for the better. For me, my main concern was to get the best from my students not only academically but in all fields.

I consider myself having done that purely based on my determination, and I was aware of the responsibilities that rested on my shoulders.

5.3.3.9 After retirement – generativity phase

At school, I never thought of early retirement. I always thought I would go to the end of my career. Nevertheless, with the bad episodes, I felt I was sacrificing my family life for the worthy cause of the country's children, but in return, I was being humiliated and blocked from moving ahead. I believed it would be benefit me to stop working because I would be strong enough to do other things. In fact, I had already thought I would be involved in social work helping the young divorced women and young widowers in their lives through social, emotional and financial support. I intended to set up a non-governmental organisation for this cause and work for the empowerment of the young divorced women and young widowers so that they could stand on their feet and reshape their lives.

5.3.3.10 Advice to an aspiring woman leader

My advice would be first of all to be aware of; there are two aspects: firstly, do not forget you are a woman and secondly, forget you are a woman.

Do not forget you are a woman because you are the owner of the status of being a woman. Use all the intuition that God has given you like caring, attentiveness, empathy, etc. Work in a way that you feel you are doing things with your heart and with sensitivity in a positive way. Do not forget that you are a woman because God has created you for the benefit of the society that you are leading.

Forget that you are a woman when you are a leader because you should not think when you are a woman that you cannot be a leader. Forget that you are a woman and believe that you can match a man and even do better in the work being done by a man.

Forget you are a woman and believe that your leadership does not depend on your gender. You have chosen to be a leader and you are that leader. Your colleague, a man may be a leader, but so are you. Expect that he will keep you on your toes, but do not expect him to do you any favours. Moreover, carry out your work professionally.

Be passionate, be true to yourself, believe in what you are doing, be ready to support what you are doing and any decisions you take, and always be ready to assume responsibility.

Be passionate again and again. Without passion you cannot achieve what you want. With passion the sky is the limit, and you will reach heights that you would never have imagined.

Humility is something that is an attribute of any person; be humble, let others see your greatness; because if you blow your own trumpet, you are will not be viewed kindly. Do not be satisfied with good only, aim for the best because if you do not try, you will not know your potential. Nothing will happen by magic. This is the sentence that I used with my students. I put in a lot of effort. It did not come easily. There was much effort behind it, and what you saw was the final product. Everything is hard work. Nothing is achieved without compromise. Three things pay. It is “Hard work! Hard work! And hard work!.

END OF HAFIZAH’S NARRATIVE.

5.4 Narrative Three: Lea’s narrative

5.4.1 Childhood and adolescent life experiences

5.4.1.1 Becoming an orphan at the very young age

I, Lea, was the youngest child of a Catholic Christian family of eight children who lived in the South-Western part of the island, a rural region. At four years old, my dad died. The situation changed dramatically, and because of the financial burden, my mother had to leave me in the care of my maternal aunt and grandfather for six years in the city of Port Louis. I had four years of my primary schooling in Port Louis and after the demise of my maternal grandfather; the last two years of primary schooling were in Black River under the care of my maternal uncle. My mother had to work and take care of my elder brothers and sisters who were already attending upper primary and lower secondary classes.

5.4.1.2 My teenage years' development

At the age of 10, I went to live at my maternal uncle's place in the district of Black River until I got married at the age of 22. My uncle, a police officer, was a very learned person in those days. As he had no children, he took charge of my schooling, home tuition and related expenses. His wife used to take me to the village church, where I got my religious teaching. At the age of 16, I took a leading role in the youth community development at the request of the Church Sister in Black River to disseminate cooking and dressmaking skills to the young girls. I had learnt cooking, stitching and dressmaking from my aunt. Frequently, there were fairs organised by the church, and I was happy to sell my finished products like Chinese Guava jam, kids' dresses, tablecloths with sewing hooks to raise funds for the church community development.

For my last year of primary schooling, I had to travel a very long distance from Black River to Plane Wilhems district to attend a primary school where I could compete for a scholarship called "Petite Bourse" in those days to benefit from free schooling at the secondary level. By God's grace, I obtained a scholarship to pursue my secondary studies in an elite girls' state school in the Plane Wilhems district. I was fortunate enough, unlike my siblings, to have a fruitful education. My uncle and aunt provided me with family support, instilled discipline and a go-getter character in me and an entrepreneurial flair and spirituality. In fact, when I had my own children, I made it a point that they too follow catechism courses and get involved in community development work to help humanity.

5.4.1.3 The development of leadership competencies during teenage years at school

During my subsequent secondary schooling days, I was the class-captain in all the subsequent levels. I remember in upper form classes I was actively involved and took a leading role in the preparation and organisation of Sports Day, Prize Giving Day, and Majorette Show for Independence Day. I also had the opportunity to play a role in “Malade Imaginaire” of Moliere in the inter-college drama competition. I was very much involved in the International Duke of Edinburgh Leadership Award Competition that germinated our leadership and socio-cultural development. My friends were all collaborative members under the mentorship of our French and Maths teachers. However, I did not like one of the science teachers, who was always favouring girls of a particular community because those girls were from politically and socially active families. I was stigmatised believing that I would not succeed in science. He wrongly advised us to opt for literature subjects, because of which I could not compete for a bursary which was restricted to students in pure science and economic sides only. I felt that was disguised racial discrimination so that we could not qualify for any bursary to pursue higher studies abroad.

After passing my Higher School Certificate exams with bright results, I wanted to go to France to study law because I was more confident with the French language than English. However, due to financial difficulties, I “grabbed” a teaching job in a private secondary school in the Southern region to teach French, though my mother wanted me to become a nurse. Primarily, one of my uncles, Jake, a politician, could have arranged for a nursing job for me in England. However, I was not very keen for any job in the health sector; instead, I wanted to be a lawyer or a secondary school teacher. When I was still a kid, for Christmas, she gave me a toy school kit with which I played the role of “Miss” – lady teacher - with my brothers and sisters. I still have it as one of my souvenirs. When I looked back, I always wondered whether the blessing of Father Christmas designed my career in the education sector.

5.4.2 Professional and school leadership experiences

5.4.2.1 Grabbing the teaching profession as the first train

I started my career as an educator of the French language in 1979 in a private secondary school, CK College, located in the southern part of the island as highlighted above. I had a role model

French teacher who inspired me a lot to the French language teaching profession. In those days the private secondary school students' population was ethnically based, for example, if the owner of a private school was a Hindu, the majority of the students of the school were Hindu.

At CK College, I taught French and French literature to girls who were around 13 years and below average in their academic performance. Besides, some were from families living in deprived conditions. I found myself playing the role of mother-teacher in their lives, even though I was not yet a mother. Nevertheless, since I came from a low-income family and thanks to the first teacher-training classes in adolescent psychology, pedagogy, sociology, and hidden curriculum, I could shoe myself rather successfully in the teacher-mother role.

5.4.2.2 The different forms of harassment in my initial years of teaching

Three months after I took up employment at CK College in 1979, I got the opportunity to join the Teacher Training College (now the Mauritius Institute of Education, MIE), to follow a Teacher's Diploma course in the French Language. Although I was eligible to get time off to follow the course, the Chinese lady Principal, the sister of the school Manager did not accede to my request as I refused to make a "small contribution" from my salary to the school. A Chinese family owned this school. There was a covert bribery practice that the school management was practising.

Additionally, the school manager imposed on teachers to contribute token-fees for the school's development in order to get the release to follow the teaching courses at Teacher Training College. I again refused to give money as a contribution since I did not get any sponsorship from the school to follow courses. Then and there, during my free periods at school, I was given replacement classes as a way to make my life difficult. Moreover, it was not easy to travel from the south region and back to MIE on time, but I managed to cope with the lateness.

During my posting at CK College, I experienced other forms of harassment. Apart from the school manager, there were "other managers" – the spy-lady teachers. I viewed this as a form of harassment and a form of jealousy because the so-called "other managers" were not eligible to follow higher-level courses, and thus they had to teach only in lower form classes. Hence, in a way to voice their frustration, they were gossiping, spying and back-biting other teachers to the school management.

Moreover, I was purposely given a classroom near the main road where I had lots of difficulties in conducting my classes because of the disturbing traffic noise the whole day. Indeed, I was faced with this almost every day. I also remember that in the school there were a few cases of alcohol and illegal Cannabis dealings among the students and the school management called upon the teachers to give a helping hand to fight the flow of alcohol and illegal drug dependencies. Since I was very much involved in church activities, I got the help of a Catholic Priest and Sisters of a church to help those girls and their families. Despite the difficulties, I was able to complete my Teacher's Diploma in the French language while working at CK College. Later in 1986, I decided to join the public secondary education predominantly for the reasons of job security and stability. However, this decision was a stepping stone towards a leadership position as this would open up scope for promotion in the public secondary schools' sector at a later stage.

5.4.2.3 Joining the public secondary school sector

When joining the public sector in mid May 1986, I was posted in a girls' state secondary school, RGSS in the Plain Wilhelm. Although I had to travel long distances (more than 75 Km), I was delighted to be in RGSS because this school did not have a dictatorial environment, unlike CK College. Nonetheless, there was a significant discipline problem in the school, and the girls used to shirk classes frequently. I was happy to propose to the Rector to conduct two roll attendances: one in the morning and one after lunch and to take appropriate disciplinary actions accordingly. This creative measure paid off rapidly, and within one month, teachers were able to get control of the students' presence in class. Now, this double school-roll control is actually implemented in all state secondary schools.

5.4.2.4 Married life and professional life

While still working at RGSS secondary school, I got married in December 1989 and moved to La Gaulette, a remote coastal village in the western part of Mauritius. In February 1990, I got transferred to REH secondary school, a co-educational school in the South where transport was a significant problem because of the very few buses on that route. The day I missed the bus at a specific time, I had to wait for at least one hour. Fortunately, the rector of REH Secondary School was a kind gentleman who understood the misery of travelling long distances to come to work.

I was very much involved in the organisation of extra-curricular activities such as drama, sports and indoor games at the REH secondary school. Undeniably, I was able to set up the first badminton club at the REH secondary school in the Southern region. Then, in mid-July, I got my transfer to BAM SSS in the Western region.

5.4.2.5 Traumatic event at BAM SSS

BAMS SSS was a co-ed secondary school, and I was in charge of the Drama and Culture Club of the school. I equipped a group of boys and girls for a high-level competition organised by Alliance Française and the French Embassy. Among the students who were performing, there was a boy and a girl who were dating. The parents did not want the boy and girl to perform together. I was feeling in a way stressed, and I decided to look for a transfer to another school because the boy and the girl would be in this school for another two more years. For the final, we won the first prize. In 1991, I was transferred to another school, CJK national college. It was within a week of my transfer that the boy unfortunately hanged himself. Emotionally, it was tough for me to handle the news at first because I had known the boy for three years, and he had confided in me. I always used to tell him that an excellent academic result would be the gateway to a successful life. Then, I felt a bit guilty because, in a way to escape the harassment of the parents, I felt that I have not been able to support that boy who had all his potential for life ahead of him. This episode still floats in my mind till today.

5.4.2.6 Treatment as a second-class teacher in unsecured work conditions

During my posting at CJK College, which is a boys' elite secondary school, I was not entirely happy because these boys were obscene and were causing trouble very often. Moreover, on the very first day, the rector made a gender stereotype and unethical remark in the staff meeting by saying: "...the Ministry took the entire male grade-A teachers and replaced them with grade B female teachers. I wonder if they will be capable of working here..." Hearing this, I felt diminished, and this made me take the decision that I would continue with my Bachelor degree course in Education as soon as the occasion presented itself. In 1992, I participated in a strike because Grade B teachers did receive an increase in salary compared to Grade-A teachers. We were tagged as teachers of the second class and in front of students and parents as if Grade B teachers had no value.

Moreover, at CKJ College, we were working in unsecured conditions: students were acting like bouncers, and they even put fire to a building block. Even after school hours, I never took the same bus as the students nor went to the bus-stop where the boys were waiting for the bus. I preferred to walk long distances to a bus stop far away from the students in order to avoid being harassed or being molested ...by the of students while stepping into the bus.

5.4.2.7 Tackling gay behaviours of students

Some of the boys at CKJ College started to imitate girls' styling by having long hair, long nails and wearing of earrings. At first, I was teaching them about respectful behaviours drawing some verses of the Bible that God has created us, men and women, so we should respect our creation otherwise we might end-up with gay and lesbian behaviours and run the risk of rejection by society. The boys, who persisted in these bad habits, I had to report them to the rector who took strict measures against them. The rector did not tolerate any misbehaviour by the students, and no one would dare challenge his decisions.

5.4.2.8 Moving to my newly constructed house

In 1993, I moved to my new house in the town of Beau-Bassin, which my husband and I constructed together. I did the interior design and decoration of the house myself while my husband was supervising all the construction work. When I moved in there, travelling distances from home to work became much shorter and less painful. However, then the kindergarten schools were quite far away. This situation motivated me to learn to drive, and shortly afterwards, I bought a car to drive my kids to school.

In 1996, I got transferred to a girls' secondary school in Port Louis and started my Bachelor in Education (B.Ed.) course. Earlier, my kids were too small, and there were other family commitments. In the middle of the year, my husband went on an official mission to Rodrigues Island. Oh..., I was left on my own to handle the house, the kids and to follow the B.Ed. Course. Finally, I got the help of my mother in the morning, and my mother-in-law in the evening to look after the children on the days I was attending evening courses. My kids were missing their father, and as such, we all went to Rodrigues during each school holiday.

5.4.2.9 Adopting an innovative teaching method

I worked on an innovative method of teaching French Literature: using a video. At that time, there was no “YouTube” technology; I had to create the videos myself. For the school activity classes, I created another video-film to teach Mauritian Literature – “Le Vent Floreal du Matin” of the writer Marcelle Lagesse. This Mauritian literature text is not in the formal curriculum because the writer is a White Franco-Mauritian. Even as a Rector, I have proposed this text during one of the Rectors’ meetings but there was still no response from the Ministry of Education. We are still studying texts of the British and French colonies, and have still not been able to adopt a Mauritian text in our curriculum, and the government says we must promote “Mauritianism” in our citizens – we live in a paradox island.

5.4.2.10 On becoming a school leader

At my third attempt to enter a leadership position, I was appointed Deputy Rector in December 2005 and I was one of the two women out of 19 who were promoted. I got my posting in a rural girls’ secondary school in the northern region. In the previous years, although I was eligible, I was withheld by family commitments since my kids were still at primary and pre-primary schools.

As educators, some of my colleagues succeeded in becoming school principals at that time, now called Rectors. Many of the male teaching staff were keener than female teaching staff to become school leaders because women had to look after family responsibilities. Nevertheless, there were a few women who were school leaders. However, later when my sons were grown up and nearly completing subsequent studies, then I said why not me crossing the line.

5.4.2.11 Covert discrimination not to accede to head of department

As an educator, I had never been able to become a Head of Department (HOD) during my 18 years of teaching. I have always worked under HOD leadership. There had been a kind of covert discrimination towards me not to accede to a HOD position, which was allocated on seniority criteria. Each time I was eligible, I was transferred to a school where someone else was more senior than me or to a school where the junior staff was more qualified than me because the criteria for headship was either a diploma and five years’ service or a bachelor degree and five years of service as a teacher. In a way, this situation also motivated me to complete my Bachelor degree in

Education and my Master's degree. Unfortunately, even after being qualified, I was never able to assume the responsibility of Head of Department, but I had been leading school clubs like drama, the literary and public speaking, which were all successful since we won prizes at national competitions. Fortunately, I got promoted directly to the post of Deputy-Rector in December 2005 after two unsuccessful attempts in 2000 and 2003.

5.4.2.12 Community Involvement

I was involved in social work during the weekends and school holidays at church. I conducted catechism classes and the Holy Bible education. I was actively engaged in community activities like counselling about happiness and welfare of families, counselling on the ill-effect of alcohol abuse and how alcohol dependence has the adverse effect on family and children, teenage pregnancy and preservation of life. Also, when I started working, my husband and I joined the Rotary Club of Black River, sponsored by one of my uncles, who was a lawyer and a politician of the Labour Party. I got the opportunity to visit a few countries when I held the post of Secretary in 1995. In a certain way, the Rotary Club provided the means for personal, social and professional development.

One of the missions of the Rotary Club is to empower people. We have been helping people especially those from deprived areas to develop backyard agricultural production with the support of the Medine Sugar Estate. We also launched adult literacy and numeracy courses, sponsored the schooling materials of children of Orphanage and organised outings for seniors. We also do fund-raising activities for children who need an overseas surgical operation. I have excellent memories of the elderly group of people of Petite Riviere Noire Church in 2008, where I was a community volunteer officer.

5.4.2.13 Non-formal school leadership experiences

When I went for an interview for the position of Deputy-Rector for the third time, I had just read about school leadership and just completed my Master's degree in Education. However, I did not have any practical experiences as a HOD or Officer-in-Charge whenever the Rector and Deputy Rector were on very short-term leaves. Apart from interview questions about administrative issues, the questions were also on teaching strategies and the importance of school extracurricular activities and their organisations. Fortunately and most importantly, the past experiences as

Secretary of Rotary Club helped me in answering the questions on leadership. I was also able to explain the importance of school extra-curricular activities that provided a platform for the psycho-socio-cultural development of students and become better-cultured citizens of tomorrow. Likewise, I aptly answered the questions dealing with a case of a drunkard student. I was able to scientifically answer these questions since I did Biology Main at HSC level and was involved in social work on alcoholism at the church level.

5.4.2.14 The good news – my appointment as Deputy Rector

Then, on the 21st December 2005, a few days before Christmas, I got my appointment letter as Deputy-Rector. “Today I am a teacher, and then tomorrow I will be deputy-rector,” I said to myself. Moreover, this thought created happiness but at the same time, a kind of anxiety since my friends would no longer be looking at me with the same eyes now. I just prayed to Jesus Christ always to keep me humble since my life would change.

When I got promoted to Deputy-Rector, I followed an induction course on school leadership and management organised by the Ministry over one week. However, it was not sufficient to master the whole process of school administration.

In 2006, I was posted in a rural girls’ secondary school of the northern region of Mauritius. The rector was preparing for pre-retirement leave. This school compared to a town school was serene since parents and students were less demanding. During the transition phase from teacher to school head, I felt awkward and confused to be in a position of authority. This state of confusion arose because I did not know how to deal with and react with teacher-colleagues with whom I was having fun with for such a long time and now I had crossed the line into an administrative and leadership position and having to deal with conflicts with the teachers who had been my colleagues.

In the school where I was posted, there were a few male and female staff who were my close friends. However, in front of all the staff, they kept their distance, and inside me, I was not at ease. This phase kept boggling my mind for almost three to four weeks. Then, for the planning and organisation of school activities, there were more frequent informal meetings, and this was the time where the friendship reconnections took place. However, over time, there have been lost friendships because as a school leader I had to assume other professional commitments. Also, the

more one climbs the supervisory ladder, the fewer friends one has, the more hostility one has, the more one is distanced from remaining friends.

5.4.2.15 Confronting a female pseudo-Leader

In the very same year, I also had a bad experience working with a lady school-usher. The latter was taking herself to be the boss of the school since the rector was on pre-retirement leave. She was a frustrated type of person. I had noticed that since my posting at the school she started coming to school more often at 9 o'clock. This made it feel like I had to do her work because of the time she arrived at school when her duties included compiling students' attendance registers, teachers' absences and other administrative duties. One day when I asked her about her lateness, she was very furious and said: "I do not take orders from you, I take orders only from the rector". I phoned the Zone Director to tell him about the incident since our rector was on pre-retirement leave. He told me to send a report and he would look into the matter. Two weeks later, the lady school-usher got transferred to a boys' school where she had always wanted to work, instead of getting an explanation letter or a warning letter. So, there were evil forces as well as protected protégés – they operated as invisible leaders.

Later in the same school, a girl did school truancy. I got a call from the parent who told me that her daughter was caught with her boyfriend at the seaside. I had to attend to the girl in her home and talked to her like a mother. I also talked to the parents so that there was not too much pressure on the girl. I did a follow-ups with her until her exams, and finally, she succeeded in her A-level examination with an average result. I was thrilled to see her succeed, and she now works as a manager in a reputed textile factory.

5.4.2.16 Becoming the Rector

In 2008, I was transferred to Telfair boys' school in Plain Wilhelm's to assume the responsibility of Rector. I was an Acting Rector till 2010 and got promoted to Rector in the same school. There I had to deal with a Form One student who brought his smartphone to school, and then he lost it. The ensuing day the boy came to school with his father who was very angry, and who insisted that I report the matter to police. I said to him "No, I cannot report the matter. If you want to report the loss, it is your right". The father was a company director, and he wanted to show me to be weak by being overbearing with me. After a lengthy discussion in a diplomatic way, finally, the

matter was settled. Later on, since there were too many larcenies and burglary occurrences, I decided to put in CCTV cameras with the approval of the Ministry in strategic positions in the schoolyard. My school was the first one to use such technology. School larceny could be tracked and decreased, as well as students' loitering in the schoolyard.

5.4.2.17 Conflict between women

Next, to the Telfair boys' school, there is also the Telfair girls' school. I remember that I wanted to do some inter-school activities together with the Telfair girls' school. I wanted the Head Boy and the Prefect body of my school to work together with the Head Girl and Prefect body of the girls' school under the supervision of teachers of both schools on school projects like a joint school magazine, mural paintings, theatre play, traditional music and joint prize-giving day. Although the Zone director was seeing excellent opportunities for the psychosocial development of the boys and girls students together, the lady rector seeing my plan of school activities refused to go forward out of jealousy. She even showed her wickedness towards me by using the supply teachers (casual teachers) who were working in both schools: some were working two days in my school and three days in her school or vice-versa. During the third term, we had a circular letter telling us that the last examination paper had to start, and then teachers not invigilating can be allowed to go home. In the other school, the lady rector was not following the instructions, and one of the supply teachers came to my office telling me "how come the lady in the next school is allowing us to go earlier than the time you have set, why are you holding us". I said, "Sorry, the Ministry's circular is there and it clearly mentioned the time of departure for educators and supply teachers". There was this kind of relational conflict between the lady rector and me. Moreover, I saw the jealousy among women-teachers because among the woman staff there gossiped a lot, especially amongst the same age group as myself.

5.4.2.18 Using communication in my approach

I have always adopted an open-door communication where any teacher can come to meet me without an appointment. Otherwise, for all official communication, I used Circulars, staff meetings, morning assemblies and order books. Every time staff members had problems, we tried to discuss them and find solutions. I was accepted as a woman rector maybe because of my age and experience and have never lost respect.

With the parents, I organised a fifteen-minute talk with them during the first week of the term so that parents were reminded about their duties and responsibilities towards their wards.

5.4.2.19 The case of a husband as an inhibitor to a leadership role

In 2007, I was working as Acting Rector in a Port Louis Girls' school. The post of Deputy-Rector (DR) was advertised. There was a veiled Muslim woman, a Mathematics teacher, Umeira – she was the Head of Department, who was eligible among other educators to apply for DR position. While talking to her, she said that she would never be able to apply because her husband would never allow her to be in a school leadership position. Her husband would not allow her to interact with male colleagues or giving orders to male staff while being in a leadership position. For her husband, it is against her religious belief. Her husband had only agreed that she work as an educator, and when the children start working, she would take her retirement. Umeira had wanted to climb the leadership ladder since she had a Master's degree. However, Umeira could not put herself at the forefront with her voice. In a way, she had the mind, but she was unable to voice her feelings.

5.4.2.20 My husband as a mentor

My husband has always been my guide. He is a CEO of a public organisation. When I entered the teaching profession, my husband was an administrative secretary in the public sector. He has always invigorated me to go further in my studies so that one day I would be better equipped to occupy a leadership position in the education sector because the government has been promoting women's empowerment by giving access to higher education and training.

5.4.2.21 My achievement as Acting Rector and paving the way to being Rector

When I arrived at the Telfair boys' school in 2008, there were only two new building blocks that consisted of 24 classrooms. Two attendants, one clerical officer, one library officer and a school usher were waiting for me. The other blocks were under construction at the same site. There was no administrative block. The Ministry of Education handed over this building to me with five staff and asked me to arrange for a temporary office, library room and school-usher's office. It was a challenge to arrange for all these in a short period. There was no laboratories nor a computer room. I did not expect that the other administrative staff and I would be in such a situation. We

had to distribute the remaining classes with 450 students from Form 1 to Form 6. This school was supposed to be a lower Forms secondary school accommodating students from Form 1 to Form 5 only and then those who have passed their O-Level exams would pursue their A-Level in an upper Forms secondary school, known as national college. However, with a change in the political regime, the whole infrastructural reform became upside down. The government decided that all schools should be doing lower and upper form classes. The science block, the library, computer room and staff room were all under construction. In 2009, we had the school ready (all rooms, offices and specialist rooms) to run all the classes.

It was very tiring travelling from home to different state secondary schools where the students had been temporarily allocated classes pending the readiness of the Telfair boys' secondary school. This was a challenge for me regarding courage, health, finance, organisation, attending meetings, driving to meet the students on alternate days at different places by the Grace of God whom I prayed to every day to give me the energy, dynamism and wisdom to manage all the issues of the school.

However, at Telfair boys' secondary school, we had neither proper playgrounds nor a Physical Education Hall. The boys had to play in an open yard; there were many bushes. The only place they could play was a kind of small rectangular space. I was able to negotiate with the neighbouring institution, which had a big football playground so that the students could use it during allocated times.

Moreover, in a meeting, I was able to convince the PTA to buy projectors so that the mode of teaching of teachers and the learning of students could be adapted with the digital education. Our school was among the first to adopt educational technologies in teaching and learning; then other schools got sponsorship from SANKORE and MICROSOFT to adopt the digital education system.

5.4.2.22 Sacking a student for security reasons

I had one parent, and he was the owner of a travel and tours tourist business and his son was always out of the classroom. The father kept on giving his son all sort of gadgets and the son was always giving problems since he was in Form 3. When he was in Form 4, he was playing and always doing mischief to his friend, so they took his shoes and threw them outside the school compound in the bush. He lost his expensive shoes. After school hours, he did not tell me anything;

he went straight home, and he phoned his father and brothers. The next day, in the afternoon, half an hour before the school day ended, the father came into my office with the sons. The father told me “my son has a problem with his friends. We have come here because they have taken one of his shoes”. After watching the camera, we understood what had happened: it showed that the boy had been misbehaving with his friends and preventing them from playing. The latter took one of his shoes and threw it in the bush. I told the parent that these things happened among boys. I promised to tell the boys the next day to look for the shoe, in the presence of an attendant. There was a hijacking threat, and I had to call the police to evacuate them from the school compound. The next day I called the Zone Director to inform her of the incident, and I exercised my authority to expel this mischievous boy from the school.

5.4.2.23 Conspiracy to push me away from a Star School

During the second term of 2013, following the event of Sports Day at Telfair State Secondary School, students went on strike on a Monday morning and conspired with a lady in school management together with some of the teaching and non-teaching staff. On Sunday night, the Zone Director phoned me and asked me whether I knew that a students’ demonstration would likely to take place the next morning. I said no, and she asked me to call the lady school-usher from whom I would get valuable information. When I called her, the latter’s mobile phone was off, and the next day she took sick leave. The next day, in the morning, Upper Forms students marched from the bus station to the school. My way of managing and leading the school were preventing them from doing as they wanted to do.

Moreover, I also had information that some of the staff came late because they were giving private tuition in the morning. Some of the students and parents were part of the corrupted system of private tuition during school hours. This was something unfair vis-à-vis other teachers and students. There was one school administration officer who was acting as a broker for the manufacture of tracksuits and was gaining commissions. Since my posting in this school, I did tell the students and staff during a school assembly and staff meetings that I would not be tolerating such kinds of malpractices.

On the strike day, the Upper Form students were standing with the pan cards, shouting near the gate of the school. The police were at school, and the chief of police asked me “do we arrest and take them to Police Station”. I said, “No, do not arrest them, because once arrested their future

careers will be at stake”. The press was outside the school, waiting for an interview on the situation. I told the press “I do not know what issues these students are protesting about”. They were just shouting, “We do not want Mrs Lea, we want Mrs Devi, the ex-rector”. “Why? I do not know; I will have to inquire”.

In the name of transparency, an independent inquiry took place. I was transferred to the Zone Directorate office, where I was given clerical duties to do. I felt diminished. I was tagged as “Rector in a Zone”, “Point Permit Rector – parallel to Driving Permit Point” because I introduced the concept of giving bonus points for good behaviour to students. However, I got support from a few of the students, teachers and parents and most importantly, my husband and relatives. During the inquiry process, I did not bow down but instead, I was determined to destroy the falsehoods and calumnies. I presented all my minutes of the meetings held with students and staff on several issues like discipline, school uniform, causes of lateness and money defrauding practices. This episode had pained me so much because it was like public humiliation. However, I did not turn away. Afterwards, I participated in a workshop where I got the platform to voice how we need to talk about discipline or implement discipline when the higher cadres of the education sector are throwing away the disciplinary measures of the school.

5.4.2.24 A different story of school leadership experience

At the Telfair girls’ secondary school, teachers and students did not want me. At Sonic State Secondary School, students and teachers wanted me to bring a change for them. At Sonic Secondary School, the President of the PTA was controlling the school because she felt that she was a close relative to a politician and she was overshadowing the previous rector who thought she would be getting some “political favours”. For all school activities like Food-Day, Sports Day, it was as if the PTA must decide in toto. On results day, she would give a brief presentation on the performances and would terrify and threaten to transfer teachers. All these “ados about nothing” was mere “acting” in showing to parents of that region that she had students’ interests; where, in fact, she was using the PTA platform as a trampoline to campaign as a candidate in the next General Election. During the third term, the President of the PTA came to see me so that she could have a copy of the third term results for analysis. I unconditionally refused her. In the previous school, I dealt diplomatically and administratively, and I ended up in trouble, but here

any interferences or malpractices would be reported to the police. I did not tolerate injustices towards the hard-working teachers to please the caprices of PTA members.

5.4.3 Higher educational leadership experiences

5.4.3.1 Gender influence when in the role of leader

At the school level, all my teachers accepted and respected me as a woman Rector. However, as a women administrator in the higher sphere of educational leadership, I mean at the Zone and Headquarters level, it was more like a conflicted space because of the political connection that exists between directors and politicians. One should have a strong character to get one's points across, and one should act more diplomatically with staff. You should know the profile of your staff, same as "know your client". Even some of the office attendants were at times administratively more "powerful" than you because of their covert political connections. So, as a woman, I could feel that I was not meant to take decisions whenever I was attending meetings. I could see the whims of the directors who were politically connected, be it male or female, they only put their personal interests first.

The paradox is that the women directors are more wicked than the male directors towards women. They have the idea that you will overshadow their work. Other things that I could see were that each of the directors had their territories, like in the jungle. At Headquarters, the higher cadres talked a lot about collaborative work to please the listeners and the public, but in reality, everyone thinks for his or her benefit, what he or she can do to please the Minister so that one remains in the excellent books of the Minister. With time, I forged my character and mind to accept critics and at the same time to defend my ideas.

5.4.3.2 Responsibilities as a woman leader and my style of leading

Being a woman, we have to face many different kinds of problems, and we need to be appropriately tactful in dealing with parents, students and teachers. We need to be wearing different hats at different times: mother, friend, psychologist, sociologist, and preacher and boss at times. We are the villain also when girls are caught with their boyfriends. Parents with no problem come, but those with a problem never come. We should do parents schooling so that parents understand their roles well. If you want to do new kinds of stuff, then this also creates conflict. In a way, you have

to satisfy everyone, but not everyone will get pleased with what you are doing. However, I like my leadership role because it is not routine. In 2012, I got transferred to a girls' college in Plain Wilhelm's. In 2012, a prominent conspiracy was organised by some of the teaching and non-teaching staff while using the students as escape-goats.

I delegated tasks with the staff, we discussed together, we did not operate as an oppositional team, but instead, we took a collective decision. There are also at times decisions that were made against my will. The majority of the team members voiced their opinions with valid, tangible reasons, so as a leader, I accepted them. For example, in a year at Sonic SSS, I wanted to organise Food Day during the first term. When I consulted the teachers, the majority of them told me to postpone it to the Second Term because of the Hindu fasting period, so I could not be obstinate and say no. On the other hand, there were times when a decision which I had vetoed against the majority of the teachers as these decisions were against school policy and the policy of the Ministry. There was a circular letter for that and we could not go against it.

5.4.3.3 Influence of culture on women occupying leadership positions

In my workplace, as a woman, I occupied a leadership position. I did not see any negativity for the most part from my staff. We did have relational conflicts more between females than between males and females. However, male parents viewed me with an interrogation on my ability to lead a boys' school when I was at the Telfair secondary school compared to girls' schools where I had also worked. However, I have managed the boys' school without any major incidents and with firmness to instil discipline so that the students succeed in their exams and life as well to become good citizens. One additional thing I would like to share is about my qualifications. Almost every year when parents of a higher social status came in for the admission of their children, they asked me from which country had graduated and whether I had done any Master's course. Then, I would start hearing a lot of praises about UK degrees compared to local university degrees or other countries. I felt awkward since I graduated from a local university, but what does that mean, people graduating from the local university or other universities apart from the UK are not good. It was absurd!

5.4.3.4 Reacting to criticism

Well, as a woman leader, I am open to criticism. If it is positive criticism, I would see what more could be done to maintain the positive results. If it was a negative disparagement, I would feel odd. But equally, I would try to rectify the problem because making mistakes is humane. Anyone can be wrong at a certain point in time, and showing humility to accept one's mistakes and improve for the next time makes someone much assertive as a leader. However, I do not view backbiting or gossiping about someone as a form of criticism; instead, it shows how intellectually limited someone is.

5.4.3.5 Proving myself as a woman in my place of work

Well, some parents have tried to challenge my decisions, especially when their sons or daughters had been misbehaving or being rude, and I would not go back on my decision. At times, some parents may have looked down upon me thinking that because I am a woman not much can be expected from me. However, this is a perception they had at first.

Also, the way I worked in a boys' school for more than five years and the way I worked in a girls' school when I just got transferred to a girls' school was not the same. I continued to be a tough-character rector without being conscious that with the girls, the situation is different. That did not work, and there were strikes and demonstrations by the girls, that is why they said: "the lady is very severe with us". Later, I became aware of the different attitudes that one needs in different types of schools. I became knowledgeable by performing and participating.

5.4.3.6 Using authority and power as a woman leader

I was able to transfer a male Zone Director in the Zone where I was working and a lady school-usher in a secondary school. While I was also able to quench the transfer of some teachers that the Ministry wanted to replace with slack ones. The lady usher was late every day. She would come to school one hour after the official time.

Moreover, on certain vital days, she would absent herself from school. Who would do her work? I phoned the Zone Director to complain about the attitude of the School Usher. He did nothing. The following day I went to the Head Quarter with all my supporting documents and my deputy rector as a witness to report the matter to the Chief Technical Officer and the Senior Chief Executive

Officer. I am not someone who would accept to be submissive when injustice is being done. I will fight for social justice to prevail.

5.4.3.7 Suggestion to women aspiring to leadership positions

You have to be very careful. Put your foot down and keep a level head on your shoulders when you are making decisions. You have to think about the welfare and best interests of the students and staff in whatever tasks you are doing. You must not be afraid to talk. In my case, I decided on my own for my school now, of course, all decisions should be within the parameters of the school policies and policies of the Ministry. Reading and getting accustomed to all the regulations about human resources and education is very important.

END OF LEA'S NARRATIVE

5.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, as explained by Bamberg (2012, p. 54), the data gathered from the field has been analysed methodically using the narrative inquiry to generate significant findings in the forms of narratives, in order to respond to the different leading research and sub-research questions (section 1.7) of the present study. The narratives represent the life history of three women participants in accessing different educational leadership positions which are considered as male-dominated spaces.

The women educational leaders have different lived experiences in relation to influences such as family upbringing, religious practices, cultural and social contexts, use of technology, political impact, gender and micro-political forces that have acted as challenges in their leadership paths and different leadership spaces. While the women participants were employing strategies to overcome the challenges, the leadership styles they adopted emerged according to the different situations.

In the next chapter of cross-case narratives, an interpretive analysis with a deeper level of probing is conducted. New themes emerged as resources in different forms that the women participants used to navigate the different leadership spaces and in charting their career path. The discussions are supported by the literature.

CHAPTER 6: CROSS NARRATIVE ANALYSIS: THE SEEN AND THE UNSEEN

6.1 Introduction

The first level of the descriptive analysis of the participants' narratives was a momentous phase on the path to understanding better the phenomenon of women entering leadership positions in male-dominated spaces.

In this chapter, the thematic cross-narrative analysis uncovers striking scenarios in the participants' journeys to becoming an educational leader and navigating the different landforms of the composite historical and socio-cultural grounds. As the women educational leaders were narrating their life stories with reflections on critical events and favourable people, their stories were marked by "the seen and the unseen" processes that both pushed and withheld them in climbing the leadership ladder and navigating to the leadership platform. The road to a leadership position has not been easy since various factors have contributed to the shaping of this bumpy road. These factors were regarded as the "seen" since they were visible on the surface. However, using bunker-like routes, the participants relied on or grappled with different resources in order to strategically scramble up the leadership hierarchy. These routes were regarded as the "unseen" and were not visible from the surface. The cross-case analysis allows the bunkered routes to become "transparent" in order to understand the dynamics that existed while the women [participants](#) escalated to the different leadership positions.

6.2 Orientation to this chapter

This chapter is structured according to six major themes that are significant in helping to understand and explain women's navigation into leadership positions. The discussion moves from their childhood experiences to their latest position as educational leaders by using the most evocative extracts from the participants' narratives that focused on religion and spirituality, adversity, family, context, entrepreneurship, gender politics and power dynamics as themes. Depending on the circumstances, the themes are at times linearly structured or sporadic and orbitally structured.

6.3 Resources of religion and spirituality

Historical records have shown that religion has been a source of social fragmentation and division (Bahullah International Community [BIC], 1995; Bottero, 2004; Norris & Inglehart, 2011). At the same time, it has acted as a barrier or contributed to the uneven advancement of women using a selective interpretation of critical religious texts to deny women their rights to be in the leadership sphere in their place of work (Khayat, 2003). Moreover, religion is often seen as a barrier to gender equality and parity at work (Shah, 2010). Unfortunately, in many cases in the world, the issues of religion and gender parity are often dismissed, as it is too complicated to address (Grim & Lyon, 2015).

In line with this idea, initially I thought that in the context of religious and cultural ties, the educational development of the women participants would be sacrificed in preference to the male children in the family since their mothers had been to neither secular nor religious schools. Besides, the time devoted to attending respective religious schools would impede on the women participants' secular education, and they would have found it unnecessary to receive religious education. Moreover, religion, customarily connected with dominant male authorities (Watling, 2002), and the women participants own religious beliefs together with patriarchal issues (Shah, 2010), would have prevented them from aspiring to climb the leadership ladder. However, while the interview conversations were in progress, I was surprised to hear how the women participants' religious schooling, and the beliefs and spiritual values gained, apart from the secular institutions, had socially constructed and contributed to the navigation of their journeys and in the development of their strategies to overcome the challenges they faced in their leadership positions and practices. In addition, it was evident seen from the socio-constructionist point of view how their gender in the religious space and place was influenced by the male guardians in shaping their characters and styles of leadership.

After a careful examination of the data, it appeared that two (religious) institutions shaped the religious and spiritual characters of the women participants, with (a) home and family considered as one institution and (b) religious schools being the other, and both complimenting each other. These two institutions influenced their social and interpersonal skills in different leadership spheres.

6.3.1 Influence of home and family as a religious institution in shaping leadership traits

The home and family settings are often constituted as barriers to gaining access to education and social development for girls and women (Sobotka, Beaujouan & Van Bavel, 2017). However, from the excerpts of the participants, the home and family settings were found to provide religious and spiritual teachings, in addition to academic education, which contributed towards the socio-professional development and the empowerment of the women participants.

“I was attending the madrassa – Islamic and Coranic classes that take place usually early morning before going to school or after school hours – a very important institution...that has contributed to what I am today. I learned prayers and Coran messages and interpretations... Till today I still inspire my decisions from the Spiritual lessons learned. Gratitude! This is what I feel today towards my parents, brothers and Janab for what I am today.” Hafiza

“...his wife used to take me to the village church, where I got my religious teaching. At the age of 16, I took a leading role in youth community development... when I hadt my children, I made it a point they too follow catechism courses and get involved in community development work” Lea

“I have never been to Baitka – the Hindu religious school...My religious instructions were at home and going to the Shivala – Hindu temple for praying.” Ananda

The home and family as a religious institution is viewed as a social structure which provides lucidity and stability in the women’s lives, allowing the women to encounter life’s problems be it in their personal everyday life, married life or professional life. Therefore, women are afforded empowerment and emancipation through the religious teachings at home unlike what have been reported in the literature.

6.3.2 Influence of religious institutions on leadership practices

From the narrative excerpts of the women participants, the religious institutions were dynamic in empowering the women early on in their lives to stand on their own two feet by taking leadership roles in youth community development. Similar findings have been reported by other researchers

(Alexander & Welzel, 2011; Watling, 2002). Moreover, [this study's research findings](#) revealed that the women's entrepreneurship initiatives and the virtues of patience and perseverance were being instilled through the church community programme. Others authors (Illick, 1997; Gupta, 2006; Zelekha, Avnimelech & Sharabi, 2014; Gümüşay, 2015; Parboteeah, Walter & Block, 2015) in the field of women emancipation and geography have discussed the influence of women NGOs in the socio-economic development of women but religious organisations propelling women to stand on their own two feet is has little mention. Therefore, the religious organisations have not only taught religious rituals but they have also contributed in the leadership development and practices of women.

Moreover, the religious learnings have shaped their spiritual attitudes such as respect, care and concern, together with responsive listening and recognising the contributions of others which are attributes that can be found in the participants' leadership practices. Spiritual practices and values which include ethical influence, humility, integrity and honest communication are found to help in facing social ills and in promoting changes for betterment. Similar findings have been found in the research works of Kimbel and Schellenberg (2013) and Gupta (2006).

*“ ... giving extra teaching support to needy students...be attentive and listen to (staff)...., put your hands to work to make things happen, show one's commitment to the project. Be holistic in your approach to the people you are working with, showing the right attitude, be positive, disciplined and have a heart in what is being done, and bring the changes slowly but surely. For me, work is next to worship.” **Ananda***

“I have been able to transform the bad reputation of the school into the noble name it bears today. I really thank God for the leadership wisdom he gave me in leading and changing the school... during every morning assemblies, I started talking to them about moral values and manners, adolescent crisis, family issues and other social concerns... converted RRC from an educational institution to an educational temple where we developed to be compassionate, altruistic love and give happiness to others through our actions... I always ask for divine guidance, whether it's in school or in my house. In every sphere of my life, I always pray, and I say ok am having problems, am getting upset and worked up for such and such issue. When I ask for divine guidance, I feel at peace; the Almighty is all the way accompanying me. People will not understand that but mind you it had worked, a lot of work also has to be done to

reach here. **Hafiza**

“Since I was very much involved in church activities, I got the help of a Catholic Priest and Sisters of a church to help those girls and their families...Some of the boys at CKJ College started to imitate girls’ styling by having long hair, long nails and wearing earrings. At first, I was teaching them about respectful behaviours drawing some verses of the Bible that God has created us, men and women, so we should respect our creation otherwise we might end-up with gay and lesbian behaviours and run the risk of rejection by society.” **Lea**

Apart from being a teacher in a classroom or a school leader, their religious beliefs and spirituality in their everyday lives, as noticed by Mayes (2003), produced characteristics of spiritual leadership in their practices as affirmed by Gupta (2006) in his literary work, Bhagavad Gītā as Duty and Virtue Ethics: Some Reflections.

Hafiza was able to challenge the patriarchal and male-dominated fashion of leadership persistently at RRC and was the pioneer in changing the way laureateships were celebrated in the form of hooliganism since colonial times. This change was made possible mostly through her spiritual discourses and practices and simultaneously liberating the shoppers from the terrorising effects of hooliganism. In another way, women with spiritual leadership characteristics represent the empowering and liberatory counter-narratives that expose and destabilise patriarchal and heteronormative accounts of women’s natures, roles and capacities as debated by different authors like Jolly (2011), Sharify-Funk and Haddad (2012) from different religious background respectively.

6.3.3 Engagement in community service

From the narrative extracts of the three women participants’ as illustrated below, service to the community is found to be another dominant engagement in their spiritual practices, and this ultimately made them adopt spiritual leadership in the various phases of their lives.

“I had also already thought of what I would be doing after my retirement. I intended to create a free-tuition centre for the orphan children of the Ashram in my locality.”

Ananda

*“I am a born leader, I think. I want to lead projects, I want to do something for the benefit of society like creating an NGO for divorced and widowed women.” **Hafiza***

*“I was involved in social work during the weekends and school holidays at the church, conducting catechism classes, Holy Bible education and community activities like counselling about happiness and the welfare of families, counselling on the ill-effects of alcohol abuse and how alcohol dependence has bad effect on family and children, teenage pregnancy and the preservation of life...” **Lea***

The women participants nearing the retirement age want to mark their lives and achievements by pursuing and leading social activities as a form of social and volunteering leadership. This form of leadership develops in the mid-adulthood of life, which is the generativity phase (Stodd, 2014; Porteous, 2013; Cosgrave & Moynihan, 1995). Hence, embracing and embarking on social leadership practices contribute to the sustainable living and benefits of future generations.

6.3.4 My Personal Reflections

Religion has been a source of guidance, inspiration and knowledge that has promoted self-empowerment and socio-professional development in the lives of the women participants and the lives of others. Moreover, the analysis shows how the different religious beliefs of the three women participants generate the power to challenge social ills, provide dynamism for unity and create communities of good citizens.

Religion and spiritual practices urge us to go beyond the boundaries of self-interest. They contribute to our collective development and advancement by appreciating our inter-dependence and inter-connectedness. The spiritual ethics which lie at the core of religion – justice, tolerance, love, humility, trustworthiness, compassion, sacrifice, keenness to the welfare of others, and unity – are the fundamentals for the progress of societies.

6.4 Resource of adversity

6.4.1 The childhood hardship

“At four years old, I became an orphan of the father. Dramatically, the situation changed, and my mother had to leave me under the care of my maternal aunt and grandfather ... because of financial burden ...” Lea

“I was brought up by my mother as a single parent ... Being poor, my family could not afford to give me the proper books and equipment for the school, and I had to walk long distances to and from the primary school in 1965 in order to save on transport.” Ananda

At an early age, realising the precarious situation their mothers had been enduring as single parents and the financial burdens they were facing, these adverse conditions motivated them to study hard to get education scholarships in order *“to get out of the poverty and escalate the social ladder”* (Ananda). Moore (2015) showed that children living in poor housing conditions in Southeast Furgerson (USA) and struggling to overcome their hardships to attend schools have an attendance rate above 78% in order to have a better future through education.

6.4.2 The childhood atrocity

Unlike Lea and Ananda, Hafiza was quite well off since her father was a reputable tailor and her two elder brothers were working. However, Hafiza suffered a different form of childhood adversity that of being beaten at primary school and managed to pass the *“classe boursiere”* to obtain admission to elite girls’ secondary school.

“For my primary schooling, I don’t have good memories; it was just robot learning; just working to have the primary scholarship ‘la classe boursiere’; to get admitted to the best secondary school. I remember carrying heavy bags, was reading till late at night and waking up early in the morning to pray and study also ... I was beaten for the ‘classe boursiere’.” Hafiza

Lea and Ananda’s childhoods were involved with helping at home and in producing home artisanal products (Levison & Karine, 1998), a form of child labour that sustained the family and allowed

them to attend school. However, for Hafiza, *“it was just robot learning, just working to have the primary scholarship”*.

The three women participants went to the same elite secondary school but at the expense of lost childhoods as Hafiza explained: *“I don’t have good memories”* of the primary schooling. Her parents used to pacify her and tell her that her teachers knew what they were doing when they were beating her shown by her success in exams. The three women have been moulded to accept and face adversities in order to be successful.

Twiss (2005) and Nejedly (2021) found that, when children are being beaten, made to do household work in orphanages or forced labour in hand-made manufacturing products in boarding schools to be sold in order to obtain a living has been found to be a form of atrocity affecting the emotional capacities of children to do better in their education. Although, it looks platitudinous, the form of household work these women participants had to undertake inside the family and the fact that they narrated it shows the impact that it had on their emotional development that has contributed to their leadership qualities.

6.4.3 The irony of life and self-determination

Accepting of one’s limitations and weaknesses, together with a belief in oneself as capable, skilful and talented, are indispensable to self-determination (Field, Martin, Miller, Ward & Wehmeyer, 1998). When acting on the basis of this mindset, I presume that people are better able to manage their lives in a disciplined way and shoulder the heroine role. Likewise, the self-determination processes get embedded as a socially constructed “configurations of gender practice” (Connell, 2020), created through historical and social processes, in patriarchal relations of power. As such, women cannot only be viewed as objects in the patriarchal discourse where sameness is preferred over difference but with self-determination that incorporates a feminist perspective as well.

In the extract below, we see how Ananda overcame the inferiority complex she faced during her adolescence to be successful personally and professionally.

“I could not talk French fluently, I felt inferiority complex, and I had to bear it. Initially, this made me introvert and turned into myself ... Those girls were looking down upon me ... I accepted my fate as it is and was determined to live out of the odd.”

Ananda

At the secondary school, Ananda learnt to speak the French language fluently. She chose to pursue her university studies in France, and she has been able to master the French language and culture that led her to be the co-chair of the Francophonic educational programme. Ananda developed the self-determination to achieve her goals. Ananda believes in the virtues of patience and perseverance to confront the adversities of life.

According to Denney and Daviso (2012), students having self-determination abilities have an improved quality of life in adulthood, even though they have specific disabilities.

6.4.4 Challenges to higher education – an alternative route to reach the destination

“I was stigmatised believing that I would not succeed in science. He wrongly advised us to opt for literature subjects, therefore I could not compete for a bursary, which was restricted for students in pure science and economics only. I felt that was disguised racial discrimination so that we are not qualified for any bursary to pursue higher studies abroad.” Lea

Lea was prevented from doing her favourite subjects and therefore could not obtain a scholarship to go abroad for further studies. However, since she was good at the French language, she took the opportunity of a French teaching job in a private secondary school through which there were government incentives for capacity building to obtain teacher training (Mauritius Pay Research Bureau, 1978) and, at the same time, to complete tertiary studies. Lea has gained qualifications and, through work experience, has achieved school headship jobs. However, the road to reach this point has been rough as other forms of challenges discourage her progress as a woman. However, Lea was auto-determined to overcome the hurdles posed by the school management. According to Oostlander, Güntert and Wehner (2014), auto-determination is a form of strategy used to face oppressive or marginalised actions in work places.

“I got the opportunity to join the Teacher Training College (now the Mauritius Institute of Education [MIE]), to follow a Teacher’s Diploma course in the French Language. Although I was eligible to get time off to follow the course, the Chinese lady Principal, the sister of the school Manager did not accede to my request as I refused to make a ‘small contribution’ from my salary to the school.... During my free periods at school, I was given replacement classes in a way to make my life difficult ... they

were gossiping, spying and back-biting.” Lea

Another strategy the women participants deployed for their professional growth was to join the public sector (state secondary schools) instead of the private sector because of job security and because teaching allows time for family care. One of the reasons people like to work for the public sector is job security (Denney & Daviso, 2012). Nevertheless, job security and scope for promotion into leadership positions in the public sector is not free of oppression as there are different forms of social and gender challenges women have to face. Male dominated top management often take advantage of loopholes in the promotional procedures to supplant aspiring women leaders (Blasé & Blasé, 2002). Explicitly, male leadership networks tend to exclude women from the “boys club” (King, 2012; Howe-Walsh & Turnbull, 2016).

6.4.5 The hostile teaching days

The teaching days in the boys’ schools for the three women were not all smooth.

“Apart from that, the rude boys were teasing the young lady teachers and making their lives quite miserable.” Ananda

*“I had a hard time in terms of mischievous behaviours while teaching the boys ...”
Hafiza*

“I was not entirely happy because these boys were very rude and were causing trouble very often towards the lady teachers.” Lea

The women participants made use of a feminine approach to to have “peaceful control” of the boys through non-verbal and non-physical acts of violence during male-female confrontations (Sinclair, 2014). Ananada got the title of “*mama*” for her “social mother” roles (Madhavan et al., 2012). On the other hand, the female teachers also adopted male characteristics (Morojele, Chikoko & Ngcobo, 2013), but in a “hard-feminine” mode of action. The different boys’ and girls’ school climates would later contribute to their becoming active leaders in the secondary educational leadership spaces.

6.4.6 The under-confidence, challenge and turmoil in leadership spaces

From the excerpts of the women participants, “becoming impulsive” is one of the emotional weaknesses women have to deal with. In such situations, women managers may expose their lack of confidence to deal with crisis situations in positions of leadership. In addition to that, the women managers are left alone to deal with the situation without receiving any support from their superiors. Similar observations have been reported (see Darling & Walker, 2001; Meret, 2015).

*“... during this part of the leadership journey, I received no support from my superiors
...” Hafiza*

Indeed, the posting of Hafiza at RRC – a challenging school – by a woman director was a way to harass her – a form of female-female power gendering process (queen-bee phenomenon), where a senior woman in leadership abuses her authority over another woman in a junior leadership position. The findings are in line with other reported cases on harassments (visual, verbal, emotional). To avoid facing such realities in the leadership spaces, women prefer to disregard their leadership aspirations (Blasé & Blasé, 2002; Derks, Van Laar & Ellemers, 2016). Hence, there are fewer women in leadership spaces.

However, Hafiza, as a school leader, reflected on her weaknesses and constituted her “*inner circle consisting of administrative staff and senior teachers*” who acted as her advisory body in decision-making and to shield her impulsiveness. Moreover, she succeeded in converting “*RRC from an educational institution to an educational temple...*”.

In so doing, Hafiza self-applied transformational, transactional, adaptive, authentic, administrative and action-centred leadership approaches to make her weaknesses become strengths. In times of turmoil and chaos in the leadership spaces and places, no single leadership style can solve problems with the maximum efficiency. Hence, there is need for alternative forms of leadership styles. These findings are consistent with literature on chaos and complexity in the social dynamics of organisations (Cottam, Ranson & Vounckx, 2015; Morrison, 2012; Marion, 1999). Baltaci and Balci (2017) point out that a leadership approach that offers instantaneous, collaborative, dynamic and reverberating outcomes in chaotic conditions is central to complex leadership perspectives. Traditional or classical styles of leadership approaches are less responsive to the changing social dynamics of work spaces because they focus on the individual leader and not on the social construction and interaction between the leader and the stakeholders.

Nevertheless, when Hafiza was in the leadership space of directorship, she requested early retirement because she was feeling the pressure of authority (Blasé & Blasé, 2002) from the most senior leaders.

“... I was a leader, and I was being suppressed again when I want to do something. It was like you had to be where you are, you can't do something, you can't act, you just have to follow, you agree, or you don't agree, you can't say anything in committee ... I made up my mind to retire early ... and do something for the benefit of society like creating an NGO for divorced and widowed women ... the director is not his own boss.” **Hafiza**

The suppression in higher leadership pushed Hafiza towards early retirement. Conversely, she found a way to be a leader and be her own boss by creating an NGO where all the life experiences she acquired could be at the service of citizens. Such leadership practices happen in the generativity phase of the socialisation ladder. Women have a tendency to shift towards social leadership perspectives when they approach retirement age because of their sage and caring characteristics (Son & Wilson, 2011; Stodd, 2014; Porteous, 2013).

“During the inquiry process, I did not bow but, instead, I was determined to destroy the falsehood and calumnies... as a women leader, I am open to criticism, now.” **Lea**

However, this tumultuous episode in the leadership practice of Lea gave her the insight to be brave while espousing a masculine type of leadership. A parallel is found in the research of Morojele, Chikoko and Ngcobo (2013) on gender-based experiences of women school principals in the paradoxical situations of avowing feminine identity and accepting masculine attitudes to deal with males in school management. Nevertheless, the different leadership situations shaped the leadership characters of women to accept detractors and lead with authenticity (Leroy & Sels, 2008; Weischer, Weibler & Peterson, 2013).

“The everyday challenge was that I had to look for everything ... manual staff ... discipline of students ... welfare of teachers ... I felt I was a woman lady at home and a woman-man in my place of work ... assigning me all kind of stressful situations ... I have never felt intimidated ... Although the surreptitious and blatant pressures are coming from different directions, I have never felt like giving up ... I am not someone

who would refuse to take an additional work ...”. Ananda

“Being a woman, we have to face many different kinds of problems, and we need to be very tactful ... we need to be wearing different hats at different times ...”. Lea

The extracts show that the encounters women have to face during their leadership tenure in the different leadership positions make them resilient leaders. These findings are consistent with Kohlrieser, Rossi, Lavoie and Perrinjaquet (2014) who observe that, in face of coping with work-life pressures, women leaders end up becoming “immune” or “normal” in the messy situations. Hence, women leaders are able to self-negotiate their own identities between the masculine and the feminine assertiveness depending on the situational spaces and locations. At the same time, understanding relationships through vulnerability and being compliant by adopting feminine and masculine types of leadership attitudes make women leaders good navigators in complex social systems. As such, a combination of leadership attitudes (transactional, transformational, distributed, resilient, dialogic and/or adaptive) allows them to succeed.

6.4.7 My Personal reflections

Leadership requires an arsenal of multi-disciplinary knowledge, skills and attitudes and the stamina of multi-tasking. None of the three women participants went through their careers without experiencing turmoil and, in this way, gained much experience. Withstanding challenges, learning from the lived experiences and deepening their resilience are the qualities that connected these women in this research and can be linked with an understanding of how adversities could be resources for success. Women who assert feminine and masculine styles of leadership are leaders who can resist pressures and continue to progress for the benefit of the society. While those women who want to adopt a feminine attitude only may become subservient leaders. On the other hand, if women adopt only masculine styles of leadership, then the organisational structure is likely to become fragile and brittle with the risk of collapsing.

6.5 Resources of family

6.5.1 Family members establishing the pillar for success in childhood

“At four years old, I became an orphan of the father. Dramatically, the situation changed, and my mother had to leave me under the care of my maternal aunt and grandfather for six years in the city of Port Louis because of financial burden. I was fortunate enough, unlike my siblings, to have a fruitful education. My uncle and aunt provided me with the family support, instilled discipline and go-getter character in me and the entrepreneurial flair and spirituality.” **Lea**

Despite the financial burden, the support of family allows a girl child to pursue her schooling (Junge & Shrestha, 1984) even though some think that it is not a necessity for girls to study and stand on their feet as later they would get married and be under the care of their husband (Ahmed, 2007). However, we see how family members support the acquisition of life-long skills for the girls to face the challenges of life (Madhavan, Schatz, Clark & Collinson, 2012).

“During my schooling, my father and brothers have been of utmost support to me ...”.

Hafiza

Although Hafiza was from a prosperous family as compared to Lea and Ananda, she still got the support of her father and brothers to push her to successful and competitive schooling in the days when girls in Hindu and Muslim families were not being schooled due to cultural customs (Ahmed, 2007). Moreover, in those days households often had more patriarchal norms resulting in gendered outcomes favouring boys over girls.

Similar family support is seen in the narrative of Ananda. She got her maternal uncles’ support and friendship from her maternal cousins and friends in the village where social and cultural relationships are more cohesive unlike the life in a town where people are more independent. Similar observations were made by Chambers and Chambers (1833) and then by Amato (1993) who posited that urban people are reluctant to help or befriend rural people. In Mauritius, although modernity, in infrastructural developments, in terms of free schools and educational access, offices and malls, road and air travels, and land ownerships, exists, there are still social boundaries between rural and urban regions (Mauritius Business Magazine, 2017) as evidenced by Ananda and Hafiza:

“I got the company of my cousins and a few friends ... unlike other girls ... from different towns. Those girls were looking down upon me ... I am also very grateful and gratified towards the help, advice and affection of my maternal uncles.” Ananda

“... mentalities of the students, personnel, and parents are different from urban. Seeing the cultural and social disparities between rural and urban living, I was having difficulties in adapting.” Hafiza

The adverse social disparities, stigmatisation and bourgeoisie class discrimination that prevailed in the life of Ananda and Lea affected their ability to succeed in the examinations that provided the passport to a better life.

6.5.2 Patriarchal and family support to work in the education sector

“... the idea of studying abroad came from my second brother who was an educator and later a rector. He has always taken the lead and advising me in the educational field ... Then, in 1982, I came to Mauritius for teaching job interview and shortly, I was appointed as an educator in the Ministry of Education.” Hafiza

“A career in teaching was not my first choice though I like teaching... my mother influenced me to go for the teaching profession ... my maternal uncles were in the teaching profession.” Ananda

“... my mother wanted me to become a nurse ... one of my uncles ... could have arranged for a nursing job ... rather I wanted to be a lawyer or a secondary school teacher. I had a role model male French teacher who inspired me a lot to the French language teaching profession ...”. Lea

The first observation is that, for all three women participants, their family members, although having strong patriarchal, religious and cultural customs, influenced them to work instead of staying at home. This contrasts with literature where girls and women in patriarchal and traditional families are prevented from access to educational professional development (Manju, 2014; Jelodar, Hashim, Yusof, Raihanah, Hamdan & Zandi, 2014). Secondly, a male figure inspired the women participants to join the teaching profession perhaps because the male figure felt that it is a job suited to females in terms of hours of work and school holidays that give the women time for

childcare and family life. This is why today we see a large majority of women joining the teaching profession. However, there is still an insignificant number of women in leadership positions. Thirdly, the male figures supported them to work so that they could be independent even though the women are from traditional families. In the literature (see Schütte, 2014; Tarar & Pulla, 2014) male guardians prevent their female family members from working outside the home setting because of tribal honour preservation even though the female could contribute financially to the financial status of the family.

6.5.3 Patriarchal and family support at work

“My husband has been a very caring person and always helping me out. So, I cannot complain that he has not been aiding me ... to take the challenge to lead my career path and become a school leader and move ahead ... I got the help of my mother to look after the kids ...” **Ananda**

“... my husband was doing everything in the house ... my husband, who had also many responsibilities in the government sector and he was leaving home earlier than me and coming later than me, but he was helping me to his best of abilities ... I had the help of my mother-in-law whenever the need was felt.” **Hafiza**

“... my husband was an administrative secretary in the public sector. He has always helped me in the household work and invigorated me to go further in my studies ... I got the help of my mother in the morning and my mother-in-law in the evening to look after the children on the days I was attending evening courses ...” **Lea**

Even after getting married and having a family with children, none of the three women participants left their jobs nor did their husbands convince them to leave their jobs to look after the welfare of the family. Instead, their husbands helped to look after the family welfare and immediate elderly family members helped to sustain their work and family lives. Moreover, their husbands smoothed their paths to enter leadership positions, which has traditionally been a male-dominated space.

6.5.4 Patriarchal support to join the leadership position

“I asked my husband, Sanjeev, who was also eligible to apply, why he was not applying

for the promotional post. Sanjeev replied that he was not interested because he did not want to take on additional responsibilities of school and that he did not want to lose his school holidays and freedom. Nevertheless, he told me ‘if you are interested, you can try applying’.” **Ananda**

As a male, instead of being in the leadership position, Sanjeevv encouraged his wife to enter the leadership position because he did not want to leave his comfort zone. Ananda diplomatically negotiated with her husband regarding the outcome of her being in a leadership position. Since the husband already voiced his intention not to apply for a leadership position, she diffused any tension that could occur in the future. This scenario of gender and power dynamics will be further analysed in the sub-section 6.8.3 of this chapter.

“When I entered the teaching profession, my husband was an administrative secretary in the public sector. He has always helped me in the household work and invigorated me to go further in my studies so that one day I am better equipped to occupy a leadership position in the education sector because the government has been promoting women’s empowerment by giving access to higher education and training.”

Lea

Lea’s husband, who was an administrative cadre in the Ministry, encouraged her to continue studying to assume a leadership position as he knew that the government was supporting gender and leadership development.

“... during the period 1992 to 1995, my husband and my elder brothers with whom I seek advice, told me to concentrate on my family rather than promotional post ... then in 1998, my husband started telling me whether I am not interested in applying for Deputy Rector ... My husband has been all through my career a source of inspiration and motivation even whenever I have had to go abroad for training and official mission.” **Hafiza**

In the narrative extract of Hafiza, initially, her husband and elder brothers advised her not to enter leadership position, but later her husband encouraged her to enter a leadership position. Although her husband has been a source of inspiration and motivation in her career path, her success was

based on the political climate prevailing in the country addressed in the sub-section 6.6.2 Political climate

6.5.5 My Personal reflections

Although patriarchy and patriarchal families exist, the women participants were encouraged to receive education and compete to secure educational scholarships. Even though two of the women participants lost their fathers at a young age, patriarchal conditions were reinforced by their maternal grandfathers and uncles, who not only provided shelter and food, but also educated the girls to be independent. Despite the fact that, the women participants had families and children to look after, they were advised and encouraged by their spouses and family members to accept leadership positions for their socio-emotional benefits (Basten, 2006; Fischmann, 2007; Haugen, Klees, Stromquist, Lin, Choti & Corneilse, 2014). The women participants therefore opted for the optimum conditions for children and family care, as well as the preparation of stepping into eventual leadership positions.

6.6 Resources of context

In this research, the context includes the different backgrounds, such as political adherence, socio-cultural and networking group, that acted as benefits or hindrances during the leadership navigation. Although the women participants armed themselves through qualifications, their backgrounds played a role in the women participants' social construction of being in leadership places and spaces. At times, the backgrounds worked in their favour, and at other times the women participants had to be in the “remain silent and watch” mode or “wait for the tumultuous water current to become normal flow” mode to access leadership spaces.

6.6.1 Socio-cultural and networking group

Findings from the narrative extracts show that different forms of socio-cultural and networking systems – colonial bourgeoisie, welfare, developmental, empowerment, religious missionaries, middle-class professionals – have directly or indirectly influenced the career paths, leadership practices and experiences of the three women participants in this study.

“... the village church where I got my religious teaching. At the age of 16, I took a leading role in youth community development at the request of the Church ... I got the

help of a Catholic priest and sisters ... Even after becoming Rector, I have been involved in social work during the weekend and school holidays at church ...". Lea

The church and church community services played a role in the shaping of the leadership skills and practices of Lea since her childhood. Through the church community service, Lea has had the opportunities to develop a variety of leadership skills such as communication, socialisation, and empathy. Also, the church has provided the space for the women's emancipation as there is their identity construction as future mothers and sisters who will take care of the welfare of families and community members.

Therefore, churches apart from places of worship have also provided the socio-spatial opportunities for women development in terms of education, personal encounters in life, workplace challenges and leadership. Hence, affiliation with religious bodies is seen as a set of social requirements and a body of knowledge that can be used by women in quest for professional development goals. In line with the above discussion, several authors (for example, Fernando & Cohen, 2013; Spinks, 2002; Andersen, 2006; Constantine et al., 2006) have outlined the preponderance role of churches as sites for human resources development.

Ananda was also involved in socio-cultural activities of "*assuming responsibilities in girls' club at school level*" and an "*Ashram for elderly people*" – a non-governmental organisation for voluntary work. On the other hand, Hafiza's own extended family provided the socio-cultural platform to develop her organisational and leadership skills beyond the school context and at an international level. In order to take advantage of this, she had to develop her small social networking group, her "*inner circle*" – on whom she could rely on for any issues within the school setup. Sen (1992) in his work on non-profit organisations (NPO) in India, found that those volunteers involved in the work of NPOs also served the role of welfare and empowerment for specific groups of people having particular interests and as a platform to develop and to empower the volunteers with leadership skills.

Compared to Ananda and Hafiza, Lea had had an international exposure in the socio-cultural networking when she "*joined the Rotary Club*" and occupied "*the post of secretary of Rotary Club*" before acceding to the school leadership positions. This helped in her professional and socio-cultural development as well as during her interviews for school leadership positions.

However, at a later stage, Ananda came to understand the importance of international networking when she became the “*chairperson of the Commonwealth Education Secretariat*”, and she started organising “*functions for the Embassies of France, USA and Australia*”. The international exposure added value to her capacity building and performance at personal, operational and strategic levels, to handle international dossiers on education. This has helped her in shouldering the responsibilities of chairing meetings in the context of National Educational Reform 2016-2020, a very high profile assignment, where Ananda wanted to leave a legacy of what she has done.

Consequently, work exposure to a different socio-cultural milieu through NGOs benefits negotiation skills, character development, experience and knowledge that are transformative, and empowers people to do jobs efficiently and with confidence. Voluntary social work through NGOs are opportunities for the development of personal, professional and social leadership and practices. The above discussions agree with the observations of Ibarra and Hunter (2007) who posit that social-networking organisations provide additional means for leadership marketing and promotions.

6.6.2 My Personal reflections

The stories of the three women participants show that, when were confronted with moving further than their functional fields and handling strategic matters fronting the secondary schooling system, they did not always understand that this will include many relational responsibilities apart from analytical, operational and execution tasks. Moreover, initially, they did not comprehend that the interactions and collaborations with a diverse array of stakeholders are not distractors from their educational leadership work but are necessarily at the core of their leadership roles.

Socio-cultural and networking groups, outside the work organisation, help in building connections and relationships with the “right people” (Groenleer, 2009). These groups usually act as pressure groups that help in promotions and the gaining of high profile assignments for its members (Carpenter, 2001; Kelemen, 2002; Wilson, 1989). The more diverse, intentional and international the socio-cultural affiliation and network is, the more effective it can be in helping a person to become more visible and advance on the leadership ladder. Watching the emerging educational leaders’ transitions while approaching their tasks, the resource of networking is found to activate a dynamic role in their leadership spaces, enhance their own development, help them to accomplish

their day-to-day home and work duties and assist them to seek future moves to sustain their leadership spaces.

6.6.3 Political climate

In this sub-theme, the political climate is interpreted as the power and influence of the formal political ruling parties of government or ministers and that of the informal politics referred to as micro-politics that operate at the organisational level (Marcus, 2015). The political climate that influenced the women participants into the leadership arena are presented.

From the life stories of the three women participants, all of them focused on their performance and hard work from their primary schooling to their professional lives by empowering themselves through qualifications to climb the leadership ladder. Nevertheless, politics also influencing their career path and the leadership ladder.

*“My brother ... taken up by political activities ... during the period 1992 to 1995, my husband and my elder brothers, with whom I seek advice, told me to concentrate on my family rather than a promotional post. I was still young and a bit immature of the political context of the country ... Then in 1998, my husband started asking me whether I am interested in applying for Deputy Rector. Therefore, after going through the application procedures, without much conviction because, in those days, there was some political turmoil, in 1999, I was nominated, Deputy Rector ...”. **Hafiza***

Hafiza’s brother was a political activist. Whenever his political party was in power, Hafiza climbed the leadership ladder because the political climate was favourable in helping her to accede to the leadership position. When the political climate was not in her favour, she was advised to concentrate on other issues to avoid bullying and mischievousness towards her by the then ruling party or by officers supporting the government.

Successful educational achievement is correlated with successful career progress and achievement (Marcus, 2015). However, being successful academically does not necessarily mean gaining promotion in the workplace, especially when competing for leadership positions. Therefore, other forms of knowledge are important such as learning to comprehend the way decisions and choices

are made in organisations and how political power influences promotions that impact on one's career prospects. Hence, it is necessary to build political allies to access the leadership spaces because workplaces are considered as political arena. Marcus (2015) and Priyadarshi and Premchandran (2019) conveyed that advancement in the world of work necessitates not only academic qualifications and expertise but also the political savvy in order to strategically move ahead in a career path.

Since the year 2009, Hafiza was entitled to become Assistant Director. She avoided the position even though she was the most senior, because of her bad experience of being professionally suppressed at Headquarters level. When the political season became favourable again in 2012, she entered the higher leadership sphere.

Despite that, her immaturity in understanding how the political climate operates was reflected when she tried to navigate on her own against the changing political landscape. She was considered as an outsider, with few ties to political cliques within the organisation and political landscape that resulted in her facing insubordination and other forms of hindrances that appeared to be gender and racial discrimination from the top but was a political annoyance from below.

*“As a Muslim woman, I must say it there was a kind of oppression towards me, a strong feeling that somebody was pulling me.... and kept being Acting Director from 2010 to 2012, the political interference was so apparent that everybody talked about this ... finally got appointed in October 2014.” **Hafiza***

Hafiza is a remarkable example of a woman who is a top performer and well informed about workplace politics since her brothers have been in school leadership and country politics. Her experiences authenticate the strong “politically savvy” that one needs to get promoted and stay in leadership in the workplace. She has been navigating the political and socio-cultural obstacles to achieve different leadership roles. Despite knowing the politics of the higher spheres in the organisation, she was blindsided during the meetings and eclipsed by the political interests. Finally, she preferred to go on retirement as a way to escape the frustration and “purposeful” insubordination.

Overall, Lea also has had a marvellous academic record, although she has had to face different kinds of obstacles during her final years of secondary schooling and her professional career development. She has been able to overcome the socio-cultural and political barriers to reach the positions of the school leader and schools' Zone Administrator, where women in such leadership spaces are rare.

Weng, Huang, Tsai, Chang, Lin and Lee (2010) suggest that mentors with different backgrounds (in terms of gender, culture and cultural association, political affiliation, age and work experiences) are important for successful career trajectories. However, despite Lea's apparent success and the socio-cultural and political mentoring by her uncle, the teaching and non-teaching staff and other potential women rectors who were politically more connected than Lea have been able to displace her from Telfair girls' school. She was viewed as an outsider to the socio-cultural context of the school. Therefore, they looked for opportunities to conspire and sabotage her image and capabilities in managing an elite school where usually rectors with a particular ethnical background and political backing are posted. Lea was duped by the "meso-politics" and its power and was "quarantined" in the Zone office by the "macro-political" influence. Hence, educational leadership spaces are socially constructed by the gender, cultural, political and ethnic backgrounds of the educational leader apart from academic know-how.

Ananda has been more or less navigating the leadership space quite smoothly because the political influence in the constituency where she lives was considered to have a high profile in her favour.

"When I became Rector, after one year of assuming the duty of Deputy Rector cum Officer-In-Charge, ... the talk of the day was that those who got promoted had a political connection ... When I got into the top administrative position, still people were talking because they believed that because I live in a specific constituency, where a senior Minister has a greater political influence, that I have been promoted."

Ananda

Nevertheless, Ananda has been facing problems like gossiping, harassment and relational problems similar to Lea and Hafiza where junior women wanted to dictate their agenda over them. This led to a gender and power relational dynamic, which is discussed in section 6.8.

6.6.4 My Personal reflections

This theme provides insights into how painful or painless it has been to navigate workplace and party politics from the lived experiences of the women participants who had been to the same secondary elite school. Although the context of gender, patriarchy and family appear as barriers on the surface, they embraced a professional career. They have been academically competent in their field and were able to reach leadership positions not only because of their hard work and capabilities but of the formal and informal political savvy they have. This demonstrates the influence of the political climate on the career paths of the women as educational leaders, and the different leadership spaces because public organisations are political fields. Politics have a widespread influence on social levels (Deckman & Swers, 2019). Understanding how decisions are made and how politics affect those decisions are critical skills and knowledge required in order to be effective in such an arena. The more political savvy one has, the more rapid one can climb in the leadership space, and the more effective one's leadership practices.

6.7 Resources of entrepreneurship

“I wanted to leave that job of teaching and do something else because I felt I was moving round and round in doing the same tasks ... I wanted to move ahead ...”

Ananda

Ananda shows the entrepreneurial flair she has had since she wanted to leave her routine teaching job in a comfort zone to climb the ladder and be involved in a dynamic, innovative and problem-solving working environment (Borasi & Finnigan, 2010). From this idea, the theme of entrepreneurship emerges and is recurrent in the other women participants' lives at different stages.

Entrepreneurship is a driving strength of innovation and change, presenting opportunities to accomplish operational and resourceful performance in any institution, such as a home or workplace, at any stage of life (Yemini et al., 2014). Entrepreneurs are people who explore opportunities for the development of innovations and do so from the recognition of a socio-economic problem, which they endeavour to resolve through the identification of creative solutions

by exploring new ways of using existing human, material and financial resources (Chell, 2008; Woods et al., 2007).

In this research study, I can sense that how entrepreneurial drives have pushed the women participants to develop and use their entrepreneurial flair to take pro-active roles in accomplishing the tasks entrusted to them while practising educational entrepreneurial leadership in the secondary educational system.

6.7.1 A co-leader and entrepreneur in the childhood and adolescent ages

Beyond the routine household work responsibilities, the participants had early experiences in acting as co-leaders at home, at school and among peers for the various home and school events that provided the ingredients for developing entrepreneurial leadership characteristics in their professional lives.

“I was giving her (my mother) a helping hand during my free time ... Being the oldest cousin, I had the responsibility to look after the smaller ones, inculcating in them the discipline and ethical behaviours. Of course, my family was an extended one, with 20 people living together. I used to organise and play outdoor games with my cousins. We were engaged in crafting and creating our toys like food cooking toys with used cans and boxes. I also recalled making gun-type toys for my cousins using bamboo shoots and grains.” Ananda

“At the age of 16, I took a leading role in youth community development at the request of the Church Sister in Black River to disseminate cooking and dressmaking skills to the young girls.... I was happy to sell my finished products like Chinese Guava jam, kids’ dresses, tablecloths with sewing hook to raise fund for church community development ... instilled discipline and go-getter character in me and the entrepreneurial flair ... During my subsequent secondary schooling days, I was the class-captain in all the subsequent levels ... I was actively involved and taking a leading role in the preparation and organisation of Sports Day, Prize Giving Day, and Majorette Show for Independence Day ... I was very much involved in the International Duke of Edinburgh Leadership Award Competition that germinated our leadership

and socio-cultural development.” Lea

“Our sports’ day was grand, much like celebrity organisation. I was taking a leading role in all the event’s organisation together with our teachers, especially for the prize-giving ceremony.” Hafiza

In their childhood and adolescence, the women participants used their entrepreneurial talents to develop leadership skills to supervise people and tasks management using the limited resources available. The small entrepreneurial tasks were already developing their supervisory roles and vision (Woods & Woods, 2009). Moreover, dealing with a diversity of friends and teachers (male and female) of different ages has contributed to their psycho-socio-cultural development taking into consideration the multi-ethnic cultural backgrounds that exist in the Mauritian secondary schooling system. Therefore, entrepreneurial leadership talents are shaped through the active process of social interaction and emancipation involving: human life, problem-solving, gaining relational skills and lived experiences due to social influences. Hence, the spaces and places where different leadership capabilities are being developed are regarded as a social development universe.

6.7.2 Enterprising the home and family edifice building

The home and the family, as an institution, is a place where, apart from the gendered roles that exist, is also a space where entrepreneurial spirits are socially developed.

6.7.2.1 As a married woman entrepreneur

“My married life influenced me in a way in my leadership practices. My house, my children, my husband and my family, have given me the opportunity to show my leadership capabilities or performances in my small family world, immediate extended family and in my very big family. In my in-laws we use to organise lots of outing together, lots of picnics and family dinners. Well, for that matter, I am always taking the lead and adjusting here and there. I sit down with a paper and pen and plan all the

tasks. I have my What's App chat with the family members in finalising the events, like for the Eid festivity for example." **Hafiza**

In the different roles as wife, mother or daughter-in-law, entrepreneurial knowledge fits in the different roles women play in everyday life with their husbands, children and other family members. These roles are embedded with the characteristics of care, love, attention, counsel, problem-solver, mediator and moderator in the same way that entrepreneurs treat their customers, staff and stakeholders. This shows the ability to deal with and bring people having different expectations aboard for the proper functioning of an institution, be it home or an enterprise (Currie, Humphreys, Ucbasaran & McManus, 2008). Moreover, Hafiza is also mindful in her approach to communicating with family members over social media. The entrepreneurial leadership flair developed at this level of the social institution provides the experience for the other levels of leadership spaces.

"My husband and I managed to construct a simple house without curtain or tiling. We construct one part, and then other rooms were added as the children were growing up. There was a lot of work and many involvements by us in the construction of our house, moneywise and labour wise; we had to make many sacrifices ... I have been a very much self-disciplined person; I like organising my household work and professional work ...". **Ananda**

Ananda's involvement in the construction and management of her house (as an organisation) and her family (people) has provided the entrepreneurial elements, drive and experience for her to be able to manage and lead schools under construction and the social and emotional welfare of the staff and students.

6.7.3 Enterprising the school and work environment alliance building

6.7.3.1 A teacher entrepreneur

"I was happy to propose to the Rector to conduct two roll attendances; one in the morning and one after lunch ... this double roll-taking is actually implemented in all

state secondary schools ... I worked on an innovative method of teaching French literature [by] using video to teach literature. At that time, there was no YouTube technology; I had to create my videos by myself ... Undeniably, I was able to set up the first badminton club at the REH secondary school in the southern region.” Lea

The above narrative extracts show that educational entrepreneurs, apart from proposing creative and innovative ways in which teaching and learning could take place holistically, also have the entrepreneurial vision, values and spirit to review traditional school practices using the limited resources the educational institutions have to meet the demands of the school population. Hence, educational entrepreneurs are not constrained by the limited resources available, but instead, they demonstrate how the missing elements create opportunities to develop creative thinking in bringing change and acting as agents of change (Borasi & Finnigan, 2010).

“I still remember my first class where I taught a topic on equation and, by the end of the lesson, a courageous girl stood up to say ‘we have not understood the lesson’. It was a failure with a hard blow ... Then, I thought that I should start teaching myself reading a little bit on how to teach and finally, by the grace of God, I had a very successful career as an educator because my students appreciated me ...” Hafiza

As an “teacher-entrepreneur”, Hafiza stepped into the teaching world where, on her very first day, she had her first failure as a teacher which she accepted with humility and learned to grow from the mistakes and failures contained within this experience which is similar to the unforeseen circumstances which an entrepreneur might have to go through (Shepherd, 2004; Thompson, 2016). She showed the determination to learn and be successful as a teacher in her career.

“As an educator, I was a leader in my class. I always felt in the early stage of my career I would be a leader and even I have worked with rudely boys ... the way I imposed myself in class without being rude, without shouting and without humiliating anyone ... we set the example; if there is no discipline, there is no teaching.” Hafiza

The road to success of an entrepreneur is never smooth. It is with will-power, patience, self-discipline and humility that an entrepreneur builds his or her business model (Verstraete & Jouison-Laffitte, 2011; Verstraete, Jouison-Laffitte, Kremer & Hlady-Rispal, 2017). In this case, the business model is the type of leadership someone demonstrates, whether it is dictatorial or democratic leadership (encompassing transformational, dialogic, transactional and authentic entrepreneurial leadership styles). A business model and strategies deployment can also serve as a setting for a career path. These findings echoed Osterwalder and Pigneur's (2009) observation that business models are road maps for any entity (individuals, homes, businesses, organisations) to strategically plan how progress will be made and sustained in the long run.

6.7.3.2 Rector entrepreneur

"I was able to convince the PTA to buy projectors so that the mode of teaching of teachers and the learning of students could be adapted with the digital education. Our school was among the first to adopt educational technologies in teaching and learning ... I decided to put on CCTV camera with the approval of Ministry in strategic positions in the schoolyard. My school was the first one to use such technology ...".

Lea

Lea ventured into investing in the acquisition of new tools in order to expand the organisational capacity of the educational institution. Within limited financial resources, entrepreneurial educational leaders need a convincing and negotiating flair with educational stakeholders about the necessity for technological pedagogical tools and also to meet new demands of school management and leadership. Therefore, entrepreneurial educational leaders have the ability to take the risk of implementing new technologies for the first time in the organisation because they have sustainable vision and values that attempt to maximise the educational development of the educational community.

Parents, teachers and educational authorities (stakeholders) have been identified in the literature as potential limitations and challenges facing entrepreneurial educational leaders (Newcastle University Research Centre for Learning and Teaching, 2015). However, entrepreneurial school leaders are making use of creative technologies, resources and networking, together with the stakeholders, to socially construct educational institutions in their missions of teaching and

learning (Pashiardis & Savvide, 2011). It is imperative to lead educational institutions with increasingly sophisticated technologies (Fromm, 2003) as innovative and creative entrepreneurial educational leadership practices need to stay attuned to the techno-socio-economic changes of the educational landscape.

“When I became a school leader, my evenings were to organise my house and plan my work otherwise it would have been chaos ... The back ones among the staffs, I used to give them responsibilities and made them committed. The educators who were the first to leave school, it was not because they want to go early, but there was something blocking them. I tried to understand them, praise them more for everything they did well, even if it was a simple task to the ‘size of mustard seed’ because they have done it with heart ... When I was leaving RRC, a teacher came with a gift to thank me for having changed his personality [and] his way of work with integrity and passion.”

Hafiza

As a school leader, Hafiza has the entrepreneurial responsiveness by giving opportunities to the teachers to take on delegated responsibilities and take ownership of what they were doing. Recognising the staff’s efforts and contributions to school projects, together with a commitment to the work and responsibilities, Hafiza was able to have her staff behind her to lead the school.

Entrepreneurial educational leaders are good role delegators, counsellors, discerners and mentors to their staff instead of just being a boss with a supervisory role. Moreover, entrepreneurial educational leaders know how to channel specific tasks according to a staff member’s abilities and recognise their valuable efforts. When responsibilities are distributed among staff and a culture of capacity building activities are instilled, such leaders are practising distributed, transformational and dialogical leadership simultaneously (Barber, Whelan & Clark, 2010). Such entrepreneurial educational leaders are able to proactively unlock and promote leadership talents in potential and aspiring leaders through the roles assigned to educators and students with advice and agency within the school context (Currie, Humphreys, Ucbasaran & McManus, 2008). Hence, entrepreneurial educational leaders have empathy with the individual and professional needs of students and staff.

“I invest myself totally to change the public views’ about an elite school with ill-

mannered characters. I think I have been able to achieve my mission as a woman leader when my head boy made a speech and said: 'You have converted RRC from an educational institution to an educational temple where we are developed to be compassionate, altruistic, loving and give happiness to others through our actions'".

Hafiza

The extract above shows that Hafiza grabbed the “business opportunities” in an ill-mannered boys’ school to capitalise on the dormant resources of the teachers’ and students’ talents and energies to transform the school into an “*educational temple*”.

Consequently, entrepreneurial educational leaders engage students and educators in social construction through meaningful extra-curricular activities. They are able to bring together the components of collaboration, opportunities, and partnerships into the school’s social capital through effective communication with the school’s stakeholders (Randerson, Degeorge & Fayolle, 2016).

Additionally, when Hafiza moulded her impulsive character by constituting her “*team of co-workers – my inner circle*”, it appeared to be a deliberate action and to foresee long-term implications in the sense that she was shielding herself from external competitive factors that could affect her leadership practices in a male-dominated leadership space (Acquaah & Masoud, 2008; Zapletalova, 2016).

“At MPSS, I had to supervise the parts of the school that were under construction also ... Almost every day, I was doing more of building technician work ... The building of GMDA was under construction in Port Louis, and I was involved in another school construction ... I told my staff and students that we made the school stand from nothing on this land. It is human-self, human skill, human effort, a human sacrifice which made this possible for the school to stand ...”. **Ananda**

Ananda’s entrepreneurial drive, her go-getter attitude, dynamic character and risk-taking traits have driven her enthusiasm to be an entrepreneurial leader in a male-dominated space (Xaba & Malindi, 2010; Pihie, Asimiran & Bagheri, 2014; Stead, 2017). In addition, Ananda has defied the

gendered cultural barrier that happens on a building construction site. A woman can equally and professionally manage the construction sites which are regarded as male-gendered spaces of work.

While some women continue to face gender biases in accomplishing specific tasks and are made to feel lacking when working in a male-dominated environment (Panicker, 2019), Ananda has been able to take over the “boys’ club” to lead and direct projects in the conceptualisation and implementation processes at national and international levels successfully (Jakobsh, 2004, 2012; Stead, 2017).

Feminist geographers reflecting on the gendered spaces of leadership state that we cannot fully understand the meaning of women’s leadership capabilities in a male-dominated space unless we listen to their lived experiences (Morin & Guelke, 2007; Dempsey, Parker & Krone, 2011; Sheridan, McKenzie & Still, 2011). As evidenced in this study, the feelings of capability and achievement by the women participants became obvious through the demonstration of positive results and the appreciation of engagement by stakeholders for the successful implementation of educational projects under the direction of women educational leaders (Piggot-Irvine, 2011).

“There was no administrative block. The Ministry of Education handed over this building to me with five staff and asked me to arrange for a temporary office, library room and usher room. It was a challenge to arrange for all these....” Lea

Lea too has in her career as school leader taken the responsibilities of managing the construction of a school while, at the same time, running the school with limited resources.

Thus, entrepreneurial educational leaders have the abilities to manage different actions and reactions in a school space with creative arrangements. Women educational leaders are entrepreneurial in their endeavours when they succeed in the bricolage of school construction and operation by creating something from nothing by bringing together all the partners of education towards a shared vision and values for the betterment of the education.

“I remember I wanted to do some inter-school activities together with the Telfair girls’ school ... under the supervision of teachers of both schools on school projects like a common school magazine, mural paintings, theatre play, traditional music and prize-giving day ... I delegated tasks with the staff, we discuss together, we do not operate

as an oppositional team, but instead, we take a collective decision. There is also, at times, decisions that are against my will. The majority of the team members are voicing their opinions with valid, tangible reasons so, as a leader, I have accepted ... I decide on my own for my school now, of course, all decisions should be within the parameters of the school policy and the policy of the Ministry.” **Lea**

Lea has been promoting team-playing and team-building to promote innovation and change in organising and managing school activities. Team-building can be considered as “cast enactment” while team-playing can be referred as “social relationship building for better conflict resolutions”. The dimensions of team-playing and team-building consolidate the social interactions occurring within leadership space (Gupta et al., 2004; Scott & Webber, 2013). Instead of showing an individual venture, entrepreneurial educational leaders are inclining towards joint team building in a democratic style.

“Former situations let one know how to manage for next similar situations ... I do many consultations, much empathy, show concern about staff problems, tackle problems diplomatically, negotiate, delegate responsibilities and then after, sometimes, we meet again and talk ... I have an open-door policy for anyone ... a two-way communication.” **Ananda**

The extracts above show that Ananda is expressing her leadership practices towards the school partners in her values, motivations and beliefs that are essential components to run an organisation in a sustainable way, especially where effective communication is a significant factor.

6.7.4 My Personal reflections

The narratives of the women-leader participants show that they were reinventing themselves, gaining the essential experiences and becoming tactical and determined in their socio-professional developments. In so doing, the women-leader participants have become action-ready, ascertaining when to capitalise on the prospective moments.

Moreover, they developed their fundraising capabilities through the “*annual food day*” events, by showing that they know how to attract funds and other resources for the school by creating trust and readiness to invest in the school as a social enterprise. They applied teamwork and engaged in

expressive communication to make their enterprises succeed which is reliant on their credence to take risks and their capacity to inspire others to also do so.

The leadership practices employed by the three women educational leader-participants are the outcome of their accumulated entrepreneurial experiences. All the three women educational leader participants are motivated by their values in the form of entrepreneurship that goes beyond monetary profit while their practices have become institutionalised.

6.8 Resources of gender and power dynamics

Grounded in the responses received, the women participants in this study interpreted gender as an inquiry into whether their gender had been a problem on the road to leadership or an issue for them in the different spaces of leadership. In some instances, the women participants were disadvantaged in the different (leadership) spaces owing more to gendered actions than to discrimination (Vedres & Vasarhelyi, 2019).

One of the reasons for the existence of feminist and gender movements is because women have been disadvantaged in various fields as compared to men (Fikree & Pasha, 2004; Reinking & Martin, 2018). Feminist geographers have revolutionised research into social activities such as family, migration and education (Dixon & Jones, 2006). However, feminism, as a concept, cannot be viewed according to a universal set of theoretical and conceptual frameworks and their corresponding methodologies. Although this study focuses on socio-constructionism and feminism, the associated influence of the concept of gender socialisation is evident in the lived experiences of the women participants. It is found that gender socialisation also forms part of the spatial dimensions of the women participants in their life experiences of social, cultural and political factors. Hence, the socio-feminist and gender framework developed for this study.

Despite the fact that this section represents the apprehensions voiced by the women educational leaders, it captures observations and perceptions about how best the women used their (feminine) talents in the different leadership spaces at home or their workplaces. The different types of social interactions between genders and the power dynamics involved in the childhood, adolescent, work, home and family settings are discussed. These micro, meso and macro sites are rarely neutral

physical spaces where the practices within the different institutions have been negotiated through spatially separated and gendered relations (Vedres & Vasarhelyi, 2019).

As opposed to existing literature on patriarchy (e.g., Coleman et al., 1998; Pashiardis & Ribbins, 2003; Tsangari & Stephanidi, 2012; Jakobsh, 2012), this research has exposed how the male gender can act as a potential resource for encouraging women rather than as a barrier. In the roles of the father, uncle, brother and husband of the women participants, it is evident that the males are encouraging and supporting the women educational leaders as they pursue their career and enter leadership spaces as clearly apparent from the following extracts.

“During my schooling, my father and brothers have been of utmost support to me My husband has been all through my career a source of inspiration and motivation ... With the support of my husband, the advice of my brothers and the guide of Allah, I ventured to take the leadership role in RRC as the first woman rector in the history of this school.” **Hafiza**

“Uncles made us understand that education would be our social way to get out of poverty and escalate the social ladder ... In the shaping of what I am today, I am also very grateful and gratified towards the help, advice and affection of my maternal uncles ... My husband has been a very caring person and always helping me out. So, I cannot complain that he has not been aiding me ...” **Ananda**

“At four years old, I became an orphan of the father ... My mother had to leave me under the care of my maternal ... grandfather for six years ... the last two years of primary schooling were ... under the care of my maternal uncle ... When I entered the teaching profession, my husband ... has always encouraged me to go further in my studies so that one day, I am better equipped to occupy a leadership position in the education sector ...” **Lea**

However, the same cannot be said about the workplaces, where the participants encountered resistance and harassment from both male and female staff members in their initial phases of leadership practices. In such working environments, they could have experienced a sense of reduced status which made them feel vulnerable and powerless to

carry out their leadership role effectively. Hence, they sought alternative ways of practicing their leadership. The following sub-sections elaborate on how gender and power played an important role in crafting the career paths of the women leader participants.

6.8.1 Negotiation of gender and power at workplace

From the findings, it has been evident that, in the leadership spaces, the women participants confronted the resistance of acceptance as women educational leaders by the senior teaching staff members particularly those male teachers who did not get a promotion and who were previously the new educational leaders' teachers. This situation created gendered social tensions in the women participants' leadership spaces (Peterson, 2014).

"I got some difficult social cohesion with some of the teaching staff, who were my ex-class teachers. They were viewing me in an odd way as to how they are still a teacher, and I have already become their supervisor. With time, they became impersonal ... and I had to rework my relationship to make work on-going ..." **Hafiza**

"During the transition phase, I felt to be in a position of authority and would be dealing with teacher-colleagues with whom I was having fun for such a long time and now having crossed the line, how to deal with conflicts with the teachers if ever there would be." **Lea**

Eagly and Karau (2002) suggested that women leaders are perceived as less suitable and likable than men leaders, by both men and women subordinates, to deal with relational and organisational issues at work. This is what the participants faced or feared to face in their social relationships with their ex-colleague teachers. Additionally, the women participants in their leadership roles and positions of power faced more gendered conflicts, competitiveness and unfriendliness with women than with men (Sheppard & Aquino, 2013). In this study, the women participants used patience and perseverance instead of positional power in their relationships with the senior teachers. In time, the gendered socio-professional relationship between the women educational leaders and the senior teachers (male and female) changed into better understanding, practicing and experiencing of leadership actions at the school level.

Moreover, when Hafiza created her “inner circle” consisting of the senior staff members who acted as shield-protector over her leadership space, the “inner circle” had delegated power and advised her in her work. In so doing, the relational and authoritarian powers became infused to create new forms of leadership dynamics (Wong, 2007). On the other hand, Lea and Ananda’s “open door” communication strategy allowed the teaching staff and parents to voice their opinions.

The difficulties in the gendered-power relationship in the leadership spaces for women to manage are a reality not clearly visible from the surface. There is a disruption in the concept of gender equality in the leadership spaces. There is more persistent enquiring, testing and prejudgment towards women than men. When women leaders are managing and leading women and men, especially those older than themselves, those women leaders’ leadership practices are constantly being scrutinised and challenged, increasing the pressures they bear in the leadership spaces (Oakley, 2000; Hryniewicz & Vianna, 2018). However, males in the leadership positions are considered as natural leaders (Eagly, 2007). This is because the traditional portrait of a leader is connected with the masculine gender and hence, the women leaders are viewed as the “others” (Eagly, 2007; Hryniewicz & Vianna, 2018). The imposed “gender expectations of society” on women in leadership positions is regarded as something “normal”; it is a covert way of supporting gender expectations and inequality.

All the three participants adopted a careful approach to dealing not only with the male students but also with the staff showing emotional care, which is a characteristic of feminine leadership (Due-Billing & Alvesson, 2000). Usually, staff and students labelling women leaders in their workplace as “mother” in the context of Mauritius is a gender-stereotype phenomenon (Yadav & Yadav, 2018). However, this is appreciated by the women participants from their male students and teaching staff. Hafiza was appreciative when she was called the “Iron-lady with velvet gloves” because of her adoption of military-type discipline and masculine characters (Morojele et al., 2013). Hafiza was therefore able to lead a “hooligan” type of school and equally as she understood the socio-emotional background of her students and teachers. The students acted as her “body-guard” while the teachers as her “soldiers” meaning that she was “well-looked after” and she was affectionate towards her students and teachers. Similarly, Ananda was tagged as “*mama*” and “*Iron-lady*”, and she accepted these labellings as compliments. She used her motherly and feminine side and equally, at times, adopting a male character to ensure that everyone “*enjoys the same privileges*”, and social justice was applied to everyone.

The analysis above shows that women are enacting the concept of gender from different angles. Firstly, women are addressing the problematic of gender and power relations through the concept of “gender as difference”. This concept takes into consideration the diverse life experiences of women and men in an educational space in a particular setting across a host of social, cultural and political processes.

Secondly, we can see how “gender as a social relation” moves the emphasis from women and men as distinct subjects of inquiry to masculinist construction and structural interconnectedness of patriarchy (Dixon & Jones, 2015). The systematised gender relational domination, exploitation, insubordination as well as benevolence, protection and love, are forms of patriarchal oppressions for the women leaders because these relations are socially constructed not on free will but against a power barter system that make the women leaders feel comfortable (Roy, 2010, 2011).

Thirdly, the social construction of gender is infused with both positive and negative expressions in leadership spaces. The discursive construction of gender codings, expressions or categories employed towards the women leaders to describe the so-called motherly, feminine or masculine characteristics describe a social constructive relationship, shaped from ideas regarding what it is to be female or what it is to be male (Aitken & Valentine, 2014). The binary social construct is resolved and sustained by a gender-specific language about the women’s actions and practices in the leadership spaces (Selzer, Howton & Wallace, 2017). Thus, words such as “mama”, “iron-lady”, “velvet gloves”, “soldiers”, etc. have gendered implications unlike words such as matriarchal decision-taker, strong-will woman, manipulative and masking unyielding determination, dictatorship, etc. Therefore, the interpretation, connotation and social value of these phrases are not fixed, but vary from one leadership space to another because these phrases are socio-constructively determined. Hence, they are associated with different assertive systems of power until they finally get the status of being “normal” such that matriarchy and patriarchy are viewed as “normal”.

6.8.2 Feminism as the agency of change in the gender and power dynamics at work

The women leader participants have been appreciated for the changes and improvements they have brought into the lives of teachers and students as well as to the image of the schools. They have acted as change agents in the gender and power relational dynamics such that the actions and expressions of the women participants have permeated in the lives of male and female staff members as well as the students.

From the narrative extract of Hafiza, the agency of change is more apparent than in the cases of Lea and Ananda. This is because the school cultures and micro-politics have been different. Hafiza has been leading an elite colonial boys' school with deeply rooted traditions while Lea and Ananda have been leading schools that were under construction during their tenures.

“The teachers, I had to give them responsibilities as someone gave to a child. I gave them their chance of doing, their time to change and recognising their efforts and praise them when the effective changes have taken place ... a teacher came with a gift to thank me for having changed his personality, his way of work with integrity and passion. I think I have been able to achieve my mission as a woman leader when my head boy made a speech and said, ‘You have converted RRC from an educational institution to an educational temple where we developed to be compassionate, altruistic love and give happiness to others through our actions’.” **Hafiza**

Besides, in the gender-power negotiation, it could be insinuated that the male staff has been working more synergistically with the women leader participants than the female staff.

“I also had a bad experience working with a lady school-usher. The latter was taking herself to be the boss of the school ... the other lady-rector, seeing my plan of school activities, refused to go forward out of jealousy ... I saw jealousy among women-teachers because ... there was lots of gossiping, especially with the same age group as me.” **Lea**

“I got some difficulties in navigating as a school leader. There was a lady Deputy-Rector, who was nearly retiring, wanted to overshadow me as rector.” **Hafiza**

“I felt that the male staff appreciated my work more than the female staff. The females were most of the time complaining about all the ills that were in the school, and they even tagged me as “Recteur demenagement” (Resettling Rector).” Ananda

The quotes above show that the womenfolk in leadership executions are less admired than their male colleagues (Parks-Stamm, Heilman & Hearn, 2008). Besides, there are the burdens of social tagging and stereotyping in the exercise of their function as school leaders (Yadav & Yadav, 2018; Derks, Van Laar, Ellemers & De Groot, 2011a; Brescoll, 2011). In so doing, the female teachers or subordinates, in comparison to male subordinate staff, put more pressure on the women leaders in order to destabilise their leadership functions. This is the opposite of the notion of “Queen Bee Syndrome” where women in positions of power and authority treat sub-ordinate women more critically than men (Staines et al., 1974; Goldsmith, 2018).

The women participants, as school leaders, were vulnerable due to their age compared to the rest of the staff who were of the same age group or older than they were. Therefore, to sustain themselves, they had to adopt masculine characteristics or feminine intuition, as depicted in the following extracts:

“With time, I have forged my character and mind to accept critics and, at the same time, to defend my ideas” Lea

“... my woman intuition and empathy” Hafiza

“I was a woman-man in my place of work” Ananda

Recognising and acknowledging women’s use of their natural emotional instincts brings authenticity to women’s leadership particularly when conflicts arise. This is because of the perception that women in leadership have a distinctive leadership flair with specific talents when compared to men. But in fact, leadership materialises on a spectrum – leadership characteristics get displayed in a range of feminine and masculine ways, be it for women or men (Sindell, 2017). Therefore, leaders ought to use a combination of approaches depending on whom they are dealing and working with and on the situational needs. However, gender and power relationships become more tense and more acute at higher leadership positions compared to school leadership.

“... as a woman administrator in the higher sphere of educational leadership at the zone and headquarter levels, it is more like a conflicted space ... As a woman, I could feel that I was not meant to take decision whenever I was attending meetings; I could see the whims of the directors” **Lea**

“... it was like you had to be where you are, you can’t do something, you can’t act, you just have to follow, you agree, or you don’t agree, you can’t say anything in committee ... I’m the only one who would ever dare to make alternative propositions if not to say challenging the Chairperson ... Everybody works in isolation.” **Hafiza**

“Although the surreptitious and blatant pressures are coming from different directions, I have never felt like giving up ... I will fight the battle till the last moment ... former situations let one know how to manage for next similar situations. I called it crisis management.” **Ananda**

From the excerpts of the three women participants of this study it can be implied that higher the leadership space, the more power-tension forces. In such a situation, the already difficult social relations between the senior women and senior men leaders and the junior female and male leaders of the upper educational leadership space become a more chaotic and complex gendered social leadership space. However, Brescoll (2011) opined that the power-tension equilibrium inclines more towards conflicts between women leaders and women subordinates than between women leaders and male subordinates when expressing authority.

Therefore, when women enter the higher leadership space in the hierarchy, the phenomenon of “covert competition” under the label of “Queen Bee syndrome” of the senior women leaders towards junior women leaders becomes more apparent (Crowley & Elster, 2019; Harvey, 2018). The female leaders’ tendencies are not only to contest other women, but rather to take the covert competition as a way to pursue their aspirations in sexist managerial cultures (Derks, Ilemers, Laar & Groot, 2011b). That is, the women leaders want to be recognised as female pioneers or female legacies instead of just as successful women leaders. Hence, it can be argued that women get more disadvantaged or marginalised in leadership spaces due to the “gendered attitude rather than categorical discrimination because of what women do, rather than because of who they are” (Vedres & Vasarhelyi, 2019). In conquering the higher territorial leadership space, “these women

succeed by pitching into masculine gender stereotypes and outpacing themselves from other women” (Derks et al., 2011b).

This explains why Hafiza preferred to vacate the higher leadership space because of the gendered behaviour of senior educational leaders in the form of “queen bees” and also because of political mischievousness due to her family’s political background as members of the opposition party. When female-female interpersonal difficulties start becoming unbearable, Sheppard and Aquino (2013) argue that

“observers are persuaded to trust that women who experience interpersonal difficulties with same-sex co-workers are more likely to pull out from and become frustrated with their organisations than men who experience interpersonal challenges with same-sex co-workers (and more so than women who experience interpersonal hitches with opposite-sex co-workers)”.

This explains the gender inequality in the secondary schooling system, and the reason that women remain under-represented among the top leadership space, de facto, making it male-dominated.

6.8.3 My Personal reflections

The “dynamic tensions” in the workplace affected the leadership practices and experiences of the women participants as they had to juggle the dynamics of gendered forces on their way to leadership positions and actively sustain themselves in the dynamics of struggle. Strong working relationships existed between the participants and the males rather than with the females. Men were seen to be supportive as compared to the perceived notion that the same gender would favour each other, that is, in-group favouritism or positive preference (Coffman, Exley & Niederle, 2017). Placing more women in senior leadership positions without attempting to resolve the institutional gender biases or conflicts remains an incomplete solution towards creating a more socially conducive leadership space for all (Derks et al., 2011a). The gender social construction and socialisation process in the leadership spaces are not linear, as one would think, but rather it have their own complexities in creating an understanding of the socially constructed notions of masculine and feminine types of leadership practices (Van Eerdewijk et al., 2017).

6.8.4 Negotiation of gender and power at home

6.8.4.1 Complementarity and harmonisation of power dynamics in the family settings

Tensions in the relational dynamics of gender and power at work also affect the spectrum of gender and power in the home and family life. The women participants in this study symbiosed and synchronised both their family and work lives by using the opinions of their family members in the decisions and leadership practices.

Seeing herself already in the shoes of middle school leadership, Ananda wanted to take the challenge to lead her career path and become a school leader when she mentioned that she “*wanted to leave teaching and move ahead ... while others less qualified than her were climbing the leadership ladder*”. This shows her strong self-commitment and motivation together with the social cognitive and social constructionist influence that encompasses her career path (Bandura, 1977, 1986; Gergen, 2001, 2011; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). Her struggles, relations and experiences in the informal milieu, formal middle management and leadership contexts, competence to succeed, social connections, motivations and abilities influence her leadership career choice. Ananda negotiated her entrance into the leadership space diplomatically with her husband, who is a teacher, by giving him his due respect of husband.

“I asked my husband, Sanjeev, who was also eligible to apply, why he was not postulating for the promotional post. Sanjeev replied that he was not interested because he did not want to take on additional responsibilities of school and that he did not want to lose his school holidays and freedom. Nevertheless, he told me ‘if you are interested, you can try applying’.” Ananda

When Ananda became a school leader and eventually a director for the secondary education system, her husband still remained a secondary school teacher. This situation was not free of negative comments, be it at the workplace or in the family settings.

“In my working environment, people were telling how come the wife has become the boss of her husband since the latter is still a teacher. Even, the sister of my husband used to say things bad to make my husband felt obdurate.” Ananda

In such a situation, understanding and appreciating relationships in the role of leadership, be it at home or workplace, becomes the strength for experiencing gender and power in the home and family settings (Hofstede, 1998). When social and gender roles, and domestic tasks overlap naturally, the equal opportunities of the sexes become prevalent, and there are fewer educational, occupational, status and power-distance dynamics (Steil, 1997; Hofstede, 2001; Van de Vijver, 2007). Moreover, respecting each other's role in the work, family and home settings fosters a complementary team spirit in the family and work settings, and this reflects on the children as well since they too become independent, self-organised and disciplined (Ramroop, 2019; Woolner, Clark, Laing, Tiplady & Thomas, 2013; Benson, 2013).

6.8.4.2 Disparaging and critical power dynamics in the family setting

“My married life influenced me in a way in my leadership practices. My house, my children, my husband and my family have given me the opportunity to show my leadership capabilities or performances.” Hafiza

Hafiza's married life influenced her in her leadership practices and capabilities in the home and family settings and she extended those experiences to the work settings. However, when she tried to use her work leadership over her husband's leadership at home, this shows that patriarchy still exists in certain home settings although the male figures have shown that women are entering the leadership spaces.

“There has been frustration also vis-à-vis my husband. It's like having the responsibility to oversee all the operations and taking appropriate decisions for many years at my workplace. So, I have been a leader in schools. I have the appropriate support in taking a particular decision. However, in my house, it's not everything that I say will be accepted, it's not always my opinion, this is where sometimes problems crop up. Unfortunately, I cannot get along with that leadership practices in my house, my husband is a stronger leader than I am, I must admit, much stronger, so I manage to give it. His character is different from mine. I deal very differently in my school. I am a different leader in my school compared to my house.” Hafiza

The gender and power dynamics negotiations at home and at work are dependent on husbands and wives' characters and attitudes and the families' socio-cultural and political dynamics. The concept of “power-over” and “power-to”⁸ in the gendered land, such as home, without prior negotiation can cause disempowerment. In such a case, there is one who capitulates and one who conquers (Jacobs, 2007). Hafiza even capitulates in front of her sons as she had wanted to make them autonomous, but finally she became subservient to them by serving them their food every morning in their rooms before leaving for work. Therefore, the capitulation of women to the expectation, duty-bound servility and allegiance of family and society has compromised the boundaries of women in the gender-socio-culturation process. Although women leaders practise their leadership capabilities in their home and family settings, they are still obliged to seek the male figures' approval like “a star upon their femininity” (Singh, 2020). Hence, the gender-power relationship of the women leaders, even in the home and family milieu, looks contradictory to the women's leadership achievements but they highlight the reality of the complex leadership spaces.

6.8.5 My Personal reflections

The workplace and home are two different gendered institutions having their own sets of complexities where the impacts of socio-cultural upbringing and beliefs are divergent. There are situations in which gender is pertinent to behaviour or attitude expectations because of the sex-based stereotypes and social roles that are imbedded in our social construction and expectations (Kolb, 2013; Eagly & Carli, 2001). Hence, since childhood, gender influences have separate behavioural scripts and expectations for females and males as social beings (Bowles, Thomason & Bear, 2019).

Therefore, in this study, the wives' (women participants) strategic negotiation of the gender roles and the power dynamics in the home and family, as an institution, is related to the gender socialisation process of the husbands (male) and wives (female) from childhood. The extent that males and females, as social beings, accept the commonness and differences of their genders that,

⁸ “Power-over” is implicit in making “power-to” work. Those who take up a leadership role develop power to attain influence over others. Power-over is the capacity to get people to do what they do not want to do due to resources, status, expertise, reward or punishment. Power-to is the ability or potential to bring about change. Empowerment has an assumed good. Power-to recognises that power is relational and reciprocal. Anyone at any level can exercise power and also resistance (Jacobs, 2007).

when put together in the home setting, create the synergies and complementarities for the fruitful development of each member of the family lies on the socio-construction process as couples. As such, the specificity of socio-cultural context and the gender-socialisation process feed directly into the leadership achievements of the family settings and indirectly into the leadership achievements of the work sphere. Despite the different types of challenges coming from different directions, in order to attain such leadership practices in male-dominated spaces, women leaders use a combination of the different leadership characteristics, styles and approaches that are both masculine and feminine.

Despite holding a higher work status or a relatively equal status job as their husbands and taking into consideration the household workload and the challenges of bringing up children, the women in the study were generally satisfied with their spouses' contribution to the household labour and the encouragement they gave to climb the leadership ladder at work. This kind of shift in the patriarchal structure brought a different perspective to the family life that allowed for a wholesome leadership development of the women participants despite different types of pressures.

6.9 Chapter summary

The women participants strategically know how to wear different hats at different times. In the diverse roles of mother, friend, psychologist, sociologist, socialist, preacher, boss and, at times, the villain, the women educational leader participants face challenges in the leadership spaces they occupy. They have to be tactful in dealing with students, parents, staff, husbands and family members in such a way that their feminine gender and identity are not jeopardised in the male dominated and patriarchal landscapes. A multitude of resources, although sometimes not in their favour, are used to effectively navigate the spaces where leadership and gendered practices are dynamic. They need to be multidisciplinary and multi-tasking in the multi-layered conception of gender-individualist, gender-interactionist and gender-institutional dynamics.

Whatever the tensions between genders due to status differences at work, all the three women participants have crafted their social relationships between the different genders and groups of people, be it at home or work sites, using a combination of feminist approaches (communication, empathy, agility, patience, perseverance) and masculinist approaches (agentic, self-confidence, ambition, assertiveness) to maintain sustainable political-social-cultural cohesion in the different leadership spaces.

In the pursuit to be educational leaders, the women participants have shaped ways to grasp the experiences and opportunities of adversities and to use them as resources (entangled and untangled) in accomplishing their educational leadership goals. Whenever the complexity of home, family and work lives have created recurring challenges, the women leader participants have renegotiated their own and others' role expectations by devising a workable distribution of household work between spouses, children, extended family and colleagues to lead effectively in different leadership spaces. In challenging and chaotic circumstances, the women leader participants have shown the determination or the reluctance to accept downfall and the willingness to try to successfully attain their leadership positions in male-dominated leadership spaces.

According to my view, with a chemistry background, the leadership space resembles the metaphor of the "Chemistry of Transition Elements" where the electrons move from ground energy level to different energy levels using a multitude of energy combinations, depending on the situation, to display the different colours at different times.

In the next chapter, a summary of the study is first presented followed by the elements that the research questions addressed. The concluding elements of the study derive new knowledge that can contribute to the existing theories of leadership and feminist geography.

CHAPTER 7: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter was devoted to the discussion of emerging themes of the study and the existing literature. From the debate, the thematic concept of resources in entangled situations made its appearance.

This last chapter covers the different chapters of this research study which was oriented on the struggle of women educational leaders to construct their career path in different leadership positions in the secondary education sector, a traditionally male-dominated space. The chapter aims at grasping the essence of the present study through a synopsis of the chapters. While the research gap and objectives of the study are highlighted, the literature review on leadership and the conceptual framework adopted for the study are illustrated. The methodology used to generate and analyse data and the main research findings are presented. Feminist quantum leadership is theorised by abstracting data through thematic analysis. Moreover, the chapter offers the contextual, practical and policy implications to identify beneficiaries of the research study. Finally, the research's limitations, suggestions for future research and the overall conclusion are also stated.

7.2 Summary of the study

Chapter 1 provides the general view of the debate over the feminist view of the teaching profession due to more women than men in the teaching workforce (Kelleher, 2011; Schmude & Jackisch, 2019). On the other hand, according to United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2019), only a few women educators enter leadership positions within the educational systems where they work. For years several studies have been conducted on women leadership or in leadership. However, how women educational leaders aspire, deal and succeed in male-dominated leadership spaces is under-researched. Hence, this study addresses these issues.

The resources, factors and strategies deployed by women entering the different leadership positions, which remain male-dominated spaces, in the secondary education sector in Mauritius

are explored. In that context, this research fills the gap in the academic work on women educational leaders. It maps women educational leaders' biographical experiences in choosing their career paths and how they have coped with the challenges in the socio-economically and culturally gendered spaces. Moreover, in this chapter, I presented the necessary tools to explore and understand how women educational leaders made their way to attain and sustain in leadership and management positions, in the male-dominated leadership spaces in the public secondary educational system. To achieve these objectives, the study investigated to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1: What are the lived experiences of women educational leaders in the public secondary educational system of Mauritius?

RQ2: How the career-path of women educational leaders evolved in the different leadership and management spaces in the public secondary educational system?

RQ3: What leadership patterns do women educational leaders adopt in this study?

Chapter 2 starts the discussion on the definitions of geographies, management and leadership. Then the different leadership approaches are discussed, followed by the barriers and challenges women face in leadership advancement and the existing strategies they deploy in the different leadership spaces.

The notion of geographies was explained as spaces and places in the social environment that are probable sites of power (Morojele & Muthukrishna, 2012, 2013; Muthukrishna, 2013). The upward mobility of female educational leaders in the different structural hierarchies of educational administration and management, which constitutes the geographies, was discussed. Geographies have been used as the location of women in the socio-spatial dynamics and social hierarchies of worksites and power – the spaces and places of leadership.

The terms and activities of leadership used as an aspect of management are exposed by Daft (2012) and Hannagan (2008, p. 38). These authors explained how leadership and management are considered mutually dependent and interconnected. To meet the goals of the organisations, managers need to have appropriate leadership skills. The success or failure of management has a

strong connection with leadership and the outcome of changes in the social, economic, cultural, political and technological environment.

Multiple leadership approaches from their fields of origin were also addressed. Making sense of the multiple theoretical approaches to leadership is challenging. Nevertheless, researchers have classified the different leadership characteristics into five major approaches – instructional, transactional, transformational, distributed and authentic – commonly found in educational settings so that educational leadership practitioners can visualise the continuum of leadership (Court, 2003; Kagan, 1994). Furthermore, the leadership competencies associated with each of these approaches and their bearing on determining each specific leadership strategy's degree of success was explained.

The source of some of the leadership attributes cited in recent literature, to understand female leadership approaches, experiences, and perspectives, were examined and revealed personal theories, contingency theories, and leadership style theories (Alabani, 2017, 2018). Moreover, the extent to which the leadership attributes are imposed on women educational leader participants was explored to depict whether any new leadership styles or approaches have emerged.

The challenges of the women's leadership cases have shown that, no matter how influential the leaders are, they are confronted with many obstacles in their leadership pathway and practices that they must overcome (Amanchukwu, Stanley & Ololube, 2015). For example, some of the common barriers to leadership advancement of women that have been identified in the literature are: the glass ceiling (Yongho, 2012), struggles between home and work accountabilities (Sanchez & Thornton, 2010), inadequate access to networking and reliable mentors (Pichler et al., 2008; Howard, Msengi & Harris, 2017), facing peers' oppression at work, and gender stereotypes (Freire, 2000; McDowell, 2015).

According to the literature review on barriers to leadership faced by women for this study, the following strategies have been identified: first, women opt for the right organisational fit; they choose to join companies with policies based on family and work balance (Darcy, McCarthy & Grady, 2012). Second, for women to overcome societal barriers, they must be self-confident in applying for leadership positions when they have the desired qualifications (Grant-Vallone & Ensher, 2011; Pirouznia, 2006). Last, the dialogic communication approach adopted by women so

that they can talk to colleagues confidentially about complex situations is discussed, views and experiences are exchanged, and solutions are discovered (Tappura, Syvänen & Saarela, 2014).

Chapter 3 presented the theoretical foundations of the research exploration. For this research study, I developed a specific framework called the Socio-Feminist and Gender (SFG) conceptual framework using a collage of social constructionism as the dominant theory encompassing theoretical perspectives of feminism and genderism in the leadership spaces of the participants. When these paradigms of theorisation were applied individually on educational feminist leadership, they inquired and explained women educational leadership insufficiently in the broader context of socio-economic and cultural changes. Typically, this happened because one construct did not recognise the existence or influence of the other constructs (Martinez-Kellar, 2012; Kellar & Slayton, 2013, 2016). However, when the three theoretical paradigms were put together, the SFG emerged and provided the potential to clarify and recognise the multi-directional interactions with multiple realities of women educational leaders in male-dominated leadership spaces. The SFG offered insights to explain their career choices and trajectories. It further uncovered the barriers to leadership achievements and approaches to navigate these challenges. It also revealed the way women leaders carved out their career path in male-dominated leadership spaces bounded by socio-cultural traditions.

Chapter 4 presented the methodological underpinnings of the study. The qualitative and interpretive paradigms, with a constructivist philosophical perspective, were used to construct and interpret the knowledge. Researching socio-constructionist, feminist and gender perspectives under the SFG conceptual framework involved exploring feminism, emphasising the meaning-making of lived experiences concerning leadership practices, scientific oppression, socio-cultural power and difference while concurrently encouraging societal engagement (Hesse et al., 2004). Hence, the narrative inquiry method as the “narrative ways of knowing“ (Yang, 2011) was used to trace women educational leader participants’ life experiences to explore meanings rather than to search for answers (Schaafsma & Vinz, 2011). As a result, multiple insights into realities were exposed. Further, this chapter discussed how a male researcher conducted studies with the women educational leader participants as research elites.

The primary data generation method was to interview the participants. With the consent of the participants, data collected were triangulated with documents and field notes (Daly et al., 2007; Creswell, 2009). I had to shift from semi-structured to unstructured and, at times, to highly structured interview questions to investigate the subjective experiences of the women participants in order to generate rich narratives (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011; Hesse-Biber, 2013). The study used a purposive sampling involving three participants coming from three different socio-religious and cultural backgrounds. Narrative analysis was carried out to present the data in biographical narratives using codes to identify emerging common and diverging themes (Polkinghorne, 1995; Creswell, 2007). The findings were presented based on themes resulting from the research questions.

Chapter 5 presented the findings in the form of life history narratives constructed from field data and guided by the research questions using a narrative inquiry methodological analysis. Using the women participants' own words from the member-checked transcripts, I co-constructed and represented the narratives that portrayed the women participants' stories of lived experiences through momentary accounts and expressive acts (Pithouse-Morgan et al., 2012). The narrative findings are presented as three theme-phases, namely, Childhood and Adolescent Life Experiences, Professional and School Leadership Experiences and Higher Educational Leadership Experiences and included influences such as family upbringings, religious practices, cultural and social contexts, use of technology, political impacts, gender and micro-political forces that have acted as challenges in their leadership paths and different leadership spaces. The chapter throws light on the emergence of the different leadership styles they adopted to overcome their challenges.

Chapter 6 discussed the findings together with the literature on leadership approaches, practices, barriers, challenges and strategies and the socio-feminist and gender conceptual framework. The thematic cross-narrative analysis uncovers striking scenes from the women participants' journeys to becoming educational leaders. The socio-construction processes in the women's lives and the feminist emancipation in the gendered milieu marked "the seen and the unseen" processes that pushed and withheld them in climbing the leadership ladder and navigating the leadership floor. Six main themes emerged: resources of religion and spirituality, resources of adversity, resources of the family, resources of context, resources of entrepreneurship, resources of gender politics and power dynamics.

According to Shah (2010), the women participants' religious beliefs and patriarchal issues would have prevented their aspiration to climb the leadership ladder. However, the findings revealed that the women participants' religious schooling socially constructed and contributed to navigating the journey and developing their strategies to overcome challenges in their leadership positions and practices. Moreover, from the socio-constructionist point of view, the participants' gender in religious spaces, in shaping their characters and styles of leadership, was influenced by male guardians. This study revealed that the home and family, as a religious institution, is the social structure that provided lucidity and stability in women's lives. These religious institutions empowered these women to take a leadership role in the youth community development. Hence, religion and spiritual practices, as resources, urge people to go beyond the boundaries of self-interest leadership.

The findings showed that the participants underwent different forms of hardships in their lives that included atrocities, socio-emotional harassment and male domination. However, the fact that women participants narrated different critical episodes in their lives showed how these impacted on their emotional capacity development, contributing to their leadership qualities. Although different obstacles appeared in their lives, they showed the self-determination to overcome the barriers of limitations and weaknesses to pursue their careers. From the findings, it was also observed that the women participants faced various encounters in their different leadership practices due to their gender. As a result, they became "immune" or "normal" in these situations and, at the same time, they were able to self-negotiate their own identities between the masculine and the feminine assertiveness depending on the situational spaces and locations. Hence, a combination of leadership attitudes (transactional, transformational, distributed, resilient, dialogic and adaptive) is involved in bringing their leadership styles.

From the study results, it was also found that family members played an essential role in the involvement of the women participants as educational leaders. Despite the financial burdens during their schooling days and the fact that the education of girls was not a priority at that time, the male members of their families made an effort to educate them and made them independent. Although strong patriarchal, religious and cultural customs prevailed in their families, the family members, especially male figures, influenced them to work instead of staying at home. Moreover, after getting married, they got the help of their husbands to look after the family welfare and even the

immediate elderly family members helped to sustain their work and family lives. Moreover, their husbands smoothed their paths to enter leadership positions by providing emotional and mentoring support. However, diametric leadership power came into play when a husband is subordinate to his wife in an educational leadership position.

Another finding from the study was the contextual implications associated with the different backgrounds such as political adherence and socio-cultural and networking groups. As a result, the resources of context were thematised. Socio-cultural networking played a major role in shaping women participants' leadership skills and practices. At times, these backgrounds worked in their favour and at other times the women participants had to be mute to navigate the leadership spaces. Through religious community networking services, the participants seized the opportunities to develop various leadership skills such as communication, socialisation and empathy. The networking groups also provided the space for women's emancipation and their women identity construction as mothers, sisters, wives and women educational leaders to take care of families, students, staff and community members. In addition, it was also noticed that political networking influenced their career paths on the leadership ladder. Hence, they were forced to build political allies to climb the leadership ladder because their workplaces are considered political in the public sector.

In "Resources of entrepreneurship" innate entrepreneurial drives pushed the women participants to develop by taking pro-active roles in accomplishing the tasks entrusted to them as leaders in the secondary educational system. It was observed that the participants' dealings with a diversity of friends and teachers (male and female) of different ages contributed to their social, feminine, cultural, and gender development considering the multi-ethnic cultural backgrounds in the Mauritian secondary schooling system. They also had the entrepreneurial vision, values and spirit to change traditional school practices using the limited resources the educational institutions had to meet the demands of the school community. Therefore, entrepreneurial leadership talents were shaped through the active process of social interaction and emancipation involving: human life, problem-solving, gendered relational skills and lived experiences due to social influences. Hence, the spaces and places where different leadership capabilities are being developed are regarded as a socio-construction development universe.

From the “gender and power dynamics resources” theme, the findings captured comprehensive observations and perceptions about how the women used their (feminine) talents in the different leadership spaces, be it at home or their workplaces. The different types of social interactions between genders and the power dynamics involved in the childhood and adolescent work, and home and family settings, were very permeable and malleable. It was noted that these sites (micro, meso and macro) were rarely neutral physical spaces. Instead, the practices within the different institutions were negotiated through spatially separated and gendered relations (Vedres & Vasarhelyi, 2019).

The findings showed how the male gender acted as a potential resource rather than a barrier for encouraging women in the home settings. In the roles of the father, uncle, brother and husband of the women participants, it was evident that the males were encouraging and supporting the women educational leaders as they pursued their careers and climbed into the leadership spaces, instead of acting as patriarchal challenges. Leadership at home and leadership at work are not two-way traffic in the gender and power dynamics negotiation because husbands and wives have different characters and attitudes. In addition, the families’ socio-cultural and political dynamics are different.

In the organisational settings, the findings showed that the women leader participants encountered resistance and harassment from both male and female staff members in their initial phases of leadership practices. The participants faced more gendered conflicts, competitiveness and unfriendliness with women than with men. However, using female qualities, the women participants used patience and perseverance, instead of positional power, to overcome the challenges of relationships with the staff. The difficulties in the gendered-power relationship in the leadership spaces for women to manage were a reality. There was a disruption in the concept of gender equality in the leadership spaces. There was more persistent enquiring, testing and prejudgment towards women, unlike towards men in the same situations.

Apart from the challenges the women leader participants encountered, the findings also displayed that they were equally appreciated for the changes and improvements they brought in the lives of teachers and students and the image of the schools. They acted as change agents in the gender and

power relational dynamics such that the actions and expressions of the women participants permeated the lives of male and female staff. The women participants, as school leaders, were vulnerable due to their young age compared to the teaching staff of the same age group or the older staff. In addition, they had to adopt varying personalities such as masculine characteristics and feminine intuition and sometimes even both at the same time.

Although women leaders practice their leadership capabilities in their home and family settings, they are still entangled by the cultural knots in seeking the male figures' approval, like "a star upon their femininity" (Singh, 2020). Hence, the gender-power relationships of the women leaders in the home and family milieu looks contradictory to the women's leadership achievements at their workplaces that highlights the reality of the complex leadership spaces.

Feminism, as a concept, cannot be viewed according to a universal set of theoretical and conceptual frameworks and their corresponding methodologies. Although this study focuses essentially on socio-constructionism, the associated influence of feminism and genderism in the lived experiences of the women participants also enters the overall debate as gender social construction also forms part of the spatial dimensions of the women participants in their life experiences while hosting the social, cultural and political factors. Hence, the socio-feminist and gender framework developed used in this study allowed for the emergence of a new leadership approach based on entangled resources.

The following section addresses the research questions and simultaneously theorises the thesis based on the concept of leadership resources and entanglements influenced by feminism, genderism and socio-constructionism in the different leadership spaces.

7.3 Insights towards a thesis of quantum feminist leadership

This section addresses the research questions that helped to understand the career path of women leaders from the education sector to leadership in secondary education and how they navigated through the various leadership positions, which is a space dominated by men. At the same time, new understandings and evolving constructs, theories or concepts originating from the study undertaken emerged to shape the thesis.

7.3.1 The lived experiences of women educational leaders in the public secondary educational system of Mauritius

The research mapped the women participants' personal and professional biographical experiences in becoming educational leaders in the secondary school system. The experiences are lived at different time phases (childhood and adolescence, cohabiting educator life with marriage and leadership moments), and in various places such as the home and family backgrounds, inside school settings and outside school situations such as local and international settings. The lived experiences are linear on the timeline, but the knowledge and experiences gained and applied in personal and professional lives are non-linear. They are multi-directional, non-deterministic and endless in time and space.

During the study, the researcher found that these women educational leader participants defined, conceptualized, experienced, and interpreted the “woman-self differently” in diverse personal, family, social and work contexts. Staying open to the possibility of “uncovering” or “discovering” diversity in women educational leaders' experiences with [feminist] leadership and management in the different male-dominated leadership and management spaces was a fundamental underlying assumption of the study. While conducting the research investigation, the researcher came to be aware of how diversities (in terms of age, health status, social position, race, sexual orientation, economic status, ethnicity, reproductive status, religious beliefs and political influence) among the women educational leader participants were essential factors impacting on the choices and decisions of the women participants to be in educational leadership spaces. At the same time, many of the mainstream studies often blind themselves to such diversities among women leaders and concentrate more on the women's doings in relation to their gender and social relationships.

7.3.2 The career-path of women educational leaders that evolved in the different leadership and management spaces in the public secondary educational system

The women participants have been unconsciously supplementing their leadership practices in the socio-cultural milieu. The interaction of the different social, cultural, political and religious factors shaped their leadership styles and approaches to be able to adapt to the changing work and home ecosystems. These factors become a complex network of gender roles and feminist practices within

the different ecosystems. At times, the women faced the challenges, while at other times, they capitulated and became compliant. At times, they feel complacent in their accomplishments but anxious about the future of their leadership with a different vision and mission to exercise agency outside the formal leadership space. Moreover, initially, the leadership pathway was unplanned and improvised, but later it became a conscious career move in the higher leadership spaces. In brief, for their success and survival in the leadership environment, I believe that the women participants had embraced the art of self-creative diplomacy – a new feminine characteristic that I call “diplo-poiesis feminism” as compared to the continuous struggling for recognition and rights (feminist emancipation).

7.3.3 The leadership pattern of women educational leaders adopted in this study

The different sites and situations which the women participants encountered for leadership practices, such as childhood playing, secondary school show organisations, family gatherings, or multiple-work spaces, determined these leadership experiences’ type and nature. Leadership is viewed as a dynamic practice with entrepreneurial, social, religious, cultural and political capital where the women participants got the opportunity to experience leadership as a day-to-day practice.

Given the nested nature of the factors that influence the women participants, I find that their career path and their leadership actions and practices include entanglements, uncertainty, flexibility, entropy and complexity. This means that the leadership concept looks abstract with a “future past-past future” flexibly connected journey where leadership is unceasingly self-created, co-created and fashioned by interactions (like particles in a quantum discontinuity). *“The existence of the quantum discontinuity means that the past is never left behind, never finished once and for all, and the future is not what will come to be in an unfolding of the present moment; rather, the past and the future are enfolded”* in the participants’ manner of iterative becoming (Barad, 2007, p. 234).

Leadership encompasses the notion of “us” instead of “me (the boss) and the others (you, the subordinates)”. Leadership is not always about hierarchy and power but it means having synergies and richness of relations. Leadership is not a “power engine” that is only based on performance, productivity and efficiency; instead, leadership is like a living ecosystem that is dynamic, alive, and creative and has a self-organising capability. Leadership is not merely about change or the

deterministic capacity to change, but leadership is about transformable transformation, transforming the un-transformable, authentic transformation; in other words, leadership has the means of changing the room instead of continuing to work within new settings of the same room. Leadership is not about evaluating conflicts and barriers as sources but to look at the barriers and conflicts as resources bringing more extensive creative opportunities. Leadership aims to terminate stationary states, especially in the generativity phase, while providing new intellectual energy to think beyond boundaries. Finally, leadership is to live with complementarity, discontinuity, overtness, tactility and complexity. In short, leadership is not about one reality (singularity) but of many realities (plurality) describing both the processes and actions in the processes by offering the trust to walk towards the future by exploiting the entire set of quantum possibilities available.

Based on the findings of this research study, my understanding of leadership is that it has a gender-mix of characteristics and does not rely solely on masculine or feminine approaches. Both men and women leaders deal with human beings of both genders. They strive to create cosmic ecosystems that recognise and acknowledge the expression and development of both the professional and private selves – including the affective, technical, cognitive, psychic, intellectual, spiritual and political dimensions. These contribute to a sense of being valued as a person and militate against personal diminishment. Women have entangled resources (seizing challenges and opportunities, obstacles, creative thinking, and problem solving abilities) and superposition natures (multi-tasking, multi-understanding, multi-thinking abilities) that unfold in their leadership-life processes (childhood, adolescent, adult, home, family, work). In some women, the leadership trait reveals itself clearly with time and place, while in others, the hidden leadership trait has to be activated-for it to be discovered.

I can see that leadership is created by the concept of **PALS**: **P**ower to inspire and give autonomy; **A**uthorship that recognises agility, artisanship, choreography and achievement; **L**ove that encompasses empathy, inclusiveness, caring and pluralism; and **S**ignificance that knits the hearts, minds and souls into the wisdom of collective destiny and rejoicing successes. Therefore, after reflecting on the above-mentioned characteristics of leadership, I conclude that the new theoretical construct of **Quantum Feminist Leadership** is the basis of this research study, with the social construct, femininity and gender (SFG) conceptual framework being its main levers.

7.4 Implications of the research

This thesis explored the under-researched area of women's participation in educational leadership in the secondary school context in the Mauritian setting. The research has contributed to the body of knowledge by providing new insights into women's career progression and the challenges they face when accessing and sustaining leadership positions and the resources they deploy to overcome the barriers and practice in leadership positions. It makes recommendations for theoretical inferences, policy, context, practice and future research.

7.4.1 Theoretical implications

This study has contributed to the theories of socio-constructionism, feminism and genderism by adopting self-negotiation, instead of fighting for rights, and viewing challenges as quantum resources instead of obstacles. Moreover, it shows how some of the challenges have been transformed into resources to move ahead in the process of a career and how the women leader participants use multiple combinations and permutations of leadership styles and approaches in the leadership space that resembles the quantum superposition.

Even if the research is limited in scope with three participants, this research offers valuable multidimensional theoretical, practical and methodological contributions. At the theoretical level, it has generated and recorded a historical account of women's experiences of ascending the different levels of hierarchy and working as leaders in the secondary education sector of Mauritius as women pioneers. Moreover, new insights at the level of socio-cultural layering have emerged from the views of urban residents about rural residents in Mauritius which is a small island state with rapid and modern infrastructural development and connectivity in both urban and rural areas. More in-depth research can be undertaken on this issue of infrastructural modernity and socio-cultural landscape change in Mauritius.

Since this research is the first study on the area of women in educational leadership in Mauritius and in the international setting, it provides the unheard Mauritian women's perspective on the topic. It conveys commonalities, variances and new insights into the prevailing literature corpus in the field. Hence, this study is a valuable contribution to research and knowledge on women's

contribution in the field of educational leadership, representing the case of the small island state of Mauritius compared to the vast body of research on women in educational leadership in developed states like the USA, Canada, United Kingdom and Australia (Coleman, 2002; Mitroussi & Mitroussi, 2009; Moorosi, 2010).

Through its academic freedom, thematic analysis, as a constructionist method, examines the meaning of lived experiences encompassing realities and events captured from data gathered. It is an issue of predominance in terms of space within each data item and across the entire data set. Hence, more illustrations of the theme across the data set do not mean that the theme itself is more critical than others. In *“qualitative analysis, no hard-and-fast answers to the questions exist, and neither do they influence the proportion of the data that needs to display evidence of the theme for it to be considered a theme”* (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Life is complex and the complexities are the ways women leaderships are implanted in the multiple contexts of women educational leaders' lives and work, the researcher believed that narratives can help researchers in the field make sense of and construe the meaning of women's leadership and management experiences in the different male-dominated settings. Hence, in this study the researcher has pronounced and illustrated a conceptual framework that incorporates socio-constructionist, feminist and gender perspectives (SFG conceptual framework) and leadership practices, all dialoguing together, in the co-creation, presentation, re-presentation and interpretation of life stories. Socio-feminist and gender and leadership narratives' interpretations is a dynamic and complex exploration process that entangled questioning, listening, attending, understanding, seeking, classifying, discovering, co-creating, presenting, re-presenting, and interpreting life stories. The iterative and informative processes in the interpretive procedures activated with the progress of the research project and continued with directed research conversations around attentive topics, vis-a-vis the research questions. Ultimately, the women participants had embraced the “art of self-creative diplomacy” – a new feminine characteristic that I call “diplo-poiesis feminism” as compared to the continuous struggling for recognition and rights (feminist emancipation). Finally, in the theorisation of leadership practices, the concept of quantum feminist leadership emerged considering the multiple roles in multi-directional, non-

deterministic and endless in time and space, women educational leaders have to embrace in their life.

7.4.2 Methodological implications

This narrative inquiry research created a relationship between the participants and the researcher to establish a collaborative rapport. Data generated was in the form of original narrative stories, which moved from the general to the more personal form of experiences to overview the more significant societal scenery. The researcher, as a pro-feminist, was interested in these latter types of experiences because the women expressed their points of view from their perspectives.

The researcher was challenged by the concerns about positionality, identity, reflexivity, polyvocality, ethics, collaboration, emotions and male-interviewer relation with women participants, intersubjectivity, and his authority as interpreter. The tensions, challenges, and opportunities as a male researcher in doing and developing the research approach to feminist research and narrative interpretations are reflected below.

Within research interview settings, people instinctively voice their stories to correlate and bond together momentous events, trials, and significant relations in their lives to make their experiences meaningful. Therefore, although semi-structured questions guided the interview processes, the researcher allowed the participants to talk about themselves as women, women leaders in their personal life, home and family settings, work and any other context they feel free to voice in whatever way they choose. Apart from giving the participants voice liberty, such an action process prevented them from forgetting to narrate meaningful episodes of their lived experiences. The conversations that occurred during research interviews were the direct result of shared moments and understandings between the women research participants and researcher-listener-interpreter. The researcher found that exchange allowed for a free flow of thoughts and encouraged participants to participate more fully in the research by offering their interpretations and contexts. The resulting research narratives were conversations bounded by the context (i.e., persons, place, time, interactions, and imbued meanings) of the research interview. The researcher viewed narratives as socially constructed tapestries that knitted together unique filaments of personal,

relational, and cultural realities, perceptions, and experiences to facilitate the creation of fluid meaning.

7.4.3 Policy implications

This thesis also has implications on policy and practice of gender equality in educational leadership and all entities of the public and private sectors as there has been a tendency to note the first woman president, the first woman speaker, the first woman vice-chancellor and the first women judge, among others. The Government of Mauritius has not yet signed the SADC Protocol on Gender Development (Kampilipili, 2017) that provides for positive gender discrimination, which is not in line with the Constitution of Mauritius. Although the Equal Opportunity Act 2007 condemns all forms of discrimination and the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Equal Opportunity Tribunal became established in 2012, covert discriminatory practices are mainly related to gender equality or political adherence. A new policy needs to be framed to address the following issues:

- Regulation and promotion of gender equality in public and private spheres;
- Elimination of gender-based discrimination to ensure that the rights of women and men are guaranteed through legislation;
- Making provisions for gender equality principles so that the socio-political and economic inequalities are reduced substantively;
- Making new legislation that caters to the responsibilities of public and private entities to eliminate gender barriers and provide for equal opportunities for both men and women;
- Make provisions in the law to cater to gender equality and gender role balance in the family and work sites; and
- Adopt appropriate guidelines to support women in role conflicts, considering women's multiple roles that often hinder them from pursuing advanced education and seek promotion.

At the level of training, the public and private training institutions such as the Civil Service College, Women's Council, Mauritius Institute of Directors, Mauritius Institute of Education, University of Mauritius and Business Mauritius should develop their leadership programmes in their respective fields. Besides disseminating knowledge, these institutions would be more efficiently utilised to provide ways to have practical and professional training of aspiring women

leaders before they formally gain leadership positions. Moreover, a professional mentoring platform could be created where retired women leaders could provide personal and professional leadership mentoring and coaching activities for the existing women leaders and those in the pipeline. In this way, there will be better social cohesion of the women leaders in the home and family, and the place of work and allow them to face or avoid gender stereotyping situations. Above all, women themselves could be empowered to plan their career prospects to lead them to eventual leadership positions.

7.4.4 Context implications

In Mauritius, although a limited number of quantitative researches have been carried out on school leadership, this qualitative research is among the first significant studies on women educational leaders at different hierarchical levels, dominated by males, in the secondary school context of Mauritius. The findings reinforce the widely accepted view that leadership is context-specific.

The research was carried out in a multi-cultural, multi-religious, multi-lingual small island state having its human development through different colonial occupations such as Dutch, Portuguese, French and British. However, independence was not fought with war or civil disobedience movement but rather obtained when the island was not agriculturally reproducible and no natural resources were found to exist. Hence, the last colonial power, the British, left Mauritius in 1967 with an almost totally uneducated adult population; only boys went to schools while only girls from privileged families attended the only secondary school (Addison & Hazareesingh, 1999). Although Mauritius has socio-cultural, religious and political systems similar to other countries, they are very different. There is an almost total socio-cultural and religious fusion in Mauritian society therefore the way these factors influenced women to be in educational leadership positions is different from other countries. The findings of this research should be used with care when comparing them to women educational leaders outside Mauritius. Therefore, the findings strengthen the broadly accepted opinion that leadership and management are context-specific (Karamanidou, 2017).

The research showed emerging evidence of a shift from a patriarchal family to gender equality in Mauritius. It is helpful for girls and women, but the researcher believes that there is still room for

improvement in terms of psychological and social support in the families and the professional lives of women leaders.

7.4.5 Practice implications

The participants in this study have evolved in multi-ethnic and multi-cultural settings with limited resources since their early childhoods. They grew to perceive the different social backgrounds of people they came into contact with in the home, in their neighbourhood surroundings, at school and in their careers. Their lives were moulded by home and family experiences, and in future years, towards the dynamics that secured these philosophies in their leadership practices. Hence, irrespective of their socio-cultural and religious beliefs and practices, the participants acknowledged the role that religious and cultural practices played in their lives and in the approach used during their leadership tenures and practices.

The participants, who were guided by parents or mentors towards leadership positions, displayed an appreciation for socio-emotional and professional developments of their students, teachers and other subordinate staff. Their spirituality and religious practices added to the development of their leadership practices together with their entrepreneurial tendencies that include creativity, achievers' characteristics and problem-solving skills. The practice of distributed, collective, relational, shared and authentic leadership shows that leadership is a socio-constructive phenomenon.

In representing women's stories, preserving the poise between the voices of the women educational leader participants and the researchers was an ongoing challenge in gender, feminist and socio-constructionist narrative interpretations. The formats the researcher chose to epitomise the women's narratives incorporated complex "ownership issues." The researcher specifically wanted to honour the women educational leader participants who exposed their life experiences and views in the development of the study, rather than entirely favouring his "overwriting" of his words and expressions. Hence, all the narratives in this study was entirely the voice representation of the women participants. Altogether, the researcher needs to admit his role and lively engagement in the 'co-creation' and interpretation of these stories, and the re-presentation of these stories to other women educational leaders, women leaders in other fields and other researchers, in promoting women's leadership and management.

Another challenge the researcher faced was not to errand one format of the narratives over another. The selections of whose narratives to bring in the forefront and present and re-present to the congregation had inferences in terms of the researcher male gender and his role as a pro-feminist researcher with a responsibility to fight the interpersonal and the societal edifices that prolong the subjugation of women educational leader participants.

This research promotes an awareness of the Mauritian women educators vis-à-vis their future career developments and the male figures that are presently in the Educators and Deputy-Rectors' posts. The study offers "food for thought" for researchers, gender development institutions, and policymakers, especially SIDS. Women's professions and enrolments for leadership positions, apart from the secondary schooling system, can be reengineered and restructured to improve women progression to leadership.

7.5 Research study limitations

No research is free from limitations. Limitations can occur due to restraints on methodology, data collection, and analytical processes, influencing the research study's findings (Simon, 2011). Some of the limitations are highlighted below.

7.5.1 Access to participants and sample size

Though few women occupy senior leadership positions in the Mauritian secondary education system, accessing these women as potential participants posed a difficulty due to their work schedules. Their small numbers also posed a problem in selecting a suitable sample size.

Another difficulty of the study was the continuous non-availability of the women's physical presence at interview sites. Although two participants agreed to participate in the interviews to be conducted only at the workplace, they were often called to join meetings. This disrupted the smooth flow of the interview and therefore no data could be recorded since the interviews were often interrupted. This also explains the under-representation of the views of the women educational leaders. The present study focused only on a small group of women educational leaders

who assented to partake in the research study. As Creswell and Plano-Clark (2011) suggested, when quantitative and qualitative research methods are used together, there is a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone. Unfortunately, the research design was only qualitative, and a narrative inquiry as a methodology allowed only for a selective and limited population size.

7.5.2 Data collection and analysis

All the lived stories crafted were based on self-reporting narratives from the individual participants but they may have given answers to interview questions based on what they knew was socio-culturally and politically appropriate compared to giving “off the cuff” responses. In addition, data collection in qualitative research is very time-consuming in terms of scheduling interviews when the participants are free, doing the transcriptions of the audio data, processing the data for categorisation and thematic analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007). This requires thorough knowledge and experience for reasonable interpretation and meaning-making of the data. As a novice researcher, vital aspects could have been omitted unknowingly (Bowen, 2009).

7.5.3 Determination of causality between diverse research phenomena

All qualitative research studies are unique and complex which explains the individual differences and similarities. Moreover, the research cannot be replicated leading to inconsistent conclusions (Barbour, 2000). Hence, this research does not aim to present any generally absolute standard model of career navigation of women educational leaders. Such an endeavour is neither concrete nor precise since contextual and circumstantial features are likely to be isolated or interconnected.

7.6 Theoretical contribution of this research study

The impact of gender choices and feminist struggles are established features of the existing literature. The sexual identity of women tends to be an obstacle in the professional development of women from institutional and organisational points of view. The gender bias that continues in organisations, institutions, and society disrupts women’s learning cycles towards becoming leaders (Ibarra, Ely & Kolb, 2013). However, the current study is significant as it shows how the traditional patriarchal notions and stereotypes have been applied to resources that have brought an evolution in both men and women’s thinking and practices by recognising the opportunities and

competencies of women. Many argue that women are as capable and talented as men to achieve merit-based leadership positions promotions (Barbosa, 1999). Nevertheless, the delusion of worthiness rests in the distorted equality of societal opportunities for both men and women experiencing different hindrances in their profession (Hryniewicz & Vianna, 2018).

The findings of this study point out the substantial role of the extended family in Mauritian society instead of just the patriarchal role as, although they came from traditional families, the girls' career choices were not influenced by patriarchy. Instead, the girls' success was promoted and sponsored. Similar attitudes influence women's access to leadership positions and leadership practices, unlike in other communities where parents and traditional societies believe that it is inappropriate for women to become educational leaders. Moreover, the role of husbands in Mauritius is progressively changing into that of a complementary life partner as the women educational leaders reported that their husbands had been supportive and encouraged them to step into educational leadership positions even though they had family, home and domestic issues.

Another theoretical issue that this study addressed is the requirement of 15 years of teaching experience as an educator in the public sector (Pay Research Bureau, 2013), which inexorably means that a career break to pursue further study and taking maternity leave, will likely constrain women's progress into leadership positions. This divergence is likely to act as a "glass ceiling" concept which is visible in the literature.

Another aspect of the theoretical importance of this study is the existence of conservative groups (Muslim, Hindu and Catholic) and their restrictive influence on women in leadership roles (Alahmadi, 2011; O'Neil & Domingo, 2015, 2016; Domingo et al., 2015), the current study shows that this factor is not a consideration since their religious education helped them in the leadership spaces.

Conventionally, there are in-built stereotypical interpretations in rural areas, while the urban ethos is more likely to espouse contemporary attitudes to gendered leadership (Lee, Chang & Kim, 2011). However, in this study, it has been naturally acceptable for women be in leadership positions. Nevertheless, there is still room for improvement.

In past studies (Chorn, 1995; Loden, 1977; Rogers, 1988), the focus was on exploring the feminine leadership style. However, the focus has shifted towards challenging the dominant masculine perception of women in leadership roles (Reay & Ball, 2000; Reynolds et al., 2008; Coleman, 2009; Celikten, 2009; Hadjipavlou, 2009). In this study, we see a blend of femininity and masculinity approaches that complement the leadership practices for the effective running of the organisation. This blended approach further adds to the Diplo-feminism construct, which involves concern for staff, creative problem resolving, cooperation and team building, collective power dynamics, and partaking in decision-making.

This study is the first piece of local qualitative research that offers the Mauritian viewpoint on women's accession in male-dominated leadership spaces and how they navigate these leadership spaces which contributes to the corpus of literature in the field. In my opinion, this thesis has achieved the aim of the study. The significance of this research lies in the fact that it gave insights into the lived experiences of Mauritian women experiencing and progressing to leadership in the secondary schooling context of Mauritius. The implications stemming from this thesis for future research and possible recommendations are presented in the next section.

7.7 Future research

Despite limitations, the research has laid a stepping-stone for further and deeper research in women's educational leaders and women in leadership and their practices in Mauritius's multi-cultural and religious contexts. Some future areas of research to be explored are listed below:

Firstly, additional research mainly focuses on Mauritian women's disparate representation in leadership in the secondary schooling system and other educational sectors such as the BEC educational and the fee-paying international secondary educational systems. Using the same methods, it is suggested that building on this investigation will give further insights into the phenomenon.

Secondly, this research portrayed stories from the lived experiences of a cohort of women participants who occupy the upper levels of the Mauritian secondary education sector. The experiences of women who have not opted to evolve to a leadership position in the secondary schooling context or in other public education sectors in Mauritius may offer different and

supplementary perspectives. This could allow for comparisons with those who have leadership positions.

Thirdly, the scope of this study was to look into the research topic from women educational leaders' standpoints by focusing on their lived experiences of attaining leadership positions in male-dominated leadership spaces. The perspective of male educators and male educational leaders who collaborated with women educational leaders could offer additional insights on the issue.

Another avenue of research in the Mauritian context could be how men experience career promotion into secondary school leadership despite the feminisation of the teaching profession. This leads to the question of how men explain women's under-representation in leadership positions.

Additionally, the research topic on “women educational leaders” might be useful for further study, since the pandemic COVID-19 has impacted over the last two years, to consider the extent to which disruption to schooling and educational system settings has impacted women leaders. While this might sit beyond the data collection, acknowledgement could be useful for future researchers as there has been evidence that COVID-19 pandemic adversely affected the careers of women as they have stepped in to pick up additional caring responsibilities.

Finally, another research possibility arising from this thesis is to compare findings of women educational leaders in private educational organisations to similar hierarchical settings, for instance, the clergy dominate the leadership positions in the BEC environment. Hence, new research may be conducted on meaning-making concerning the navigation of the career path of women educational leaders from the BEC of similar designations, ages and socio-cultural backgrounds.

Based on the women participants' experiences, some general recommendations that could be considered are:

- Developing a sensitising campaign on the importance of the Mauritius Equal Opportunities Act 2007 and the dissemination of information of Work Place Discrimination;

- Opening up a conversation about the under-representation of women educational leaders or women leaders in other fields with the higher authority and policymakers about how the situation can be redressed;
- Providing access to a range of leadership accredited courses and training through the Civil Service College of Mauritius that caters for Continuous Professional Development of civil servants; and
- Developing a connected network of retired educational leaders and in-service and aspiring educational leaders to engage in leadership focus group discussions where mentoring and support are provided.

7.8 Overall Conclusion

This research study on women educational leaders in the secondary school sector in the Mauritian context reveals significant implications for the education sector and other governmental and private sectors. The struggles of the three women participants who navigated their daily lives to reach and sustain leadership positions has shed new light on fundamental qualities for reaching the goal targeted by these women leaders which are: patience, perseverance, empathy and love, motherly affection and care, humility, diligence and spirituality.

The findings of this study provide an insight into the leadership practices, competencies, styles and characteristics of the women participants that have enabled them to chart a career path to leadership. Examining factors, such as patriarchy and family, religious belief and culture, political and network savvy, power and gender, and entrepreneurship, show the women's abilities to lead effectively. The study signifies the researcher's attempt to stimulate aspiring and existing educational leaders to practice leadership more effectively. The results of this study will serve as a valuable resource for leaders to reflect on their intrinsic characteristics and skills, and abilities developed through maturity and experience.

Although the population sample was limited, the research findings may be extrapolated in other sectors. It has led to developing the “diplo-poiesis-feminist” theoretical construct where the career path is juxtaposed with the metaphor of Quantum entanglement. In addition, the leadership styles resemble a Quantum electron spin superposition where multi-combinations of leadership styles are adopted depending on the forecasted and improvised situations, despite being limited to leaders in

similar situations as in this research study. The study, therefore, has important and broader implications not only for leadership practices but also in the field of feminist geography.

The researcher hopes that this study's findings and conclusions will push the research boundary by merging lived leadership experiences with quantum processing. It will undoubtedly render the research more meaningful to understand new and remote leadership demands due to unexpected health events like Covid-19 and rapid technological changes, especially in artificial intelligence and blockchain.

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APPENDIX A: APPROVAL OF STUDY BY RESEARCH COMMITTEE OF UKZN



UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL
INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI

02 November 2015

Mr Eze S Aliraja 212573484
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mr Aliraja

Protocol reference number: HSS/1315/0150
Project title: The Geographies of Women Educational leaders in the Secondary Context.

Expedited Approval

In response to your application dated 02 September 2015, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully


Dr Shemuka Singh (Chair)

/gm

cc: Supervisor: Professor PJ Morojwiri and Professor S Panyasandty
cc: Academic Leader Research: Professor Kamwendo
cc: School Administrators: Ms B Bhengu, Ms T Khumalo and Ms PW Ndlimande

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee
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APPENDIX B: LETTER SEEKING GATE KEEPER PERMISSION

Mr. ALIRAJA Bye Salim
29, Orchidees Street,
Coromandel.
Tel: 57548459

22 August 2014.

Dr. TAHER Amode
Chief Technical Officer
Ministry of Education and Human Resources
MITD House, Phoenix.

Dear Sir

Re: GATEKEEPER PERMISSION FOR DOCTORAL RESEARCH STUDY

I am a doctoral student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in collaboration with the Mauritius Institute of Education. As a requirement of my doctoral degree in education I have to undertake a research study entitled “*The Geographies of Female Educational Leaders in the Secondary Context – A Narrative Inquiry*”. I intend to explore Female Rectors’, Administrators’, Assistant Directors’ and Directors’ leadership experiences in general and their views on educational management in particular. The research study seeks to (i) map the female participants’ own meaning-rich explanations and descriptions of all subsystems that affect and contribute to their experiences of secondary education and their views on educational management, (ii) explore the spatial and experiential patterns of the women secondary educational leaders, (iii) explore the inclusionary processes and exclusionary pressures they experience, (iv) investigate how women secondary educational leaders navigate these pressures to arrive and remain in the higher positions in a traditionally male defined dominated profession. As the head of the technical cadre where the Female Rectors, Administrators, Assistant Directors and Directors in the study are under your umbrella, I am seeking your permission to interview those female participants in their official status of rectors, administrators, assistant directors and directors, and any other stakeholders in the state secondary educational sector occupying leadership positions outside their working hours at a place convenient to them.

The research would consist of an interview lasting approximately 45 minutes which will be conducted at outside working hours and at a place they would feel at ease. The interview will be

audio-taped. I want to assure you that every precaution will be taken to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the information provided by the participants. The data will always be kept in a locked cabinet in my supervisor's office in Mauritius, Dr Shakuntala Payneeandy, Associate Professor at Mauritius Institute of Education. The names of participants will not be on any text and in the study pseudonyms will be used. The identity of any of the participants will not be revealed. As with any research conducted under the auspices of the University, it is guided by strict ethical considerations that protect the participant at all times. Such considerations are anonymity, confidentiality of responses and the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

It is hoped that the findings of the research will not only enrich my own understandings of the topic but will be used for improving the knowledge and development of the participants, my peers, myself and any aspiring educational leaders. Further clarification can be obtained from my supervisors Dr. Pholoho Morojele, Academic Leader: Research & Higher Degrees, University of KwaZulu-Natal Edgewood Campus , Cell phone: 071 041 0452, E-Mail: Morojele@ukzn.ac.za and Dr Shakuntala Payneeandy, Associate Professor Mauritius Institute of Education, Cell phone: 57921156, E-Mail: s.payneeandy@mieonline.org. Should you have any questions about your participation and your rights in the study you may contact Ms Phume Ximba of UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at ximbap@ukzn.ac.za or call her at 27 41 2604587.

The permission letter in original should bear your name in full, signature and stamp.

I shall be grateful to you if my demand could be favourably entertained by as earlier possible as I have to submit the permission letter together with the final research proposal for approval by the UKZN Research Ethics Committee.

Yours faithfully,

Mr Bye Salim ALIRAJA

APPENDIX C: GATE KEEPER PERMISSION LETTER



REPUBLIC OF MAURITIUS
**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & HUMAN RESOURCES, TERTIARY
EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH**

Our Ref: ME/305/3 T₇

16 April 2015

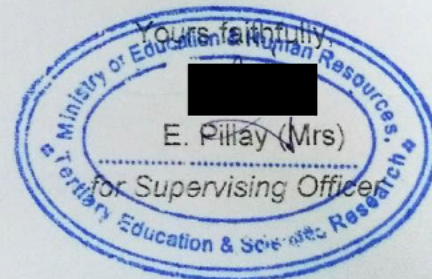
Mr Bye Salim Aliraja
29, Orchidées Street,
Coromandel,
Beau Bassin

Dear Sir,

Subject: Gatekeeper Permission for Doctoral Research Study

Please refer to your letter dated 22 August 2014 in connection with the above subject.

2. The Ministry is pleased to inform you that approval has been granted for you to carry out your research as mentioned in the letter under reference.
3. It is understood that it will be left to the Rectors, Administrators, Assistant Directors and Directors themselves to decide whether to participate or not.
4. You are kindly advised to liaise with them prior to conducting your interviews.



APPENDIX D: LETTER TO PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT

Mr. ALIRAJA Bye Salim
29, Orchidees Street,
Coromandel.
Tel: 57548459
Email : b.al.salim@intnet.mu

Date: 24.11.2016

Mrs XXXXX
Director
Ministry of Education
MITD House
Phoenix.

Dear Mrs XXXXX

Re: Request to Participate as Participant in a PhD research study.

My name is Bye Salim Aliraja and I am a doctoral student at University of KwaZulu-Natal in collaboration with the Mauritius Institute of Education. I am conducting a research study on female educational leaders. The title of my research is **“The Geographies of Women Educational Leaders in the Secondary Context – A Narrative Inquiry”**.

Research Permission has already been obtained from the Ministry of Education, a copy of the letter is attached.

I intend to explore Women Administrators', Assistant Directors' and Directors' leadership experiences in general and their views on educational management in particular. I shall be conducting **interviews using an audio recording device**, at a time and place most convenient to you. The recorded interviews will then be transcribed and then descriptive, interpretive and theoretical data analysis will be conducted. Each interview will last for 1-2 hours and may be split depending on your preference. Your participation in this research is voluntary.

Any information given by you cannot be used against you, and the collected data will be used for purposes of this research only. Data will be stored in secure storage in my local supervisor's office and destroyed after 5 years.

To maintain confidentiality, **I will use pseudonyms to your names** and describe your position in a manner that will in no way link you to the interview results. I will be transcribing all interviews myself, so no one else will have access to the interviews.

Your involvement is purely for academic purposes only, and there are no financial benefits involved. However, the research will contribute greatly in the domain of knowledge, especially the lived experiences of women educational leaders and the meaning-making of it for the benefit of everyone in the educational field.

It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but I have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential risks.

If you have any questions, please contact me by email at: b.al.salim@intnet.mu or by phone on 57548459. If you have any queries about your rights as a volunteer in the research, please contact Mr. P. Mohun of UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee Office on Tel: 041 260 4557 or E-mail: mohunp@ukzn.ac.za

If you are agreeable to participate in the study do contact me by email or by phone.

Prior to the research interview I would like to have a first meeting of about 15- 20 minutes with you to explain and clarify the research and also explain to you about the use of artefacts that will help during the interview. Kindly do mail me or phone call me to inform about the 1st meeting.

I do hope that I will get your collaboration to participate in the research on Women's Leadership.

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

Yours faithfully,

Bye Salim Aliraja

APPENDIX E: PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Participant Consent Sheet

*“THE GEOGRAPHIES OF FEMALE EDUCATIONAL LEADERS IN THE SECONDARY CONTEXT –
A NARRATIVE INQUIRY”*

Dear Participant,

I invite you to take part in a research study, entitled above, as part of a doctoral thesis at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, in Durban (Edgewood Campus). In this study female educational leaders will narrate their stories about their leadership experiences. From this study the following issues will crop out: (a) What are the professional experiences of female educational leaders, (b) How do women educational leaders navigate in their positions, (c) What are leadership patterns do women educational leaders adopt, (d) Why do the secondary female educational leaders experience what they have experienced.

I will conduct three interviews with you. The duration of each of these interviews will be around 1hr. The interview will be audio taped. Every effort will be made to ensure that no one will know that you took part in this study. If I use any information that you share with me, I will be careful to use it in a way that will prevent people from being able to identify you. To protect your identity I will ask you to provide a different name during the interview. You will be allowed to read and review all the transcripts. You are free to withdraw from the research at any stage without negative or undesirable consequences. All information is only intended for the research purposes.

Permission to conduct this research study has been obtained from University of KwaZulu-Natal. The supervisors of this project are Dr. S. Payneeandy from Mauritius Institute of Education and Dr.Morojelo from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, School of Education. Should you have any questions about your participation and your rights in the study you may contact Ms Phume Ximba of UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at ximbap@ukzn.ac.za or call her at 27 41 2604587.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing two (2) pages.

Thank you for your co-operation.

Name of participant	Signature	Date
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
Name of Supervisor	Signature	Date

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

Interview protocol for Women Educational Leaders in Secondary Educational System

Childhood

1. Can you tell me about your family of birth? Siblings, parents and grandparents.
2. What was your growing up days like? What kind of activities did you engage in?
3. Was religion important in your family?
4. What special events/occasions did your family or community celebrate?
5. What do you remember most about your parents or other family members during your childhood years?
6. What feelings come up when you remember your parents or grandparents?

Schooling / Adolescent

1. At what age did you start attending school?
2. Did your other siblings attend school too?
3. What was your primary school life like?
4. How about your secondary school?
5. What do you remember most about your college life?
6. Who financed your education? How affordable was the school fees?
7. Do you remember any particular challenges you faced that might have prevented your schooling?
8. Who or what influenced and shaped your schooling life most?
9. Who were your role models? Why?

Marriage and work life (educator to educational leader in schools and to higher educational leader at zones and headquarter)

1. Did you marry before or after college?
2. Can you tell me as much as possible about your professional life before you became a school rector/administrator/assistant director/director?
3. How old were your kids (if they do) when you started working?

4. How did you become a school rector/administrator/assistant director/director, meaning your career stages? Did you aspire to become a rector/ administrator/assistant director/director? Was gender important?
5. What influence did gender have on your decisions and identity, on both long-term and short-term, or even daily basis?
6. How did being a married woman with children affect your leadership?
7. Was the school you led located within or outside rural and/or urban region(s)?
8. Was your assistant a male or a female?
9. How did you feel about being a woman rector/ administrator/assistant director/director in your school/organisation?
10. Have you had any particular challenges to your leadership in your school and/or organisation?
11. How did you navigate these as a woman?

Other follow up and cross-examination questions

12. Have you experienced discrimination in any form? What strategies did you deploy to manage/ negotiate this?
13. In male-dominated professions, some female leaders speak of the “double-binds”. Have you ever experienced a situation where you felt this pressure?
14. What would you like to change about the female leadership?

15. How you come to decide to become a leader or decided to apply for a position in educational leadership? i.e What pushed you to apply...
16. How have you prepared yourself in addition to qualification, to apply for leadership position? (...any community involvement,...member of any social club...lions club...etc)
17. Can you tell me your experience (positive and negative) as a women candidate for leadership position, taking into consideration that these positions are/have mainly dominated by male, when you attended your 1st interview? How many times you applied for this post?
18. How did you feel during the interview? Did you feel that your gender had an influence on the way the interview was going on?
19. How did you feel when you got the promotion?

20. What was your aspiration in becoming an educational leader initially (1st time) and now? Why? Any kind of mentorship/advice you received?

21. What kind of help you received from colleagues (male and female)? How did you manage to establish protocols and practices in your profession?

22. How did being a married woman with children affect your leadership? How do husband/children/family have an influence on your leadership positions?

23. How were you dealing with male and female staff, male and female parents, male and female students? What kinds of relationship were there? And equally what kind of tensions were there? (Regarding schooling context, cultural context, internal and external constraints of schools/ministry)

24. Any example according to your experience, which kind of gender would you like to work and why?

25. How did/do you feel about being a woman leader in the secondary schooling context? Did you ever feel your identity as a woman conflicts with your identity as an educational leader? Any example?

26. What challenges (positive/negative) you had during your leadership position and how you tackled them? What worked and did not work?

What has been the great challenge (s) in your leadership career?

27. To what extent did your gender influenced/influences the way you worked as an educational leader or the way people faced/faces you? (...any specific way that you were compelled to adopt in order to lead...)

28. Can you say something about your personal developments which you believe have impacted on the effectiveness of your leadership?

And what are the things you do that can help to make a school/organisation effective in order to achieve the organisational goal?

29. Does culture have an influence on women occupying a leadership position? Why according to you?

Any suggestions to women aspiring to educational leadership and to policy makers based on your experiences?

30. How do you react to criticism? An example of an episode of you being right but a wrong critic on you. And an example of an episode of you being wrong and a critic on you, so how do you reacted to it and what lesson you derived from it.

Have you ever felt that you have had to prove yourself worth as woman?

Did you ever feel like giving up at any stage in your progress towards leadership position?

31. Authority/Power

Can you talk about whether you have used your position and authority to make things happen, and if so, How?

Can Spell out the difficulties and challenges you have come across in using your authority to achieve what you have set out to do?

32. What message you have to give to aspiring women educational leaders? What advice will you give them?

Thank you for your valuable time, support and contribution given.

APPENDIX G: PARTICIPANTS' INTERVIEWS AND CODING EXTRACTS

ANANDA-AGHA'S INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT WITH INITIAL CODING TO CONSTRUCT THE CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENT EXPERIENCES' NARRATIVE

I: Bon, Ok Madam. So before we begin, with this interview, so, I would like to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you have understand your participation in this study and it is entirely voluntary, so at any point in time you may refuse to answer any question or you may withdraw from this study at any time. It's free, totally free.

P: Read and signed consent form.

I: Oui.

P: and noted contents.

I: Oui.

I: Ok, so any question before we proceed?

P: No it's ok.

I: So, so the first part of this interview will be concerned a bit of your childhood, and then it will come with schooling. So with childhood, so, would you like to tell me a bit about yourself first, and then family, your siblings, your parents or grandparents, whoever you want to talk.

P: Yeah, ok then, so as you may be aware, I start by telling you that I was born in 1959 and I started my primary schooling in [...] around 1965. So as you may be aware, Mauritius was not that developed at that time and being from a poor family, we had to go to school walking for example [...respondent giggling] this is only one of the piece and then we [...] sometimes we didn't even have the proper books and equipment for school but then we enjoyed going to school with other friends from the same village walking some 3 or 4 kilometers and us [...] we were made to understand that education would be our social way to get out and escalate the social ladder and the way to get out from the orphan background and we made it a point to study. So this is [...] as such I don't have any brother or sister and I was brought up at my uncle's place. [...] background noise] my mother always supported me during my years of study. Then at that time there was scholarship in the primary, if you were among the top in all of Mauritius then you'll be given the scholarship and you didn't pay the schooling nor the bus fare, and I happened to be one of them and for my secondary school therefore I went to the best school at that time, travelled some [...] thinking] 2 hours from my village up to, up to town with transport problems lots of [...] unsure] as such the distance was not very

Commented [AS1091]: CHILDHOOD AND SCHOOLING

Commented [AS1092]: Born and schooling during British Occupation before Independence in 1968

Commented [AS1093]: Poor family

Commented [AS1094]: Determination

Commented [AS1095]: Lack of facilities as compared to today

Commented [AS1096]: Team work

Commented [AS1097]: Socio-constructionism

Commented [AS1098]: Determination to succeed

Commented [AS1099]: Orphan unique child

Commented [AS10910]: Socio-constructionism/constructivism, vision, objectives

Commented [AS10911]: Determination to emerge and be someone in life

Commented [AS10912]:

LEA'S INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT WITH INITIAL CODING TO CONSTRUCT THE PROFESSIONAL AND SCHOOL LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES' NARRATIVE

1. I: Govt secondary sector?

2. P: It was a very enriching experience. You know the level of the school was a bit average we have to work hard with the students and it was not like the College we have to work till 3 and we don't have off, we had to ask with the rector for early departure to attend course and he did not accede to our request, unless we make a "small contribution" from our salary to the school. I refused, others agreed on that. On Tuesdays and Thursdays the course starts at 4 and we were not able to be on time. But I manage to do it. Lecturers were kind enough to understand our situation for the lateness in the courses. The school head was a Chinese lady, the sister of the school Manager. The school belonged to a Chinese family, I have forgotten the their name.... Chinese name not easy to remember, hahaha...

3. I: Was it being sponsored?

4. P: No but all the teachers we fight for it some get it but then we had to sign a private agreement with the manager to continue working for them for 5 years and contribute a token sum of money, a certain percentage of salary towards school development otherwise I should pay a certain fees if we are leaving. I did not agree because we did not get any sponsorship nor release to follow course. It was an imposition. Others could not do anything because there was the fear of termination of job from manager.

5. I: How many years?

6. P: After three years, first three years it was part time for teacher's diplomat and after Three years as a teacher in school and we had to sign that agreement, but I did not sign. Some of my colleagues also but a few signed it as if "zot la main ti en bas roche". During my free periods at school, I was given replacement classes in a way to make my life difficult, at times teachers, spy-ladies, the so-called "other managers" were not eligible to follow higher-level courses, and thus they had to teach only in lower form classes, were reporting all my doings in class to manager or rector. They were backbiting. I viewed it as a form of harassment and a form of jealousy.

7. Despite that after I got the job in the government sector, the manager wrote to me and I think to the others also. They had a project of setting up the first private school in the south to implement new system with the website, the IT etc. so they wrote to us if you could help them and to give them the first Pay

Commented [AS1091]: Giving the best of ability to students for their optimum development

Commented [AS1092]: Success is achieved with hard work

Commented [AS1093]: Telling hard,

Commented [AS1094]: Obstacle towards professional development

Commented [BSA5]: Covert bribery - Lea refusal.

Commented [AS1096]: Striving hard

Commented [AS1097]: Distance as obstacle

Commented [AS1098]: Striving to get course sponsorship

Commented [AS1099]: Covert bribery. It was a common practice for manager to extort money from newly recruited teachers since salary was being paid by government and not school.

Commented [AS10910]: Covert Bribery / Barrier

Commented [AS10911]: Discrimination, Disguised Bribery / Barrier

Commented [BSA12]: Harassment- from colleagues lady teachers out of jealousy

Commented [AS10913]: Even after leaving private school, manager still Harassing

Commented [AS10914]: Financial harassment even after leaving private school job

HAFIZA'S INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT WITH INITIAL CODING TO CONSTRUCT THE HIGHER EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCES' NARRATIVE

Things were becoming more serious for me in terms of work and dossier to handle, I still do not have an office, then I found myself an office one day there was an officer telling me "madam if you get your office let me know, I will furnish it for you. Then somewhere there was nobody, a big hall they made it for conference education ministers for conference. Then they partitioned it, as if constructed a bath-cabinet room for me, it was not that practical. All directorates were on the third floor, if you have to deal with files you have to move to the director and Acting SCE, most of the time doing to and fro from 2nd to 3rd floor, but it was really... I was feeling so miserable, victimise. Nearly 8 months of begging to get a personal office like a bathroom cabine. it was not that practical... Personally, I went to complain to her. I said: I say " Please, come down and see in what condition I am working, how can I work in such an office. she was very rude to me, am sorry to say that she was very rude and I put everything in an official letter and send to her and out you say this that to me and copy to Head of Civil Service and finally, I was able to get an office with a secretary, and this office was quite far and on another building level, you have to frequently go and come to the SCE office or Chief Technical Office, it was very tiresome. I was discussing with my husband and I said you know " I am very unhappy with my job and on top I was having a lot of problems in subordination for me, I was a leader and I was being suppress again when you want to do something it was like you had to be where you are, you can't do something, you can't act, you just have to follow, you agree or you don't agree, you can't say anything in committee

When there is a meeting, all directors they will say things that the minister wants to hear and I said it "haut et fort. I am not the type of lady to let favour ever on me, never. I prefer to be victimised not to get my due than to get my due by being agreed on something that I don't adhere to something that I don't believe in so that's how I made up my mind to retire early,

Commented [AS1091]: The female director making her life miserable, not providing the due consideration and resources for the good work to progress.

Commented [BSA2]: Fighting for her rights/due/ privileges – female boss making her life not easy/ intimidation

Commented [AS1093]: R1 R2 – Socio-Professional conflict as leader in AD position;

Commented [AS1094]: R3 Soldier in the battle field, Iron-lady character

APPENDIX H: TURN IT IN REPORT

Turnitin Originality Report

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THE GEOGRAPHIES OF WOMEN EDUCATIONAL LEADERS IN THE SECONDARY SYSTEM – A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

ORIGINALITY REPORT

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APPENDIX I: LANGUAGE EDITOR CERTIFICATE

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Editing/proofreading services
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Full member of The Professional Editors' Guild

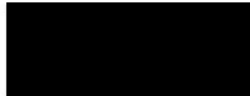
To whom it may concern

This letter serves to inform you that I have done language editing, reference checking and formatting on the thesis

**THE GEOGRAPHIES OF WOMEN EDUCATIONAL LEADERS IN THE SECONDARY
SYSTEM – A NARRATIVE INQUIRY**

by

Bye Salim ALIRAJA



Barbara Shaw

03/09/2021