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## Female Teachers' Promotion Barriers and Mitigation Strategies: Multiple Case Study Findings from South Africa

Dorris Goodness Mathebula <sup>a</sup>, Onoriode Collins Potokri <sup>b, \*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

<sup>b</sup> University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa

### Abstract

The study investigated barriers female teachers face when applying for promotional positions and their consequential impact on their teaching responsibilities. In this study, female and women are interchangeably used. The study was based on a qualitative multiple-case study research design and approach. Purposive sampling was used. In line with the design and approach, the sample consisted of five teachers from five different schools. An unstructured interview method was used to collect data, and the data collected were analysed by means of the thematic analysis method. The findings of this study revealed several barriers to management positions. These include domination by men, lack of leadership and management skills, lack of self-confidence, corruption in the schools, discrimination, and women not wanting to work far from their children or homes. These barriers burden women teachers because they become demoralised, demotivated, and bitter. Mitigation strategies that could help female teachers with their experience regarding promotional barriers also emerged as part of this study's findings. Based on the findings, conclusions and recommendations were made.

**Keywords:** congruity theory, female teachers, gender discrimination, management, promotion barriers, qualitative research, school governing body.

### 1. Introduction

Women have been found to form the bulk of the workforce in public education in both developed and developing countries (Sinyosi, Potokri, 2021). However, many studies have revealed that in school administration, men serve as bosses and that men are more likely to be found in positions with the greatest power, pay and prestige in comparison to women (Blackman, 2000; Smith-Doerr, 2004). In 2012, the total number of female educators in public and independent schools in South Africa combined was 285,252 (68%), while the number of male educators was 132,852 (32%) (Department of Basic Education; DBE, 2012). This means that female educators outnumber male educators by 7,107.

In Limpopo Province, where this study is delimited, there is a total of 58,194 educators. The number of female educators totals 34 074, while 24 120 are male educators (DBE, 2012). Again, this clearly indicates that female educators also dominate the teaching workforce in Limpopo Province. This figure shows that the DBE employs more female educators in South Africa than male educators. However, recent figures from 2017 indicate that male educators are promoted

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\* Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: [cpotokri@uj.ac.za](mailto:cpotokri@uj.ac.za); [cnuvie@gmail.com](mailto:cnuvie@gmail.com) (O.C. Potokri)

to higher positions than female educators. The Minister of Basic Education and Training, Angie Motshekga, confirmed this when she said:

*“There are 8210 female principals and 14 337 male principals appointed in permanent positions in South Africa. This is a cause for concern, particularly because women constitute the majority in society and in the education sector in particular. The situation is worse in secondary schools where the majority of principals, their deputies and heads of department are male”* (News 24, 2013).

Both the mentioned figures and statements of the Minister clearly show that the under-representation of women in school management continues unabatedly in post-apartheid South Africa. This is even though the government has attempted to address the issue of the under-representation of women in management positions by introducing legal frameworks. These include the South African Constitution (1996), the Labour Relations Act (No. 66 of 1995), the Employment Equity Act, 55 of 1998, as well as the concept of Affirmative Action, which informs the Employment Equity Act, among many other measures or frameworks. Given the above scenario, the researchers sought to investigate the barriers hindering female educators in the Groot Letaba Circuit of Mopani District primary schools in Limpopo Province from applying for and being promoted to school management positions. In addition, the impact of the barriers on their teaching responsibilities and the strategies that could be put in place to address the promotional barriers will be explored.

## 2. Literature Review

### General barriers to promotions

According to Greyvenstein (1989), barriers to promotion are all the factors that prevent women or men from achieving fully on a professional level. Women face many challenges when applying for promotions in schools and other workplaces. Before discussing the barriers, it is essential to identify the metaphors related to the barriers experienced by women when they apply for promotional positions. The metaphors include the Glass ceiling, Glass escalator, Glass cliff, Pipeline, and Labyrinth.

Northouse's (2013) work indicates that during the 1960s and 1970s, when women attempted to advance beyond middle-management positions, they came up against an invisible, insurmountable barrier that kept them from attaining higher positions. This barrier was called “*glass ceiling*”. Accordingly, the glass ceiling prevents women and minorities from reaching more elevated positions in organisations, irrespective of their achievement and qualifications. Glass ceiling is the invisible upper limit in the organisation, beyond which it is very difficult or sometimes impossible for a woman and minority men to reach, despite their efficiency or qualifications. In other words, it is a well-ostracised measure perverted with the support of institutionalised culture and practice that prevent certain classes or categories of workers from not promoted beyond a certain rank or post.

The glass ceiling leads to inequalities and differentiations that cannot be explained by characteristics relevant to the female employees' work but can be explained solely by referring to an employee's gender (Cotter et al., 2001). Similar to the glass ceiling, the concept of the “*glass escalator*” is very much prevalent in the corporate world, and it means that men are progressing faster in the dominating female industry; namely, teaching and nursing, than women (Harlan, Berheide, 1994). This indicates that men are given more preference than women. The metaphor of the labyrinth was coined to emphasise that women are still faced with the interplay of diverse and complex factors which may work against them on their journey toward top-management positions (Eagly et al., 2007). Finding their way through a labyrinth requires women's constant awareness and resilience, focus on their professional development, and ability to understand the challenges ahead of them. These can be foreseen or unexpected, for example, prejudice against women, stereotypes, views on management styles and credibility, or family responsibilities (Carli, Eagly, 2016).

The *labyrinth* appears to have given rise to the Glass cliff – a metaphor which indicates that cracks have now begun to appear in the glass ceiling and women are making it into top positions, although as yet only in small numbers (Eagly et al., 2007). According to Ryan et al. (2011), women who have broken through the cracks are more likely than men to be appointed to leadership positions in companies facing difficult times. Brescoll et al. (2010) unveil that if they fail to turn the company around, they are more harshly judged than men would be in similar situations. The lack of women in top leadership positions has been explained using the metaphor of a *pipeline* that staff move through

up the organisational hierarchy (Einarsdottir et al., 2018). According to the pipeline theory, correction of the gender ratio will happen in due time as women and men gain entry-level positions in equal numbers and are therefore expected to reach top-management positions in equal numbers.

### **Barriers women face in the workplace**

Actual barriers faced by women refer to intrinsic and extrinsic barriers. Intrinsic barriers are internal or personal, which are within women because of their femaleness, while extrinsic barriers are environmental challenges that influence the promotion of women into management positions in the teaching profession (Van der Westhuizen, 1997). Globally, about one out of every two adult women participates in the labour force compared to three out of every four men (World Bank, 2020). On average, women who participate in the labour force earn less than their male counterparts (Jayachandran, 2020). The barriers women face at the workplace are classified into different categories: gender stereotypes, philosophies and attitudes about women, lack of mobility, lack of aspiration, gender discrimination, home-related factors as barriers, lack of support, and organisational barrier factors.

#### **Gender stereotypes**

Gender stereotyping refers to the perceived and socially received traditional social roles, status differences, and power inequalities between men and women (Long, 2011). According to Neidhart and Carling (2003), women's identities and roles have traditionally been associated with parenting and caring, while men's identities have been associated with paid employment as well as becoming public and industrial managers. This perception leads to personal sanctions and guilt, lack of ambition, poor self-image, and poor self-confidence in female educators. According to Jonsen et al. (2010), people use stereotypes as a shortcut to predict how people will behave, and their abilities and stereotypes are enforced by society. Gender stereotypes are, therefore, oversimplified ideas, messages and images about differences between males and females. In other words, gender stereotypes make generalisations, assumptions and judgements about a person's personality, behaviour, appearance, skills, and interests.

Owing to sex role orientation, men are viewed as being dominant and aggressive, while women are viewed as passive and dependent (Potokri, 2015). When the traditional views are broken, and women seek roles that are traditionally reserved for men, then gender stereotyping occurs. Stereotypes have several adverse effects on human beings, such as decreased working memory, increased stress and anxiety (Potokri, 2015). According to Tearle (2004), the best way to avoid stereotypes is to focus on the fact that women are more than merely their gender. Tearle (2004) recommends that women should focus on discovering their true power from within, finding ways to use this power to help organisations achieve greatness, help others to discover the power that they have within them and encouraging others to direct their incredible power (Potokri et al., 2018).

#### **Philosophies and attitudes about women**

Women have been conditioned and socialised from childhood to believe that femininity is synonymous with a gentle and passive approach to everything (Greyvestein, 1989). Osumbah (2011) emphasises that women are labelled as mothers and wives and not capable of top management positions. That is why there is a sentiment which says, "women take care, men take charge" (Welbourne, 2005). This view is supported by Lipman-Blumen (1984) when he emphasises that women are regarded as unfit for leadership because they are portrayed as weak, soft-hearted, people-oriented, sensitive, manipulative, talking too much, prone to lying, protective, passive, emotional, dependent, fearful, and unsure about themselves.

#### **Lack of mobility**

Mobility is the capacity to move freely from one place to another (Home, 1998). In most cases, promotions require a person appointed to move from one place to another; the movement can be from one town or village to another town or village. A study by Home (1998) revealed that both married and single women are not interested in moving their families from one place to another. Another study by Chabaya et al. (2009) showed that many female teachers turn down promotions that require them to move their families to other places. According to Akpinar-Sposito (2012), many female teachers appointed in higher positions are not prepared to relocate to other places because of their children's education and social support systems.

### **Lack of aspiration**

The term aspiration refers to a strong desire to achieve something high or great (Oplatka, Tamir, 2009). Many studies revealed that women do not have aspirations to occupy top positions in the workplace because of low self-esteem, an inferiority complex and a lack of confidence (Chabaya et al., 2009). Smith found that “many women have to a certain degree, internalised the attitudes and role expectations about women that they have learnt to fit neatly into the stereotypes” (Chabaya et al., 2009). Furthermore, Chabaya et al. (2009) found that many female teachers are not interested in promotional positions because of the challenges associated with higher positions. In addition, Coleman (2001) found that women are not interested in becoming principals of schools because of a lack of self-confidence. When female teachers are eventually appointed as principals of schools, they cannot solve the challenges because they do not believe in their abilities.

### **Gender discrimination**

The term “gender discrimination” refers to treating someone unfavourably because of that person’s sex (Okechukwu et al., 2014). According to Hall (2004), for many decades, women in all spheres of life were not regarded as equal to men because they were not allowed to vote during elections. They did not earn the same salaries as compared to men; men received better benefits than women in terms of general working conditions in the workplace. Furthermore, in education, a female educator was not supposed to be pregnant before marriage; those who fell pregnant were suspended or dismissed, and very few female educators occupied management positions. After 1994, everybody believed that gender inequality in South Africa would disappear. This was emphasised by Honourable Nelson Mandela, the first President of the Republic of South Africa, when he said that democracy and freedom would never be acquired until all the people of South Africa and the whole world emancipated women from all types of oppression (South African Government, 1994). Nelson Mandela also emphasised that unless we in South Africa can observe that the conditions of the women of South Africa have transformed radically for the better, and that all the women of South Africa are all empowered to intervene equally with all citizens of our country, freedom cannot be achieved (South African Government, 1994). After 1994, the South African democratic government introduced various legislations aimed at eliminating discrimination against women. Although the South African government worked very hard to eliminate discrimination and racism, sexual discrimination is still applied, and women are prevented from occupying top leadership and management vacant posts in South Africa (De Braine, 2011).

There is still a higher percentage of males filling top posts in government institutions than females, which undermines the regulations, legislations and Acts of the Republic of South Africa (2001). According to the Minister of Basic Education in South Africa, men continue to dominate school principal positions despite an overwhelming number of women in the education sector (News 24, 2013). In 2016, 31.2% of school managers in the Limpopo Province were females. The districts with the highest female manager ratios are Lebowakgomo (39.8 %), Waterberg (38.8 %), Mokgalakwena (35.8 %) and Mopani (34.8%) (DBE,2016). Most school managers are black Africans. In contrast to the school managers who are predominantly male, six out of ten educators (59.9% in the Limpopo Province are female (34.8%) (DBE, 2012).

### **Home-related factors as barriers**

Women’s barriers extend far beyond the confines of the workplace, such as school (Einarsdottir et al., 2018). For many female managers, the home environment presents several obstacles that must be overcome to achieve upward mobility. One obstacle is that some women managers, especially those with families, experience the so-called “second shift syndrome”, where they must work on the first shift in the workplace and continue to the second shift in the home environment (Einarsdottir et al., 2018). This challenge is caused by the way girls and women have been socialised in many countries, which makes them believe in the overriding importance of being a mother and wife first, and that anything else, including their careers, is secondary (Chabaya et al., 2009). Several women managers are exposed to stress owing to the multiple role demands of running a career and managing a home (Meyerson, 2001).

The burden of juggling work-related goals with family responsibilities is a serious concern for some women. Women who find themselves in this circumstance are also called “dual career women”, where performance at work and home is necessary. Performing this balancing act between professional development and personal life may prove too difficult for some women in

many ways (Brownell, 2004). Some women eventually receive inadequate support from their respective families to pursue career advancement goals. Top positions are also a challenge to women because they are required to work long hours, attend lengthy meetings and regularly travel, negatively affecting their families (Chuma, Ncube, 2010). Women are therefore expected to sacrifice long-term relationships and have children. Many women cannot compromise this challenge because they want to spend more time with their families (Warsame, 2006).

Consequently, female teachers are not prepared to apply for management positions. Similar to Warsame's (2006) work, Chabaya et al. (2009) stress that lack of confidence contributes to the under-representation of women in school management positions. Chabaya et al. (2009) thus concluded that women are their own worst enemies when it comes to promotional prospects because they lack self-confidence. Owing to their lack of self-confidence, many women are not interested in applying for management positions in schools. Hansard (1990) also emphasises that women lack self-confidence because they fear criticism and taking risks.

### **Strategies to assist female educators in overcoming promotional barriers**

There is an urgent need to assist female educators in overcoming barriers to promotions to senior positions in schools and other sectors of life. Various strategies may be implemented to overcome the promotional barriers of female educators.

#### **Creation of awareness programmes**

In South Africa, there is a need for a very strong awareness programme which will make everyone aware that women face serious challenges when applying for promotions. According to Simpson (2008), an awareness programme is the creation of awareness and understanding, as well as an acceptance of the process aimed at changing the status quo in the organisation. Researchers such as Mckeen and Burke (1991) have suggested that male managers who are aware of the issues facing women in management could support change in relation to gender issues in their organisations. This implies that men should lead awareness programmes to demonstrate that men are not against the programme. The programmes designed to reduce bias, such as blind review of resumes, can limit bias in crucial aspects of the hiring process and encourage effective workplace culture change (Hill et al., 2016).

#### **Mentorship programme**

One of several ways in which women overcome barriers is through mentorship programmes. According to Noe (2008), mentoring is an activity that provides career guidance and psychological support to all employees, especially women. Coleman (2001) recommends that additional support should also be provided to men. The importance of mentorship is emphasised by Bush and Coleman (2010), who state that mentorship is important to career advancement, higher pay and greater career satisfaction. Moreover, the mentoring relationship may be critical to the advancement of women in organisations, although demand exceeds supply (Bush, Coleman, 2010). Mentoring should, however, not end when the aspirant achieves a position in management but should continue to support the success and advancement of those in management (Noe, 2008). Mentors create opportunities to operate outside organisational norms and set high-performance standards that stimulate personal motivation. Lumby and Azaola (2010) found that mentorship has many advantages for women who participate in mentorship programmes and some of the advantages are greater self-confidence, motivation and effective management.

#### **Mobilising and educating women about their abilities to manage**

According to Aifeng (2000), the strategies for mobilising and educating women can be achieved by focusing on girl child education in terms of women in top educational management and leadership providing realistic role models, meeting biological and sanitation needs of girls in school, and removing all negative stereotypes of women at all levels of education. This strategy is vital to educate female children to be confident so they can be as effective as managers as their male counterparts. Pirouznia (2013) supports this view by underscoring that to change women's attitudes, it is important to examine what is done about this in early childhood and primary school gender role education.

#### **Changing the views of patriarchal and traditional societies about gender roles**

According to Archer and Lloyd (2002), patriarchy has long been cited as the root cause of women's role conflict in traditional societies. This indicates that males, as husbands, fathers, co-workers, and the dominant force in school management positions, are part and parcel of the

problem of the under-representation of women in management positions. In a study conducted in the United Kingdom, Liu (2000) emphasises that the higher demands on the professional roles of women teachers make the conflict and tension between self-respect and feelings of inferiority even more acute. Therefore, women must take charge of their destinies and be proactive to succeed. Aifeng (2000) also emphasises that males must change their perceptions of the value of women and discard traditional gender concepts formed thousands of years ago.

### **Theoretical framework: the role congruity theory**

Eagly and Karau (2002) developed the role congruity theory. Accordingly, role congruity theory is grounded in social role theory's treatment of the content of gender roles and their importance in promoting sex differences in behaviour. The role congruity theory postulates that prejudice towards female leaders occurs because inconsistencies exist between the characteristics associated with female gender stereotypes and those associated with typical leadership. The concept "prejudice" refers to preconceived and unfavourable feelings towards people or persons because of their political affiliation, sex, gender, beliefs, values, social class, age, disability, religion, race, ethnicity, language or nationality (Dovidio, Gaertner, 2010). Prejudice is an affective feeling towards a person based solely on that person's group membership (Eagly, Diekmann, 2005). This view implies that a group will be positively evaluated when its characteristics are recognised as aligning with that group's typical social roles. The role congruity theory of prejudice toward female leaders proposes that perceived incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles leads to two forms of prejudice. These include perceiving women less favourably than men as potential occupants of leadership roles and evaluating the behaviour that fulfils the prescriptions of a leader role less favourably when a woman enacts it (Eagly, 2005).

According to the role congruity theory, one of the two main causes of prejudice preventing women from achieving high-status positions or success is the perception of women when placed in leadership positions (Eagly, 2005). The possibility of prejudice against female leaders inherent in the female gender role follows from its dissimilarity in what people expect from leaders. Prejudice can also occur when people judge women as the wrong replacements for particular leadership positions. People believe that women do not possess the qualities required to succeed as a leader. Furthermore, people tend to have dissimilar beliefs about leaders and women and similar beliefs about leaders and men. Eagly and Karau (2002) emphasise that women who are leaders are perceived less positively when compared to male leaders. Eagly (2005) also showed that women have a more difficult time achieving high-status positions in the workplace and in maintaining these positions through achievement and success. These accepted gender stereotypes allow for a greater prediction of sex differences between males and females in social behaviours, which arguably may impact promotional ambition or desire at places of work. Owing to their socially accepted roles, women are more often perceived in lower-status positions than their male counterparts, and men emerge as leaders more than women.

The role congruity theory further indicates that women in academic positions such as lecturers, professors and researchers struggle with meeting the expectations of the male-dominated role (Whitley, Kite, 2010). Caplain (1994) asserts that the characteristics associated with the female stereotype, such as nurturance, warmth and supportiveness, are incongruent with the expectations of the faculty, which are masculine, such as directive, assertive and knowledgeable. Therefore, a female faculty member violates societal expectations for both women and leaders. This violation results in both discrepant expectations for men and women and negative evaluations of women in such positions. The role congruity theory asserts that women are subject to higher standards for leadership competence than their male counterparts. This implies that women have to work harder than men to prove their competency and capability as leaders by putting in more time and energy and monitoring stereotypical expectations that they face as women. However, this hard work has the potential negative side effects of women leaders being unfavourably judged as characteristically trying too hard.

The role congruity theory also emphasises that women are expected to choose between being viewed as competent leaders or being liked by co-workers and followers. Women who adopt a masculine leadership style are often viewed as competent but receive more negative evaluations of their interpersonal skills when compared to women who adopt a feminine leadership style. When women assert themselves, they risk being seen as competent but cold (Fine, 2010). The role

congruity theory predicts that women will be less likely than men to emerge as leaders when expectations for the leader role are incongruent with gender stereotypes. Although women have gained increased access to supervisory and middle management positions, they remain quite rare as elite leaders and top executives. However, Eagly and Karau (2002) emphasise that women should experience reduced prejudice and gain increased representation and acceptance in leadership roles in the future because organisations have shifted away from a traditional view of leadership toward a more democratic and participatory view. The role congruity theory is considered helpful in this study because it assisted the researcher in understanding gender inequality and the barriers experienced by women in the workplace.

## 2. Method

The study was based on a qualitative multiple-case study research design and approach (Sarfo et al., 2021). Regarding the selection of participants, we used purposive sampling (Sarfo et al., 2022). In line with multiple case studies, the sample consisted of five teachers from five schools in the Groot Letaba Circuit of Mopani District in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. An unstructured interview method was used to collect data. The interview was intended to gather information about the participants' experiences, understandings and feelings about female educators' barriers when applying for educational and promotional positions. Five educators who applied for promotional positions and failed were interviewed. To protect the identity of the participants, they are referred to as Participants 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. In sequence or accordingly, Participants 1 to 5 are from schools 1 to 5.

The data collected through interviews were analysed by the Tesch Method of qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2014). This involved interpreting the data in the basic sense of reflecting on the data until a better understanding of what was meant was achieved. After the transcription of the interviews, a general impression was observed by reading all transcripts. Moreover, ideas about possible categories were jotted in the margins as they appeared in mind. Similar topics were put together. A list of the topics was returned to the data and abbreviated as codes. The codes were written next to the appropriate segments of text. The most descriptive wording for the topics was written and then turned into themes or categories. Related topics were grouped together to reduce the number of categories. Interrelationships between categories were identified, and a final decision was taken on the abbreviation for each category. The researchers assembled the data material belonging to each theme or category in one place and did a preliminary analysis. Finally, the researchers started interpreting and reporting the research findings.

## 3. Results and Discussion

Data collected from the five teachers through individual interviews are presented and analysed accordingly. The responses of participants to the interview questions are categorised into different themes. Based on the research questions, three main themes and four sub-themes emerged from coding interview transcripts. See Table 1 for details.

**Table 1.** Responses by participants on the main themes

Main theme	Sub-themes
1. The barriers faced by female educators when applying for promotional positions in schools.	- Women do not have self-confidence. - Women are not fit to occupy management positions
2. Promotional barriers impact women educators' teaching and other responsibilities at school.	- Women become so demoralised that they are not able to perform to their best level.
3. The strategies that can be implemented to assist female educators in overcoming promotional barriers to management positions.	- Men and the government should support women to overcome barriers to management positions

### **Main theme 1: The barriers faced by female educators when applying for promotional positions in schools**

This theme relates to the first research question. The participants were asked questions about the barriers faced by female educators when applying for promotional positions in schools. An analysis of the participants' responses produced two sub-themes. First, women do not have confidence in themselves. Second, women are not fit to occupy management positions.

Common to the participants' voices is the belief that women do not have confidence in themselves because they are not supported, especially by people who are supposed to or the ones they look up to for support, which discourages them. According to Participant 1, *most women are not interested in management positions because they are not supported and are afraid of being victimised by men*. The participant further said *that when women are given schools to run and have to work with men, they find it difficult and always think that men are undermining them and will not cooperate*. This possibly explains why men dominate Deputy Principalship posts and Principalship posts in schools. The beliefs of women also enhance men's dominance in these positions.

An excerpt from Participant 2 indicates that women educators or teachers themselves are not sure if they can perform in those positions. In her words, *women are naturally and culturally taken as weak vessels, and they may not be equal to the task sometimes*. Further to this, *some are afraid to leave their families behind in case they get the post far from their homes*, and this is the case for some promotional posts that are vacant or advertised.

As echoed, Participant 3 thinks *women lost confidence because they are being labelled as people who are only fit to occupy kitchens and not fit to be given schools to manage*. *They are also discouraged from applying for promotional posts by people who think they may not succeed in managing a successful organisation as a school*. Whenever a woman gets a chance to occupy principalship positions, people are likely to make statements, such as *that school is heading for fall because no woman can ever run a successful school*, said Participant 3.

The views of the participants expressed above are not different from other participants. For example, it is emphasised by Participant 4 said that women have lost confidence because they are always undermined for promotions. Accordingly, she reveals *that women are always discouraged from applying for promotional positions because they are regarded as weak for those positions compared to men*. *Surprisingly, women are always compared to men and not to other women*. This perception indicates that there is gender-based discrimination in the appointment of teachers in higher positions. For Participant 5, *women lost confidence in themselves because they were still looked down on by society and were still regarded as powerless people*. *Women also lose confidence because they feel oppressed by men and are afraid to challenge men*. *Women also think they do not have the strength to lead men*. As researchers, we agree with the further assertion of the participant that it is not true because strength is not necessarily required for promotional posts female teachers seek; only skills and knowledge count.

The views of participants, as shown above, reveal that lack of self-confidence and belief that women do not fit or are capable of occupying management positions are mainly the barriers female educators face when applying for promotional positions in schools. This revelation, part of this study's findings, agrees with the assertion of other writers and researchers scanned from reviewed literature. Chabaya et al. (2009), for example, revealed that women do not have aspirations to occupy top positions in the workplace because of low self-esteem, inferiority complex and lack of confidence. As researchers of this study, we would assume in agreement with Coleman (2001) that women's lack of confidence in themselves is why many women teachers are not interested in becoming principals. To a large extent, given the finding established here, we believe that lack of confidence and belief that women are not fit or capable of occupying management positions "internalised the attitudes and role expectations for women, including female teachers, which culminates into the stereotypes" (Chabaya et al., 2009).

### **Main theme 2: How promotional barriers impact women educators' teaching and other responsibilities at school**

This theme related to the second question revealed that all the participants indicated that promotional barriers demoralise women to the extent that they cannot perform their work effectively. This view was confirmed by Participant 1, who indicated that the barriers to promotional positions negatively affect her work because she is always angry when performing. According to her, *the anger which is caused by discrimination against her because of her gender*



*demotivates her from working hard.* The participant indicates that she *always performs very well in the interviews, but she is not appointed because she is a woman, and this is clear because only men are appointed to senior positions.* Participant 2 also expressed that she is experiencing a negative impact on her work because of demotivation. Participant 2 indicates that the barrier to occupying a promotional position negatively affects her work. She said she could hardly satisfactorily teach her learners joyfully as she used to and loved to do. She believes she can be a principal, but she is not appointed. She is demotivated in her work because she is not appointed as a principal, and only men are appointed. She can no longer perform her work effectively because she is always worried about this barrier. Participant 3 also confirms that discrimination against her affects her work at school, including teaching her learners. According to Participant 3, *promotional barriers cause many problems at school because all side-lined women do not perform their work to their best level.* Participant 3 emphasises that the promotional barrier also demoralises and prevents women from improving their academic and professional qualifications. Of what point or need will the improvement of academic and professional qualifications be? If women are not considered for promotion. Participant 3 said, *I know several women who have high qualifications but are not promoted.* Participant 4 also supports that gender discrimination in promotional positions negatively affects her work. Unlike Participants 1, 2 and 3, who emphasises that the barrier affects their workplace responsibilities and women's performance, Participant 4 indicates that the gender-based barrier affects both female and male teachers because incompetent male teachers are appointed to higher positions, such as school managers. The male principals struggle to manage and lead the schools due to their incompetence. Owing to her high competence in management and leadership, she is pressured to perform many duties of the male principal, which creates an overload and stress. The overload and stress result in poor performance of the female teacher.

As deduced from theme 2, demoralisation is a major impact of promotional barriers on women teachers, negatively impacting their teaching responsibilities. They are usually demoralised after their promotion applications and, sometimes, by the promotion application outcomes of other women teachers they know. This demoralisation can be factored in or equated to the concept of "prejudice" highlighted in this study's theoretical framework. The concept refers to preconceived and unfavourable feelings towards people or persons because of their political affiliation, sex, gender, beliefs, values, social class, age, disability, religion, race, ethnicity, language or nationality (Dovidio, Gaertner, 2010). The concept of "prejudice" allows for women to be perceived less favourably than men as potential occupants of leadership roles and positions (Eagly, Karau, 2002). This leaves women educators or teachers demoralised and subsequently impacts their job responsibilities, including teaching their learners, as mentioned by participants. Participants in this study, like women in academic positions given the work of Whitley and Kite (2010), struggle with meeting the expectations of leadership posts. We ascribe their struggle to their psychologically conceived perception that leadership roles are for men because society sees leadership as a male role.

### **Main theme 3: The strategies that can be implemented to assist female educators in overcoming promotional barriers**

Most participants indicate that support from the government and men is the best strategy to assist women in overcoming promotional barriers to management positions. This implies that the government and men should support female teachers to overcome the barriers associated with demoralisation and the belief that women are not fit to occupy management positions, impacting their confidence level. In the words of Participant 1, *the government should support women by ensuring that the Equity Act of South Africa is effectively applied to avoid discrimination against women and gender-based violence.* The government must apply this act as a strategy by ensuring that interviews are conducted fairly and without discrimination and corruption and ensure that more women occupy managerial positions. Participant 1 also emphasised that *the government should encourage women to further their studies and submit applications for promotional positions.* The support for female teachers as a strategy to fight promotional barriers facing women is confirmed by Participant 2, who indicates that *the government and teachers must always give women responsible positions in schools, avoid discrimination against women, empower women and ensure that Equity Act is effectively implemented.* The provision of support to women as a strategy for avoiding barriers to promotional positions women is also supported by Participant 3, who asserted that *men, especially male teachers, should support women by respecting women's*

*rights and supporting women when they are appointed to managerial positions.* To this end, the government should monitor interview processes to avoid discrimination and corruption.

The suggestion of most participants about government and men's support for women has been the best strategy to assist women in overcoming promotional barriers concurs with Mckeen and Burke's (1991) finding. Accordingly, Mckeen and Burke argue that male managers, particularly those aware of the issues facing women in management, should support change in relation to gender issues in their organisations. The same support should be extended to female teachers who aspire or seek promotion to higher or managerial positions. In view of this, Aifeng's (2000) notion that males must change their perceptions of the value of women and discard traditional gender concepts formed thousands of years ago must be upheld. The emphasis and call of this study's participants for effective implementation of the Equity act in the country suggest that it is not well implemented as it ought to be. It could help address or mitigate the promotional barriers if effectively implemented. This argument sounds logical when one draws on the work of Hill et al. (2016). For these authors, any programme directed at the eradication of barriers for women, which could be in the form of legislation and acts must be designed to reduce bias, such as blind review of resumes, can limit bias in crucial aspects of the hiring process and encourage effective workplace culture change (Hill et al., 2016).

#### **4. Conclusion and Recommendation**

The analysis of this study's data revealed that female teachers face numerous barriers when they apply for promotion in schools. These barriers include the domination of men at their respective schools, which is their place of work. Men, the dominant ones, can influence policy, control and encourage their male colleagues as opposed to the female ones. In view of this, female teachers do not get support for promotional issues. Apart from the already mentioned barriers, other barriers include female educators' lack of leadership and management skills, resistance to work far from their homes or children, lack of self-confidence, corruption, and societal beliefs about women.

Evidently, the barriers prevent women from getting promoted to higher managerial posts and impact their teaching responsibilities. Three impacts of promotional barriers on women educators' teaching and other responsibilities at school include: (1) It is a burden because women are compelled to do other people's work, (2) Women who are being side-lined do not perform to their level best, because they become so demoralised, (3) Women become demotivated and bitter by promotional barriers. In sum, the barriers' impact negatively impacts the job satisfaction of women teachers who are unable to get a promotion because of the barriers that prevent them from applying and/or being promoted.

Based on the barriers illuminated in this study, ways of overcoming the barriers must be sought. We, therefore, recommend that the Department of Education should motivate the communities, men, principals, SGB members, teachers and heads of department to support the promotion of women to management positions in schools. Further, we recommend that the Department of Basic Education should organise and conduct effective workshops to discuss improving the promotion of women to management positions. The Department of Basic Education should also design new policies to enhance women's promotion to management positions. Importantly, the employment equity act should be properly implemented. The communities, principals, school governing board (SGB) members, teachers and heads of departments should always promote gender equality by supporting the promotion of women to management positions in schools.

#### **5. Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors of the manuscript declare that there is no interest in conflict, and all reference materials were dully acknowledged.

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