

UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA



**LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE HEADS OF SENIOR HIGH
SCHOOLS IN TWO DISTRICTS (CENTRAL REGION) IN
COMBINING FAMILY AND PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES**

MILLCENT ASIWOME KPEKPOH

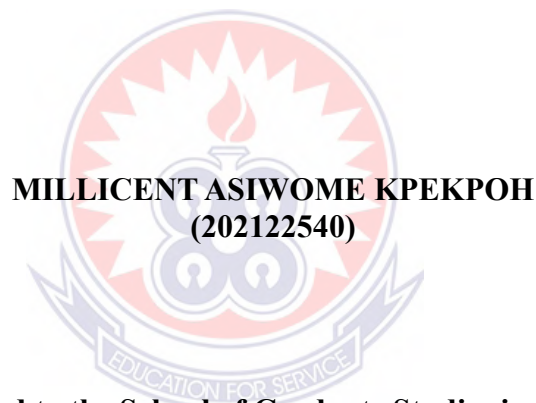


MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES**



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**A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the award of the degree of
Master of Philosophy
(Educational Administration and Management)**

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION AND MANAGEMENT,
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING,
UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

MAY, 2024

DECLARATION

Student's Declaration

I, Millicent Asiwome Kpekpoh, hereby declare that this thesis, except for references contained in other peoples' work which have all been duly acknowledged, this work is the result of my own original research and that this thesis has neither in whole nor in part been presented for the award of degree elsewhere.

Signature:

Date:

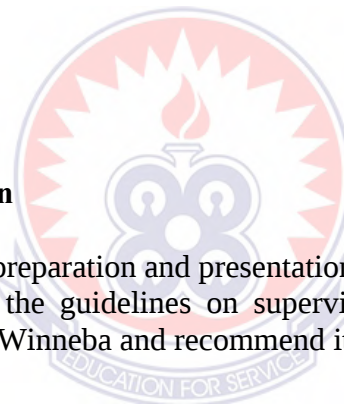
Supervisor's Declaration

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this thesis were supervised by me, in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Education, Winneba and recommend it for acceptance.

Name of Supervisor: PROF. HINNEH KUSI

Signature:

Date:



DEDICATION

To my lovely children; Maynard Kekeli Addai and Mario Klenam Addai.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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My profound thanks go to my Auntie Irene Nyonator and my mother. Madam Mawuse Akuaku; sisters, and Mr. Bright Atsrim for their prayers, encouragement and support throughout this study.

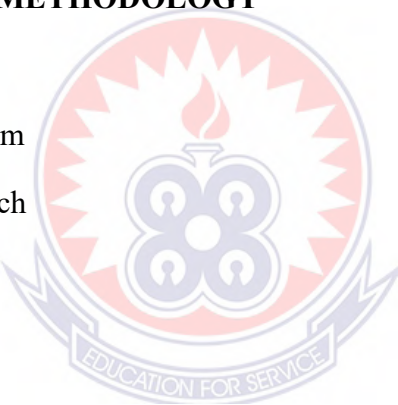
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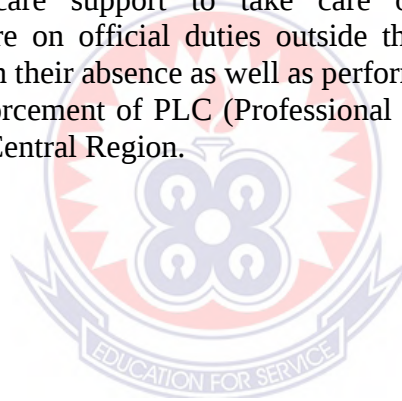


GLOSSARY

CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
GES	Ghana Education Service
JHS	Junior High School
MDGs	Millenniums Development Goals
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations,
PLC	Professional Learning Communities
PSHEA	Protection from Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SHS	Senior High School
UNESCO	United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UN	United Nation
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
MoE	Ministry of Education
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
UCC	University of Cape Coast
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
MLQ	Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire
HR	Human Resource

ABSTRACT

This study explores the experiences of female heads of senior high school in educational leadership, particularly in combining family roles, management and administration of senior high schools in the Central Region. The crux of the study was to understand the uniqueness of their career, particularly in leadership positions, on-the-job experiences, family-work balance, and coping strategies to provide seamless functionality in their roles. This research was a descriptive research design with a qualitative approach adopted through the conduct of interviews with eight headmistresses and assistant headmistresses who have, at least, two years' experience as heads in the selected SHSs. Purposive sampling was used to select the headmistresses who participated in the study. The collected data was analysed using the thematic approach. The study revealed that most headmistresses delegate tasks to assistants in order to reduce their workload. The study also pointed out that headmistresses in the Central Region have had no significant issues with insubordination from their male subordinates. According to the study, there was no formal system that supported female heads in performing their roles despite the lack of formal structures, the study sheds light on the significance of informal support systems, peer support, delegating tasks to colleagues and, while residing close to the workplace. The study therefore recommends stakeholders in education should consider household and childcare support to take care of housekeeping services for headmistresses who are on official duties outside their homes to ensure that their families are cared for in their absence as well as perform their official duties with ease. There should be reinforcement of PLC (Professional Learning Communities) among headmistresses in the Central Region.



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Over the past few decades, classrooms around the world have filled with women, yet the principal's office remains largely the domain of men. International monitoring reports remind us that although women constitute the bulk of the global teaching force, they still emerge occasionally at the helm of schools and education systems. The 2024/25 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, for example, shows that in forty countries the proportion of female principals trails the share of female teachers by at least twenty percentage points. Only one country in ten has adopted an explicit strategy to close that gap. Numbers of that scale signal more than a statistical quirk: they hint at structural obstacles that quietly reroute qualified women away from senior leadership and, by extension, deprive entire school communities of the perspectives those women could bring. An accumulating body of cross-country research links women's leadership to better learning outcomes, stronger parent engagement and lower teacher absenteeism. A recent World Bank synthesis of projects in Benin, Madagascar, Senegal and Togo found that pupils in schools led by women scored up to a third of a standard deviation higher in reading and mathematics roughly the impact of doubling the school year's instructional time. These benefits have sparked global initiatives such as the forthcoming, SheLeads 2025 programme, which pairs emerging female school heads with seasoned mentors across, underscoring a simple idea, when women thrive in leadership, whole systems flourish.

Yet getting to and succeeding in the principal's chair is seldom straightforward. Apart from the familiar "glass-ceiling" hurdles, many women who do secure top posts face another, quieter adversary, work-family conflict. The concept captures the grinding

friction that arises when professional and household demands pull in opposite directions and time, energy or money simply will not stretch far enough. Studies in Ghana, Kenya and South Africa have shown that long after the dismissal bell, female heads are still juggling lesson-observations, budget forecasts and parents' meetings against the unyielding rhythm of childcare, elder-care and community obligations. Late-night grading can easily spill into emotional exhaustion at home, while a feverish toddler can derail plans for an early-morning staff briefing. Over time that tug-of-war erodes job satisfaction and family wellbeing alike. In Ghana, national policies acknowledge the imbalance without fully relieving it. The Pre-Tertiary Teacher Professional Development and Management Policy, along with the 2018–2030 Education Strategic Plan, calls for stronger school-leadership pipelines and bespoke training for heads. Still, official staffing profiles reveal that women occupy barely one-quarter of head-teacher positions country-wide. Recent Ministry reforms, emphasising stringent performance management, extensive data reporting and high-stakes accountability arguably pile additional administrative load onto leaders already stretched workplace and household. The effect, many female heads report, is a perpetual sense of sprinting on a treadmill that self-accelerates.

Focusing on individual districts clarifies how those national patterns play out on the ground. The experiences of female headteachers in Ghana's Central Region, specifically within Sekyere East District and Cape Coast Metropolis, underscore a dynamic interplay between professional leadership and domestic obligations, shaped by entrenched sociocultural norms and institutional constraints. The evidence from qualitative studies in Sekyere East highlights the ongoing logistical hurdles these headmistresses confront: extended commutes, insufficient institutional housing, and unreliable transportation (Amponsah & Boateng, 2021). These challenges align with

the core tenets of Work-Family Conflict Theory (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985), which argues that conflicting expectations from professional and domestic spheres frequently overwhelm the limited reserves of time and energy available to individuals. In Ghana's patriarchal context, where women are often expected to prioritize familial caregiving, these tensions are especially acute (Adomako Ampofo, 2001).

Within Cape Coast Metropolis, qualitative interviews further reveal that unmarried or single female headteachers face disproportionate scrutiny, frequently being characterized as "too ambitious" or as failing to conform to traditional maternal identities (Arhin & Koomson, 2020). This mirrors the predictions of Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987), which contends that societal expectations impose rigid behavioral scripts on women, often penalizing those who deviate. The psychological burden of simultaneously fulfilling the roles of authoritative leader and nurturing caregiver can contribute to persistent stress and role strain (Oplatka & Tamir, 2009).

Despite these significant obstacles, female educational leaders in the region have developed various adaptive strategies to sustain their dual commitments. Some headteachers employ distributed leadership models, delegating operational responsibilities to deputies (Spillane, 2006), while others adopt time-batching techniques to compartmentalize administrative work and safeguard personal or family time (Claessens et al., 2007). Informal support systems, such as church groups and peer networks provide vital emotional and practical resources (Moorosi & Grant, 2018), and initiatives like SheLeads, which connect Ghanaian headmistresses with international mentors, further expand these support structures (Akyeampong & Asante, 2022).

Nevertheless, these coping mechanisms are often undermined by persistent systemic deficiencies. The absence of on-site childcare, inadequate staff housing, and persistent teacher shortages compel headmistresses to assume additional classroom responsibilities, exacerbating their workload and stress (Yeboah, 2019). As a result, many advocate for structural reforms, including district-level relief staff, flexible scheduling during exam periods, and subsidized housing, arguing that such changes are essential to prevent burnout and improve retention (Owusu-Ansah & Amoako-Gyampah, 2023).

From a policy perspective, addressing these challenges is imperative. Although the Ghana Education Service (GES) has articulated commitments to improve student outcomes and enhance gender equity, these goals are invariably compromised when female leaders are overburdened by the persistent conflict between professional and domestic roles (Manuh et al., 2016). Implementing gender-responsive measures such as providing on-site childcare, targeted mentorship programs, and family-friendly HR policies, could bolster the sustainability of female leadership (Morley et al., 2017).

Theoretically, the Ghanaian context offers a compelling case for reassessing the applicability of Western frameworks such as Work-Family Conflict and Social Role Theory in low-resource, high-expectation environments. The lived realities of Ghanaian headmistresses' challenge universalist assumptions, highlighting the significant impact of postcolonial labour dynamics and kinship structures on the experience of role strain (Moorosi & Diko, 2021). Further research could illuminate how localized, contextually relevant feminist leadership models emerge under these conditions, contributing valuable insights to global discussions of women's leadership in education. The dual responsibilities shouldered by female heads of senior high

schools in Ghana's Central Region particularly in Sekyere East and Cape Coast present a nuanced case that both echoes and challenges prevailing Western theories on work-family balance. While frameworks such as Work-Family Conflict Theory (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985) and Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987) offer foundational perspectives, their application in the Ghanaian context is limited by cultural specificity. In particular, the persistent significance of extended-family obligations in Ghana introduces a layer of complexity that remains largely unaddressed in Western literature (Osei, 2020). Rather than simply managing nuclear family responsibilities, Ghanaian headmistresses are often deeply enmeshed in broader kinship networks, providing financial support, caring for elderly relatives, and mediating family disputes, all while executing demanding administrative roles (Ampofo & Prah, 2021).

This cultural dimension becomes particularly salient when analyzing the negotiation of professional identity among female school leaders. Despite the existence of progressive gender policies, women remain underrepresented in senior educational leadership, a phenomenon attributable to entrenched structural barriers (Aidoo, 2021). Those who do attain leadership positions experience what might be described as “double scrutiny syndrome”: their professional decisions are closely examined for perceived inadequacies, while their domestic roles are similarly scrutinized for lapses in traditional responsibilities (Arhin & Koomson, 2022). This goes beyond the conventional notion of role conflict and may be more accurately termed “institutionalized role ambivalence”, a condition in which supportive structures for women's professional advancement paradoxically reinforce incompatible expectations.

The adaptive strategies employed by these educational leaders are instructive for both scholarship and practice. Their reliance on extended family support networks challenges the individualistic assumptions prevalent in Western work-family models (Muthuki, 2021). The practice of “professional batching”—consolidating school administrative tasks into designated time blocks to safeguard family time—demonstrates an innovative approach to time management under significant resource constraints (Owusu-Ansah, 2023). Additionally, the formation of informal peer support networks among headmistresses parallels the idea of “communities of practice” (Wenger, 1998), but is distinctively characterized by a preference for collective problem-solving.

Nevertheless, these coping mechanisms are constrained by systemic deficiencies. A persistent shortage of teacher housing in district capitals, for instance, leads to high teacher turnover, exacerbating the workload for remaining staff and headmistresses, who are often compelled to cover teaching duties themselves (Yeboah & Ankomah, 2022). Such realities highlight the necessity for policy interventions that extend beyond gender parity in leadership appointments to address broader systemic factors that impact the sustainability of women’s leadership in education (Morley et al., 2023).

The policy implications are significant. Ghana’s educational sector is currently navigating a critical intersection of demographic change—including increased female student enrolment and ambitious goals for quality enhancement. Evidence suggests that female school leaders excel in fostering collaborative environments and mentoring emerging female talent (Moorosi & Grant, 2022). However, high attrition rates among mid-career women administrators threaten this potential. Targeted strategies—such as establishing district-level relief teacher pools and offering flexible professional

development opportunities are essential for retaining experienced leaders and attracting new talent (Smith & Hodge, 2022). The Ghanaian context really challenges the standard ways we think about sustainable leadership. Western discussions of “resilience” usually conjure up images of the lone individual, toughing it out through sheer willpower. But, looking at the Central Region, what actually comes through is something like “networked resilience” basically, resilience as a group project, not a solo performance (Adomako Ampofo, 2023). This resonates with recent African feminist scholarship that pushes back on the overly individualistic focus of mainstream leadership theories (Nnaemeka, 2021).

By focusing on women who head schools in these two districts, this analysis doesn’t just fill in research gaps it also offers a new angle for policy development. Instead of just cataloguing barriers, it highlights how these women navigate and innovate within tough conditions, while pointing out where actual systemic change could happen. There’s room for future research, too: for instance, comparing different regions within Ghana or tracking how policy shifts affect leadership retention over time. Ultimately, if the goal is real gender equity in educational leadership, it’s not enough to just increase representation. What’s needed is a deeper look at the complicated mix of cultural, institutional, and everyday factors shaping these women’s professional lives.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Unbelievably, despite the fact that women teach in practically every classroom on the planet, far fewer of them open the office door labelled "principal" or "headmistress." According to the most recent UNESCO Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report 2024–2025, the proportion of female principals in forty countries is at least twenty percentage points lower than that of female teachers, and only one out of ten countries

have any real policies in place to close the gap (UNESCO, 2025). The pattern is consistent across both rich and poor systems, indicating that the majority of the blocking is caused by invisible ceilings rather than a lack of talent. However, the daily personal sacrifices made by female leaders just to remain in their positions are conspicuously missing from most of the discussion. This study, focused on the lived experiences of female senior high school heads in Ghana's Central Region, specifically within the Cape Coast Metropolitan and Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese districts, starts with those human stories.

Research consistently shows that when women lead schools, the benefits are substantial, students achieve more, teachers have higher attendance, and parents feel genuinely included in the conversation. So, when there's a lack of women in these leadership roles, it's not just a superficial issue. The imbalance can actually undermine school performance and community engagement. The evidence, spanning multiple countries, really drives this point home. According to a recent World Bank synthesis that covers Benin, Madagascar, Senegal, and Togo, when a woman, rather than a man, holds the top position, learning gains in reading and mathematics range from 0.17 to 0.34 standard deviations, which is roughly equivalent to adding an extra term of education (Guilbert et al., 2024). In order to improve entire communities, female leaders spend more time meeting with parents, scheduling additional remediation classes, and consistently keeping an eye on teacher attendance. To put it briefly, the leadership gap is a problem that goes beyond gender equity; it has quantifiable effects on social cohesion and learning.

These worldwide trends are reflected in Ghana. Stronger leadership pipelines are promised by policy documents like the Pre-Tertiary Teacher Professional Development and Management Policy, but women still hold a small percentage of headships. According to a study conducted on 263 schools across two districts in Ghana, female heads of schools are just less common than their male counterparts, but they are neither less competent nor less able to teach (Abonyi et al., 2022). Women's representation in the Central Region, which is home to the oldest secondary schools in the country, increases in urban areas but decreases significantly in rural areas, creating areas where a girl can go through high school without ever seeing a woman in the top seat. **This urban-rural disparity is exemplified in the contrast between the urban Cape Coast Metropolitan and the more peri-urban/rural Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese District.** The Ghana Education Service and Ministry of Education have verbally endorsed gender equity, but the shortage still exists. The promise between policy and practice appears to be being stalled by something.

Work-family conflict, or the ongoing tension that results from competing demands on one's time, energy, and emotional space between work and home obligations, is one potent brake. Heavy workloads at home and at school, along with high financial expectations from extended families, push married women in particular toward exhaustion and lower job satisfaction, according to Ghanaian studies of female teachers in the Komenda-Edina-Eguafo-Abrem municipality (Abakah, 2018). Similar results are found in New Juaben, where career mothers report that long commutes, late-night homework supervision, and early-morning lesson planning are stressors that leave little time for personal care (Agyeman & Attom, 2021).

The conflict between leadership responsibilities and household chores is the biggest obstacle to effective management, according to 67 female heads in Tamale (Yeng et al., 2024). The Central Region presents a distinctive set of challenges. Daily life for many involves preparing children for school, caring for elderly family members, and navigating poorly maintained roads to reach educational institutions where resources—like water and adequate teaching staff—are sometimes in short supply. Insights from recent qualitative research involving six headmistresses and eight deputy heads in a metropolitan area highlight these realities. For these leaders, adopting participatory leadership is less about preference and more about necessity; it becomes a practical strategy for distributing responsibilities, especially when faced with family emergencies or staff shortages (Ayensu et al., 2024).

Despite a handful of case studies floating around, comprehensive insight into how female leaders in the Central Region's peri-urban districts actually manage these competing pressures is still pretty limited. A focused investigation within the specific contexts of Cape Coast Metropolitan and Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese is absent. Most of the existing research just lists the obstacles they face, barely scratching the surface when it comes to detailing their day-to-day realities, outlining the strategies they use to cope, or actually assessing which types of support like on-site childcare, relief staff at the district level, or more flexible schedules make a tangible difference in easing their workload.

Frankly, there's a surprising gap in our understanding of how cultural expectations like deference to authority or traditional views of motherhood actually intersect with real, on-the-ground school challenges, such as sudden enrollment surges or crumbling facilities. These intersections are likely to manifest differently in an urban metropolitan setting compared to a peri-urban district. You can roll out well-intentioned policies all

day, but without a nuanced grasp of these cultural dynamics, you risk solving the wrong issues or even worse, just dumping extra administrative headaches onto already overwhelmed staff.

The stakes are high in practice. The Ghana Education Service's goals for improved learning outcomes depend on steady, capable leadership, and if women burn out or choose not to assume leadership roles, national pledges to promote gender parity fall apart. The system loses hard-won experience and future mentorship for younger teachers each time a qualified woman turns down a promotion because she does not see a way to balance. On the other hand, even small-scale measures like district replacement pools, subsidized housing close to schools, and organized peer mentoring could reduce attrition and increase the leadership dividend that has already been shown in other parts of the continent.

This study tackles a pressing concern: how do female senior high school administrators in the Cape Coast Metropolitan and Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese districts of the Central Region navigate the ongoing conflict between professional and family obligations? It's a balancing act that often comes with significant personal cost. The research also seeks to uncover what additional support systems or resources might empower these women to lead effectively, without sacrificing their health or well-being.

Rather than remaining at the level of abstract policy or broad generalizations, this work centers the lived experiences of women who simultaneously oversee schools and manage households. Their perspectives, often underrepresented in research and decision-making, are crucial for understanding the real impact of role conflict in contexts marked by limited resources and high expectations. Ultimately, the findings aim not only to inform stakeholders at both the metropolitan and district assembly levels

but also to contribute to theoretical discussions surrounding work-family dynamics in challenging environments.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The study sought to explore the lived experiences of female senior high school heads in two districts of the Central Region of Ghana in balance their professional roles in school administration and management with their family responsibilities.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The study sought to:

1. Explore the experiences of female Senior High School heads in the Cape Coast Metropolitan and Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese District in combining their professional and family roles.
2. Ascertain the challenges confronting female Senior High School heads in the Coast Metropolitan and Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese District in combining their professional and family roles.
3. Explore the existing strategies employed by the female Senior High School heads in the Cape Coast Metropolitan and Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese District to cope with the challenges associated with combining the roles.
4. Explore the alternate support systems that could be put in place to enable female Senior High School heads in the Central Region to manage the challenges they face.

1.5 Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. What are the experiences of the female Senior High School heads in the Cape Coast Metropolitan and Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese District in combining professional and family roles?
2. What challenges confront female Senior High School heads in the Cape Coast Metropolitan and Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese District in combining professional and family roles?
3. What are the existing strategies employed by the female Senior High School heads in the Cape Coast Metropolitan and Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese District in coping with the challenges associated with combining the roles?
4. What alternative support systems can be implemented to help female Senior High School heads in the Central Region to balance their professional and family responsibilities?

1.6 Significance of the Study

It is always imperative to demonstrate the contributions of a study to policymaking and practice. Marshall and Rossman (2015, p. 33) argued that “the researcher must show that practitioners need information that the research will provide.” Therefore, whereas the study aims at contributing to the theoretical knowledge about women’s experiences in educational administration, it is also envisaged that it will provide policymakers in the educational administration of Ghana with the needed insight into the challenges facing female heads as they play the role of senior high schools’ headmistresses.

Again, it would inform policy on the application of gender and diversity in policy formulation and implementation. It is important to note that women's representation in leadership roles in various sectors of the country has been of great concern in both the

past and recent days. A study of this nature is therefore needed to explore the various ways to ensure gender equality and diversity in assigning roles of leadership in the educational sector. Education specialists, gender advocates, and employers in the sector would have empirical evidence as a result of the findings of this study to better understand female heads' experiences and formulate policies accordingly to help promote female leadership and sustenance in the sector.

1.7 Delimitations of the Study

The study is delimited to Female Heads and Assistant Female Heads in educational administrative positions in senior high schools in the Cape Coast Metropolitan and Abura Asebu Kwamankese District all in the Central Region of Ghana. It explores their experiences, as well as the contextual and gendered challenges they encounter.

1.8 Definition of Terms

1.8.1 Family

A family is a group of two or more persons related by birth, marriage, or adoption who reside together.

1.8.2 Family Responsibilities

For female school administrators, family responsibilities include a variety of household duties based on social and cultural norms. These include supporting their spouses, taking care of their children, handling household duties like cooking and budgeting, and attending to the needs of their extended families, such as taking care of elderly relatives. Regardless of her professional role, these responsibilities are seen as the woman's primary duty in many African contexts, including Ghana. They put extra strain on women who must juggle them with the demands of school leadership because they are frequently non-negotiable, emotionally taxing, and time-consuming.

1.8.3 Professional Responsibilities

A wide range of professional responsibilities essential to the efficient operation of their institutions fall within the purview of female senior high school administrators. These include exercising leadership, managing employees, upholding discipline and academic standards, and making sure that Ghana Education Service (GES) policies and reforms are followed. Along with managing administrative duties like reporting, budgeting, and meeting planning, they also mentor educators and interact with community stakeholders. Given the high level of dedication needed for their position, these duties typically require long hours and consistent mental effort, often lasting past regular working hours.

1.8.4 Female Heads

Women who occupy senior leadership roles in educational settings are referred to as "female heads." Administrative and managerial responsibilities fall under the purview of female heads. These executives have significant influence over their organizations' overall goals and strategic orientation. They face particular opportunities and challenges in their roles because of their gender and leadership context. The need to effectively manage their personal and professional obligations is a major obstacle they face.

1.8.5 Assistant Female Heads

Assistant female heads are women who hold deputy or supporting leadership positions in educational institutions. They are essential in assisting the head in handling both academic and administrative duties. They might be in charge of particular areas like staff development, student welfare, or curriculum planning. They also frequently serve as important liaisons between students, instructors, and school administration,

facilitating efficient communication and productive teamwork. Notwithstanding their significant contributions, assistant female heads usually face difficulties like excessive workloads, elevated stress levels, and restricted resource availability.

1.8.6 Work-family Conflict

Work–family conflict is the tension that arises when the demands of one’s job and home life collide, making it tough to satisfy both. Sometimes work spills over—long hours, tight deadlines, constant emails, leaving little energy for loved ones or causing emotional exhaustion at home. Other times, family duties, caring for children, tending to elderly parents, managing the household, intrude on work, leading to missed meetings or distracted focus. When this tug-of-war becomes chronic, it can sap job satisfaction, heighten stress, and undermine well-being. The strain is most intense for people who shoulder major responsibilities in both spheres, such as working parents or caregivers, and is especially pronounced for women in leadership positions who must juggle high-stakes professional expectations alongside family commitments.

1.9 Organization of the Study

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter One, which is the introduction of the study, provides background to the study, a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the objectives of the study, research questions, the significance of the study, as well as the organization of the study. The second chapter focuses on the review of related works that are relevant to this study. It involves the theories, concepts, and empirical studies that underlie the study. Chapter Three explains the methodology of the study. The research approach, design, study population, sample size and determination, instruments for data collection, and procedure for data analysis were all discussed in this chapter. The fourth chapter is the discussion of the results and findings.

It presents the results in alignment with the research questions and objectives of the study. The last Chapter, Chapter Five, provides the summary, conclusions, and recommendations drawn from the findings of the study.



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses relevant issues related to educational management and administration. It discusses both the empirical studies and theories related to the study. Other issues, like challenges and management strategies, are all discussed.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Three interconnected theories, the work-life balance theory, the stress and coping theory, and the social role theory form the basis of this investigation. When combined, these frameworks offer a thorough lens through which to view how female senior high school administrators balance the demands of both family obligations and professional leadership. Social Role Theory describes how gendered behaviour and women's roles at home and at work are shaped by societal expectations. The theory of stress and coping provides information about how people deal with the psychological strains brought on by competing demands. Lastly, the theory of work-life balance offers a methodical explanation of how people try to strike a balance between their personal and professional obligations. The investigation of the experiences, difficulties, and coping strategies of female school leaders is informed by these theories taken together.

People have multiple roles in their lives, each of which is linked to a set of socially constructed norms, expectations, and behaviours, according to the Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987; Merton, 1957). These roles are often gendered, meaning that society holds men and women to different norms and attributes, which affects their experiences in a variety of contexts.

For female senior high school administrators to comprehend the gendered expectations that impact their professional and personal lives, this theory is essential. Women have historically been socialised into roles primarily associated with nurturing, caregiving, and domestic responsibilities, whereas leadership and professional roles have historically been associated with masculine traits (Eagly & Wood, 1999). These cultural norms continue to be obstinately embedded, surpassing progress in equality, resulting in an unseen burden where women are often expected to manage their homes and families as lead carers while holding demanding leadership positions. A double bind may result from higher standards in both areas. Conflict arises as much from the characteristic of expectations for each role, which can be seen as inconsistent, as from the volume of demands (Goode, 1960).

Through this lens, the study's objective of identifying the challenges faced by female heads in balancing their roles as family and professional is directly understood. It highlights the ways that deeply ingrained cultural norms and gendered expectations produce pressures that extend beyond pragmatic concerns, like the potential for criticism or to be viewed as unworthy if one fails to meet both sets of expectations. Additionally, it aids in exploring their experiences balancing their roles in the home and at work by offering a framework for analysing their emotions of overwhelm, guilt, or the constant balancing act between their roles as heads and mother/wife.

The Work-Life Balance Theory examines how people manage their personal and professional lives from a range of perspectives (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). It explores the dynamic processes of segregation and integration and their effects on people's performance and well-being, going beyond simply acknowledging conflict. A key component of this broader theory for the study is the Work-Family Border Theory.

The Work-Family Border Theory views work and family as distinct boundaries or domains that individuals must constantly navigate (Clark, 2000). People cross boundaries between these domains on a physical, chronological, and psychological level. The permeability of these boundaries, the ease with which demands, emotions, and information can flow between domains as well as their flexibility, the extent to which people can control their integration or separation are essential for understanding work-life management (Kreiner, Hollensbe, & Cha, 2006). It is often difficult for female heads to establish clear boundaries because of the high demands of their jobs, which often require highly permeable boundaries (e.g., taking work calls at home, thinking about family issues at school).

This theoretical lens is essential because it describes the daily negotiations and boundary management they do. Female heads may employ a range of border management techniques, such as segmentation (attempting to maintain a strict separation between work and family) or integration (blending the two domains), according to Nippert-Eng (1996). Research on the effectiveness of these strategies in managing role conflict and stress, as well as the potential for work-family spillover, where experiences in one area have an effect on the other, either positively as enrichment or negatively as conflict is crucial (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). One can better comprehend their daily struggles and proactive attempts to achieve balance by learning about these relationships.

The Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) offers a thorough framework for comprehending how people see, understand, and react to stressful circumstances. It sees stress as a transactional process that involves a person's

assessment of a situation and their available resources to manage it, rather than just as an external stimulus.

This theory states that people perform primary appraisal when faced with potentially stressful situations, such as the demanding dual roles of a senior high school head, determining whether the situation is challenging, threatening, or harmful. They then perform secondary appraisal, evaluating their options and coping mechanisms. Stress results from a perceived mismatch between resources and demands (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The ongoing strain of overseeing a sizable educational institution while also having important family obligations can be considered a chronic stressor for female heads, resulting in feelings of exhaustion, burnout, and overwhelm.

This theory is crucial because it offers a psychological perspective on how these demands affect people. Importantly, it directly informs the coping strategies, which can be divided into two categories: emotion-focused coping (which aims to regulate the emotional response to the stressor, such as seeking emotional support, cognitive reframing, and self-care) and problem-focused coping (which aims to change or manage the stressor, such as assigning tasks, time management, and seeking instrumental support) (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Finding effective practices requires an understanding of the variety of coping strategies used by female heads. External support networks are also important tools that can improve coping skills and lessen stress perception.

2.1.1 Role theory

Role theory offers a useful lens to understand the social life, characteristic behaviour patterns or roles of female heads who combine family and professional responsibilities. According to Biddle (1986), it explains roles by presuming that persons are members

of social positions and hold expectations for their own behaviours and those of other persons. The constant interaction between an individual and other people is called the socialization process. It is in this process that an individual assumes a role, position, status, or responsibility that is required or demanded for a particular context. Female heads, therefore, concurrently hold dual roles, such as caregiver within the family sphere and leader or supervisor in their professional context. Each role carries distinct expectations and responsibilities that they must maneuver.

As Monnot (cited in Palomino & Frezatti, 2015) explains, an individual may assume a role that requires him/her to act as a supervisor in one setting while serving as a subordinate in another, implying varying responsibilities depending on the position being occupied. Similarly, female heads balance the supervisory role in their workspace with caregiving or subordinate roles within family dynamics. This dual role tenancy often requires them to manage possibly conflicting demands, time constraints, and societal expectations, highlighting the depth of their lived experiences.

Thus, role theory clarifies how female heads in these districts negotiate and integrate their family and professional roles, shaping their behaviour and strategies for handling the overlapping responsibilities. This lens stresses the importance of understanding the social position-based expectations that influence their day to day lives and the challenges essential in balancing multiple roles (Biddle, 1986; Monnot cited in Palomino & Frezatti, 2015).

2.1.2 Role conflict theory

The role conflict theory (O'Neil, Denke, & Blazina, 2016; Graham & Folkes, 2014) provides a framework for understanding the challenges faced by female heads of senior high schools as they navigate the competing demands of their professional and family

roles. The theory states that when an individual participates in several roles that are not compatible, conflict springs up between these roles (O'Neil, Denke, & Blazina, 2016; Graham & Folkes, 2014).

According to Teh, Yong, and Lin (2014), in their view, observe that any role or task that influences an individual's time due to their involvement in that role can create conflict with another equally significant role to be performed. This is particularly important for female school leaders, whose work demands (such as administrative duties, staff supervision, and student discipline) often discord with family obligations (such as childcare and household responsibilities). The theory is premised on the assumption that time allotted to family roles (e.g., caring for children or dependents) cannot be assigned to work roles (Graham & Folkes, 2014). This implies that, there is a competing demand for the roles and the conflicting roles may compete for an individual's scarce time and energy, making it impossible to conform to the expectations of both domains (Wharton & Blair-Loy, 2006; Kopelman, Greenhaus, & Connolly, 1983).

From a rational perspective, role conflict suggests that the total amount of time invested in work and family roles is positively related with role encumbrance, which can be explain as the perception of having too many responsibilities and not having adequate time to perform them (Duxbury, Higgins, & Lee, 1994). Frone, Yardley, and Markel (1997) argue that when an individual has excessive role to perform at a given time, they must assign more time to these roles, thereby depleting resources (such as time and energy) needed for other responsibilities. This is particularly evident among female school leaders, whose extensive professional commitments in one domain may reduce the capital resources in other domains such as time and motivation necessary for

performance in the other domain. The rational stands has been supported by research findings, demonstrating that an increase in the number of hours a person spends in work and family activities also leads to an increase in work and family conflict and the likelihood of an individual experiencing family-work conflict (Byron, 2005; Keith & Schafer, 1984). Essentially, time and energy spent on family-related activities cannot be used for work-related activities, thereby creating family- work conflict for the individual.

This theory is therefore used as the lens through which female heads in leadership positions and their family work are studied. Work-family conflict occurs when there is an inter-role clash in which work and family demands are mutually incompatible, making it quite difficult to meet both family and work roles (Higgins, Duxbury, & Lyons, 2007). Research indicates that WFC is often a serious stress factor at the workplace, leading to several adverse outcomes, negatively affecting employee well-being (Karatepe & Tekinkus, 2006; Hellgren & Sverke, 2003). Female heads of senior high schools, in particular, face unique challenges due to societal expectations that place greater domestic responsibilities on women (Eagly & Carli, 2007). The dual burden of balancing both school leadership and household responsibilities often lead to role strain, where the pressures from a role extends to the other (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Moreover, cultural and institutional factors exacerbate these challenges. In many societies, traditional gender roles specify that women carry the main burden for domestic duties, even when they hold challenging leadership positions (Amponsah, 2021). This develops into increased stress level for female school heads, who must balance high professional aspirations with societal and familial expectations. Studies

on female educational leaders in Ghana, in particular, disclose that many strive with time management, emotional exhaustion, and minimal spousal support, further aggravating work-family conflict (Addai, 2018; Osei-Hwedie & Boateng, 2020).

The role conflict theory effectively highlights on the difficulties faced by female heads of senior high schools in resolving their professional and family responsibilities. The competing demands of both roles lead to work-family conflict, which influences their well-being and job performance. Resolving these challenges request institutional support, such as flexible work policies, delegation of duties, and gender-sensitive leadership training, to assist women in educational leadership achieve a more sustainable work-life balance (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Amponsah, 2021).

2.2 Conceptual Review

Educational researchers have long been interested in how gender relates to educational leadership. Classic studies (Chisholm, 2001; Coleman, 1996; Morriss, Tin, & Coleman, 1999; Shakeshaft, Nowell & Pretty, 1991) showed that men and women approach school leadership in different ways. More recent literature highlights that these differences in style are rooted in larger social structures that influence women's simultaneous involvement in family and work roles.

Coleman (1996, 2000) used Gray's (1993) masculinity–femininity paradigm to demonstrate that while male principals typically place more emphasis on guidance, discipline, and performance evaluation, female principals frequently characterise themselves as compassionate, innovative, and sensitive to the needs of each individual. While pointing out that this does not preclude the strategic use of authority, when necessary, subsequent scholarship confirms that many women leaders have an ethic of care orientation (Brunner, 2002; Ayensu et al., 2024). Ayensu and colleagues

discovered that married female heads of senior high schools (SHSs) in Ghana's Central Region prefer relational and participatory approaches, while single heads tend to be more assertive in order to gain compliance in male-dominated settings.

According to Dimmock and Walker (1998, 2006), cultural factors influence leadership. Women's access to and acceptance in senior roles are restricted in many sub-Saharan countries, including Ghana, by patriarchal norms that frame leadership as masculine. Although there is evidence that women's collaborative style can improve school outcomes, a 2022 systematic review of gender and school leadership in Africa found organisational, social, and personal factors that combine to impede women's advancement (Bush, Kirezi, Ashford, & Glover, 2022). In a similar vein, Oplatka (2006) noted that in order to navigate patriarchal expectations and maintain power, female leaders frequently take on an androgynous style that combines "feminine" relationality with "masculine" toughness.

While stress and coping theory describes how people handle the stress brought on by conflicting demands, social role theory asserts that gendered expectations from society influence how people fulfil their roles in the home and at work. These concepts are expanded upon by work-family balance theory, which emphasises the reciprocal influence between the home and school environments. Role conflict, time constraints, and emotional labour are common challenges faced by female heads who are mothers, wives, or carers (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Byrne, 2006). These theoretical stances help to explain why women's experiences cannot be adequately captured by leadership style alone; rather, their everyday reality is defined by the relationship between leadership and household duties.

Significant obstacles, especially for women, are revealed by the work-life balance of secondary school teachers and tertiary administrators. According to Asiedu Owusu (2024), sabbaticals, flexible scheduling, and spouse support are essential factors that help senior female administrators at the University of Cape Coast maintain a healthy balance. At the secondary level, Oteng (2017) discovered that too many teaching responsibilities and household duties force female SHS teachers in Kumasi to change their family plans and put off advancing their careers. Female headteachers exhibit similar trends; a 2023 study conducted in Tamale Metropolis revealed that the "double shift" of home management, teacher resistance, and gender bias all seriously impair their efficacy (Yakubu & Mumuni, 2023). The tactics used by female leaders. According to qualitative research conducted in Cape Coast, female school administrators use intentional "letting go," social support, and faith to cope with stress (Amoako, 2022). These tactics align with international research showing that cognitive reframing, exercise, and social support reduce chronic role strain (Oteng, 2017; Bush & Glover, 2016).

According to World Bank analyses conducted in four West African nations, female principalship is associated with improvements in reading and math scores of 0.17–0.34 standard deviations (World Bank, 2023). Remedial classes, parent involvement, and improved teacher supervision are some of the mechanisms; these practices reflect both the paradigms of caring and instructional leadership. Such data refutes narratives of deficit and emphasises the importance of assisting women in achieving headship.

In order to preserve power while fostering employees and students, female leaders exhibit stylistic hybridity by utilising both "feminine" and "masculine" leadership philosophies. The expectations of stakeholders are shaped by patriarchal norms and

organisational cultures, which result in extra scrutiny and resistance that male heads rarely encounter. This emphasises the importance of cultural mediation. Although role conflict and resource depletion are ongoing issues in work-family negotiations, coping mechanisms like social networks, flexible work schedules, and religious practices that reduce stress and maintain performance are examples of agency. The study responds to calls for culturally nuanced frameworks (Dimmock & Walker, 2006) by placing the phenomenon at the intersection of gendered leadership discourse and work-family scholarship. It also advances current knowledge by highlighting the lived strategies used by female SHS heads to maintain their roles as effective leaders and happy family members.

Understanding how female heads reconcile the demands of school leadership with familial obligations is crucial for equity and school improvement. Insights from this conceptual review suggest that policy interventions, such as leadership preparation tailored to women's realities, childcare support, and flexible scheduling, may not only enhance women's wellbeing but also bolster student outcomes.

2.3 Educational Management

Bush (2007) and Leithwood, Jantzi, and Steinbach (2007) have classified educational leadership and management models into formal, collegial, political, subjective, ambiguous, and cultural paradigms. The collegial model, which is in line with participative, transformational, and interpersonal leadership styles, is frequently linked to female leaders because of their propensity for group decision-making. However, Social Theory, Work-Life-Balance Theory, and Stress and Coping Theory must all be included in the analysis in order to completely comprehend the dynamics of female leadership in educational management. Social theory, especially feminist social theory,

challenges systemic injustices that prevent women from rising to positions of leadership. It draws attention to how institutional biases and societal norms influence how people view female leaders, frequently devaluing their authority while stereotyping them as cooperative or nurturing. Despite being empowering, the collegial model may unintentionally perpetuate gendered norms by linking women to consensus-driven leadership as opposed to authoritative decision-making. Women are under-represented in hierarchical leadership positions but over-represented in collegial settings like elementary schools, which can be explained by social theory. Despite women's preference for participative leadership, structural barriers such as implicit bias and a lack of mentorship still exist. Work-Life Balance Theory looks at how women in leadership roles are disproportionately impacted by the competing demands of their personal and professional lives. When it comes to juggling administrative and family obligations, female principals are frequently subjected to more scrutiny. Because collaborative decision-making necessitates more time and emotional effort, the collegial model's emphasis on drawn-out consensus-building may make work-life conflicts worse for women. Aspiring female leaders experience burnout and attrition as a result, underscoring the necessity of institutional support networks that recognise these difficulties.

According to the Stress and Coping Theory, people use emotion-focused techniques, like reaching out for social support, or problem-focused techniques, like reorganising workloads, to cope with stress. Peer mentoring is one of the relational coping strategies that women in educational leadership frequently use to manage stress at work. The participatory nature of the collegial model can be both a benefit and a drawback; although it creates support systems, the drawn-out decision-making processes can also lead to increased stress. In order to cope, female leaders might push for legislative

changes that eliminate bureaucratic red tape, highlighting the necessity of flexible leadership strategies that reduce stress while preserving teamwork. There are important ramifications for women in leadership roles in education. To promote work-life balance, policy changes should target structural obstacles like rigid schedules. Through focused leadership development, mentoring programs can use Social Theory to undermine gendered stereotypes. Furthermore, incorporating stress management techniques into professional training can give female executives the tools they need to deal with the particular demands they encounter.

Although women's leadership abilities are well suited to the collegial model, its shortcomings and social restrictions call for a more comprehensive theoretical approach. We can more effectively push for structural adjustments that enable female leaders in education by combining Social Theory, Work-Life-Balance Theory, and Stress and Coping Theory. Together, these frameworks show how stress management, personal-professional balance, and societal expectations interact to provide a thorough understanding of the opportunities and challenges facing women in educational leadership.

2.4 Female School Head and the New Managerialism

Academics are primarily self-regulatory, independent, and autonomous, and universities are typically collegial in character. Their collegiality is characterized by a lax policy-defining and execution-control culture (Oberg & Bringselius, 2015). However, what is known as 'the new managerialism,' or the corporatization of academia, is rapidly eroding this collegiality. This is based on corporate principles, with a culture that emphasizes policy creation and execution control (Oberg & Bringselius,

2015), as a result of the increasing globalization and marketization of educational institutions (Blackmore, 2002).

According to Bleiklie (2020), "new managerialism" is "a set of different and frequently conflicting organizational and management reactions to the program of public-sector reform initiated by several Western governments during the last two decades." Management and leadership naturally take on new shapes in the framework of contemporary managerialism, mimicking those in the corporate world with a focus on efficiency and effectiveness. As a consequence, headmistresses are increasingly overburdened with paperwork, marketing programs, student recruitment, decentralized budgets tied to cost centres, quality audits and performance reviews, and other non-academic tasks. What this and other studies concerned about women academic leaders and managers are concerned about is where women middle managers are in all of these fast developments. What effect, if any, will the 'new managerialism' have on the gains in equity in academia? Male hegemony seems to be being strengthened as a result of recent developments and the clear march towards corporatization.

But what does the research show? Several international researchers in schools and higher education in Australia, the United Kingdom (UK), Canada, New Zealand, the United States of America (USA), and South Africa share a common perspective on the likely impact of this paradigm shift on the academic community, particularly on women academics and women leaders. "It is a complex ideology that informs ways of managing public institutions by advocating many of the practices and values of the private for-profit sector in pursuit of efficiency, excellence, and continuous improvement," Watson (2000:7) says, quoting Rosemary Deem's definition of new managerialism. Deem, on the other hand, appears to advocate a "more sensitive approach" that emphasizes

"collaborative and facilitative management, concern for people rather than just focusing on tasks, a lack of interest in personal status and competing with others, flexibility in approach, and... ability to work as a member of a team," according to Watson (Watson, 2000:7-8).

From this vantage point, it seems that Deem is concerned about the likely loss of female management styles as a result of 'new managerialism,' which appears to value competition above teamwork and cooperation. Researchers in the United Kingdom (UK), Canada, and Australia (Blackmore, 2002; Lynch & Grummell, 2018; Lynch, 2014, 2015; Klikaver, 2015) all agree that 'new managerialism' creates uncertainties for women academics and leaders as well as managers. Hence the recognition of women's leadership potential and the need for a "more sensitive approach to people management, an approach that will capture both the hearts and minds of workers" (Deem, 2020:50), it appears that opportunities for female academics aspiring to be leaders and managers should open up. However, because of what is known as "a fast-revolving door," which assures that women join and depart executive roles quickly, no sooner do women enter executive positions than they leave (Lynch, 2015:51). The ambiguity arises from the fact that, although there are discussions about inclusiveness and arguments for more "feminine traits" in leadership, the "hegemonic culture of competitive achievement" stays constant (Kanter, 1990; Lynch, 2015:51).

Lynch used data from a large qualitative study of women school leaders in Victoria, Australia, to show how presently available leadership scripts hinder and/or give opportunities for women in education leadership. Her conclusion is that the existing paradigm poses a challenge not just to feminism and feminist professors at universities but also to women's entire standing in society (Lynch & Grummell, 2018). They look

at how this new paradigm (at today's Australian institutions) would affect women's leadership opportunities and any accomplishments achieved in policy measures and improvements in encouraging anti-sexist behaviours. Bleiklie (2020) describes a study to investigate the degree to which 'new managerialism' has infiltrated university administration in the United Kingdom.

This study was conducted in the United Kingdom on a group of manager-academics,' which comprised vice-chancellors, deputy vice-chancellors, and heads of departments. Although the research did not focus only on female academic managers, the results have significant implications for female headmistresses working in the new higher education management environment. The growing amount of work, as well as the additional expectations and obligations imposed on Headmistresses, needs continuous learning, reskilling, and retooling. This may require time away from home, which, although not always a negative thing, may add strain and stress to already overburdened women.

When examining women principals in Britain during the 'new managerialism' period, Hall noticed an intriguing discovery. "There are different interpretations of entrepreneurial activity in education, which on the one hand criticize and on the other hand encourage it," she remarked (Hall, 2002:13). Lynch's (2014) writing on the present situation and issues of academic women working within the setting and limits of 'new managerialism' in the UK higher education system echoes this point.

She expresses worry about the influence of UK higher education's 'new managerialism' on women's academic identity and experience, which she claims is frequently exacerbated by the shifting "ethos, praxis, and pedagogy of UK higher education institutions in the twenty-first century" (Lynch, 2014:379). She notes that there is a

fundamental inconsistency or anomaly between academic women's ideals and the values of 'academic managerialism.' Academic women's ideals include "social justice, equality, collegialism, and cooperation," which seem to be at odds with academic managerialism's principles of "efficiency, individualism, and competitiveness." Brown conducted a study of the personal stories of academic women in UK institutions.

Equal opportunities issues were central to the issues found to disadvantage academic women who reported marginalization and isolation from disciplinary, departmental, and organizational networks, deemed very important for 'success' in the current 'corporatist' academic culture, according to a study published in 2000. (Lynch 2014:384). Webster, Ajayan and Balasubramanian (2020) observe many changes in the academic workplace caused by what they call "academic managerialism" in a preliminary survey of academics performed in six South African higher education institutions. Their results are applicable to all academics, not just women. They claim that academics struggle to acclimate to being referred to as line managers and to dealing with management as an employer or employee rather than as colleagues.

Finally, the 'new managerialism' and 'academic managerialism' look to pose a severe danger to the advances gained in academic equality initiatives. The seeming decline of collegial systems of governance (which are seen to be more favourable to women) and their replacement with corporate ideals of efficiency and effectiveness may be harmful to women and, in effect, obstruct their development into management roles. Instead, 'new managerialism' seems to be more likely to sustain male dominance (specifically, white male dominance) and "impart greater power to the strong," as Lynch (2015) puts it.

2.5 Women in Leadership and Management

Women in leadership and management are a relatively young topic of study with a wide range of opportunities, particularly in this age of contemporary management. Before diving into the details of this topic, it's important to understand what the terms "leadership" and "management" mean and how they vary. Many scholars, however, interchangeably employ the terms 'leadership' and 'management,' as well as 'leader' and 'manager.' As the conversation develops, this will become clear. Although the literature suggests that there is a debate about whether leadership and management are synonymous or whether there is a distinction between the two, the discussion that follows focuses on the latter viewpoint, that there is a distinction between leadership and management and between a leader and a manager. The perspectives of Kairys (2018) and Elias (2018) on leadership and management will be addressed. Leadership and management are two separate but complementary approaches to problem-solving. Each has its own role and set of activities; both leadership and management are required for success in today's more turbulent corporate environment; the true difficulty is to mix the two and utilize each to balance the other. Management is about dealing with complexity, while leadership is about dealing with change, and these two responsibilities form management and leadership's distinct tasks. To begin, management performs the job of dealing with complexity by planning and budgeting, while leadership performs the function of change by first establishing a direction.

Second, management builds the ability to carry out its strategy by organizing and staffing, while leadership does so by bringing people together. Finally, management assures success through control and problem-solving. Motivating and encouraging others is something that leadership accomplishes as well (Kairys, 2018). Elias (2018) makes a distinction between leaders and managers that is comparable to Kairys's

(2018). In his paper, 'Managers and Leaders: Are They Distinct? Elias demonstrates that "managers and leaders are generally different sorts of individuals" and tries to show that "managers and leaders have different views regarding their objectives, professions, relationships with others, and themselves" (Elias, 2018:36). She outlines the many paths of growth for managers and leaders, claiming that their success is contingent on developing a one-on-one connection with a mentor.

Managers have a tendency to have a cold, impersonal approach to objectives. Their objectives are driven by need rather than desire and are therefore firmly rooted in the organization's history and culture, while leaders are proactive rather than reactive, developing ideas rather than reacting to them. They take a personal and aggressive approach to achieving their objectives. Leaders and managers have different perspectives on work.

Managers tend to view work as an enabling process involving some combination of people and ideas interacting to establish strategies, make decisions, and limit options, whereas leaders work in the opposite direction, developing new approaches to long-standing problems and opening issues up to new possibilities. Managers tend to deal with people and connect to them based on their place in a chain of events or a decision-making process, while leaders concerned with ideas relate in a more intuitive and empathic manner. In other words, a manager is concerned with how things are done, but a leader is concerned with what events and choices mean to participants (Elias, 2018).

The study of women in leadership and management is a relatively new phenomenon, owing to the fact that traditionally, leadership has been associated with political leadership, with "great men" who defined power, authority, and expertise (Predue

2016). Leadership has been widely linked with males and masculine forms of behavior, and since women have not been in leadership roles in large numbers, most people's mental picture of a leader is male (Padilla-Gaytan, 2022). "Most leadership research prior to the 1980s was conducted by men and dealt almost exclusively with male leaders. Because women have been largely absent from the study of leadership, much of our knowledge of leadership has been derived from male researchers' descriptions and analyses of male leaders; thus, leadership has been synonymous with masculinity (Predue, 2016).

The language of leadership has masculine connotations; images of leaders are often male heroes, and popular contexts for leadership include traditionally masculine scenarios. Common perceptions of appropriate leadership behaviours also have stereotypically masculine overtones: of command and control, autocracy and dominance, personal power or charisma, and decisiveness (Abdulraham & Amoush 2020).

Despite the recognition of women's leadership potential as "future leaders in the twenty-first century and as the future in academic leaders" (Gale, 1994, cited by Kessissoglou 1995:8), their gender is a barrier in the evaluation of female leaders, according to Predue (2016), and acts as a filter for assessing women's leadership skills and effectiveness (Gale, 1994, cited by Kessissoglou 1995). The topic of gender and leadership was not addressed until a critical mass of women in positions of leadership had formed. Women's leadership potential was recognized as their exposure grew. Despite this, their leadership development is modest, especially in higher education. In a study on the state of women's leadership in higher education conducted by Hoyt and Simon (2024), it was established that women administrators continue to be grouped in

middle management roles and areas outside of academic deanships and other more key administrative positions.

As previously said, women are seen as having the capacity to lead academia in the twenty-first century. "More women and people of non-Anglo heritage are expected to be managers in the twenty-first century," according to the Karpin Report and the Working Party on Management Education (1995). Leadership in the twenty-first century necessitates a variety of abilities, including those to: empower others and instill enthusiasm in them; build informal networks and coalitions; be flexible and responsive to customer and client needs; nurture and develop individuals; be willing to share information and operate in an open and transparent manner; articulate core values; and thus develop culture through the creation of shared meaning (Abdulraham & Amoush, 2020). It is commonly acknowledged that women have different approaches to problem-solving and conflict resolution. Cooke (2023) are worried about the applicability of conventional leadership theory to the demands of female managers, pointing out that in the past, leadership research has been almost solely focused on male managers' behaviour. According to research on women's leadership styles, women are more democratic and participatory in their management approaches than men. They share knowledge and authority, as well as supporting and encouraging subordinates. Women managers are thought to be persuasive, powerful, and charming, and they excel at interacting with others.

Furthermore, as Cooke (2023) point out, female managers who embrace feminine management methods are better adapted to current business situations than male managers, since modern management practices are generally focused on cooperation, flexibility, trust, and the open flow of information. Hall (2002) concluded that the

behaviour of six female school administrators demonstrated a model of educational entrepreneurialism that eschews conventional managerialism in order to preserve the integrity of the educational enterprise and its ultimate goal, that of young people's learning and development, after observing how they used power, managed staff, and transformed some externally generated reforms for the benefit of the school.

According to Hall (2002) research, being a manager and leader "is not about compromising ideals and dominating people" for women (p. 21). Many female educational and academic leaders working in male-dominated workplaces have created a management and leadership repertoire that promotes education's ethical as well as social benefits. Changes in technology, increased international competitiveness, and economic globalization are quickly changing the setting in which universities function today (Vroman & Danko 2020). These technological advancements have resulted in a requirement for new talents and new methods of functioning, which necessitates the use of inventive abilities by new leaders and managers. Communication technology, for example, "demands communication skills of a special and unique sort, as well as 'protean' managers who are versatile and adaptive enough to survive in continuously changing circumstances," according to Vroman & Danko (p. 2).

Many of these changes in approach, attitudes, and working styles (Abdulraham & Amoush, 2020) are more likely to apply to female managers than to male managers (Abdulraham & Amoush, 2020). Female executives were described as sympathetic, supporting, relationship-building, power-sharing, and information-sharing in the Korn Ferry study project, while male executives were described as risk-taking, self-confident, competitive, decisive, and direct (Abdulraham & Amoush, 2020). Managers of the future will need qualities like sharing authority and knowledge, and women seem

to have them. Women are more consultative and conciliatory, avoid confrontation, and are more likely to be task-focused than their male counterparts, according to Malaysian research on the leadership traits of men and women in universities. Women in university leadership are generally regarded as "cooperative, team-oriented, collaborative, fair, and contextual," while males are portrayed as "competitive, hierarchical, winning, logical, cold, and principled (Abdulrahman & Amoush, 2020).

2.6 Prospects of Women Leaders in Educational Management

Contemporary discourse on education regards the appointment of women to leadership positions as a strategy to improve educational outcomes and transform institutions, rather than solely a matter of social equity. Despite ongoing issues such as gender discrimination, role conflict, and insufficient support systems, female leadership remains very potential, particularly in developing countries like Ghana. The experiences of female principals in senior high schools within the Central Region demonstrate that women are indispensable assets to educational management, possessing distinctive abilities, transformative leadership attributes, and relational competencies, despite the societal and institutional obstacles they face.

Women in educational leadership frequently emphasise collaboration, empathy, and inclusive decision-making. These characteristics, often unacknowledged in traditional, male-centric leadership frameworks, align with contemporary perceptions of effective school leadership. Amoako and Effah (2021) assert that female school administrators in Ghana foster superior school environments by promoting collaboration among staff, endorsing student-centered learning, and enhancing community involvement more effectively than some of their male counterparts. These characteristics render female

school leaders not merely custodians of systems, but also transformative leaders capable of enhancing schools to become more compassionate and responsive.

Women are often perceived as embodying a nurturing and servant-leadership approach. This is particularly beneficial in secondary schools, where the relationships among staff, students, and parents are crucial for the institution's success. Women, particularly female educators and students, place significant importance on transparent communication, collaborative governance, and mentorship. Antwi and Asare (2023) assert that female headteachers frequently act as role models for female students, demonstrating that they may assume leadership positions. This influence is particularly significant in societies where men have traditionally been regarded as the sole leaders. So, having women in leadership may be like a quiet revolution that breaks down outdated gender roles and gives young people new opportunities.

The presence of women in leadership positions inside schools has been associated with enhanced academic performance. The study by Osei and Boakyee (2022) revealed that schools in Ghana's Central Region led by female heads consistently excelled in student discipline, teacher retention, and community engagement. This link does not imply causation; rather, it endorses the notion that female leadership in educational institutions introduces valuable concepts and methodologies worthy of acknowledgement and emulation. It is essential to acknowledge the impact of familial and professional experiences on women's leadership trajectories. Female school leaders frequently navigate dual identities as both educators and carers. This dichotomy is frequently perceived as a dilemma; nevertheless, it can also be regarded as a source of strength. Women generally acquire soft skills such as time management, empathy, negotiating, and multitasking through the management of houses, child-rearing, and

caregiving for extended families. These skills can also be applied in educational leadership.

Akua and Mfum (2020) assert that these leadership experiences within the household enhance women's professional perspectives, equipping them with the resilience, creativity, and adaptability to address administrative challenges. An additional encouraging indication is the increasing advocacy for gender equality in education by various policies and institutions. In recent years, the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service have prioritised gender mainstreaming strategies to address leadership gaps. Scholarships, leadership development, and mentorship initiatives for female educators are garnering increased attention. The "Ghana Education Outcomes Project" (World Bank, 2021) includes components that emphasise the leadership and career progression of female educators. Despite the ongoing changes, they instill optimism in women aspiring to advance inside educational management hierarchies.

There is an increasing consensus globally that diverse leadership teams perform more effectively. According to UNESCO (2022), the inclusion of both men and women in school leadership enhances governance, promotes ethical management, and improves student outcomes. In Ghana, where education is integral to national development goals, empowering women in school leadership is not merely symbolic; it is a strategic initiative. Female leaders contribute various perspectives to talks, enhance decision-making, and ensure that policies include the needs of all stakeholders, including those frequently marginalised. Despite these positive indicators, advancement remains uneven. Certain women are appointed as school leaders only to fulfil gender quotas, rather than due to their qualifications or leadership skills. Some women encounter nuanced resistance from male colleagues, community members, or even other women.

These characteristics can hinder leaders from completely realising their potential, resulting in subpar performance, not due to a deficiency in talents, but because of an inadequate environment. The growing body of evidence indicating that women excel as leaders strongly advocates for more investment in programs that facilitate women's leadership development.

Moreover, the significance of mentorship and representation cannot be overstated. A multitude of women overseeing senior high schools in the Central Region assert that they attained leadership roles mostly by observing the success of other women in similar positions. This illustrates the significant influence that exposure can exert on others. As an increasing number of women attain significant positions and discuss their strategies for balancing professional and familial responsibilities, they facilitate similar opportunities for other women. Nyamekye and Appiah (2022) assert that structured mentorship programs can expedite this process by partnering early-career female educators with seasoned school leaders who can assist them in addressing leadership challenges.

The future of female leadership in educational administration relies on continuous advocacy, systemic reforms, and cultural transformation. The educational system in Ghana must not only acknowledge women's leadership across all domains but also actively empower them. Policies must be supported by adequate resources. Educational institutions must incorporate gender sensitivity into their decision-making processes. Society must recognise women as inherent and essential leaders, rather than viewing them as exceptional. Women should not merely be "permitted" to lead; they ought to be anticipated to lead according to their competencies, fervour, and foresight. The experiences of women leading senior high schools in the Central Region indicate that

women's leadership can significantly influence outcomes when optimal conditions are established. An increasing number of women are assuming leadership roles and transforming the culture of their schools from within. This not only enhances educational institutions but also transforms perceptions of leadership in Ghana and globally.

2.7 General Discrimination against Women Leaders

Gender-based discrimination constitutes a significant and enduring challenge for female heads of senior high schools in Ghana, particularly in the Central Region. This issue extends beyond just institutional barriers and encompasses societal and cultural attitudes that women are inherently incapable of managing complex professional responsibilities, particularly in leadership positions within educational institutions. Significant advancements have occurred globally in the pursuit of gender equality; yet, female leaders in educational institutions continue to encounter discrimination due to entrenched patriarchal ideologies.

Recent research indicates that gender discrimination encompasses not only the exclusion of women from positions of authority but also the perceptions of women's capabilities. Asare and Yeboah (2021) assert that numerous female school leaders in Ghana continue to be perceived through stereotypes that portray women as overly emotional, excessively domestic, or insufficiently authoritative to be effective leaders, despite possessing superior academic qualifications and demonstrating competence in their roles. These notions are not only erroneous but also detrimental, as they marginalise women from leadership positions and diminish their impact inside their businesses and society at large.

Female school leaders frequently encounter both overt and covert forms of discrimination that their male counterparts do not experience. This include discourteous remarks, insufficient collaboration from colleagues, and exclusion from decision-making procedures. Anyidoho and Darkwah's (2018) research indicates that women in leadership positions frequently face demands to "prove" their capabilities in ways that men do not. They are subjected to heightened scrutiny and are less likely to receive equivalent institutional support or mentorship. These inequitable attitudes are not solely individual but are also systemic in nature. This is due to society's perception of leadership as inherently masculine.

The issue of discrimination becomes far more complex when addressing female school administrators who are simultaneously mothers and wives. Individuals frequently render unjust evaluations on those who must reconcile familial and professional obligations. Arkorful et al. (2020) assert that many individuals believe female school principals neglect their "natural" domestic responsibilities when they dedicate themselves entirely to their professional roles. Individuals frequently label these women as inadequate mothers or spouses, while they do not hold males in same circumstances to the same standards. This inequitable societal expectation imposes significant mental and emotional burdens on female educational leaders, who must fulfil elevated demands both professionally and domestically.

Cultural traditions and religious beliefs in Ghana further impede women's leadership opportunities. Ofori and Oppong (2022) conducted a study revealing that numerous communities, particularly in rural and peri-urban regions, continue to perceive men as inherent leaders while viewing women as more appropriate for supportive or caregiving roles. This belief system hinders female school leaders from being regarded seriously,

resulting in reluctance among staff, students, and community members to collaborate with them. This type of resistance complicates the ability of school leaders to do their duties effectively and contributes to the stress and burnout experienced by female leaders.

Gender-based discrimination results in marginalisation, which is another significant consequence. Baah-Ennumh and Owusu (2023) assert that marginality in educational leadership relegates women to the periphery of power structures inside institutions. Female principals of senior high schools are frequently excluded from high-level discussions regarding policies, strategic planning, and other administrative issues. Their external position diminishes the influence of their voices, notwithstanding the potential equal or greater value of their thoughts compared to those of their male counterparts. This results in their inability to implement substantial changes in their schools, perhaps causing job dissatisfaction and stagnation.

Another form of discrimination is the notion that motherhood and professional competence are mutually exclusive. It is commonly perceived that fatherhood is advantageous for a male leader, whereas motherhood is often viewed as detrimental for a female aspiring to advance in her career. Asumadu and Fening (2019) assert that numerous individuals continue to hold the belief that "good mothers" ought to prioritise domestic responsibilities over their professional aspirations. Individuals often consider female leaders who dedicate extensive hours to their jobs as neglectful, while male leaders engaging in same behaviour are regarded as diligent and committed to their work. This double standard hinders women's job advancement and obstructs the progress of competent female educators.

The notion that women lack the assertiveness or decisiveness required for leadership persists in numerous institutions. Agyekum and Osei (2021) assert that in Ghanaian educational institutions, leadership is predominantly evaluated based on characteristics typically linked to masculinity, such as severity, aggression, and dominance. Women exhibiting these traits are labelled excessively ambitious or insufficiently feminine, whereas those who are nurturing or collaborative are deemed weak or ineffective. This complicates matters for women leaders, since they must constantly navigate and reconcile varying expectations regarding their leadership style.

Female leaders encounter discrimination when they lack access to assistance and training necessary for job advancement. Men are more inclined to lead informal professional networks, which are generally the most effective means of advancing in one's career and discovering new chances. Female high school principals may be excluded from these associations, resulting in missed opportunities for advancement. According to Mensah and Bosiakoh (2017), the absence of support hinders numerous women in educational leadership from advancing in their professions, regardless of their qualifications or capabilities.

It is essential to recognise that these inequitable systems are not confined to specific schools; they also mirror broader national and cultural tendencies. National education plans frequently overlook the distinct challenges faced by female leaders, particularly those striving to reconcile professional and familial responsibilities. The absence of gender-sensitive policies, such as flexible work hours, parental leave provisions, and institutional support structures, exacerbates discrimination and hinders women's advancement in leadership roles.

To address these entrenched discrepancies, both scholars and practitioners advocate for a novel leadership paradigm that eschews masculine standards. A rising demand exists for gender-equitable leadership frameworks that acknowledge diverse leadership styles and promote inclusivity for all (UNESCO, 2022). Educational institutions should not only encourage women to assume leadership roles but also ensure that their unique experiences and responsibilities are acknowledged. This entails establishing mentorship programs for women, providing female leaders a platform to share their experiences, and ensuring women's representation in all decision-making entities.

Discrimination against female heads of senior high schools in Ghana, particularly in the Central Region, constitutes a multifaceted issue that complicates their ability to reconcile domestic and professional responsibilities. This stems from misconceptions regarding women, institutional prejudices, and cultural norms that collectively diminish women's authority and restrict their potential. As Ghana strives to achieve gender equity in education, eliminating these inequitable structures must be a paramount objective for the entire nation. To support female educational leaders in achieving success both domestically and professionally, it is imperative to implement intentional measures and reform the existing system.

2.8 Dual-Role Leadership Experiences

The investigation of female leadership styles provides important context for understanding the experiences of female leaders who balance work and family obligations. Role demands, organisational context, and follower expectations are just a few of the situational factors that affect a leader's style, which is generally defined as how they interact with others and handle tasks and challenges (Hollander & Offerman, 1993; Ruiyao et al., 2023). Empathy, teamwork, and participative management are

traits of transformational and democratic leadership that are frequently displayed by female leaders (Jones, 1997; Ghani et al., 2018; Alzougool et al., 2021). These qualities closely match the organisational, interpersonal, and communication abilities needed to handle challenging roles at work and at home.

Women who hold leadership positions in the workplace usually have to balance two sets of expectations: taking care of their families and performing well in leadership roles. By creating supportive environments at work and in families, the "softer," relational traits frequently linked to female leadership styles such as nurturing, emotional intelligence, and inclusivity may make it easier to balance these demands (Lynch, 2015; Chapman, 2019). These traits may help create more adaptable and flexible leadership styles that take into account the difficulties of handling several responsibilities.

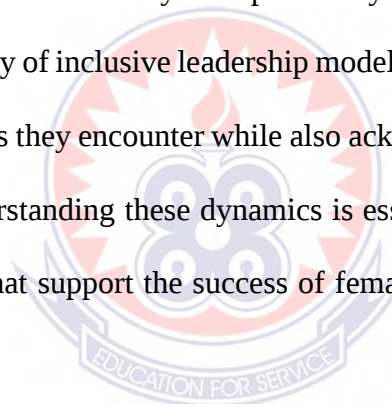
The literature does, however, warn against generalising women's leadership styles, highlighting the variety of experiences influenced by social determinants such as race, class, and ethnicity (Miranda, 2019; Chapman, 2019). The way intersectional identities impact leadership priorities and styles is demonstrated by the way black female leaders prioritise issues like racial justice in addition to their professional duties (Osler, 1997, cited in Hall, 2002). This diversity suggests that women heads' balancing of work and family responsibilities is complex and situation-specific.

Additionally, typically male-dominated organisational cultures that prioritise directive, command-and-control styles often misunderstand or undervalue the leadership approaches of female leaders, which often emphasise empowerment and collaboration (Maling, 1990; Ghani et al., 2018). The complexity of women's experiences may be

heightened by such settings, which may also put extra pressure on them to manage expectations surrounding family roles and adhere to masculine leadership standards.

The leadership styles attributed to many women are better aligned with changing organisational cultures that place a greater emphasis on teamwork, flexibility, and emotional intelligence. This could potentially reduce the conflict between work and family responsibilities (Offermann & Foley, 2020; Dwiri & Okatan, 2021). This change emphasises how crucial it is to value and acknowledge a variety of leadership philosophies as necessary for efficient management in modern environments.

In analysing female leadership style in light of juggling work and family obligations shows how leadership is a socially and personally constructed construct. It draws attention to the necessity of inclusive leadership models that support women in juggling the conflicting demands they encounter while also acknowledging gender diversity and intersectionality. Understanding these dynamics is essential to creating organisational cultures and policies that support the success of female leaders in all spheres of their lives.



2.9 Work and Family Conflict

It is hard to think about workplace gender disputes without taking into account the overlap between work and home duties. Women continue to experience problems and disappointments at work and at home in a country that claims to have eradicated prejudice. In her work summarizing historical studies on women in school administration, Shakeshaft (1989) said that women do not have the same opportunities, job experiences, or advantages as males. Teaching and educational administration were promoted for men, but only as a semi-profession that would enable the obligations of wife and mother to continue unaffected for women. Shakeshaft (1989) discussed the

roots of women educators' experiences, implying that they still have an impact on present practices.

Teaching was first promoted as a good career for married women because it allowed them to combine motherhood, wifehood, and work. During the 1950s, teaching was promoted as a good job for married women because it allowed them to combine motherhood, wifehood, and work. Summer vacations and a shortened school day were thought to be a perfect balance. Shakeshaft (1989) noted that a man's qualifications as a teacher and administrator were unaffected by marriage or family duties. Contracts forbidding women from dancing, prohibiting marriage, requiring eight hours of sleep each night, and requiring careful nutrition to preserve excellent health were all in place when they first joined the profession. Over time, school boards altered their minds and began to prefer to hire married women. The scholar further stated that when men's demand for work rose after the war, attitudes about women's marital or single status shifted, restricting her job options. Thus, imposing extreme cultural stereotypes on women

Responsibilities and relationships complicate women's conflicting home and work-related decisions. Blount's book *Destined to Rule the Schools* (1998) looked at how women's position as educators evolved as society's requirements changed. In 1963, school boards changed administration tasks, requiring "administrators to have a helpmate at home" due to increasing hours and responsibilities. When the school board hired an administrator, he and his family moved into the neighbourhood. Assuming the administrator was a man, school boards said that the "executive's wife must alter her life pattern in the best interests of her husband, her children, and the community. The administrator's wife was described as a "skilled homemaker and family partner who

devotes her time to raising her children and providing both practical and emotional support to her husband," allowing him to focus on his vital school administration responsibilities. These expectations were a benefit for married male administrators but a problem for women whose male partners often worked full-time and had minimal household obligations (Blount, 1998).

Women's contradictory home and work-related expectations are complicated by duties and relationships as well as society's point of view. Women continue to carry the majority of the duty at home, even when they work in the public sector, according to recent research (Haslam, Filus, Morawska, Sanders & Fletcher, 2015; Rabenu, Tziner & Sharoni, 2017; Emslie & Hunt, 2009; French, Dwnani, Allen & Shockley, 2018; Bennett, Beehr & Ivanitskava, 2017; Song, Lee & Kim, 2024). Feng, Han, and Trepstra (2024) examined the continuance of this dynamic in their seminal examination of how the market and pseudo-scientific ideology have influenced women's lives and choices. They argue that this quandary is portrayed as a woman's issue when its origins are really found in societal systems. Their attentiveness to social signals shows that women are encouraged to adhere to fairy tale ideals while being pushed to independence by social expectations and economic demands.

Women's progress toward social and economic gender equality has historically and now been defined by political conflict rather than a collaborative process (Zulkamain, Ginting, Adenans & Sianturi, 2024; Allen et al., 2013; Yucel & Cchung, 2023). In *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical Reader*, LaB and Wooden (2023) examined Simone de Beauvoir's works and noted how a focus on women's independence from males will emancipate them, but at a cost. Women will always be dependent on others, as long as

they are forbidden from earning a livelihood. Women who are looking for paid jobs, on the other hand, face class exploitation and gender persecution at every step.

They are exploited, underpaid, and alienated at work because they are oppressed at home. Factory labour isn't freeing under capitalism, according to Beauvoir, so it's no surprise that many working-class women would prefer to be housewives if they could afford it, especially since they typically have to do the housework anyhow. Women are trapped in an internal double bind in such circumstances: without a paid job, they are vulnerable to male exploitation; with paid labour, they are forced to work double shifts with little pay at the end of the week. While some women bravely fight for change by joining labour unions or joining different socialist parties, the majority, understandably, do not have the time or energy to do so. "A bitter dilemma therefore develops," LaB and Wooden (2023) stated. Only labour may emancipate women, but nothing enslaves them more fully. The social circumstances of women's lives must be profoundly modified before true freedom can be achieved. Freedom from reliance on others for survival liberates and enslaves women at the same time. Her work day continued even after her employer's time clock expired (Song, Lee & Kim, 2024).

Domestic labour takes time away from a woman's day job as she manages, organizes, and schedules household concerns. Despite the fact that she is "at work," she is aware of her family's duties and continues to do chores mandated by her many positions. Women continue to work after punching out on the time card, according to Emslie and Hunt (2009), and are perceived as being responsible for sustaining seamless, or ideally unnoticeable, transitions between the worlds of home and professional life. Men high school administrators, according to Molina (2021), were able to manage their family duties by bringing their spouses and children to school events and activities.

The female high school principals attempted to balance their home and work lives without forcing the principal ship on their families, reflecting the mainstream gendered rhetoric, which expects women to balance their lives and careers around their children's demands and their husbands' jobs (Molina, 2021). Women are expected to "put the family first" and make "trade-offs like lowering or eliminating their paid job" and minimizing home responsibilities by hiring outside assistance and opting for pre-packaged meals, according to cultural expectations (Milkie & Peltola, 1999). Feng, Han, and Terpstra (2024) argued that society should be based on human needs rather than gender. Thus, a society in which child rearing is not discarded as each woman's personal concern but in which the nourishment and well-being of all children are a transcendent public priority. The scholars further emphasized that women's ideals of community and care must ascend to the centre as the sole human principles.

Some women choose teaching as a career because it "could dovetail, rather than challenge, mothering roles and the need of women to be flexible in relation to their husband's employment opportunities" (Shi, Chen & Cheung, 2023), allowing her to maintain her position as second class in the family. Others begin teaching as young women, leave to have children, and when they return years later, they discover that advancement chances and skills developed through child-rearing experiences are overlooked in subsequent jobs. By remaining at home as the primary caregiver, women must re-enter the promotion race, thereby preserving the socio-political order of "womanly ideals of community and caring" (Feng, Han, & Trapstra, 2024, p. 324). In their view, caring must ascend to the center as the sole human principle, with equal opportunities for men and women to pursue education and employment since they share responsibility for upholding "human ideals."

Despite the fact that teaching is a caring profession, men and women in the field have distinct professional goals. Molina (2021) described how men and women in her research had different professional choices. The men took a more self-directed and earlier route to becoming high school leaders, with the help of a network of male administrators and high school principals. Females, on the other hand, put off starting a profession because of family obligations and only explored educational administration and high school principalship when particularly urged by others.

Men's professions had a steady development from teaching to administration that was driven by the financial demands of their young and expanding families, while women's jobs were interrupted by child rearing (Molina, 2021). Women's later entrance into high school principalship had a direct impact on their tenures as principals and their career objectives, according to the study. In addition, when women became principals, they were older than their male counterparts and felt the position marked the end of their careers. They talked about retirement rather than future career goals. The Eckman study was one example of the socio-political quandary that women face when pursuing principalship (Molina, 2023).

Yucel and Chung (2023) asserted that although women have the skills, strength, and fortitude to accomplish their goals and aspirations, changes in society's expectations for women may not come quickly. Sherif said, the rest of the world changes more slowly than the new awareness of self, and parts of both resist change or simply stay the same. Social power is not equitably distributed.

2.10 Educational Administration

Based on the vast amount of global research examining the gendered dynamics of educational leadership, it is imperative to investigate the unique experiences of female heads of Senior High Schools (SHS), especially in various regional contexts. Academic oversight, staff management, student discipline, financial administration, communication with educational authorities and community stakeholders, and institutional compliance and development are just a few of the many diverse headship duties that fall under the purview of a SHS head (often reflected in frameworks similar to those discussed by Brundrett, 2018 concerning leadership demands). These work-related responsibilities naturally require a large time and emotional commitment. According to Fullan (2016) and Lynch (2015), female heads of households typically manage complicated family roles that are firmly rooted in sociocultural norms. These roles frequently entail primary or significant responsibility for childcare, elder care, household management, and maintaining familial relationships.

For female heads, the combination of these rigorous professional duties unique to SHS leadership and deeply rooted family responsibilities creates a challenging environment. Significant challenges arising from this confluence are consistently identified by international research. Long-standing gender norms in society often place the majority of domestic and caregiving responsibilities on women, which leads to a fundamental conflict with the large and frequently unpredictable time commitments needed for SHS headship (Fullan, 2016; Lynch, 2015). As female heads attempt to meet expectations in both areas, this conflict shows up as practical difficulties with time constraints, role overload, and the psychological strain of role conflict (Gu, 2018; Clark, 2018).

Additionally, the leadership standards ingrained in conventional educational leadership theories—which were frequently derived from male experiences may not easily adapt to the demands of managing family responsibilities, which could result in a feeling of incongruence or a devaluation of leadership philosophies that have been modified to meet these demands (Lynch, 2015; Johnson, 2020). Opportunities and limitations faced by female leaders are shaped by the socioeconomic environment, which includes access to reasonably priced childcare, spousal support systems, and extended family networks (Fullan, 2016).

In order to manage their dual roles, female SHS heads actively participate in identity work and create coping mechanisms in response to these difficulties. Studies show that they frequently use techniques like careful time management, delegating work and home responsibilities strategically, setting boundaries (however flexible), and using support systems like partners, family, and domestic help when possible (Gu, 2018; Clark, 2018; Bruna & Marcus, 2020). The need to balance caregiving can also encourage the growth of adaptive leadership styles, which are marked by adaptability, teamwork, and increased emotional intelligence. These traits may go unnoticed in traditional leadership paradigms but are derived from lived experience (Bruna & Marcus, 2020).

To lessen the difficulties faced by female heads, the literature fervently supports the establishment of organizational-level supportive structures. Successful mentorship programs that pair seasoned female leaders with those who are new to headship can offer vital support and validation (Fullan, 2016). Lynch (2015) highlights the importance of family-friendly organisational policies, such as generous parental leave provisions, access to on-site or subsidised childcare, and flexible working arrangements

where operationally possible. It is crucial to cultivate an encouraging corporate culture that values diverse leadership styles and openly recognises the difficulties of work-family integration (Johnson, 2020).

Additionally, establishing fair and long-lasting leadership pathways for women in SHS headship requires the development of inclusive leadership frameworks that transcend male-centric models and acknowledge and validate the intersection of gender, family responsibilities, and professional identity (Johnson, 2020). Therefore, it is essential to comprehend the unique interactions among the headship duties that are specific to Senior High Schools, the various family roles that female leaders play, and the impact of the local socioeconomic environment. Research, as demonstrated by academics like Shakeshaft (2016), Lynch (2015), Gu (2018), Fuller (2019), Johnson (2020), Brundrett (2018), and Clark (2018), highlights that navigating these combined roles successfully calls for not only personal resiliency and strategy but also a critical analysis of leadership paradigms and the proactive creation of supportive institutional structures that are adapted to the realities of female leadership in education.

2.11 Support systems for Women in Leadership

Effective leadership, particularly within educational institutions, cannot function optimally in isolation. A network of support systems is essential for leaders to flourish, particularly female school administrators who frequently juggle responsibilities at home and in the workplace. In Ghana's educational institutions, particularly within the Senior High Schools in the Central Region, female administrators confront a distinctive amalgamation of expectations and pressure. This encompasses managing familial obligations, responding to policy requirements, and addressing institutional responsibilities. These women necessitate robust formal and informal support structures

integrated within both the educational framework and society at large to perform effectively.

In this study, "support systems" refers to the comprehensive array of practical, professional, emotional, and institutional resources that assist women in leadership in advancing their careers and maintaining well-being. These strategies are crucial for assisting female educational leaders in managing the challenges of work-life balance, mitigating workplace bias, and enhancing their administrative competencies. Akotia and Anum (2021) emphasise that support systems are essential rather than optional, particularly in patriarchal environments where women are obligated to fulfil both traditional gender roles and professional responsibilities.

According to Amponsah and Boateng (2022), such systems encompass access to skill development programs, gender-sensitive policies, mentorship, childcare services, emotional support, and equitable hiring practices. These measures are crucial for ensuring that female school leaders may achieve their objectives without jeopardising their familial responsibilities or personal well-being. Institutional mechanisms such as professional development training, equitable compensation frameworks, anti-harassment policies, and accommodation support are essential to dismantle the obstacles hindering women's effectiveness and advancement in educational leadership positions.

Ongoing professional development is a crucial form of assistance required by female high school principals. Educational leadership is ever evolving due to the introduction of new rules, modifications to the curriculum, and advancements in technology. Consequently, leaders must maintain their skills current. Abrefa and Agyei (2020) discovered that women in educational leadership positions in Ghana frequently lack

access to leadership training programs compared to their male counterparts. This primarily results from inequitable selection procedures and practical challenges, such as childcare responsibilities or excessive distance from training locations. Osei-Akoto and Mensah (2023) assert that regular training and coaching for female school leaders can enhance their confidence and competence. These programs should encompass not only school administration but also personal resilience, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution. This will assist women in managing the stress associated with juggling professional and familial responsibilities alongside the demands of school administration. Online and hybrid training modalities may prove beneficial for women with demanding schedules.

The Ghana Education Service and the regulations governing schools significantly influence the performance of female school heads. Flexible work schedules, job stability during maternity leave, equitable recruiting practices, and impartial promotion systems for both men and women can contribute to a more level playing field. UNESCO (2022) asserts that educational systems must implement gender-responsive policies to bridge the disparity between men and women in leadership positions and create more inclusive school environments.

However, in Ghana, numerous organisations still lack such regulations, resulting in burnout among female executives. Housing issues, particularly for women relocating to distant schools from their families, can result in tardiness, absenteeism, and diminished productivity. Adjei and Konadu (2019) assert that the absence of housing support for female leaders in rural areas diminishes their productivity and conveys the notion that their demands are subordinate to those of the organisation. Providing female school leaders with proximate housing or financial assistance for transportation may

bridge this gap and enhance their operational efficiency. Female school leaders heavily rely on informal support networks, including assistance from spouses, extended family, friends, and colleagues inside the educational institution. Such assistance is particularly significant in societies where women serve as primary carers. Agyemang and Aidoo (2020) assert that emotional support from spouses and family members is often the determining factor in whether women persist in leadership positions or resign from them.

School-based networks, such as headmistress organisations, women-in-education forums, or peer support groups, can foster a sense of community and shared experiences among individuals. These forums enable women executives to discuss their views, exchange strategies for addressing challenges, and collaborate to advocate for enhancements inside their businesses. Dzamboe and Amankwah (2021) emphasise that these peer-support networks offer mentoring opportunities, particularly for younger women entering educational leadership positions. This positions them as a reservoir of prospective leaders. Motivation constitutes a significant form of support that influences job satisfaction and retention among female leaders. Antwi and Owusu (2019) assert that motivation encompasses both real rewards (such as income, bonuses, and housing) and intangible benefits (including recognition, autonomy, and positive feedback). A supportive workplace that fosters respect and value for female school leaders can promote commitment, resilience, and innovation.

Furthermore, enhancing gender sensitivity in schools, where female leadership is normalised and recognised, can significantly elevate morale. In numerous schools in Ghana, it remains customary for men to hold positions of authority. Consequently, female leaders often operate in environments where their authority is challenged or

subtly undermined. To address this issue, educational officials must diligently advocate for gender equality initiatives, compose institutional papers that feature narratives of leaders across both genders, and ensure equitable treatment of all staff members, irrespective of gender.

The presence of successful female educational leaders serves as a form of intrinsic support. Observing women in prominent positions who successfully balance professional and familial responsibilities challenges stereotypes and inspires young women and novice educators to aspire for greater achievements. Nyarko and Serwaa (2023) assert that showcasing narratives of successful female headmistresses, particularly those who have adeptly balanced professional and familial responsibilities, is crucial for dismantling internalised barriers and encouraging more women to aspire to leadership roles. Educational institutions ought to allocate funds for mentorship initiatives, story endeavours, and leadership seminars with seasoned female leaders who share their journeys, including the challenges encountered and the solutions implemented. Such programs render leadership more tangible and demonstrate to young women that the perceived impossibility of combining many responsibilities is, in fact, achievable.

2.12 Empirical Review

The ongoing negotiation of dual identities is a defining feature of the experiences of female senior high school (SHS) heads in juggling their roles as professional leaders and family members. According to research, these women frequently view leadership through a relational, caring lens that is strongly related to their roles as mothers. In their study of female head teachers in the UK, Bradbury and Gunter (2006) show how participants integrated their personal and professional responsibilities by viewing their

leadership as nurturing and centred on the well-being of both staff and students. In a similar vein, Johnson (2021) highlights the experiences of Black women educational leaders in the US who exhibit emotional intelligence, resilience, and moral judgement while navigating environments that are primarily white and male-dominated. Oyniran (2018) discovered that in Côte d'Ivoire, female principals have to constantly balance social expectations that place a premium on family responsibilities with asserting their authority in leadership roles. These dual roles are a common reality across various regions, as demonstrated by Bodalina and Mestry's (2020) description of South African female education leaders who deal with cultural pressures related to motherhood and household duties.

These women deal with a variety of issues that cut across institutional, cultural, and psychological boundaries. Because gender stereotypes raise questions about women's leadership potential and foster an atmosphere of increased scrutiny, institutional and societal biases continue to be major obstacles. Oyniran (2018) identified the "think manager, think male" mentality in the Côte d'Ivoire study, and Bodalina and Mestry (2020) confirmed it in South African districts. This mindset marginalises women by equating leadership with masculinity and eroding their legitimacy. Additionally, Grogon and Shakeshaft (2018) talk about how male coworkers may subtly or overtly criticise female leaders, which can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and the need for continual approval. In Tanzania, where female head teachers frequently rely on informal mentoring from male predecessors, a lack of formal leadership training further disadvantages women by limiting their access to institutional support and essential administrative skills (Onguko, Abdallah, & Webber, 2012). Research conducted in China by Xintong (2020) shows how ingrained patriarchal traditions and cultural norms place a higher priority on domestic responsibilities than on the professional

development of women in educational administration, thereby posing structural barriers to their advancement. Furthermore, as both Bodalina and Mestry (2020) and Oyniran (2018) have shown, role conflict resulting from unequal expectations regarding childcare and household management causes emotional strain and burnout. Stead (2013) elaborates on the psychological difficulties by presenting the idea of (in)visibility, which describes how female leaders struggle to strike a balance between leadership demands and traditional feminine roles because they are either disregarded or subjected to undue scrutiny because of gendered expectations.

Female leaders use a variety of tactics that demonstrate adaptability and resilience in the face of these challenges. As demonstrated by Oyniran (2018) in the context of Côte d'Ivoire, female principals typically embrace transformational leadership, which is typified by empathy, effective communication, and participatory decision-making. According to Stead (2013), this approach is consistent with feminist leadership theories that emphasise relational and inclusive approaches. Furthermore, female leaders exhibit excellent time management and conflict resolution abilities, which allow them to successfully balance a variety of duties. Women frequently rely on experiential learning and informal mentoring in the absence of formal training, which is beneficial but underscores the need for more organised development opportunities (Onguko et al., 2012). Johnson's (2021) study also demonstrates how women of colour use innovative problem-solving and culturally sensitive leadership approaches to overcome structural obstacles and promote equity in their organisations.

Scholars suggest a comprehensive strategy that incorporates gender-sensitive leadership development programs catered to the particular difficulties faced by women in order to better assist female SHS heads in juggling their roles as family and professional leaders. In order to empower female leaders, Onguko et al. (2012)

recommend training modules that concentrate on time management, conflict resolution, and transformational leadership. In addition to offering direction, emotional support, and career advancement strategies, formal mentorship programs can lessen professional isolation, as highlighted by Bodalina and Mestry (2020). Xintong (2020) highlights the significance of institutional policies that support work-life balance, including flexible work schedules, parental leave, and childcare assistance, in lowering role conflict and burnout. Additionally, as Johnson (2021) argues, advocacy campaigns that challenge gender stereotypes and advance inclusive leadership models are essential for changing cultural attitudes and normalising women in senior administrative positions. Intersectional policy frameworks that acknowledge and address the unique obstacles faced by women of colour are necessary to address the exacerbated issues they face and guarantee fair opportunities for advancement.

All things considered, the empirical literature shows that female senior high school heads function within a complicated web of institutional, cultural, and gender factors that influence how they manage their demanding work and family obligations. These women continue to face major challenges, such as discrimination, a lack of institutional support, and societal expectations, even though they have demonstrated remarkable resilience and used transformative and ethical leadership styles. In order to overcome these obstacles, comprehensive approaches combining leadership development, policy reform, mentoring, and cultural transformation are required. In addition to advancing equity, these initiatives support more inclusive and successful educational leadership. In order to create sophisticated interventions that support female educational leaders worldwide, future research should delve deeper into intersectional experiences, especially in non-Western contexts.

2.13 Conceptual Framework

Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987; Merton, 1957), Work-Life Balance Theory (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006), which includes the Work-Family Border Theory (Clark, 2000), and Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) are all interwoven in this study's tripartite conceptual framework. When combined, these frameworks offer a multifaceted perspective on how female senior high school administrators in Ghana's Central Region manage, reconcile, and address their conflicting responsibilities to their families and their careers.

The fundamental tenet of social role theory is that men and women are subject to distinct behavioural norms and expectations from society, which shapes their roles in the home and at work. As assertive leaders in school settings and nurturing carers at home, roles that are typically framed as mutually exclusive, female educational leaders frequently find themselves in a difficult situation (Eagly & Wood, 1999). This conflict is particularly noticeable in Ghana because of the country's patriarchal cultural norms, which still place a premium on male leadership and female domesticity. The theory is crucial for examining how deeply ingrained gender norms influence how women are perceived by others as well as how they internalise expectations, which frequently leads to psychological and emotional stress.

This is complemented by the Work-Life Balance Theory, which describes how people try to balance the frequently incompatible demands of their roles in the home and at work. According to Clark (2000), the Work-Family Border Theory specifically views work and family as separate but related domains that individuals manage on a daily basis. Female heads of SHS frequently work in settings with extremely brittle boundaries, where personal and professional responsibilities overlap. Rigid

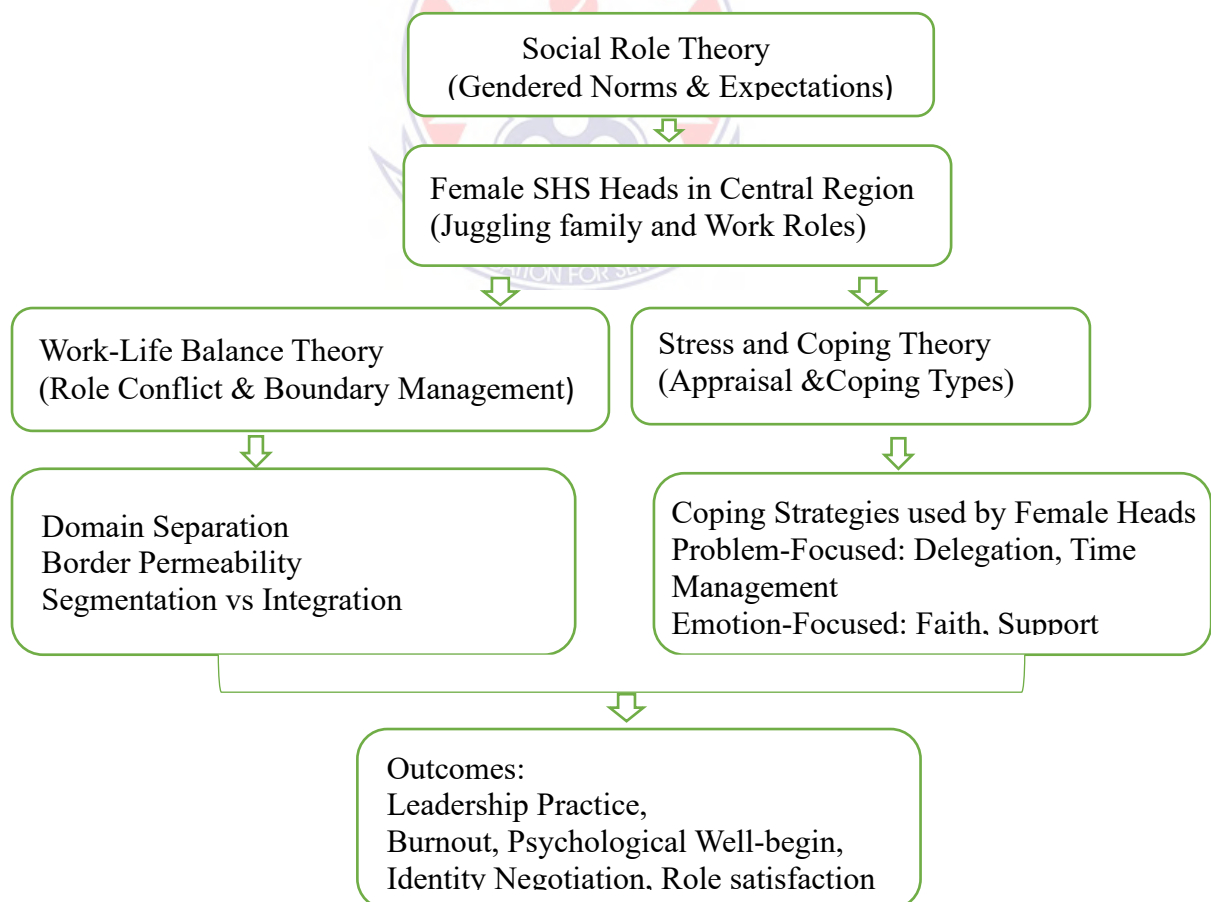
segmentation is challenging due to factors like the rigidity of school obligations, emotional caregiving at home, and the lack of institutional support. This results in a variety of border management techniques, including segmentation, which aims to separate each domain, and integration, which combines work and family activities (Nippert-Eng, 1996). These tactics have an impact on their personal wellbeing as well as the calibre of their work.

A psychological framework for evaluating how female heads perceive and respond to the conflict resulting from their dual roles is provided by the Stress and Coping Theory. Stress is caused by both external pressure and how people perceive and respond to these stressors, claim Lazarus and Folkman (1984). In order to determine whether challenges are threatening or manageable, female heads use primary appraisal. They then use secondary appraisal to ascertain whether they have the material, psychological, or social resources necessary to cope. Burnout, guilt, and emotional exhaustion can be brought on by the ongoing stress of running educational institutions and taking care of household duties. Additionally, studies of Ghanaian female leaders have demonstrated that the theory makes a distinction between emotion-focused coping strategies (e.g., prayer, emotional support, self-reflection) and problem-focused coping strategies (e.g., time management, chore delegation).

Ghanaian empirical data emphasises how useful this framework is. Oteng (2017) noted that the conflict between their professional and family roles is made worse by the fact that female heads frequently operate under extreme pressure and lack institutional support. Yakubu and Mumuni (2023) also emphasised that in order to stay productive in both domains, many women rely on coping mechanisms like time-sharing techniques, peer networks, and spiritual practices. The combined application of these theories is validated by these empirical findings, which demonstrate that a

comprehensive framework that takes into account psychological coping, work-family boundary management, and social norms is necessary to understand the experiences of female SHS heads.

Thus, from formulating the research questions and creating the interview guide to examining the participant narratives, the conceptual framework directs every step of the research process. It offers a framework for analysing how these women's lived experiences are shaped by the interplay of institutional leadership requirements, family responsibilities, systemic cultural expectations, and individual agency. Importantly, it also helps guide policy discussions on empowering women in leadership by highlighting ways that interventions, like social support networks, family-friendly laws, and leadership training, can lessen the stress associated with juggling multiple.



Source: Author (2022)

Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework of the study

2.14 Summary of the Chapter

The theoretical foundation for the research was offered in this chapter, which includes social role theory, work-life balance theory and the stress and coping theory. The chapter also covered the history of principalship, principalship roles, principalship skills, historical perspectives on female leadership, barriers to females progressing into educational leadership positions, Dual-role leadership experiences, how female leadership skills can be improved, and what can be done to reduce barriers to females progressing into educational leadership positions. The research strategy and technique used in the study are presented in the next chapter.



CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the relevant issues about how the study was conducted. It deals with the research philosophy, research designs, the study area, target population, selection procedures, data collection techniques, management and analysis of the data and ethical procedures that guided the inquiry. The chapter ends with the summary of the overall study.

3.1 Research Paradigm

The interpretive philosophy believes that reality consists of individuals' subjective experiences of the external world. Interpretivists adopt an inter-subjective epistemology and are of the view that reality is socially constructed. Interpretivism involves the interpretation of social phenomena by people based on their lived experiences and cultural and social values (Junjie & Yingxin, 2022). According to Petty, Thomson, and Stew (2012), interpretivists gather data through the use of techniques such as observation, interviews, oral history, documents, and audio-visual materials. The philosophical perspective of this study was therefore drawn from the interpretative paradigm, which falls within the constructivism theoretical perspective of world view.

Walsham (1993) explains that in the interpretive tradition, there are no 'correct' or 'incorrect' theories, instead, they should be judged according to how 'interesting' they are to the researcher as well as those involved in the same areas. Gephart (1999) contends that interpretivists assume that knowledge and meaning are acts of interpretation, hence, there is no objective knowledge that is independent of thinking and reasoning in humans. Again, Myers (2009) insists that the premise of interpretive

researchers is that access to reality is only possible through social constructions such as language, consciousness, and shared meanings.

Interpretive methodologies position the meaning-making practices of human actors at the centre of scientific explanation. Qualitative research in some disciplines, is conducted from an experience-near perspective in that the researcher does not start with concepts determined a priori but rather seeks to allow these to emerge from encounters in "the field." Interpretive research focuses on analytically disclosing those meaning-making practices, while showing how those practices are configured to generate observable outcomes.

Reeves and Hedberg (2003) note that the "interpretivist" paradigm stresses the need to put analysis in context. The interpretive paradigm is concerned with understanding the world as it is through the subjective experiences of individuals. They use meaning-oriented methodologies, such as interviewing or participant observation, that rely on a subjective relationship between the researcher and subjects. Interpretive research does not predefine dependent and independent variables, but focuses on the full complexity of human sense making as the situation emerges (Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994). The interpretive approach, aims at explaining the subjective reasons and meaning behind social action.

The interpretative method is best used to explore the hidden reasons behind multifaceted social processes. Quantitative evidence may be biased, inaccurate, or otherwise difficult to obtain. Second, they are often helpful for theory construction in areas with no or insufficient a priori theory. Third, they are also appropriate for studying context-specific, unique, or idiosyncratic events or processes. Fourth, interpretive

research can also help uncover interesting and relevant research questions and issues for follow-up research.

At the same time, interpretive research also has its own set of challenges. First, this type of research tends to be more time- and resource-intensive than positivist research in terms of data collection and analytic efforts. Too little data can lead to false or premature assumptions, while too much data may not be effectively processed by the researcher. Second, interpretive research requires well-trained researchers who are capable of seeing and interpreting complex social phenomena from the perspectives of the embedded participants and reconciling the diverse perspectives of these participants, without injecting their personal biases or preconceptions into their inferences. Third, all participants or data sources may not be equally credible, unbiased, or knowledgeable about the phenomenon of interest or may have undisclosed political agendas, which may lead to misleading or false impressions. Inadequate trust between participants and the researcher may hinder full and honest self-representation by participants, and such trust building takes time.

However, with the limitations of the approach notwithstanding, the study adopted the same to better appreciate the lived experiences, perceptions, and how participants (female educational leaders—headmistresses of senior high schools) navigated and are navigating through the leadership roles in their various institutions. The approach offered in the study was to effectively engage the participants in their world and make sense of it.

3.2 Research Approach

The study adopted a qualitative methodology. Qualitative research is a form of social inquiry that focuses on the way people interpret and make sense of their experiences and the world in which they live. According to Baabereyir (2009), qualitative research involves the interpretation of data, whereby the researcher analyzes cases in their social and cultural context over a specific period of time and he or she may come up with theories that emphasize how events occur over some time in a particular area under study (Grix, 2004). With qualitative research, the focus is on the interpretations and experiences people have about their world, which are shaped by their social values and cultural background (Bryman, 2008). The basis of qualitative research lies in the interpretive approach to social reality and in the description of the lived experience of human beings.

This research adopted the qualitative method to get a deeper understanding of the issues-lived experiences of headmistresses of senior high schools in the Cape Coast metropolis and Abura Asebu Kwamankese district. It was obvious that the use of the method offered the researcher a clear opportunity to understand certain issues that relate more to the thinking and human side, which may be extremely difficult to quantify. As other methods of data collection were not feasible to capture perceptions and the full scope of the data could not be encapsulated by the other methods, semi-structured interviews were the focus. The interview was structured to focus on each objective one after the other, viz., the experiences of female heads in combining their leadership and family roles in managing senior high schools; the challenges confronting the female heads in combining their leadership and family roles; the existing strategies employed by the female heads in coping with the challenges associated with combining the roles;

and the alternate support systems that could be put in place to enable the women to cope with the challenges they face in combining the roles.

One advantage of the approach is that the questions in these areas offered a broader platform for both the interviewer and the interviewees to maneuver and decide on what they wanted to share about the topics from their experience. In essence, the qualitative approach helped to bring out participants' comprehensive views about women in leadership as well as the lived experiences of women in educational leadership positions to address the aim of the study, to analyze the experiences of female parents managing senior high schools in the Central Region.

3.3 Research Design



This study employed a qualitative case study (Landis et al., 2022) with phenomenology design (Creswell, 2014). The case study design offered the researcher the opportunity to gain insights into the experiences, motivations, challenges and strategies the female heads in the SHSs in the Cape Coast metropolitan and Abura Asebu Kwamankese district assemblies. As the study focuses on a specific geographic region and identifiable educational setting, the case study design enabled diverse and nuanced examination of both socio-cultural and organisational factors that culminate into experiences of females in educational leadership in the SHS.

Phenomenology is a design to qualitative research that focuses on the commonality of lived experiences within a particular group. The fundamental goal of the design is to arrive at a description of the nature of the particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was useful and deployed for this study since it enabled the researcher to learn from the lived experiences and sense making of the particular group of female headmistresses who head senior high schools in Ghana.

IPA was a useful research strategy as it helped shed light on “a person’s relatedness to the world through the meanings they make” (Larkin and Thompson, 2011:102). Given its idiographic nature (Guihen, 2019), IPA was an appropriate strategy for investigating the rich, nuanced, and complex facets of individual participants’ career experiences. Its focus on the particular also offers a sensitivity to context, which facilitates consideration of the female headmistresses in relation to their historical, socio-cultural, and political worlds, and vice versa. (Smith et al., 2009)

This design aided the researcher in constructing the general meaning of the event, situation, or experience and reaching a profound understanding of the phenomenon. The use of phenomenological methods helped to facilitate a very effective description of the experiences, challenges and perceptions of the individuals from their own perspectives.

3.4 Study Area

The Central Region was historically part of the Western Region until 1970, when it was carved out just before the 1970 Population Census. It occupies an area of 9,826 square kilometers, or 4.1 percent of Ghana's land area, making it the third smallest in area after Greater Accra and the Upper East, and its capital is Cape Coast. The Central Region is one of the sixteen administrative regions of Ghana. It is bordered by the Ashanti and Eastern regions to the north, the Western region to the west, the Greater Accra region to the east, and the Gulf of Guinea to the south.

The Central Region is a hub of education, with some of the best schools in the country. The region’s economy is dominated by services, followed by mining and fishing. Cape Coast Castle and Elmina Castle are prominent UNESCO World Heritage Sites and serve as a reminder of the slave trade, Ghana Statistical Service (2014).

The region's population is 1,593,823. The region is the second most densely populated in the country. Roughly 20 to 37 percent of the population in the district are migrants, Ghana Statistical Service (2021).

The Central Region is considered a hub of educational institutions, particularly SHS. As indicated in the Annual Digest data (MoE, 2020), the number of female heads in the region continues to increase. The choice of the region for the study is therefore informed by the significance of the number of females in headship positions in the SHSs. It is further motivated by the researcher's working relationships with the heads of these institutions which would therefore facilitate seamless and timely data collection.

Cape Coast Metropolitan and Abura Asebu Kwamankese District, all in the Central Region of Ghana, both localities share same historical context, were established within the same administrative reform and share boundary at the South Eastern with the Gulf of Guinea. The selection of Cape Coast Metropolitan and Abura Asebu Kwamankese District are significantly informed by the growing number of females in the administrative leadership in the educational ecosystem particularly in the second cycle level.

Cape Coast is a city, a fishing port, and the capital of Cape Coast Metropolitan. The older traditional names of the city are Oguaa and Kotokuraba (meaning "River of Crabs" or "Village of Crabs"). The crab is the city's mascot, and a statue of one stands in the city center. Cape Coast was founded by the people of Oguaa, and the region ruled over by the paramount chief, or Omanhene, is known today as the Oguaa Traditional Area. Cape Coast is the only Metropolitan Assembly in the Central Region. Cape Coast Metropolitan Assembly is one of the twenty-two districts in Central Region, Ghana. Originally created as a municipal district assembly in 1988, which was created from the

Cape Coast Municipal Council, it was later elevated to metropolitan district assembly status on February 29, 2008, to become the Cape Coast Metropolitan District.

Cape Coast is the seat of the University of Cape Coast (UCC), Ghana's leading university in teaching and research. Cape Vars, as it is popularly called, lies on a hill overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. It also has one of the best Polytechnics, the Cape Coast Technical University (C-POLY). The city also boasts of some of Ghana's finest secondary and technical schools: Wesley Girls' High School, St. Augustine College, one of the first Catholic schools in Ghana, which was established in Cape Coast during 1936, Holy Child High School, Ghana Mfantipim School, and Adisadel College, among others.

Abura Asebu Kwamankese District is one of the twenty-two (22) districts in the Central Region. It was carved out in 1988 from the erstwhile Mfantseman District Council. Abura Dunkwa is the District Capital. It is made up of three paramountcies, namely Asebu, Abura, and Kwamankese. The district shares boundaries with Twifo-Heman-Lower Denkyira Districts on the west, Assin South District on the north, and Mfantseman District on the east. On the south-western part, the district is bordered by Cape Coast Metropolitan and the Gulf of Guinea on the south-eastern part. The District has an estimated land area of about 380 km², 376 settlements, and an estimated population as of 2021 of 142,920 (projection from the 2010 housing and population census). As one constituency district, the Assembly has eight (8) sub-structures (one urban, one town, and six area councils). There are thirty-one electoral areas with a total composition of forty-four Assembly Members. The ancient Akan Asebu Kingdom was also situated in this district. The dominant language spoken is Fante. Agriculture (crops, forestry, livestock, fishing, and hunting) constitutes the major economic activity of the

district economy. It employs about 65.4 percent (that is, 54.5 percent for farming and 10.9 percent for fishing) of the economically active population, followed by 21.9 percent for services and then 12.7 percent for industry (Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese District Assembly, 2009).

3.5 Population

The population consists of the administrative female heads of SHSs within the Central Region. Specifically, the target population is the female heads and assistant headmistresses of selected senior high schools in the Central Region. For this study, the sampling frame included 8 participants (headmistresses) from two administrative districts in the region. Eight participants from eight schools were selected and interviewed. This aligns with Creswell and Poth's (2018) recommendation that phenomenological studies typically involve 5 to 25 participants to ensure depth while maintaining methodological rigor in qualitative research. Morse (1994) suggests at least six participants for this type of study (phenomenological study). For a qualitative study of this nature, the total number of female heads finally selected and used was based on the principle of saturation. This is a point in the data collection process where no new and relevant information is added or generated after interviewing more than five participants (Green & Thorogood, 2004).

3.6 Sample and Sampling Techniques

The purposeful sampling technique, also known as the judgmental sampling technique, was used to select the respondents. Purposive sampling is used when people within a given population bear certain characteristics that meet the criteria of the researcher or the study (Alvi, 2016). Purposive sampling enables the researcher to deliberately select

those who, in his or her view, are knowledgeable enough to provide very useful information to facilitate the knowledge production process.

In this study, heads and assistant heads who met the selection criteria from the SHSs in the region were selected for data collection. Specifically, eight SHS headmistresses and assistants who had at least two years' experience as headmistresses were purposively sampled for the study. This implies that participants in this study were handpicked based on certain characteristics and goals. It therefore dovetails into convenience sampling approach within this purposive or selective sampling.

The convenience sampling technique is used by researchers to select individuals or groups that happen to be available and are willing to participate in the research at the time (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003). It allows for effective time management and responds efficiently to the ethics of the study.

In view of this, only women with at least two years' experience as headmistresses and who were willing and available at the time of data collection were selected for the study. It is believed that they possess vital information needed to answer the research questions formulated for the study and that availability as well as readiness to provide information were equally crucial for timely data collection processes. The participants were personally contacted to express their readiness to participate in the study, and they were required to choose their own settings for the interview.

3.6.1 Inclusion Criteria

1. Female headmistresses with a minimum of two years' experience
2. Female assistant headmistresses with a minimum of two years' experience. In this study, therefore, three assistant headmistresses with a minimum of two years' experience were engaged and interviewed.

3.6.2 Exclusion Criteria

1. Female headmistresses with less than two years' experience
2. Female assistant headmistresses with less than two years' experience
3. Acting female headmistresses

3.7 Research Instrument

Interview guide was the main instrument used to collect the data. The interview schedule has two main sections: one on socio-demographic data and the section on various items to explore the experiences of the headmistresses. The first section collected data on interviewees' marital status, ethnic background, and current rank in the service. The other section dealt with issues relative to experiences as headmistresses, challenges, and other relevant issues that relate to the work of headmistresses. The content of the research instrument is guided by the relevant issues that have been identified during the literature review stage. The use of the in-depth interview guide allowed me the flexibility to ask numerous questions and seek clarifications through probing. In dealing with the experiences of individuals, interview guides help respondents to freely express themselves without any inhibition.

The semi-structured interview is a very effective method of data collection for qualitative data. It is chiefly used to explore thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about a particular subject. It also helps individuals to present issues relevant to their personal experiences. The guide was, therefore, used to collect qualitative data to answer all the research questions formulated. The purpose of an interview "is to reveal existing knowledge in a way that can be expressed in the form of answers that are accessible to interpretation" (Flick, 2006).

3.8 Data Collection Procedures

An introductory letter was first obtained from the researcher's department, the Department of Educational Administration and Management. The copies of this introductory letter were presented to the participants to seek permission and also schedule a date or ascertain their willingness to grant interviews for the study. In line with ethical principles, prior notice was given to the participants to get them ready for the study. In a week prior to the conduct of the interview session, consent forms were administered to participants to state their willingness or unwillingness to take part in the study. After which, the researcher fixed a date for the collection of data.

The interview was conducted face-to-face with the participants at their various offices at an agreed-upon and arranged time. Largely, data was collected at the convenience of the participants in a manner that did not disrupt their official work activities. The data collection process took a period of 2 weeks and was done between January and February 2022. The interview, which lasted not more than 30 minutes, was audio-taped with the consent of the participants. In line with the objectives of the study, the interview explored all relevant issues about what their experiences were as headmistresses. With this technique, the researcher had the opportunity to follow up with questions for clarity and deeper insights into the issues. The researcher ended all the interview sessions with a word of appreciation to the participants for their time, efforts and willingness to participate in the study.

3.9 Data Management and Analysis

The individual interviews were cleaned and stored with a secured password on a computer in order to prevent data loss. The interviews were downloaded, and the recordings of each respondent were given unique codes that differentiated them in order

to prevent mixing of the data. To make sure that the data is safe, duplicates or extra copies of the data were also made and stored in the clouds, which could be retrieved at any time in case of a loss. The audio-taped interviews were also transcribed verbatim and identified as such. The researcher was solely responsible for the transcription and ensured that the data was safe and confidentiality was assured.

The transcribed data was analysed thematically in the form of participants' narratives (Creswell, 2014). This was done in line with each research question and objective as formulated. The phenomenological method was employed for the analysis process.

The phenomenological method has a number of steps that have to be followed in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. The transcribed data was first read to achieve good insight; the second reading was very thorough in order to note down the sub-themes in each text. At the third stage, there was coding of the sub-themes, which were subsequently reorganized into major themes. Finally, all the major themes were synthesized to provide one major theme that reflects the experiences of the respondents. The phenomenological analysis has been used by many qualitative researchers in several studies to explore experiences.

3.10 Trustworthiness

The aim of the study is to, as much as practicable, put the knowledge created through the research into practice. Therefore, the study is tailored to meet the level of legitimacy and familiarity required for understanding as well as uptake by researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and the public. Trustworthiness remains one of the ways to ensure that research findings are worthy of attention (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) refined the concept of trustworthiness by introducing the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to parallel the

conventional quantitative assessment criteria of validity and reliability. Leveraging on Lincoln and Guba (1985), the study sees these worthiness criteria as useful pragmatic choices towards the concern about the acceptability and usefulness of the research for a variety of stakeholders, particularly in the educational ecosystem.

Credibility

Credibility establishes whether the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants' original data and are a correct interpretation of the participants' original views. In this study, credibility was ensured through the use of triangulation. Triangulation aims to enhance the process of qualitative research by using multiple approaches (Sim & Sharp, 1998). The study employed methodological triangulation by using different data collection methods to gather the data. In this study, though in-depth interviews were used as the main instrument, field notes were employed to supplement as well as triangulate the data. The researcher employed the services of the research assistants, who, together with the researcher, took concurrent notes for comparisons and to achieve investigator triangulation. Lastly, "member check" was used to achieve credibility. Here, all transcripts of the interviews were sent back to the participants for feedback. In addition, halfway through the study period, a meeting was held with those who had participated in the interviews, enabling them to correct the interpretation and challenge what they perceived to be 'wrong' interpretations. Finally, the findings were presented to the participants again in another meeting to confirm the conclusions.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the generalizability of an inquiry. Transferability concerns the aspect of applicability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ensuring transferability requires the researcher to provide a ‘thick description’ of the participants and the research process to enable the reader to assess whether the findings are transferable to their own setting. In this study, the researcher provided a rich account of descriptive data, such as the context in which the research was carried out, its setting, sample, sample size, sample strategy, demographic, inclusion and exclusion criteria, interview procedure and topics, and excerpts from the interview guide.

Dependability

Dependability is an important part of trustworthiness. It refers to how stable and consistent the research process and its findings are over time and in various analytical settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This requires that the study's methods and analytical procedures are well-documented. They also need to be applied systematically and rigorously throughout the research (Shenton, 2004). To establish dependability, it is essential to show that the analysis follows the accepted standards and principles of the selected qualitative research design (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Importantly, as Shenton (2004) points out, interpretations should come directly from the data, not be overly swayed by the researcher's personal beliefs or biases. To ensure dependability in this study, a key strategy was to conduct a supervisor audit. The supervisor carefully reviewed the documented analytical process. This involved assessing how consistently the techniques of the chosen qualitative methodology were applied and checking that the process was clear and could be repeated logically.

Confirmability

Confirmability is another crucial aspect of trustworthiness. It centers on the neutrality and objectivity of research findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) first defined confirmability as ensuring that findings represent participants' views rather than the biases of the researcher. Shenton (2004) built on this idea, highlighting the role of reflexive journaling and audit trails in maintaining an unbiased approach. Confirmability audits, introduced by Guba (1981) and expanded by Houghton et al. (2013), offer a way to externally verify the objectivity of research.

Several methods have been created to improve confirmability in qualitative studies. Reflexivity, supported by Tracy (2010) and Creswell and Poth (2018), encourages researchers to recognize and bracket their assumptions through positionality statements. Thick description, promoted by Houghton et al. (2013) and Nowell et al. (2017), ensures that there is enough contextual detail to reflect the grounded nature of findings. Using qualitative software for structured coding, as discussed by Bazeley (2013), helps to maintain confirmability through organized data. Together, these strategies show that interpretations come authentically from the data, rather than being influenced by the researcher.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

Access: A letter of introduction from the head of Department of Educational Administration and Management, University of Education, Winneba was presented to the suitable authorities. The researcher sought audience with the authorities involved to brief them on the purpose of the research and assured them of it being solely academic work.

Informed consent: Consent was obtained from the respondents to be used in the study and to ensure that they participated voluntarily. Before the interviews, people used for this study had to consent to the involvement of this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). General verbal consent was sought from the participants before the interview was carried out.

Confidentiality: All pertinent issues concerning the study, the objectives, justification, and how to ensure confidentiality—were discussed with the respondents. Additionally, how the findings will be disseminated and other expectations of both the researcher and the respondents were discussed thoroughly before the commencement of data collection. All selected respondents were required to sign a written consent form as evidence of their consent.

Anonymity: For the purpose of anonymity, participant's names were excluded and were given unique codes that differentiated each respondent's recording from the others in order to prevent mixing of the data. In doing so, the personalities of respondents were detached from the findings by providing no trace to the specific sources of information. They were also informed and assured that their participation in the study was voluntary, and they have the option to withdraw at any stage if they feel the need to do so, and it will not affect the relationship that exists.

Betrayal: The data gathered from respondents, which was audio-taped, was transcribed verbatim and identified as such. The researcher was solely responsible for the transcription and ensured that the data was safe and confidentiality was assured.

3.12 Summary

The chapter deals with the methodology adopted for the study and how the data was analysed. The qualitative research approach helped in bringing out participants' comprehensive views and suggestions about their experiences. For this study, the lived experiences of women in leadership positions in senior high schools within the Central Region were explored. The chapter also discussed relevant issues about the interpretive philosophy, which believes that reality is socially constructed.

The researcher chose phenomenology as the study design because it is an approach that involves observing and describing the behaviour of a participant without influencing it in any way. This approach aided me in constructing the general meaning of the events, situations, or experiences in order to reach a profound understanding of the phenomenon.

The lived experiences of women in administrative positions in the Central Region have not been fully explored; hence, my choice of Central Region. Data was collected from headmistresses within the region. Female principals as heads with two years' experience or more were selected for the study based on their knowledge and skills. The semi-structured interviews were audio-taped, and the transcribed data was analysed thematically.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the data collected for the study is organized and discussed. The study sought to explore the experiences of female heads managing SHSs in the Central Region of Ghana. This chapter presents the raw data collected on the topic, analyses it, and discusses it in relation to relevant literature, especially those reviewed in Chapter Two of the study.

4.1 Demographic Characteristics

This section discusses the demographic characteristics of the participants in the study. These include the distribution of participants by their level of education, leadership position/rank, marital status, and work experience. This information below in Table 4.1 shows the background of the participants in the study. The information contains the background information of the eight selected and interviewed participants in the study.

Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics

Participants	Level of Education	Marital Status	Working Experience	Leadership Position	Number of Years in Office
Participant 1	Master Degree	Married	20	Deputy Director	7
Participant 2	Master Degree	Married	31	Deputy Director	2
Participant 3	Master Degree	Married	29	Deputy Director	4
Participant 4	Master Degree	Married	20	Deputy Director	5
Participant 5	Master Degree	Married	22	Deputy Director	4
Participant 6	Master Degree	Married	21	Deputy Director	6
Participant 7	Master Degree	Married	23	Deputy Director	4
Participant 8	Master Degree	Married	23	Deputy Director	4

Source: Field survey, (2022)

The table above indicates that all the participants had obtained Master degree and were married, reflecting comparable education level and marital status among the participants. The working hours ranged between 20-31 years, which indicates a very experienced group of professionals. Every participant held the same position of Deputy Director as a mark of shared responsibility and rank in their organizations. Years served in current leadership role The participants had served as leaders in their current role between two and seven years, reflecting a mixture of newer and more experienced leaders. Generally speaking, these participants are matured, married female educational leaders with high academic and extensive professional experience in the educational field.

4.2 Data Presentation and Interpretation

RQ 1 What are the Experiences of Female Heads in Combining School Leadership and Family Roles?

The analysis surfaced four central sub-themes: leadership role in conflict with family responsibilities, trade-offs, family misunderstanding and balancing work and family life. Drawing on Braun and Clarke's (2006) analytical framework, these themes highlight both the everyday challenges and the deeper sociocultural constraints experienced by women in leadership positions. Methodological rigor was maintained throughout, adhering to the criteria established by Nowell et al. (2017).

Leadership role in conflict with family responsibilities

In an attempt to fully ascertain the experiences of female heads in combining family and leadership roles, an array of questions was posed to each of the participants who participated in the interview sessions of this research work. While the experiences of these women differ in many ways, there are certainly similarities in the challenges and

adversities that they have faced and their perceptions of what has allowed them to experience success in their leadership roles. For many participants, particularly those who have young children, their primary experience issue was how to balance childcare and other house chores while at the same time fulfilling all the demands that come with managing SHSs. In the view of one participant:

It is difficult, as a female leader, to meet different role expectations at the time. You, know that for this job, one has to spend a lot of time and energy in order to deliver effectively. Remember, you are managing teachers and other non-teaching staff. However, I get to spend a lot of time and energy on housework, my husband, preparing for children's education, and other extended family, particularly my elderly mom (#P7# 2022).

In a related response, other participants emphasized the burden and quantum of work involved in managing the house and the work. The worrying situation, according to a participant, is that the two tasks (home and work activities) sometimes overlap.

What is worse is that there are frequent conflicts in the time arrangements for my office work and my housework. In most cases, managing the two seems quite challenging, and I breakdown too. It is a huge task, especially for those of us who have children, and your husband expects you to perform marital duties as well (#P8#, 2022).

The responses emphasise the point that women in leadership experience instances of conflict in the performance of their house chores and office duties. It was revealed that in most cases, it was difficult for the women to balance their careers while accompanying their children and husbands.

The findings are clearly in agreement with the role conflict theory that underpins the study. The role conflict, as espoused by Duxbury, Higgins and Lee (1994) established that the amount of time women expended in performing their office duties as well as their family roles positively correlates with role encumbrances. Based on the theory, this view explains why any headmistress is likely to battle with an uncomfortable burden of responsibilities under her job profile and is unlikely to have enough time to

do justice to each of them. The authoritative burden placed on the headmistresses of schools based on organizational policies, together with the traditional societal roles, create a contorted cycle which keeps repeating itself, without any room for gap between workload and time, steadily straining their efficiency in duty cadence.

From the theory, when such female leaders face these dilemmas, women must make a choice and sacrifice to meet the needs of the other side, which often brings a heavier psychological burden to women. In other instances, many of these female heads explained that they had to sometimes seek assistance from their spouses to help with the kids or some of the house chores so they could have enough time to fulfill work demands. Other women, delegated work duties to subordinates as a way of reducing their work-load. There is a broad range of literature about the balance of work and private lives for women, particularly the impact of family-life demands. According to Chisholm-Burns, Spivey, Hagemann, and Josephson (2017), the increased commitment and work pressure that a leadership promotion entails often affect a woman's personal life and career choices in a way that is not usually experienced by men. Morongiu and Ekehammar (1999) refer to this as the "double track," which they defined as combining home and work routines continuously. Similarly, Roebuck, Smith, and El Haddaoui, (2013) posit that women, particularly married women who are in leadership positions across all sectors, are faced with the daunting task of balancing home chores such as taking care of children, cleaning, cooking, and other domestic chores with the increased work-load that comes with leadership positions. Some comments from the interviewees are presented below:

First, the bond factor helps, but there should be a balance, so you know when you are at work and at home, and then each day and how it goes... I delegate, that also helps because you can't be everywhere, so sometimes when Daddy is around. I seek for his help, for instance, I say to him, "This is what I would like

you to do for me." In fact, some of the petty aids are handled by him so that I would have the opportunity to do this work (#P2#, 2022).

This excerpt from participant 2 narrates her experience as a woman managing an SHS in relation to her responsibilities as a mother and a married woman. This participant emphasized the need to create a balance between her role as the manager of an SHS and her responsibility towards her family. This is in line with Sundaresan (2014), who states that women in leadership across all sectors try to create a balance between the private lives of women, particularly the impact of family-life demands, and leadership demands.

Findings from the interview sessions also revealed that women who had older children did not have any difficulties combining family and leadership roles. However, some participants who had older children shared their experience with combining their leadership role with attending family events such as weddings and funerals. Some key excerpts from the interviews are discussed below.

Okay, for me, this is not too much of a problem because my children are grown, I have four children; two of them have finished university, and the other two are in university, so they are not with me. They come to me occasionally, so most of the time I am here alone.... Combining has not been too difficult because I don't have small children; I have to pick them up from school or check their homework (#P3#, 2022).

As I said last time, by the time I entered the office, my children were all adults, so there was not much to do with family matters like that, so there was no stress at all. That's why I said when I came here, I was stressed. When I get home, I distressed because there is not much to do (#P1#, 2022).

Findings from the interview sessions reveal that women managing SHSs in the Central Region of Ghana, like women in other sectors, try to achieve a balance between their work and their family lives.

Trade offs

It was revealed that participants sometimes had to forgo equally important academic progress and focus on the family duties or vice versa. In interactions with participants, it was identified that some female heads decided not to go further the academic ladder because of the challenges that it may pose with family responsibilities. For instance, one participant intimated:

You see, being a woman and married one for that matter, there is always compromises to make when it comes to decision-making. I have to drop the decision to take a PhD program at a point (#P5#, 2022).

I remember some time ago, I was selected as a delegate to one of the conferences outside the country, a very important conference. It was the same time my husband had to attend to equally important duties. I had to drop mine and allow him the space to attend to his. This is all due to family responsibilities that would be affected if the two of us were absent from home (#P7#, 2022)

According to Ward and Eddy (2013), some female academics choose to forgo promotions and leadership positions in anticipation of the messy politics, sexist cultures, or irreconcilable challenges between work and family life. On the other hand, those who are able to climb the leadership ladder tend to give up or are filled with regrets as a result of the challenges associated with the demands of leadership roles, including the irreconcilable challenge of work and family life.

However, participants in this study state that they have no regrets about taking on the role of managing a SHS. Several scholars have associated this with the fact that women may have found a way to successfully strike a balance between work and family life.

For me I don't regret taking up this role, it provides enormous learning and experiences that build my personal and professional development. In fact, it makes me stronger (#P#3, 2022)

Latchem, Kanwar, and Ferreira (2013) argue that women are making a difference in higher education. They have introduced new ways of approaching the challenges and opportunities of taking on leadership roles in education. Similarly, Bradley, (2013),

Kreissl, Striedinger, Sauer and Hofbauer, (2015), and Morley (2013) posit that women have broken the code to achieving senior leadership roles.

Key excerpts from the interview sessions are presented below.

No, it shows that if others have done it, you can do it, so the fact that we tap from others also helps, but they are solid behind me so they understand when Mummy has to be away for days because of work. We started preparing them down as soon as the appointment came, even my mother, my siblings, so that they would know that. Now they know that if they cannot reach her, sometimes you can call and my phone is not reachable, so I psyche them before I take any decision out (#P2#, 2022).

No, it is an experience. I am learning, I learned, and I continue to learn because administration is broad. It is good that you get to know some of these things. As teachers, we do not know all of that, but when you are given the position, you are not perfect. You would make one or two mistakes, but you would learn from them, move on, and forge ahead (#P3#, 2022).

The responses from the participants highlight the opportunities and challenges of female heads in leadership positions. It reinforces the issues of the conflicting roles, the need to delegate or support from spouses as well as work and family balance.

Family misunderstanding

The findings revealed that pressure from family members tends to magnify the work and family conflict for female heads, which sometimes degenerates into family misunderstandings. In the view of the participants, Ghanaian society, which is deeply influenced by traditional conservative concepts, expects women to play a second role as men rise to the highest ladder. Participants emphasized that their leadership is seen as a threat to social status arrangements in the natural scheme of things. Therefore, instances of the reality of work pressure led to misunderstandings and conflict.

I can tell you that I am expected to keep quiet and do housework. One, because, it is my work and any complaints would lead to arguments and misunderstandings (#P# 5).

This revelation corresponds with Cole, Zucker, and Duncan (2001; Kimball, 2001), whose findings established that women's progress toward social and economic gender equality has historically and now been defined by political conflict rather than a collaborative process. It is in line with their assertion that women who are looking for paid jobs, on the other hand, face class exploitation and gender persecution at every step, including the family.

Balancing work and family life

Based on the findings, the ability to create a synergy between family obligations with work roles emerged as a core experience of the participants. As noted by the participants, the waged motherhood and professional leadership roles require considerable obligations that must be managed diplomatically. Participants uniformly emphasized the need to balance their professional commitments with domestic responsibilities, illustrating the delicate equilibrium required by their dual roles. This illustrates what many scholars, including Eagly and Carli (2007), have termed the “double bind” phenomenon, where women leaders are expected to balance caregiving and demanding professional standards.

A participant intimated:

It is not easy for a woman who has family responsibilities as well as leadership roles in academia. For the past years I have been in this position, I have had to struggle with dealing with family issues alongside the work. I have been pregnant; I have travelled, leaving my family and other responsibilities that had me compromise on the other (#P# 7).

Sometimes, I had to take home some official work and attend to it only when my family (children and husband) were asleep. It gave me a comfortable time to work and peace of mind (#P#8).

In order to balance these competing domains, the participants implemented a number of coping strategies aimed at minimizing the impacts of their absences professionally on the home front. Consistent with Clark's (2000) work/family border theory, which

advocates the need for flexible boundaries between work and home life, the experiences of the participants underscore the need for boundary management by women leaders. For some, this meant attending to work responsibilities during non-traditional times, especially when their partners and children were not available.

RQ 2 What Challenges Confront Female Heads in Combining their Leadership and Family Roles?

The analysis surfaced three interconnected challenges: the dual burden: women leaders as primary earners and primary caregivers, uncooperative attitude from the male colleagues, gender stereotyping. These issues represent not only overt barriers but also subtler sociocultural biases embedded within institutional contexts. The study employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, ensuring methodological rigor as described by Nowell et al. (2017). Taken together, these findings highlight the intersectional pressures constraining women's advancement in educational leadership.

The Double Burden: Women Leaders as Primary Earners and Primary Caregivers

Participants' lived experiences highlight the ongoing conflict between family responsibilities and career aspirations, which shows up as a constant juggling act of time, energy, and social expectations. These women manage a maze of duties that go beyond the office, but they still serve as the primary carers despite their leadership positions.

Some key excerpts from the interviews are discussed below.

No, as for the family, I do not face challenges like that, but yes, sometimes, some challenges may come from the family that you didn't think would happen, but when it happens like that, I'm able to marry the two, I'm able to work in the office, and I also go home and continue.....I let the assistance take over for me. They take over, and I would go and do that before coming back again to continue (#P1#, 2022).

The sources of the work-family challenges that women encounter is related to the expected roles of women in society. In spite of the progress that has been made in the advancement of women in the workplace, managerial and executive women still constitute the minority in most organizations. Thus, women are expected to be the ones to take care of the home, irrespective of their positions and whether or not their positions give them enough time to do so. For instance, participant 1, makes reference to the fact that emergencies, such as taking a sick family member to the hospital, may interfere with her work schedule.

All of a sudden, because of a new role, some of your children even joke with it, all of a sudden, sometimes the mummy reduces to heady. Such alone is a challenge. Then sometimes your husband needs you, the work needs..... they are expecting so much from you, especially the extended family, my nuclear, they understand that mummy is there to serve (#P2#, 2022).

The emotional and physical toll of “all of a sudden, sometimes the mummy reduces to heady,” as participant 2 described, captures the sobering truth of how families shift and the multi-layered burdens of caregiving that comes with what often seems like a career progression. The phrase “mummy” becoming “heady” shows the emotional toll of spilt identity a woman undergoes when she is a leader; this is the construction of her identity as a functioning member of the workforce, reduced symbolically to heady. The children's light-heartedness hints at a deeper wound they bear, suggesting they know far too well about what has been traded for her absence, the emotional disengagement and physical presence of their mother, and professional progress.

Participant 3 posits that,

My family is not regularly here, so I can work when I want to, but when you talked of extended family, my mom is in Kumasi, so occasionally we have to pay a visit. You must always ask permission, then you have to rush from there, either you leave Kumasi on Sunday or you leave early Monday morning to come to school, that's all to it (#P3#, 2022).

The experience of participant 3 shows how geographical distance only gives women leaders a surface-level degree of work-life flexibility. She is temporarily able to work independently due to her physical separation from her family, but she is still constrained by caregiving obligations because she must travel to Kumasi to visit her mother. This illustrates how, in spite of professional status, traditional gender roles still exist, requiring permission-seeking behaviours and compressed "commuter caregiving" (Dlamini, 2021). Her case demonstrates that caregiving responsibilities simply adapt rather than vanish, and that women's freedom in the workplace is still dependent on family circumstances. The long-standing assumption that female leaders must balance both work and home responsibilities is ultimately validated by even seeming exceptions.

As espoused by Chiloane-Tsoka (2010) and which assertion corresponds with the gendered leadership dynamics uncovered in our study, work-life balance is experienced in different ways, depending on the position held by the individual. The responsibilities of managers are characterized by many challenges, including dealing with team members and stakeholders. Hence, people, for instance the headmistresses, in managerial positions tend to experience work-life conflict due to the magnitude of their work, which includes working long hours and attending long meetings (Kaizer, Overfield, & Yarborough, 2011; Powel, 2003).

As a result, managers are consequently faced with professional obligations that demand their time from their families, affecting their ability to perform both roles effectively (McDonald & Leaptrott, 2009). For women in managerial positions, as seen in this study, it is an issue of great concern as they are expected to be caretakers of the home. In African settings like Ghana, traditional and cultural beliefs regarding the role and status of women in society are still prevalent. While some women are able to break through these cultural barriers to rise to leadership positions, more often than not, it also means having to juggle cultural expectations with leadership roles.

Uncooperative attitude from the male colleagues

One of the significant challenges female heads face in managing secondary schools, the findings revealed, is the uncooperative attitude of some male colleagues. According to the participants, the uncooperative attitude from the male colleagues often stems from deeply rooted gender biases and societal norms that traditionally associate leadership with masculinity.

Some of my male colleagues in the school exhibit characters that suggest that they cannot submit to woman's directives and authority. Their difficulty is based on the fact that a woman is leading and they have to accept her directives (#P5#, 2022)

In their view, some male staff members struggle to accept a woman in a position of authority, leading to subtle or overt acts of defiance, lack of support, or even deliberate obstruction of directives.

So, you will some of the male colleagues deliberately coming to staff meeting late or absenting from meetings, not regular at school; or decided to delay actions on issues or not meeting deadlines or even open defiance. All in a way to test female leadership ability (#P3#, 2022)

The excerpt above demonstrates a lack of cooperation from the male teachers, which manifests in various ways failure to attend meetings, reluctance to implement administrative decisions, or undermining the head's authority in front of other staff or

students. The participants indicated that such attitude creates uncooperative environment and therefore makes it difficult for congenial decision-making processes.

However, some of the participants revealed that such attitude was not pervasive as anticipated. In their view, it was very minimal and they were able to deal with it. Participant 1 for instance reveals that she does not have any challenges with male subordinates and that she relates to them just like she does with female subordinates, saying,

I don't have a challenge with the males; I work with them just as I work with the females. I think I have more male colleagues working with me hand in hand. I have a lot of them; they see me as their superior, and they give me all the respect, and I also give them all the respect (#P1#, 2022).

While some participants openly admit that they have encountered various acts from their male coworkers intended to undermine their authority, others report that they have not encountered any instances of insubordination from their male subordinates.

Our males over here don't pose any problems; the only one I had was an outsider. Over here, we work together. We have three assistants: domestic, academic, and administrative. Academic is male, and the two of us are female, so we work together and don't pose any challenges. We help one another all in the name of the school. We have one objective: to build the image of the school, to improve upon academic work, to make sure that there is excellence in the school, and that is what we look at (#P3#, 2022).

It is argued that women who were raised in societies that have cultural stereotypes tend to believe that men are the ones supposed to be in leadership. Thus, when such women are in leadership, they tend to give their male subordinates some special treatment or reverence that they would not give their female counterparts. According to participant 3, she accords her male respondents respect and even has a pet name for her male subordinates, so they can in turn respect and obey her.

Over here, I don't have much of a challenge because I always believed that Adam was created first, so no matter the age of the other sex, accord the person the respect. So, I have nick names for all my subordinates who are males; some of them are called sweethearts, and sometimes I call them daddy. When you

respect a man, the person will obey everything you do, so for that one, I came out of a man, I respect them, I accord them, and because of the petty names and I make them feel, one looks like my husband, so I call him sweetheart. That alone is enough; men need to be accorded that respect for them to obey (#P3#, 2022).

While this statement expresses a belief in respecting men, it raises concerns about potentially unprofessional workplace dynamics and gender bias. Effective leadership relies on mutual respect and clear communication, not nicknames or assumptions about obedience based on gender.

In environments where traditional gender roles are deeply rooted, it was established that some male staff members struggle to accept female authority, particularly their headmistress. This uncooperative attitude, according to the study, manifests in subtle or overt ways ranging from reluctance to follow directives, withholding crucial information, passive-aggressive behavior, or outright defiance. As the findings indicated, the attitude is born out of perceived association of leadership role with masculinity. This aligns with Msuya (2017) who asserted that gender-related cultural practices, particularly in Africa, are harmful to women. Because of cultural and historical stereotypes, there are prejudices among the members of societies that women cannot exhibit leadership qualities as compared to their male counterparts (Sahin, 2018). Educational institutions are not excluded from cultural interference because members of the school come from communities that believe in these cultural perceptions. Thus, men who believe that men should not be led by women resist female leadership, even in schools.

Contrary to these assertions, some participants in this study also revealed that they do not face such issues with their male subordinates. According to them, addressing these challenges often requires significant emotional intelligence, resilience, and consistent

efforts to foster a professional and inclusive work culture that values competence over gender which they have efficiently exemplified.

Gender Stereotyping

The study reveals instances of situations where female leaders in education have had to consistently fight for space within the academy as they constantly face overt and covert forms of gender stereotypes. These stereotypes create contexts that tell women who rose to the positions that they go to the level as a result of favors and not on their own strengths or competence. Many of the participants reported facing gender stereotypes at work as one key setback they have had to deal with over the years.

In an interview interaction, one participant indicated:

At this age, we have male friends who constantly label us incompetent. They feel our rise to the position was purely a favour. Indeed, some of the males in their chit-chats make some of these assertions. And then, I get all manner of attitudes that seek to undermine my authority because I'm simply a female (#P4#, 2022).

The finding provides a clear indication that gender stereotypes remain pervasive and could affect working relations and efficiency.

RQ 3 What are the strategies employed by the female parents in coping with the challenges associated with combining the roles?

The analysis of Research Question 3 surfaced five prominent coping strategies. Family support, delegation of duties, effective time management and prioritization, emotional intelligence and people management and the use of technology. Taken together, these themes reflect both tangible problem-solving approaches and deeper leadership capacities. The analysis drew on Braun and Clarke's (2006) framework, adhering to Nowell et al.'s (2017) guidelines for methodological rigor.

Family Support

Reddick, Rochlen, Grasso, et al. (2012) refer to coping strategies as the ways in which women reconcile work and care by rationalizing their need to work on economic grounds. On the strategies adopted to cope with the challenges associated with combining family and work roles, participants shared similar yet distinct strategies. The common strategy used by participants to combine their work and family roles is seeking family support. Support from both the external and nuclear families according to the participants ranges from spouse support, children understanding and supporting their mother as well as soliciting support from extended family members with respect to taking charge of the home.

From the responses, Participant 1 emphasize the point that upbringing the children is a major coping mechanism for her. According to her, it is crucial for women balancing leadership and family roles to raise their children to understand that their mother has demands to fulfil as well work.

When it comes to the family, there are not many challenges, but it is all about the upbringing of the children. They appreciate the work that you are doing, so if your family is there to help you, they know that if Mummy is not there, I have to do this, and that is all about the upbringing (#P1#, 2022).

Some key excerpts from the interviews are presented below:

Yes, we have a family system where we sit periodically to assess ourselves.....Today we needed this; it wasn't there. What is the way forward to do that? That is a practice, so for the family, I can't have a lot of issues with them (#P2#, 2022).

As for family, maybe when a family event coincides with school programs that's a problem either than that I don't have too much problem, now one of my daughters is at home; she is not a baby that I have to say is lunch time, let me go and see what she would eat something like that, I don't have that challenge (#P8#, 2022).

The responses from the participants highlight the role of the family in navigating work-family responsibilities. As apparent in the findings, women were able to balance work and family responsibilities after having to rely heavily on the support of their spouses and immediate family.

Van der Lippe and Peters (2007) state that many people struggle to balance work and family obligations because of the increasing demands of their jobs and parenting standards, in addition to the fact that their households are juggling more and more conflicting responsibilities. As a result, women frequently struggle to balance their dual roles of providing care and working. Many women use coping mechanisms like time management and prioritisation to deal with these pressures, which helps them divide their resources between their family's needs and their work obligations. For instance, having flexible scheduling and establishing clear guidelines for work hours can help lower stress and enhance the harmony between work and family life.

In this study, support from both the external and nuclear families was established as one key coping strategy for the headmistress in order to balance the work-family role. The family support in this case entails varying support from the spouse, extended family members as well as cooperative attitude from the children.

This outcome aligns with Vidyakala (2020) which study established that women in leadership positions employ coping strategies such as working fewer hours, receiving support from partners or other family members, or outsourcing care. This implies that in order to fulfil their duties as family carers, some women may decide not to seek leadership roles or cut back on their working hours. In a similar vein, Sandberg (2014) contends that women frequently pass up chances for career progression because they are worried about how their work responsibilities might affect their personal decisions.

Delegation of Duties

Another coping mechanism used by participants is delegation. According to some participants, in situations where they are unable to attend to work duties themselves, they delegate tasks and responsibilities to reduce the overall family workload.

First, the bond factor helps, but there should be a balance, so you know when you are at work and at home.....I delegate, that also helps because you can't be everywhere, so sometimes when Daddy is around, what I would like you to do for me is handle some of the petty aids for me so that I would have the opportunity to do this work (#P5#, 2022).

Aside that, always delegate part of my duties to the assistant—both academic and administration or even departmental heads (HODs). By so doing I shed off some of the responsibilities which largely reduces the workload (#P6#, 2022)

The findings as apparent in the responses above demonstrate that headmistresses often assign specific duties to their assistant heads, heads of departments or even their spouses when at home. This strategy helps the headmistresses to reduce both official and personal workloads. In consonance with Bush and Glover (2013), delegation is a widely adopted strategy by leaders of educational institution to manage workload. Bush and Glover (2013) emphasise that effective headmistresses deploy the assistance of their deputies, heads of departments and senior staff to help execute certain task in view of sharing the workload. The findings also agree with Harris (2004) which asserted that in the environment of work overload, distributed leadership helps to mitigate stress and enhances decision-making. Apparently adopting this strategy does not only reduce the stress and workload but also helps to foster collaborative school environment.

Effective Time Management and Prioritization

Effective time management was found to be one essential tool the headmistresses adopted in juggling responsibilities. According to the participants, they often use calendars, and “to-do-list planners” to structure and prioritize their daily activities.

Personally, what has worked for me over the years is prioritizing and structuring my daily activities. So, when you come to my office, I have my “to-do-list planner that tracks what I do on daily basis and that tells me the pressing demands and what to delegate (#P8#, 2022)

I manage the time in a manner that I don’t get unnecessarily overwhelmed by the demand of the office. Mostly, I use calendar planning approach to put all the activities of the term in the order of priority. In that case, I work towards each task to meet tight deadlines or designate when it becomes necessary (#P7#, 2022)

As evident in the responses above, the participants adopt diligent time management and prioritization to structure their daily routine with the view to ensuring that urgent tasks are prioritized. This outcome is corroborated by Lumby and Coleman (2007) which study asserted that headmistresses leveraged planners such calendars, to-do list and other digital tools to structure their daily activities. This affirms the findings that effective time management is essential in handling complex responsibilities. It hinges on prioritizing urgent tasks to ensure efficiency and optimization of time.

Emotional Intelligence and People Management

The findings indicate that building relationships and effective conflict resolutions were key strategies headmistresses adopt to deal with some of the challenges in the workplace. In their view, most of the challenges that relate to deliberate attempt to undermine their authorities were handled using emotional intelligence and interpersonal relationship building.

You see, I apply emotional intelligence in most of the circumstances. When you someone deliberately seeks to undermine your authority, you have to be intelligent enough to deal with. You may not have to engage in open outburst or strict application of the rules in all cases (#P7#, 2022)

I maintain an open and supportive relations with my staff and students. It’s a tool that create for me a positive climate where most of these petty problems were even resolved at the teachers level without even getting to me (#P5#, 2022)

It was clear from the interview responses that participants deploy effective relationships and emotional intelligence to deal with some challenges. According to the participants, it gives them opportunity to build a positive team spirit towards transparency, openness and frankness with little or minimal animosity.

The use of Technology

It was revealed that some of the participants leveraged the current patronage of technology to plan activities and minimize in-person meetings. The participants indicated that given the current usage of technology particularly smart phones, communication platforms were created to disseminate information without necessarily have to meet in person as a staff.

These days, technology has come to help reduce the workload in some ways. I share information on our WhatsApp platforms and it is carried out without struggling to meet staff. It saves time, cost and workload (#P4#, 2022)

The findings agree with Selwood & Pilkington (2005) who believe that the use of technology-driven tools like digital record systems, communication apps, and performance monitoring software streamlines operations and reduces administrative burden (Selwood & Pilkington, 2005). It therefore explains the reason the participants affirm that the deployment of the tools reduces the workload and stress. In the era where technology continues to evolve and expand, the headmistresses' reliance on technology to cope with workload points to their readiness to keep up with the evolution. For instance, school management systems allow real-time tracking of student performance and staff attendance

From the quotes above, it is evident that participants in this study engage in diverse coping strategies to ensure that they are able to effectively balance their work and family responsibilities. Findings from the study reveal that some of the common coping

strategies adopted by participants of this study include support from family and delegation of work.

RQ 4 What alternative support systems can be implemented to help female heads to balance their professional and family responsibilities?

Analysis of Research Question 4 surfaced two contrasting forms of support: lack of formal institutional support structures and peer support. Applying Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic framework made it clear: the gaps in policy are right there on the surface, while deeper down, professional communities show impressive resilience. Throughout, the process stayed true to Nowell et al.'s (2017) standards for qualitative rigor.

Lack of formal institutional support structures

Female heads have always had to balance their work and family roles. Thus, several scholars have suggested various support systems that can be used to help female heads cope with the challenges they face in combining work and family roles. According to Madsen (2012), leadership development programmes for women continue to be a critical element in supporting women to prepare for, attain, and maintain positions of influence within their institutions.

Morley (2014) is of the view that enabling structures such as career development support; coaching; training; advice and sponsorship; professional development; organizational change such as equity policies; advocacy; and mentorships are key ways of providing support for female heads in leadership positions. Participants were not able to identify any formal support system available to support female heads in leadership.

Participant 3 posits

When I was bringing up my children, being a teacher was very strategic because when I vacate, my children are also on vacation and I can spend time with them. Because they complain, especially our women, when their children are on holidays, some of them bring them to school; they leave them in the staff room, and you hear noise from them while you teach. I don't know what support system they use, but you can suggest some for me. We don't have any system for them (#P3#, 2022).

The results show a clear reality about the seeming lack of support networks accessible to women across different educational institutions, as the response above makes evident.

Peer Support

However, participant 2 identifies the support from fellow head as a support system that helps her to deal with challenges she faces as a head teacher.

First, when we go to SHTA meetings, we interact, so that alone is support for one another. The interaction is good, and the consultation and finding out from others has been possible because others have led... I have a good rapport with my board chair, so I'm able to go to him with every issue I'm going through. So, soliciting information from other people is a support system, but you must remember that you can do the work alone (#P2#, 2022).

Participant 1 suggests that female who are heads of schools live close to the school premises to make it easy for them to commute to the school and to their homes in case of any emergency. She also recommends having a cordial relationship with the assistant heads to make delegating tasks easy.

The challenges are huge, and some even run away because of the challenges if they see that they have children that are not yet off-age. You are a family woman who is also taking care of a school. The two are very, very hectic for you, but encourage them if you relate well with them; they will do the work even when you are not there (#P1#, 2022).

It is observed that female heads of households do not have access to any official support networks. Alternative support systems can be taken into consideration to assist them in managing the difficulties of juggling several responsibilities. Peer mentoring, flexible work schedules, childcare services, skill-building workshops, and community-based

support groups are a few examples. Furthermore, establishing robust social networks and motivating nearby organisations to offer focused support can greatly reduce the stress that female heads experience when handling their duties.

4.3 Chapter Summary

Perceptions of leadership are still shaped by gender stereotypes, which erect invisible obstacles for women who have to deal with cultural norms that frequently clash with work-related demands. Those who do not fit this limited ideal are marginalised by this cultural paradigm, which views leadership as fundamentally masculine. Despite advancements in the representation of women in leadership positions, especially those in high-demand roles like school heads, face the additional challenge of balancing their careers with deeply ingrained caregiving expectations.

This tension is aptly demonstrated by the experiences of female senior high school administrators in Ghana's Central Region. Regardless of their professional status, women are still culturally positioned as the primary carers, and these women manage a delicate balance between administrative and family responsibilities. Their stories demonstrate how caregiving and other household responsibilities, such as taking care of ailing family members, frequently conflict with and interfere with work obligations, requiring them to come up with flexible ways to cope. Many turn to unofficial support systems, assigning work to assistants or extended family, but these are frequently band-aid rather than long-term fixes. Participants in this study reported no overt insubordination, which is in contrast to the broader African workplace dynamics where female leaders often face resistance from male subordinates. Their testimonies, however, point to a more complex reality, one in which some female leaders purposefully use strategic deference, giving male coworkers "special treatment" or

increased respect in order to gain compliance. This delicate balancing act exposes the unsaid emotional work women do to preserve power in settings that are still adjusting to female leadership.

The lack of formalised support networks to lessen these two stresses is arguably the most noticeable. The absence of official workplace policies, such as flexible scheduling or on-site childcare, leaves structural inequities unaddressed, even though participants mentioned task delegation, family support, and proximity to workplaces as personal coping mechanisms. A cycle where leadership and caregiving are still needlessly incompatible is perpetuated by this gap, which highlights a significant disconnect between the infrastructure of professional spaces and the realities of women's lives.

Organisational cultures and policy frameworks need to be re-evaluated in light of these findings. Whether through mentorship programs, spousal engagement initiatives, or workplace accommodations that recognise caregiving as a shared responsibility rather than a women's issue, educational institutions must move beyond relying on individual resilience and instead implement tangible supports if they are to retain and empower women leaders. Until then, women will continue to face the dilemma of leadership and motherhood, not because they are incapable, but rather because systems are still in place for people who are not constrained by social norms that they did not establish.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the study, and presents conclusions, recommendations, and suggestions for further research. It explains the extent to which the researcher's objectives have been achieved. The study focused on the experiences of family women managing SHSs in the Central Region of Ghana.

5.1 Summary of the Studys

The focus of the study was to explore the experiences of female heads in education leadership, particularly in the management and administration of SHSs in the Central Region of Ghana. The study involves a sample size of 8 participants (headmistresses) purposefully selected from senior high schools in the Cape Coast and Abura Asebu Kwamankese. The objectives of the study were to:

1. Explore the experiences of female Senior High School heads in the Cape Coast Metropolitan and Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese District in combining their professional and family roles.
2. Ascertain the challenges confronting female Senior High School heads in the Coast Metropolitan and Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese District in combining their professional and family roles.
3. Explore the existing strategies employed by the female Senior High School heads in the Cape Coast Metropolitan and Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese District to cope with the challenges associated with combining the roles.
4. Explore the alternate support systems that could be put in place to enable female Senior High School heads in the Central Region to manage the challenges they face.

To effectively ground the study in the existing scholarly dialogue, a thorough review of relevant literature was conducted. This review aligned with the study's goals. At the centre of this investigation was Role Conflict Theory, which served as the main theoretical foundation and lens for examining the experiences of women in educational leadership roles. This theory addresses the tensions that arise when people face competing demands from multiple roles. It was especially important for understanding the complex challenges female headmistresses face as they balance professional responsibilities with societal and personal expectations.

Complementing this, Social Theory places individual experiences within wider social structures and cultural norms. It helps to show how gender expectations and institutional practices influence the leadership roles women take on and the challenges they face in these positions.

Stress and Coping Theory adds depth to the analysis by explaining how female headmistresses handle the psychological and emotional pressure from role conflict. This theory focuses on the strategies and coping methods used to reduce stress, maintain well-being, and stay effective at work despite competing demands.

Finally, Work-Family Border Theory provides a detailed view of how women manage the boundaries between their work and personal lives. It highlights the ongoing processes of managing and negotiating these boundaries, allowing female leaders to seek balance and integration in both areas without sacrificing either role.

Together, these perspectives create a rich framework for understanding the complex experiences of women in educational leadership. They reveal both structural factors and individual approaches that influence their career paths.

The literature review examined several interrelated themes that were key to understanding the study. One theme looked at the dual-role leadership experience, focusing on how individuals manage the challenges of balancing multiple leadership responsibilities at the same time. This experience often involves combining various approaches, such as collaboration, empathy, and transformational practices, to meet the demands of different roles effectively. These dual-role dynamics differ from traditional leadership models that usually stress singular, often hierarchical, leadership traits. Understanding these details was important for recognizing how leaders in educational settings assert authority, influence school culture, and guide their teams in ways that reflect both their varied roles and personal viewpoints.

Additionally, the review examined the broader landscape of women in leadership and management. It highlighted systemic challenges such as gender bias, limited access to professional networks, and organizational cultures that can hinder women's advancement to executive roles. This body of literature highlighted the structural and cultural barriers women leaders often face, particularly in education, where leadership remains disproportionately male despite a female-majority workforce. The intersection of gender and leadership was also considered in regard to women in education. It recognized the unique factors that influence their career paths, the expectations they encounter, and the strategies they use to succeed.

Another important aspect addressed in the literature was the impact of new managerialism on educational leadership. New managerialism emphasizes efficiency, accountability, and market-driven practices. This approach has transformed public sector institutions, including schools, and often increased the administrative and performance pressures on school leaders. For female headmistresses, this shift created

additional challenges as they navigated the demands of managerialism alongside gendered expectations for leadership style and work-life balance. The literature emphasized how these pressures can heighten role conflict, as leaders manage competing priorities in a highly scrutinized and results-focused environment.

The issue of work-family conflict featured prominently in the literature review. This phenomenon describes the tension between professional obligations and family responsibilities. It is especially relevant for women leaders, who often take on disproportionate caregiving roles. Literature on work-family conflict provided insights into how female educational leaders balance these dual demands, the coping mechanisms they employ, and the potential effects on their wellbeing and job performance. This theme was crucial for understanding the experiences of headmistresses and the societal and organizational factors that impact their realities.

To answer the research questions, the study used an interpretive research strategy rooted in the phenomenological approach. Phenomenology prioritizes the direct exploration of lived experiences and aims to uncover the meanings individuals assign to their realities. This approach was well-suited for focusing on headmistresses, allowing for an in-depth understanding of how these women view and make sense of their leadership roles amid the complexities of gender, organizational demands, and personal life. By centering participants' voices, the phenomenological approach provided rich and nuanced data that highlighted the subjective aspects of leadership experiences that are often overlooked in quantitative research.

Primary data collection involved semi-structured interviews, which provided both structure and flexibility. This method allowed the researcher to engage deeply with participants, encouraging them to share detailed stories, reflections, and insights about

their leadership journeys, challenges, and coping strategies. The interviews were key for capturing the complexity of their experiences, providing a rich dataset for analysis.

Instead of relying solely on secondary sources, the study included field observations and reflective journaling as complementary methods during data collection. Field observations allowed the researcher to see firsthand the dynamics of school leadership, observing interactions, decision-making processes, and contextual factors that influenced the headmistresses' roles. This observational data deepened the understanding of the experiences reported in interviews, adding another layer of context. Reflective journaling by the researcher also aided in critically engaging with the data, surfacing implicit assumptions, emerging themes, and interpretive insights throughout the research process.

After data collection, the study applied thematic analysis and a framework approach to analyse the qualitative data. Thematic analysis helped identify and organize recurring patterns and themes within the interview transcripts and observational notes, highlighting key issues related to role conflict, leadership style, and work-life balance. The framework approach offered a structured way to categorize and compare data across participants, ensuring consistency and rigor in analysis. Together, these methods supported the development of a coherent interpretation of the lived experiences of female educational leaders, ultimately contributing valuable insights to the fields of educational leadership, gender studies, and organizational behaviour.

5.2 Summary of Findings

The first objective sought to explore the experiences of female parents in combining leadership and family roles in managing SHS. The study revealed leadership roles in conflict with family responsibilities as part of the experiences of female leaders in secondary education management. Participants indicated that they had to juggle between family responsibilities and work-related roles. Work-life balance experience has been identified as another important revelation in the study. Management of both family and career was apparent in the findings.

As revealed in the study, participants were as committed to keeping their homes as they were to pursuing their careers. Participants disclosed that the relationship between their family and career is sometimes daunting, especially when it comes to the management of children and husbands. They asserted that the time spent on household chores, caring for the children, and the activities involved with their headship all had to be mapped out.

Family misunderstanding emerged as one of the women's key experiences. It was profoundly revealed that pressures from family members, especially husbands, tend to magnify the role conflict. Such a lack of compromise in certain instances leads to misunderstandings.

Objective two sought to explore the challenges that confront female parents in combining their leadership and family roles. The study revealed the multiplicity of challenges that women in leadership positions are confronted with in the discharge of their duties as managers of second-cycle institutions.

Gender stereotyping was identified as one challenge associated with women in the leadership framework. The experiences of this study's participants with regards to

gender stereotyping reflect the pervasiveness of the situation among leaders and possibly the entire spectrum of education management.

The study also found that institutional heads had to deal with a lot of other important issues. Participants reported that a range of overt and covert behaviours and actions created barriers that affected their ability to perform effectively in their institutions and in their professional roles. These difficulties frequently made the workplace challenging and affected their capacity for self-assured leadership.

The study revealed that in male-dominated settings, the males intentionally failed to cooperate with the female heads as a way of undermining their authorities. The majority of the participants indicated that most of the difficult staff to manage are males and that, in most cases, issues of indiscipline usually involve their female counterparts.

Finally, the study revealed work and family balance as a challenging situation. The participants confirmed that they also face other structural constraints as they seek to balance home life with office demands. As emphasized in the study, these women are committed to handling multiple roles (leading the school and managing the house), while their male colleagues tend to have more relaxed times, do less effort, and get less stress than those of women.

The third objective examined strategies that can be adapted to cope with the challenges associated with combining the roles. The study revealed that participants in this study made use of their support networks, particularly family support. In this study, engaging house help or household support were key strategies the women relied on. The study revealed delegation of duties as one other coping strategy. The participants revealed that in instances of an overwhelming workload, they did not hesitate to delegate powers, particularly to the various assistant heads and mentors, and found it very useful. Also,

the study reveals that the headmistresses adopted efficient time management tools-to-do list and calendar planners to structure and prioritise their daily/termly activities. Again, the headmistresses leveraged the technology-driven communication platforms such as WhatsApp platforms to disseminate information and to convene meetings.

The last objective explored the alternate support systems that could be put in place to enable women to manage the challenges they face. Findings indicated that women in leadership positions face a constant challenge: balancing the demands of their careers with their family lives. This essay explores the support systems, both formal and informal, that can help women navigate this tightrope walk, as well as the difficulties they encounter in the absence of such systems. Formal support systems, as identified in the research, encompass a range of tools designed to empower women. These include leadership development programs, mentorship opportunities, career coaching, and training initiatives. Additionally, organizational changes promoting equity through policies and advocacy create a more supportive environment. However, the study reveals a concerning reality a lack of readily available formal support structures for women leaders.

The absence of formal support systems translates into a significant burden on women. They struggle to juggle work and family obligations, often forced to extend their working hours due to childcare responsibilities. This highlights the crucial need for official support networks that can alleviate these pressures. Despite the lack of formal structures, the study sheds light on the significance of informal support systems. Women find solace and assistance through collaboration with colleagues. Peer support through interaction and encouragement provides a sense of community and shared

experience. Additionally, delegating tasks to colleagues helps distribute the workload, while residing close to the workplace offers a practical advantage in managing time.

In conclusion, women in leadership positions require a multifaceted approach to achieve a healthy work-life balance. While formal support systems encompassing leadership development, mentorship, and flexible work policies are crucial, the study underscores the importance of fostering informal support networks. Encouraging collaboration, fostering a sense of community, and delegating tasks among colleagues are steps that organizations can take to empower women leaders. By acknowledging the challenges women face and implementing both formal and informal support systems, organizations can pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable leadership landscape.

5.3 Conclusions

The findings of this study reveal the significant challenges female heads of Senior High Schools (SHSs) face in the specific contexts of the Cape Coast Metropolitan and Abura Asebu Kwamankese districts. These locally identified issues demand urgent attention from district and national policymakers and point to a need for change within the institutions of the Central Region.

A major challenge uncovered in these two districts is the ongoing discrimination and gender inequality from male colleagues. This problem is deeply rooted in the traditional beliefs and cultural practices of the area. Within the schools studied, discrimination occurs not just through obvious actions but also through subtle attitudes and behaviours that undermine the authority and skills of female leaders. As a result, their professional effectiveness and growth suffer. These gender biases create an oppressive atmosphere

that impacts the women personally and has wider effects on school governance and the quality of education in these communities.

Another significant issue, particularly acute in this regional setting, is the lack of social support systems designed for female heads. Without these support structures, the women in Cape Coast and Abura Asebu Kwamankese face additional burdens as they try to balance professional and family responsibilities against a backdrop of local expectations. The study shows how hard it is for female leaders here to find a balance between these aspects, which is essential for their well-being and ongoing performance. Without adequate support, these women experience increased stress and a higher risk of burnout, harming both their personal lives and their ability to lead their schools effectively.

The research highlights that gender-based discrimination in institutional management continues within the schools we studied, even with progress in other areas. Many of the participating women shared direct experiences where male staff members acted in ways that questioned or undermined their leadership abilities. These actions show local manifestations of systemic biases that keep women marginalized in leadership roles, reflecting broader societal prejudices that go beyond the workplace. Such discriminatory practices hurt the career advancement of female leaders in Ghana's educational sector and continue a culture of inequality.

Faced with these conditions and without formal support, the female heads in this study show impressive resilience and adaptability by using informal coping strategies to manage their dual roles. One common form of informal support found was hiring domestic help, a practical solution within the local economy. This assistance is crucial for reducing household demands, allowing female leaders to dedicate more time and

energy to their professional duties in their schools. Additionally, delegating tasks within the school emerged as a vital approach these heads use to handle heavy workloads in a resource-constrained environment by empowering subordinates and sharing responsibilities, these leaders create their own support networks to better manage the demands of their positions.

These findings, drawn from the lived experiences of female heads in Cape Coast and Abura Asebu Kwamankese, suggest a thorough re-evaluation of current policies and cultural attitudes is needed to create an environment where female leadership can flourish here. Policymakers and the Ghana Education Service need to recognize the systemic barriers that female heads encounter in districts like these and work actively to break them down. Possible measures, informed by this local context, could include creating formal support systems, providing gender-sensitivity training for all staff, and promoting fair leadership opportunities that validate women's professional skills.

In conclusion, this study illustrates the distinct challenges and adaptive coping strategies of female heads in SHSs in the specific locales of Cape Coast and Abura Asebu Kwamankese. It shines a light on the ongoing fight against gender biases and the critical lack of support within these educational circuits, while also showcasing these women's resourcefulness and determination to succeed. Addressing these issues will not only improve the working conditions for female leaders in the Central Region but will also contribute to broader national efforts aimed at achieving gender equality and empowering women in education.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study is that its findings emanate from only eight female led schools in the central region. This is based on both time and financial resources that could not allow the study to be extended to cover other schools, districts, and regions. Hence, the limitation of generalization of the issues. Although the findings may not be generalizable, it is possible to consider what might follow in terms of implications and recommendations.

Another limitation is the inability to generalise the findings. This emanates from the scope of the research. The scope of this study encompasses female heads of SHSs in Cape Coast and Abura Asebu Kwamankese. It would have been ideal to cover the whole of the central region, or perhaps the whole of Ghana, to enable effective generalisation.

Finally, the study's scope poses a minimal threat to anonymity. Though the study deployed essential privacy considerations in the collection and analysis of the data, it is quite possible to speculate on selected schools given the number of schools headed by females currently in the region and metropolis.

5.5 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions drawn from the study, the following recommendations were made:

The study established that within the schools studied, female leaders face the challenge of unwanted sexual advances. Therefore, it is recommended that the Secondary Education Unit of the Ghana Education Service (GES) in the Central Region organizes mandatory workshops and training for all teaching staff in secondary schools across the region. This training should deepen knowledge on Protection from Sexual Harassment,

Exploitation, and Abuse (PSHEA) and establish clear, localized safeguarding protocols. While participants showed personal resilience, a formal, institutional response is needed to create a safer professional environment for female leaders in these districts.

It emerged from the lived experiences of headmistresses in Cape Coast and Abura Asebu Kwamankese that there is no clear institutional support system to help balance home and office duties, a pressure intensified by local cultural expectations. Particularly for nursing mothers in leadership, this dual burden is complex. The study recommends that the Ghana Education Service, in collaboration with district assemblies, pilots a practical household and childcare support scheme. This could provide assistance for headmistresses during official duties, ensuring their families are cared for and allowing them to perform their roles with greater ease and reduced personal strain, directly addressing a key stressor identified in the Central Region context

The study shows that in the male-dominated staff rooms of the schools studied, female leaders who demonstrate strong competence can positively influence their colleagues. To systematically build this professional confidence and peer support, it is recommended that the GES strengthens and formalizes Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) specifically among female heads within and across districts. Creating regular forums for headmistresses in the Cape Coast Metro and Abura Asebu Kwamankese to share strategies, challenges, and successes would foster professional competence, moral integrity, and a supportive network. This would help them navigate prejudice and solidify their leadership in their specific school contexts.

Finally, the study unravelled a practical, logistical challenge: headmistresses in these districts often lack reliable personal transportation for essential family visitations, especially when families reside outside their duty station. To address this very specific

barrier to work-life balance, the study recommends that the Ghana Education Service facilitates accessible vehicle loan schemes for female school heads. Such a policy would serve as both a practical mobility solution and a motivational tool, enabling them to maintain crucial family connections and improve their overall well-being, thereby supporting their retention and effectiveness in often remote or hard-to-reach duty stations.

5.6 Suggestions for Further Research

One encouraging sign of progress in reducing gender inequality in leadership positions within Ghanaian educational institutions is the growing number of women holding headmistress positions in senior high schools. The wide-ranging experiences of female leaders in these roles have been examined in the current study. Further investigation into the experiences of female headteachers in coeducational and single-sex schools would be beneficial in order to build on this foundation. Richer insights into the type and scope of the difficulties and assistance they face, as well as the particular leadership strategies they use to succeed in their different contexts, may be obtained from such a comparison. Strategies to further empower women in educational leadership across a range of school contexts may be informed by this deeper understanding.

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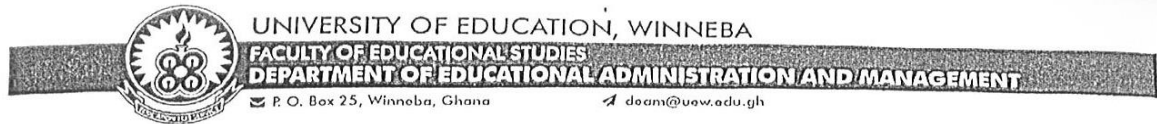
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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Letter of Introduction



UEW/EAM/INT/27

Date: 28th May, 2022.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam,

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

We write to introduce **MILLCENT ASIWOME KPEKPOH**, a student on the M.Phil in Educational Administration and Management programme of the Department of Educational Administration and Management.

MILLCENT ASIWOME KPEKPOH is currently working on a research project titled:

"EXPERIENCES OF FAMILY WOMEN MANAGING SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN SELECTED SCHOOLS IN THE CENTRAL REGION".

Please, give her the necessary assistance and co-operation.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Judith Bampo".

Judith Bampo (PhD)
Ag. Head of Department

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide

**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION**

Introduction:

I am Millicent Asiwome Kpekpoh, a student at the University of Education, Winneba. I am pursuing a Masters programme in Educational Administration and Management. As part of the programme, you have been selected to take part in this study based on your knowledge and vast experience as an educational administrator. I am here to interview you to collect some relevant information concerning your work. The study is to find out factors that motivate women to take up administrative positions in Senior High Schools in the Central Region. It is also envisaged that it will provide policymakers in educational administration with the needed insight into the challenges facing women as they play the role of Senior High Schools headmistresses. Your views and suggestions will be very relevant to the study.

Please rest assured that any information discussed here will be used for the purpose of this study and will not be made available to a third party without your permission. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time if you do not wish to continue with the study.

Section A: Social-demographic data

1. Please tell me about yourself.
2. I will be glad to know your current rank.
3. Please, may I know your marital status?
4. Your ethnic origin.

Section B: What are the experiences of the family women headmistresses in combining SHSs school leadership and family roles?

5. What are the experiences of combining leadership and family roles?
6. How would you describe your typical day balancing school leadership and family life?
7. How has being a woman influenced how you are perceived in your role?
8. How do your family expectations influence or interact with your role as a headmistress?
9. Can you share any specific moments where your family role conflicted with your leadership duties? How did you handle it?

Section C: What challenges confront female heads in combining school leadership and family roles?

10. What challenges do you face as a headmistress?
11. How stressful is it to be the head of this great institution?
12. How challenging has your position been as a family woman?
13. What challenges do your male subordinates pose?
14. What relationship exists between you and your male counterparts in other schools?
15. What challenges do you face as a headmistress pertaining to your social life?
16. How do the members of the community perceive you and your management style?

Section D: What strategies employed by the family heads in coping with the challenges associated with combining the roles?

17. How do you react to negative remarks or comments from the staff and the community?
18. How do you carry yourself among your male counterparts?
19. What specific steps do you take to cope with challenges posed by your teachers?
20. How do you handle resentful or dissenting teachers?

21. Prob further: teacher-student relationship, truancy, absenteeism, refusal to accept additional responsibility.

Section E: What are the support systems put in place by the family women to cope with the challenges they face in combining the roles?

22. What measures do you put in place to deal with challenges as a headmistress?
23. What measures do you put in place to deal with challenges as a female heads?
24. How do you handle challenges working with the male teachers on staff?
25. What alternative support system is in place in order to help female heads manage their stress to cope with the challenges they face?



APPENDIX C

Map of Cape Coast and Abura Asebu Kwamankese

