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SELF-ESTEEM AND WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF FEMALE PRINCIPALS IN BHEKUZULU CIRCUIT (ZULULAND DISTRICT) IN KWA ZULU NATAL SCHOOLS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT :

Lack of high self-esteem in women educational leadership remains a challenge in Zululand-KwaZulu Natal in South Africa. In South Africa over the past two decades there has been a shift from the oppressive apartheid rule to a democratic political dispensation. In the past, women did not have equal employment opportunities as men because of institutional and cultural constraints. The study critically examined the cultural barriers and institutionalized constraints affecting female leadership in educational systems. As women gain leadership positions in the new era, they still face more challenges compared to their male counterparts because of patriarchal relations. This requires women to have a higher degree of self-esteem. The findings of this study indicate that lack of self-esteem among women educators and female Principals in high schools greatly affect the women leadership in education insitutions. The article emphasises the significance of having high self-esteem for women in educational leadership in order to improve women effective-leadership in education systems.

Keywords: Self-esteem, Women Leadership, Educational leadership, Cultural and Institutionlized Constraints, Educational Institutions, Secondary Schools, Principals, Zululand, Bhekuzulu Circuit, South Africa.

1.Introduction:

Leadership lies at the core of quality education (UNESCO, 2024). In educational systems, both female and male educators must actively participate in leadership roles to foster inclusive and effective institutional development. Historically, however, leadership positions in educational administration have predominantly been occupied by men (Day, 2014; Longman & Anderson, 2016; Merchant, 2012). As Msila (2013) notes, women in leadership often lack community support and must navigate their roles within patriarchal societies under challenging conditions.

A substantial body of literature highlights how cultural and traditional norms contribute to the persistent distrust of women in leadership positions (Cundiff & Vescio, 2016; Msila, 2013; Morley & Crossouard, 2016). Despite these challenges, South Africa's **Bill of Rights (1996)** guarantees equal rights to all citizens, regardless of gender, race, or ethnicity. Furthermore, the **Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998)** affirms the right to equal employment and promotion opportunities (Republic of South Africa, 1996, 1998).

Nevertheless, women in South Africa continue to face both institutional and cultural barriers to leadership (Moorosi, 2010). Even with constitutional protections, female leaders remain underrepresented and often encounter systemic inequalities in the workplace (Msila, 2013). Within the context of school leadership and management, **self-esteem** plays a critical role—it encompasses a positive sense of self-worth and confidence in one's abilities, particularly in environments shaped by gender and racial dynamics (James William, 2001).

Although extensive research has explored women's leadership and self-esteem in Western contexts, limited attention has been given to how self-esteem functions under the dual pressures of cultural and institutional constraints in South African educational institutions. Existing studies tend to rely on quantitative assessments or isolated policy analyses, rarely examining how the stability of self-esteem affects leadership performance in patriarchal and bureaucratic school settings. Moreover, few investigations incorporate qualitative perspectives from the lived experiences of school principals in under-resourced areas such as the **Bhekuzulu Circuit**.

Given these gaps, this study aims to critically examine the significance of self-esteem among female leaders in educational institutions, with a particular

focus on female principals in secondary schools within the **KwaZulu-Natal Province** of South Africa.

2.Literature Review:

Global literature and local literature have been used to describe the theoretical framework of the study and the emperical literature of the study.

2.1   Theoretic Framework of the Study

The study is underpinned by two theories namely the theory of self-esteem by William James (1890) and Effective Leadership Theory by Michael Fullan (2001), and a complimentary theory of Theoretical Framework of Carol Gilligan on women's Moral Development (1977). These theories will help bring a better understanding of self-esteem and female education leadership. James's theory of self-esteem and Fullan's Effective Leadership theory is used in this study because they are part of the investigative tools of self-esteem and female leadership in educational institutions especially with the secondary school principals.

2.1.1   Psychodynamic and Self-Esteem Foundations

William James's (1890) foundational theory defines self-esteem as the ratio of one's successes to one's aspirations, highlighting its dynamic, context-dependent nature. After the turn of the twentieth century, psychodynamic scholars revived self-esteem as a key psychological theme: Alfred Adler (1927) emphasized overcoming "basic inferiority" through achievement; Karen Horney (1937) focused on reconciling real and idealized selves; and Robert White (1959, 1963) tied self-esteem directly to perceived competence. Contemporary work by Rosenberg (1986) and Kernis et al. (1993, 2000) distinguishes between level and stability of self-esteem. Stable self-esteem, minimal short-term fluctuation in feelings of self-worth, predicts resilience and intrinsic motivation, whereas unstable self-esteem correlates with vulnerability and low motivation (Baldwin & Sinclair, 1996; Waschull & Kernis, 1996).

While these studies elucidate how self-esteem forms and fluctuates, they rarely address how patriarchal norms and bureaucratic constraints in non-Western school settings may further destabilize female leaders' self-esteem.

2.1.2   Leadership Frameworks and Emotional Intelligence

Fullan's Effective Leadership Theory (2001) identifies moral purpose, understanding change, coherent decision-making, relationship building, and knowledge creation as pillars of educational leadership. Transformational leadership models (Bass & Riggio, 2006) and Goleman et al.'s (1998) emotional intelligence framework further connect self-esteem to core leadership competencies, self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills, that enable effective conflict management, motivation, and trust-building (Connelly, 2007).

Empirical research often measures self-esteem quantitatively or surveys emotional intelligence in corporate settings, but few studies examine how fluctuations in self-esteem stability impact real-time decision-making and relationship management among female school leaders facing resource constraints and gender bias.

2.1.3   Gender, Culture, and Institutional Constraints

The "labyrinth" metaphor (Eagly & Carli, 2007) captures the complex barriers women face in leadership. In South Africa, Greyling & Steyn (2015) document persistent cultural resistance to female authority despite constitutional mandates (RSA, 1996) and the Employment Equity Act (1998). Social role theory (Eagly & Steffen, 1986; Eagly & Wood, 2012) explains how gendered expectations shape occupational norms, while stereotypes remain easily activated in social interactions (Brands & Kilduff, 2013; Mthethwa et al., 2019). Organizational analyses highlight how masculine-normed structures, such as expectations of constant availability, perpetuate women's marginalization (Acker, 1990; Blackmore, 1999; Ely & Meyerson, 2000).

Although these works illuminate structural and cultural barriers, they seldom integrate self-esteem theory to explain why and how such barriers erode women leaders' psychological confidence and impede effective leadership practices.

2.1.4   Empirical Insights on Self-Esteem and Women's Educational Leadership

Quantitative and qualitative studies show positive correlations between self-esteem and leadership effectiveness (Bradberry & Greaves, 2003; Caruso & Salovey, 2004). Research on gender imbalance in educational administration underscores underrepresentation of women at all levels (Arar, 2018; Potvin et al., 2018; Mestry & Schmidt, 2012) and identifies isolation, exclusion from informal networks, and systemic discrimination as key challenges (Jean-Marie, 2009; Msila, 2013; Diko, 2014). To balance the relationship of self-esteem and leadership in view of women leadeeship in educational institutions there is a need to employ the theoretical framework of Carol Gilligan's theory of Women's Moral Development (1977). The theory describes three levels that female leaders will fall into: first, orientation to individual survival. Second, goodness of self-sacrifice, and last, morality of non-violence Gilligan, 1977). This act of categorization assisted in explaining how self-esteem impacts leadership in women. Yet very few investigations focus specifically on female secondary-school principals' self-esteem, nor on the strategies these leaders employ to manage and transmit self-esteem within their schools.

Hence, Carol Gilligan's Theory of Women's Moral Development (1977), Fullan effective leadership theory (2001), and James William theory of self-esteem (1890) have been employed to develop survey-structured interview questions for the study in regards to Bhekuzulu circuit female principals and female educators.

2.2   Emperical Literature Review on self-esteem, women and leadership in education

A positive relationship exists between effective leaders and self-esteem (Goleman et all, 1998; Bradberry & Greaves, 2003; Caruso, & Salovey, 2004). In educational sytems, gender imbalance and inequality in leadership has been the central focus of studies in the field of educational administration for many years (Arar, 2018; Potvin et al., 2018). According to the social role theory (Eagly & Steffen, 1986; Eagly & Wood, 2012), there are discrepancies in role occupancy within society and family, and occupations establish role expectations for each gender. This mindset persists in some circles, where members believe women are incapable of being successful leaders. Stereotypes of men and women are pervasive and easily activated in social situations (Brands & Kilduff, 2013; Mthethwa et al., 2019).

Relationship management is one of the pillars of good education leadership skills. Relationship management include abilities such as motivation, teamwork, conflict management, and creating a positive environment (Connelly, 2007). The other domains of self-esteem that is self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills all support relationship management (Goleman, 1998). It involves motivation, and inspiring others. Using self-esteem and other emotional intelligence skills good leaders are able to build and maintain levels of trust among those with whom they work and interact with. In order for leaders to effectively handle relationships with others, they need to be genuine, authentic and real (Connelly, 2007).

Institutionalized constraints as structural barriers to women's advancement in organisations like education institutions have their roots in the fact that most organisations have been created by and for men and are based on male experiences of management, hence a particular form of masculinity in organisational management exist (Acker, 1990; Blackmore, 1999; Ely & Meyerson, 2000). Grogan (1996) also argues that the absence of women in power positions suggests that women are being seen through traditional theoretical lenses and are being measured against ideals that have historically served men best. Meyerson and Fletcher (1999) affirm that organizations still define their competence and leadership on the traits that were stereotypically associated with men, such as availability for work at all times. Most organizations, they assert, act as if the historical division of labour, that had the workplace as the men's domain and family as women's domain, still holds, even when women are as active as men in the working industry. These are the realities of gender inequality that drive the organizational life like in education system for which neither men nor women can be blamed (Meyerson & Fletcher, 1999).

Few researches have been conducted on self-esteem of female school leaders and its effects on educational leadership. None of these studies has explored the strategies that could be used by female secondary school principals in managing their self-esteem and empower other women with their self-esteem in managing and administrating secondary schools.

2.3   Contexual Literature Review on Female Educational leadership in South Africa

Contextually, the new South African constitution after apartheid has gone a long way towards ending the discrimination based on gender and racism. According to Section 9 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996), all South Africans are equal before the law. Nonetheless, women continue to be a minority in educational leadership positions and there is a need to propagate the notion of women's active presentation in the educational systems (Mestry & Schmidt, 2012).

In view of female leadership literature in educational institutions in South Africa, Greyling and Steyn (2015) concluded that research shows an underrepresentation of women in management positions at all levels of the education system, including primary schools, high school, universities and other educational institutions. The cause of underrepresentation of women in educational institutions could be cultural and institutionalized constraints.

Female school leaders continue to struggle with gender-based racism, isolation, exclusion from informal networks and systemic discrimination in South Africa. Hence, women in leadership roles in the field of education have to deal with internal and external pressures and peer scrutiny and criticism from others (Jean-Marie, 2009). The tradition and culture of mistrust of female leadership have led to women having to prove that they can lead sometimes under the trying conditions of a patriarchal society (Msila, 2013). According to Diko (2014), there are strong cultural expectations about women who enter school leadership because of a gender stereotyping syndrome in society.

2.4   *Conceptual Framework of the Literature Review*

The conceptual framework has provided a visual representation of the variables involved and how they relate to each other. The variables are categorized into independent variables, dependent variables, and control variables. The conceptual framework suggests that independent variables (cultural-societal constraints and institutionalized constraints) directly affect the dependent variable (female principals and female educators), while control variables (such as self-esteem, gender, and leadership) help refine and better understand the significance of self-esteem in women leadership in education institutions.

Hence, the conceptual framework of the study provides a systematic understanding of contextual literature review on women over self-esteem and leadership. Leadership and self-esteem must be viewed as key components in any management of an education institution and therefore, self-esteem and women leadership in educational institutions must be enhanced. According to William James (1890), "self-esteem is the feeling of self-worth that results from consistently meeting expectations for personally valued activities". This is what could be needed in the women leadership in Bhekuzulu Circuit in KwaZulu Natal Province. Lambert (2002) defines leadership as a "reciprocal process that enable participants in an educational community to construct meanings that lead toward a shared or distributive leadership purpose of schooling." Another scholar Dubrin (1998) defines leadership as "the ability to inspire confidence and support among followers who are expected to achieve organisational goals". This is what educational institution needs and women must take part in active leadership positions of the education institutions. In education leadership especially for women, there is a need to have relationship management, and relationship management include abilities such as motivation, teamwork, conflict management, and creating a positive environment (Connelly, 2007).

To have an effective gender equity in educational leadership roles, there is a need to include more women as managers of educational institutions. In the past years, there has been lack of self-esteem in female educational leaders which affected the leadership roles of women in the educational institutions.

2.5 Research Gap:

Despite extensive global and local literature on self-esteem, emotional intelligence, leadership frameworks, and gendered barriers, there remains a clear absence of studies that:

1. Examine self-esteem stability among female school leaders under the combined pressures of patriarchal culture and organizational bureaucracy.
2. Integrate qualitative insights from principals' lived experiences in under-resourced South African circuits.
3. Identify and evaluate targeted strategies by which female principals can bolster their own self-esteem and empower other women within their institutions.

3.Research Methodology:

Mixed methods research has been employed. This means that both qualitative research approach and quantitative research approach has been used in the study to critically examine the siginifance of self-esteem on female leadership(Principals) in secondary schools in Bhekuzulu Circuit in KwaZulu Natal Provice in south Africa. Female Principals and female and male educators were interviewed to complete to gather gata

3.1   *Study Area and Population*

The study focused on five secondary schools within Bhekuzulu circuit in KwaZulu Natal Province. 5 female principals, 25 women and men educators, 5

from each secondary school were among the participants with range of teaching experiences and qualifications.

### *3.2	Sampling Technique*

Purposive sampling method was used to ensure effective data collection. Leedy and Ormrod (2005) argue that in purposive sampling participants are chosen because they are knowledgeable and informative about the phenomenon the researcher is investigating. The sample has deemed to be sufficient because participants represented a diverse range of experiences within cultural and institutionalized constraints in Zululand. With the use of qualitative approach and quantitative approach, triangulation was also used as it is a valid procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Triangulation is used when the strengths of one method offset the weakness of the other, so that together, they provide a more comprehensive set of data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). This strategy allowed for equitable representation of female principals, women educators and male educators to provide systematic and productive information on self-esteem and leadership in secondary schools.

### *3.3	Data Collection and Analysis*

Survey structured questionnaires and interviews were conducted. Interview sessions lasted 20-30 minutes and covered each topic in detail. Qualitative, open-ended interview questions afforded respondents the opportunity to describe their experiences in their own words and gave researchers the flexibility to ask what, how, when, where, and why. Thematic analysis was used to identify the major themes and common issues (Patton, 2015). Data analysis involves coding and indexing data, focusing on different categories, and identifying and explaining themes and patterns from the participant's perspective (Chenail, 2012). These themes and patterns are then explained and understood as they emerge from the setting of the people. Data analysis is a continuous process that involves reflecting on the data, asking analytical questions, and writing memoranda as the study progresses.

4. Research Findings and Interpretation:

Survey was conducted on the importance of self-esteem among female leaders in the secondary schools in Bhekuzulu circuit. From the quantitative approach of the study, the research findings indicated that 80% accepted that self-esteem functions under the dual pressures of cultural and institutional constraints in South African educational institutions and 20% disagreed.

Figure 1: Summary of the Significance of Self-esteem in female leadership in secondary schools
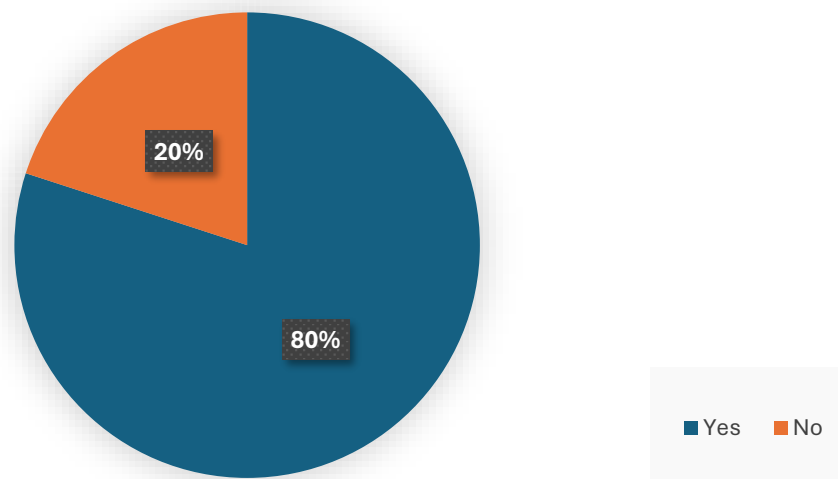
The research findings show that there is a need of establishing the stability of self-esteem in women leadership amidst cultural-societal and institutionalized constraints.

### *4.1	Self-Esteem Stability (low/high) affects Women Leadership in Secondary Schools*

An important part of this study was assessing how self-esteem affects the female leadership in secondary schools. The study was critically examining whether low self-esteem or high self-esteem has contributed to poor performance and minimal representation of women in educational leadership and whether this has affected the appointment of women as principals in the secondary schools and their performance as female principals.

Table 1: displays the findings of low self-esteem affecting female leadership among the selected principals and women educators in the secondary school administration and management.

Table 1: Summary of Self-Esteem Stability

Self-Esteem Stability	Findings
Low self-esteem	91% agreed that women with low self-esteem perform badly in the educational leadership as principals of secondary schools. 09% disagreed that women with low self-esteem perform badly in educational leadership because the problem is the unavailability of qualified women in education system.
High self-esteem	100% agreed that women with high self-esteem perform very good in educational leadership positions especially in secondary schools as administrators and managers.

These findings demonstrate that a significant number of female principals and women educators lack self-esteem that is why they perform badly in the educational leadership positions as administrators and managers. Lack of self-esteem and low self-esteem greatly affect women as female principals. This is caused by two factors according to the findings: cultural-societal norms as constraints and institutionalized constraints backed by male dominance in education system.

4.2   *Institutionalized Constraints and Mentality of School Stakeholders*

There are many regulations and frameworks which help to run the secondary schools in KwaZulu Natal in South Africa. Some of the frameworks have gender inequality which makes female principals to be underprivileged. In secondary school environment, teachers, students, and parents are stakeholders for good school environment. The mentality of male teachers, students and parents also affect the self-esteem of female principals.

Table 2: Summary of Institutionalized Constraints and Mentality of Stakeholders

Factor	Findings
Institutionalized challenges and Constraints	90% of the principals indicated that institutionalized challenges affected their ability to support their self-esteem and this affects the smooth running of school administration
Institutionalized Male Teachers mentality on female principals	98% of teachers and 95% of Principals reported that the societal attitude towards female principals is negative and they are undervalued in the society as school leaders.
Institutionalized Students' mentality on female principals	90% of teachers indicated that male students have negative mentality towards the female teachers and female principals to the point that they do not take most of their assignments.
Institutionalized Parents mentality on female principals	88% of principals felt that male parents as stakeholders of the school management do undermine the authority of female principals

According to the survey conducted, except one principal but all the principals agreed that they meet institutionalized constraints in the exercise of their duties and obligations of secondary principals. Most of male parents undermine the authority of female principals. Male students are sabotage to the female principals and female educators. This points to gender inequality and gender imbalance in the educational institutions.

4.3   *Societal-Cultural Constraints*

The way society perceives female principals has been influenced by the cultural norms which value only men as leaders. Table 3 illustrates the findings on the way the teachers and students in their culture view the female leaders (principals in the secondary schools) and how the society react to such appointments of female principals. The importance of dealing with cultural constraints is emphasized in this study.

Table 3: Summary of Cultural-Societal Constraints

Factor	Findings
Cultural Restrictions	100 % of teachers and 100% of Principals felt that cultural values and norms in Zululand prohibit women to be leaders as the culture values only men as leaders of the family.
Societal Attitudes	85% of teachers and 95% of Principals reported that the societal attitude towards female principals is negative and they are undervalued in the society as school leaders.
Teachers' attitude	50% of female Principals accepted that teachers both female and male do not respect them as school leaders.
Students' attitude	55% of female Principals felt like students do not respect them as school principals because they are women and they just take them as mothers in the house who are waiting for the father to reprimand them.

According to three quarter of the principals surveyed, their self-esteem is affected by the cultural constraints and the society negative attitudes towards them. Teachers' attitude and students' attitude also affect the growth of self-esteem as they are viewed as mothers in the society not leaders of the society in Zululand.

4.4   Findings Analysis

Female principals themselves indicated that male dominance was an entrenched culture among male staff members in general in their respective secondary schools and this gives low self-esteem to both female teachers and female principals. However, as the review of literature has shown, the effect of culture and tradition, wherein women are acculturated to believe that they are inferior to and must bow down to men could have impacted on how students, male teachers view female school principals.

The investigation has found that female principals in Bhekuzulu circuit continue to face hurdles such as gender inequality, discrimination, gender-based stereotyping, negative attitudes from some male teachers, problems with male parents and dealing with challenging learners and teachers. This has contributed to the low self-esteem of the female principals. Hence, female principals and female teachers need high self-esteem to embrace the institutionalized and cultural constraints.

5. Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations:

5.1   Discussion

The findings of this study can be interpreted in relation to key theoretical frameworks that explain the significance of self-esteem in female leadership in the educational institutions especially the secondary school principals. According to Msila (2013), strong cultural norms about women entering positions of leadership in schools had a negative impact on female principals. Four of the respondents of the research narrated that as women they were first rejected by the community as the principal of the schools because they preferred a male principal because of their patrilineal culture and the community advocated for a male principal. The difficulties and challenges which female educational leaders encounter are significantly influenced by societal beliefs (Maseko, 2013). These cultural-societal barriers and institutionalized constraints contribute to the low self-esteem of female principals. Research has shown that low self-esteem cause depression, anxiety, guilt and many of mental distress and the high self-esteem has an important role in personal life, social relations, creativity, and ultimately, academic success and career growth and human development. More active in social and economic activities who have higher self-esteem and more successes are achieved.

Some educational scholars and gender scholars have attributed the cultural and institutionalized constraints in educational institutions as gender stereotyping and discrimination. Diko (2014) stated that due to a gender stereotyping syndrome in society, there are significant cultural expectations concerning women who lead schools. This was consistent with the study's findings that some teachers and students rejected the principal's counsel because she was a female. Notably, Msila (2013) discovered that women were perceived as being less serious, more motherly and more caring, and unable

to handle difficulties and obstacles. This demonstrated the persistence of the notion that women make poor leaders as Mestry and Schmidt (2012) commented that discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping continued to perpetuate the myth of female submissiveness so clouding their performance and potential. According to Kanjere (2011), traditional and tribal leaders frequently held the view that only men should hold positions of authority.

However, according to Wolle (2023) female principals perform much better than their male counterparts in four out of the five key functions of a principal. To combat cultural and institutionalized constraints female principals in schools encounter, there is a need for the principals and women educators to have high self-esteem. The determination on the importance of self-esteem in female leadership in secondary schools needs the use of all the three theories to underscore the strategies for female principals to manage the cultural and institutionlized constraints: William James theory of self-esteem, Michel Fullan theory of effective leadership, and Carol Gilligan theory of moral development. As William James introduced the concept of self-esteem in view of a measure of success and he believed that self-esteem was linked to the evaluation of person's achievements and competence, especially in areas where success is important (James, 1890). High self-esteem is very important to empower leaders in education system as principals. With the understanding of Michel Fullan's leadership model, the cultural and institutionlized constraints in educational system should be focused on creating effective leadership (Fullan, 2001), especially in challenging and complex environments like schools in Kwa Zulu Natal. With the Carol Gilligan theory of moral development, women must adhere to morality which will develop into high self-esteem to combat the institutionalized contraints and cultural constraints.

In a nutshell according to Diko (2014), women continue to suffer social resistance and are ignored in respect to their constitutionally guaranteed right to equality despite government legislation and programs that enlighten and provide direction on gender equity. As confirmation of these findings, Msila (2013) citing Grant (2005), stated that women in some communities in South Africa still had little or no credibility as leaders. The participants and respondents of this study noted that most of women in educational leadership positions like principals face more of cultural-societal challenges than educational institutionalized challenges. The study recommends the mounting of gender awareness workshops with both parents and educators to educate them on gender equity issues and female teachers to be mentored by their respective school leaders, to promote women leadership in educational institutions and foster high self-esteem. High self-esteem provides female leaders with leadership skills for building effective good governance of the schools.

5.2   *Conclusion*

The study found that female principals of secondary schools in the Bhekuzulu Circuit of Zululand district in Kwa Zulu Natal province need high self-esteem to deal with cultural and institutionalized constraints in the school management and administration. Taking from the findings, it is abundantly clear that it is important for female school principals as leaders to have high self-esteem because it enables them to be effective educational leaders and they get conducive climate for teaching and learning. The findings indicated that, despite post-1994 developments in South Africa, South African women, in this case those from Bhekuzulu Circuit in Zululand District, continue to face numerous cultural barriers and institutionalized barriers in managing their schools. Based on the findings of the study, it can also be concluded that female principals are affected by the low self-esteem which is developed from the societal norms and institutionalized norms. High self-esteem can therefore help female leaders in educational institutions to cope under stressful situations in their administrative duties. Leaders especially women need self-esteem. Self-esteem is a complementary tool to enhance effective women leadership in education system.

Female principals in Bhekuzulu Circuit exhibit significantly lower self-esteem due to intertwined cultural and institutional barriers, which undermines leadership effectiveness. High self-esteem, by contrast, empowers decisive governance and fosters positive school climate. Hence there is a need to enhance the followings:

1. Empowerment workshops - province-wide training on self-esteem and emotional intelligence for female leaders
2. Mentorship networks: pair new principals with experienced women leaders across districts
3. Policy reform- Integrate gender-sensitivity modules into school governance regulations.

5.3   *Recommendations*

1. **Enhanced women empowerment in education system**: the provicial government of KwaZulu Natal should implement targeted training sessions to women to increase self-esteem for female pricipals and women educators in the education system

2. **Policy Implementation**: Amidst institutionlized constraints, provincial government of KwaZulu Natal should set effective efforts to empower women in the educational strategic policy folumation which will be inclusive to women and allow women to folumate policies.

3.   **Enhanced cultural senstization on gender equality**: Amidst cultural constraits, the educational curriculum of social studies should be developed by the governement for young girls and boys in the schools to be sestized on cultural torerance of women as leaders in the society and on the cultural inclusivity of women in the society and embrace the positive impact of women in educational leadership.

4.   **Enhancement of Societal awareness**: Identify the cultural barriers that women face in gaining high self-esteem and Identify women educational career strategies that have been successful in to eliminate the barriers; to create cultural awareness to the society on gender equality and importance of having high self-esteem for women and girls

5.   **Enhancement of awareness programs**: Induction programmes and mentoring of newly appointed female school principals by the Department of Basic Education (DoBE) on self-esteem and leadership should be organised to equip female principals on the strategies they can use to increase their self-esteem and manage others without cultural and institutionalized constraints.

Future Research, some scholars could examine longitudinal effects of self-esteem interventions on leadership outcomes explore male allies' roles in shifting school cultures.

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