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The Experiences of Female Heads in Senior High Schools in the Sekyere East District, Ghana

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Abstract: In many developing countries, women are significantly underrepresented in elementary school leadership positions, raising concerns about social justice, equity, and sustainability. The overall aim of the study was to explore the experiences of female heads in secondary schools in Sekyere East District, Ghana. Qualitative research methodologies were employed to collect data. In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather insights from headmistresses, assistant headmistresses, department heads, and teachers regarding the teaching of expressionism in the classroom. The sample comprised two (2) headmistresses, four (4) assistant headmistresses, three (3) department heads, and eight (8) teachers, selected through purposive sampling to ensure the relevance and depth of information. The data were explored through thematic analysis and recurring themes were identified that seemed to relate to the women's actual experiences. The results showed that most female heads were motivated by the desire to teach and share knowledge with others. Again, most of the female

leaders were selected based on application, interview and appointment by the Ministry of Education. The study recommends prioritising women's education in Ghanaian society to eliminate stereotypes and empower women, thereby contributing to long-term development.

Keywords: elementary school, Ghanaian educational system, headmistress, ministry of education.

Introduction

Females all over the world have the responsibility and right to participate actively in leadership roles like their male counterparts. Understanding the prevailing gender dynamics, educational landscape, and sociocultural environment is crucial for exploring the experiences of female school heads globally (Offermann & Foley 2020; Smith et al., 2021). These distinguished scholars also noted that women have a unique form of leadership that demands recognition and critical attention. With the exception of a few countries, women dominate the teaching profession worldwide; despite this, women are significantly marginalised in administrative and managerial positions (Cubillo & Brown, 2003).

According to Powell and Butterfield (2003), women who perceive themselves as less fortunate than men may be less inclined to apply for available leadership positions. Ideas of masculinity and the belief that men are naturally stronger leaders than women have historically been associated with leadership (Tran et al., 2021). Men generally have better disciplinary skills than women, can work with predominantly male boards of education, and have political power. Due to the current changes in the composition or structure of many companies, women can now practice in leadership positions that were previously mainly male (Post et al., 2019).

In addition, improvements in the modern school system are creating opportunities for more females to pursue careers in education. Leadership in schools where men have led is changing; In fact, several schools have their first female head. School leaders act as buffers because they are expected to resolve any issues that arise that affect students, counsellors, parents, and other active stakeholders. Administrative work is stressful, demanding and requires long hours. Although many of the issues facing school administrators are gender neutral, women undoubtedly face unique challenges (Flabbi et al., 2019). Promoting female leadership in schools is crucial for the education system. Change is needed to support and retain women as heads and educational leaders as more and more of them become heads. Strategies should focus on women who can enter leadership positions and achieve professional success and advancement.

In Ghana, female leaders are central to the functioning of educational institutions such as schools. Girls' education can be taken to a higher level with female leaders who support women teachers and students and lead and manage effectively. The Ashanti region of Ghana also faces challenges regarding the underrepresentation of female heads in secondary schools due to various factors. These include pervasive barriers in the education sector, entrenched cultural norms that prioritize male leadership, and limited access to leadership training and professional development for women. In addition, socioeconomic variables such as parental disapproval and poverty can make it difficult for women to aspire to leadership positions (Oppong Asante, 2019). Also, Davis (2018) identified collaborative leadership, mentoring and influencing as effective techniques used by female leaders in various situations.

Research Problem

The issue of female under-representation in secondary high school leadership positions, particularly in the Sekyere East District of Ghana, is a serious problem despite efforts to promote gender equality in education. There is a need to investigate in more detail the factors affecting female

achievement in secondary schools in Sekyere East District, Ghana. There is a noticeable gap in research that examines the experiences and challenges faced by female managers, particularly concerning gender bias, mentoring opportunities, and the balancing of management responsibilities with societal expectations. Although, previous studies by researchers suggests that factors such as personal ambition, commitment to the quality of education and the desire to make a positive difference in their community can influence women's decision to fulfil a head role (Johnson & Fournillier, 2022; Smith, 2018). As Senior High School heads, female leaders use a variety of tactics to address the needs of their communities and schools and to foster an effective leadership. On the other hand, little is known about the particular tactics used by the female heads of the Sekyere East District. Previous studies conducted by researchers like Nassar et al. (2021) and Davis (2018) have highlighted collaborative leadership, mentorship, and advocacy as effective strategies used by female leaders in various contexts. However, more research is required to comprehend how these tactics are modified and used by female leaders in in SHS the Sekyere East District to overcome obstacles and encourage constructive change in their schools.

Research Focus

This study centred on exploring the first-hand experiences of female senior high school heads in Ghana's Ashanti Region. The study focused on evaluating the possible influencing factors to their choice for leadership posts, as well as the professional and personal obstacles they must overcome to fulfil their responsibilities as heads. To fully understand the experiences of women who are heads of Senior High Schools, it was important for the study to investigate multiple aspects, including their career paths, leadership approaches, obstacles they faced, and methods to overcome them.

Research Aim and Research Questions

The aim of the study was to investigate the experiences of female heads of Senior High Schools in Ghana's Ashanti Region's Sekyere East with respect to a significant project that clarifies the intricacies of gender dynamics in the educational system.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What inspired the career paths of women to headship positions in Senior High Schools in the Sekyere East District?
2. What were the on-the-job experiences of female heads in selected Senior High Schools in the Sekyere East District?
3. What leadership strategies have female heads in selected Senior High Schools deployed as leaders in the Sekyere East District?

Literature Review

The experiences of female heads in Senior High Schools in the Sekyere East District, Ghana, necessitate a clear declaration of the review's aim with theoretical framework underpinning the study, showing leadership strategies used by SHS female leaders. By outlining the purpose of this review, the study sheds light on the reasons for exploring the distinctive challenges and achievements experienced by female leaders in this particular educational environment, as well as the stereotypes and inequalities that women encounter in their workplaces. This initial step will pave the way for a comprehensive exploration of the factors influencing women's progression to headship roles, on-the-job-experiences and the strategies employed to navigate gender biases and administrative responsibilities effectively within the Sekyere East District.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework underpinning this study was the feminist theory. The feminist theory provides a lens through which to analyse the practices of female educational leaders in the context of gender dynamics and power relations. This theory focuses on understanding and challenging systemic inequality and discrimination that women face in society, including educational institutions (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). By utilising the feminist theory, this study can explore the impact of gender norms, stereotypes, and patriarchal structures on the careers, leadership opportunities, and work experiences of female high school principals. In addition, feminist theory can help illuminate strategies to promote gender equality and empower women in leadership positions in education.

The rationale of feminist theory provides a framework for understanding the gender dynamics that affect women's opportunities, experiences and difficulties in education. It recognises that institutional barriers and gender discrimination are common for women, which can affect their experiences in the workplace and their ability to assume leadership roles. The aim of the study was to identify and assess gender differences in the education system of Sekyere East District with a focus on secondary school leadership positions using the feminist theory. The application of feminist theory in this study improved analyses of the socio-cultural context, organisational structures and institutional practices that either facilitate or hinder the advancement of female leaders in secondary schools. This involved analysing how traditional gender norms, stereotypes, and power dynamics have impacted women's recruitment processes, leadership approaches, and career trajectories. In addition, this theory served as a basis for investigating how female heads navigate and resist gender discrimination and address gender equality in their schools and communities.

Leadership Strategies Used by Secondary School (SHS) Female Heads and their Impact on School Performance and Gender Equity

The literature explores the leadership strategies employed by female leaders in Senior High Schools (SHS) and their influence on school performance and gender equity, which are crucial components of comprehending effective educational leadership.

Collaboration. SHS women managers often use collaborative management strategies to promote teamwork, shared decision-making and inclusive employee participation. Research by Gasman-Zylbermann (2021) highlights the importance of collaboration in promoting organisational effectiveness and improving student outcomes. By including stakeholders in decision-making processes, female leaders can build trust, improve communication and create a supportive work environment that fosters student success.

Mentoring and Professional Development. Many SHS women leaders prioritise mentoring and professional development initiatives as part of their leadership strategies. Studies by Davis (2018) emphasize the importance of mentoring programs to increase the professional success and leadership aspirations of women in education. By providing mentoring opportunities and investing in staff development, female leaders can empower their colleagues, develop leadership potential and promote gender equality in their schools.

Promote Gender Equality. Female SHS heads often advocate for gender equality and inclusion in educational policies, practices and opportunities. A 2020 UNESCO study highlights the importance of empowerment to challenge gender stereotypes, remove systemic barriers and promote equal access to education for all students. By supporting the gender-responsive policies and initiatives, female leaders can create more equitable learning environments and promote the academic success and well-being of both female and male students.

Promoting Inclusive Leadership Practices. The high school women leaders promote inclusive leadership practices that value diversity, equity and inclusion. Heikkinen et al. (2022) emphasise the role of inclusive leadership in fostering a sense of belonging, respect and empowerment among students and staff. By embracing diverse perspectives, fostering collaborative relationships, and addressing inequities, female leaders can improve school climate, promote social justice, and improve educational outcomes for all students.

Strategic Planning and Management of Resources. Effective resource management and strategic planning are integral parts of the management strategies of SHS women leaders. Hill and Jones (2012) emphasized the importance of strategic management in optimising resource allocation, improving organizational efficiency and achieving academic excellence. Through the effective utilisation of resources, the establishment of clear objectives, and the on-going assessment of progress, female leaders can enhance school improvement, reinforce accountability, and advance gender equality in educational outcomes.

Overall, the leadership strategies of female secondary school heads play a crucial role in shaping school outcomes and promoting gender equality in education. By adopting collaborative, inclusive, and strategic approaches to leadership, women leaders can create supportive learning environments, empower students and staff, and promote educational excellence and equity.

Overcoming the Challenges of Women in Educational Leadership

According to Justin et al. (2024), a supervisor's ability to advance professionally can greatly depend on the presence of both men and women mentors. Mentors have the ability to create opportunities, provide recommendations, influence policies and initiatives that foster career growth, and cultivate valuable relationships. Despite the value of mentoring, research has shown that women do not seem to have access to both male and female mentors. When men mentor others, they usually choose to support other men or those most similar to them (Wardatun et al., 2023). The refusal of women to accept male mentors is one reason why women cannot voluntarily accept mentorship (Maida & Weber, 2022). Another explanation could be that certain men see women as an unknown quantity and do not see them as trustworthy or faithful. Therefore, they can be considered a significant risk factor for the mentor. Sexual intercourse and harassment in the form of sexual bribery are other problem for men who recruit women as trainees.

According to Michel (2020), one of the most important things women want is a workplace where they can always turn to their supervisor. Women in Educational Leadership made this argument in support of Warring (2015) who argues that mentors - male and female - can be the most important factor in a person's professional development. Mentors advise open doors, give recommendations and offer tactics for a career. Studies have emphasised the significance of social connections and mentorship in fostering women's professional development (Lestari, 2023). This is because women tend to achieve success by combining certain performance techniques with meaningful social contacts (Prabowo & Nurdin 2019). The two main behaviours or functions of mentors are career development behaviours that are believed to help mentees advance in the organisation, and psychosocial behaviours that support individuals' personal and professional development (O'Brien, 2019). These activities or roles of mentors make them essential to the functioning of the institution.

Stereotypes About Women in Society

Scholars have argued over the years that our patriarchal culture is the main cause of gender inequality in society (Miltersteiner et al., 2020). Recognising the diverse findings from researchers is crucial for grasping how this issue may affect women's lives. It's also important to acknowledge that

positive stereotypes can arise as well (De Paola et al., 2022), although they are not discussed in this section, since the main focus is derogatory remarks about women in society. During the research, the thesis may encounter these stereotypes. Eagly and Mladinic (1994, p. 547) gave examples of these positive biases about women, according to which there are gender types and attitudes towards both men and women. Positive traits often associated with women include being helpful, empathetic, warm, gentle, devoted, compassionate, understanding, and emotional. While these characteristics can promote a nurturing and supportive environment, they also contribute to the stereotype that women possess a "weaker" side in their personalities. This perception can be viewed both positively and negatively, depending on the context. On one hand, these traits highlight the strengths of emotional intelligence and relational skills; on the other hand, they may reinforce traditional gender stereotypes that position women as "weaker" compared to men in various situations. This underscores the need to challenge and redefine these stereotypes, recognizing the complexity of individual identities beyond simplistic classifications.

However, Castano et al. (2002) emphasised this further by examining attitudes towards women and gender stereotypes. Castano et al. (2002) argued that "the other element of the couple was always considered worst and associated with women" and that society was based on established dichotomies such as culture/nature, mind/body, reason/emotion, objectivity/subjectivity, and public/private. Another common misconception is that women's main responsibility is to take care of their families, although this is seen as a sign of weakness (Nassar et al., 2021), noting that pregnancy, motherhood, and children were the predominant topics in women's health articles during their examination of media coverage related to women's health.

The Inequalities Women Face in the Working Environment

Though the previously mentioned category seems similar to this one, a key difference exists: two of the studies cited earlier (Lämsä & Tiensuu, 2002) focused specifically on its implementation in a workplace setting, while the majority of the other studies (Dunne et al., 2022; Ventura et al., 2021) were fixated on the representation of females in themselves. However, future research in this area must evaluate the existing body of work, leading to a strong emphasis on the professional traits of women, especially those in executive roles. Prior research on gender inequality has indeed focused on various aspects of it and how it can impede women's advancement in the workplace; however, it is reasonable to assume that stereotypes and traditional gender norms disappear from the workplace once a woman reaches the executive level.

In a similar vein, one could argue that a female who rises to the highest in her field is a result of her combating societal injustices and preconceptions, such as the idea that a woman's pay should be determined by the type of work she does rather than by her gender. As was previously highlighted in Lämsä and Tiensuu's (2002) study, it is evident how journalists perpetuate gender inequality in society by directing gender-focused questions at female executives. On the other hand, one may counter that journalist's work to empower females by providing them with a voice (Meeks, 2012). Also, it was discovered that different inquiries on this issue were not posed to scientists, politicians, or businessmen. This report was largely inspired by the 2002 study by Lämsä and Tiensuu, which highlighted the necessity for more investigation of the representation of executive women in news discourse in light of journalists' interviewing techniques.

Concluding the review of the experiences of women leaders in the Sekyere East region of Ghana, the study identified motivations for delving into the unique challenges and advancements facing women leaders in this particular educational environment. This first step paves the way for an in-depth study of the advancement of women in leadership positions and the strategies used to effectively navigate

gender bias and administrative responsibilities in Sekyere East District.

Materials and Methods

Study Design

A qualitative case study conducted by Landis et al. (2022) enabled the researchers to delve into the experiences, motivations, challenges and strategies of female heads in secondary schools in Sekyere East District. By focusing on a specific geographic region and educational setting, the case study design allowed for a multifaceted and nuanced exploration of the unique sociocultural dynamics and organisational factors influencing women's leadership experiences.

A phenomenological approach is well-suited for examining the subjective experiences, motivations, and challenges faced by secondary school leaders (Aslan, 2020). By focusing on the nature of individuals' experiences, this approach allows researchers to uncover the meanings, understandings and emotions associated with leadership roles in educational contexts. The research design was chosen because it offers researchers the opportunity to create a comprehensive explanation of the phenomena expressing the attitudes and feelings of female heads in Senior High Schools in the Sekyere East District.

Sample and Participants

According to Mweshi and Sakyi (2020), a sample is a fragment of a population designated for study through a process called sampling. The sample is the same as the population size of this study, so the numerical method was adopted. There are several sampling techniques, but this study used a purposive sampling procedure to select two secondary schools in Sekyere East District of the Ashanti Region. It was accomplished in order to obtain accurate data for many subgroups of the study population. A purposive sampling was used in the, also known as selective sampling, where participants are hand-picked based on certain characteristics and goals. In addition, it is inexpensive and it gave the researcher easy access and willingness to provide first-hand information from respondents who were intimately familiar with the issues affecting the education system in Ghana. In order to ensure equality, inclusion and fair representation of the target population, schools were selected according to their importance according to the geographical area of the study.

According to Andrade (2021), a convenience sampling is a type of test population that is improbable (non-random) if the participants in the target group are involved in certain useful processes, such as availability, topographic proximity, accessibility at any given time and the pleasure of participating in a reliable successful plan survey. The choice of the researcher was based on the students who had the main idea, but it was also mentioned in the specific demographic that was easily available to the researcher. The main motivation behind the use of convenience sampling is to gather evidence from members who are readily available to the researcher and willing to give the researcher a response.

Although the convenience sampling is evaluative, the influence of study participants selected using this technique was very important in decision-making. However, it was difficult for the researcher to obtain a gender-matched sample using this approach because the sample size was chosen based on their presence in the geographical area of the study and the individuals who administered the administration management, in particular, 17 participants (Table 1) were selected who were most likely to complete the research topic and who were willing to share their experiences as heads.

Table 1*Summary of Sample Size used for the Study*

Categories of Study Participants	Sample Size
Headmistresses	2
Assistant Headmistresses	4
Heads of Department Teachers	3
	8
Total	17

Source: Researchers fieldwork (2024).

Instrument and Procedure

The data collection method of the study was semi-structured interviews asserted by Magaldi and Berla (2020). The semi-structured interviews gave participants the opportunity to share their experiences and insights into the barriers that limit their access to leadership positions and the strategies they use to overcome them. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed the interview process to be flexible while ensuring that learning objectives were met.

The data collection tools of the study were an interview guide and audio recording devices. An interview guide was developed based on the research questions and was used to guide the interview process. Recorders were utilised to capture the interviews for transcription and analysis. The interview guide was pre-tested with some female training managers who did not participate in the study to ensure that the questions were clear and appropriate for the study. The pre-test also helped to identify necessary changes to the interview guide to improve its effectiveness.

Data Analysis

The thematic analysis was used in the analysis of the qualitative data (Christou, 2022) received from the respondents, while the themes were developed based on the research questions of this work. Themes related to the direct interview, observation and notes were analysed qualitatively thematically. According to Lester et al. (2020), the qualitative data analysis is essential because it offers the researchers the opportunity to identify important issues related to the data collection methods that defined the study, which in turn helps the researchers obtaining robust information about the phenomenon being studied.

The data obtained during the thematic analysis were used to answer the research questions one to three. The researchers reviewed the explanations and took concise notes. While compiling these notes, they created a list of the information gathered from the research instruments. Subsequently, the researchers organized the list by categorizing each item for clarity. The researchers examined whether the categories were related in any way and categorized them into main or subcategories (or themes), then compared and contrasted the main and subcategories or themes. After collecting all 17 transcripts, the researchers thoroughly categorised and evaluated each transcript, assessing its importance and relevance.

The researchers evaluated the data in order to ensure proper classification after all the data in the transcript was categorised into smaller and larger categories or themes. Then the researchers went through all the categories to see if any could be combined, and which could be subdivided. Finally, the researchers went back to the original textbooks to verify that all gradable material was covered. Finally, the researchers double-checked that all materials to be classified were filled with original texts. The verbal responses of the participants were used as an aid to analysis.

Results

The results present the findings of this study, which are grounded in qualitative analysis. Data necessary to address the current issue were gathered, evaluated, and interpreted.

Demographic Characteristics

Table 2 shows the demographic profile of the respondents based on age, academic qualification, school status, marital status and school name. According to the age of the respondents, the highest age group is 45-54 years old, 52.9%, followed by 35-44 year-old respondents 23.5%. The age distribution is not surprising given the educational structure and policies of Ghana, many SHS teachers are mainly in this age group. Second, the demographic profile of the respondents according to academic qualification, the frequency of undergraduate education is 11 and its total percentage is 68.8%; in master's studies, the frequency is 5 and the total percentage is 31.3%. Most of the respondents, or 93.8 per cent, are married, while only 6.3 per cent are single.

Table 2

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable		Frequency	N %
Age	18-24	0	0.0%
	25-34	1	5.9%
	35-44	4	23.5%
	45-54	9	52.9%
	55-60	3	17.6%
Academic qualification	Diploma	0	0.0%
	Bachelor's Degree	11	68.8%
	Master's degree	5	31.3%
	PhD	0	0.0%
Position in school	Headmistress	2	11.8%
	Assistant headmistress	4	23.5%
	Head of Department	3	17.6%
	Teacher	8	47.1%
Relationship status	Single	1	6.3%
	Married	15	93.8%
	Separated	0	0.0%
	Divorced	0	0.0%
	Widowed	0	0.0%
Name of school	T.I Ahmadiya Girl's shs	13	76.5%
	Effiduase SeniorHigh/Commercial School	4	23.5%

Source: Researchers fieldwork (2024).

Table 3*Participants' Career Backgrounds*

Participants	Number of years taught before Promotion	Number of years in current position
Headmistress	31	14
	21	Less than a year
Assist headmistress	23	2
	12	4
	15	13
	28	6
HOD	23	4
	10	3
	14	5
Teachers	13	2
	13	4
	14	14
	20	10
	2	13
	20	19
	13	13
	10	6

Source: Researchers fieldwork (2024).

The Participants' Career Backgrounds

The years of teaching experience, length of time teachers have taught before becoming a head, and length of time in their current position were among the data collected on the career backgrounds of headmistresses, assistant headmistresses, department heads, and teachers. The women were selected from two Effiduase Secondary Schools in the Sekyere East District of the Ashanti Region. The results are presented in Table 3.

The duration of their teaching tenure varied from two to thirty-one years, with the headmistress serving the longest at thirty-one years. Before being promoted, the majority of these heads had been educators for six to nineteen years.

Themes and Sub-Themes

Table 4 below shows how the raw data from the three data-collection approaches were examined and developed into themes and sub-themes.

Table 4*Preparation for Leadership – Headmistress*

Theme One	Career
Sub-themes	• Motivation to become a headmistress/ HOD/Teacher • Preparation for leadership • Society's perception

Theme Two	Work Experience
Sub-themes	• Experience with learners/teachers/stakeholders • Personal Challenges • Administrative challenges • Positive experience
Theme Three	Future aspiration
Sub-themes	• Improvement in women's participation in leadership

Source: Researchers fieldwork (2024).

The results of the female's actual experiences will be disclosed in the part that follows.

Findings

Table 4 shows how the raw data produced four major themes and several sub-themes. The sub-themes make up the subheadings, and the primary themes make up the main headers. There were extra subheadings beneath certain subheadings. Additionally, participant anecdotes were used as examples with each one selected and further highlighted in the study.

Career

This first topic dealt with the teacher's reasons for becoming a headmistress/assistant headmistress/head of department or teacher, education received, social attitudes towards female heads, and perceived barriers to women becoming heads.

Motivation to Become a Headmistress/ HOD/Teacher

Despite the fact that none of the women mentioned that it was difficult for them to enter a management position, most of their answers indicated a desire to teach and impart knowledge that people motivated them. According to a 2016 survey of female high school leaders, encouragement and support from male leaders may inspire female educators to pursue roles as head teachers, assistant heads, heads of departments, or teachers (Kruse & Krumm, 2016). Jones (2020) recommends that women seek out their own mentors in addition to being more proficient in communicating information about how to create productive mentoring relationships with other aspiring women leaders.

Participant 1: As an old student and a very hardworking employee of GES, I felt the need to contribute my quota to the development and progress of the school by directly participating in its management.

Participant 2: Passion for teaching and learning

Participant 2: Managing girls and their development.

Work Experience

This section examined women's views on their experiences as female heads in their schools. The first section explored the perspectives of heads regarding the ways they are welcomed by various stakeholders upon arriving at their workplace. The second part dealt with the administrative problems they encounter during the work.

Experiences with Students/Teachers/Stakeholders

The purpose of this part of the interview was to obtain information about the teachers' first experiences in the office and how they communicated with other stakeholders, including parents,

teachers and students to them. The reactions of parents to them were generally different than those of students and teachers. Jones (2019) argues that women in leadership positions cultivate and exhibit characteristics of empathy, compassion, and caring when interacting with students. They emphasise student success and well-being. Here are their answers:

Participant 1 - Assistant headmaster: Some parents struggle to shape the life of their congregation. Others are also very close to the school administration in shaping and forming their school congregation.

Participant 2 - HOD: Most students look up to me as a guide, mother and role model because I have a good relationship with them and I am very fair and firm in all disciplinary actions.

Participant 2 - HOD: I have a very good relationship with the teachers in my school.

Participant 3-Teacher: With outside influence, maintaining discipline has become a big challenge for heads.

Future Aspirations

Improvement in Women's Participation in Leadership. Participants offered some ideas about what they believe would encourage women to enter leadership positions in schools. Most of them expressed concern about the lack of mentoring in the development and training of school leadership roles. Many of them stated that this idea was completely alien to them when they entered the profession, because there were so few women in leadership positions in schools at that time.

Participant 1 teacher: Women who are already in leadership positions should be praised by the authorities and the whole society.

Participant 1 Teacher: The government should introduce laws to protect women in leadership positions.

Participant 1 -HOD: More women should be in higher education.

Participant 4 - Assistant headmistress: Females education must be a priority in society to eliminate stereotypes and give women the opportunity for long-term development.

Discussion

In addressing the research question, "What inspired the career paths of women to headship positions in Senior High Schools in the Sekyere East District?" it is crucial to explore the motivations and factors that drive women to pursue leadership roles within this specific educational context. Recent studies have emphasised the significance of intrinsic motivations such as a passion for education, a desire to make a positive impact on students' lives, and a commitment to fostering a conducive learning environment as the key inspirations for women seeking headship positions in educational institutions. The results revealed that the majority of female heads indicated that their motivation to apply for leadership positions stemmed from a strong desire to teach and impart knowledge to others. Comparing with studies of Ventura et al. (2021), one factor that could influence a female teacher to apply for the position of high school headmistress/vice headmistress/heads of department or teacher was the encouragement and motivation she received from administrators to impart knowledge to students. Harris et al. (2021) buttress the point that not only more teachers are aware of teaching other women aspiring leaders strategies to participate effectively in mentoring relationships but they advise women to seek out their own mentors and help other colleagues after acquiring knowledge from them. Additionally, external factors like mentorship, professional development opportunities, and a supportive organisational culture have been identified as influential in shaping women's career aspirations towards leadership roles in the education sector as asserted by Debusscher (2023). Comparing the findings of this study with recent research reveals a consistent theme emphasizing the

significance of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivators in inspiring women to pursue headship positions in educational settings. Studies have underscored the role of personal values, career advancement opportunities and a supportive network in encouraging women to aspire to leadership roles within the educational landscape. By aligning with these findings, this research contributes to the growing body of literature emphasising the multifaceted nature of motivations that drive women to leadership positions in senior high schools.

In addressing the second research question, "What were the on-the-job experiences of female heads in selected Senior High Schools in the Sekyere East District?" this study delves into the on-the-job experiences of female heads in these schools, uncovering valuable insights into the intricacies of their leadership roles. The findings depict how parents tend to react differently towards female heads, while also highlighting the positive relationships these leaders often have with students. Based on the head teachers' accounts, it was evident that occasionally they felt unconfident about their work. When comparing the results of this study with contemporary research, emphasizing the pivotal role of on-the-job experiences in shaping the leadership trajectories of female heads in educational institutions, Codreanu (2023) asserts that head teachers blamed a culture that fostered prejudice and stereotyped behaviours for the unfavourable attitudes they encountered. According to Wijaya (2023), women in leadership positions are said to be nurturing and to display traits of empathy, compassion, and caring while interacting with students while others see otherwise, related to findings emulated by the researchers in the study. Also, Bautista et al.'s (2022) study support the findings which show that women in leadership roles struggle to strike a balance between their professional leadership responsibilities and the expectations placed on them by society regarding their family responsibilities. The following studies corroborate the aforementioned claim which enriches the ongoing discourse on the experiences of women leaders in the educational sector.

Based on the third research question about the leadership strategies deployed by female heads in selected Senior High Schools in the Sekyere East District, exploring these strategies can provide valuable insights into effective leadership practices within this specific context. The findings of this research demonstrated that, despite the difficulties experienced by female head teachers in running public senior schools, there were strategies that could be employed to improve and efficiently run these second-cycle schools. These findings include the collaborative leadership, emotional intelligence, and adaptability as key components of effective leadership strategies for women in educational roles.

These findings are reinforced by a study by Mburu (2022) in Kenya, which found that most female managers employed domestic helpers to assist with chores and delegated some of their work to subordinates to manage difficulties related to their duties, aligning well with collaborative efforts. Also to buttress the findings Mpezeni (2022) study shows how the ability or willingness of female leadership in Swaziland to change in order to suit different conditions in their environment when given different multi-tasking teachings in schools depicting adaptability to change. When comparing the results of this study it is evident that recent studies emphasized the importance of collaborative leadership and adaptability as key components of effective leadership strategies for women in educational roles.

The limitations of the study, such as focusing on a specific geographical area such as Sekyere East District, may affect the generalizability of the findings to a wider context. This narrow scope may limit the applicability of the findings to other regions or educational institutions outside the Sekyere East region. In addition, the reliance on self-reported data and potential response bias affects the reliability and validity of the conclusions drawn from the study. These limitations highlight the importance of caution in extrapolating findings beyond Sekyere East District and highlight the need to consider different perspectives and contexts in future research on female career paths, work experiences and management strategies in educational institutions.

Conclusion

The study investigated the experiences of female principals of secondary schools in Sekyere East District, Ghana. The coverage of this study was limited to female leaders in the Sekyere East District. This limitation affected the generalizability of the results. The study focused on the Sekyere East District may limit the transferability of the findings to other regions or contexts. The results indicated that the motivation for female head teachers to assume leadership roles stems from their desire to teach and impart knowledge to others. Also, the findings revealed that one of the factors that influenced female leaders to apply for the position of high school headmistress/assistant headmistress/head of department or teacher was the motivation and encouragement they received from male principals.

The results showed that the self-confidence of female heads was variable that improved when they were more confident in their abilities. An additional obstacle was the balance of work and social life and the conflict arising from combining work and domestic responsibilities. The findings indicated that most female heads studied and gained experience with both unruly students and male teachers who were unwilling to accept instruction from female heads. Female leaders were once again able to withstand interference from the government, traditional leaders, elders, and male teachers.

The study recommends that several ideas emerged from the research and the skills and practices of female principals that could assist female leadership and educational leadership in rural primary schools. These include the creation of a mentoring network for female school principals, as well as raising awareness and implementing the equality policy designed by the Ministry of Education. They also include training programs for educational management leaders.

Suggestions for future research

A survey was conducted to assess the number of female educators who meet the qualifications for headship positions based on their academic and professional backgrounds according to established policies. Additionally, the survey explored the reasons why these qualified individuals were not appointed as principals and identified any obstacles they encountered in obtaining these positions. The interviews in this study were conducted using convenience sampling and qualitative methods, which may not be fully representative of the entire population, thereby limiting the generalizability of these findings. To address this limitation, future research should incorporate a quantitative survey to gain a broader and more statistically significant understanding of students' opinions. This approach will help validate the qualitative insights and provide a more comprehensive view of the research topic.

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Conflict of Interest

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