

# Gender and leadership positions: understanding women's experiences and challenges in patriarchal societies in Northern Ghana

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Women are rarely seen in positions of leadership in patriarchal societies, which is unsurprising. Following gender equity policies, few women have been able to break through the gender equity barrier and assume leadership positions in schools. Few research investigations have delved into the experiences and challenges that women encounter in positions of leadership in patriarchal societies in government schools in Northern Ghana. The study seeks to comprehend the experiences and challenges that women confront in positions of leadership in patriarchal societies in Northern Ghana.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The study aimed to gain a better understanding of the experiences and challenges that women encounter in educational leadership roles in patriarchal societies in Northern Ghana. To achieve the study's objectives, a quantitative research approach and a social survey design were used, as well as descriptive and inferential statistics.

**Findings** – The findings of the study revealed that in patriarchal societies in Northern Ghana, women experience conventional gender roles that conflict with roles, cultural values, gender stereotyping, family responsibilities and cultural beliefs and perceptions of women and attitudes and low expectations of women's managerial skills discourage women from taking on leadership positions in men-dominated societies.

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**Compliance with ethical standards:** The authors hereby declared that the study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the comparable ethical standards. All individual participants in the study gave their informed consent.

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**Research limitations/implications** – There is a need to shift the gender position and question the negative cultural convictions of cultural and patriarchal societies. Equal opportunities for men and women necessitate equal access to leadership positions. It proposes that in patriarchal societies, education and community stakeholder involvement in leadership training programmes for women be considered, as policy documents alone would not be sufficient to eradicate deeply embedded cultural social practices and dispel negative notions about women in leadership positions in men-dominated societies.

**Originality/value** – The study established that in patriarchal societies, women experienced conventional gender roles that conflict with roles, cultural values, gender stereotyping, family responsibilities, cultural vulnerability of women and the interplay between cultural expected roles and management goals influence women from taking on leadership positions.

**Keywords** Gender, Women, Experiences and challenges, Patriarchal societies, Leadership positions

**Paper type** Research paper

## Background to the study

Women play important roles in both primary and secondary education for children and adults. Over the last few decades, women have played supportive and compassionate roles in ensuring the educational system's success (Openjuru, 2021). Women have taken on more prominent and difficult roles in the education sectors around the world in recent years, and it is expected that there will be a lot of academic research on women as they were part of scholarly literature (Openjuru, 2021). Many people agree that women are house changes and thus socially designed to be confined to the kitchen as their primary responsibility (Hart, 2006). As a result, their decision-making experience was not shared. Women can advance to higher positions, but they face a number of obstacles rather than simply moving ahead as men frequently do (Sileshi, 2015).

Similarly, women are thought to have made up the majority of educational employees in recent years; however, women who are the focal point of leadership roles in the workplace receive little attention in current literature (Openjuru, 2021). In fact, because of their large number in the teaching profession, women in the education field have yet to be granted the authority to be included in high leadership roles in an organisation's management (Hart, 2006). According to Enomoto *et al.* (2000), family and private obligations, among other constraints, have been some of the reasons for excluding women from leadership roles in educational administration. The authors went on to say that women's prejudices, sexism and subpar social expectations all contribute to the reasons they are downgraded in positions of authority. Others believe that their primary role as a child caregiver has made it extremely difficult for them to successfully combine both roles, which is why they are not more excellent or competent for educational leadership positions (Tomas *et al.*, 2010). This held many assumptions that contributed to a disproportionate number of women in positions of leadership in comparison to men (Bornstein, 2007).

According to a study conducted by Ajemba (2023), 30% of women represent 58.4% of the population but only 35% of senior leadership positions. The findings established that women hold 35% of top management positions in developed countries such as the United States. Despite the fact that women make up more than half of the global workforce, only 8.8% of corporate leadership positions are held by women. It argues that the most significant barriers keeping women from leadership positions are that women are perceived negatively and that many businesses are unwilling to hire women for top executive positions due to role conflicts (Bornstein, 2007; Ajemba, 2023). According to the Global Gender Gap Report (WEF, 2020), 41% of women and 36% of men worldwide achieve a tertiary level of education. The report revealed that gender gap in education and corporate organisation is a global challenge. Men hold 65% of all leadership positions, while women hold 35% of senior leadership positions. However, little is known about the relationship between gender and leadership in patriarchal societies, particularly in Northern Ghana. It is critical to investigate women in leadership in order to provide a variety of perspectives.

Also, many studies have been conducted to determine the causes of gender disparities in school management that influence women participation (Coleman, 2005; Blackmore *et al.*, 2006; Moorosi, 2010; Fuller, 2013), which revealed men leadership dominance in managerial appointment. Similarly, Mahlase (1997) investigated the position and experiences of black women teachers in South Africa, highlighting race, culture and ethnicity as issues affecting and defining the experiences of women teachers in general and women managers in particular. However, few studies have been conducted to investigate the challenges that women face in positions of leadership in patriarchal societies in Ghana. As a result, the current study seeks to comprehend the challenges that women face in educational leadership positions in Northern Ghana. The current study's main research question is to understand the barriers that women face in educational leadership management positions in order to address these challenges and improve women in managerial positions in patriarchal societies in Ghana.

### **Contextualising gender and educational leadership positions in Ghana**

This study was conducted in patriarchal society using a positivist quantitative approach. Gender and leadership positions in Ghana are characterised by the exclusion of women from top managerial positions in education, a global phenomenon (Schwab *et al.*, 2017; Chancel *et al.*, 2022; Ajemba, 2023). The literature on gender and leadership positions varies by country, and few studies on gender and leadership positions in Ghana have been conducted (Kwadzo, 2010; Appiah, 2015; Djan and Gordon, 2020). Gender and leadership disparities in education have long been a problem in Sub-Saharan Africa, and researchers rely on data from developed countries to suggest that gender disparities are on declined McKillop and Moorosi (2017). Due to a lack of quantitative data on gender and leadership positions, understanding the experience of women in patriarchal societies are unknown, as a result, it is difficult in taking critical steps in designing strategies to address the issue in men-dominated societies in Ghana. According to Ohene (2010), few studies have been conducted in Ghana, with the majority of these studies focusing on corporate business entities. The experiences of women in educational leadership positions in patriarchal societies in Northern Ghana have received little attention. Further research into these issues, such as challenges, factors influencing, and measures, is therefore required, as these findings are likely to reveal the factors contributing to gender disparity in leadership positions among men and women in patriarchal societies. Gender and leadership positions in Northern Ghana are one of the areas in Ghanaian traditional societies where patriarchy is manifested through the exclusion of women leadership in educational institutions.

Previous research has identified the issue of a lack of women participation in educational leadership management (Adu-Oppong *et al.*, 2017; Kusi, 2019). Women's leadership positions have been influenced by factors such as a lack of qualification, a lack of social support, and a lack of peer models (Appiah, 2015). People's perceptions of gender vary by society and change over time, according to Herrera *et al.* (2012) and Azumah *et al.* (2022). People are instilled with societal norms and behaviours regarding gender relationships. Gender structures, relationships, and social roles all influence people's activities and approaches to dealing with problems, as well as leadership responsibilities (Herrera *et al.*, 2012).

Leadership and gender have a significant relationship that should be evaluated in order to facilitate streamlined organisational operations (Kolb, 1999). The purpose of this paper is to identify the challenges that women face in leadership positions in patriarchal societies, the factors that impede women's leadership positions, and potential solutions to the problem. The findings will allow policymakers to implement measures to support women in leadership positions in Ghana's patriarchal social system in order to promote gender equity.

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## Literature review and theoretical model

The purpose of this paper is to comprehend the difficulties that women face in positions of leadership in patriarchal societies in Northern Ghana. Women and leadership positions play an important role in society; however, few studies have been conducted in Ghana to investigate the experiences of women in leadership positions in patriarchal societies (Ohene, 2010; Appiah, 2015; Segkulu and Gyimah, 2016). Segkulu and Gyimah (2016) conducted a study in Ghana using a descriptive survey to examine women in top leadership positions. According to the study's findings, only a few women hold top-level management positions in the Ghana Education Service (GES). Women's leadership in educational institutions in the Metropolis was hampered by factors such as low educational qualifications, traditional beliefs, and cultural practises. Appiah (2015) conducted a similar study to investigate the lived experiences of Ghanaian women in leadership. According to these findings, Ghanaian women leaders continue to be underrepresented in organisations and face a lack of support from policymakers and human resource personnel in their pursuit of professional careers. George and Braimah (2021) conducted another study to investigate the efficacy of women in authority and how it affects the lives of underprivileged women in society. According to the findings, women in leadership have shown a strong commitment to women's emancipation. However, there is still work to be done to persuade ordinary Ghanaian women that women in positions of authority adequately represent the interests of all women, particularly the poor and vulnerable in society. These findings are intriguing; however, the literature on women's experiences and leadership positions in patriarchal societies in Ghana is lacking. To fill a gap in the literature, it is worthwhile to investigate the experiences of women in leadership in men-dominated societies.

Again, several studies on gender gaps in research in educational administration, gender disparity, women heads in disadvantageous schools, women better leaders than men, leadership positions and roles in Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa have been conducted (Shakeshaft, 1989; Perumal and Naidoo, 2014; McKillop and Moorosi, 2017; Cliffe *et al.*, 2018). Contrasting men's and women's leadership styles according to Eagly and Carli (2003) and Pounder and Coleman (2002), women leaders are more transformative and engaged in more contingent reward behaviours, and that leadership is genderless. Transformation leaders articulate a future vision and share it with their colleagues and followers (Perumal and Moyo, 2019). They inspire, promote, empower, and assist their followers while also effectively solving problems and serving as positive role models. These findings provide us with interesting and intriguing information in South African context, however, the challenges that women in leadership face in educational leadership positions in Ghana, is largely ignored in the literature.

According to Hasan and Othman (2013), women leaders promote engagement and cooperation, and as a result, women's leadership styles can be more efficient and effective in less hierarchical organisations. Coleman (2005), on the other hand, investigated gender gaps in secondary schools, but the findings revealed some significant gaps in gender and leadership style. According to the study's findings, men and women leaders behave similarly to men leaders. For the reason that, leadership performance is correlated with the ability to inspire others, have vision, build good relationships, and influence outcomes and several studies have shown that women leaders typically have such leadership qualities. In this regard, Eagly and Carli (2003) and Coleman (2006) concluded that allowing women equal access to leadership positions improves efficiency and staff strength. This helps to pool the organisation's resources for long-term success. However, while these findings provide valuable information about leadership positions, they fail to take into account the challenges that women face in leadership positions, particularly in patriarchal societies.

McKinsey and Company (2020) identified nine leadership behaviours that were found to have a positive impact on organisational performance. They connected the use and power of

these behaviours in women and men leaders. Participatory decision-making, role modelling, motivation, goals and incentives, human growth, intellectual stimulation, constructive communication, individual decision-making and control, and corrective action are among the nine activities. According to the study, men and women use these nine habits differently in their respective roles. Women have been shown to be stronger and more successful than men in activities such as people's growth, expectations and incentives, and role modelling. Women also make more use of inspiration and participatory decision-making than men. Analytical inspiration and constructive communication are used by both women and men leaders. This is another intriguing finding; however, the literature has failed to comprehend the issues associated with women in positions of leadership.

A variety of factors are thought to influence women's advancement up the leadership ladder. While some of these factors make it easier for motivated women to advance to high-level positions, others prevent them from doing so. The 'glass ceiling,' which is an indirect barrier to negative perceptions and biases that prevent women and minorities from moving beyond a certain level of place in hierarchies, is one of the factors limiting women (Bateman and Zeithaml, 1993, p. 13). This has contributed to a number of studies identifying barriers to the advancement of women's professions, with the effects of sexism in the workplace being one aspect of the glass ceiling's conceptualisation. The glass ceiling is defined as the observation of an indistinguishable, informal barrier used by men to discourage women and minorities from advancing to senior and executive positions within organisations (Morrison *et al.*, 1987). The authors provide an interesting narrative about the challenges of women in higher positions in general; however, the challenges of women in educational leadership have received little attention in the literature.

According to Morrison *et al.* (1987), this artificial barrier to women's upward mobility is based on attitudinal or organisational prejudice. It has demonstrated how qualified individuals have been prevented from progressing to management level positions in their organisation (Morrison *et al.*, 1987). Glass ceiling conditions have also been identified as barriers in business surveys, according to similar findings (Morrison *et al.*, 1987; Cech and Blair-Loy, 2010). However, the literature has shown that the factors impeding women's upward mobility, as well as the difficulties women face in leadership positions in patriarchal societies, have not been adequately addressed.

According to James and Wooten (2006), there is a lower representation of women and minorities in high-level jobs, executive positions, and boards of directors. The study discovered that women faced obstacles not only at the top, but also at lower levels, which have been shown to impede a woman's career development and distract from her professional success. Another study conducted by Appelbaum *et al.* (2003) discovered that the concept of the "glass ceiling" clearly prevents women and minorities from rising to positions of management and leadership. The findings of this study focused on the examination of a number of impediments that prevented women, in particular, from rising through the ranks to positions of leadership in the workplace. Women were assigned and hired in positions such as clerical, health care, education, domestic services, and food services, but even in traditionally women professions, women did not hold key positions in relation to their members. In schools, for example, women teach while men coordinate, prepare, direct, and supervise. Crampton and Mishra (1999) observe that, in contrast to social agencies, women are typically middle managers who look to direct service employees, whereas their men counterparts are in charge of organising projects and developing budgets for the organisations in which they operate. Furthermore, research shows that even when women have the highest level of credentials, they appear to hold lower roles in their organisations. However, the issues that women face are critical in understanding the situation surrounding women in positions of leadership and must therefore be considered.

The existence of restrictions placed on women who are ambitious in their pursuit of a managerial role by society, the family, and women themselves is the next constraint on women who are ambitious in their pursuit of a managerial role (Crampton and Mishra, 1999). Many researchers consider some of these impediments to be theories, preconceived notions, or unsupported notions. According to studies, women are frequently perceived as dependent, non-aggressive, passive, fragile, empathetic, non-competitive, inner-oriented, sensitive, subjective, intuitive, and supportive (Crampton and Mishra, 1999; Appelbaum *et al.*, 2003; Wei *et al.*, 2022). The difficulties that women face in positions of leadership are rarely discussed in the literature. To supplement the existing literature, it is important to understand the challenges that women face in positions of educational leadership.

Another factor that contributes to a lower representation of women in senior management positions is sexism and disparities in compensation and resources for personal development. This includes the presence of “good old boys’ networks” that overlook and struggle to encourage women to advance to senior management positions (Hoffman, 2011, p. 15). Discrimination may occur as a result of organisational structures, initiated policies, informal networks, and societies that are so dominated by men that they create barriers for women seeking to advance in their careers (Murgai, 1991).

The need for society to balance professional and family roles is also a barrier to women’s workplace mobility. According to Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2007), despite their professional achievements, many respondents indicated that women’s voices were not heard, and thus opportunities for them and other groups within organisations were severely limited. That was not due to a lack of competence, but rather to the company’s unconscious inability to see them as viable players in the management system (Eagly and Carli, 2003).

According to research, some of the limiting assumptions that discouraged women from pursuing careers were that they are not hard enough, do not want to work long or irregular hours, are too emotional, do not travel, lack quantitative analytical skills, and have difficulty making decisions (McKinsey and Company, 2020). Women are required to participate in a variety of activities by members of any community. They should strive to balance the dual responsibilities of home maintenance and career advancement. Many organisations believe that women leaders who have children are less dedicated than those who do not have children. This is to say that the majority of people believe that women leaders who do not have children are more committed than those who do. These attitudes toward women are detrimental to their success in positions of leadership. Mentors can help to teach organisational roles by acting as mentors or trainers to help the protégé improve their skills. Women must participate in role modelling behaviours at higher levels of management and leadership in order to advance (Cross *et al.*, 2017).

In most countries, society establishes values, expectations, and traditions for organisations and individuals. This occurs in all aspects of life and inevitably has an impact on women leadership (Gulnaz *et al.*, 2019). The home and family continue to dominate society’s perception of women’s roles. This limits their career options. It is also widely accepted that a woman assumes the role of “motherhood” and family caregiver. Men, on the other hand, are viewed as the ‘breadwinner’ and head of the family. Social influences have an impact on many aspects of life and are difficult to control. They are also the most time-consuming and difficult reasons for reform (Ghittoni *et al.*, 2018). Cultural attitudes and stereotypes about gender roles persist and can be significant impediments to women’s professional advancement. According to social norms, women’s proper actions should be nurturing, loving, and cooperative. It has long been assumed that women who exhibit characteristics of violence or assertiveness in obtaining what is owed to them are less desirable (Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt, 2007). Furthermore, laws and services governing employment equality, civil rights, access to quality day care, and reproductive rights have a significant impact on women’s willingness to advance to senior positions (Hunt *et al.*, 2020).

Organisations and their internal culture, which includes workplace expectations, opinions, and values, have an impact on women's ability to advance in their careers. According to [Ghittoni et al. \(2018\)](#), organisational culture has a direct impact on the success of the company and its employees. Organisational culture can be defined in various ways and has various characteristics. Furthermore, culture can shift as a result of new trends, changes in the business world, or changes in leadership. Organisational structures impede women's entry and advancement in the workplace ([Ghiasipour et al., 2017](#)). The induction of social or systemic causes is accomplished through organisational and structural activities. Gender stereotyping, disproportionate recruitment and assignment, limited training opportunities, a lack of women-friendly policies, a lack of flexible work arrangements, the absence of women from decision-making bodies, and a lack of networking and mentoring opportunities are some of the organisational factors that inhibit women's anticipation of leadership roles ([Cross et al., 2019](#)).

The literature indicated that gender inequality in appointment, succession planning, promotion, and assessment prevents women from advancing to leadership positions ([Addi-Raccah and Ayalon, 2002](#)). [Oakly \(2000\)](#) identified business practises as a significant barrier to women's advancement in professions in her paper. It has been established that gender imbalances are caused in part by men favouritism in recruitment, retention, and promotion. Similarly, [Ganiyu et al. \(2018\)](#) identified corporate culture as a major reason for women's absence from management and leadership positions because it limits women's career advancement, particularly the lack of family-friendly policies at work, and forces them to prioritise their family life over paid work. It has been established that women must perform significantly better than men in order to be perceived as equally competent ([Kark and Eagly, 2010](#)). Long hours, late meetings, and last-minute demands, which are frequently demanded by leadership positions, can also conflict with the responsibilities that women face at home. Lack of family-friendly policies in the workplace is one of the factors influencing women's advancement in their professions, as they are more responsible for childcare and family responsibilities influenced women's leadership roles and children's academic performance ([Howe-Walsh and Turnbull, 2016](#); [Adongo et al., 2022](#)).

Individual obstacles are caused by women's psychosocial characteristics and interpersonal abilities. Poor self-image, lack of motivation and desire to take on the task of "moving up the ladder," lack of faith in one's ability to achieve in a higher role, lack of commitment and willingness to take risks, less assertiveness, less emotional stability, and lack of capacity to cope with a crisis are all personal factors that impede women in leadership ([Council, 2008](#), p. 12).

Work-life balance and job efficiency were also found to have positive correlations by the researchers ([Lyness and Judiesch, 2008](#)). This is because fulfilling life obligations, such as family and parental responsibilities, leads to better work results ([Lyness and Judiesch, 2008](#)). By incorporating flexible work structures, a company's culture can also make a significant contribution to work-life balance ([Shagvaliyeva and Yazdanifard, 2014](#)).

As a result of a lack of trust and career ambition, women are prevented from becoming senior citizens and managers. According to a management and leadership institute study, women managers' careers are hampered by lower goals and aspirations ([Katulwa, 2015](#)). Furthermore, when women exhibit leadership-related characteristics, they are frequently chastised because they are incongruous between the leading role and the women gender role ([Eagly and Karau, 2002](#)). Also, [Lahti \(2013\)](#) published a survey of women's occupations in which 128 women in high positions were interviewed, and the majority of women responded that their own ambition was the most important factor in their career. They responded that a lack of adequate support networks means that women are reliant and willing to advance their careers. The encouragement of their managers was the second most important factor. Other career advancements included the division of work at home with a partner, preparation, the

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right networks and ties, and women's attitudes (Lahti, 2013). To summarise, there is a large body of literature on the factors that prevent women from advancing to positions of leadership; however, the challenges that women face in educational leadership positions in patriarchal societies have received little attention. As a result, the study investigates the challenges that women face in educational leadership positions in patriarchal societies in Northern Ghana.

### **The management route model**

To achieve the study's objectives, the management route model developed by Van Eck *et al.* (1996) and sociological theories were used to better understanding the women leadership experience. This model is used as an analytical framework to understand and identify the challenges that women face in positions of leadership in patriarchal societies. This was due to the nature of gender inequality in women in patriarchal societies. This model is appropriate for identifying the challenges associated with management stages such as expectations, skill and training acquisition, and performance to educational management. The first phase, according to Van Eck *et al.* (1996), is the expectation phase, which prepares women for management. The emphasis in this phase is on the development of knowledge and skills required for a management position. Qualifications, training and workshops, as well as participation in informal networks, are viewed as playing a critical role in preparing women for management positions on a personal level. Opportunities to act in management and attend important meetings prepare women for the actual managerial function at the organisational level, but the argument is that men managers have distributed these opportunities to the benefit of other men (Moorosi, 2010).

The acquisition phase, which focuses on access and entry into management positions, is the second phase. This is the stage at which women are actively seeking positions in management. In this phase, candidates' job application skills and ambitions, as well as informal networks and sponsorship support, are critical. The acquisition phase is when policy is most active, but it is also when discrimination is most prevalent (Coleman, 2005; Blackmore *et al.*, 2006). The men normative model of school management, which stems from the fact that men hold the majority of leadership positions in education, harms women because their suitability and acceptability are likely to be evaluated based on men characteristics. Clarity of the selection criteria and procedure, backed up by national policy and regulations promoting women's chances of being appointed to management positions, thus plays a critical role in this phase. Training and sensitisation are also necessary for those who participate in the appointment process, such as school governing body members and some district officials (Moorosi, 2006).

The third phase is the performance phase, in which the management function is carried out. The emphasis in this phase is on the fact that the under-representation of women in management positions is a problem even for women who have achieved these positions. Van Eck *et al.* (1996) demonstrated that intrapersonal, organisational, and social factors influence women's experiences in the educational management route. This model aids in understanding how the complexities of factors influence women's status in educational management. According to Moorosi (2006), women teachers frequently face barriers to advancement due to the interaction of intrapersonal, organisational, and social factors. Gendered social norms constructed by society on the division of labour influence personal and organisational factors, as do men's and women's management qualities (Ely and Meyerson, 2000).

According to the model, these effects manifest across the three stages of the principals' career path and have a negative impact on women's participation in managerial positions. As a result, in order to understand and identify the challenges that women face in leadership positions in a patriarchal society, the study relied on this model. As a result, the study's

research question is: what are the challenges that women face in positions of educational leadership? What factors impede women's advancement to positions of leadership in patriarchal societies? What are some strategies for increasing women's representation in positions of power in patriarchal societies?

### **Sociological theoretical perspectives**

To gain a thorough understanding of the gender and leadership concept, three major sociological perspectives have been incorporated in the study to enhance the understanding of the phenomenon as distinct ways of explaining various aspects of society and human behaviour within the context: the interactionist perspective, the conflict perspective, and the functionalist perspective. Gender roles, according to functionalists, limit women's responsibilities in the workplace or organisational settings (Turner, 2012). These roles are considered functional because women are constrained by pregnancy, nursing, housework, and being unable to leave the house for extended periods of time. They were an effective means of keeping the family system running smoothly (Turner, 2012; Ormerod, 2020). However, these gender roles have had an impact on women in positions of leadership (Ormerod, 2020). As evidenced by gender and gender roles, as well as the social construction of positions among men and women, functionalist perspectives consider the entire society, allowing for purpose in society. Gender and leadership roles are seen as necessary for promoting stability, as evidenced by the traditional roles of only men working and women staying at home to care for children, as a way to ensure that both the workforce and carer roles are fulfilled in order for society to function properly (Lindsey, 2020). The most common criticism is that its assumption of systemic equilibrium is flawed, because structural functionalism ignores the processes of social change that occur within a social system and fails to take gender equity, societal exploitation and inequality into account (Bartos and Wehr, 2002).

The conflict theory is another sociological theory that demonstrates the influence of gender and leadership positions. According to this theory, society is a struggle for dominance between social groups such as men and women. Conflict theory holds that social problems arise when dominant groups exploit subordinate groups. It is difficult for women to rise above men in patriarchal societies because dominant group members established the rules for success and opportunity (Bartos and Wehr, 2002). Conflict can be beneficial or detrimental because it allows individuals and groups to form meaningful relationships. The manner in which the conflict is resolved, on the other hand, determines whether it is productive or destructive (Turner, 2012; Smiley, 2018). The main criticism levelled at conflict theory is that it fails to recognise how various social institutions such as the family, education, politics, religion, and so on serve important functions in society and can work together to achieve balance (Smiley, 2018).

Symbolic interaction theory also improves understanding of human behaviour and how meanings are associated with social position in society. This is unquestionably relevant to the discussion of gender and leadership positions in educational settings. Gender is socially constructed in patriarchal societies, and this social construction of sexuality created definitions about the cultural appropriateness of leadership positions with reference to norms that influence work or leadership experiences (Turner, 2012). Nonetheless, it falls short of addressing macro-level issues such as social structure and gender. Similarly, it focuses on interactions at the micro level, the interactionist approach overlooks the importance of power structures, positions and larger social structures.

### **Methods**

#### *Research design and study setting*

The study employed a quantitative approach, employing a social survey research design. Researchers can collect a large amount of data in a relatively short period of time thanks to

the design of social surveys. Surveys are less expensive than many other data collection methods. It also enabled the researchers to gather information on a wide range of topics, including personal facts, attitudes, past behaviours, and opinions about the phenomenon (Creswell, 2018). This design offers a high level of general capability in representing a large population, as well as low costs, easy data collection, statistical significance, little subjectivity, and precise results (Muijs, 2010). As a result, the design is widely used in the evaluation of educational phenomena, its implementation is applicable to this phenomenon. This design, however, has been criticised for allowing respondents to provide dishonest answers and leave unanswered questions, differences in understanding and interpretation, difficulty communicating feelings and emotions, some questions being difficult to analyse, and respondents possibly having a hidden agenda (Kothari, 2004). Despite this, it allows the researchers to investigate the challenges that women face in educational leadership in a population, and it is especially useful in educating and developing gender-sensitive policies.

The research was carried out in four senior high schools in the Kasena-Nankani Municipality in Ghana's Upper East Region. The Municipality has five senior high schools, which were chosen using a probability sampling technique. Probability was chosen to ensure that each of the municipality's five senior high schools has an equal chance of being chosen and that the results accurately reflect the entire population in the area. The four schools for the survey were chosen using simple random sampling techniques. The region was chosen because it is one of the patriarchal societies in which men wield primary power and predominate in positions of leadership, moral authority, and social privilege over women, and it would be an ideal location to study the phenomenon (Akweongo *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, few research on women's experience on educational leadership positions in the Region has been conducted.

#### *Study population*

The study population consisted of all women teachers in the study area who had previously held a leadership position. Women educators who were teaching or retiring at the time data for the study were collected are also included in the population of interest. As a result, the population studied was made up entirely of women teachers or headmistresses. Women employed by the Ghana Education Service (GES) in capacities ranging from teaching to administration were excluded from this study (for example, typists, secretaries, etc.). The exclusion of women's working in various capacities in the GES was motivated by the fact that they would be unable to provide the necessary information for the study. It was methodologically unsound to include them because they were not teachers and might not understand the difficulties that women teachers faced in the leadership positions in the study area. As a result, individual female teachers in leadership positions or who previously held leadership positions in the municipality served as the study's analysis unit.

#### *Sampling strategy and sampling size*

The study used probability sampling techniques because the total number of teachers in the four senior high schools varies greatly across the district, and the stratified sampling technique was deemed appropriate for the study. Using this sampling technique ensures that sub-regional comparisons have equal statistical power. Proportional allocation sampling was used to select a representative sample for each school. That is, sample size was determined by the number of teachers in each school. Each school was classified as a stratum. From a total of 362 teachers and other educators in the area, a sample of 250 was chosen. As a result, the sample of 250 students will be distributed as follows: Navrongo Senior High School =  $74/362 \times 250 = 52$ , St John's Integrated Senior High Technical School =  $53/362 \times 250 = 37$ , Awe Senior High School =  $57/362 \times 250 = 40$ , and Our Lady Lourdes Senior High School =  $66/362 \times 250 = 46$ .

The teachers for the survey were chosen using a simple random sampling technique after the proportional allocation. The numbers assigned to each school's teachers were written on strips of paper and placed in two separate opaque jars. The proportionally allocated sample sizes for each school were drawn from the jars without replacement. The survey was carried out with the teachers who represented the selected numbers. Each school was presumed to have at least one eligible employee. The inclusion and exclusion criteria used to identify the study population being consistent, dependable, uniform, and objective. The exclusion criteria include characteristics that preclude the recruited population from participating in the study. Only women who have held a position in the school in the past or present were included in the study. Men and women who had never held a position of educational leadership were excluded from the study.

#### *Data collection instruments and management*

According to [Creswell \(2014\)](#), survey questionnaire designs are built around gaps in the literature and the research question that the study hopes to answer. The survey was designed based on the information that needed to be gathered, the scope and purpose of the study, the target population, and the identified gap ([Creswell, 2014](#)). The survey was chosen based on the nature of the study's objectives. The survey questionnaire is useful in describing the characteristics of the study's large population. No other study design provides this level of flexibility, resulting in a more accurate sample from which to draw conclusions and make important decisions ([Van Selm and Jankowski, 2006](#)).

According to [Creswell \(2014\)](#), a survey questionnaire is standardised, reliable and valid, and easy to analyse; however, accessibility issues, a lack of personalisation, and a hidden agenda are some of the questionnaire's disadvantages. Another major issue with survey questionnaires was the format of the questions. As a result, the questions were limited to response options, such as 1 = Strongly disagree/Not at all prioritised, 2 = Disagree/Not prioritised, 3 = Not sure, 4 = Agree/Some degree, 5 = Strongly agreed/Highly prioritised on Likert scale; the respondents were given numbers but no explanation for why those numbers were given ([Creswell, 2018](#)). This was identified as a problem with the survey questionnaire's use of the Likert scale in the study. Despite this, it was deemed the most appropriate tool for data collection.

After the construction, the survey questionnaire was reviewed by experts and piloted to improve the quality of the data. Also, to ensure validity and reliability in the data collection, it was ensured that the instrument used for the study contained the constructs and contents reflecting the theoretical underpinnings of educational leadership. The researchers ensured strict confidentiality to facilitate maximum reliability and validity of the data. The researchers also made sure there was internal consistency. In terms of external validity, results were compared with those existing in the body of literature to ascertain the degree of variability or agreement to the findings of this study ([Kothari, 2004](#)).

The researchers then went to the selected institutions and distributed the survey questionnaires to the respondents after obtaining permission and consent forms from the institutions and the individual. The survey questionnaires were self-administered and administered by the interviewer but there was some clarification given to the respondents when necessary or appropriate.

Data management, data cleaning was conducted every day after field visits and the data were entered by the researchers into the Statistical Kit for Social Sciences (SPSS) programme. After all the quantitative data have been entered, the frequency has been checked to ensure that the total number of questions on the returned questionnaires have been entered correctly ([Creswell, 2018](#)).

### *Data analysis*

The data was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 20). Microsoft Excel was also used to modify the SPSS-generated tables and figures. The SPSS was primarily used due to its dependability in terms of accuracy, precision, and clarity. On the basis of the data, descriptive data analysis of frequencies and percentages was performed. For visualising the numbers and proportions in the analysis, statistical methods are useful. The, standard deviation, means, and  $p$ -value were used to make inferences and generalisations. Inferential statistics were helpful in reaching conclusions that went beyond the immediate results. We used inferential statistics to make assumptions about the likelihood that an observed difference between groups is valid or could have occurred by chance in this study. Furthermore, inferential statistics allow researchers to make educated guesses about the numerical characteristics of these large groups. The sampling rationale allows the researchers to test assumptions about these groups with only a small portion of the participants (Creswell, 2014, 2018; Kothari, 2004).

### *Ethical consideration*

Throughout this review, the works of others were properly acknowledged by proper citation. Furthermore, all procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the institutional and/or national research committee's ethical standards, as well as comparable ethical standards. The study was approved by the University's ethics committee. The selected schools' headmasters and headmistresses also gave their approval. The data from the chosen study was strictly confidential and only to be used for academic purposes. Furthermore, the investigators determined that protecting the identity of study participants was critical. To that end, respondents' anonymity was ensured. The names of the respondents were not included in the responses they received during data collection.

## **Results**

### *Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents*

The study found that most women were young in the selected schools in relation to socio-demographic resources. So, every school had more young teachers. The least prevalence was in respondents aged 51 years and over. The study found 137 graduates (56% of the sample) in total and 121 (88%) were educated out of these graduates. Only 11.6% of the first-graduate total number were eligible. It must also be noted that 73 Master's and five diploma holders were also present. Field data shows that the married women instructor is more than the single one or the divorced one. Around 46% of them were married and 44.7% of individual teachers were closely followed. Within and out of marriage (divorced or widowed) there were only about 10% of the respondents. The style of years of education has shown itself to have been decreased by 12–15 years (35%), followed by people who have been teaching for eight to 11 years (25%). Nearly 20% of them taught between the ages of one and three and 23 (9.3%) taught within 15 years 111 (45%) of the respondents had previously been housewives. The leadership positions ever held included headmistress, department heads, domestic mistresses, academic headmistress, assistant headmistress, senior house mistress, girls' coordination and the head of the counselling unit.

### *Factors contributing to women's underrepresentation in educational leadership positions*

The study discovered a number of factors that influence women's proclivity to move up or down the educational leadership ladder. The mean score, standard deviation, and  $p$ -value are used to describe the variables. To begin with, the majority of respondents acknowledged that women have many responsibilities at home and are unable to balance work and family

obligations. It prevents them from holding a variety of positions, including positions of leadership. This element was given a mean score of  $X = 4.67$  and a  $p$ -value of 0.005. The data also show that the responses of the study participants were reliable, as the factor had a standard deviation of less than one. The findings also established that cultural beliefs deter women from leading men in various capacities. Cultural values and behaviours in society have been found to influence women's advancement to positions of leadership in education. This was a critical factor for the respondents because it had a mean score of  $X = 4.55$ , a  $p$ -value of 0.006, and a standard deviation of less than ten. Similarly, family responsibilities have an impact on women's leadership positions, with a mean of 4.40 and a  $p$ -value of 0.006. Gender stereotyping was also discovered to influence women in positions of leadership, according to the findings. Such stereotypes are typical of the people culture with a mean value of  $X = 4.26$  and a  $p$ -value of 0.007. The respondents accepted, predictably, that such "negative marks" discourage women from rising to the top. This suggests that derogatory remarks have been found to influence women's advancement to positions of leadership in education. According to the majority of respondents, these remarks go a long way to negatively influence their professional responsibilities and confidence. As a result, it has an effect on their zeal and desire to assume other leadership positions.

Many respondents strongly agreed that educational institutions provide women with the same opportunities for leadership positions as men. Furthermore, in patriarchal societies, a lack of equal opportunity for both men and women influence women's leadership positions with a mean of 4.22 and a  $p$ -value of 0.107. According to the respondents, education qualification was the most important factor in educational leadership positions with a mean of 4.09, and  $p$ -value of 0.009; however, many women had the educational qualifications but were not considered due to cultural norms and perceptions of women in the society. Furthermore, the findings established that women cannot function effectively in a leadership role while caring for their families with a mean score of 3.64, and  $p$ -value of 0.008.

Furthermore, motherhood and marital status had an impact on their ability to advance to positions of leadership in education, with a mean of 3.47 and a  $p$ -value of 0.008. Furthermore, the findings revealed that women's marital status influences their acceptance of leadership positions. It has a 3.12 mean score and a  $p$ -value of 0.007. The respondents also agreed that there is gender inequality in leadership appointments. The statement has a mean scored of 2.85 with  $p$ -value of 0.05. With a mean score of 2.73 and a  $p$ -value of 0.009, the majority of respondents agreed that making flexible work arrangements at home where men could help at home aids in managing leadership roles and work. However, the respondents were unsure whether there were few opportunities for preparing women to have the passion and desire to rise to the top of educational leadership. However, there were several points where respondents disagreed. For example, they did not support the claim that many women in the education sector have low self-esteem, lack leadership ambition, and are underrepresented in decision-making because these values have an average mean of 2.26 and a  $p$ -value of 0.109 (see [Table 1](#)).

#### *Measures to increase the number of women in educational leadership positions*

The study also proposed some strategies for increasing the number of women in educational leadership positions. Some of the strategies were strongly supported by respondents, while others were strongly opposed. The study discovered that the modernisation of cultural beliefs and practises was the most important factor to consider in increasing the number of women in educational leadership. It had an  $X = 1.54$  mean score, a  $p$ -value of 0.002, and a standard deviation of less than one. That is, their responses were unanimous in their belief that changing cultural beliefs and perceptions of women in leadership positions would result in a

**Table 1.** Factors that influence women's advancement to educational leadership positions

| Statement   | SD | D   | U   | A   | SA  | Mean | Std Dev. | <i>p</i> -value |
|---|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|----------|-----------------|
| Work and family issues                            | 11 | 21  | 11  | 138 | 65  | 4.67 | 0.58     | 0.005           |
| Cultural beliefs and perceptions about women      | 12 | 5   | 9   | 123 | 97  | 4.55 | 0.63     | 0.006           |
| Family responsibilities affect women's leadership | 3  | 5   | 3   | 134 | 100 | 4.40 | 0.60     | 0.006           |
| Gender stereotyping                               | 14 | 23  | 20  | 106 | 83  | 4.26 | 0.78     | 0.007           |
| Equal opportunity for both men and women          | 69 | 136 | 17  | 11  | 13  | 4.22 | 1.28     | 0.107           |
| Educational qualification for positions           | 11 | 9   | 19  | 129 | 78  | 4.09 | 1.32     | 0.009           |
| Balance of family and leadership roles            | 17 | 12  | 42  | 71  | 104 | 3.64 | 1.72     | 0.008           |
| Motherhood affects women's leadership             | 20 | 15  | 33  | 157 | 21  | 3.47 | 1.29     | 0.008           |
| Lack of training programmes for women             | 39 | 6   | 122 | 57  | 22  | 3.42 | 1.42     | 0.104           |
| Marital status affects women's leadership         | 12 | 21  | 27  | 35  | 151 | 3.12 | 1.67     | 0.007           |
| Poor self-image of women                          | 58 | 114 | 20  | 33  | 21  | 2.89 | 1.45     | 0.100           |
| Gender inequality in appointment for positions    | 11 | 21  | 11  | 129 | 74  | 2.85 | 1.60     | 0.050           |
| No flexible work arrangements for women           | 18 | 4   | 17  | 131 | 76  | 2.73 | 1.42     | 0.009           |
| Lack of leadership ambition to for women          | 35 | 198 | 1   | 7   | 5   | 2.61 | 1.47     | 0.106           |
| Lack of self-confidence                           | 72 | 155 | 13  | 3   | 3   | 2.23 | 1.42     | 0.107           |
| Poor organisational culture                       | 71 | 140 | 22  | 8   | 5   | 2.30 | 1.53     | 0.108           |
| Low involving of women in decision-making         | 82 | 136 | 12  | 10  | 6   | 2.26 | 1.55     | 0.109           |

high representation of women in positions of power. It is accompanied by a need for social network supports for women.

The majority believed that social networks played critical roles in increasing the number of women in leadership. For the media, social movement support groups, and other individuals who are interested. The element has a mean score of  $\bar{X} = 1.65$  and a *p*-value of 0.008. This also had a standard deviation of less than one, indicating that the respondents' opinions were highly consistent. Support from family and colleges was similar to social network support. Another strongly agreed-upon statement was gender equity for both men and women in positions of leadership. With an  $\bar{X} = 1.37$  mean score and a *p*-value of 0.003. The respondents agreed that gender equity will result in equal opportunities for deserving qualified individuals. Equal appointment opportunity for all was another close link to gender equity. It has a mean average score of 1.40 and a *p*-value of 0.004.

Furthermore, the majority of respondents agreed that changing traditional cultural values would enable women to take on leadership roles in patriarchal societies. The statement has a mean value of 1.38 and a *p*-value of 0.005, indicating that there has been a significant change in cultural values and perception. Furthermore, the majority of female teachers were unsure of the involvement of women in educational decision-making would in any way influence their representation. Society has an impact on the drive to include more women in leadership positions. Some respondents also claimed that culture has been patriarchal towards women and that, in order to increase the number of women in educational leadership, there would need to be a shift in the work culture in educational institutions in the communities that discriminates against women. Women's participation in educational institution appointment and promotion, shifting societal values and perceptions towards women, promoting women's networks and campaigns, promoting family members support at the home, supporting women in the educational leadership positions, and combating stereo-types of behaviour were all deemed extremely important.

Affirmative action such as encouraging people to recognise women leaders in education, women's leadership training, outreach efforts and other positive steps are all very important to women teachers with a mean score of 1.82 and a *p*-value of 0.008. All of these items had

mean scores ranging from one to two, but their consistency was poor. Respondents were divided on whether gender positions would aid in increasing the number of women in educational leadership. Some respondents strongly disagreed with some of the proposed strategies for increasing women in positions of leadership in patriarchal societies. Gender roles play an important role in society, monitory self-confidence, hard work and sacrifice, and access course for women were disagreed with the respondents as measures in increasing women representation (see [Table 2](#)).

### Discussion

The current study examines the experiences and challenges that women face in positions of leadership in patriarchal societies in Ghana. The study discovered several challenges that women face in positions of leadership in patriarchal societies. These difficulties manifested from various angles, making the situation more complicated. The cultural and social norms of their roles posed a barrier to coping with their positions. It has been discovered that cultural values and behaviours influence women in positions of leadership in patriarchal society. Gender stereotypes have also been discovered to be formidable barriers that prevent women from achieving top positions, as women principals in leadership positions have discovered. These difficulties have rendered their positions unsuitable for women. The findings are consistent with those of [Moorosi \(2010\)](#), who discovered that cultural and social norms influence women's willingness to take the initiative to participate in principalship because they believe they will fall short of society's expectations of their role. A similar finding by [McKinsey and Company \(2020\)](#) consistently noted that women have pursued a variety of practises to try to manage home-work dual responsibilities. Many companies perceived

| Statement  | SD  | D   | U  | A   | SA  | Mean | Std. Dev | p-value |
|--|-----|-----|----|-----|-----|------|----------|---------|
| Gender roles are imperative                          | 28  | 40  | 24 | 19  | 14  | 1.06 | 1.05     | 0.075   |
| Role models  | 35  | 22  | 24 | 15  | 13  | 1.36 | 1.00     | 0.066   |
| Gender equity  | 10  | 28  | 41 | 134 | 33  | 1.37 | 1.21     | 0.003   |
| Mentoring of work place                              | 22  | 20  | 21 | 10  | 14  | 1.00 | 1.20     | 0.060   |
| Flexible work arrangements                           | 26  | 23  | 28 | 130 | 39  | 1.32 | 1.32     | 0.050   |
| Change of traditional culture                        | 25  | 32  | 33 | 132 | 128 | 1.38 | 1.23     | 0.005   |
| Access courses for women                             | 31  | 124 | 29 | 31  | 21  | 1.04 | 1.11     | 0.070   |
| Competing for opportunities                          | 25  | 45  | 19 | 22  | 15  | 1.35 | 1.28     | 0.100   |
| Leadership training for women                        | 11  | 12  | 22 | 20  | 12  | 1.45 | 1.42     | 0.050   |
| Acceptance of women leaders                          | 26  | 10  | 28 | 134 | 48  | 1.75 | 1.02     | 0.005   |
| Affirmative actions                                  | 19  | 20  | 36 | 128 | 43  | 1.72 | 1.33     | 0.008   |
| Counteracting stereotypes                            | 24  | 13  | 35 | 128 | 46  | 1.61 | 0.48     | 0.050   |
| Positive self-image of women                         | 12  | 30  | 31 | 11  | 12  | 1.30 | 0.32     | 0.080   |
| Family members support                               | 29  | 37  | 13 | 125 | 42  | 1.69 | 0.68     | 0.006   |
| Social networks support                              | 21  | 18  | 43 | 371 | 129 | 1.65 | 0.57     | 0.008   |
| Modernisation of cultural beliefs and perceptions    | 16  | 11  | 39 | 130 | 50  | 1.54 | 0.87     | 0.002   |
| Equal appointment opportunity                        | 38  | 15  | 12 | 138 | 43  | 1.40 | 0.49     | 0.004   |
| Change in organisational culture                     | 140 | 44  | 23 | 17  | 11  | 1.36 | 0.66     | 0.070   |
| Inclusive-decision-making                            | 11  | 20  | 21 | 13  | 10  | 1.35 | 0.48     | 0.060   |
| Support and encouragement from colleagues and family | 18  | 10  | 36 | 152 | 31  | 1.31 | 0.48     | 0.050   |
| Women self-confidence                                | 15  | 13  | 21 | 10  | 12  | 1.35 | 0.54     | 0.080   |
| Hard work and sacrifice                              | 22  | 31  | 25 | 19  | 10  | 1.30 | 0.46     | 0.070   |

**Table 2.**  
Proposed strategies for increasing the number of women in leadership positions

women managers with children to be less dedicated than those without children; thus, they believed that their careers were impacted by those attitudes.

The study also found that intrapersonal factors influence women in positions of leadership in patriarchal societies. The interplay of society expectations and their ability to perform dampens their desire to take on managerial positions. [Shakeshaft \(1989\)](#) observed that women perpetuated their own glass ceiling by failing to believe in themselves and their ability to succeed in leadership roles, resulting in a self-barrier to leadership roles. The findings also revealed that these forces affect family, friends, culture, and women who want to advance in their careers. These findings are consistent with previous research that one of the major challenges that women who want to step up face is those imposed on them by culture, family, and women themselves ([Crampton and Mishra, 1999](#)). Some academics refer to some of these flaws as theories, preconceived notions, or unsupported assumptions. According to the study, women in leadership positions face numerous challenges in terms of expectation, acquiring skills and training, and performance at work due to their anticipated roles at the family and societal levels. This was identified as a barrier to women excelling in leadership positions because they were unable to balance work, family, and social expectations. [Cliffe et al. \(2018\)](#) discovered differences in men's and women's reported experiences and propose policy and cultural changes to enable inclusive and long-term planning. Similarly, [Judith \(2010\)](#) identified individual barriers to women's career advancement as a result of their various roles in career management and home and family management. According to her, women must work long hours due to stressful work and must sacrifice personal relationships and the ability to have children if they want to rise to the top of their profession. She concluded that the greatest barrier to women's advancement to leadership positions is work-family harmony ([Judith, 2010](#)). According to [Lyness and Judiesch \(2008\)](#), there is a strong link between work life balance and work performance, as fulfilling life commitments such as family and parental roles contribute to better work performance. They claimed that by establishing flexible work arrangements, the company's culture will significantly contribute to work-life balance ([Shagvaliyeva and Yazdanifard, 2014](#)). The current study, which depicts the patriarchal society in Ghana, paints a similar picture. More than half of the respondents in this study agreed that women find it difficult to advance to the top because they cannot balance work and family life.

However, the study discovered results that contradicted previous studies in terms of low self-image and loss of self-confidence ([Onsongo, 2004](#); [Council, 2008](#)). Previous research has found that individual barriers influence women's psychosocial characteristics and behavioural skills. Personal factors include a poor self-image, a lack of motivation and a desire to "move up the ladder," a lack of faith in one's ability to succeed in a higher position, a lack of dedication and an inability to take risks, a lack of assertiveness, a lack of emotional resilience, and a lack of capacity to deal with a crisis ([Onsongo, 2004](#); [Council, 2008](#)). Nonetheless, the current study found that women teachers who participated in the study denied having a low self-image in the field of education. Any of the respondents either strongly disagreed or disagreed with women's low self-esteem in the education sector.

Similarly, the current study contradicts previous research findings that women in the education sector lack self-confidence and motivation to take on leadership roles. Previous research has concluded that a lack of confidence and career ambition discourages women from pursuing senior and executive positions. According to an Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) study, lower aspirations and expectations are impeding women managers' careers ([Katulwa, 2015](#)). Furthermore, when women exhibit leadership characteristics (confidence, self-reliance, dominance, and self-promotion), they are chastised for the inconsistency between perceptions of the leadership role and the gender role of women ([Eagly and Karau, 2002](#); [Fuller, 2013](#)). On the contrary, the current study found that the majority of respondents either strongly disagreed or disagreed that women lack self-confidence in the field of education.

The findings also revealed that challenges such as limited training programmes for women in educational institutions, marital status affecting women's rise to educational leadership position, unfair appointment of women in leadership position, expectations from society, negative attitudes towards women in education demoralised women's ambition to take up leadership positions, and practises in educational institutions preventing women from moving to top leadership positions were identified as challenges women experienced. The findings support the [Van Eck \*et al.\* \(1996\)](#) management route model of anticipation and demands from family and society at large as well as lack of institutional and social support also leaves women at a loss in a field, they are unfamiliar with. They are also expected to balance their work and family lives and the negative traditional and cultural norms about women. Women are less likely to accept women leadership positions due to some cultural factors.

The study's findings validate conflict theory perspectives on social structures (gender and social status in society) that create social classes and groups of people with different patriarchal interests, which further determine which social positions one is expected to occupy in regard to gender, whether men or women. The findings, however, contradict the functionalist theory because gender and leadership positions experienced by women generate social division, patriarchal interest, classes, hierarchies, fear of assuming leadership, and the interplay of cultural and positions that generate and perpetuate inequalities in leadership positions among women rather than serving a purpose in society. The findings also contradict the interactionist approach, which ignores the significance of power structures and positions in larger social structures.

Despite the fact that policies that supported race, culture, and ethnic discrimination against women ran parallel with traditional gender stereotypes ([Moorosi, 2007](#)). Women remained in subordinate positions as teachers in schools, while these policies encouraged men to seek positions of leadership ([Kiamba, 2007](#)). This means that, even if policymakers and/or society as a whole are attempting to assist women educators, they must work hard and make sacrifices in order to achieve success. Affirmative action was another factor that respondent's thought was extremely important. They believed that asserting such things as reserving certain positions for women teachers or prohibiting men from competing for certain positions with women would go a long way toward encouraging and improving women's representation in educational leadership. This finding, in particular, corroborates earlier educational research findings. According to [Luthar \(1996\)](#), affirmative action assists organisations in allowing minorities and women to occupy certain positions while also assisting them in being considered for government scholarships. Luthar's term refers to policies that assist people who are not socially or politically dominant in gaining access to education and employment. Other affirmative action supporters, [Eagly and Carli \(2003\)](#), see the term as a way to address discrimination or encourage the representation of a marginalised group. Mentoring and role models have also been identified as less important in ensuring that more women hold positions of leadership in the field of education as most of the respondents acquired higher degrees. Despite this, respondents believed that older women leaders and their experiences should make conscious efforts to encourage the young and allow them to learn from them and look up to them as role models in order to serve as a motivator for accepting leadership positions. That reflects an earlier study's stance, as indicated by [Ehrich \*et al.\* \(2004\)](#), that mentoring relationships allow both individuals to develop psychologically or professionally. According to [Hill and Ragland \(1985\)](#), mentoring is critical for women's leadership development and increases their chances of advancement in an employment.

Previous research concluded that incorporating courses or programmes for women only into the educational curriculum would help improve and encourage women in

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leadership education. As a result of this, the need for more women in leadership positions has resulted in the need for women in senior and secondary positions to take courses (Ruijs, 1993). Also, organising women-gender training for women who want to advance in their careers or themselves to enhance their career opportunities. This has the potential to empower and encourage women to believe in their ability to advance. Also, when women are allowed to be members of only women's groups that provide development support and motivation. Indeed, this provides women with relief from all men-dominated environments or from the isolation of normal working conditions (Chigbu, 2019). However, the current study's findings did not support or contradict the preceding findings. The majority of respondents in the current Ghanaian study were unsure whether the introduction of access courses for women would help increase or encourage more women to advance in the field of education.

#### *The study implications*

The findings have a number of implications and these require attention. The difficulties women encountered in positions of leadership took different forms. Management of education should implement policies to eradicate these sociocultural factors influence women leadership positions particularly in patriarchal societies. Also, stakeholders should be involved in order to understand managerial skills, expectations of leadership practises, attitudes and the challenges that underpin them. Again, for women to be able to hold leadership positions, social barriers in the form of broader cultural expectations regarding gender role stereotypes, political, traditional, and historical influences must be addressed because they are so deeply ingrained in institutional cultures and society. This could also be addressed through further studies to understand new issues arising from societal norms and traditional values to tailor social interventions towards them.

Furthermore, men and women conform to traditional behavioural patterns in different ways, which for instance, women's centrality to childrearing and family is not significantly challenged in practise and is a part of women's identity, values, and needs, regardless of the role women currently play in the field of management, should be addressed. Women's leadership styles play an important role in educational management settings. Men are perceived as better leaders in society than women, which has an impact on women accepting leadership and doing their best. Women have the ability to implement change as well as lead their subordinates in education to achieve the goals and objectives that have been established. Gender disparities in patriarchal societies have a negative impact on women's leadership. The underrepresentation of women in educational leadership is due to stereotypical attachments that women cannot produce effective leaders, not low confidence or inability of women to lead. To achieve gender equality in leadership, people must change their overall perception of women, particularly in patriarchal societies, and treat both genders equally.

Another important finding from this study is that social stereotypes portray men as more capable than women in educational leadership. Stereotypes are misleading because both men and women demonstrate effective leadership traits when provided with the necessary infrastructure and resources. This was found to be common among women in patriarchal societies, and it has demonstrated that women have fewer opportunities to assume coveted leadership positions than men. More importantly, socially constructed social gender roles contribute to the gender gap in educational management between men and women and should be addressed to enable women to accept more responsible roles in educational management.

## Conclusion

The study explored the challenges women experience in the position of leadership in patriarchal societies in Northern Ghana. The findings have demonstrated that women experienced several challenges within the family level and the society at large. The difficulties to reconcile work and family, the impact of cultural values and attitudes, family obligations and gender stereotyping were identified as challenges they encountered. The study found that traditional cultural value systems and gender-unfavourable structural arrangements in schools frequently undermine women's leadership positions. The participants draw attention to the gendered environments in which they operate. Women continue to struggle against genderist cultural attitudes in their communities and educational settings rather than focusing their emotional and intellectual energies on the actual management job. When social norms and beliefs appear to be influencing what happens in the school context, perpetuating a continued men dominance in management of a field dominated by women, the interaction between the social and organisational levels becomes obvious and this negatively impacts their leadership role. This suggests that in the larger contexts in which schools operate, education is necessary to change the attitudes and mindsets of community members.

The findings also demonstrated that practices in educational institutions that prevent women from advancing to top leadership positions should be discontinued and that changes in family traditional structure and cultural beliefs and attitudes toward women, leadership training for women, educating people to accept women leaders in the education sector, women in the education sector should have a positive self-image of themselves and support from family members for the home need to be addressed in patriarchal societies.

The findings also established that the interplay between social, cultural, family and opposing forces at the workplace and school levels becomes obvious, where social norms and beliefs appear to be informing what happens in the school context, helping to perpetuate the regeneration of sustained men domination in the management positions and scaring women away from assuming leadership positions. According to the study's findings, women in patriarchal societies in Northern Ghana are less likely to accept leadership positions because of traditional gender roles that conflict with roles, cultural values, gender stereotyping, family responsibilities and women's cultural vulnerability. Women's leadership in schools in patriarchal societies will continue to decline unless these barriers are overcome.

According to the findings, the Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service have policies in place to encourage equal representation in leadership. These policy efforts alone are insufficient to eradicate deeply embedded cultural social practices that promote women's leadership positions in school governance in patriarchal societies.

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### Further reading

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