CRACKING THE GLASS CEILING: UNVEILING THE RESILIENCE AND PERSISTENCE OF WOMEN LEADERS IN SENIOR LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE NAMIBIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

There is a growing body of study and interest worldwide concerning the experiences of women in senior leadership roles in higher education institutions (HEIs). Hence, this study examined persistence of women leaders in senior leadership positions in the HEIs in Namibia. To gather the lived experiences and narratives of female leaders taking senior leadership positions the study combined qualitative methods with a critical paradigm-supported phenomenological case study design. Thematic analysis was used to semi-structured interview data, emphasising recurrent themes, patterns, and important topics. The study's findings were theoretically interpreted using feminist and role modelling motivation theories. Findings reveal that women leaders' leadership experiences have been influenced by their attendance at conferences, seminars, and workshops. They made a positive difference in the lives of their colleagues and fostered a positive work environment. They have also inspired other women to aspire to leadership roles. By shedding light on these experiences, the study enriches understanding of gender dynamics in academic leadership, providing valuable insights for institutions striving towards gender equity and inclusive leadership. It sheds light on the strategies that contribute to their sustained success in senior roles. Future researchers should consider collecting data from aspiring women leaders so that there would be informed comparisons of their experiences. In addition to investigating the experiences of male leaders in senior leadership roles and establishing their perspectives of women leaders in senior leadership positions, future researchers should examine the impact of mentoring on career advancement and retention of women in senior leadership positions.

Keywords: Glass ceiling; persistence of women leaders; Namibian higher education; motivational theory of role modelling; feminist theory

Introduction

The experience of women in senior leadership positions in higher education institutions (HEIs) has been a subject of increasing interest and research globally. Studies have highlighted various challenges and opportunities encountered by women in these roles, shedding light on the gender disparities and the need for greater gender equality in academic leadership. Motivated by the dearth of literature on how women leaders thrive amid the challenges experienced in HEIs, this study examined persistence of women leaders in senior leadership positions in the HEIs in Namibia. It sought to contribute to existing literature on women's experiences in senior leadership positions in (HEIs) and provide empirical evidence on motivators for women leadership, positive and negative experiences, and measures to promote women leadership. The traditional expectations placed on women to take care of their families, raise children, and maintain the home limited them in the past. Unlike their male

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counterparts, their positions were homebound and their ability to participate actively in the social and economic arenas was restricted (Mwetulundila, 2019).

However, the nation's independence freed women and allowed them to pursue and obtain senior positions in the public and private sectors, including higher education. Furthermore, a significant factor in women joining the workforce has been the growth of feminist movements and activists who support women's engagement in activities outside the house and the labour force (Moyo, 2022). Nevertheless, women's entry into the work force was marked by several hurdles, difficulties, and roadblocks that some had to face while others chose to resign from positions of leadership (Zulu, 2016).

Following the country's democratic transition, the Namibian government worked hard to eliminate laws and policies that discriminate against women in top positions, removing obstacles and difficulties they face. Soon after independence, the government created the Department of Women's Affairs (DWA), which served as a focal point under the president's office to coordinate and address gender-related issues in the nation, with the goal of ensuring equality for men and women in the workplace (Republic of Namibia, 1995). The nation ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1992 through the DWA, which urged member states to take swift action to stop gender-based discrimination (Ruppel, 2008). The forum helped the government address gender inequality that was established in pre-colonial times and persisted in colonial and post-colonial periods until it closed in the middle of the 1990s (Republic of Namibia, 1995).

The Ministry of Women Affairs and Child Welfare (MWACW) was established in 1999, marking a significant advancement. The MWACW's primary responsibilities have been to coordinate and offer services to the public regarding issues related to development, children, and gender. Its goals are to protect children's welfare, women's and men's socioeconomic development, and gender equality. A more comprehensive Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare replaced the MWACW later. The National Gender Policy was subsequently established by the government, which was a significant step towards achieving gender equality in the nation. In terms of participation in all developmental programmes and nation-building efforts, the policy offered a framework to direct the implementation of initiatives meant to fulfil Namibians' expectations, particularly those of women, to achieve fundamental freedom and be treated equally to their male counterparts (Shikongo & Amukugo, 2021).

The creation of the EEC was one of the government's actions. Under the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, the EEC assumed responsibility for the Affirmative Action Act of 1998. The purpose of this legislation was to promote fair employment practices regarding the hiring, selection, appointment, promotion, and fair compensation of individuals who were previously disadvantaged. Women and members of the so-called designated category of people with disabilities were previously considered to be disadvantaged people. Though not particularly promising top posts, the commission made it simpler for many women to enter the labour field in a variety of roles and industries that had previously been controlled by men. The previous socioeconomic, political, and cultural disparities that existed in pre- and post-colonial Namibia were also intended to be filled by the Affirmative Action Act.

The challenges still exist, nonetheless, despite all the government's efforts to alleviate the problems and obstacles faced by women in high-level roles at HEIs. According to the LAC (2016), there are several reasons why women in senior positions have difficulties. For example, women are naturally responsible for caring for their families, bearing children, and nursing them. These biological disparities can lead to significant cultural inequality and support the idea that women should take care of the home even if they are employed. Through various social institutions as well as at home, these roles are consistently socialised and normalised. Furthermore, Namibian cultural norms frequently encourage women to take care of all household duties and to be the primary carers for ailing and elderly family members (Mwetulundila, 2019). Senior women are burdened by these tasks and find it challenging to reconcile their obligations to their families and careers.

Theoretical Framework

The motivational theory of role modelling and feminist theory (FT) provided the framework for this investigation. The study's foundation was established by the integration of different theoretical approaches. The experiences of women in senior leadership roles in HEIs were better understood when the study was seen from these theoretical angles. The traditionally dominant male perspective frequently ignores social problems, trends, and difficulties that are brought to light by feminist theory (FT) (Guy-Evans, 2023). The power disparity between men and women is the root cause of these social issues. Gender issues encompass patriarchy, women's status in society, and gender discrimination, as explained by feminism. The FT highlights the importance of women's freedom by supporting their legal and political rights as well as the mistreatment of women by men in both public and private institutions (Guy-Evans, 2023).

According to the concept, women's lived experiences offer important tools for assessing and challenging the general consensus regarding the status of women in senior leadership positions in higher education. Feminist research needs to come from the experiences of all women since knowledge is based on human experience and because women are represented in all racial, social class, and cultural groups. Every person has a different view on the world from everyone else. According to Shobana (2019), the FT mandates that researchers prioritise women in their research processes. By centering the investigation around women, the researcher is able to better understand the distinctive circumstances in which women lead their lives.

Furthermore, the idea aids in knowledge construction and the comprehension of how women have historically been misrepresented. According to Harding (2004), it offers a framework for explaining and theorising the establishment and upkeep of social order in HEIs. Lastly, given the dearth of evidence regarding the application of FT in Namibian situations and the paucity of evidence regarding its application in African contexts, adopting FT would enhance the theoretical worth of this research, which is why this theoretical approach was chosen.

The Motivational Theory of Role Modelling centres on the role models' impact on role aspirants' attainment of their intended objectives. By examining both the good and negative role models in HEIs, the Motivational Theory of Role Modelling may be utilised to explain how women rose to leadership positions in the face of women's oppression as defined by feminism. As a result, admirable role models can motivate others by presenting a picture of the idealised, desirable self, emphasising potential goals, and outlining the steps necessary to reach them. Negative role models can serve as sources of inspiration by projecting an image of a dreaded, avoided self, indicating potential future catastrophes, and emphasising mistakes that should be avoided to prevent them (Vieira, Mara & Júlio, 2022).

Women in leadership positions of higher education

While many African nations are making good progress in closing the gender gap in politics, women still face significant barriers to higher education since they are not treated equally with males (Moyo, 2022). Compared to other African nations, only Rwanda and Burundi have nearly reached 50/50 female representation in top leadership positions in HEIs (Aiston & Fo, 2021). Women face barriers to obtaining leadership positions and to carrying out their duties in those roles, according to most African research on the representation of women in senior roles in HEIs (see for example, Verbooy & Moyo, 2024; Zulu, 2016).

Although it is a worldwide issue, the gender equality gap in academia is particularly pronounced for women when it comes to positional and financial compensation. Due to their parental duties, women face discrimination and are sometimes criticised for having less effective and more emotionally subjective management methods. Furthermore, preconceptions that hold that women perform less well in top-level

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positions make it difficult for women to be accepted in these roles, and they also reduce the likelihood that women will be promoted to professional or upper management positions.

Despite the significant progress women have made in improving their educational opportunities and entering traditionally male-dominated fields, inequality still exists in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (Mwetulundila, 2019). As a result, women still face obstacles when attempting to hold senior positions in HEIs. The evidence indicates that women are still predominately dominated by men in the decision-making bodies in these institutions, despite the efforts made by various governments to establish policies to promote equal representation and participation of both men and women in senior leadership positions in HEIs (Kuzhabekova, 2023). This demonstrates how women are both externally and physically excluded from senior leadership positions within institutions, including the ability to make decisions that have an impact on those institutions.

Positive reinforcement of institutions to adopt policies targeted at promoting women to leadership roles is one aspect of South Africa's higher education transformation. Even though institutions and the government are working together to promote equality in senior leadership, the obstacles they face are preventing them from moving forward quickly. Many the obstacles will be covered in a later part of this chapter. It is now my focus to discuss the status of women in leadership roles within Namibia. According to research, women have long been underrepresented in leadership roles in South African higher education institutions (HEIs), regardless of their ethnicity (Ramohai & Marumo, 2016). Nonetheless, there are certain organisations that are making strides in which a few numbers of women are progressively gaining leadership roles. The ratio of males to women at this level is remains unequal, notwithstanding a minor increase in the number of women in top positions at South African universities (Verbooy & Moyo, 2024). There is still cause for concern regarding the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles in HEIs (Verbooy & Moyo, 2024).

Women's Leadership in Higher Education in Namibia

The National Gender Policy seeks to bridge the gaps in Namibian society caused by socioeconomic, political, and cultural inequality. In addition, it seeks to end marginalisation while promoting harmony, equity, and equality for men and women in all areas of life. By guaranteeing that women participate in development initiatives on an equal footing with men, it also aims to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women in Namibia's socio-economic, cultural, and political development (MGECW, 2013). The MGECW was created as a chamber to oversee the execution of additional gender equity initiatives in the nation by virtue of the Republic of Namibia's Constitution (Hopwood et al., 1989). A number of other policies were also introduced, including the Gender Reform policy, the 50/50 gender representation policy, the Employment Act No. 29 of 1998, the Strategic Plan for 2017–2022, the National Plan of Action on Gender-Based Violence for 2012–2016, the Labour Relation Act 6 of 1992, the Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998 (Affirmative Action), and the National Gender Policy for 2010–2020 (Amupanda & Tomas, 2015).

According to Shikongo and Amukugo (2021), there are only two female campus directors and two female assistant pro-vice-chancellors out of ten campuses. Given that women make up a small minority in NHEIs, it is not surprising that O'Connor, cited in Toni and Moodly (2019) characterise top managerial roles in HE as akin to a "boys' club" or "old boys' club," where males continue to favour working with other men, thus upholding patriarchal standards. Female participation at the post-secondary and undergraduate levels of institutions was higher than that of male enrollment (Shikongo & Amukugo, 2021). Compared to their male counterparts, a higher proportion of female students participated at the master's level. At the PhD level, however, their participation starts to drop. At the PhD level, the number of male students exceeded that of female students. Because women cannot compete with men academically, this may be a sign that the declining number of women earning doctorates has an impact on

the small number of women holding senior leadership roles in higher education. Men have, after all, satisfied the conditions set by the organisation.

In a similar vein, Kuzhabekova, (2023) asserts that access to senior leadership and managerial roles for women depends on their advancement to the professoriate. Only a small percentage of women can pursue doctoral degrees, which is a necessity for academic careers in higher education (Toni & Moodly, 2019). There is a need to decrease the standards for recruitment to accommodate women, as the prerequisite has gendered implications because it ignores the fact that most women do not get higher academic qualifications. On the other hand, data from global research indicates that, despite obstacles on their path, women are becoming more and more prevalent in senior leadership roles in HEIs (Peterson, 2016; Vieira, Mara & Júlio, 2022). Nonetheless, the research suggests that since women have begun to occupy roles that were previously held primarily by men, the difficulties that women face once they achieve these senior positions are more severe and surpass those that they face on the path to obtaining them (Moyo, 2022).

Research methodology

The critical paradigm, which addresses the problem of power dynamics in society, served as the framework for this study, which used a qualitative research approach (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). The paradigm seeks to upend the current situation for women leaders in HEIs and advance women's empowerment via social justice. Women in senior leadership roles were able to share their tales and lived experiences using a phenomenological case study design. To address the why, who, where, and when inquiries with a reasonably comprehensive comprehension of the study's scope, the exploratory case study was utilised (Lichtman, 2023). Supplementary to the viewpoints, a case study provides multiple analytical perspectives whereby the investigator considers not only the viewpoint and voice of one or two actors in a scenario, but also the opinions of other pertinent actor groups and their interactions (Nasri, 2023).

A purposeful sample of twelve individuals was drawn from an institution with twelve campuses, four schools, four departments, and eight faculties. The choice of the research site was based on practicality. The researcher can choose subjects using predetermined criteria by using purposeful sampling (Lichtman, 2023). Among the requirements was the presence of women in top leadership roles inside the organisation. Within the framework of this investigation, these women held top leadership roles at the HEI as assistant pro-vice-chancellors, directors, deputy directors, deans of faculties, and heads of departments. Five department heads, three directors, one deputy director, two deans, and one assistant pro-vice chancellor were therefore included in the sample. To gather information, semi-structured interviews were employed. Participants in semi-structured interviews were given the opportunity to discuss the subject and express their opinions at their own pace (Hense, 2023).

Using an inductive technique, the data was thematically examined, allowing the data to identify and provide the themes. When analysing qualitative data, the theme approach works well, and it is typically used with a collection of texts like transcripts of interviews. The process was broken down into six steps: familiarisation, coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition and naming, and report writing (Caulfield, 2019). Credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability were used to guarantee the quality of this research (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Following institutional ethical approval and an official written request to the university, participants were made available to take part in the study. The COVID-19 guidelines and protocols were followed. The laptop was password-protected, and the researcher was the only person with access to it. Handwritten notes were taken during the interviews, which were audio recorded.

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Findings

This section presents the findings that emerged from the participants based on the question: what assisted them to navigate and persist amid the challenges encountered? The following reasons transpired from the participants' responses as the reasons for their persistence. They cited believing in God, planning and preparing, speaking out, being supportive and accommodative, acknowledging shortcomings, acceptance advice, and delegation.

Believing in God

Most of the participants indicated that they were believers; their faith kept them holding in spite of the challenges they encountered. P.5 stated that,

I am a Christian; I pray and fast over my roles and it helps me a lot. For instance, when I am going for a meeting, I pray for God to speak through me and direct all my steps.

Similarly, P.2 shared the same sentiment that,

I am a believer; I do not let minor problems to block me. I take everything to God in prayers and he sees me through during all the difficulties and I achieved what I have achieved what I have achieved because of the faith that I have in him.

Planning and preparing

P.4 elaborated that

what makes me persist is that I am determine and I am a hard-working person and I have a positive outlook on life facts, I plan and make a priority list. For instance, I decide which task is the most important one and which one requires more time, then I work them out in the morning when the mind is still fresh. And the other tasks that are not too demanding I do them in the afternoon or evening.

P.5 alluded that

I really try to prepare myself; for instance, when I am going for a meeting I think thoroughly of what I am going to say and practice how I am going to say it. I make sure that whatever I say is in line with the policies or am I closing people's boundaries. Sometimes, I prepare for the responses for the questions that might be asked, even as negative as they are.

P.9 added that

For me to survive in this leadership position, I always tell and try to advise my colleagues that if you don't plan your life, you might feel as if you are living an unhealthy lifestyle, but for me, I plan my life. As of me, my family is the priority. Of course, I am a believer and God comes first, then my family and my work. I don't take any work home be it during the week or over the weekend, I have to attend to my family. I may say it is not easy, but you plan in such a way that your life has a balance between family and work roles.

P.8 indicated the following:

For me to thrive I have learnt to develop myself by reading documents, policies and laws, so that whatever I say I make references to the policies and regulations. Even when I am holding meetings, I had to prepare and know what to say to people, I don't just go there and assume, I must know what I am say because I am working with academics and they read, know the policies.

Speaking out

Most of the respondents indicated that they have learnt to speak up for themselves and for their subordinates. P.4 elucidated that

I have learnt to just speak out for what is right, gone are the days when I just take in and try to push myself to a limit that I cannot really maintain because I am afraid to tell these people that I

was not just here doing nothing waiting for a request, I have other requests, I cannot manage. I would do it as directed rather than just stressing myself and complaining to my colleagues who cannot change anything. Every text and email that comes in I reply and tell them what my stand is.

Similarly, P.3 recounted that,

To persist I have learnt to speak out for myself and for people under my supervision. But when I get home, I cannot just go and close myself in a study room and kick all the kids and husband out. Then she said I did not think about that. Then I said you cannot think about it because you are not into it. Then she said, Okay! You can hand it in the following day. So, I learnt to stand firm and exercise the authority entrusted in me. Also. I make sure that decisions are taken and speak to the needs of my people.

In the same breath, P.6 detailed the following:

I learnt to speak up, sometimes it is very annoying to say the truth, I have planned for my day and there comes person telling me, can I have this submission at the end of the day. So, I deal with it by making it clear that if you know that you need this submission or this information, just tell me two days in advance so that I can put my energy in it. You cannot send me an email at 12h00 and you are telling me at the end of the day that is very stressful for me.

Again, P.7 shared the same view:

I learnt to speak out and act immediately when something comes up, for instance when somebody gives me an attitude or does something that I do not appreciate, I do not wait until it happens again or many times, I react fast and say I do not like or appreciate what you have done.

P.8 recounted her experience:

In academia we are working with people from different faculties for instance: I have encountered people from other faculties telling me of what should be done and how I should do my work, but they have not studied for it. So, I always find a way to remind them that education is a specialised field, therefore people do PhD in education and there is a reason why we do it. So, Education is a science on it is own, the fact that you went to school does not make you an expert in all the fields. So, they will find ways to cut it down. So, one that's one thing that made me to persist. I learnt to fight for the things that I believe in, the values and the principles that I stand for.

On the similar note, P.7 noted that:

We were at the conference at Safari hotel, and I was sitting at a place where you can make your own tea and next to me there was a man, who asked me to make some tea for him indicating that he was used to being served. We had a good talk and I made him understand and I also got to realised that his believe is a culture based because culturally men are not allowed to cook, they are also not allowed to step an inch at kitchen they are chased away.

Being supportive and accommodative

P. 11 pointed out the following:

I learnt to be open to everyone, for instance if somebody needs a shoulder to cry on, I open it up for my fellow to lean on. If I must go and visit those that are mourning, I join and cry with them. If I must visit those that are sick I do so, but when it comes to what I expect them to achieve I do not lose it, I continuously demand it irrespective.

P.7 articulated that

I would notice some people's attitudes especially men, when for example I am doing a big project or conference, they think that they should be given an opportunity on the basis that they are men when it is my roles. It was a matter of really understanding how this gender, how they think and

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operates. So, I learnt very early to manage those kinds of behaviours because I also grow up with men and I socialise with them. Men still find it hard to accept that there is a woman

R.11 explained:

> *I have identified my haters, although in most cases we fear our haters so much. I brought these people closer to me and work closely with them and I got to know that sometimes people do not really hate us but is just because of the wrong perceptions they heard about us, so those qualities made me stand in my position.*

Correspondingly, R.3 expounded:

> *I acknowledged the individual abilities and I allow people to do what they can do. When I delegate them with tasks, I give clear instructions that this is what you are going to do, and this is how you are going to do it. I provide them with templates where possible. I don't let my people fall in the deep end, I go with them, work with them and help them to achieve what they intend to achieve. I also make sure that my people are looked after and I don't go in the meetings and sell them out, I must go there, speak and fight for them.*

Acceptance and acknowledgement

P.11 indicated that

> *One of the things that helped me to persist is learning people that I am working with and accommodate them equally. I got to learn that I am working with people with different personality, background, experience, and abilities. I accept that people think differently and do things differently. I accept that I cannot easily change them, and I got to embrace the element of individuality.*

P.8 illustrated that

> *When I held meeting and something erupt during the meeting and afterwards, there are colleagues who think I could have handled it differently. I got this kind of support from my supervisor; colleagues and friends and it helped me a lot to improve in my leadership career. So, I learnt to accept that when people are saying this to me, they are trying to help and support me.*

Furthermore, P.11 clarified that, *as a leader, one needs to know your strengths and weaknesses and know why you are at that position and what you are expected to do and fulfil it*. She further added that as a leader, *I do not expect people to love me or look favour in people, but when I get it I appreciate it*. Sharing the same view, P.1 indicated that:

> *I don't buy favour from people, what you see is what you will get, I don't go after people to look for favour, I am principled in what I believe in, what I have experienced, and I am able to reflect, and I accept when I are wrong or didn't do well without being offended.*

Delegation and praise

Most of the participants indicated that they were making strides in their leadership positions because of the willingness of some of their subordinates who executed tasks delegated to them.

P.4 specified the following:

> *One thing that makes me persist is that I am a good communicator I can approach someone to do something for me and I will explain it so thoroughly. I can even invite you to sit right next to me in the office, and say while I am working on these things, you may work on the other thing. I give proper guidance so that by the time you are going to finish it, I am confident enough to be willing to submit it. I have done this through delegation and praising them for those good work. I have realised that my male counterparts like to be recognised when they have done great work, by so doing I gained their support. I acknowledged people who make it easier for me to do my work. I literally send them appreciations via emails and address it to my supervisor that the following*

colleagues have done outstanding job and are keeping the department going and for this reason, I thank them. So, this practice has motivated the majority to change their attitudes and do good work. Adding to that, respondent has indicated that we celebrate each other's achievement for instance graduations and birthday celebrations that brings us closer to each other.

Another participant (P.6) shared the same sentiment:

I have learnt an approach of not doing things alone. So, whatever I do, there should be somebody so that person also learn for future when I am not there. Even if I must attend a meeting or a conference somebody has to accompany even if he/she has just to be an observer, just to know what had transpired in that meeting or workshop, my subordinates applaud me for that.

Other qualities that were consistently listed by the participants were being driven by a bigger vision, being hardworking, performance, humility, honesty, determination, perseverance, passion, patience, tolerance, confidence, transparency, teambuilding, sacrifices, being a good listener and good communicator and being understanding. Most of the participants indicated that the leadership field was not levelled and there were many challenges to overcome. Another thing that helped them to navigate the challenges was that they looked at their fellow men counterparts and saw what they were able to do and looked at themselves as a human being and not as a woman – they noted that if men were able to do A, B and C, then they could also do it (P.1, P.4, P.10).

Discussion of findings

In response to the research question: How do women leaders thrive in senior leadership positions amid the challenges? The results showed that women leaders were devout Christians who prayed and fasted to God to direct and guide their job. They thought that all they got was a result of their prayers. In their pursuit of leadership, women leaders persevere and overcome obstacles. The results showed that most participants were Christians, trusting in God to guide them in their work. Most participants mentioned, among other things, that they had learned to stand up when they didn't like something—for both them and the group they are leading. Additional insights that surfaced and were examined under this heading included: organising and getting ready, accepting and acknowledging, assigning, and recognising individual work. The data on the actions recommended by female leaders occupying senior leadership roles to advance women's leadership in the NHEI is provided in the final section. The results above suggest that institutional difficulties are prevalent. This indicates that to attain the goal of gender parity in the NHEI, significant work must be done to mitigate these obstacles.

Facilitators for female leaders to succeed in senior leadership roles in the NHEI despite obstacles

Another strategy employed by female leaders to lessen the difficulties was careful planning. Women leaders were able to arrange and prioritise their work through planning. They were able to prioritise jobs and determine which ones needed more time thanks to the to-do lists. By doing this, they could tackle the more difficult jobs first thing in the morning when their minds were still clear and deal with the easier ones later in the day or at night. Furthermore, scheduling allowed female executives to schedule time for their families and careers. Their personal development was another tactic that helped women leaders persevere in the face of adversity. According to the study, for women leaders to succeed in their leadership roles, they needed to focus on their professional and personal development and arm themselves with sufficient knowledge of institutional policies, laws, and regulations. By consulting the pertinent materials, their educated decision-making and problem-solving abilities were enhanced.

Speaking up about things that upset them was another strategy that helped the female leaders in this study overcome the obstacles. Fearlessly and without favouritism, female leaders spoke up and battled for the ideals and beliefs they held dear. Senior female leaders demonstrated that they had learned to respond quickly to things that they did not like in addition to speaking up. They did not wait for the

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incorrect behaviour to develop into a routine. Even in the face of difficulties, they persisted by speaking up and acting. A further strategy used by female leaders in the HEI to succeed in their roles as leaders was delegation. An institution cannot be successfully led by one person; the study found that female leaders shared certain responsibilities for everyone to contribute to the institution's success. The study found that delegation was crucial for the following reasons: first, everyone tended to understand others' perspectives and encountered difficulties in completing tasks; second, criticism was minimised when people were involved and felt ownership through participation; and third, criticism was minimised when people were able to meet deadlines and produce collective outputs. One of the strategies that allowed women leaders to thrive in their current roles was family support. The results of the study showed that the wives, parents, kids, friends, and other family members of the women leaders in the study provided them with significant support networks. Married women stated that their spouses' support was crucial to their ability to handle the responsibilities of their jobs; without it, it would be challenging for them to manage their duties as leaders and parents (Vieira, Mara & Júlio, 2022). Families provide guidance, motivation, and domestic chore sharing to enable women leaders to work extended or late hours. The results of the survey showed that they were able to prioritise career work over household duties with the assistance of their spouse and family.

According to Mohajeri and Mousavi (2019), women leaders were able to succeed in their roles due to a variety of personal qualities, such as their ability to work well with others, collaborative style, strong dedication, assertiveness, adaptability, and determination. The additional personal characteristics that supported the persistence of the female leaders in their leadership careers included work ethic, communication abilities, hard work capacity, and problem-solving abilities. The evidence obtained for this study showed that women in senior leadership roles went after and won those roles to serve as role models for younger women. Others were motivated by self-efficacy to overcome the stereotype that women couldn't hold high leadership roles due to their gender. Therefore, it was seen that these strong women's internal motivation was sparked by the queen bee syndrome and the absence of role models, which in turn introduced the motivational theory of role modelling. After achieving those high positions, they acted as inspiration for other women leaders by serving as role models. The motivational theory of role modelling and women's experiences developed a cyclical link. Additional research may be necessary to determine how this association contributes to the development of motivation in aspiring women leaders who previously lacked it.

It is possible to argue that institutional, political, and social issues all influence how women are positioned in society. According to Moyo (2022), patriarchy is the system of male supremacy over women that permeates all facets of cultural and social life. Vieira, Mara & Júlio (2022) define it as a trans-historical system of female subjugation. The study's conclusions demonstrated that the women were hesitant to pursue leadership roles in HEI even if they have the necessary credentials. Their supervisors, friends, family, and coworkers all provided encouragement for them to pursue job advancement. Since women are typically perceived as inferior to men, it is rare for them to naturally possess the internal drive needed to assume leadership roles. Consequently, efforts must be made to offer extrinsic motivation through legal frameworks. According to the study's findings, the women expected to hold senior leadership positions, but they also needed encouragement to reach their full potential (Madsen & Longman, 2020). This type of extrinsic motivation has been crucial in helping women rise to senior leadership roles in NHEIs and continues to do so.

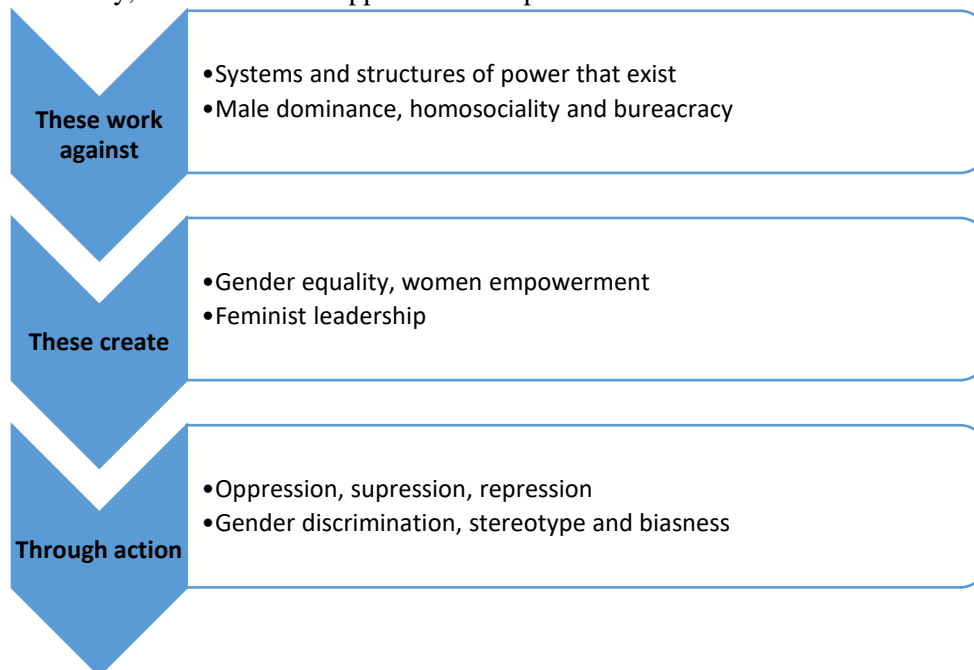**The feminist theory and the motivational theory of role modelling**

The Theory of Role Modelling and FT served as frameworks for the study, helping to contextualise the experiences of women leaders. There are not many studies conducted in other countries that have used the FT (Lee, 2021), and we could not find any studies conducted in Namibia that did so

either. Because it examined the experiences of women in top leadership roles at an NHEI framed by FT, it was assumed that the study would be unique. Using FT as a framework for comprehending the intricate dynamics and power structures that affect the experiences of women in senior leadership positions, the study predicted that future researchers would push these boundaries into critical research to unearth the underlying mechanisms that cause the current and persisting leadership structures in NHEIs in a democratic nation. Employing FT would also facilitate the integration of intersectional feminist viewpoints to acknowledge the various identities and contextual elements that overlap with gender, impacting the encounters and obstacles encountered by female leaders.

A model to encourage feminist leadership in higher education institutions

      The model below was developed by the researcher to illustrate the structural and cultural issues that support gender inequality in NHEIs as well as potential policies to advance women's leadership in HEIs based on study findings. Feminist viewpoints were used to identify issues and investigate possible solutions for altering the patriarchal, homosociality-based bureaucracy that now governs society and suppresses gender equality. To achieve social change, fairness, women's emancipation, and empowerment, this paradigm promotes changing the status quo for women in leadership roles in HEIs. Therefore, this model has the potential to support gender equity and equality in NHEIs, cultivate inclusivity, and establish a supportive atmosphere for women's advancement into leadership roles.

These work against	• Systems and structures of power that exist • Male dominance, homosociality and bureacracy
These create	• Gender equality, women empowerment • Feminist leadership
Through action	• Oppression, supression, repression • Gender discrimination, stereotype and biasness

CRACKING THE GLASS CEILING: UNVEILING THE RESILIENCE AND PERSISTENCE OF WOMEN LEADERS IN SENIOR LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE NAMIBIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Ms Klaudia Ndakolonkoshi[1], Zvisinei Moyo[2], Clive Smith[3].*

These lead to
- Affairmative Action, 50/50 gender representation
- Fair recruitment and appointment
- Induction, mentoring and role modelling, capacity building and continuous professional development and networking

These breed
- Power and oppression are acknowledged and disrupted
- Understanding, advocacy and change

Gender equality and equity
- Social transformation and social justice, women empowerment and emancipation
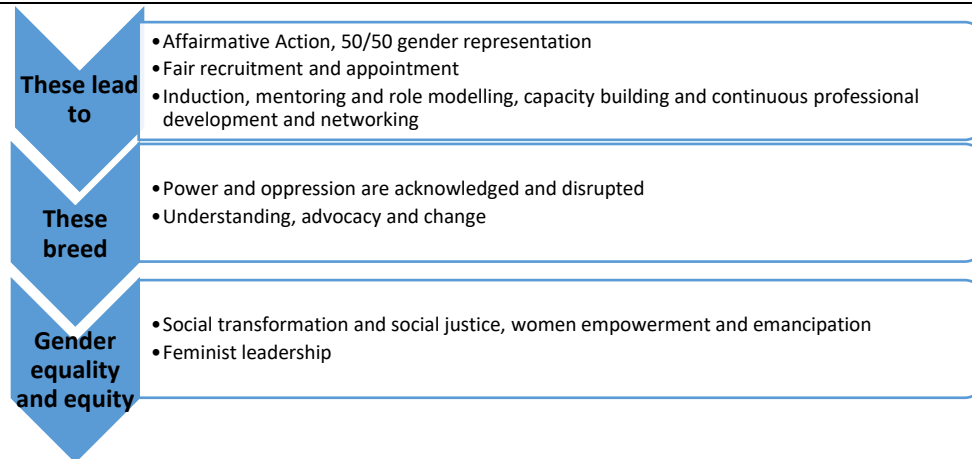- Feminist leadership

Figure 1: Model to promote feminist leadership in higher education institutions.

Conclusion

The findings of the research showed that there is a lack of female representation in top leadership roles within the NHEI. Women face a variety of obstacles in the male-dominated leadership system, including institutional, personal, and social ones. These obstacles prevent female leaders in NHEIs from prospering and moving up to senior leadership roles. The study offered proof and suggestions for enabling women in NHEIs to reach their full leadership potential. Thus, for three main reasons—social justice, which promotes equity within institutions; improving the quality of leadership, which can be facilitated by diverse practices; and, finally, the institution's demonstration of equality and inclusivity—the study supports equal representation of men and women in positions of power and decision-making processes. The study also emphasises how crucial it is for there to be an equal number of women in senior leadership roles in NHEIs because this will encourage and mentor more women to pursue careers in leadership, which will further the goal of having an equal number of men and women in positions of power in NHEIs.

Gender-specific policies should be implemented by policymakers for women in senior leadership roles to reduce barriers and make institutions more inviting to them. Develop and promote family-friendly laws, such as flexible work hours, paid parental leave, and childcare support, that will assist women in juggling their personal and professional responsibilities. Flexible work schedules can improve the balance between work and family life and reduce barriers for women in top leadership positions. Establish comprehensive and detailed policies and standards that clearly define unacceptable behaviour, the consequences for offenders, and procedures for combating sexual harassment. Establish robust reporting protocols, such as anonymous reporting channels and confidential support services, to incentivize victims to come forward and seek justice. Monitoring and assessment mechanisms are to be put in place to ascertain the efficacy of programmes and policies aimed at preventing sexual harassment.

Institutions are additionally tasked to recognise the contributions made by women in the same manner that they do by men. Moreover, a woman who falls short of the institution's standards need to receive the same level of help in the areas where she is deficient as a man who does the same. This would encourage women to climb the leadership ladder and assist them in realising their full leadership potential. Moreover, female leaders promoted the idea that women should be seen as distinct individuals with a range of abilities, so that no woman's flaws would be used to gauge the abilities of other women. Therefore, no woman's failure ought to open the door for another's. All research participants were affiliated with a government higher education institution. Future researchers might compare the

experiences of Namibia's public and private higher education institutions to identify disparities and suggest strategies for achieving gender equity. The focus of this study was on women occupying high leadership positions. To create informed comparisons of their experiences, it is advised that future research collect data from female leaders who aspire to positions other than leadership, such as professors.

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