

**GENDER-RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP AND  
THE PARTICIPATION OF FEMALE  
TEACHERS IN LEADERSHIP ROLES IN  
PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS  
IN KENYA**

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**Abstract**

Gender-Responsive School Leadership is essential for promoting gender equity and inclusivity in educational leadership. Despite Kenya's progressive legal frameworks, such as the Two-Thirds Gender Rule and other gender equity policies, female teachers remain underrepresented in school leadership roles. This underrepresentation is attributed to socio-cultural stereotypes, institutional barriers, limited mentorship, weak policy advocacy, and discriminatory recruitment practices. This study adopted a Systematic Literature Review approach to examine how gender responsive leadership has impacted female teachers' participation in school leadership through gender policies advocacy, identification of challenges they face, and strategies for promoting equity. The findings revealed that while gender policies exist, their implementation is weak due to institutional resistance and persistent societal beliefs that associate leadership with masculinity. Female teachers often encounter work-life balance challenges,

gendered career progression, and exclusion from professional mentorship networks, factors that collectively discourage or limit their access to leadership positions. To address these issues, the study recommends strategies such as policy advocacy, leadership training, structured mentorship programs, enforcement of gender policies, and institutional reforms. Additional proposals include developing gender-responsive recruitment processes, supporting professional development, and promoting a cultural shift towards inclusivity in leadership. Anchored in Transformational Leadership Theory, the study argues that visionary, inclusive, and empowering leadership is key to advancing gender equity. It concludes that increasing female participation in school leadership in Kenya requires systemic reform, effective policy implementation, and institutional support. These efforts are crucial to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4, which advocates for inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

**Keywords:** *Gender-Response, School Leadership, Policy advocacy.*

**1.0 Introduction**

Gender-Responsive School Leadership (GRSL) refers to leadership approaches that actively recognize and address gender-related barriers in education, promoting an inclusive and equitable

environment where all staff, regardless of gender, can thrive professionally (UNESCO, 2019). This desktop research examined how GRSL influences female teachers' advancement into leadership positions in both primary and secondary schools. It reviewed existing literature and studies that refer to the deliberate actions, policies, and behaviors demonstrated by school leaders (headteachers and principals) that identify and mitigate gender-based disparities within the school environment. These practices in school leadership include equitable staff appointments, gender-sensitive decision-making, support for female teachers' career advancement, inclusive leadership training, and the creation of a safe, respectful, and non-discriminatory school culture. The study employed a secondary research methodology, analyzing relevant articles on GRSL.

This research highlighted the crucial role of school leaders in fostering inclusive environments that reflect and respond to broader societal needs. Achieving this requires adopting leadership approaches that embody gender-responsive practices, behaviors, and competencies (Brown et al., 2022). It specifically investigated how leadership practices, policies, and institutional support affect female teachers' participation in leadership roles. By identifying key barriers and enablers, the research aimed to inform strategies

that support more gender-inclusive school leadership.

## 1.2 Background of Study

Achieving gender equality in school leadership is crucial for inclusive and effective educational governance (UNESCO, 2019). However, despite increased efforts to bridge gender gaps, women in education, such as in Beirut, Lebanon, still face significant barriers to leadership roles due to cultural biases, limited mentorship, and institutional constraints (Issa & Hariri, 2024; Morley & Crossouard, 2021). Popular culture significantly shapes gender perceptions, influencing how individuals view the roles and behaviors of men and women. Women in leadership are increasingly setting new standards and contributing to organizational growth, financial performance, and long-term sustainability through a distinct and impactful leadership style (Nehoda, et al., 2024).

Gender-Responsive School Leadership (GRSL) emphasizes inclusivity and equity in all aspects of school management.

In Sweden, *the Gender-Responsive Leader's Handbook* encourages school leaders to adopt policies that remove gender-based barriers and foster equitable environments (Groves-Williams, 2024). Hollowell (2019) also highlights that promoting inclusivity and supporting women in leadership are essential in

addressing female underrepresentation in educational leadership. Jayadeva (2017) argued that gender-responsive school environments shape student perceptions of gender roles and leadership, making it critical for schools to adopt inclusive practices that nurture future leaders. Similarly, the UN's Women, Peace, and Security framework emphasizes the importance of including women in decision-making, including in educational contexts, to promote inclusive governance (Carey, 2019).

Estimated Global Statistics allude to the fact that in Primary Education globally, about 60–70% of primary school teachers are women. This information further discusses that in many countries, women represent over 80% of the primary teaching workforce. This trend drops in secondary schools to around 45–55% globally, and in school leadership (e.g., headteachers, principals), women hold fewer than 30% of leadership positions. While women make up most primary school teachers globally, they remain underrepresented in leadership, particularly in secondary schools (Bergmann et al., 2022; UNESCO, forthcoming). According to a 2021 UNESCO report on gender in education leadership, in Kenya, women make up more than 60% of primary school teachers, and yet they hold fewer than 20% of school headship roles in primary and even fewer

in secondary schools (Usawa Agenda, 2024).

In Ghana, despite female teachers showing better student outcomes, they are less likely to be rated as effective leaders (Bergmann et al., 2021). Intersectional factors such as race, culture, and stereotypes further compound these challenges. Asian women in leadership, for example, often overcome microaggressions and institutional bias to drive meaningful change (Cai, 2023). Studies from Greece, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Zimbabwe consistently reveal that women face exclusionary practices, cultural expectations, and institutional neglect in leadership development (Savvopoulos et al., 2024; Melka et al., 2022; Abonyi et al., 2024; Shava & Chasokela, 2020).

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, women's experiences of marginalization have inspired some to become advocates for equity and social justice, as seen in Ethiopia (Tekleselassie & Roach, 2021). Nevertheless, the persistence of male-dominated leadership structures and limited support continues to hinder progress. In a report on the findings of a systematic review of school leadership and gender in Africa, Bush et al. (2022) highlighted that limited research exists on gender and school leadership in most African countries, and women face social, organizational, and personal barriers to leadership. However, African women principals often exhibit more collaborative

leadership styles and may be more effective than their male counterparts. In Kenya, **legal frameworks such as the Constitution of Kenya (2010)** and the **Basic Education Act (2013)** support gender equality and non-discrimination in education and leadership. Effective strategies, such as training, mentorship, and policy support, are essential for advancing gender equity and inclusive leadership in schools.

### 1.3 Statement of the Problem

Despite growing global and national commitments to gender equality in education, female teachers in Kenya occupy only **24%** of leadership positions in primary schools and **34%** in secondary schools in school leadership positions (Kilonzo, 2020; Ombuor, 2022). While women make up a substantial proportion of the teaching workforce, their progression into leadership roles is not felt even after the enforcement of gender equity policies such as the Two-Thirds Gender Rule. This underrepresentation is not due to a lack of qualified women but stems from barriers that associate leadership with masculinity.

Although gender-responsive leadership is designed to promote inclusivity and equity, it has not been fully embraced or effectively implemented in many Kenyan schools. The disconnect between policy intentions and actual leadership outcomes continues to undermine the empowerment

and participation of female educators. This study, therefore, seeks to explore how gender-responsive leadership can enhance the inclusion of female teachers in school leadership by analyzing the role of policy advocacy, identifying key barriers, and evaluating strategic interventions. Without deliberate institutional reforms, strong policy implementation, and a cultural shift toward inclusive leadership, the realization of gender parity in school leadership and the broader goal of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) will remain out of reach.

### 1.4 Objectives of the Study

- i. To examine the role of policy advocacy in promoting the participation of female teachers in school leadership roles in Kenya.
- ii. To examine the barriers to female teachers from access to school leadership positions within the Kenyan education system.
- iii. To explore gender-responsive strategies that can enhance the inclusion of female teachers in leadership positions in schools.

### 1.5 Research Questions

- i. How does policy advocacy influence the participation of female teachers in school leadership roles in Kenya?
- ii. What are the major challenges that limit female teachers' participation

- in school leadership roles in Kenya?
- iii. What gender-responsive strategies can be implemented to strengthen the participation of female teachers in school leadership roles in Kenya?

## 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a review of literature on gender-responsive school leadership, incorporating both theoretical and empirical perspectives. It is grounded in Transformational Leadership Theory, which emphasizes inclusive, empowering, and change-driven leadership critical for promoting gender equity in school leadership. The review further analyzes empirical studies on policy advocacy for gender-responsive leadership that encourages the participation of females in leadership roles, the barriers they encounter, and effective strategies to support gender-responsive practices. This literature review provides a foundation for the current study and helps to identify existing research gaps it aims to address.

### 2.1 Theoretical Review

This study is grounded in Transformational Leadership Theory (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985), which emphasizes visionary, inclusive leadership that inspires change. The theory's four dimensions, idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual

stimulation, and individualized consideration, closely align with the study's objectives on gender-responsive school leadership.

Research by Brown et al. (2019) found that transformational leadership promotes equity and social welfare in higher education, making it suitable for advancing inclusivity in school leadership. Sharif (2019) similarly showed that Qatari female managers effectively used transformational traits to navigate male-dominated workspaces, highlighting the theory's potential in overcoming structural and cultural barriers.

Shields and Hesbol (2020) underscored the value of inspirational motivation in creating inclusive, socially just school environments. Bin Bakr and Alfayez (2022) linked transformational leadership to psychological empowerment, advocating for more female leadership roles and targeted support, an approach that can inspire more women to pursue school leadership. With this in mind, it can be concluded that transformational leadership helps challenge gender stereotypes by offering role models (idealized influence), motivating women to lead (inspirational motivation), encouraging critical thinking (intellectual stimulation), and providing mentorship (individualized consideration) in all aspects of school leadership. Boakye-Djan (2020) revealed that Ghanaian female

leaders often face cultural and religious biases, recommending mentorship and professional development as solutions.

Maheshwari and Nayak (2022) highlighted that transformational leadership could address institutional and cultural constraints facing female leaders in Vietnam by having leadership that motivates all people in the organization. Mareque et al. (2022) showed that female students often lag behind male peers in leadership training due to cultural norms, a gap that transformational leadership can help bridge through inclusive strategies and mentorship programs. Baroudi (2022) examined Arab female leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic, identifying traits like resilience and emotional intelligence as crucial to crisis leadership, suggesting that leadership training for women should be strengthened. Effendi et al. (2020) demonstrated that transformational leadership can influence national education policy by embedding cultural and moral values, including those promoting gender equity into law. Transformational leadership provides a strong theoretical foundation for promoting gender-responsive school leadership. It supports policy advocacy, mentorship, and inclusivity, making it a powerful tool for addressing gender barriers and empowering female educators within Kenya's school leadership system.

## **2.2 Empirical Studies**

In this section, the research delved into secondary data on the areas covering the research topic on gender-responsive school leadership and female teachers' participation in school management, and the various variables that elucidated the role of gender responsive leadership. These variables were on the existing gender policies, barriers, strategies, and role of mentorship in female teachers' participation in leadership in schools.

### **2.2.1 Policy Advocacy in Promoting the Participation of Female Teachers in School Leadership Roles in Kenya**

Policy advocacy involves influencing decision-making to create or reform policies in specific areas. It includes stakeholder engagement, public education, and coalition-building to support targeted change. In the context of education, policy advocacy is essential for increasing the participation of female teachers in school leadership roles (UNESCO, 2019). Silander et al. (2024), in a comparative study of Sweden, Norway, and Finland, reported that gender mainstreaming policies often fail to produce transformation due to weak implementation and lack of accountability. Similarly, Hailu et al. (2023) analyzed gender-related higher education policies in Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda, concluding that while gender equity is a stated goal, women remain

underrepresented in leadership and STEM fields. They observed a clear gap between policy intentions and outcomes, emphasizing the need for stronger implementation mechanisms.

In Nigeria, Adeteji et al. (2024) linked national economic progress to human capital development and argued that persistent gender inequalities, particularly in education, hamper growth. The study recommended prioritizing gender-sensitive policies that improve opportunities and eliminate discrimination. This was echoed by Mubarok et al. (2024), who emphasized the role of institutional leaders in promoting gender equality policies in all aspects of an organization.

In Kenya, constitutional provisions such as Article 27 and Article 81(b) support gender equality and affirmative action. However, as Kameri-Mbote (2018) and Makau (2019) observed, enforcement remained slow due to cultural resistance and weak political will. This calls for strengthened advocacy, legal reform, and political commitment to realize constitutional guarantees in all aspects of an organization. The National Gender Equality Commission (NGEC), the Ministry of Education's Gender in Education Unit, and the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) all have mandates to promote gender equality in education. However, policy success will depend on consistent

enforcement and support from all education leaders at all levels of school leadership.

Research by Kanai et al. (2022) found that negative perceptions of female leadership, such as doubts about competence and conflict resolution, limit women's participation in school leadership in Tharaka North, Kenya. The authors recommend advocacy and mentorship to shift societal attitudes. As elucidated by Okoko (2020), leadership preparation in Kenya is often unclear and shaped by personal experience rather than structured programs. The study recommended a formalized framework that aligns individual needs with national policies to better prepare school leaders. This will give the female teachers a chance to exercise leadership roles pegged on laws other than on what is preconceived.

Kenya's gender policy in education, anchored in the 2010 Constitution and the 2013 Basic Education Act, aims to eliminate gender disparities. The 2015 Education and Training Sector Gender Policy promotes fair access and participation. Although progress has been made especially in curriculum development by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development, more needs to be done to eliminate gender biases and foster inclusive school leadership. Overall, effective policy advocacy remains crucial to increasing female participation in

school leadership by addressing structural barriers, enforcing existing laws, being deliberate in following the one-third gender rule as required by the constitution, and shifting public perceptions.

### **2.2.2 Barriers to Female Teachers' Participation in School Leadership**

Despite the growing number of female teachers in education, their representation in school leadership remains low. This underrepresentation is driven by various barriers, including gender stereotypes, societal expectations, work-life balance challenges, and institutional biases (Chanda & Ngulube, 2024). As education leaders, identifying and addressing these challenges is essential for achieving gender equality and encouraging more participation by female teachers in educational leadership.

Studies have shown that traditional attitudes and cultural norms continue to favor male dominance in educational leadership. The absence of female role models, negative perceptions toward women's leadership, and demanding administrative workloads further restrict women's advancement, even though academic qualifications and professional experience are no longer the primary obstacles (Purdul et al.2020; Maiyo et al.2018). Moreover, institutional resistance to gender-transformative practices and the lack of structured

support systems discourage many capable women from pursuing leadership positions.

Women continue to face significant challenges in attaining leadership positions, particularly in male-dominated societies. Taj (2016) notes that such barriers hinder their professional growth and effectiveness, highlighting the need for responsive educational management that supports female leaders. In the study on Pakistan's University Gender and Development Office (UGADO), the study revealed that although efforts were made through training and awareness programs, a lack of institutional support hindered the enforcement of gender policies. This underlines the importance of both policy formulation and enforcement in achieving gender-responsive leadership.

Despite this support in gender equality, women in academia still face barriers to leadership due to cultural norms and institutional practices (Chacha, 2021; Dahlvig & Longman, 2020). Hockett (2021) underscores that the lived experiences of five Kenyan women principals reflect broader societal barriers that hinder women's leadership advancement in education. This means that the recurring issues of underrepresentation, bias, lack of mentorship, and limited leadership development opportunities highlight the

urgent need for gender-responsive reforms in education leadership.

Research by Shah (2023) highlighted that within patriarchal cultures, women in leadership often struggled to assert authority and balance family responsibilities, while men are naturally perceived as leaders. This was also echoed by Coleman (2020), who added that masculine work cultures, discrimination, and family obligations hindered women's leadership progression. Similarly, Gandhi and Sen (2021) observed that women in higher education often remained in mid-level roles. This calls for deliberate strategies by education leaders to bridge the gender leadership gap and ensure women teachers are not discriminated against. A study in China by Wang and Warewanich (2024) also concluded that in Chinese higher education, gender roles, particularly strong family-role orientation, negatively impact women's leadership aspirations and self-confidence. Work-family conflicts further discourage women from pursuing leadership.

Sebastian et al. (2022) surveyed **elementary teachers** in public elementary schools in the Philippines and observed that, despite the majority of elementary teachers being female, men dominated leadership roles. Maheshwari and Nayak (2022) identified similar patterns in Vietnamese higher education, where work-life imbalance and limited access to

social networks were major barriers. Brescoll (2016) drew on existing experimental and observational studies and noted that emotional stereotypes against women hindered leadership advancement as they were deemed as "too emotional," hence imposing a particular barrier for women in leadership roles. This was also observed in a study by Nkosi (2024), who observed that gender discrimination persists among female school leaders in South Africa, despite equity initiatives. The continued restriction of women's leadership opportunities is significantly influenced by the absence of supportive family-friendly policies. This challenge is further compounded by the persistent underrepresentation of women in leadership positions and the limited access to mentorship opportunities (Keohane, 2020; Smith, 2024; Allen et al., 2021; Calsy & D'Agostino, 2021).

In the Arab education system, Arar and Abramovitz (2013) found that patriarchal norms limit women's rise to school principalship, despite their dominance in teaching roles. Cassidy et al. (2021) and Mpofu (2019) further noted that societal expectations and workplace demands prevent women from ascending to top leadership positions. Corneille et al. (2019) examined barriers faced by women of color in STEM, while Psaki et al. (2022) called for improved interventions to reduce gender-based educational barriers.

Ngonyani (2017) found that Tanzanian female school leaders face socio-cultural barriers but succeed through democratic leadership and by serving as role models. Noel (2024) explored why some female principals in Pennsylvania leave leadership roles, citing limited autonomy and stalled career growth. Moomba (2023) discussed operational challenges faced by female heads of departments, including resource constraints.

Kanini et al. (2017) emphasized that family responsibilities, socio-cultural pressures, limited role models, and fear of transfers discourage women from leadership. They advocate for gender-responsive recruitment, strict policy enforcement, and expanding girls' and mixed schools to increase female leadership uptake. Lubowa and Mwangi (2023) identified gender stereotypes as internal barriers to gender-responsive monitoring in NGOs. M'mbaha and Chepyator-Thomson (2019) called for leadership programs to support women in sports leadership. Ojwala et al. (2024) noted similar barriers in ocean science education, including discrimination and career stagnation. Wakiaga (2022) pointed out that despite progress in women's education in Kenya, their presence in senior leadership remains low, underscoring the need for stronger policy implementation.

It is important to note that for gender responsive school leadership to thrive, the stakeholders in education will need to understand the issues that hinder female teachers' participation in school leadership. These include, and are not limited to, gender stereotypes, societal expectations, patriarchal cultures, family obligations, institutional and cultural barriers, limited access to mentorship and support networks, and inadequate policy support.

### **2.2.3 Strategies to Strengthen Female Teachers' Participation in School Management.**

Female teachers face barriers to advancing into school management roles due to gender biases, societal expectations, and institutional challenges. To enhance their participation, leadership training, mentorship, policy reforms, and work-life balance support are essential. Implementing these strategies could promote gender equality and improve school leadership. Adopting inclusive leadership practices, such as building partnerships with parents and promoting culturally responsive teaching, can contribute to more equitable outcomes. School leaders who are critical of policies and procedures and understand societal norms and expectations are better positioned to implement gender-responsive decisions (Leithwood, 2021).

Coe et al. (2019) highlighted that leaders in science and medicine remain unaware of the barriers women face in these fields, hindering global advancement. To break these barriers, leaders must educate themselves on removing obstacles to women's leadership. Maheshwari and Nayak (2022) emphasized the importance of family support, mentorship, and employers' changing attitudes to advance women's leadership in education. May (2016) reported that South African women in school leadership positions face ongoing challenges but possess the skills to effectively manage schools. The study recommended that governments and education departments appoint more women to leadership roles to transform South African schools. Allen et al. (2021) argued for systemic solutions to improve gender equity in education and leadership, calling for global changes to create ethical and inclusive career opportunities for women. Similarly, Kim and Lee (2020) found that principal instructional leadership significantly influences teacher participation in professional development, which can vary by country and type of development activity.

Praise et al. (2020) advocated for gender-responsive training programs, mentorship, and inclusive policies in educational institutions, recommending family-friendly workplace policies to support women's career advancement. Naidoo (2019) found that strong leadership

development for principals is essential for school improvement and effective teaching. Zahed-Babelan et al. (2019) confirmed that principals' instructional leadership influences teachers' work engagement, particularly through school culture, teacher empowerment, and job characteristics. Chen and Guo (2020) also found that principals' emotional intelligence and instructional leadership are key factors in improving teaching strategies.

Globally, researchers and education leaders are interested in achieving quality education, through continuous professional development (CPD) with teacher mentoring guiding, supporting, directing, and developing competence of teachers and sense of belonging in the teaching profession. Teachers who have participated in mentoring develop confidence, gain leadership and communication skills, feel valued and have the ability to function independently. Countries all over the world must, therefore, introduce teacher mentoring and promote its sustainability for effective leadership in teaching and learning (Abetang, et al.2020, Abonyi et al. 2024). Emma (2024) emphasized the importance of policy interventions to address gender biases and promote equality in leadership roles across all sectors.

Nyoni and He (2019) found that societal, administrative, and individual factors

contribute to the underrepresentation of women in top leadership positions in Tanzanian universities. This should call for Gender mainstreaming, capacity development programs, and monitoring interventions to bridge the leadership gap. Corneille et al. (2019) called for further research on the efficacy of mentoring and institutional efforts to support women of color in STEM leadership roles. Sakwa et al. (2023) concluded that principals' reward strategies influence teacher performance, and an optimal blend of rewards is necessary for achieving maximum teacher performance. Okoko (2020) discussed the need for a formalized capacity development framework for school leaders in Kenya, taking into account their personal and contextual needs. Ojwala et al. (2024) recommended gender-transformative policies and women-specific support structures in universities to address gender inequalities in leadership roles.

Maldrine and Kiplangat (2020) emphasized the importance of staff development and effective supervision in improving teacher satisfaction and preparing teachers for leadership roles. Ndiso et al. (2023), who *investigated the influence of principals' mentorship practices on female teachers' progression into management of public secondary schools in Kenya determined that mentorship practices influenced the number of female teachers who applied for*

*the management positions in public secondary schools. The study concluded that some of the mentorship practices included exposing female teachers to peer mentoring, delegation of duties, and allowing competent teachers to perform management roles based on their capabilities. These practices boost their exposure to management roles, which motivates them to take management positions.*

The literature highlights that transformational leadership supports gender-responsive school leadership by promoting inclusivity and empowerment. Despite existing policies, female teachers still face barriers like stereotypes and limited support. Empirical studies show that policy advocacy, mentorship, and leadership training are key to enhancing women's participation in school leadership. Bridging the gap between policy and practice remains essential for achieving gender equity.

### 3.0 METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Introduction

This study on gender-responsive school leadership and female teachers' participation in school leadership in Kenya employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology. Desktop research was conducted by synthesizing existing literature, policy documents, and research studies to analyze the influence of gender

policies, barriers to female leadership, and strategies for enhancing female teachers' participation in school leadership in Kenya. The methodology focused on secondary data collection, qualitative analysis, and ethical research considerations.

### 3.2 Research Design

This study adopted a systematic literature review (SLR) that utilized a qualitative synthesis design to examine gender-responsive school leadership. It was conducted exclusively through secondary data sources, without primary data collection whereby it was based on the analysis of existing literature, official reports, and policy frameworks. It explored policy implementation, leadership challenges, and recommended strategies by reviewing academic publications, policy papers, and institutional reports.

### 3.3 Data Collection Techniques

For this desktop research, data were collected exclusively from secondary sources. In the document analysis, scientific and objective procedures were applied to ensure the validity, reliability, and transparency of the review process. To maintain academic rigor, the selection of documents followed a systematic and replicable approach. The purpose and scope of the review were clearly defined, establishing the research objectives that

guided the analysis. A relevant example was the review of documents addressing gender-responsive school leadership practices between 2019 and 2025. The researcher adopted a **narrative review methodology** and utilized electronic databases such as **ERIC, JSTOR, and Google Scholar**. This was supplemented with grey literature, including policy documents, NGO reports, and institutional publications.

To ensure consistency and objectivity, the study applied **predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria**. The inclusion criteria comprised relevance to gender-responsive leadership in schools, type of publication (peer-reviewed articles, official government reports, policy briefs, and institutional evaluations), time frame (2019–2025), and geographical scope (with a focus on Sub-Saharan Africa and selected global perspectives). Only documents published by reputable sources such as academic journals, universities, and international organizations like UNESCO were included.

The study excluded opinion pieces, blog posts, publications lacking empirical or analytical rigor, documents outside the specified time frame or geographical scope, and studies that did not address leadership, gender responsiveness, or education. The five-year time frame was adopted to ensure the inclusion of recent and relevant evidence.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

The study employed a thematic content analysis approach to interpret and synthesize qualitative data obtained from a range of secondary sources. This method allowed for the systematic identification and organization of key patterns and meanings relevant to the research objectives.

The analysis process involved several interrelated stages. Data were subjected to thematic categorization, in which information was grouped according to the core objectives of the study. These included: examining the role of policy advocacy in promoting the participation of female teachers in school leadership roles in Kenya; identifying the barriers that hinder female teachers from accessing leadership positions within the Kenyan education system; and exploring gender-responsive strategies that could enhance the inclusion of female teachers in school leadership.

### 3.5 Ethical Considerations

Since this study was based on secondary data, ethical research standards were maintained through:

- i. **Credible and ethical sourcing:** Only published, credible, and peer-reviewed sources were used to ensure accuracy and reliability.

- ii. **Proper citation and attribution:** All sources were acknowledged using proper referencing formats to avoid plagiarism.
- iii. **Objective and unbiased analysis:** Efforts were made to analyze the data without bias, ensuring that the research presents a balanced perspective on gender-responsive leadership.

### 3.6 Limitations of the Study

- i. **Reliance on existing data:** As this study did not involve primary data collection, it relied solely on the availability and accuracy of existing literature and institutional reports.
- ii. **Potential data gaps:** Some relevant studies, particularly internal policy evaluations or unpublished institutional documents, may not have been accessible, thus limiting the comprehensiveness of the dataset.
- iii. **Contextual limitations:** The study was limited to the Kenyan context; hence, its findings may not be directly generalizable to other countries or regions with different socio-cultural and policy environments.
- iv. **Lack of direct stakeholder insights:** The study did not involve direct engagement with key stakeholders such as female teachers, education policymakers, or school administrators. As a result, it may not fully reflect emerging or lived

challenges related to school leadership dynamics.

### **3.6.1 Quality Assurance Considerations**

Despite these limitations, several measures were undertaken to ensure the validity and reliability of the study. First, a clearly defined set of inclusion and exclusion criteria guided the selection of documents, ensuring that only credible and relevant sources were reviewed. Peer-reviewed articles, official government publications, and reports from reputable international organizations were prioritized to enhance data integrity.

Second, a systematic and replicable search strategy was employed, which improved the transparency and consistency of the review process. Finally, thematic content analysis was conducted with careful attention to conceptual alignment with the research objectives, thereby enhancing interpretive validity. These methodological considerations contributed to the overall rigor of the study and helped generate credible insights into gender-responsive leadership in Kenya's education sector.

## **4.0 FINDINGS**

### **4.1. Introduction**

Gender-responsive school leadership plays a vital role in advancing equity and inclusivity within Kenya's education sector. However, despite existing gender policies, female teachers continue to

encounter significant obstacles to leadership, including entrenched cultural norms, institutional biases, and inadequate mentorship. These challenges limit their participation in leadership and contribute to persistent gender disparities in decision-making roles. This study aimed to examine the impact of gender policies on leadership opportunities, identify the key barriers hindering women's progression, and assess strategies such as mentorship, policy enforcement, and capacity building to enhance female teachers' participation in school leadership.

### **4.2 Gender Policy Advocacy on Female Teachers' Participation in School Leadership in Kenya**

The literature reviewed highlights several critical insights on how gender policies influence the participation of female teachers in school leadership in Kenya.

Despite progressive constitutional and policy frameworks, women remain underrepresented in school leadership. Hailu et al. (2023) note that although Kenya has advanced in promoting gender equity, women still encounter structural and cultural barriers that limit their progression into leadership roles. The gap between policy formulation and actual implementation significantly hampers their participation. While the Kenyan Constitution (2010) and the Basic Education Act (2013) advocate for gender equality, enforcement remains

inconsistent. Makau (2019) observes that male-dominated leadership structures and resistance to change slow the pace of policy implementation, impeding gender balance in school leadership.

The Two-Thirds Gender Rule, articulated in Articles 27 and 81 of the Constitution, aims to prevent dominance by any one gender in public institutions. However, Kameri-Mbote (2018) points out that this goal remains unmet in educational leadership. Many female teachers face systemic and societal biases that hinder their advancement into administrative roles. Institutions like the National Gender Equality Commission (NGEC) and the Ministry of Education have initiated gender mainstreaming in educational policies. The Education and Training Sector Gender Policy (Ministry of Education, 2015) promotes fairness in leadership appointments, while the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) requires gender-balanced leadership in mixed schools to enhance inclusivity.

Deep-rooted cultural norms and patriarchal attitudes continue to restrict women's access to leadership. Khalifa et al. (2019) argue that remnants of colonial governance structures still shape leadership dynamics in schools, making it difficult for women to break through. Taj (2016) further notes that female leaders often face heightened scrutiny and unique challenges in patriarchal societies. While

the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development has introduced gender-sensitive content, challenges persist in eliminating biases through pedagogy and teacher-student interaction. Mubarok et al. (2024) report that gender offices in universities face institutional neglect, a challenge mirrored in basic education, where gender-responsive leadership often lacks prioritization.

While Kenya has made important strides in enacting gender-responsive policies, persistent gaps in enforcement, cultural resistance, and institutional inertia continue to limit female teachers' participation in leadership. Effective policy advocacy, robust enforcement, and sustained institutional support are essential to enhance gender equity in school leadership.

#### **4.3 Barriers to Female Teachers' Participation in School Leadership in Kenya**

Despite the increasing number of female teachers in Kenya, their progression into school leadership remains limited due to a range of social, institutional, and structural barriers. Leadership is still largely viewed through a masculine lens, discouraging women from aspiring to or advancing in leadership roles. Key obstacles include discriminatory practices, limited mentorship, exclusion from professional networks, and challenges unique to technical and STEM-related

leadership. Although gender equity policies exist, weak implementation continues to hinder progress.

Deep-rooted gender stereotypes and societal norms portray leadership as a male domain. Women in school leadership often face patriarchal attitudes, requiring them to work harder to assert their authority. For example, research in Israel's Arab education system showed women dominating teaching roles but facing opposition when pursuing leadership (Arar & Abramovitz, 2013). Similarly, in Kenya, societal expectations continue to undermine women's leadership potential (Shah, 2023). Balancing leadership with domestic responsibilities remains a major challenge for women. They typically bear the primary burden of childcare and household duties, limiting their availability for leadership roles. The absence of family-friendly policies such as flexible work hours and accessible childcare worsens this burden (Keohane, 2020; Smith, 2024), often leading to burnout or stalled careers.

Gender bias within educational institutions limits women's advancement. Studies report on masculine work culture, promotion discrimination, and the glass ceiling effect (Coleman, 2020). In Kenya's higher education sector, women remain underrepresented in senior roles like vice-chancellors despite being a large part of the workforce (Gandhi & Sen, 2021;

Wakiaga, 2022). Similar patterns are observed in Tanzania (Ngonyani, 2017), reflecting regional trends. Women often lack access to influential professional networks and mentors, limiting their career growth. While male leaders benefit from strong professional ties, female teachers struggle to find role models or support systems (Maheshwari & Nayak, 2022; Allen et al., 2021), reducing their visibility and confidence in pursuing leadership. Gendered expectations around emotional expression affect how female leaders are perceived.

Women are often penalized for showing emotions, especially assertiveness, leading to a double bind either seen as too emotional or too detached (Brescoll, 2016). This complicates their ability to lead effectively, as shown by Moomba (2023), who found female department heads often struggle with managing staff expectations. Women are often clustered in mid-level roles such as department heads or deans, with limited advancement to senior positions like principals or superintendents. Cultural expectations and structural barriers limit upward mobility (Cassidy et al., 2021; Mpofu, 2019). Though policies promoting gender equity exist, enforcement is often inadequate. Studies highlight persistent discrimination despite equity initiatives across various sectors (Psaki et al., 2022; Calsy & D'Agostino, 2021; Nkosi, 2024).

In Kenya, this reflects a gap between policy and practice, stalling women's leadership advancement. Women remain underrepresented in STEM-related educational leadership roles due to systemic gender bias. In ocean science education, for example, Kenyan women reported slower career progression and discrimination (Wakiaga, 2022; Ojwala et al., 2024). These fields require focused strategies to foster inclusive leadership. Women in leadership roles often face internal barriers such as self-doubt and fear of criticism. Studies show that lack of clarity in promotion paths and inadequate mentorship discourage women, especially in demanding fields like STEM (Corneille et al., 2019; Noel, 2024).

The underrepresentation of female teachers in school leadership is shaped by gender norms, institutional bias, and structural limitations. To address these challenges, Kenya's education sector must adopt deliberate policy reforms, mentorship programs, and cultural shifts to create more inclusive and supportive environments for women leaders.

#### **4.4 Strategies to Enhance Female Teachers' Participation in School Leadership in Kenya**

Advancing gender equality in school leadership in Kenya requires a comprehensive approach that includes leadership training, mentorship, institutional reforms, gender-responsive

policies, and a cultural shift toward inclusivity. Creating supportive environments, promoting work-life balance, and investing in talent development are essential to empowering female teachers for leadership roles. Structured leadership development programs are vital for equipping female teachers with the skills and confidence needed for leadership.

Training, mentorship, and professional development opportunities help build instructional leadership capacity and prepare women for management. Ongoing mentorship from experienced leaders, peers, and family members plays a significant role in motivating women to pursue leadership. Support structures such as coaching, mentoring programs, and leadership workshops guide female teachers through challenges and promote career progression (Maheshwari & Nayak, 2022; Kim & Lee, 2020).

Policy interventions that ensure equal opportunities, combat discrimination, and support career advancement for women are critical. Gender mainstreaming in recruitment, evaluation, and promotion systems can address biases that hinder women's progress in leadership (Abonyi et al., 2024; Nyoni & He, 2019). Female teachers often face challenges balancing professional and personal responsibilities. Flexible schedules, childcare support, and parental leave policies help create

enabling conditions for women to engage in leadership without compromising family life (Praise et al., 2020).

Addressing gender biases requires increased awareness and cultural transformation within educational institutions. Educating school leaders and policymakers about the barriers women face can promote equity in decision-making and foster a more inclusive school culture (Coe et al., 2019; Leithwood, 2021). Incentivizing leadership through rewards, career advancement programs, and targeted training encourages female teachers to aspire to leadership. Recognizing and nurturing leadership potential fosters active participation in school governance (Sakwa et al., 2023).

Universities and teacher training institutions should implement gender-transformative policies, including gender-sensitive recruitment and designated leadership pathways for women. These initiatives can strengthen the pipeline for female leadership in education (Ojwala et al., 2024).

Tailored leadership preparation programs that reflect the lived experiences of female teachers are essential. Formal training initiatives and leadership academies equip women with the skills and knowledge to transition into management roles (Okoko, 2020). Encouraging inclusive instructional leadership practices creates a supportive environment for female

teachers. School principals who champion gender-responsive strategies can enhance female teachers' engagement and leadership potential (Chen & Guo, 2020).

Long-term gender equity requires systemic changes in school management practices. Reforms in recruitment, promotion, workplace culture, and accountability mechanisms such as gender audits and diversity targets are necessary to overcome institutional barriers (Allen et al., 2021).

Increasing the participation of female teachers in school leadership in Kenya demands a multi-layered strategy. This includes training and mentorship, gender-responsive policies, institutional reforms, and a shift in cultural attitudes. By addressing these areas holistically, Kenya can create equitable leadership pathways and harness the full potential of its female educators.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

This study explored how gender policies, existing barriers, and targeted strategies influence female teachers' participation in school leadership in Kenya. Although policies promoting gender equality are in place, their weak implementation limits progress in increasing women's representation in leadership roles. Persistent institutional biases, gender

stereotypes, and challenges related to work-life balance continue to restrict women's advancement. However, the findings show that targeted interventions such as leadership training, mentorship, policy reform, and institutional support can effectively enhance female participation. Addressing these challenges through systemic reforms and well-structured initiatives is essential for fostering a more inclusive and equitable leadership environment in Kenyan schools.

## 5.2 Recommendations

### *i. Strengthening the implementation of gender policies*

The Ministry of Education and the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) can implement this effectively by strict enforcement of gender policies by auditing current gender policies and align them with the Constitution of Kenya, Basic Education Act, and the Gender Policy in Education. They can also regularly monitor and evaluate policy effectiveness by establishing a gender monitoring unit within TSC or MOE to oversee implementation.

### *ii. Address Barriers Hindering Women's Leadership Progression*

The Ministry of Education and the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) can operationalize this by

promoting awareness and cultural shifts to challenge gender stereotypes and biases in school leadership by introducing gender equity and leadership training into teacher education and professional development programs. They can also develop work-life balance policies, including flexible working arrangements and parental support programs. By taking these deliberate and structured actions, the Ministry of Education and TSC can create an enabling environment that not only removes barriers but also fosters the rise of women into leadership positions in Kenya's education system.

### *iii. Enhance Leadership Development Programs for Female Teachers*

The Ministry of Education and the Teachers Service Commission (TSC) should provide Structured Leadership Training and Capacity-Building Programs by developing or adopting tailor-made leadership training modules focusing on gender-responsive leadership. They should also expand mentorship and coaching programs by identifying and training seasoned female headteachers and principals to serve as mentors and leadership coaches.

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