

Leadership Styles of Female Leaders in Management of Senior High Schools in the Central Region of Ghana

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Abstract: The role and contribution of women in modern organisations have been phenomenal. However, societal norms and other patriarchal values continue to stifle the progress of women leaders. The study's overall purpose was to examine the leadership styles of female leaders in managing senior high schools in the Central Region of Ghana. The study adopted non-numerical data and used a purely qualitative research approach. A phenomenological design supported the study framework, and the required data was collected through interviews. The target population for the study were female headmistresses and assistant headmistresses in the various Senior High Schools in the Metropolis. The study involved all six female headmistresses and eight assistant headmistresses in the Metropolis. The participants were sampled using the census to meet the study objectives. The data were analysed thematically. The study revealed that married couples use the participatory leadership style, but those who are single use the assertive style. The study also concluded that women leaders who are single and are farther from 60 years old are more likely to have problems in the discharge of their duties as leaders since men, per societal influence, will always try to resist the control of women leaders. The Ghana education service should package special incentives for women who aspire to achieve the utmost leadership role of becoming heads of senior high schools. It will motivate the young women generation. It is also recommended that women in leadership positions in the Ghana Education Service are advised to learn by updating their skills and competencies to grow in confidence and share ideas with colleagues in the same field to adopt and adapt leadership styles that have worked in other institutions to handle institutional challenges.

Keywords: Leadership, Management, Senior High Schools, Central Region, Ghana

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1. Introduction

The leadership landscape in educational institutions, particularly in senior high schools, is a critical domain where the role of female leaders is increasingly being recognised and valued. In the Central Region of Ghana, female and assistant headmistresses play pivotal roles in shaping the academic environment and fostering student development. However, the journey of these women leaders has its challenges, as societal norms and patriarchal values often create barriers to their progress and success. This paper investigates the intriguing realm of leadership styles female leaders exhibit in managing senior high schools in the Central Region of Ghana. Through a qualitative research approach and a phenomenological design, the study explores the experiences, perspectives, and challenges these women face in leadership positions. By examining the

unique leadership styles adopted by female and assistant headmistresses, this study aims to provide valuable insights into leadership dynamics in educational settings and the impact of gender norms on leadership practices. By shedding light on the experiences of women leaders in senior high schools, this research contributes to the ongoing dialogue on gender equality, empowerment, and leadership development in educational institutions. Understanding the leadership styles of female leaders highlights their contributions to the academic community and underscores the importance of creating inclusive and supportive environments for women in leadership roles. Through this exploration, we aim to advocate for greater recognition and support for women leaders in senior high schools, paving the way for a more equitable and diverse educational leadership landscape in Ghana and beyond. Leadership Styles of Female Leaders in Management of Senior High Schools in the Central Region of Ghana" revolves around examining the leadership styles adopted by female leaders in senior high schools in Ghana. It seeks to explore how societal norms, patriarchal values, and individual characteristics influence the leadership styles of female and assistant headmistresses in these institutions.

Additionally, the study aims to investigate the impact of age, marital status, and cultural factors on the leadership approaches adopted by women leaders in the educational context. The study's overall purpose was to examine the leadership styles of female leaders in managing senior high schools in the Central Region of Ghana. The study was guided by this research question: What leadership styles are adopted by female leaders in SHS in the Cape Coast Metropolis?

1.1. Intersectionality theory

The intersectional theory is the concept that people are often disadvantaged by multiple sources of oppression: their race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and other identity markers [1]. This theory holds that the various social and cultural constructions which inform different forms of discrimination against women are, for instance, influenced by intersections of race, gender, and ethnicity [2]. Cultural patterns of oppression are not only interrelated but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society, such as gender, class, and ethnicity [religion and culture] [3]. These are mutually constituted and not to be seen as fixed or distinct categories. The intersectionality theory provides a tool for analysing various systems of inequality and developing a politics of resistance and empowerment [4]. The theory of intersectionality helps to explain and understand the positions, barriers, and steps for improving the status of women in leadership positions within the GES in the Cape Coast Metropolis.

An understanding of intersectionality is a vital element in gaining political and social equality and improving the democratic system. Giving equal opportunities to women would be an attempt at liberation from dehumanisation. Thus, to fully understand women's positions in the GES, one must examine how leadership structures, processes and social representations are shaped [4]. This study tries to discuss, among other things, how gender, age, ethnicity and culture, class/socioeconomic situation and gender equity in leadership positions influence and affect women's lives in the GES. The role that human rights activists and gender advocates play in this influence cannot be overemphasised. The study explores how these factors interact in empowering or disempowering circumstances to women in leadership positions within the GES and how these women negotiate within their space. Another study has suggested that African women would have to challenge cultural socialisation by rejecting the assumption that the roles of men and women have been fixed by the Creator or culture [3].

Perceptions of gender differences about women in leadership positions are critical in this analysis as it is in the context of ethnic/cultural background, which has some religious limitations on women of childbearing age, to the extent that some argued or hold the perception that older women are men [5] It is essential to see how gender difference affects

them in their leadership roles. The women being studied are middle-aged; however, it would be crucial to know what opportunities they had when they were younger and whether younger and older women today have more opportunities. The kinds of opportunities they had and how they accessed them were also assessed.

These intersections that affect the positions and roles of women in leadership positions within the GES in Ghana today may also have a background of impost-colonialist thought that relates to women [3]. In most parts of Africa, the introducers of Christianity disregarded some aspects of the culture of the converts, which they labelled as evil. Thus, Western culture was also intended to replace the indigenous culture [6]. Missionaries had the support/security of the colonisers, and they, in turn, implemented their (colonisers) agenda. Thus, as Kwok Pui-Lan puts it, Christianization and Westernization became almost synonymous processes in the colonial period [7]. This form of institutionalised (Catholic and Protestant) Christianity and Westernization marginalised women [6]. In its history, the stories of the various women in leadership have been similar, as the women who played vital roles remain primarily nameless.

The gender constructions of the Westerners and colonisers were such that women were not engaged in specialised and productive work outside the home. They were limited to accepting low-paid and unpaid domestic jobs [5]. This influenced the status of women in the colonised communities. It is no wonder that most of the history of missionary work has very little information on women, though some accompanied their husbands. The same discriminatory view has been held for women in leadership positions across the board, and this has significantly affected either their ego or performance. Many people, especially men, think women should still be relegated to the background in everything [8].

Furthermore, in religion and, most significantly, historical records in some Christian denominations in Ghana, women leaders have to be discussed less. For instance, some women who came as missionaries to advance their course in religion and spearhead significant progress had their names mentioned because their work was limited to women and girls. In the history of the Pentecostal mission in Ghana, for instance, although Sophia McKeown, the wife of James McKeown, played a significant role in the commencement of their missionary work in Ghana, her role is only mentioned in passing. However, like earlier white women missionaries of the time, because of the understanding that she had about the place of women, Sophia McKeown focused on women and girls, teaching them vocational skills [8].

The indigenous religious and cultural system of Ghana has a gender system that includes both women and men in its spiritual and social structures. However, it is argued that some indigenous cultures experienced the imposition of some aspects of Western cultures at the time. One such aspect was the limitation of women to private or domestic roles [8]. The missionaries enforced strict gender roles - training boys for priesthood and trade while the girls were taught domestic services such as European forms of cooking, cleaning, sewing and child care. This indigenous culture is not replicated in the GES, where both genders can hold leadership positions. However, the society within which these women operate is infected with this gender-biased thinking, thus creating a challenging atmosphere for such women leaders [6]. In the church and society, there are changes in the roles of women and men, which, in a way, challenges the gender ideals for both men and women. These influence people's view of women 'crossing their boundaries' and raise questions of gaining more space. The changing roles of women are also a challenge to those already in leadership, primarily men, about accepting women as 'new entrants into their fold'.

Issues of gender are usually related to questions of authority or power. Thus, for these women, what sort of power do they have? How did they attain it, and to what extent do they exercise the kind of power or authority they have? Some researchers discuss the three power levels as personal, cultural and structural [9]. The personal level is for the

individual to develop confidence, a sense of worth, and enhancing skills. Power at the personal level allows one to influence and develop others [6]. The cultural or discursive level exposes the framework in which people find themselves and how they question such stereotypes. The structural level looks at positions, the opportunities available, and how one becomes conscious [4].

Power may also be looked at in terms of structure/politics, agency and experience. Additionally, researchers argue that no one owns power but rather machinery and that power is everywhere and not within our control [9]. Understanding what power does and not what it is, Foucault sees power from the perceptions of male ownership [5]. Thinking of power in this way takes it from the domain of that which is gendered. From this perspective, it can be said that power is not limited to life and domineering but encompasses the ability to influence and to act [10]. Women's roles can thus be power relations.

The work is also set within Max Weber's (1864-1920) concept of charismatic leadership. This concept is based on divine origin and a form of heroism. He identifies three forms of leadership: bureaucratic, traditional, and charismatic. Weber defines charismatic leadership as resting on devotion to a person's exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him. For Weber, charisma will be applied to a certain quality of an individual personality by which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are not accessible to ordinary people but are regarded as of divine origin [11].

Weber distinguishes charismatic leadership from traditional and bureaucratic leadership in such ways that whereas traditional and bureaucratic leadership strive for permanence, rules and impartiality, charismatic leadership is) temporal, depending on the leader's ability to perform miracles [7, 13-14]. Thus, the followers have a personal devotion towards the leader based on the leader's traits, such as the demonstration of unusual insight and accomplishment [10]. One hundred and one charismatic leaders are sometimes transformational, changing followers' lives. Weber's concept of charismatic leadership allows leadership opportunities for women.

1.2. Leadership and Gender

Leadership and gender have received attention in the literature [15, 16]. Ritter and Yoder (2004) suggest there are three theoretical explanations for the types of male and female leaders: Biologically Different (hormones, temperament, etc.), Culturally Different (socialised for different roles), and Structurally Determined (relative standing in organisational structures) [16]. However, practical differences yielded few differences in actual leadership ability [13, 17]. Leadership styles vary, especially in request directness and perceived politeness, but there is negligible difference in real leadership ability between men and women. Practical differences aside, the real problem with women in leadership positions is the attitudes of those around them. Disparaging feelings toward women in the workplace consisted of attitudes such as women lacked career orientation and leadership potential and were undependable and emotionally unstable - all of which made women unsuitable candidates for management [9]. Even as recently as 2013, Cho and Co replicated the study, but they still need to change their attitude. Polls about women in business said that despite executives' more favourable view of women, the majority still think only a truly exceptional woman can succeed in production [8, 10]. Why are women perceived as less competent leaders if there is an insignificant ability difference? Our unfounded attitudes are the more significant concern for our understanding of women in leadership.

A woman entering into a leadership position must decide the extent. The types of demands she is willing to accept, given the patriarchal nature of most societies and households and the double workloads that most working women experience (being

responsible for domestic responsibilities despite entering the workforce), being in leadership is bound to have an impact on women's social and personal lives and in turn affect how they perform [18]. Many religious leaders, some scholars, some writers, and even some women insist that women play their most significant role as wives and mothers in their own homes. Women who do participate in the workforce are concentrated in certain occupations because of the social structure of segregation between men and women and the limited access to specialisations for women. As a result, work opportunities for women are limited [19]. The concerns indicated above concerning leadership led to asking several questions. When it comes to leadership, does gender matter? Is there a difference between women leaders and men who lead? If so, what are the unique qualities of female leadership that the most influential women leaders possess, and are they unique to women? In 2005, a year-long study conducted by Caliper identified several characteristics that distinguish women leaders from men regarding leadership qualities. Women leaders are more assertive and persuasive, have a more vital need to get things done and are more willing to take risks than male leaders. Women leaders were also more empathetic, flexible, and more robust in interpersonal skills than their male counterparts [20]. This evidence - that women's leadership style is not simply unique but possibly at odds with what men practice - begs the question: Do these qualities have value in the marketplace? Is this type of leadership welcomed by society and the public and private sectors? These are among the questions that all gender-related issues seek to address. Apart from them, other studies also endeavour to assess whether women leaders in the private sector prefer a particular leadership style that is different from those of the public sector and whether there are any differences and similarities in the leadership style of women leaders in both the public and private sectors in society. These things are worth assessing since they add up in the quest to bridge the gender inequality gap.

1.3. Gender and leadership style

Over the past decade, many studies have been published on gender differences in leadership styles ([21, 22]. Typical masculine leaders emphasise achieving organisational goals, whereas typical feminine leaders emphasise people and relationships [21]. In support of this view, a researcher believes that men tend to identify with - transactional leadership and view subordinate job performance as a series of transactions, which exchange rewards for services rendered or punishment for inadequate performance [23]. More often than women, men use the power from formal authority and their position within the organisation. In this sense, men only thrive on their position to subject their subordinates to circumstances that emerge in their line of duty [23].

In contrast, many women possess leadership characteristics that are identified as transformational leadership. A study further stated that this type of leadership provides opportunities for subordinates to transform their self-interest into the group's interest through concern for a broader goal [23]. This form of leadership is well suited to provide support during chaotic and uncertain times. Many women attribute their power to personal characteristics such as charisma, interpersonal skills, hard work, or individual contacts rather than organisational structure. This character trait of women shows that their style is born out of personal courage rather than organisational favour [23]. Knowing that organisational structure sometimes favours males more than females, women use different strategies to contain such unfair treatment. Similarly, women within the GES also face the same organisational treatment; hence, they need coping strategies.

A researcher recognised that men's preferred leadership style is - command and control. Women prefer to work interactively, sharing power and information. When encouraged to identify the perceived differences between themselves and their male colleagues' leadership styles, 458 (68%) of women agreed there was a difference in how women and men approached their work. The women surveyed associated their style with keywords such as - consensus building and - cooperation. Many felt their style was less

aggressive than their male colleagues [23]. This less aggressive attitude of women though less, ens their problems but sometimes subjects them to the aggressive nature of their male counterparts who work under the women. The National Foundation for Women Business Owners study found that women succeed by building relationships with their customers and employees and having control over their destiny and monetary gain. Conversely, men derive success from the satisfaction of a job well done and achieving desired goals [24]. Thus, women's leadership approach brings about an environment that is a - web of inclusion, while men's leadership is more likely to encourage hierarchical organisations with a top-down approach [25].

Research supports past evidence that many senior women managers work in male-dominated environments. These environments can impact women managers' leadership styles and stress levels. Women have often found themselves pressured to use a masculine leadership style. Researchers conducted a survey which revealed that 326 (74%) of women recognised that it is essential to their professional success to develop a style comfortable for their male colleagues. The pressure for women to alter their leadership style has been proven to be a substantial challenge for them and may hinder them from moving into upper levels of corporate management [26]. However, women are starting to succeed despite stereotypical characteristics associated with being feminine and considered inappropriate as leaders. A researcher in the article -The Way Women Lead for the Harvard Business Review identified the second wave of women who are making their way into top management. Female executives who have reached the peak of their professions are starting to represent a new leadership paradigm [23]. They are drawing from their attitudes and skills and need to adopt the style and habits proven successful for men. An earlier study supports this belief that "women leaders in the past used traditionally masculine leadership traits. These masculine traits consisted of women being domineering, authoritative, and - tough".

In contrast to their male counterparts or successful women of the past, these women embrace their femininity and utilise it to their advantage in business [27]. Researchers addressed the new approach by reflecting on past practices of copying male leadership styles, which did not steer women into the top jobs of America-s leading companies. For example, power dressing and bulging shoulder pads for female executives during the 1980s produced minimal progress for women. The topic of gender and leadership style has generated much debate. However, it has paid off for a few successful women leaders within corporate America, government agencies, and education [27].

Several women today serve as powerful role models for women aspiring to hold visible leadership positions. For example, Condoleezza Rice exemplifies leadership in U.S. Foreign Policy, Oprah Winfrey is important in the entertainment world, Carly Fiorina of Hewlett-Packard serves as a former CEO of a Fortune 500 company, Mary Sue Coleman represents education as President of the University of Michigan, and Hillary Rodman Clinton represents women in politics. Some argue that as this trend continues, women will suffer more stress-related disorders as they move into high-pressure jobs and as they combine work and family roles [27].

1.4. Gender stereotype

The widespread attitudes people have about women in leadership positions are perceptions with no objective basis, hence called stereotypes. The gender-role theory says that people develop expectations for their and others' behaviour based on beliefs about what is appropriate for men and women. In a more concrete example, if a woman were to open a car door for a man before she walked around to get in the car herself, we might find her behaviour odd based on what we know of men's and women's typical behaviour. It would be an example that conflicts with our expectations [28]. The Correspondent Inference Theory states that the less likely an act is, given the actor's situation, the stronger the perceiver's inferences are that the actor's underlying disposition corresponds to the

actor's behaviour [29]. In other words, when behaviour conflicts with our expectations, we seek to find a state of cognitive consistency. Using the Fundamental Attribution Error to explain the cognitive inconsistency, it is assumed that the behaviour is an outward show of underlying attributes or traits. These two theories are also applicable to the workplace. A term known as Gender-Role Spillover is the idea that gender-based expectations of behaviour carry over from social interactions into the workplace [30]. So, in addition to the expectations and stereotypes people hold socially, when in an organisational setting, they also rely on leadership and management stereotypes [31]. As women enter the workplace, stereotypes of women and leaders and gender roles must be considered to understand how they are viewed.

Stereotyping is one of the more significant hurdles for women in leadership positions. As previously mentioned, leadership is as much (or more) an idea in followers' minds as a reality of leaders themselves [30]. When a negative stereotype perceives a person, it is tough to change because one must change the co-workers' attitude. However, when provided with unambiguous and undeniable information about performance effectiveness, undervaluation of women does not occur [15, 16]. For example, when a female leader's management success is proven and outstanding, her performance will not be evaluated using gender stereotypes but by the available known information. It is as if women leaders are assumed incompetent until proven competent. The stereotype of women in society is what researchers call Communal [31]. Women are seen as friendly, unselfish, concerned with others and emotionally expressive. Men, on the other hand, are stereotyped as "Agentic" [32]. They are independent, masterful, assertive and competent. The differences in these roles are evident by the nature of the descriptions. What complicates them more is the similarity between the Agentic stereotype and the stereotype of a good leader. Strong leadership is also characterised as independent, assertive, and competent. Women generally lead in a more democratic and participative style than men [30, 33].

Men are autocratic in leadership style [34]. However, when women do not lead in the expected style and lead in an "autocratic" style, their attributes as distinct from men and successful managers are hardly pleasant [35]. Women are noted for negative qualities, such as bitterness, quarrelsomeness, and selfishness, and others suggest they have an unbridled ambition for power and achievement. This description seems to conform to the "Bitch" role type, which often has been alluded to in characterisations of high-power career women [35]. Men and women also differ primarily in task orientation (i.e. perceptions of tendencies to have subordinates follow the rules and procedure, maintain high standards and make the leader and subordinate rules explicit [36]. Men are rated lower in task orientation and, therefore, more favourably. Women, however, are rated more highly in task orientation and, therefore, less favourably [37]. These results occur even when the task orientation is at the same level for both men and women. People only perceive a difference. Seeing women as more task-oriented may reflect the more excellent contrast between the leadership role and the gender stereotype [36]. Women with masculine leadership styles exacerbate their evaluation [37].

With task orientation and communal and agentic stereotypes, it is logical that studies have found that scepticism of women's capability in leadership is exaggerated when they take charge in an especially authoritative manner [36]. When women deviate as significantly as to seem autocratic, where the stereotype suggests they should be communal, the distance between the stereotype and the behaviour causes discomfort to the subordinates, and they try to reconcile the two. Reconciliation takes place by using negative stereotypes [5]. Female behaviour, when autocratic, is regarded as more extreme than men's, resulting from deviation from stereotypes [36]. However, another deviation amplifying the female stereotype results from fewer women than men in high-status positions [5, 35]. This connects logically to a study that "the more masculine a stereotype a woman portrays in a business leadership position role conflict and increase the

likelihood of unfair negative, the more at odds others will be with her stereotype and will seek to mediate their discomfort" [37]. Assertive and forceful behaviours when exhibited by a woman become negatively evaluated. Unfortunately, there is a -lack of fit" perception between women and power [2, 38]. The more autocratic and directive mannerisms a female shows, the more negatively she is seen. Gender stereotypes cause women's behaviour to be interpreted differently than if a man were in the same situation. The very same behaviour that would have been deemed acceptable for a man is now unacceptable because the actor is a woman [6, 11]. This gives men a much greater flexibility of management styles [6].

1.5. Perceptions of gendered differences in leadership

In Ghana, perceptions of gender differences in the abilities of men and women as leaders are sometimes marked by culture and beliefs. More often than not, women leaders face stereotypes that are rooted in their historical employment as maids in the homes of white employers. In one of the few studies, researchers observed subculture differences and similarities between Ghanaian men and women managers in retail banking [39]. A study stated that "male Ghanaian managers concentrated on performance, competition and winning, power, control and directive leadership" [40]. On the other hand, the author stated that Ghanaian women managers highlighted cooperation, empowerment, involvement, intuition and empathy. The study characterised women's style in her sample of 216 retail managers as transformational and interactive. The previous review also included racial differences in the behaviour of the managers in her sample. The study found that "the organisational culture of white managers differed greatly from that of blacks. The black managers in her sample were more Afro-centric (male-dominated leadership) in their approach to leadership. This canker was very much profound during the apartheid regime in South Africa" [40]. From the South African perspective, the Afro-centric model is centred on the concept of Ubuntu. Ubuntu is not a leadership style but a philosophy of African humanism, which values collectivism and group-centeredness in contrast to individualism [41]. Researchers using Hofstede's national culture model gave higher scores for blacks on collectiveness, human orientation and gender equality than their white counterparts. They concluded that blacks are not as results-determined as whites. Although she measured leader attributes, she did not report them [30]. Also, they observed differences in the cultural orientation of white and black women. Black women scored higher on humane orientation compared to white females. In general, black women emphasised concern for employees and collective mutual support and interdependence compared to white women's emphasis on independence and freedom, employees as workers, planning, and future action.

It should be noted that the sample did not include Asians and coloureds [30]. The study suggests that "perceptions of leader behaviour should vary across race and gender". However, it is interesting to note that "no cultural differences existed amongst the managers in their study". For them, management efficiency was independent of both ethnicity and race. Using Hofstede's model of national culture, they observed the influence of racial/ethnic diversity on managerial effectiveness in South Africa. Regardless of managers' identification with their ethnic group, there was a common national culture at the management level. Aspects of that national culture, including a high degree of uniqueness and a low tolerance for hierarchical differences in power, are similar to those found in the Netherlands, England and the United States [30, 41]. A study points out the historical impact of Dutch, British and American cultures on South Africa and the prevalence of British and American management systems in business education and practice.

On the other hand, they argued that apparent disagreements can be reconciled by the unique nature of African collectivism, in which individuals act autonomously but stay socially united, a concept referred to as communalism. As a structure of collectivism,

communalism can coexist with personal freedom or individualism. This is supported by cross-cultural leadership theory and research on gender and leadership in South Africa, which indicates that there ought to be significant differences in perceptions of ideal leadership behaviour across racial and gender groups [41].

2. Materials and Methods

The study adopted non-numerical data and used a purely qualitative research approach. The researchers adopted this research approach owing to the aim of this research, which was to provide an in-depth and interpreted understanding of women's leadership styles. A phenomenological design supported the study framework, and the required data was collected through interviews. According to Creswell (1998), the phenomenological approach is done through interviews with individuals who have experienced the phenomenon. The phenomenological approach aims to illuminate the specific and identify phenomena through how the actors perceive them. In the human sphere, this translates typically into gathering 'deep' information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews, discussions and participant observation and representing it from the perspective of the research participant(s). The population for the study comprised female headmistresses and assistant headmistresses in the various Senior High Schools in the Metropolis. The schools and headmistresses were purposively selected for the study. Six (6) headmistresses and eight (8) assistant headmistresses were drawn from six senior high schools within the Cape Coast Metropolis of Ghana. These schools are as follows: Holy Child Senior High School, Wesley Girls' Senior High School, Ghana National SHS, Oguaa SHS, University Practice SHS, and Christ Academy SHS. As of the study, these schools had female heads and assistants.

The main research instrument for this study was the interview guide. Using the semi-structured interview guide enabled me to probe further during the interview process to have emerging themes and generally gather 'deep' information Creswell (1998) about the lived experiences (phenomenological approach) of women in leadership positions. To ensure the Trustworthiness of the data instrument, the findings generated from this study are a true reflection of the study participants; the questions in the interview guide were considered to address the issue of ambiguity and double-worded questions or repetitions. Then, researchers tested the questions with some personalities to check their clarity. That is, if the personalities directly responded to the questions asked without having to ask for clarification, the questions were deemed to be devoid of ambiguity and nebulosity. Also, in addressing the issue of Trustworthiness in the study, researchers relied considerably on literature to develop the research question, develop the questions in the interview guide, and operationalise the research questions. The data analysed were based on themes, but interpretations were based on information from interview responses.

3. Findings and Discussion

This section presents findings and discusses the research question: *What leadership styles are adopted by female leaders in SHS in Cape Coast Metropolis?* This research question aimed to identify the adopted leadership styles women use in leadership positions in SHS to perform their duties; women have been observed to have various leadership qualities and exhibit different styles that move them forward in their organisations. All the women leaders interviewed had a peculiar leadership style that helped run the schools they headed. It emerged from the interview that all the participants have spent at least five years in their current positions and used different approaches to manage a particular situation where necessary. Hence, this was looked at success in leadership as a woman, adopted styles in leadership, best leadership styles and conflict management procedures about their age and marital status.

3.1. Success in leadership as a woman

The participants revealed that to be successful as a woman in leadership; one should have self-confidence and build the –and do" spirit in themselves. Women in leadership should not look down upon themselves or allow anyone to intimidate them. It is important to obey rules and regulations guiding one's position and be principled. It also emerged from the interview that it is necessary to continue learning and training to be abreast of current procedures for handling issues. Suppose these qualities of self-confidence and being on top of subjects are in place, paying due diligence to matters, and being principled. In that case, the possibility of women becoming successful in leadership would be high. Some of the comments are given below.

-I always believe in myself and my abilities. I know that I was put in this position as a result of my hard work, and hence, I am always ready to deliver" (WL # 3)

–do not stay idle with the intention that once I am the head, things will be all right; I regularly study and try to upgrade myself. I am not an accountant, but as the head of the school, I have to be familiar with all finance procedures. Therefore, I try as much as possible to learn some sort of financial management so that I can competently supervise some of the financial issues that arise from the account section" (WL # 7) – .it is not easy, but once I know doing that would make me succeed and move the school to achieve its vision, I do not have any option" (WL # 7)

-GES has been enacting many regulations to run the school affairs. So, what I do is that I make sure those regulations are correctly implemented without circumventing the core areas of the policies" (WL # 6)

It emerged from the interview that, though some challenges may hinder progress, one can be successful in one's position with determination and a self-sacrificing spirit. Furthermore, regarding age and marital status, I deem it pertinent to admit that WL#3 and WL#7 are single, and WL#6 is married. Also, it is necessary to add that WL#3 and WL#7 are between the age range of 51-60, but WL#6 is within the age range of 40-50. This means that while those who are married and those who seem farther from 60 strive for success in leadership positions by strictly adhering to or following religiously laid down rules and regulations set for them by GES, those who are single and are nearing 60 years old try to know more about their role and what is expected of them as well capitalise on sustained confidence. So, married women and women farther than 60 who are in leadership positions focus on the given to achieve success. Those single and nearing 60 use epistemological stance and character to succeed.

3.2. Adopted styles in leadership

All the participants use hybrid leadership styles in their duties. Almost all leadership styles, including democratic, transformational, participatory, and sometimes autocratic leadership styles, were adopted. According to the participants, there is a need to blend these styles to achieve a desired target. It was also clear that to properly use all these leadership styles, one has to be dynamic and quickly anticipate problems. The participants indicated that in similar or the same situations, different styles could be used depending on the nature of the people involved and the history of their conduct. Some stated:

-Some of the students are troublesome while others are not, so you have to be vigilant when applying sanctions, and so I try to consult my staff on the appropriate sanctions to give" (WL # 10).

-Usually, I become autocratic on issues that may be detrimental to the school's progress. When I see the need to proffer sanctions, I do not hesitate and, therefore, instruct my staff to implement my orders (WL # 11)."

-Usually, I participate in activities; I could go to the dormitories since it is an all-female school and teach the girls how to scrub even though their housemistress would be around. You could see that the girls become thrilled and ready to do whatever they are asked to do" (WL # 1)

It also emerged that if the women leaders become too flexible or complacent on critical issues, people, especially male teachers, tend to indulge in all sorts of acts that contradict the school's virtues. Therefore, to maintain the virtues and integrity of the schools, women leaders sometimes applied coerciveness in their decision-making. From the ensuing extracts, it should be learned that WL#10 and 1 are married and are between 51-60 years but WL#11 is single and within 40-50. Then, it can be offered here that the women who are married and are nearing 60 years old adopt participative and transformative leadership styles and are relationship-oriented. However, the one who is single and farther from 60 is assertive. This could be premised on the fact that such a woman who is single and is farther from 60 does not have any influence from home as in the husband as to make them want to be authoritative, women who are married seem to have some influence from home and therefore place a barrier on their authority.

-Some male teachers could sometimes behave insubordinately, and to clear their mischief, you have to apply autocratic and arbitrary decisions so that sanity could prevail" (WL # 6)

3.3. Best leadership styles

This question sought to unveil from the participants the best leadership styles that could be used in performing duties. All the participants indicated that, more often than not, arbitrary and autocratic means of dealing with issues are not appropriate. Aside from these styles, which sometimes come to the fore due to the circumstances, all the other styles were deemed appropriate. Some of the enumerated styles in this regard include participatory, democratic and transformational, as already stated. According to the participants, there are no fast rules on these excellent leadership styles, and many others should have been mentioned. For instance, they indicated that democratic and participatory styles lead to transformational leadership, which brings more extraordinary transformation to organisations. It further emerged that most of the participants liked the idea of participation. In applying this style, all stakeholders contribute to a given situation. In this regard, students, teachers, and non-teachers feel part of a decision and become ever-ready to ensure the successful implementation of those policies or decisions.

—have always tried to involve all hands in a decision-making process so that after a final determination has been made, people, upon knowing that they were part of the process, would make it work" (WL # 4)

-Listening to people's" views on issues is very good in leadership; sometimes you have to sit down and regulate as stakeholders in a situation discuss resolution" (WL # 8). -With this trajectory, stakeholders lessen the blame on me if there is any failure along the line, and the pressure on me becomes less" (WL # 8).

Following the extracts above, it becomes clear that all the study participants agreed that the same leadership style was the best, which emerged from the study as a participatory leadership style. Even though they all agree that one leadership style is the

best, they use different leadership styles. Their biographic data could explain this, as some are free from assuming a different role (being a subordinate) at home.

3.4. Conflict Management Procedures

The interview revealed how they manage conflict as part of their leadership styles in performing their duties. It also emerged that conflict resolution forms a good part of their day-to-day administration. The participants employed different procedures or strategies by the women leaders to resolve conflicts. In a few cases, the headmistresses asked both sides to air their grievances in a conversation with an impartial party to ensure that no one felt cheated or discriminated against. It also emerged that the two parties are sometimes brought together in the presence of others who can be objective mediators and allow them to air their grievances. From the study findings, it was realised that almost all the participants adopted the same conflict management procedures. So, there was no need to provide any further analysis of the participant's age and marital status. On the issue of conflict management procedure, I provide unified information as given by the respondents. This is given below.

—do not permit behaviour or words that are overly hurtful and mean.

Moreover, I make sure by asking for apologies after words used or interrupt to prevent that manipulative, controlling behaviour and words that are unacceptable in dealing with conflict' (WL # 10)

It further emerged from the interview that it is not easy to get entrenched in one's reality and not consider any other points of view. Therefore, the participants indicated that they sometimes have to step outside of themselves and make a genuine effort to perceive life from the other person's position. One stated, "... this is not a natural inclination..." (WL # 2)

The implication is that ordinarily, such participants would not have put up such effort but for the sake of leadership position. It was revealed that this conflict management strategy usually requires outside guidance from someone who has yet to invest in the conflict. However, if the parties are trained in this strategy, they can step away, take time to analyse the other person's position and then come together to build a workable solution. It also emerged that within the schools, conflict resolution occurs more quickly when the parties work toward crafting a win-win solution instead of battling in a zero-sum game where the winner takes all. The interview revealed that people often enter into conflict thinking that if the other side wins, they lose and vice versa. Therefore, with more communication, time, and compromise, the choice of win- a win-win approach becomes helpful. As usual, there is no one fast rule regarding leadership styles and their choice. The objective sought to explore some of the frequently used styles by these women and identify how they correspond to reducing the challenges they face as women leaders.

The study found that, first of all, women had to wield self-confidence and determination before they could succeed as their leaders. Moreover, continuous training and learning about the role of leadership positions is essential for success. Some of the identified personal traits were self-discipline, diligence, and principle. Some of the adopted leadership styles found in the study were participatory, widely used, followed by democratic, and transformational. It was also found that in some situations, the autocratic leadership style was the best to deal appropriately with issues which, when not confronted with such an approach, may be detrimental to the organisation's success. Arguing from the adopted leadership style, it emerged that all styles were situational. Depending on which issues are brought up, a specific style is adopted to deal with them.

This view, however, contradicts the ideals of an earlier study that “there are real differences in leadership style between male and female managers. Women negotiate, mediate, facilitate and communicate tasks to their subordinates clearly” [23]. Research shows that “this feminine style reduces hierarchy, satisfies subordinates and achieves results” [23].

These findings are consistent with the literature that “leadership styles vary, especially perceived politeness, but there is negligible difference in real leadership ability between men and women. Practical differences aside, the real problem with women in leadership positions seems to be the attitudes of those around them” [13, 17]. The findings are also consistent with a previous study that “women exhibit a type of leadership that provides opportunities for subordinates to transform their self-interest into the interest of the group through concern for a broader goal. It is believed that “this form of leadership is well suited to provide support during chaotic and uncertain times” [23]. Therefore, it is unsurprising that most participants attributed their power to personal characteristics such as charisma, interpersonal skills, hard work, or special contacts rather than organisational structure.

The study on the Leadership Styles of Female Leaders in the Management of Senior High Schools in the Central Region of Ghana investigates the practical application of leadership theories in the context of women leaders in educational settings. One prominent theory that resonates throughout the findings is the concept of situational leadership, which emphasises the importance of adapting leadership styles based on the situation. The findings reveal that female leaders in senior high schools predominantly employ a participatory leadership style. This aligns with the theory of situational leadership, which suggests that leaders should adjust their approach based on the needs of their team and the circumstances they face. By embracing a participatory leadership style, these women leaders demonstrate a collaborative and inclusive approach to decision-making, involving their deputies and subordinates in the process.

Moreover, the study highlights the impact of age and marital status on the leadership styles adopted by women in senior high schools. It is noted that married women and those closer to 60 years old tend to lean towards participative and transformative leadership styles, while single women and those farther from 60 years old exhibit more assertive tendencies. This nuanced understanding of how age and marital status influence leadership styles underscores the complexity of leadership dynamics and the need for leaders to adapt their approaches based on individual characteristics.

By integrating the theory of situational leadership into the study's findings, we gain valuable insights into how female leaders in senior high schools navigate the complexities of their roles. The emphasis on participatory leadership and the influence of personal factors such as age and marital status underscores the multifaceted nature of leadership practices among women in educational leadership positions. This integration of theory and empirical findings enhances our understanding of the diverse leadership styles employed by women leaders in the Central Region of Ghana. It provides a framework for further research and development in educational leadership.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

In the study, it emerged that all the women interviewed favoured the participative leadership style as the best leadership style, but from age and marital status variation, those who are married use the participatory leadership style, but those who are single use the assertive style. The conclusion that can be drawn from this finding is that women leaders who are single and are farther from 60 years old are more likely to have problems in the discharge of their duties as leaders since men, per societal influence, will always try to resist the control of women leaders as revealed by one of the interviewees during the interview. The Ghana education service should package special incentives for women who aspire to achieve the utmost leadership role of becoming heads of senior high schools.

It will motivate the young women generation. It is also recommended that women in leadership positions in the Ghana Education Service are advised to learn by updating their skills and competencies to grow in confidence and share ideas with colleagues in the same field to adopt and adapt leadership styles that have worked in other institutions to handle institutional challenges. Again, they can take up mentoring programmes to equip female teachers and educationists who aspire to heights like theirs.

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