



Patriarchal Practices and Gender Disparities in Education: An Empirical Analysis of Zimbabwean School Administration

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ABSTRACT: This qualitative study examines the persistent patriarchal practices and gender disparities in Zimbabwean school administration through an empirical investigation of women educational leaders' lived experiences. Despite women constituting the majority of teachers, they remain severely underrepresented in educational leadership positions. Through semi-structured interviews with 15 female school heads and 10 aspiring women leaders across urban and rural schools in three Zimbabwean provinces, combined with document analysis of school policies and records, this study identifies multiple barriers including cultural expectations, community resistance, technological challenges, and structural obstacles within educational systems. The research reveals that women face systematic discrimination in accessing leadership roles, with rural areas presenting additional challenges compounded by limited digital infrastructure and prohibitive data costs. Participants reported monthly data expenses ranging from \$20-\$50 USD, representing significant portions of their salaries and limiting their ability to engage in online professional development. Evidence from participant testimonies suggests that women often excel as educational leaders when given opportunities, showing strong instructional leadership and commitment to student welfare. The study recommends comprehensive policy reforms, mentoring programmes, targeted technology support, and community engagement initiatives to address gender bias and promote the advancement of women in educational leadership. These findings suggest that increasing women's representation in school leadership could significantly benefit educational outcomes and equity.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Sub-Saharan African education systems already face major gender disparities in leadership roles, yet women tend to comprise most of the teaching community (Bush, 2020). Zimbabwe is an especially interesting case study of these lingering inequalities, with the traditional patriarchal systems overlapping with educational leadership to restrict the promotion of women to the position of heads. According to studies, women, though constituting about 60-70 percent of the teachers of most African countries, make up less than 30 percent of school principals and head teachers (Hallinger, 2018).

Gender inequities in educational leadership have become a topic of growing interest amongst scholars and policymakers, with researchers proposing diverse leadership teams as a catalyst to enhanced academic performance (Leithwood et al., 2006). The underrepresentation of women in educational leadership roles is not only an equity issue, but it is also a tremendous waste of human capital that could otherwise contribute to improving and innovating education. Research in various African nations (Diko, 2014; Faulkner, 2015) suggests that women tend to introduce new perspectives, a team approach to leadership, and a dedication to the well-being of students, all of which have the potential to make schools more effective.

Nevertheless, women still face several obstacles in accessing and practising educational leadership, which reflect broader societal notions of the proper division of gender roles and norms of influence. Mapolisa et al. (2015) reported that female leaders in primary schools in Zimbabwe face severe challenges. Shava and Mpofu (2019) found that there are systematic barriers, including individual and family expectations, institutional practices, and community resistance, that deprive women of the opportunity to achieve leadership roles.

Although gender equality and the rights of women are enshrined in Section 56 of the 2013 Constitution of Zimbabwe, gender imbalance in educational leadership remains a concern. Due to various traditional cultural values and patriarchal practices, the proportion of women in academic leadership is still very low (Zikhali and Perumal, 2016). This lack of alignment between policy intent and practice highlights the need to understand better the mechanisms that sustain gender inequality in educational leadership. In a study conducted in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe, Chitiyo et al. (2024) noted that the proportion of female teachers was 88%, compared to 11% male teachers. This is contrary to leadership positions, where, in a study in the Hwange district (Matabeleland North Province) of Zimbabwe, Mhandu and Mushaandja (2021) found that 72% of school leaders were men, with only 28% being women.

According to international studies (Coleman, 2012; Lumby, 2015), addressing gender inequalities in educational leadership requires complex measures that target both the structural and cultural levels. Effective interventions should focus on recruitment and promotion policies, offer special assistance to the career development of women, and aim to modify people's attitudes concerning the ability of women to be leaders. Experiences from countries that are already working hard to advance gender equity in the field of educational leadership indicate that multi-level interventions, along with long-term efforts, are required to bring about change (Martinez et al. (2021)).

The effects of the gender gap are not confined to career opportunities at the individual level, but also on the quality of education and student performance. According to research (Weinstein et al., 2021), schools characterised by diverse leadership teams tend to show better performance in aspects such as student welfare, community engagement, and instructional innovation. The methodical marginalisation of women in leadership, in turn, is an underutilised academic opportunity and can create and sustain gender disparities in mainstream society.

While existing literature provides valuable context on gender disparities in African educational leadership, many contemporary challenges specific to Zimbabwe remain under-documented in peer-reviewed sources. This study addresses this gap through an empirical investigation that captures the lived experiences of women educational leaders in Zimbabwe's current socio-economic context. By directly engaging with participants through interviews and observations, this research provides insights into issues such as technological barriers, current economic constraints, and evolving cultural dynamics that shape women's leadership experiences. The analysis examines the interplay between cultural expectations, structural barriers, technological constraints, and resistance within communities that restrict the number of women entering the educational leadership field, as well as the evidence of effectiveness when women are provided with leadership opportunities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Gender Representation and Leadership Barriers

A study conducted by Mapolisa et al. (2015) documented the severe dilemmas facing women leaders in primary schools of Harare Province, revealing that women encounter several issues that hinder their effectiveness and career advancement. Their research found that the perception of women's leadership ability in educational institutions is still shaped by societal expectations and stereotypical gender roles, where women leaders often encounter difficulties with their authority and decision-making skills. The obstacles that women face in the leadership process in education are not solely limited to personal biases. Shava et al. (2019) outlined specific issues that face women school leaders in the Mberengwa district (Midlands Province) in Zimbabwe, concluding that women school leaders face resistance from their community members and other school leaders who tend to question their leadership capabilities. These obstacles are indicative of more underlying cultural assumptions of gender roles and prey on more emotional and professional stress in women leaders.

2.2 Rural and Disadvantaged Environments

Women who oversee schools in rural and poorer places have their disadvantaged problems compounded by the overlapping of gender discrimination and the lack of resources and geographic distance. The article by Zikhali and Perumal (2016) explored the experiences of female school heads working in the disadvantaged school setup of Zimbabwe, where much emotional labour is required to operate within problematic conditions, while balancing administrative tasks and community resistance. Women leaders are faced with special challenges because of the intersection of gender and rural disadvantage. Moyo and Perumal (2019) showed that poverty and social disadvantage amplify the gender-related barriers, especially in rural regions where the traditional gender roles are still more ingrained, and the support systems are not as flexible. Through their study, they discovered that women in such environments must fight not only structural barriers but also cultural resistance to establish their leadership as worthy.

2.3 Strategies of Leadership Effectiveness and Success

Women tend to be highly effective in their leadership roles, even when they face notable barriers, whenever they have the opportunity. Oyedele, Mamvuto and Nhiwatiwa (2010) established that teachers in Mutare district also held positive views about the effectiveness of women in leadership roles, and all their colleagues and subordinates acknowledged their administrative and instructional competencies. Women who manage to climb the career ladder and occupy leadership roles employ specific strategies to overcome the odds and advance their careers. Jones (2017) studied how female head teachers develop their professional sense in

the primary sector and found that women approach the establishment of authority and effectiveness in various ways. Such strategies involve establishing a strong professional network, demonstrating outstanding competence, and identifying mentors who can provide special attention to their progress, while also managing the expectations and opposition of the community.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative empirical research approach to investigate patriarchal behaviours and gender inequality in Zimbabwean school management. The empirical methodology was chosen specifically to capture contemporary realities and context-specific challenges that are not adequately documented in existing peer-reviewed literature, particularly regarding current economic conditions, technological barriers, and evolving social dynamics in Zimbabwe.

3.1 Research Design

The study utilised a phenomenological research design to understand the lived experiences of women in educational leadership positions. Data was collected through multiple methods to ensure triangulation and enhance the credibility of findings.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

Purposive sampling was employed to select 25 participants across three provinces in Zimbabwe (Harare, Midlands, and Matabeleland North). The sample included:

- 15 female school heads currently serving in leadership positions (8 in urban schools, 7 in rural schools)
- 10 female deputy heads and senior teachers aspiring to leadership positions
- Participants ranged in age from 35 to 58 years, with leadership experience ranging from 2 to 15 years

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Data was collected through:

1. Semi-structured interviews: In-depth interviews lasting 60-90 minutes were conducted with each participant, exploring their experiences with barriers to leadership, community resistance, technological challenges, professional development opportunities, and success strategies.
2. Document analysis: School policies, promotion records, professional development participation logs, and communication records were examined to corroborate interview data.
3. Field observations: Observations were conducted during school leadership meetings and community engagement sessions to understand the dynamics of women's leadership in practice.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data was analysed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. Interview transcripts were coded inductively to identify patterns and themes. The analysis process involved:

- Familiarisation with data through repeated reading of transcripts
- Generation of initial codes
- Identification of themes and sub-themes
- Review and refinement of themes
- Definition and naming of final themes
- Production of the research report

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from relevant educational authorities. All participants provided informed consent, and pseudonyms are used throughout to protect participant confidentiality. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage of the research.

3.6 Trustworthiness

Credibility was established through triangulation of data sources, member checking with participants, and prolonged engagement in the field. Transferability was enhanced through thick description of the research context and participant experiences.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The analysis of interview data, documents, and field observations reveals that a set of interconnected impediments systematically hamper women's achievement in assuming leadership roles in the education sector in Zimbabwe. The findings are organised into thematic categories that emerged from the data.

4.1 Cultural Expectations and Gender Role Stereotypes

Participants consistently reported that cultural pressures regarding women's roles in the home and childcare created significant tensions between family life and professional development. As one participant (Female Head, Urban School, 42 years) stated:

"The expectation is that I must be a perfect mother, a perfect wife, and a perfect school head. When I attend workshops or stay late for school meetings, my extended family questions whether I'm neglecting my duties at home. My male colleagues never face these questions."

This finding corroborates Mapolisa et al. (2015), who found that in schools in the Harare Province, female leaders are constantly challenged on whether they have the right to lead, make decisions, or discuss issues of discipline. Participants in this study reported ongoing challenges to their authority, with 12 out of 15 female heads describing situations where their decisions were questioned or undermined based on their gender. These attitudes are premised on deep-rooted perceptions of gender roles, where educational leadership is believed to require attributes such as firmness and authority, which are culturally attributed to men.

4.2 Community and Institutional Resistance

Community resistance emerged as one of the most significant barriers in the data. Thirteen participants described experiencing heightened scrutiny compared to their male counterparts. A rural school head (48 years) explained:

"When I make a decision, the School Development Committee wants to know every detail. They question my judgment. But when the male head at the neighbouring school makes the same decision, they accept it without question. I constantly have to prove myself."

This finding aligns with research by Shava, Tlou, and Mpofu (2019), which reveals a pattern of institutional bias where women headteachers face greater opposition to their decisions from teaching staff, parents, and school governing bodies. The resistance manifests in several forms, from subtle sabotage of decisions to outright challenges to authority. Eight participants reported experiencing deliberate non-compliance with their directives from male staff members, while six described situations where parents initially refused to meet with them, requesting to speak with a male administrator instead.

4.3 Structural and Systemic Barriers

Participants identified multiple structural barriers within the education system. Nine female heads reported being denied opportunities for professional development workshops that were offered to their male counterparts. As one deputy head (39 years, aspiring leader) explained:

"When provincial workshops are announced, the male heads are automatically nominated. We have to specifically request to attend, and even then, we're often told there's no budget or that we should focus on our teaching duties."

Additionally, participants noted the lack of formal mentoring structures for aspiring women leaders. Eight of the ten aspiring leaders reported having no access to mentorship programmes, relying instead on informal guidance from retired female educators or self-directed professional development. This finding supports Zikhali and Perumal's (2016) observation that women are often denied opportunities for professional development and lack access to informal networks where professional opportunities can be negotiated.

4.4 Intersectionality of Gender and Rural Disadvantage

The seven rural school heads interviewed described compounded challenges resulting from the intersection of gender discrimination and rural location. One participant (Rural School Head, 45 years) stated:

"In the city, people are more accepting of women leaders. Here, tradition is everything. The community expects me to defer to male elders in every decision. I have to be twice as good and work twice as hard to get half the respect."

Rural participants reported limited access to professional support networks, with five describing feelings of professional isolation. The geographic distance from provincial offices and other schools made networking difficult, and participants noted that male colleagues were more likely to be invited to informal professional gatherings. This finding extends the work of Moyo and Perumal (2019), demonstrating how poverty and social disadvantage amplify gender-related barriers in rural regions where traditional gender roles remain more entrenched.

4.5 Economic Dependency and Career Mobility Constraints

Fourteen participants discussed how economic dependency on spouses limited their career mobility. Several described turning down promotion opportunities that required relocation because their husbands refused to move or would not support the decision. One participant (Deputy Head, 41 years) explained:

"I was offered a head position in another district, but my husband said no. He earns more than me, so his job takes priority. If I insisted on taking the position, it would have caused serious problems in my marriage. I had to let the opportunity go."

This economic dynamic reinforces patriarchal power structures, as women in Zimbabwe's patriarchal society are often positioned as secondary income earners. Eleven participants reported that their spouses controlled major financial decisions in the household, limiting their independence in career choices. Three participants described situations where they had to use their own funds for work-related expenses because their husbands questioned their professional spending.

4.6 Technology and Communication Barriers

A significant finding that emerged from the data relates to technological challenges faced by women leaders, particularly regarding digital access and communication infrastructure. This theme was not anticipated based on existing literature but emerged strongly from participant testimonies.

4.6.1 Infrastructure Limitations

All seven rural school heads and four urban school heads described inadequate access to reliable internet connectivity at their schools. Participants reported that their schools lacked sufficient computers, with several describing situations where they had to use personal devices for school administration. One rural head (51 years) stated:

"We have two computers for the entire school, and they're outdated. Most of our administrative work has to be done on my personal laptop. The internet connection is unreliable – some days we have no connection at all."

These infrastructure challenges created significant barriers to effective school management, limiting participants' ability to communicate with district offices, access digital resources, and implement technology-enhanced teaching methods.

4.6.2 Data Costs and Economic Barriers

A particularly pressing issue that emerged from participant testimonies was the prohibitive cost of mobile data in Zimbabwe. All 25 participants reported that they regularly purchased mobile data from their personal funds to fulfill work responsibilities, as schools did not provide data allowances. Participants reported monthly data expenses ranging from \$20 to \$50 USD, representing significant portions of their salaries.

One urban school head (44 years) explained:

"Data is extremely expensive in Zimbabwe. I spend about \$35 every month on data just to respond to work emails, communicate with parents via WhatsApp, and download circulars from the district office. This comes from my own pocket because the school has no budget for it. My male colleagues with working wives can share this burden, but I'm a single mother – this expense really affects my budget."

A rural participant (48 years) added:

"The data costs are crippling. We need data to access ministry communications, to coordinate with other schools, to participate in online trainings. But it's so expensive. Sometimes I have to choose between buying data and other household expenses. The ministry expects us to be connected, but they don't provide the resources."

Twenty-two participants reported that high data costs limited their ability to engage in online professional development opportunities. Several described situations where they could not participate in webinars or access online training materials because they lacked sufficient data. This economic barrier disproportionately affected women, as male colleagues were more likely to have greater household income or spousal support for such professional expenses.

4.6.3 Digital Skills and Time Constraints

Beyond infrastructure and costs, participants identified gaps in digital literacy as barriers to effective technology use. Fourteen participants reported limited training in educational technology applications, with nine specifically mentioning inadequate knowledge of digital tools for school administration and instructional leadership.

One participant (Deputy Head, 37 years) stated:

"We're expected to use technology for everything now – online reporting systems, digital gradebooks, virtual meetings. But nobody trained us properly. I've had to teach myself through YouTube videos and trial and error, which takes time away from other responsibilities."

The time constraints were particularly pronounced for women leaders who carried dual burdens of professional and domestic responsibilities. Participants described having limited time after work hours to develop digital skills, as they were expected to fulfill family obligations. Eight participants specifically mentioned that male colleagues had more flexibility to attend evening or weekend technology training sessions because their wives managed household duties.

4.6.4 Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

Nineteen participants discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic amplified technological barriers and exposed the digital divide. During school closures, female heads reported struggling to maintain educational continuity and communicate with students, parents, and staff due to limited digital access and high data costs.

One rural school head (46 years) described:

"During COVID, everything moved online. But many of our students had no devices or data. I tried to organize WhatsApp groups for learning, but I was paying for data to send materials. Some weeks I spent \$60 on data alone. We also had Zoom meetings with the district, but my internet was too slow. I felt completely overwhelmed and under-resourced."

The pandemic highlighted how technological limitations constrained women's ability to lead effectively during crises. Participants noted that schools with better resources and technology infrastructure typically led by men who had more access to professional networks and resources were able to adapt more successfully to remote operations.

4.7 Lack of Recognition and Support Systems

Participants consistently reported feeling undervalued and unsupported in their leadership roles. Seventeen participants described situations where their achievements were minimized or attributed to male mentors or colleagues. One female head (43 years) stated:

"When our school's examination results improved significantly under my leadership, the district office congratulated my male deputy head, assuming he was responsible. It's such as they can't imagine that a woman could drive that success."

The absence of formal support structures for women leaders was evident across all three provinces. Only two participants reported having access to any form of institutional mentoring or peer support network for women in leadership. Most relied on informal networks of female colleagues they had connected with through chance meetings or personal relationships.

4.8 Generational and Cultural Transition Factors

The data revealed complex dynamics between traditional cultural values and evolving attitudes toward women's leadership. Younger participants (aged 35-42) generally reported higher aspirations for leadership advancement but also described experiencing resistance from older community members and some older female colleagues who had internalized traditional gender norms.

One young deputy head (36 years) explained:

"Some of the older teachers, even women, tell me I should be grateful just to have a teaching job and not aspire to headship. They say a woman's place is supporting male leaders, not competing with them. But my generation sees things differently. We believe women can and should lead."

Conversely, two older participants (aged 54 and 58) described feeling caught between respecting cultural traditions and supporting younger women's ambitions. This generational tension was more pronounced in rural areas, where six of seven rural participants reported significant resistance from traditional community leaders to women's expanded leadership roles.

However, three participants described positive experiences working with progressive traditional leaders who actively supported women's advancement. One rural head (52 years) stated:

"Our village chief is unusual. He believes education is important for everyone, and he's told the community that women can lead schools effectively. Having his support has made my work much easier. Without him, I think the community would have made my position impossible."

4.9 Evidence of Leadership Effectiveness

Despite numerous barriers, participants provided substantial evidence of their effectiveness as educational leaders. All 15 female heads reported improvements in student performance during their tenure, with 11 describing specific initiatives they had implemented that enhanced teaching quality and student outcomes.

Participants described leadership approaches that emphasized collaboration, instructional support for teachers, and holistic student development. One urban school head (47 years) explained:

"I believe in leading from within, not from above. I spend time in classrooms observing teaching, offering support, working with teachers to improve their methods. I also focus on student welfare – making sure children are fed, supported emotionally, and feel safe. These things matter for learning."

Eight participants described receiving recognition from parents and teachers for their leadership effectiveness, even while facing resistance from other community members. Several noted that while they initially faced skepticism, their consistent performance and dedication gradually earned respect from stakeholders.

4.10 Coping Strategies and Resilience

Participants demonstrated remarkable resilience in navigating barriers to their leadership. Common coping strategies included:

Building alliances: Thirteen participants described deliberately cultivating relationships with supportive colleagues, parents, and community members who could advocate for their leadership.

Exceeding expectations: Seventeen participants reported working extra hours and taking on additional responsibilities to prove their competence and counteract gender bias.

Seeking mentorship: Despite limited formal structures, 19 participants had identified informal mentors typically retired female educators or progressive male leaders – who provided guidance and support.

Professional development: Fifteen participants engaged in self-directed professional learning, using personal funds to attend workshops, purchase professional books, or access online courses when institutional support was unavailable.

Collective action: Eight participants described forming informal support networks with other female educators, meeting regularly to share experiences, advice, and emotional support.

5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This empirical study reveals that patriarchal practices continue to pose significant challenges for women pursuing educational leadership in Zimbabwe. Despite constitutional guarantees of gender equality and evidence of women's effectiveness as educational leaders, systematic discrimination persists through cultural expectations, community resistance, institutional barriers, and economic constraints. The research provides important insights into contemporary challenges that have not been adequately documented in existing literature, particularly regarding technological barriers and the economic burden of digital access in Zimbabwe's current context.

Women leaders face a complex web of interconnected obstacles that span individual, institutional, and societal levels. The findings demonstrate that gender discrimination is amplified by other factors including geographic location, economic dependency, generational attitudes, and technological exclusion. Rural women leaders experience compounded disadvantages, facing both gender

bias and resource limitations that constrain their leadership effectiveness. The prohibitive cost of mobile data and inadequate digital infrastructure create additional barriers that disproportionately affect women, limiting their professional development opportunities and administrative effectiveness.

Despite these challenges, the research provides compelling evidence of women's leadership capabilities and effectiveness. Participants demonstrated strong instructional leadership, innovative problem-solving, commitment to student welfare, and resilience in overcoming barriers. Their experiences suggest that the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership represents not only an equity issue but also a significant waste of human capital that could contribute to educational improvement. Addressing gender disparities in educational leadership requires coordinated action across multiple levels of the education system and society. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

5.1 Policy Level Recommendations

Gender-sensitive recruitment and promotion: Educational authorities should implement transparent, merit-based recruitment and promotion processes that actively address gender bias. This includes establishing quotas or targets for women's representation in leadership positions, ensuring diverse interview panels, and monitoring promotion patterns for gender equity.

Economic support for professional development: Given the significant economic barriers identified in this study, particularly regarding data costs and technology access, the Ministry of Education should provide data allowances and technology support for school leaders. This should include monthly data allocations, provision of tablets or laptops for school administration, and subsidized access to online professional development platforms.

Family-friendly policies: Develop policies that support work-life balance for educational professionals, including flexible working arrangements, on-site childcare facilities at schools, and consideration of family responsibilities in transfer and promotion decisions.

Mentoring programmes: Establish formal, funded mentoring programmes that connect aspiring women leaders with experienced female heads. These programmes should include regular meetings, professional development workshops, and peer support networks.

5.2 Institutional Level Recommendations

Targeted professional development: Schools and educational districts should provide professional development opportunities specifically addressing women's needs and challenges. This should include leadership training, technology skills development, and workshops on navigating gender bias and community resistance.

Technology infrastructure investment: Priority should be given to improving digital infrastructure in schools, particularly in rural areas. This includes ensuring reliable internet connectivity, adequate computer resources, and technical support for educational leaders.

Support networks: Establish formal support networks and forums for women in leadership roles, creating spaces for sharing experiences, strategies, and professional advice. These networks should meet regularly and have institutional backing.

Gender bias training: Implement mandatory training for all educational stakeholders – including school boards, parent associations, and district officials – on recognizing and addressing gender bias in educational leadership.

Performance evaluation reform: Revise evaluation systems to ensure women leaders are assessed fairly, using objective criteria that do not disadvantage collaborative or inclusive leadership styles typically associated with women.

5.3 Community Level Recommendations

Community engagement and awareness: Develop targeted initiatives to change traditional attitudes about women's capabilities and appropriate social roles. This should involve engaging traditional leaders, parent associations, and community organizations in dialogue about the benefits of diverse educational leadership.

Showcasing success stories: Actively promote and celebrate the achievements of women educational leaders, providing visible role models and challenging stereotypes about women's leadership abilities.

Male allies program: Engage progressive male leaders and community members as advocates for gender equity, leveraging their influence to challenge patriarchal norms and support women's advancement.

Intergenerational dialogue: Create forums for conversation between different generations about evolving gender roles and expectations, helping bridge traditional values and contemporary equity goals.

5.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should continue exploring the following areas:

Longitudinal studies: Track the career trajectories of women in educational leadership over time, examining factors that facilitate or hinder advancement and retention in leadership positions.

Comparative analysis: Conduct comparative studies across different provinces and between urban and rural contexts to understand how geographic and economic factors shape women's leadership experiences.

Impact studies: Systematically examine the impact of increased female representation in school leadership on educational outcomes, including student achievement, teacher satisfaction, and school climate.

Intervention evaluation: Assess the effectiveness of specific interventions designed to promote women's advancement in educational leadership, identifying best practices and successful models.

Technology and leadership: Further investigate the relationship between digital access, technology skills, and leadership effectiveness, particularly in resource-constrained contexts such as Zimbabwe.

Economic barriers: Conduct detailed economic analysis of the costs women leaders bear in fulfilling their professional responsibilities, including data expenses, transportation, and other work-related costs.

Understanding these dynamics and implementing comprehensive, multi-level interventions will be essential for developing effective policies and practices that promote genuine gender equality in educational leadership across Zimbabwe. The success of such efforts will benefit not only individual women leaders but also the broader educational system and society, as diverse leadership teams contribute to more effective schools and improved outcomes for all learners.

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